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# **Universalizing Nine-Year Compulsory Education for Poverty Reduction in Rural China**

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## **Executive Summary**

It is widely agreed that the most effective strategy for eliminating poverty and achieving sustainable development in any country is to expand educational access and improve educational quality. To achieve these goals, the government of China embarked on a program to make nine-year compulsory education universally available, particularly in rural areas where the majority of its population lives and where low economic development has been the norm.

According to the 2000 census, China's rural population is 810 million—64 percent of the country's population. Over 80 percent of primary schools and 64 percent of lower secondary schools are in rural areas. The poor are concentrated in rural areas because of the gap between rural and urban development. The government focused on universalizing nine-year compulsory education to eliminate illiteracy among youth and adults and to upgrade the rural population's quality of life. Its longer-term goals were to eliminate poverty and achieve sustainable social progress.

Since the 1986 passage of its compulsory education law, China has fundamentally achieved the national goal for the “Two Basics,” namely, extending universal nine-year compulsory education among the school-aged population and literacy among those less than 20 years old. The average years of schooling have risen from fewer than five in the early 1980s to more than eight now, a gain of three years. Nine-year compulsory education was universalized in the area where 90 percent of the population lives— up from just 40 percent in the early 1990s. In addition, the illiteracy rate for the 15–45 age cohort was reduced to 4.8 percent from 10 percent over the same period. Consequently, the enrollment rates at the primary and lower secondary levels reached 98.6 percent and 90 percent, respectively, in 2002. The “Two Basics” were achieved in 2,598 counties, 90 percent of the total number of counties in China.

At the same time, the quality of education was raised. In the late 1990s, the government formulated objectives for quality education targeting all students and aiming to improve overall educational quality. As part of this process, a new national curriculum was introduced and massive teacher training programs were launched to improve teachers' professionalism.

China's persistent efforts to provide compulsory education resulted in developing strong human resources that, in turn, have helped to yield sustainable economic growth in the past two decades. With regard to rural development, universalizing compulsory education provided the rural population with equal access to education and empowered rural laborers with more skills. The poor

population in China was 250 million in 1978; it declined to 80 million in 1995, and further decreased to roughly 30 million by the end of 2000.

### **Lessons learned**

Universalizing compulsory education can be used as a long-term strategy for poverty alleviation and rural human resources development to enhance the rural population's knowledge base and improve laborers' productivity, farmers' living standards and, eventually, sustainable social and economic development. To carry out the strategy, one must "*plan by region, implement by phase, and guide by category,*" taking into account regional economic discrepancies. For example, over time, the central government and provincial government have taken on more responsibility in providing infrastructure services for compulsory education provisions, as government's financial capacity increased.

National policies for and progress in universalizing nine-year compulsory education were disseminated through mass media to those in all walks of life. to create a favorable atmosphere for rural education and to mobilize community support for promoting compulsory education.

It is equally important to promote equity in education. The Chinese government focused on the basic learning needs of the poor rural population groups, especially those residing in remote and minority regions, and other disadvantaged social groups. By relying on community resources and the support of international aid agencies, the government has been able to implement many projects targeting poor rural areas such as the Basic Education Development Project in Poor Areas, National Compulsory Education Program for Poor Areas (NCEP), Rural-Urban Aid Program, Renovation of Dilapidated School Buildings in Poverty Areas, Project of Hope, and Spring Bud Scheme. In these projects, stipends and free textbooks were provided to families with economic difficulties, and special support was offered to allow disabled children access to compulsory education. All these secured the right to compulsory education of school-aged children in poor rural areas and of disadvantaged groups.

To constantly improve results in the nine-year compulsory education program, various levels of the government met regularly to monitor progress and exchange successful experiences. In addition, an inspection and reward system was developed and the results used as a critical indicator of government performance. Best practices of the international community were ushered in, such as project management, learning performance assessments, and gender equality, as well as the involvement of more professional institutions for policy research, intervention, and outcome dissemination.

China's nine-year compulsory education efforts were strengthened by the strong support it received from international agencies including The World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund, The United Nations Development Program, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Asian Development Bank, and Britain's Department for International Development, as well as overseas Chinese. Working jointly with various government offices, they developed cooperative projects to improve educational infrastructure, teacher training, curriculum and pedagogical renewal, upgrade educational quality, build capacity, reform management systems, and develop educational resources.

### **Remaining challenges and next steps**

Despite the government's many achievements, universal compulsory education in rural China still faces many challenges.

- *A wide gap between rural and urban educational status.* Up to 2002, the 372 counties failing to achieve the "Two Basics" goal were all concentrated in the disadvantaged rural western regions.
- *County-based funding and the management system.* Although the Chinese government has made great efforts in mobilizing resources for the compulsory education program, the total investment is still low when compared with international standards. The new administration system that relies mainly on county-based management is facing many difficulties; for example, the basic education provision system appears less functional in poor rural counties because it lacks a fundraising capacity.
- *Gaps in educational quality in poor communities.* The current basic education activities still remain less than equitable in some poor communities. Studies reveal that the equitable distribution of learning opportunities, both quantitatively and qualitatively, and especially in poor rural areas, will be a more demanding challenge.

To cope with these identified challenges, the State Council convened the National Working Meeting on Rural Education in September 2003. The universalization of nine-year compulsory education was at the top of the agenda. As a series of special measures to support the promotion of universal compulsory education in rural areas, the following policy interventions have been proposed:

- Redefine the specified universal compulsory education responsibilities of the government and all parties involved in rural areas to ensure the goals for compulsory education in rural areas are fully met.

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- Establish a guarantee mechanism for compulsory education in rural areas and strengthen the obligation of central and provincial financial departments' investment in compulsory education in rural areas.
- Strive to achieve the "Two Basics" in the western regions to ensure nine-year compulsory education attainment in all counties in terms of equitable education.
- Promote quality education through the new national curriculum and massive in-service teacher training programs.
- Initiate the national priority project on rural distance learning in all rural schools (to include a CD-ROM with the curriculum package for each village school or class, a satellite receiver and relay facilities for each complete school, and a computer classroom in each lower secondary school).
- Mobilize more extensive cooperation and partnership with domestic professional institutions and international agencies to generate support and a facilitative environment to upgrade China's performance in extending the compulsory education into rural areas.

