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Living with Livestock: The Nu and the Value of Local Voice in Rural Chinese Development

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Abstract

The Nu (Yunnan Province) are a rural, economically marginal ethnic minority in southwestern China known for their tradition of raising livestock in pens built under or next to their homes. The local government used the federal Targeted Poverty Alleviation (TPA) program to build freestanding pens and relocate livestock in response to the perceived poverty of the Nu. The project had limited success. We argue that the program's failure left the Nu out of decision-making and program planning process. Our discussion explores an alternative approach to the top-down structure of TPA and incorporates ethnic minorities in decision-making. By listening to local voices and embracing ethnographic–anthropological methods, the governments can improve the effectiveness of TPA in ethnic regions of China.

Keywords: Living with livestock, indigenous development, Targeted Poverty Alleviation, cultural tradition, the Nu people

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1.0 Introduction

Targeted Poverty Alleviation (TPA) programs began in China, in 2014 with government sponsorship and promised to directly address (target) rural poverty and develop measure that would support economic growth across the nation. TPA replaced previous poverty alleviation programs and strived to improve their accuracy, effectiveness and sustainability by tailoring projects to help poor households and individuals according to their needs. Programs were organized to meet specific goals that could be quantified at a national level and linked directly to local governments. The assumption was that local governments would support national goals that strove to meet specific targets under federal standards. In other words, TPA was meant to identify 'real poverty' that might confront the poor or real challenges that limited rural opportunity and integration.

President Xi Jinping argued that TPA goals are best met through industrial development, relocation, eco-compensation, education and the expansion of both the protections and reach of social security programs. He also regards TPA as critical to

ending poverty nationwide, the most important goal for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Nevertheless, a significant and complicated challenge for ethnic minority regions is that the benefits of TPA programming have not fully met the needs of many ethnic minority communities in the country's west. Nearly 30.5 million people continued to live in poverty, earning no more than 2,952 yuan ($429) annually as recently as 2017. Of this group 33.9%, or more than 10.3 million people, were living in the ethnic minority regions. And the poverty rate for China's ethnic minorities living in the western half of the country was 6.9%, more than double the poverty rate of the nation overall 3.1% (National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China, 2018). A nationwide survey found diverse needs and a series of different challenges added difficulties for TPA to succeed (Li, Su, & Liu, 2016).

This means that TPA while an important approach to dealing with poverty does not take into account what local minorities are really talking about to some extent. We need to rethink current poverty alleviation methods and explore an effective development model in western China and for ethnic minority groups. TPA goals were defined by the government not the minorities' communities in question. It is by listening to local communities and engaging with their traditional practices, that the government can plan 'real targeted' programs and meet not only national goals but make those goals local and sustainable.

2.0 Review

Governmental departments and regional workers have explored various approaches to poverty alleviation through years of practical application. Over the last several years the Chinese government has learned that income transfer programs and non-food based social safety ultimately places more choices in the hands of the poor as they gain the ability to make informed economic decisions (Ramanujam & Chow, 2016). Yan (2016) summarizes some of the costs and benefits of various programs in "Poverty Alleviation in China: A Theoretical and Empirical Study" noting ways the state combats rural poverty among other things. Wu and Han (2018) argue that it is also crucial to engage with the poor as stake holders in any programing. And while the government's decision to launch the TAP program is based on defining and understanding poverty in China, Xing and Zhao (2016) note that there is no single definition that captures the dynamic nature of poverty in the nation. They argue that poverty is a cultural construction that reflects ideas associated with 'the poor' and perhaps more importantly structural factors that confront and limit what those living in poverty can accomplish. Factors that limit rural and impoverished Chinese include capital, resources and technology, education and knowledge, information and culture among other things. A second set of challenges are defined by what the state considers the 'misuse' of relief funds that are spent on alcohol and cigarettes. In Gansu and Ningxia, rural poor will quickly sell the cattle or sheep that were provided by local government programs to earn a quick return; thwarting the hopes of local programs and programmers who sought to increase rural engagement with national cultural programs. The challenges that confront TPA suggest that the rural poor in China have yet to fully benefit from programed poverty reduction (Wang & Zeng, 2018).

