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Comfortable Housing Projects for Tibetan Farmers and Herdsmen from the Perspective of Poverty Alleviation

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Abstract Through questionnaire survey and field interview of farmers and herdsman, this paper studied the comfortable housing projects implemented since 2006 in Namling County of Shigatse City. Taking the comfortable housing projects in Namling County as an example, this paper elaborated the relationship between the poverty alleviation and the comfortable housing projects for farmers and herdsman and discussed the necessities for implementing comfortable housing projects in the context of the poverty alleviation. There are some problems at the same time of social, economic and ecological benefits of implementing the comfortable housing projects for farmers and herdsman. Finally, it came up with pertinent recommendations for strengthening and improving the construction of comfortable housing projects in Namling County.

Key words Poverty alleviation, Comfortable housing projects, Farmers and herdsman, Income increase

1 Introduction

Tibet is the only concentrated poverty-stricken province in China. Its task of poverty alleviation is arduous. Housing is an essential part of new socialist countryside construction, and also a basic guarantee for farmers and herdsman shaking off poverty. Since 2006, Tibet has implemented the comfortable housing projects, mainly including transformation of farmhouses, settlement of herdsman, poverty alleviation and relocation, and revitalizing border areas and enriching residents. The comfortable housing project sticks to the principle of "transforming, building, and relocating as necessary", and respects voluntary selection and living habits of farmers and herdsman, to maximally improve living conditions of farmers and herdsman. Wei Gang and Li Xia stated that the promotion of comfortable housing projects should focus on improving the existing subsidy standards, increasing credit funds and increasing income of farmers and herdsman^[1]. In the opinion of Tian Xu^[2], from a public perspective, most poverty-stricken and destitute farmers and herdsman were weak in the ability of repaying, which increases the loan risk. In this situation, most comfortable housing projects especially for destitute farmers and herdsman implemented in Tibet relied on financial support of both the state and the region, rather than self-raising or loan. However, the right to use the house belongs to the individual and has the characteristic of pure public goods. He Lijun stated that it is required to firstly provide a comfortable housing environment for poverty-stricken farmers and herdsman to help them shake off poverty^[3]. From the perspective of nomadic area, Xu Ping believed that the implementation of comfortable housing projects is favorable for narrowing the gap with developed areas and helping farmers and herdsman to shake off poverty as soon as possible^[4]. From the perspective of industrial development, Ding Hengjie held that the

implementation of comfortable housing projects is favorable for realizing coordinated development of primary, secondary, and tertiary industries and favorable for the urbanization construction of Tibet^[5]. However, from the microscopic perspective, we analyzed the importance of implementing the comfortable housing projects in Namling County of Shigatse City.

2 Methods and purpose of implementing the comfortable housing projects in Namling County

2.1 Overview of Namling County Namling County is located in the central and southern Tibet Autonomous Region, borders on Nyemo County of Lhasa City, is adjacent to Xaitongmoin County, borders on Xainza County and Baingoin County, and faces Shigatse City to the south. Namling County is 98 km long from the east to the west, and 110 km wide from the south to the north, and its area is 8848 km². It is 76 km from Shigatse City. Now, it administers one town, 16 townships, 146 administrative villages, and 485 natural villages. In the end of 2015, there were 14343 households, including 12548 agricultural households, 1667 animal husbandry households, and 128 non-agricultural households; the total population was 85346, the farmland area was 1891.46 ha, and the year-end live-stock inventory was 370236. In 2015, Namling County realized total rural economic income of 563 million yuan, the per capita net income of farmers and herdsman of 5194 yuan, the general budget revenue of county-level finance of 14 million yuan, the total yield of grain and oil was 24 million kg, 29100 kg more than in 2014.