# **1. Review of Nine-year Compulsory Education in Rural China**

China is a developing country with its majority population living in rural areas. According to 2000 census, the rural population had reached 810 million, 64 percent of the whole population. As a most populous country with diversified social and economic development status across the country, poverty population mostly reside in rural areas, esp. western and remote villages. Therefore, universalizing compulsory education and thus improve rural population's productivity and self-reliant capacity by means of science and technology became main task of "poverty alleviation through education".

## **1.1 Process of Promoting Compulsory Education in China**

Since foundation of new China, the process of GOC promoting compulsory education in rural China could be summarized into 3 phases:

### **Initial efforts for promoting universal primary education in rural areas (1949-1984).**

In 1949 when China won its independence, merely 20 percent of school-aged children had access to schooling, and over 80 percent of the population were illiterate or semi-illiterate. Primary education became the government's initial target in 1956, namely "to make great efforts in reducing illiterates, gradually extending primary education and achieving universal compulsory primary education within 12 years with available financial resources". However this target could not be achieved due to the poor economy caused by the natural calamities late in late 1950s and social chaos throughout 1960s and 1970s.

Since 1978 China began to recover from the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) with massive reform starting from rural economic system. Farmers' demand for universal education access roared up as their income increased and in pursuit of higher living quality. In 1980, the *Decision on Several Issues Concerned with Primary Education* formulated by GOC further pinpointed universalizing primary education as a predominant task of national modernization drive and stated that universally accessible primary education should be provided nationwide in 1980 and universally accessible primary education should be realized in some developed areas. It also stated that provision should vary from area to area based on their economic, cultural and other status, with region-based planning so that the objectives could be achieved by phase and by groups. The state also committed itself to provision of universal primary education in the most disadvantaged areas.

Moreover, as a reinforcing mechanism, a certification system was proposed to regularly monitor and assess the UPE progress.

**Promoting nine-year compulsory education with legislation (1985-1990).** With what has been achieved in primary education, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China released *Decision on Reform of Education System* in 1985, which put forward the goal of “universalizing nine-year compulsory education stage by stage”. In 1986, annual session of the People’s Congress passed LCE proclaiming the compulsory provision of nine-year basic education, and that “all the children at age of six should have the right for schooling regardless of gender, ethnicity and race”. The law also requires that “the state, the community, schools and families should guarantee the right of all children for schooling”. *Measures on Enforcing the Law for Compulsory Education* followed, which together with LCE, provided a legal protection system for rural universal compulsory education.

In late 1980s, one major change with rural basic education was to decentralize responsibility of universal nine-year compulsory education to the community level to mobilize more extensive resources, namely “Education for the people and by the people”. Consequently, massive publicity campaigns were organized among all walks of life for raising funds to improve school facilities. As a result, a total of 106.2 billion RMB Yuan was collected from farmers and communities in addition to the government regular budget from 1981 to 1991. The increased resources contributed enormously to supplementing the government UPE endeavors. Consequently, the proportion of dilapidated school buildings fell from 17 percent to 2 percent. Thus school conditions were improved, children’s educational access expanded sizably, which laid solid groundwork for universalizing compulsory education in rural areas.

**The goal of basically universalizing Nine-year Compulsory Education (1991-2000).** In the 1990s, China’s national effort for compulsory education was further strengthened with dual goal of “Two Basics”, namely, to achieve nine-year compulsory education and literacy among 85 percent of age cohort population by 2000 as primary goal of education development raised in annual session of the People’s Congress in 1992. Dual goals for compulsory and literacy hence became crux of education initiatives in China.

## **1.2 Objectives, principles and approach**

The main objectives of universal nine-year compulsory education were: to promote education based on each area’s economic level and educational foundation, specifically, universalization of NYCE should reach areas where 85 percent of the population inhabits, and enrollment rate at



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primary level should reach 99 percent and lower secondary level 85 percent by 2000; furthermore, universally accessible NYCE should be achieved in all the counties across the country by 2007.

As a most populous developing country, it is undoubtedly a gradual historical process to realize the above objectives. Therefore, the implementation of “nine-year compulsory education” program was planned in principle of “differentiated planning, standards and different timing” thus to cope with the diversified contexts. Such a strategy with county taking up the main responsibility is illustrated in the following Table 1.

**Table 1. Strategy of Universal Nine-year Compulsory Education in China**

Phase	Time	Objectives	Coverage
1 <sup>st</sup> phase	1994—1996	NYCE reaching 40-45 percent population	Cities and better-off counties
2 <sup>nd</sup> phase	1997—1998	NYCE reaching 60-65 percent population	Medium developed areas
3 <sup>rd</sup> phase	1999—2000	NYCE reaching 85 percent population	Population in medium developed areas and 5 percent of population residing in poor areas with relatively better condition
4th phase	2000-2007	To extend NYCE in poor western areas	Dealing with 372 counties and 83 million population

### 1.3 Policies and Measures

As rural economic system advanced and national strength picked up, GOC has continuously made adjustments on policies and measure related to compulsory education to promote universal NYCE.

**To pilot on rural education expenses sharing mechanism and administration system renewal** As raised in *Decision on Reform of Educational System* (1985) and further consolidated by LCE (1986), since the middle of 1980, responsibility of rural compulsory education has been shared by various levels of governments under the direct administration of State Council with local governments as the main management body. After two decades, *Decision on Reform and Development of Basic Education* again made adjustments and shifted administration of rural compulsory education to county governments.

**Table 2. Change with Administration System of Compulsory Education in Rural China**

Phase	Economic reform background	Rural education administration system	Rural education funding mechanism
1985-2000	Household based contract responsibility system Financial contracting by levels	Administration at provincial, county and township level under the leadership of the State Council	Mainly relying governmental allocation, with various sources of funding Rural farmers donated for school improvement

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Since 2001	Inter-governmental taxation sharing  Rural taxation reform	Shared administration by local governments by levels under the leadership of State Council and with county as the main management body.	Relying mainly upon county government' finance, while central and provincial government provide support by earmarked allocation.
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In the late 1970s, household-based contract responsibility system was established and implemented to mobilize farmers' productive initiatives, which directed both production cost and profits to every household. The renewed system shared responsibility of rural education provision in the background of national funding deficiency. Thus, rural educational funding has been mainly raised by farmers through grassroots organizations thanks to the household contract responsibility that improved farmers' poverty status.