Further complicating poverty reduction in China is the lack of diversity and flexibility in TPA policies (Ge & Zing, 2015). Too often the state promotes a 'one size fits all' approach to poverty alleviation that ignores or underestimates local

challenges to programming—undermining flexibility and application. Bu (2018) describes the problems TPA is facing in ethnic areas as a form of developmental 'involution' creating complexity as groups come into to contact around poverty reduction without actually addressing any problems (see also Geertz, 1963; Fang, 2014). The resulting distortions led to the inaccurate delivery of TPA resources, problematic TPA performance, and a weakening of policy. 'Growth without development' complicates support as public support wanes in response to failed development.

Xiao and Wu (2018) argue that the widening of the income gap counteracts the effect of economic development of the poor, based on a study of ethnic regions over the past 70 years. Urbanization and population flows as well as cultural differences further impact poverty reduction programs (see also Nie and Gong, 2018). Bao (2018), who has studied the Mumba and Lhoba ethnic groups in Medog, Tibet, believes that TPA should move from a set of programs that are focused on poverty relief to programs that seek to foster development.

In fact, the lack of recognition of the unique challenges facing ethnic minority communities tests much of the effort by the state to foster programming. We argue that the challenges facing TPA are founded in the unique and diverse needs of the various rural and minority communities the state seeks to support. Further complicating programs is the government's failure to engage with local communities in defining challenges as well as the search for sustainable solutions. Policies and measures of TPA can be truly 'targeted' only if they take into account structural challenges to local groups, the cultural background of minorities and changing the existing 'top-down' model promoted by the state. To test our assumption, we surveyed Qiunatong village, Gongshan, the site of a recent TPA program located in a remote county defined by mountains and gorges in northwest Yunnan Province and near China's border with Myanmar.

3.0 Challenges

Home to the Nu, Gongshan County is one of the poorest rural areas in Yunnan (see Table 1), a region characterized by mountainous terrain, poor infrastructure, and an ethnically diverse population that includes the Lisu, Derung, Tibetan, Bai and Naxi in addition to the Nu (Yeh, 2015; Zheng, 2017). Traveling across the region's many rivers captures the challenge that rural minorities face in Yunnan. Rather than bridges, most people must depend on zip-lines to cross rivers and move from home to work (see Figure 1).

To better understand the challenges of development and review ongoing projects, we worked with the Nu people in Qiunatong village, a community in Gongshan county, Yunnan province, China. The Nu is one of 56 ethnic groups in China, with a population about 40,000 (Writing Group, 2008, 2009; Zhao, 2001; Mullaney, 2011; Yang, 2011). Named for their proximity to the Nu River (see Figure 2), the ancestors of the contemporary Nu lived in the upper and middle reaches of the River as early as the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368 AD). The Nu practice Christianity, having converted from Tibetan Buddhism in the late 19th century following missionization by the French. Similar to the Lisu and Derung people of this region, the Nu share a good deal of their regional and cultural identity (Gao, 2010; Gros, 2011). In 1956, Gongshan became an autonomous region of People's Republic of China, known as Gongshan Derung and Nu Autonomous County.

The Nu live in small settlements and divide their time between small-scale agriculture—growing corn and wheat for family consumption—and raising livestock—pigs, cattle as well as chickens. The traditional Nu home is a wooden structure built cooperatively and on stilts, or into a hillside. It typically includes a central room (堂屋) and a fire pit (火塘) (Wang & Liu, 2012; Lu, Zhu, & Du, 2016). In the Nu villages—including Qiunatong Village, our research site—that dot the Gongshan landscape the Nu keep their animals in one of three types of pens: (a) Type 1-those built next to or under the bedroom (see Figures 3–5), (b) Type 2-those built under the kitchen (see Figure 6) and, (c) Type 3-those built under storage spaces (see Figure 7). While we encountered each type of pen during our research, pens under kitchens and under storage spaces were most common. With pens nearby or under homes, the Nu are typically described as 'Living with Livestock' (人畜混居).