2.2 Current situations of the implementation of comfortable housing projects in Namling County In the context of new socialist countryside construction and targeted poverty alleviation, according to actual demands of farmers and herdsman, Namling County started taking improving living conditions of farmers and herdsman and promoting increase in income of farmers and herdsman as basic point, taking "comfortable housing" and "working in contentment" as starting point of regional economic growth, to

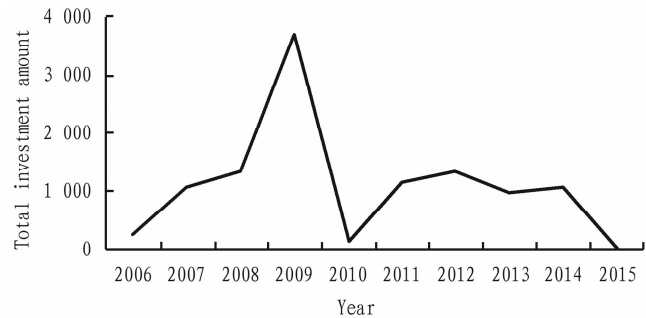
solve the problem of settlement of farmers and herdsmen. We collected data of comfortable housing projects implemented in 2006 – 2015 provided by Comfortable Housing Office of Namling County Finance Bureau. According to Table 1, by the end of 2015, Namling County had implemented the comfortable housing projects for 13743 households, the total construction area was 2249488.7 m²; in 2006, at the beginning of construction of comfortable housing projects, it implemented 340 households, accounting for 2.5%, 2194 people got benefited, accounting for 2.5%; the construction area was 93183 m², accounting for 4%; in 2009, it provided comfortable housing projects for 4491 households, accounting for 33%, 26514 people got benefited, accounting for 31%, the construction area was 747039.61 m², accounting for 33%; in 2015, it provided comfortable housing projects for 56 households, accounting for 0.4%, 33 people got benefited, accounting for 0.38%, the construction area was 856 m², accounting for 0.3%. Through implementing comfortable housing projects, Namling County had provided comfortable houses for 86163 farmers and herdsmen. The number of people getting benefited is gradually declining, but the subsidy fund projects become richer.

Table 1 Implementation of comfortable housing projects for farmers and herdsmen in Namling County in 2006 – 2015

Year	Number of households	Number of people	Construction area//m ²
2006	340	2194	93183
2007	1374	9055	208316
2008	1715	11157	308449
2009	4491	26514	747039
2010	208	1041	34153
2011	1447	10741	257480
2012	1610	10109	208153
2013	1194	7133	187891
2014	1308	7883	196254
2015	56	336	8568
Total	13743	86163	2249488

2.3 Fund input in the implementation of comfortable housing projects in Namling County In order to better understand the implementation of comfortable housing project in Namling County, we carried out field survey of farmers and herdsmen in Namling County. In 60 households of farmers and herdsmen we interviewed, 44% households were households receiving minimum living security, 15% were poverty-stricken households, and 7% were households enjoying five guarantees. Since the implementation of the policy of providing minimum living security for households who should receive minimum living security, the autonomous region government has increased the investment and housing of poverty-stricken farmers and herdsmen gets effectively improved. Since the implementation of comfortable housing projects in 2006, Tibet has made outstanding achievements in the new socialist countryside construction with living and working in peace and contentment as the breakthrough point. According to Fig. 1, at the beginning of the construction of comfortable housing projects in 2006, Namling County invested a total of 26.302 million yuan and provided comfortable housing projects for 340 households. By the end of 2015, the total investment in comfort-

able housing projects reached 1102.4719 million yuan and it completed comfortable housing projects for 13743 households. The subsidy fund of autonomous region was 161.231 million yuan, subsidy fund for earthquake prevention was 51.57 million yuan, municipal support fund was 7.0415 million yuan, the county support fund was 0.34 million yuan, the fund for supporting Tibet was 12.3175 million yuan, the masses raised 766.8594 million yuan, and bank loan was 103.1125 million yuan. According to the questionnaire survey, the total investment of Namling County was 26.302 million yuan in the comfortable housing projects. Most funds were used in timber, cement, stone, and reinforcing bar, and the rest funds were used in furniture, limners, and masons.



Data source: Comfortable Housing Office of Namling County Finance Bureau.

Fig. 1 Total investment amount of Namling County in comfortable housing projects in 2006 – 2015

2.4 Satisfaction of farmers and herdsmen in Namling County with implementation of comfortable housing projects

With the economic development and high investment at all levels of government, Namling County accelerated the implementation of comfortable housing projects, which promoted the increase in income of farmers and herdsmen and provided spacious and bright new houses for farmers and herdsmen. At the same time of improvement in living conditions, the overall environment of rural communities was also greatly improved, the income of farmers and herdsmen was stably increased, but the satisfaction of farmers and herdsmen was different with the implementation of comfortable housing projects. As shown in Fig. 2, the comfortable housing projects in Namling County were approved by the vast majority of farmers and herdsmen. In 60 copies of questionnaire, only 5% farmers and herdsmen were not satisfied.