Since 1990s, the shortcomings of the system were exposed with the introduction of rural taxation sharing mechanism, such as heavy burden rendered to farmers, teachers' brain-drain caused by arrears in salary, mismatch between governmental officials' ability for administration and requirements of quality compulsory education. Esp. with progress of rural taxation reform that cancelled rural education donation and educational surtax, the funding source for rural education no longer existed.

Targeting at the above problems, GOC has made adjustments and reformation over rural compulsory education management system in 2001, and stipulated that rural compulsory education provision, under direct administration of State Council, should be responsibility of local governments and exercise multi-level administration, with county as the main management body. Through the adjustments, two major shifts were achieved, i.e. shift from education donation by farmers to governmental funding for education provision and shift from township as the main management body to county as the main management body.

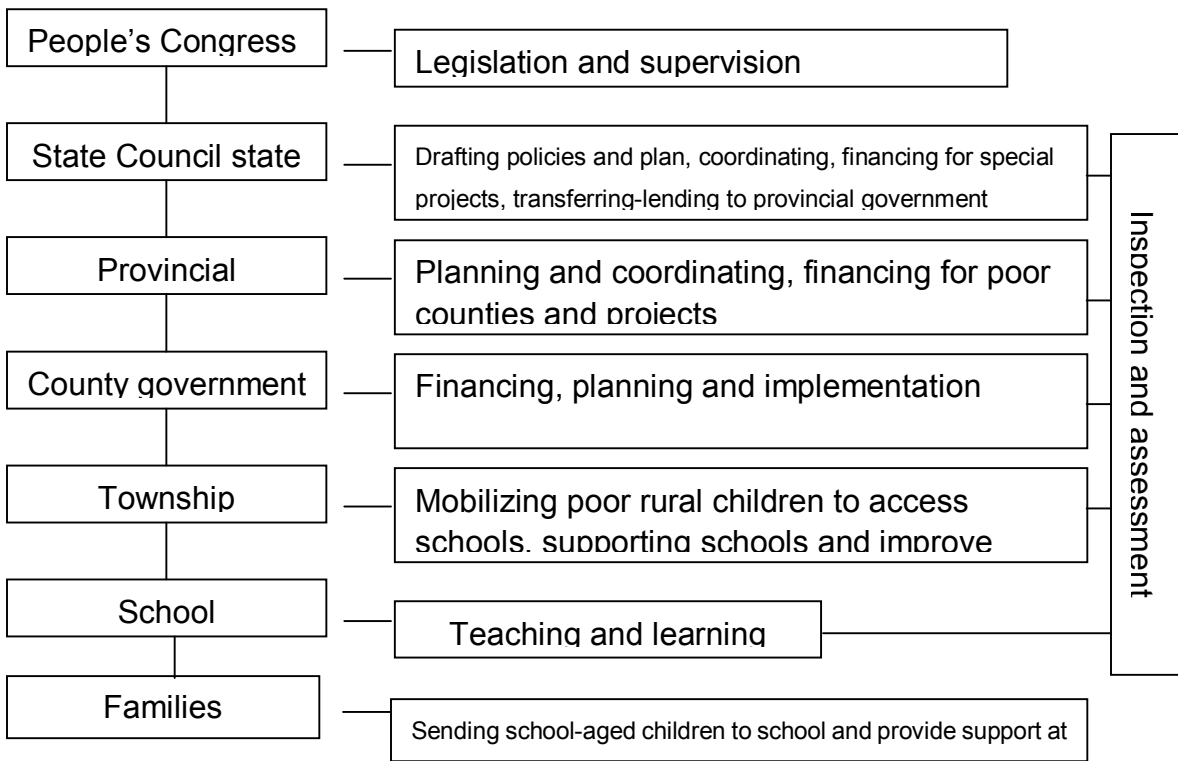
The rural compulsory education administration reform clarified various levels governments' responsibility. Confirmation of county government's chief responsibility for promoting rural compulsory education is the centerpiece of adjusting and improving rural compulsory education administration system. In the meanwhile, it strengthened central government and provincial governments' role for monitoring and macro-control in developing rural education, esp. Compulsory education in poor rural areas.

In addition, the major responsibility of township government in universalizing compulsory education was to mobilize and support children from poor families to access education, to improve school and teachers' life.

**To establish inspection and accreditation system** To reinforce various governments' administration and funding input for "two basics", an inspection and accreditation system was initiated to monitor process of universalizing NYCE and eliminating illiteracy in youth and adults in 1993. Later on, counterpart department at national, provincial and country levels were established as well.

Inspection and accreditation was conducted once every year to assess educational expenditure, progress, teachers' qualifications, educational quality, etc. The inspection procedure normally begins with self-evaluation by the county respectively on the school facilities, enrollment of children, qualification of teachers and outcomes of school performance. The county then applies to the provincial inspection authority for field inspection. Once the province reaffirms the accomplishment as measured with the specific criteria, a certificate will be conferred as qualified county with attainment of UBE (or both UBE and Literacy). The National Inspection Office also goes to the field to re-evaluate the UBE/Literacy counties on random basis.

**Chart 1. Shared Responsibility for Rural Compulsory Education**



Those rank first in inspection will be rewarded by praise or prize. The assessment results of the inspection attained, as a critical indicator for government performance, are then publicized

nationwide and followed by reward or warning and even punishment. Besides, the People's Congress at different levels, in addition to their role for legislation, hear report on work on NCEP by various governments, and undertake regular inspection field trips on government performance on UBE implementation.

### **Promoting education in poor areas as an approach for poverty alleviation**

The long-term national policies for poverty alleviation in rural counties have yielded remarkable outcomes by the beginning of 1990s. The poverty population, with the inadequate food and clothing, was reduced from 250 million (over 20 percent rural populace) in 1978 to 8 million (8.87 percent) in 1995. The poverty-stricken population live mainly in 592 nationally designated poor counties (set by *National Outline for Baqi Poverty Reduction*) located in the underdeveloped interior and western provinces with undesirable natural environments. Due to the economic difficulties, these counties could not meet the basic learning needs of school-aged children. Indeed, realistically speaking, the counties could hardly fulfill the objectives of NCEP by their own efforts if without priority support provided by central and various local governments.

