



Boletim do Tempo Presente - ISSN 1981-3384

Poverty Reduction through Enterprise Procurement in China Evidence and Case Study

Shen Qi^I
Zhang Junzhe^{II}

Abstract: This paper gives China's experiences in poverty reduction. Both the government and enterprises in China contribute to helping the poor population in rural China. New Era Corp. hires local rural labor to collect and gather pollen from pine trees. The New Era Corp.'s case shows that enterprise procurement can help the local poor solve the financial constraints and reduce the risk and uncertainty they are facing. Under a digital economy of big data and artificial intelligence, this pattern can successfully solve the information asymmetry problem and help to achieve poverty reduction in China.

Key-words: Poverty Reduction; Information Asymmetry; Case Study.

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China's government has been focusing on poverty reduction. The Central Government of China issued an important document to show its firm determination to fight poverty in China and gave much policy support to the poor Chinese people, especially people in rural areas. With unremitting efforts and correct guidance, China has made great achievements in poverty alleviation, and has lifted out of poverty in an all-around way by the end of 2020. In the process of dealing with poverty and rural revitalization issues, China has developed many innovative and effective solutions to this tough issue, such as poverty alleviation through creating new economic activity, financial measures for poverty alleviation, poverty alleviation through education, and others. Not only the central government but also the enterprises in China give their contributes to poverty reduction. New Era Corp. is one of these enterprises. We will provide a case study on how New Era Corp. helps Chinese rural poor people increase their income and shake off poverty.

Introduction of basic poverty alleviation methods

Poverty reduction: theories and practices in China

Poverty alleviation through employment is a concept that emphasizes solving the poverty issue by increasing the opportunities for employment and ensuring the employment of the poor (Ping, Luo, and Zhang 2021, 32-43+3). According to Xi Jinping, 'The most direct and effective way to get rid of poverty is to get one person employed and lead the whole family out of poverty', which fully illustrates the importance of employment for the poor. Obtaining employment is the basic guarantee for people to make a living, and the direct cause of poverty of many poor households is their inability to find a job, whether due to the high employment requirements or limited by some physical or family reasons. Therefore, solving the employment problem of the poor is the most direct and effective way to help them. Regarding the alleviation direction toward employment, there are many points worth noting, such as improving vocational skills, employment incentives and employment quality of the rural poor (Li 2018, 29-36+154). In general, methods of this alleviation direction can be divided into helping farmers go out to work and increasing local employment according to geographical location.

Outside Employment

Seeking outside employment is a typical and traditional way for rural residents to make a living and pursue better living conditions with China's rapid economic growth. The beginning of the wave of going to cities to make a living can be traced back to the 1980s. Since the start of the reform and opening-up, an upsurge of farmers entering towns and working in township enterprises has occurred (Hu 2012, 118-121). In 1992, the reform process was accelerated after Deng Xiaoping's talks delivered on his inspection tour of southern China. Enterprises in the Southeast Coastal Area of China developed rapidly, so quantities of employment vacancies have appeared in these areas. Meanwhile, because of the increase in population and the development of agricultural technology, rural regions had an abundant labor surplus which needs to be solved. As a result of the reasons above, many rural residents, especially those who lived in the central and western regions, were encouraged to find a job in areas that developed quickly, such as Guangdong Province. During these years of development, the government kept taking this method as a vital measure to solve the poverty problem (Zhang, and Luo 2021, 58-64). With the expansion of China's trade scale, domestic market demand continues to increase and provides

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more employment chances, which maintains the method of finding outside employment an important way to eliminate poverty (Chen, and Chen B. 2020, 80-93).

However, this method has some drawbacks. First, the education level of farmers is generally low, which leads to difficulty in working in many positions. Vulnerable employment problems exist in the rural poor group and especially in women and it is difficult for them to go outside and find nonvulnerable jobs (Sridevi Yerrabati 2022). In addition, the living cost is much higher than in the countryside. In general, the cost of adjusting life in cities is too high to afford for rural residents. Second, some of the rural residents have the burden of raising the elderly population and children. It is difficult for them to coordinate the relationship between work and family. If they choose to work, then it is tough to fulfill the obligation of support. If one chooses to bring the family into the city, it will be challenging to afford the daily cost. Some others may have a disability and cannot go out to have a long-distance job because of the limitation of their health condition. For these people, outside work is hard to realize.