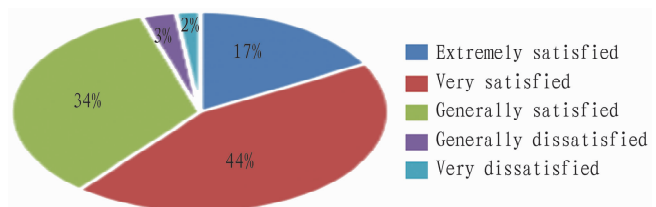


Fig. 2 Satisfaction of farmers and herdsmen in Namling County with implementation of comfortable housing projects

3 Achievements of comfortable housing projects in Namling County

3.1 Bringing development opportunities to Namling County Before 2006, the majority of farmers and herdsmen of Namling

County still lived in short and dark houses. First, there was no enough fund and labor force; second, there was no support policy; third, due to restriction of traditional concepts and lack of technical support, most farmers and herdsmen still lived below the poverty line. Since the implementation of comfortable housing projects in Tibet in 2006, large amount of funds and material resources flowed to agricultural and pastoral areas. For the poverty alleviation of Namling County, this was a great opportunity. Comfortable housing projects brought huge employment market for local farmers and herdsmen, such as establishing construction teams and utilizing housing project to carry out other economic activities, gravel fields, brick factories, and lime factories founded by farmers and herdsmen were put into operation. A good many farmers and herdsmen construction teams, transport teams, and carpenter teams were active in construction sites of housing projects. All of these provided, to a large extent, industrial support for farmers and herdsmen to shake off poverty.

3.2 Expanding channels for increasing income of farmers and herdsmen Through the implementation of comfortable housing projects, farmers and herdsmen became more enthusiastic to do migrant work. The construction of comfortable housing projects not only promoted development of stone processing, building industry, and transport industry, but also stimulated farmers and herdsmen to learn culture and skills, which created employment opportunities for them. In the survey in Tobgyai Township of Namling County, we found that most of the farmers and herdsmen went to cities to do migrant work, and the effect of increasing income and improving living conditions and standards was significant. The construction of comfortable housing projects further stimulated the enthusiasm of farmers and herdsmen in Namling County for building the new socialist countryside, and enhanced the awareness of farmers and herdsmen for building new life. At the same time of improving production and living conditions of farmers and herdsmen, the construction of comfortable housing projects promoted the transformation of concepts of farmers and herdsmen. There were significant changes in mutual assistance awareness of neighbors and relatives, and metal outlook and concept of farmers and herdsmen. Their desire to get rich and development becomes stronger and stronger. With the implementation of comfortable housing projects, there is fundamental improvement in infrastructure of agricultural and pastoral areas. The construction of two-storey foreign-style houses communities provides much convenience for life of farmers and herdsmen. The improvement in ecological environment and living environment of agricultural and pastoral areas in Namling County creates stable environment for increase in income of farmers and herdsmen.

4 Problems

4.1 Low ability of farmers and herdsmen to repay the loan

Since the implementation of comfortable housing projects, both the state and financial departments have provided much policy support for farmers and herdsmen. Most poverty-stricken farmers and herdsmen in Namling County had difficult economic situations and had great difficulty in raising funds for building houses.

Through field survey, some poverty-stricken farmers and herdsmen had narrow channel of income. They did not realize the issue of loan repayment. Some farmers and herdsmen tried every possible means to increase their income to repay the loan, while some farmers and herdsmen hoped to extend the repayment period. If it failed to broaden the income channel and establish long-term mechanism for increasing the income, there will be difficulty in repaying the loan.

4.2 Single fund source, low subsidy amount, and difficult fund raising

4.2.1 Farmers and herdsmen had narrow income channel. Cash income of farmers and herdsmen in Namling County was limited to potato (Ema Township) and migrant work. Some farmers and herdsmen who still not built houses had limited funds despite subsidy funds at all levels of government and bank loan. In addition, the price of building materials soared, which increased the economy bearing capacity of some farmers and herdsmen and accordingly influenced the project schedule. Some areas equalized the subsidies for construction of houses, and did not well solve the problem of fund input of low-income families.