Responding to that problem, the central government has adopted 3 major strategies to intervene since 1990s, namely, government's initiatives for poverty reduction, mobilizing community resources as well as usher in aid by international agencies

### **Governmental Initiatives of Education for Poverty Reduction.**

Since 1990s, GOC has enhanced its support to poor rural areas. Jointly with related government sectors and responsive to actual needs for promoting compulsory education, MOE has formulated a series of policies and organized a number of projects have been implemented to support such needy groups as children living in poor rural areas, ethnic minority children, disadvantaged girls, disabled children, as well as rural-urban migrant children to ensure their equal rights to education.

“National Compulsory Education Programme for Poor Areas (NCEP)” jointly coordinated by MOE and MOF (Ministry of Finance) has been the most massive basic education project in poor areas since foundation of new China.

### **Case 1. National Project on Compulsory Education in Poverty Areas (NPCE)**

NPCE has been carried out in two phases. The first phase was from 1995 to 2000 and the second phase 2001 to 2005. The project follows the principle of education for poverty reduction with a focus on meeting basic learning needs of children in 852 poor counties. The benefited population reached 250 million. The first priority was given to universal primary education and second to universal lower secondary. The main

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intervention areas included provision of basic school facilities, training of teachers and principals, free distribution of textbooks and supply of ICT assistance. 12.4 billion was invested for the first phase and 7.25 billion for the second phase. In addition, NPCE has drawn upon international expertise such as project management system to achieve better cost-effectiveness.

By 2000, the project was concluded with the following outcomes:

First, the enrollment rates in the project counties have reached 99 percent at primary level and 91 percent at lower secondary school levels. Among the 852 project counties, 428 have reached the national literacy standards, and 242 counties achieved universal primary education (UPE). Such a progress contributed positively to the national achievement of the dual goals of nine-year compulsory education and literacy in 2540 counties with a population coverage of 85 percent. Secondly, the school infrastructure has been strengthened with establishment of 4000 new schools, renovation or expansion completed in 30,000 schools. The total school building areas has been increased from 130 million square meters to 190 million square meters. Other supplies have also been made, including 6 million sets of desks and stools, 100 million books, 400,000 sets of experiment equipment.

Consequently, most project schools have acquired the basic standard of learning, namely safe classroom for each class, desk and stools for each child, facilities to undertake experiment prescribed by the syllabus.

Thirdly, teacher competencies have been built up with massive training involving around 450,000 teachers and 70,000 principals. In addition, 94.3 percent of the primary school principals have obtained, by various in-service program, required qualifications. All these created a positive impact on classroom teaching.

Fourthly, effective school re-mapping has been accomplished for the efficient utilization of resources with reduction of 17,000 schools, increase of enrollment of 4.37 million children, average primary school size raised to 168 and lower secondary to 660. Student-teacher ratio reached respectively 22.7:1 and 18.2:1 at primary and secondary level.

### 1.4 Implementation of Educational Aid Project

Since 1990s, the central government has undertaken several major projects for poor areas (See Table 2).

**Table 2 Special Funding Aid from the Central Government**

Title	Duration	Investment (RMB)	Areas of intervention	Target beneficiaries
Compulsory education project for poor areas	1995-2000	12.46 billion	Supply school buildings and teaching facilities, train teachers and principals	568568 state-designated poor counties, 284 province poor counties with a total beneficiary population of 250 million

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	2001-2005	7.25 billion	Distribute free textbooks among students from poor families and apply ICT in schools	522 counties without attainment of nine-year compulsory education
State-subsidized stipend for students from poor families	1997	130 million/year	Help poor students for schooling	Poor students from minority areas
	2001-2005	100 million/year	Help students from poor families for schooling	Students from poor families
Special aid for free textbooks	2001-2003	700 million /year	Aid the students from poor families	Students from poor families
Allowances for teachers' salaries	Since 2001	5 billion /year	teachers' salaries in poor areas	Primary and secondary teachers in western and interior poor areas
Reconstruction of dilapidated buildings	2001-2003	3 billion	Improve school buildings	Schools in project counties
	2003-2005	6 billion		
Distance education programme for rural schools	2003-2007	9 billion	Primary and secondary schools in western rural areas	86400 teaching station 252000 rural full schools 30000 lower secondary schools in townships
Rural boarding school construction programme	2004-2007	10 billion	Primary and secondary schools in western rural areas	To build and rebuild 6400 boarding schools

Apart from the nationally funded projects, the MOE has also organized regional projects that mobilized resources from the developed provinces to help poor provinces and similarly the urban cities to help rural townships in form of staff training, human resources and material support with contract-based operational mechanism. Since 2000, eastern areas has sent over 1800 person time teachers and administrative to western areas. Over 1400 person times from western areas have undergone training in eastern areas. The aid funds provided has exceeded 200 million, let alone piles of computers, books and teaching facilities.

In 2003 December, the state council has made a critical decision to invest 10 billion RMB Yuan from 2003 to 2007 to implement “Two Basics” in western regions, aiming at the population coverage of “Two Basics” rising to 85 percent from present 77 percent, and illiteracy rate of population aged 15 and above dropping from 9.02 percent to below 5 percent .

**Extensive mobilization of resources from the community and other donors**

Provision of basic education for rural areas has been a joint effort of the society. With initiatives of governments at different levels, various NGOs and community institutions have also been closely involved in the process of rural education for poverty reduction. Table 3 is a summary of some projects.

**Table 3. NGO Projects on Basic Education in Rural Areas**

Organization	Activities
China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation	Provide funding support for rural schools
China Charity Funds	Scholarships for students and allowance for teachers
All-China Women’s Federation	Spring Bud Project for rural girls
China Youth Foundation	Project of Hope □scholarships for school dropouts, building of Project of Hope Schools, teacher training and supply of school facilities
Guangcai Charity Funds	Donations to rural schools
Mme. Song Yat-sen Foundation	Girls education, female teacher training, mobile school libraries and incentive for teachers
Communist Youth League	Volunteers to teach in rural schools

It is estimated that during the 1996-2000 period, 31 billion RMB was donated to rural compulsory education program by the community including overseas contributions. For example, the Project of Hope raised 2 billion RMB Yuan for construction of 8,300 new schools in rural villages, which attracted 2.3 million dropout children back to schools. Besides, 10,000 sets of library books were provided to rural schools and 2,300 rural teachers trained.

