



# CLOSE TO VICTORY

## Zuoquan, a county in Shanxi Province, looks forward to a better life with poverty alleviation projects

**H**ao Aihong, a 48-year-old farmer in Zuoquan County in north China's Shanxi Province, couldn't conceal his excitement when talking about his new home: a 100-square-meter apartment with a spacious living room and three bedrooms. Because of a leg disability, Hao is unable to work, leaving his wife to earn a paltry salary as a waitress in a local restaurant.

"Now, my family doesn't have to live in rented spaces or travel long distances from our shabby cottage to work. All I paid for our new home was 10,000 yuan (\$1,400)," Hao said. The market price of the apartment is about 500,000 yuan (\$71,750), a formidable figure for a low-income family.

Zuoquan is one of China's 592 impoverished counties. During the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20) period of the country, more than 4,500 people will move into apartments like Hao's. The first batch of villagers had relocated by November 20.

"After the resettlement, job opportunities will be offered to poverty-stricken people. A series of poverty reduction projects have been carried out to help them get employment at plantations, livestock farms and industrial workshops," said Wang Hongchang, Deputy Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Zuoquan County Committee. He stressed that there should be a focus on preventing populations that have shaken off poverty from sliding back into it.

### Ensuring a livelihood

Poverty alleviation relocation projects are part of the efforts to reduce overall poverty in the county. By the end of 2017, roughly 80 villages in Zuoquan had got rid of poverty, with the incidence declining to 11.89 percent. According to county government plans, this year, another 44 villages will step out of poverty, with the incidence further dropping by 0.51 percentage points, in step to meeting the county's target of overcoming poverty.

The Chinese Government has set a target to eliminate absolute poverty by 2020. More specifically, all poverty-stricken populations in rural China will be guaranteed food and clothing, compulsory education, basic medical care and housing security and will see their per-capita disposable income grow at a faster

pace than the national average while gaining access to basic public services. When that is achieved, all impoverished rural residents will be lifted out of poverty and overall regional poverty will be eradicated.

Today, elder people in Zuoquan's Lichang Village are used to having three meals a day at a senior care center which provides free meals for local villagers over 65 years old. Established in November 2014, the senior care center's operational costs are funded mainly by local poverty alleviation industries.

In June this year, the Zuoquan and Lichang collectives invested 700,000 yuan (\$101,678) and 46,000 yuan (\$6,700), respectively, to build a 100-kilowatt photovoltaic solar project for the village. It can generate 400 kilowatt hours of power per day, yielding a profit of 130,000 yuan (\$18,900) a year.

In addition to the collective project, there are also roof-mounted solar panels on village houses. Liu Aijun, a farmer who lives with his wife and two children, earns about 7,000 yuan (\$1,000) per year from the solar panels installed on the roof of their house.

"I got a 200,000-yuan (\$29,100) interest-free loan from the local government," Liu Aijun said. His blue panels have created steady wealth for his family.

Liu is now mulling over the idea of purchasing three cattle and running a small livestock farm. "We should not rely entirely on government support, but also try to get rich on our own," he said.

Free food and clothing for the elderly, improved medical insurance and poverty alleviation loans are guarantees of a better life due to the poverty reduction projects run by the village collective.

Lichang also benefits from assistance to Zuoquan from the Beijing-based China International Publishing Group. The county received more than 730,000 yuan (\$106,000) to build a duck feedlot, which makes a profit of about 500,000 yuan (\$72,700) annually.

The money is used mainly to support impoverished villagers who are unable to work and to pay for the incidental expenses of the village collective, said Song.

"In addition to these existing projects, we are also prepared to explore other industries. The aim is not just to eliminate poverty, but also to realize collective prosperity," said

Song Xianglin, Secretary of the CPC Lichang Village Branch.

### Standing on their own feet

To alleviate poverty, complete infrastructure is a must, while equal attention must be given to ecological conservation. With this in mind, many construction teams have been formed to advance land reclamation, improve agricultural water conservancy and engage in reforestation. Most of the workers recruited into these teams are poor villagers.

Liu Yueming, a 60-year-old farmer who used to subsist on growing corn, is now a member of the Muchen afforestation cooperative, where 60 percent of the workforce comes from impoverished households.

"I earned more than 20,000 yuan (\$2,900) this year by planting and maintaining trees in the mountains. Working on the team has helped me throw off poverty," said Liu Yueming, adding that it is hard for a man of his age to find a job in towns or cities.

Song Wenbin, Manager of the cooperative, said of his 20-member team, 13 are from poverty-stricken homes, earning an average annual income of 15,000 yuan (\$2,200) per person.

Before starting construction work, his team pays a deposit of 300,000 yuan (\$43,600) to guarantee that preferential consideration is given to impoverished households in the recruitment of workers. For agricultural water conservancy and land reclamation teams, cash deposits are 500,000 yuan and 1 million yuan (\$145,400), respectively.

Currently, 97 construction teams have been formed across the county, employing more than 3,000 impoverished people. Improved water conservancy facilities, reclaimed land and afforested mountains will lead to more than 9,000 people being lifted out of poverty in the near future.

Zuoquan is also setting its sights on modern agriculture. Compared to traditional vegetable growing, greenhouse cultivation can prevent plant diseases and harmful pests, enhance yield and quality, and shield vegetables from damage caused by rain or floods.

Deng Ruibin, a 52-year-old farmer, despite experiencing extreme poverty, loves his



Visitors at the Longquan Forest Park in Zuoquan County, north China's Shanxi Province. Developing tourism has become a major measure to reduce poverty in Zuoquan

village Xiashuang. This year, he saw his earnings grow to 40,000 yuan (\$5,800) due to a tomato greenhouse.

With interest-free loans from the local government and free training and guidance from resident agrotechnicians, 746 households in Qinquan—of whom about two thirds lived below the poverty line—now have greenhouses, with income that exceeds 35 million yuan (\$5.1 million).

"In the past, my wife and I earned less than 10,000 yuan by farming 12 mu (0.87 hectares) of land. Now, our net income from a tomato greenhouse of 1 mu (0.07 hectares) can be 15,000 yuan a year. For that reason, I plan to expand my greenhouse cultivation next year," said Deng.

More than 100 local impoverished households now work nearby for large-scale greenhouse vegetable farms, on a daily wage of 80-100 yuan (\$11.5-14.5), which is a better choice than leaving home to work far away, said Liu Wengming, head of the vegetable

department of the agriculture committee of Zuoquan.

### Looking forward

To prevent sliding back into poverty after shaking it off, efforts must be made to strengthen local economic foundations and industrial development, fostering the capacity to generate a steady and sustainable growth force.

As an old revolutionary base area located on the west side of Taihang Mountain, Zuoquan also has a tourism resource. In 2018, 11 tourism highways began to be constructed, connecting almost all the towns and six scenic areas in the county.

A host of industrial projects are also

sprouting up, including iron works, wind power and garment production. In the future, 20.48 billion yuan (\$2.97 billion) will be invested in the development of 10 major industrial projects and 10 infrastructure projects, with 3.05 billion yuan (\$443 million) invested this year.

From 2014 to 2017, more than 30,000 people had been lifted out of poverty in Zuoquan. To consolidate poverty reduction progress, the county government has spent over 2 million yuan (\$290,800) to insure people.

With insurance, these people are less likely to return to poverty due to illness, natural disaster, education costs or aging. ■



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