Local employment

In contrast to outside employment, local employment is much easier to put into practice. Local employment solves the employment problem following the principle of proximity, which is to increase work chances in rural areas, just near farmers' houses. By this means, the problem of lacking abilities to go outside or contradiction between work and family can be solved.

While some drawbacks still remain in this direction, such as low income from farm work, problems can be solved in several ways. First, although earnings are less than city jobs, they are roughly the same after eliminating the living cost. In addition, the government should produce a better nearby working environment (Che, and Du 2019, 48-56). Moreover, one of the most effective ways is to encourage the development of township companies and create more local work positions for rural residents. According to the *Guiding Opinions of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, the Ministry of Finance, the Poverty Alleviation Office of the State Council on Doing a Good Job of Poverty Alleviation through Employment in year 2016*, all localities should actively develop employment posts and expand local and nearby employment channels for poor labor. For farmers, this requires a relatively lower need for education, and costs less than entering cities to make a living. It is highly useful to reduce poverty by promoting local business and local employment, and in this process, enterprises play an important role (Tackie et al. 2022). According to this, the company in the case analyzed in the paper later chooses this way to contribute to poverty alleviation.

Ecological Poverty Reduction—Building a Green Industrial Chain

According to the *Decision of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Winning the Fight against Poverty in year 2015*, one of the basic principles of the poverty alleviation activity is to insist on protecting the ecology and achieving green development. Challenges exist in balancing the ecology and economy, and it is a difficult problem to develop and not harm the environment simultaneously (Gan 2018, 40-45). Based on the concept proposed by Xi and research on solving the tough problem, China has a corresponding poverty alleviation concept called ecological poverty alleviation, which is using an environment protecting way to increase farmers' income, such as creating ecological friendly positions or developing green industries to increase employment (Lei 20, 152-162).

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There are several subdivided concrete measures about this concept, such as implementing an ecological compensation (eco-compensation) scheme (Qin et al. 2022) or creating new positions of protecting the environment for the farmers and at the same time, ensuring their basic living security by giving them salary. One of the measures is to develop some industries that are ecological friendly (Xu 2018, 1-6). It's the practice of the principle "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets".

While conducting this process, corporations are supposed to take responsibility and play a role. Several aspects need to be considered. First, emphasize the development and utilization of ecological sources that have economic potential. In remote areas, many natural sources have the potential to be transferred into high-nutrition products. The role and the potential of a natural material is determined more by the socioeconomic and environmental context of the production (Belcher 2005, 82-89). As a result, companies are supposed to produce and create contrapuntally according to the materials. This is capable of increasing the income of remote areas and creating more employment chances locally.

Meanwhile, avoid damaging the environment. That is, some eco-friendly means are used to exploit resource and process materials. Some industries use environmental health as the cost of fast growth, which will lead to a much higher cost. A vicious cycle may come into being (Zhang 2021, 65-81). In addition, the destruction to the environment may be difficult to repair and recover.

In general, the direction of reducing poverty through an ecologically friendly way has many benefits. First, it can adequately use the natural source and turn it into wealth, which will promote economic development in remote areas. Second, it is sustainable which means it will keep producing wealth without hurting the environment. In this way, long-term benefits can be brought and a one-off increase can be avoided. Moreover, the growth of the industry will bring many employment positions.

With this method, enterprises gain economic profits and reach long-term benefits that come from a good environment. Therefore, it is a win-win pattern for an enterprise to try to develop in an ecologically friendly industry. This method is reflected in the case below.

Information Poverty Alleviation --- toward Information Asymmetry, Risk Aversion and Financial Constraints in Poverty

In the digital economy, poor people have disadvantages in acquiring data and information. Their information ability and awareness are weak, and their Internet information ability is poor (Tao, Lin, and Ying 2022, 78-97). In contrast, urban citizens have higher information abilities and more channels. This information asymmetry is one of the blocks for poor people to earn more money, and it leads to other matters.

Poverty and information famine often lead to risk aversion strategies in behavior (Zhang, and Gu 2020, 33-51). Poor people are not capable of having information guidance and lack of life support if their finances get in trouble. Even if possibilities exist for poor people to earn more money, the poor may stop taking steps because of risk aversion. This is supposed to result in decreasing possible income (Wang, Jiang, and Zhang 2022, 88-100). It is a kind of market failure and unfairness.