The Spring Bud Project, implemented by the All-China Women’s Federation, has raised 500 million RMB Yuan which assisted 1.3 million girls from poor rural and ethnic families to access schooling. Likewise, Li Jiacheng Foundation from Hong Kong, established up to 10,000



ICT learning centers in rural schools. The Sino-American Science Association have implemented “Adopt a Rural Library” project and built 30,000 libraries in poor rural areas.

Apart from that, education research institutions and teacher training colleges have performed an active role, too. For example, educational research institutes in Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, Guizhou, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Xinjiang have undertaken long-term field intervention project on children’s learning performance, girl education and life skill training etc. and achieved very well. Northeast Normal University and Nanjing Normal University have set up rural education research institute, while Northwest Normal University and Southwest Normal University have conducted fundamental research on national compulsory education provision as well.

### **Developmental project aided by international agencies**

China’s UBE effort has been strengthened with the funding and expert support from international agencies including UNESCO, the World Bank, UNICEF, UNDP, the Asian Development Bank, DFID, and many other international donors.

### **Case 2. World Bank’s Basic Education Project in Poor Areas**

During the period of 1992 to 2002 , the World Bank and Chinese Government jointly invested a total amount of 885 million US dollars to undertake four projects on basic education development. The projects were covered 100,000 schools of 466 poor counties in 21 provinces. The projects were designed to facilitate the UPE and UBE process in the project counties, by means of renovating dilapidated school buildings under dangerous conditions, supply of desks and chairs, teaching facilities, training of teachers and principals, building of information management system, and research for innovations.

With the field operation, the project emphasized the following procedures and strategies to ensure efficiency:

- Formulate a well-defined project proposal jointly with local partners in response to the local needs;
- With the shared commitment of the Chinese Government and the World Bank;
- Apply the World Bank methodology and criteria to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation;
- Enhance local capacity building through staff training, research and pilots on innovative practices;
- Undertake regular field supervision and monitoring for improvement in the field work; and
- Maintain interactive dialogue and cooperation with government departments and local partners.

The World Bank Project on Basic Education in poor rural counties has proved effective for improving the status of education provision and, at the same time, demonstrated its resourcefulness for other projects.

Such external support has been geared to improving the infrastructural status of rural schools and local capacity building with intervention on school building, teacher training, teaching-learning processes, special assistance to girls and other needy groups as well as management performance.

The commune system was replaced with family-based production and the land was redistributed on a per capita basis. Consequently, all the farmers were motivated to try their best to increase productivity and income. As a result, the number of people living under the poverty line was significantly reduced from 250 million in 1978 to 80 million in 1995.

### **Case 3 Sino-UNICEF Project on Promotion of Primary Education in Poor Counties (1996—2000)**

This project was carried out in 12 provinces in the western region of China, including Gansu, Shanxi, Ningxia, Qinghai, Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Chongqing, Guangxi, Xinjiang, Inner-Mongolia and Tibet, with a coverage of 2,318 schools in 102 poor counties. The goal was to realize the goal of universal primary education by 2000 and also to provide successful experience for other poor areas.

The main intervention thrusts included promoting children's early childhood development, raising girls' enrollment rate, enhancing monitoring system of children's enrolment, undertaking teachers' training and enhancing children's learning achievement, in particular, of Chinese language, Maths and life skills.

Such practices were assessed as effective for promoting the universal primary education, especially for increasing enrolment rate of girls, disabled children and children of rural-urban migrants. It was recognized that the outcomes of the project had generated positive impact upon local education practices. The Ministry of Education published an official paper on promotion of girls' education in poor rural areas and minority-inhabited communities in 1996, the first document on gender equity in rural education. Besides, the monitoring exercise has been published and sustained as a quality watch instrument in many provinces.

## **2. Impact Analysis**

### **2.1 Achievements**

GOC's persistent efforts for universalizing compulsory education in past two decades have made considerable achievement. China has primarily achieved the goals of its proclaimed "Two Basics", i.e. universal nine-year compulsory education among majority all school-aged children and literacy among majority all youths and adults, but also ranked first in promoting EFA among the world's

nine most populous countries. According to **the statistics at** the end of 2002, The population coverage rate of areas that achieved universal access to NYCE has risen from 40 percent in the early 1990s to over 90 percent. As well, the rate of illiteracy among youths and adults was reduced down to 4.8 percent over the same period. The “Two Basics” were achieved in 2598 counties, 90 percent of the total in the country. The average years of schooling of the population rose from less than five in the early 1980s to above eight now, three years of increase.

### **2.1.1 Improved Education Status of Rural Population**

Over 80 percent primary schools and 64 percent lower secondary schools in China are set in rural China. Since 1990s China’s profile of compulsory education has been considerably improved due to the constant efforts for promoting compulsory education in rural areas. From 1985 to 2002, the enrolment rate of school-aged children has been raised by 2.58 percent (from 96 percent to 98.58 percent) at primary level and by 53.24 percent (from 36.76 percent to 90 percent) at lower secondary level. The universal compulsory education has been becoming the social welfare for all the children in China.