Table 1: *Economic Develop Index, Gongshan, 2015*

Population	GDP	Per capita GDP	Rural Per capita Net Income	Local Financial Revenue
34,900	$ 156.1m	$4469.9	$728.9	$10.9m

Figure 1. Zip-line.

Source: Photograph taken by Shengyu Pei, 09/28/2015.

Figure 2. The Nu People.

Source: Photograph taken by Shengyu Pei, 09/28/2015.

Figures 3-5. Type 1.

Source: Photographs taken by Shengyu Pei, 09/28/2015.

Figure 6. Type 2.

Source: Photograph taken by Shengyu Pei, 09/28/2015.

Figure 7. Type 3.

Source: Photographs taken by Shengyu Pei, 09/28/2015.

The challenges the Nu face in Qiunatong village, Gongshan are common to other rural communities that are known for raising livestock and it captures the contests that place state defined TPA goals at odds with local beliefs and practices. While this lifestyle makes sense for the Nu, politicians from urban centers in the east as well as other large cities in China often associate this lifestyle with poverty. Assumed to be a sign of poverty, the government sees the Nu's homes as a problem and the location of the animal pens under a home as a challenge to be improved. In response to perception of the Nu tradition of stabling livestock under the home as a sign of poverty, TPA programs invested in building new cement and brick pens. The pens were moved away from the homes (see Figures 8–9) as were the animals living in them. Leaving a clear, uncluttered space below the Nu homes. TPA leaders celebrated the project as an important way to address poverty, improve health in the Nu community, support market integration and foster local development as well as rural integration. The government argued the new pens held many benefits. They would help the Nu produce more and healthier, larger livestock for a growing food market that would bring investments to the region. Unfortunately, and according to our investigation, the Nu did not use the new pens. In fact, most families continued to house their livestock under their homes.

Figures 8 and 9. Separate pens.

Source: Photographs taken by Shengyu Pei, 09/28/2015.

The outcome was awkward to say the least. Regional officials were confused when Qiunatong villagers rejected the improved newly constructed pens. They were further frustrated by the investments made in labor and financial support that the state had invested in building the pens. Locals, on the other hand, wondered why so many other problems were ignored. In fact, the local community felt the government was asking them to reject their traditions, turn their backs on their past and their ethnicity and adopted a series of untested and untried innovations that were problematic at best and threatened to increase their dependency on governmental handouts.

To better understand 'living with livestock' and move away from the assumption that it is a sign of poverty, we asked the people of Qiunatong why they adopted this way of life. They answered without hesitation: "That's what we Nu people have done in the past. We're used to it." And while living with livestock was recognized as a local tradition, community leaders were keen to learn of new opportunities and engage new markets that might better integrate Qiunatong into a growing regional market and state systems. Nevertheless, for the villagers, these were changes that could come without building new pens and changing how livestock were cared for and stabled. In other words, while there was shared consensus over the need for development and investment in the area, there was very little support that investment and programming needed to include new ways of stabling livestock. The challenge

was clear. While local government and state leaders had a series of goals targeting poverty alleviation in rural China; the Nu did not agree on how best to even identify what the problem might be; certainly, for the villagers there were other challenges that were more pressing.

4.0 Findings

To understand the disconnection between the government's goals, the TPA program and the response of the Nu, we conducted one week of ethnographic research in Qiunatong village, in Gongshan County, Yunnan Province. We conducted interviews with local governmental officials as well as villagers to develop our case-study of the community (see Beebe, 2001 on the conduct of rapid assessment in ethnography).