Financial constraint is another obstacle that poor people may face. Because of a lack of enough money to invest, and a lack of information to give reliable support, poor people may give up the opportunity to increase their income. The banks have little willingness to give loans to

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poor people, which aggravates the dilemma.

The government and the enterprises in urban areas, especially in large cities, have advantages in gathering and using information. They also have the ability to help farmers avoid some of the risks. Several measures are worth using. First, if the government and urban enterprises can share enough information with rural people, it will give poor rural people more information guidance and support. Meanwhile, if the government and urban enterprises can bear all the risk and uncertainty, the poor people will grasp the opportunities for earning more money without taking high risks. In addition, if the government or urban enterprises can help poor people solve their financial constraint problem, it is highly possible that poor people will have more choices and higher welfare levels. In the case we studied, this solution will be reflected.

Below is the case of the New Era Health Industry Group, who devotes to supplying local employment, building ecologically friendly industries, and helping poor people solve the difficult problems they are facing.

Case on the New Era Health Industry Group (NEHI) of local employment

We gave a detailed observation and collected the relative data on NEHI in 2017 and gave an overall investigation about the process of sending bulk commodities, such as pine pollen, flaxseed oil and milk powder to front-line farmers of the NEHI. The research results are as follows.

Raw Materials of Pine Pollen

The collection scope of tassels includes Tengchong, Shidian, Changning, Longling, Lianghe and other counties in Yunnan Province, Beisan Township, Dengshang Township, Baxian County and others of Chengde County in Hebei Province, and, the scope radiates to Liaoning Province, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Hunan Province, Jiangxi Province, Anhui Province, Chongqing City, etc. All the regions rely on planting crops and doing odd jobs as their main sources of livelihood, in which the average income is 90 yuan per person per day and the average monthly income is 2,700 yuan per person.

In 2017, the company collected approximately 1,000 tons of pin pollen in all. The collection period of tassels was approximately 20 days, and there were 25 thousand farmers participating, with an average income of 130 yuan per person per day. During the collection period of tassels, the income of everyone increased by approximately 2,600 yuan, which was equivalent to a month of income increase for 25,000 people. It added 65 million yuan to the farmers' income in total. The achievements of farmers in increasing income and improving living standards are as follows.

The Story of Ms. Li Minglan

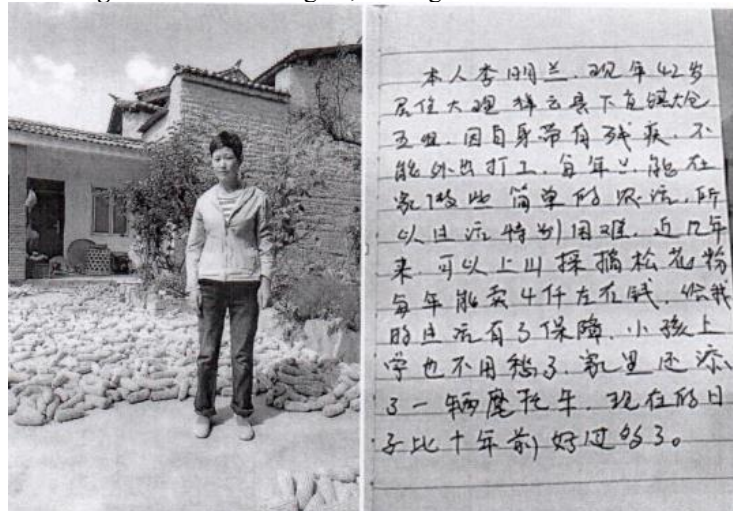
Ms. Li Minglan is a villager from Dacang Group 5 Village, Xiazhuang Town, Xiangyun County, Dali, Yunnan Province, aged 42 years old. Because of her disability, her family members cannot go out to work and can only be at home doing some simple farm work in normal times. As a result, their living conditions are difficult, and the total annual income of her family is less than 8000 yuan. In recent years, Ms. Li and her husband went up the mountain to collect pine pollen because of the company's acquisition, and their income reached approximately 4000 yuan,

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an increase of 50% over the previous year. It not only improves the family's living standard, but also gives financial security for children to go to school (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Ms. Li Minglan, a villager in Yunnan Province



Source: NEHI

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The Story of Mr. Zhang Qingwu

Figure 2. Mr. Zhang Qingwu, a villager in Hebei Province



Source: NEHI

Zhang Qingwu, aged 46 years old, lives in Tianqiao Town, Fengning County, Hebei Province. From the beginning of the pollen collection to sending to designated area after pollen collection, since 2012, Zhang's six small grass houses have already been turned into four larger tile houses of 100 square meters each. These all benefit from the pine pollen project, which improves not only their living standard but also their living quality (see Figure 2).