**Figure 1 Enrolment Rate of Primary School-aged Children in China (1985-2002)**

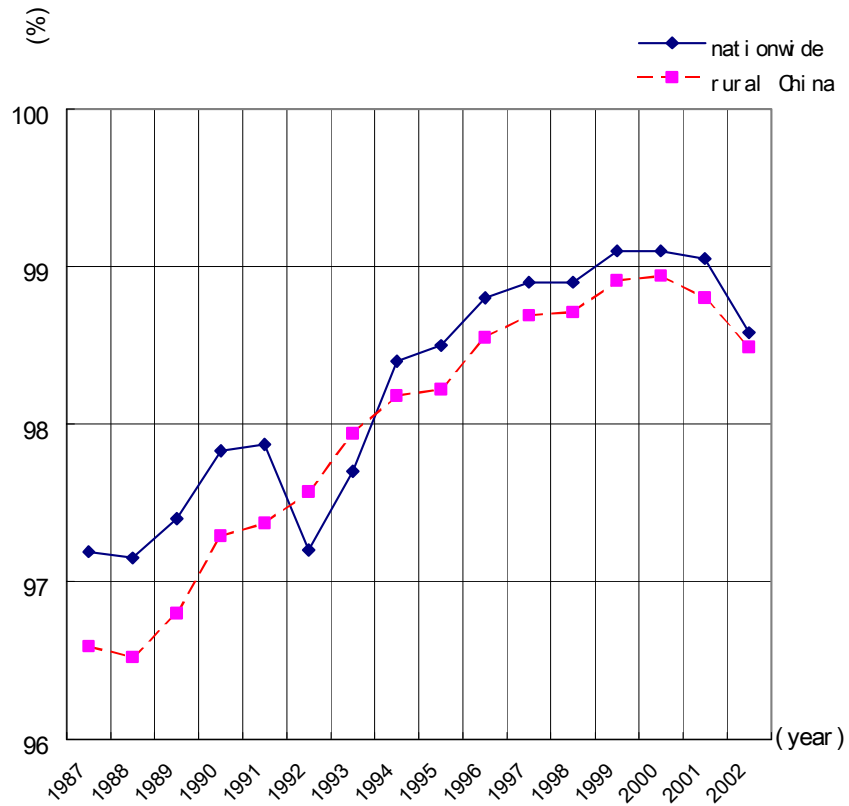


Figure 1 Enrolment Rate of Primary School-aged Children in China

Note: the enrolment rate before 1992 came out by general calculation among children aged between 7 to 11, and that after 1992 was calculated by age and schooling-year.

Source: Educational Statistics Yearbook of China (1987-1988). Beijing Industry University Publishing House. Educational Statistics Yearbook of China (1989-1991)(1998-1999)(2001-2002) People's Education Press. Educational Statistics Yearbook of China (1992-1997). People's Education Press, 2003.

**Figure 2 Gross Enrollments at Lower Secondary Level in China (1990-2002)**

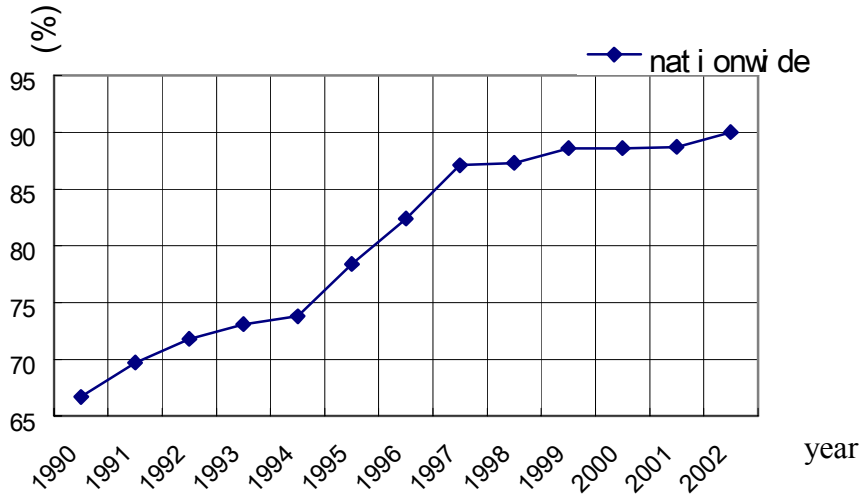


Figure 2 Gross Enrollment at Lower Secondary Level in China

Source: Educational Statistics Yearbook of China 2002. People's Education Press, 2003.

Dropout rate is also an important indicator to measure the universalization of education. Between 1990 to 2000, dropout rates nationwide at primary and lower secondary levels has declined by 1.8 percent (from 2.35 percent to 0.55 percent), 2.18 percent (from 5.38 percent to 3.2 percent) respectively. (Figure 3)

**Figure 3 Decline of Dropout Rates Nationwide in Primary and Lower Secondary Schools**

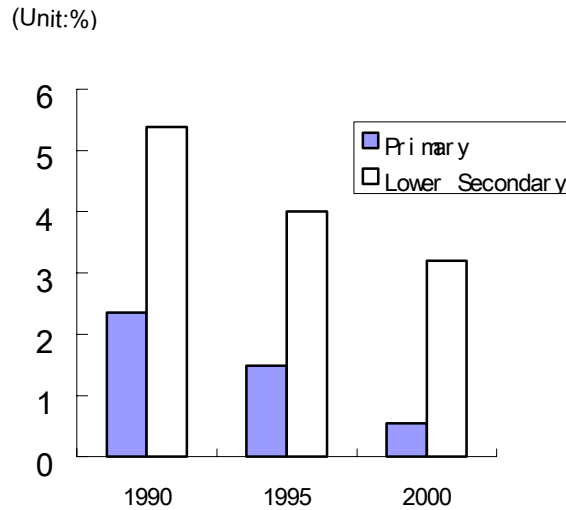


Figure 3 Decline of Dropout Rates

Source: Educational Statistics Yearbook of China 1990, 1995, 2000, People's Education Press.

The successful extension of 9-year compulsory education has greatly changed the backward education status of rural areas. In table 4 it is apparent that the proportion of educated rural population of the school-agers has progressed increased significantly. The primary and lower secondary graduates out of every 100 thousand people has raised 7255 from 1982 to 1990, and 9261 from 1990 to 2000, in which, the latter were mainly generated from the compulsory education development in rural areas. From 1990 to 2000, the primary and lower secondary graduates out of every 100 thousand people in rural China has increased 14037, 12074 more than that in their urban peers areas. Success in expansion of rural compulsory education access, consequently, promoted the rural literacy, narrowed the rural urban educational gap, and further enhanced educational equity. From 1982 to 2000, the illiteracy rate among 15 and above age cohort in rural China has dropped 26.19 percent (from 37.74 to 11.55), doubling that of urban areas (See Table 4).