Our first challenge was to find out why the government approached living with livestock as an urgent problem to confront and resolve. We discovered that the state's demands for change came from experiences around a similar issue in Liangshan—Sichuan Province, China—that caught the nation's attention in 2015. A composition named "tears", written by a little girl in Liangshan, was reported by several major media outlets as the saddest story in the world. The document reflected what the young writer described as the appalling and unbelievable poverty that was common in Liangshan and that included the Yi people—another ethnic group of China—who practiced 'living with livestock' as they often slept with pigs and cattle in one room of their home. In response to the perceived deprivation and hoping to limit a repeat of such problems elsewhere, the provincial government asked local officials to begin TPA programs that would focus on developing an alternative way to stable animals. While the most important goals were ending local poverty, in the process, lifestyles changes would follow. Leaders assumed that once livestock were removed from the home, rural poverty would decline. From 2016 to 2017, TPA invested 230 million yuan ($33.4 million) in Liangshan and helped 12,031 residents build new homes in addition to new pens (Government of Foshan City and Government of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, 2018).

Local and provincial leaders throughout the country who face similar forms of rural poverty felt the pressures of public opinion to address the problem. Often the resolution of rural poverty had less to do with local perceptions and reflected instead urban leadership living far from the problem. In Gongshan one way that local leaders responded to their perceptions of poverty and the pressures of state leaders was to build new pens. Following directives from state leaders, rural officials in Gongshan moved to erect new stables, replace 'living with livestock' and rescue the Nu and Qiunatong villagers from the poverty that included livestock living underneath their homes. Supporting the interventions, building new pens was not very expensive or difficult and the results came quickly bringing government officials' political praise in rural places including Qiunatong village.

Local leaders were anxious to engage with state level programs (including TPA), find problems that were easily resolved and build quantifiable successes they could 'bank' for later. In the 'top-down' system of development that was common to TPA, projects focus not on the community in need but instead on the political actors directing programs. The complexities of a political system that involves many vertical layers of governance, competition between localities and an ever-changing balance between centralization and decentralization (Logan, 2018) made listening to local leadership difficult and fostered a 'one size fits all' approach. This is not a

new challenge. For instance, some local leaders use only one anti-poverty measure or standard set by the superior government to solve impoverishment for all poor in an area. And while such programming can be successful, they can also lead governments to ignore potential challenges, including the challenge that came as the Nu rejected the projects and would not move their livestock.

Too often, local populations and their practices are assumed to be a problem; this is particularly true when those practices do not fit into the models that the state associates with success and progress (see McGillivray 2006). Anthropologists have developed alternatives to 'blaming the victims' of poverty (Frerer & Vu, 2007) and argue that local populations describe potential challenges and even effective solutions in ways that outsiders cannot. As we have shown, few of members of Qiunatong village wanted to use the newly constructed pens and instead chose to continue their traditional practice and stable their livestock under their homes. Working with villagers, we discovered that the community was ready to embrace the goals of development, but they did not want to abandon their traditions and they rejected any attempt to blame them for their predicament. As we learned, stabling animals under a home is not a sign of poverty; rather living with livestock is a sign of a family's wealth, their traditions and lifestyle. The community was not interested in the pens but other issues.

Villagers argued that the new pens challenged traditional practices and local preferences that included living in close proximity to livestock. The Nu tend to live in stilt houses that are a response to the steep and uneven geography of the mountain region they call home. Building on stilts makes sense and is a symbolically rich practice rooted in deeply held traditions. The stilt houses are an adaptive framework for managing geography and potentially better health, and it is pragmatic as families' moisture-proof, their homes create ventilation and shelter from the rain and the earthquake.

Villagers believe that the shady space covered with weed and straw under their homes is an ideal place to stable animals during hot summer and cold winter months. Placed in cement and brick pens, away from home, livestock can suffer skin diseases, rashes, freeze, and certainly cannot be watched carefully. Several locals commented that their pigs did not feel well living in the new cement pens. Moreover, it is the symbol, which distinguishes these communities from other groups, other livelihood mode practices, historical inheritance, cultural characteristics and wellbeing. In the eyes of the villager the person who builds a traditional stilt house from local wood and stone is regarded as industrious because he has chosen physically difficult work. In contrast, the person who builds a house with tiles and bricks supplied by a project or program, is deemed lazy (Zhang & Liu, 2007). Applied to homes in the village, the form of the structure and the way space is organized captures the harmonious relationship between people and land, the organization mechanism of the family and the neighborhood space; at the same time, they show a unique ethnic character that manages environment and climate as well as inheritance.