Other contributions from NEHI

NEHI's procurement includes pine pollen, milk powder, flaxseed oil, maca, bamboo leaves, Pueraria extract, emblica extract, sea buckthorn fruit oil, pumpkin powder, carrot powder and other products. All these procurements have significant effects on the increase of the local poor people's income. In summary, the company's procurement of bulk materials has driven the income of front-line farmers to increase by a total amount of 138.187 million yuan every year, which has made positive contributions to the development of agriculture, rural areas and farmers while the enterprise continues to develop (see Table 1).

The main distribution area of forest resources in China is in mountainous areas, with Pinaceae plants accounting for 60% of the total. Especially in the mountains of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Yunnan and Guizhou, *Pinus massoniana* is magnificent and has huge economic value. Among

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them, *Pinus massoniana* pollen is a valuable resource. The Compendium of Materia Medica records that it has the effects of treating many diseases. However, due to the inconvenient transportation and backward economy in the forest zone, the rich resources did not benefit the local farmers. As pine trees cannot be picked fruits like fruit trees, and large-scale felling is not allowed for mountain and forest protection, it cannot bring direct economic value to local farmers. “Since pine pollen is the main raw material of NEHI’s products, and is a renewable resource, can we establish a model that can not only ensure the supply of raw materials, but also lead the farmers in the forest area to shake off poverty and become rich?” It is the idea that NEHI is based on exploring how to organize local farmers to pick pine pollen in the mountains in undeveloped and remote areas, national poverty counties and other regions to organically integrate developing and utilizing forestry resources, and protecting the ecology and alleviating poverty to achieve a multi win-win situation.

Table 1. NEHI’s procurement and contribution (Source: NEHI)

| Product | Per capita income increase (yuan) | Total number of people | Total income in (million yuan) |
|---------------------|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Pine Pollen | 2600 | 25000 | 65 |
| Milk Powder | 8000 | 6750 | 54 |
| Flaxseed Oil | 5244 | 1623 | 8.511 |
| Maca | 11500 | 100 | 1.15 |
| Bamboo Leaves | 33000 | 80 | 2.64 |
| Pueraria Extract | 12000 | 50 | 0.6 |
| Emblica Extract | 12000 | 50 | 0.6 |
| Sea Buckthorn Fruit | 5000 | 80 | 4 |
| Pumpkin Powder | 32200 | 30 | 0.966 |
| Carrot Powder | 36000 | 20 | 0.72 |

Case on New Era Health Industry Group of Ecological Industry Development

The premise of “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets” is the sustainable transformation from natural resources to invaluable assets. It is the process that discovers ecological products from ecological resources, intensively processes them in the technique method, and finally realizes the value of ecological products by market means, through which we are able to turn leaves into money, and truly achieve the goal of turning “lucid waters and lush mountains” into “invaluable assets”. As a subsidiary of the China Energy Conservation and Environmental Protection Group, New Era Health Industry (Group) Co. Ltd. (hereafter referred to as NEHI) has been committed to pursuing the harmony between corporation development and the balance of ecology and creatively constructing a complete green ecological industry chain of “collecting pine pollen and bamboo leaves - preliminary processing of pine pollen and bamboo leaves - deep processing to form commodities - sales in specialty stores - serving end consumers - planting pine and bamboo”, through which it turns abundant agricultural and forest resources into ecological products that are green and safe.