**Table 4 Population with Different Education Attainment per 100,000 (1982 – 2000)**

	National Average			Urban Areas			Rural Areas		
	1982	1990	2000	1982	1990	2000	1982	1990	2000
Primary School	35396	37057	35701		26582	23546		40926	42558
Junior Secondary School	17750	23344	33961		30344	35342		20797	33202
Senior High School and Technical Secondary School	6627	8039	11146		18077	21083		4357	5302
Junior College and Above	601	1422	3611		4859	8769		164	484
Illiteracy rate 15 and above ( percent)	33.14	22.21	9.08	17.63	11.97	5.22	37.74	26.23	11.55

Source: Wang Dewen: “Compulsory Education in Rural China: Status, Problems and Solutions”, World Bank Working Papers Series, No. 35, 2003, 8.

### **2.1.2 Positive changes in teachers’ qualification contributed to the improvement of rural educational quality**

Positive changes in teachers have taken place in the process of universalizing compulsory education in rural areas as a result of effective teacher training and improvement of their treatment.

Professionalism has been attained among teachers in rural areas. In 1985, the total number of primary teachers was 5.377 million including 2.759 million “Minban Teachers” without eligible teaching qualification and recruited from local communities, 51.3 percent of the total. The figure of lower secondary was 2.167 million with 413.5 thousand “Minban Teachers”, 19.08 percent of the total. The total number of “Minban Teachers” in primary and lower secondary schools then was 3.17 million, accounting for 42.05 percent of all the teachers in service. At present, various methods have been adopted by governments to improve teachers’ qualification, such as qualification examination, training programs, retirement and transferring to other business, etc. By far, “Minban Teachers” in service has almost disappeared while rural teachers attained relatively high professionalism.

Educational attainment of teachers has been greatly improved. The eligibility of teachers’ educational attainment means teachers’ attainments have reached the national requirements. And the eligible rate of teachers’ attainment is also an important indicator for teacher resource. From 1985 to 2002, the proportion of qualified teachers qualifications of in primary and lower secondary

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schools have raised/ upgraded/ improved respectively by 36.79 and 62.78 percentages points (See table 5).



**Table 5. Percentage of Primary and Secondary School Qualified Teachers Nationwide ( percent)**

Items	Year				
	1985	1990	1995	2000	2002
Primary School	60.6	73.9	88.9	96.9	97.39
Lower Secondary School	27.5	46.5	69.1	87.0	90.28

Source: Educational Statistics Yearbook of China 1985, 1990, 2002, People's Education Press.

Positive changes in teachers' educational attainments and teaching ability have greatly contributed to the improvement of educational quality. From 1985 to 2002, the graduate rate of primary and lower secondary schools have raised respectively 28.62 (from 68.4 percent to 97.02 percent) and 16.6 (41.7 percent to 58.3 percent) percentage points (See figure 4).

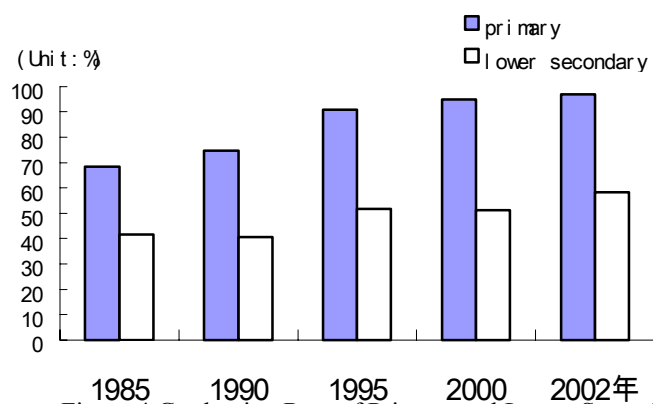
**Figure 4. Graduation Rate of Primary and Lower Secondary Schools Nationwide (1985-2002)**

Figure 4 Graduation Rate of Primary and Lower Secondary Schools Nationwide

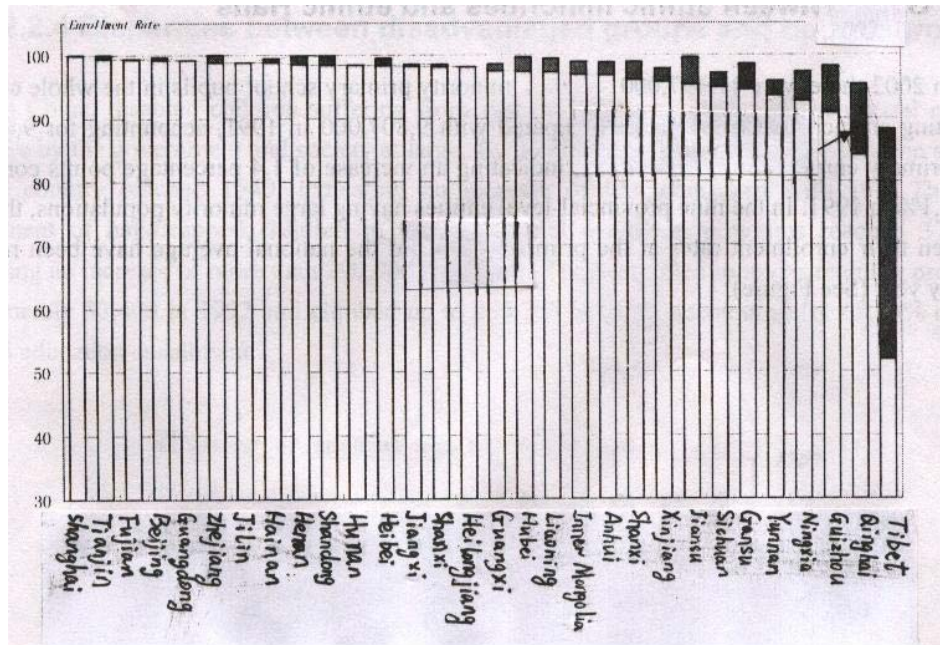
Source: Educational Statistics Yearbook of China 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2002, People's Education Press.

### 2.1.3 Reduction of Disparity in Education

Due to the efforts towards the central and western areas by central government and various social sectors, the disparities as measured by the province, gender, ethnicity have been improved in general. Educational equity has gradually been becoming the reality in China.

