

THEORY AND PRACTICE BEHIND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ECOLOGICAL MODEL VILLAGES

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Yongning county in the southeastern part of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region is under Nanning, the capital of Guangxi. There are 21 towns, 238 villages and 1774 hamlets. The county population is 900,000 out of which 800,000, or 89%, are farmers. In 1999 the average net income of the farmers was RMB 2,480. There is a considerable environmental degradation (deforestation, soil erosion) due to the use of wood, crop stalks and grass as fuel.

Since October 1999 the county party committee and government have conducted a campaign for the ecological development of the county's rural areas. After successful trials in model villages such as Pingfeng of Wuxu town and Xingfu of Changtang village the county in year 2000 put forward a proposal to develop 45 model villages, at least two in each town. The 45 model villages consist of 1,758 households and a total of 9,852 people. By the end of July 2000, RMB 3,620,000 had been invested, RMB1,360,000 from government subsidies and RMB 2,260,000 from the inhabitants. A total of 560,000 working days have been spent on the development of these 45 model villages.

As a result of these efforts there are now in the county 679 biogas digesters (for 39% of the families), 1,440 ecosan toilets (for 82% of the families), 1,376 rebuilt kitchens (for 78% of the families), 35 villages have separated humans, 29 villages have cemented roads and lanes, 40 villages have improved their electricity supply network, 29 villages have installed telephones (each now has at least 3 telephones), all the 45 villages have improved their supply of drinking water, 29 villages have received cable TV, and all 45 have beautified the surroundings through parks and plantations.

Great changes have now taken place in these 45 model villages. Many poor conditions commonly found in the past have been thoroughly changed and the rural areas are taking on an entirely new look.. In the course of comprehensive ecological improvement, Yongning county 's way to " renovate villages without pulling down houses " has fully been affirmed by the provincial and municipal leaders and departments concerned.

For this Yongning model the most important issues are:

1. Political will and good administration

Leaders ' political awareness and efforts in works are essential to the success of the model villages. The specific approaches in Yongning are:

- First the county party committee and government set up a special leading group with an office fully responsible for all development efforts. All towns establish the organizations accordingly, chief heads responsible for models in person and deputies going to work at grass-root level to organize the masses to fulfill their tasks.
- Second a system of job responsibility is implemented. Every leading member of the-

county ' s four chief departments was responsible for a model with specific tasks and executive persons in each town/village/hamlet.

- Third close cooperation and joint efforts regarding funds, manpower, equipment and materials. The construction departments were responsible for overall planning and supervision, the forestry departments were responsible for the construction of biogas digesters and the renovation of kitchens, the public health departments were responsible for the construction of ecosan toilets, the electricity departments and the telecommunication departments were responsible for their respective infrastructure improvements.
- Fourth, monitoring and follow-up: encouraging the advanced and urging on those who lag behind. This is done both by the special county department as well as by village and town heads.

2. Guidance by models

The power of examples is inexhaustible. In the course of comprehensive ecological improvement, Yongning county has attached great importance to strengthening the job of setting examples, giving full play to the model villages and families. In 1999 Yongning county designated five villages as the models for comprehensive environmental improvement. The party committees, governments and departments concerned at all levels were meticulous in job organization and enforcement. After half a year the environment in the five models had taken on an entirely new look. The success attracted many cadres and farmers from other areas to view and to emulate. Some visits were organized by villagers and townspeople and some were self-organized. Some came only to look, others came for detailed technical observations. At times there was a heated discussion about the construction of biogas digesters and ecosan toilets. These activities greatly encouraged many people to develop their own ecological villages. The model villages thus increased from 5 in 1999 to 45 in 2000, creating a breakthrough in the development of ecological villages.

3. Investment and efforts from all directions

To stimulate the development the government granted a subsidy of 10 bags of cement for each biogas digester (20 in 1999), a subsidy of RMB 30 for each hygienic toilet, and a subsidy of RMB 30,000 for each model village. For the improvement of the electricity supply, the installation of telephones, drinking water supplies, the cable TV etc the departments concerned also offered some subsidies and supports. The capital for cementing country roads and paths and beautifying and making villages green were mainly from the collective funds. For example, Xingfu village invested RMB 50,000 from the income of milling, fish breeding and digging sand. As the direct beneficiaries from comprehensive ecological improvement villagers invested labour and time as well as money.

4. "Science treated scientifically"

Firstly, comprehensive planning. We prepared plans after having decided on tasks and considered the specific conditions of each model village. We began with constructions like biogas digesters, new kitchens and hygienic toilets that required less funds and created quick and obvious benefits in order to strengthen confidence and gradually head

for more difficult tasks. Secondly, technical training. The county and villages (towns) were to organize practical, highly efficient technical teams. By inviting experts as advisors, organizing technical training sessions and learning from others we developed a group of technical teams with solid professional knowledge, capable of theoretical and practical work and capable of setting examples. Thirdly, ideological work. Through training by technical personnel, introducing experience by model families, and combining with other activities by the departments concerned, people's awareness and knowledge of public health issues was increased.

5. Proceeding from actual conditions

In the last two decades of reform in rural areas, Yongning county has made great achievements in agriculture and rural economy. With the steady growth of people's living standard, the rural ecological improvement is becoming more important than before. In recent years, Yongning county has constantly sent people for study visits in Guangxi and outside. Initially this led us astray when we applied so-called "high standard" planning, pulling down all the old houses and building new ones. As a result, the construction speed slowed down and it became difficult to keep on. From this we learnt a lesson. In the course of development, we upheld the principles of proceeding from actual conditions, taking measures suited to local conditions, being efficient, not applying others' experience indiscriminately but acting according to the people's and the county's capability, and according to the present economic level. Following a way "supportable for the governments and the collectives, endurable for the farmers", we adhered to the rule "renovate and repair instead of pulling down and building new". As a result we used less money to improve the built environment. It proved in practice that under identical conditions there turn out to be two entirely different results between "pull down and rebuild houses" and "renovate and repair".