We also discovered that 'living with livestock', though frowned upon by state leaders, is convenient and adaptive as the Nu keep their livestock close. Zhang—a Nu villager—said pigs must be fed regularly and typically twice daily (10 a.m. and 6 p.m.). Pigs in particular, eat pigweed, rice bran, wheat bran and corn; also, they eat scraps and leftovers from meals. He needed to boil these foods together to make the fodder necessary for pigs that eat up to 22 pounds of fodder a day on average

(including 1.2 pounds of corn flour). Carrying that much food to pens—and in reality, buying food rather than using available kitchen scraps to meet daily demands—is difficult. It demands engagement in a cash economy and a means of transportation that may not be available. It is much easier and efficient to keep livestock close, in pens under a kitchen or storage area for feeding. With livestock safely under a home there is no need to travel, no need to carry food and no worry that animals might disappear or be stolen. Pens located under homes are typically small and support self-sufficient production that is critical and central to Nu life (Wen, 2014). And while the limited number of livestock available to a family can restrain participation in a larger market for meat, each village family met its own needs with the pigs, cattle and chickens living under their homes. In other words, large-scale farming may not be critical as a traditional approach to stabling meets the needs of most villagers.

Finally, Qiunatong villagers know that keeping animals penned under their home largely eliminates the cost that can be associated with stabling. The space is readily available, accessible and handy. There is no need to purchase specialized building materials to create a pen, no time spent traveling or paying for vehicles—whether bicycles, cars or trucks—between home and pen, no need to move or purchase special foods and there is no time required to guard the animals who are now unsupervised. Yu—a local official—said, although the price of wood ($0.12/ft³) had been set by the local government, the villagers actually did not pay for it. Wood–lumber and stones were free. On the other hand, cement and brick ($0.4/ea.) are 'expensive' for building a new pen. In addition, there is the annual food cost of raising a pig—about $53 or 7.3% of per capita net income. Covering the costs of maintenance of the new pens was a further challenge that few Nu families could meet. Under the circumstances, they found that they had to choose how best to spend their incomes. Cement and brick were unanticipated expenses that meant other purchases could not take place. Not surprisingly, most villagers quickly left the new stables and returned to, 'living with livestock', a much more economical alternative.

Villagers understood that separate pens, located away from their homes were likely part of a more hygienic way to raise livestock. Nevertheless, they did not think that living with livestock was the most serious problem they faced. According to the report of Gongshan County People's Hospital, the main infectious disease in the area is tuberculosis. There were few if any infectious disease in the area that could jump between humans and animals (Yu & He, 2016); and the positives that they associated with moving animals to new pens did not outweigh the benefits of continuing their traditions.

Since they did not use the pens, an important question asks why the villagers allowed officials to build the new pens. We believe that the Nu were motivated to comply with TPA programming goals as a way to avoid conflict in exchange for having access to other governmental resources. After the implementation of various kinds of government programs for roads, electricity, water and television signals in recent years, the infrastructure of Qiunatong village has been greatly improved. Compared with the past, the income of villagers has also increased. In effect, there was little reason for them to be concerned over the value and practicality of the pens; rather, they did not want to object to the government's decisions and seem unappreciative of the support. Allowing the pens—even if they were not to be used—meant the leaders of the community could return to the regional government at a later date to request additional support. Engaging the government is critical, villagers did not

reject the opportunity to integrate with the broader economy and local residents were keen to find new ways to link with the economy and world that was developing around them, and many believed that TPA and governmental investment were an effective part of an economic strategy that brought the region new resources and opportunities.