The NEHI insists on both development and protection, and has scientifically compiled the *Guidance Manual for Pine Pollen Harvesting*, which gives farmers detailed guidance on environmental protection, scientific picking, processing and drying, dehumidifying and impurity

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removal, classified storing, etc. “With the pamphlet, we know when is the best time to pick, how not to damage the trees, and learn the processing precautions and drying requirements, which are truly practical.” It is praised profusely by farmers in Xiangyun County, Dali Prefecture, Yunnan Province. With scientific guidance, trees have been protected and utilized reasonably, and the quality of pollen has also been greatly improved. The NEHI organizes unified purchases regularly every year, thus establishing a long-term supply and marketing relationship. It not only enables farmers at the front line of the forest area to master the primary processing technology, increases the source of income, and broadens the channels for farmers to become rich, but also establishes a targeted assistance mechanism. To date, more than 20 raw material bases have been established in Jiangxi, Zhejiang, Yunnan, Guizhou and other provinces rich in forest resources, of which 7 are located in the Yangtze River Economic Belt. Over the past 27 years, the NEHI has brought hundreds of millions of yuan of income to farmers, benefiting hundreds of thousands of forest zone farmers (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Ecological Industry Development



Source: NEHI

The NEHI successfully explores natural resources and turns them into assets. By collecting and producing in an eco-friendly way, building an environmentally friendly industry chain and reaching a benign circle, the enterprise achieves a balance between the environment and profits.

Self-development through Modern Technology and Reach a win-win situation

Deep processing of raw materials: technology enhances product value

In beautiful Yantai, which is on the coast of the Bohai Sea, the development zone is prosperous. Among the row upon row of buildings in the zone, the modern production base of NEHI has a quite scale, and the advanced production lines operate in high speed and efficiency. Every year hundreds of millions of pieces of pine pollen enter the homes of consumers all over the country from here. The reason why the core product of NEHI, pine pollen, is able to steadily occupy the market is precisely because it has solved the industrialization problem of ecological resources such as pine pollen and *Lophatherum gracile* Brongn with the help of the powerful

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scientific research and technology strength of aerospace and military industry, and has made full use of advanced producing and processing equipment, automatic information management systems, and strict quality monitoring and tracing systems to achieve the effective transformation of ecological resources from raw materials to products. Through continuous scientific and technological breakthroughs and production transformation, the added value of ecological resources is constantly increasing, making its ecological value rise step by step.

The transformation of “lucid waters and lush mountains” is not simple and extensive resource exploitation and processing but uses advanced technology to transform the advantages of resources and the environment into advantages of product quality on the basis of industrial analysis and positioning. Since its establishment, the NEHI has attached great importance to R&D investment and technological innovation and has invested a great deal of money every year for scientific research and new product development. After 27 years of scientific research and technological transformation, the New Era Health Industry Group has successfully developed and produced three brands, which are “Guo Zhen”, “Xiang Lan Ge”, “Zhu Zhen” and six categories, and more than 150 kinds of health products with high-tech content, high cultural taste and high added value. By the end of June 2020, the NEHI had applied 377 patents, undertaken 7 national science and technology projects, took the lead in forming 12 national, industrial and group standards, including pine pollen, flaxseed oil, traditional Chinese medicine health care services, maca flour, wheat oligopeptide flour, etc., compiled 44 enterprise standards, and owned 2 nationally recognized CNAS laboratories to ensure product quality with science and technology.

Operation and sales: driving employment and increasing taxes

In the bustling urban streets, in the quiet corner of the town, a touch of peaceful and quiet green will jump into sight inadvertently - this is the unique green logo of the New Era Guo Zhen specialty stores. To date, the NEHI has set up provincial branches in 31 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the Central Government, and has provided convenient and fast presales, sales, and after-sale services for consumers through more than 1300 health-life halls across the country. These specialty stores not only witnessed the market extension of NEHI, carried the entrepreneurship and pursuit of countless people, further eased the pressure on social employment, and fulfilled the social responsibility of central enterprises for the country to achieve “six stabilities” and “six guarantees”.