4.2.2 Wide area was benefited from government policies but effect was limited. Since the implementation of comfortable housing projects in Namling County, despite with subsidies of all levels of government, many farmers and herdsmen were benefited, the rate of implementing subsidies was relatively low, the transport condition was poor, the transport cost for building materials was high, the funds failed to be put in place in full amount, finally there was a gap between the number of indemnificatory houses and expectation.

4.2.3 The area of comfortable houses exceeded the standard. Through survey, we found that houses of farmers and herdsmen in Namling County have double functions of production and living, so the construction area should not be too small. However, most farmers and herdsmen wanted large building area, some farmers and herdsmen had high demands for transformation of houses, leading to high building costs. In the situation of relatively few subsidy funds and difficult transfer of surplus labor, house builders had difficulty in bearing the additional costs for anti-seismic buildings.

4.2.4 Technical force was to be strengthened and technicians were insufficient. With the economic development of Namling County, the demand for human capital became higher and higher, and had become a prominent problem restricting the economic development of agricultural and pastoral areas and the poverty alleviation of farmers and herdsmen. On the one hand, engineering technology management personnel were quite insufficient in the county and townships. On the other hand, it lacked construction craftsman of farmers and herdsmen. According to the survey, although the government made effort to promote, due to restriction of scientific and technological and cultural level, and labor skills, it was difficult for surplus labor in agricultural and pastoral areas to transfer, most farmers and herdsmen had to engage in works with low technological content and low income.

4.2.5 The cost of traditional building materials was too high. Namling County is located in the high and cold area, the ecologi-

cal environment is vulnerable, so the energy conservation work is particularly important for buildings. However, due to influence of traditional concepts and living habits, as well as rise in cost of alternative materials, many farmers and herdsmen still did not want to use alternative materials in the process of house building.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Softening the loan conditions for farmers and herdsmen

The implementation of comfortable housing project was upheld by farmers and herdsmen. Through the survey, we found that farmers and herdsmen had to bear huge loan and the repayment period was close. Thus, their pressure of repaying loan was tremendous. We believed that government and banks should soften the loan repayment period to provide farmers and herdsmen with enough time. Besides, it is recommended to evaluate the loan repayment ability of farmers and herdsmen, to subsidy the loan interest of bank.

5.2 Encouraging farmers and herdsmen to participate in industrial development

First, the income of farmers and herdsmen in Namling County mainly came from the primary industry. Therefore, it is recommended to continue to support the construction of leading industry, and actively develop characteristic ecological tourism to increase the income of farmers and herdsmen. Second, the rural cadres should respect the desire and choice of farmers and herdsmen, and actively offer suggestions for increasing income of farmers and herdsmen, become real guiders of increasing income of farmers and herdsmen, and create favorable environment for migrant work. It is recommended to create favorable social environment, provide green channel for farmers and herdsmen to become migrant workers, provide training for farmers and herdsmen, and improve their ability of adaptation and competition. In addition, we should encourage and guide some farmers and herdsmen to engage in the regional passenger and cargo transport industry, which is an essential approach for increasing income of farmers and herdsmen. Furthermore, it is required to strengthen and support enterprises and farmers and herdsmen to develop tourism souvenirs with local characteristics, special agricultural and livestock products, handicraft and various tourism products to increase cash income of farmers and herdsmen.

5.3 Increasing technical forces of technical personnel

In recent years, the quality of technical personnel has been improved, but it still not adapted to socialist market demands. Low cultural quality of technical personnel resulted in lack of scientific and technological knowledge, which seriously influenced rural economic development of Namling County. Therefore, it is recommended to provide education and training for rural cadres and agricultural technical personnel taking agricultural colleges and universities as the front, to comprehensively improve the quality of technical personnel.

5.4 Making reasonable planning for resources and adopting alternative building materials

To protect the forest resources, Namling County should continue to strengthen the propaganda and education work of the masses, and actively guide the masses to use the framed building, encourage the use of alternative materials, do not waste timber, make reasonable plan and strict management,

strictly prohibit occupation of farmland, save timber and farmland, protect ecological environment, and further regulate the construction of model energy conservation buildings, to realize the harmony between human and nature.

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