5.0 Discussion

We can find that the issue of living with livestock is dynamic and varies from region to region. The extreme and deep poverty, such as living with pigs and cattle in one room in Liangshan, certainly needs to be tackled by TPA as soon as possible. Perhaps it is the 'real poverty' that the local Yi people are eager to change. Nevertheless, for the Nu of Qiunatong village, Gongshan, living with livestock is unique and it should not be dealt with the same as it is in Liangshan. For the villager of Qiunatong, it is a tradition that makes sense and it is a smart choice for local folks. Living with livestock is a sign of tradition rather than poverty and it is a critical way in which the Nu adapt to their world.

Western modes of economic, political and social reform once defined universal patterns of development that viewed local traditions as unreasonable and inferior (Escobar, 1995; Haque, 1999). Poverty was rendered as a technical issue that would be solved through careful planning and engaged governance (Schech & Haggis, 2014). And, we are still discussing the structure of poverty in China as well as the significance and strengths of the competing models of the culture of poverty (Gajdosikienë, 2004; Lende, 2010; Fang, 2012) and poverty of culture (Wang, 2012) approaches in ethnic regions of China. A top-down, culture of poverty model argues the Nu are poor because that is all they know and living with livestock reflects that poverty and its conditions including a lack of development and limited national integration. Unfortunately, the government's emphasis on top-down political mobilization and advanced technologies of TPA produced inevitable tensions among practitioners, officials and locals in ethnic areas (Mu, 2018). We believe the most important reasons for limited success of TPA in Qiunatong village, Gongshan include the ways in which the pen project ignored local traditions and the structural differences that sit behind development. TPA needs to be clearly defined based upon the needs and voices of local minorities, their cultures and the goals they share with leadership. We can facilitate TPA strategies by identifying and addressing the most important concerns for the target population and in the process, we can enhance the long-term sustainability of development interventions (Tilt, 2011). TPA alone cannot reduce the challenges that face poverty alleviation or sustainable economic development without including cultural aspect of rural, ethnic minority life (Chan & Ma, 2004).

Rural poverty remains a challenge in China but living with livestock is not by definition a symptom of poverty or the central concern of marginal ethnic minority communities. We suggest it is time for the local government to listen to the community and identify opportunities, goals and challenges for change. It is critical to change the perspective of the poverty problem and make targeted measures from locals' view for TPA to play a positive role in the development of ethnic regions. Rather than direct moving and replacing pens, the local government can establish a cooperative working mechanism and implement phased programs to meet the needs of communities through the development of tourism, farming and other industries.

Challenging traditions, even in a rural setting that is economically and politically marginal, can create new difficulties and limit opportunities.

Specialists who are not aware of local cultural practices and traditions cannot judge the values that are critical to ethnic minorities. The assumption that urban needs are equivalent to rural needs also needs to be abandoned. As we have argued, the Nu do not object to development and many in the region hope to be better integrated into their province and the nation. Local people should be seen as part of the solution, not the problem (Foggin & Torrence-Foggin, 2011). Rural, ethnic minority communities, including the Nu, seek development that will enhance education, build connections—and therefore integration—and bring the state to Qiunatong while Qiunatong is carried to their state.