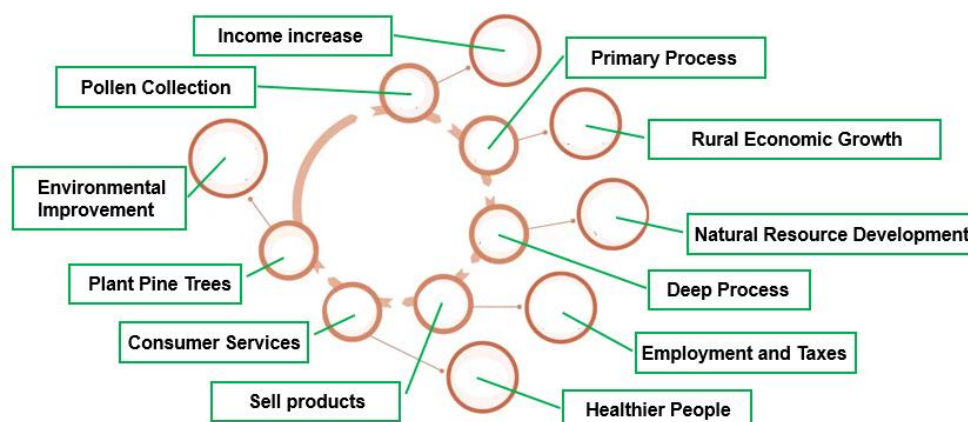
In recent years, with the development of big data, 5G, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things, the New Era Health Industry Group has complied with the trend of “Internet+”, constructed a multicategory market sales management system online and offline, built a new media sales promotion channel integrating APP, WeChat, live broadcast and short video, established Jian Kang Ke e-commerce platform, and gave full play to the advantages of zero distance, low cost and convenience of social e-commerce. With the help of stores and salesperson offline advantages, it enables the integration of online and offline development and provides young entrepreneurs with new choices that make them overtake on curves.

Over the years, the New Era Health Industry Group has made continuous efforts to create good economic benefits, promote the growth of the national economy, and increase national taxes. By the end of 2021, 21.232 billion yuan of profits and taxes were turned in (including 9.536 billion yuan of profits and 11.696 billion yuan of taxes). The benign circle of NEHI has been settled (see Figure 4).

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Figure 4. Benign Circle of NEHI



Source: NEHI

Conclusions and suggestions

In the digital economy, the government and enterprises have much more information than individual persons, especially poor persons. Enterprises' procurement can help to solve the information asymmetry problem. The local villagers need only to do what is required to do, instead of finding things to do by themselves. If the villagers have to face market competition directly, they sometimes have difficulties dealing with risks. Enterprises' procurement transfers the risks from poor people to enterprises. Abundant funds from enterprises can help poor people overcome financial constraints. Under enterprise procurement, the local villagers can work in the local region instead of going to a large city far away to seek higher income. The government and the enterprises can help to establish a benign circle in the local environment. This paper gives a case study of the NEHI. The NEHI has already made many achievements in local poverty alleviation and environmental protection. The experiences of NEHI may help other enterprises in China and other countries.

Based on the case above, there are some methods that are worth referring to. Suggestions are as follows:

- Build rural industries.

The government should help develop rural industries. By this means, more local employment chances will be created and it is more convenient for rural residents to find a job. This solves the problem from the origin that rural poor lack the abilities to go outside and find high salary jobs.

- Direct mining.

Enterprises can adopt the method of direct procurement from the origin and construct a production base near the source of raw materials, which will reduce intermediate procedures and reduce costs.

- Create ecologically friendly industry and employment.

Explore the commercial value of ecological sources without destroying them. In this way, they can obtain a benign circle of profit and protect the environment and help the poor in remote areas by ensuring their employment at the same time.

- Skills training and information provision.

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Improve the education level for the poor through skills training and basic knowledge of useful techniques, such as how to use smartphones. Provide more outside information. It will improve the efficiency of production for the corporation.

- Risk avoidance and insurance for farmers.

Encourage farmers to use financial methods to increase their income and provide some insurance for them to reach a risk pooling situation. Smooth consumption when crop failure. Enterprises can take a loan-like way to protect the farmer from crop failure, for example, when meeting crop failure, enterprises can provide aid to ensure the basic living condition of farmers. When harvested, they can choose to get raw materials cheaper to balance the payment.

- Improve the technological ability of corporations.

While making efforts to help farmers and indirectly obtain benefits, corporations should focus on their own improvement, and the most important is technique. Corporations should increase the input in research and development, and use modern techniques to improve efficiency. Additionally, they can use 'Internet +' to conduct brand marketing and sales.

Notes

^I Shen Qi, Associate professor, School of International Trade and Economics, Central University of Finance and Economics (CUFE).

^{II} Zhang Junzhe, research assistant of Prof. Shen Qi, School of International Trade and Economics, Central University of Finance and Economics (CUFE). E-mail address: 1902388714@qq.com. Mobile Phone Number: 86-15303368280.

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