Our recommendations build upon Chinese anthropology's concerns for 'others'— ethnic minorities. Different from most cases that are focused on the Han—majority of China—the minorities do not want to see their living space changed in order to meet the goals of 'modernization', and they do not want their economic, social, and cultural traditions replaced in response to limited knowledge of outsiders and the media. Locals need and are seeking integrated development based on ethnic cultural traditions. In this case, engaging local voices and incorporating local leadership builds upon the traditions of participant observation, ethnographic interviews and thick description to create a framework for participatory development that can be used widely by the state, TPA programming and in particular programs in China's western regions (Zhou & Qin, 2003). The guiding role of anthropological theory and the application of anthropological methods contribute to effectiveness, cost reduction and intellectual support for TPA (Qi, 2017). Similarly, Eversole (2018) describes how insights from anthropology informed a local and regional development program in North West Tasmania, Australia. She points out that an anthropological approach can challenge dominant framings of development issues and reveal alternatives. Knowledge partnering draws attention to the knowledge and logics of different actors and can help development professionals and community members to reframe old issues in new ways. The example of the Liangshan Development Center of the Yi Women and Children provides an exceptional example of our vision. The LDC combines anthropology theory and social work to support the Yi as they rebuild their homes in Sichuan with TPA funds in a way that balances modern needs with cultural traditions (Hou, 2018). We believe that it is only through an inclusive model that includes listening to local communities as problems are defined and solutions designed that TPA can succeed.
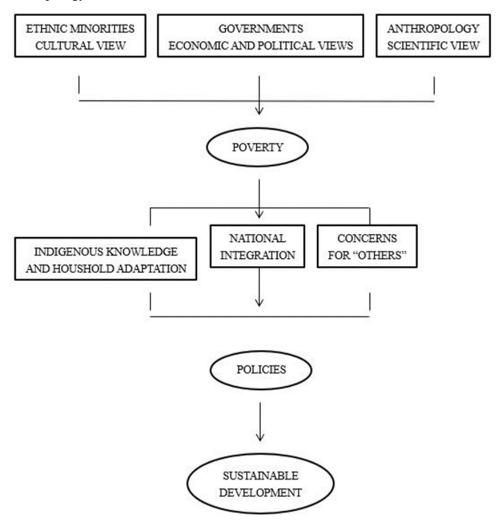
6.0 Conclusion

Our investigation offers a new TPA model for sustainable development (see Figure 10) that includes identifying 'targeted' poverty as defined in-situ and organizing policies that can address unique issues. Our approach removes tensions between the local community and the state by introducing an ethnographic sensitivity that better captures the complex challenges locals and leaders face as they coordinate their efforts.

The challenges that confront governmental leaders and TPA programs as they work to end poverty are massive, particularly in China's ethnic minority communities. Nevertheless, many of these challenges stem from cultural misunderstanding. In the new TPA model, ethnographic work will effectively help the government to better understand the cultural traditions of ethnic minorities and engage with local

communities. Poverty is more than an economic problem. Rooted in cultural beliefs, political power and social practice, it varies as we move from urban to rural settings and think about unique issues and challenges. Indigenous knowledge is critical for an effective TPA. Traditional customs, including living with livestock, do not mean that minorities are ignorant or poor. Living with livestock is not a problem; rather it is a phenomenon and an adaptation by the minorities to a specific set of challenges that are unique to them and their lifestyle.

Figure 10. A new model for TPA including indigenous knowledge and anthropology's concern for 'others'.

Source: Authors.

In response, we believe that China's strategies and policies for sustainable development must respond to these differences and build upon them as they embrace sustainable economic development goals. Enforcement of TPA does not make sense without a dialogue between populations about needs, outcomes, traditions and practices. Minority and indigenous groups must be respected by the government and their needs and practices must be acknowledged when making policies and organizing programs. Including minority communities in program planning as well as decision making holds promise and points toward more sustainable outcomes for

at least two reasons. First, empowering local communities and including them as decision-makers brings critical, experienced voices to TPA programming and focuses solutions on locally defined challenges. It will be conducive to the adaptability of the TPA programs. Second, bringing local voices into decision making moves toward the recognition of those voices as competent, well informed and engaged. This will facilitate bottom-up political expression in rural development. Following this approach, local communities are no longer a problem and a challenge to national solutions; instead, they become strong tools for tackling local challenges and creating workable, sustainable solutions.

The core idea of TPA programs should be to support the people rather than simply meeting a state defined goal at any cost. This means choosing the right programs and effectively targeting the challenges that are identified by internally and by the communities in question. Unfortunately, no one method of targeting poverty or developing opportunity stands out as being a cut above the rest in absolute terms (Lavallée, Pasquier-Doumer, & Robilliard, 2010). The point is to enhance success by using different methods and targeting different problems in different places. This also provides a vast space and valuable opportunity for the application of anthropology in a changing China and its minorities regions.

Acknowledgements

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