**Reduction of Regional Disparity:** Enrollment disparities between the provinces has been reduced by 33.26 percent (from 46 percent in 1991 up to 12.74 percent in 2002). (Figure 5)

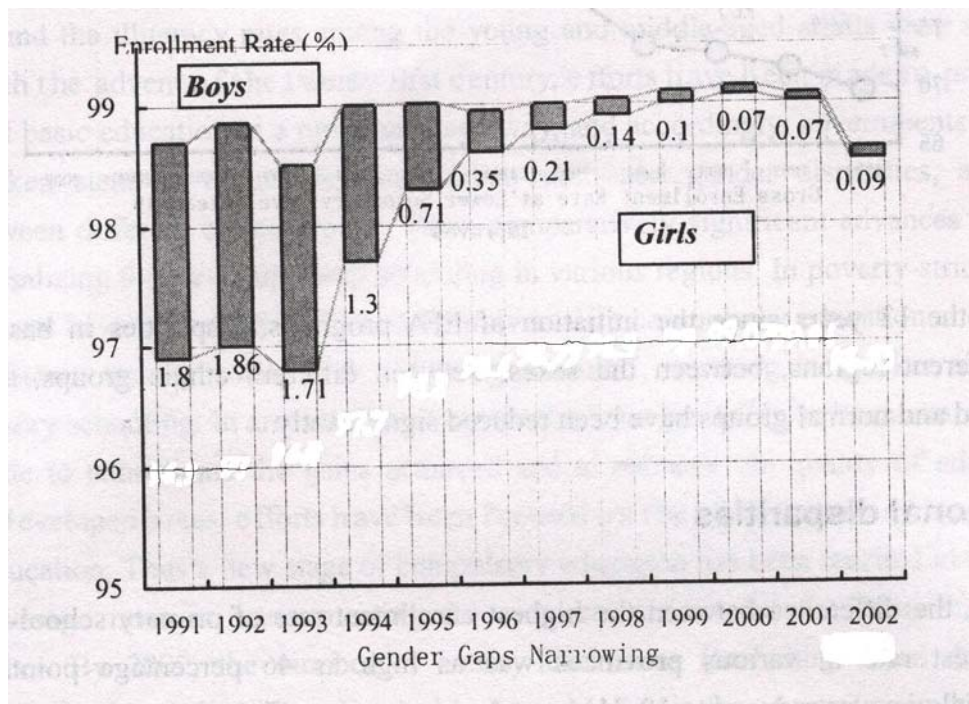
**Figure 5. Incremental Enrollment Rate for Basic Education from 1991 to 2002 by Province**



Source: National Report on the Progress of EFA in China. Ministry of Education, PRC, Oct 2003.

**Reduction of Gender Disparity:** In most provinces the gender gaps have been largely narrowed. The difficulty for girls to enjoy education has basically been eliminated. By 2002, the gender gap of access to primary schooling was reduced to 0.09 percent. (Figure 6)

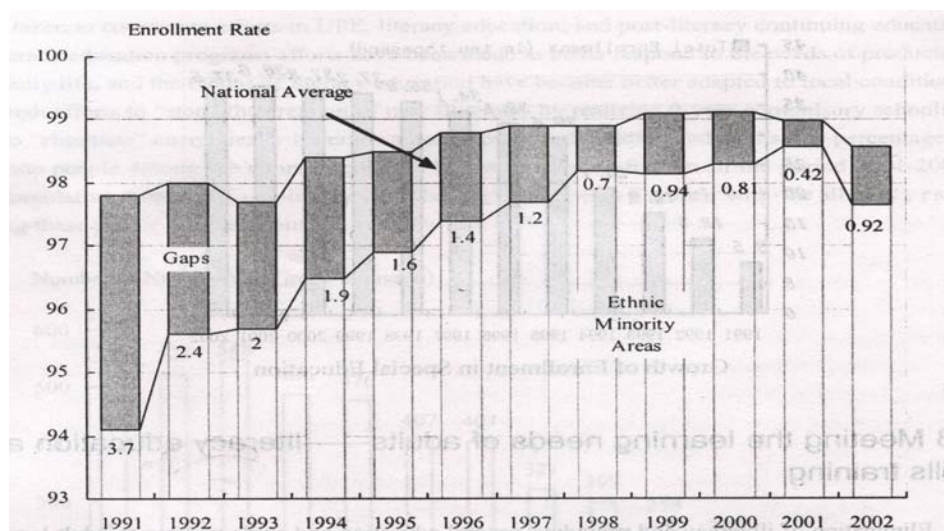
**Figure 6 Enrollment Change in Gender Disparity Elimination of Gender Gaps Enrollment Rate for Basic Education by Gender (1991-2002)**



Source: National Report on the Progress of EFA in China. Ministry of Education, PRC, Oct 2003

**Reduction of Ethnic Disparity:** The enrollment gap between ethnic minorities and national average has also been reduced from 3.7 percent in 1991 down to 0.92 percent in 2002. (Figure 7)

**Figure 7. Enrolment Rate of Primary School-Age Children in Minority Areas and the National Average Enrollment Rate, 1991-2002**



Source: National Report on the Progress of EFA in China. Ministry of Education, PRC, Oct 2003

## 2.2 Impact Analysis of Compulsory Education for Poverty Alleviation

Through universalizing compulsory education, rural children were equal access to education, which contributes to the improvement of rural population's intellectual quality. From 1990 to 2000, the average year of schooling among 15 and above age cohort in rural areas has raised from 4.7 to 6.85, which laid the foundation for strengthening rural laborers' capacity to get rid of poverty. The poverty population in China has dropped from 250 million in 1978 to 80 million in 1995, and 30 million by the end of 2000.

### 2.2.1 Increase of Economic Growth Rate led by Education

Great achievements have been gained in the past 18 years since the promulgation and implementation of *Law for Compulsory Education*. In the early 1990s, the proportion of areas with universally accessible compulsory education was about 40 percent, while, at present, the figure is 91 percent. The average year of schooling has raised from less than 6 years to over 8 years. The illiteracy rate of youth and adults has dropped from 10 percent in early 1990s to 4.8 percent at present. Prof. Yang Zhenning, the Noble Prize Winner, has once said, "This is a miracle in the world. China has been called 'World Factory' due to its rapid economic development in the past 20 years. It is hard to image if there are no enough powerful qualified labourers backed up by universalization of compulsory education (Liu Bin, 2004)."

A study report released at the International Forum on Development and Financing in Western China held in August 2001 reported that with 1 percent investment increase in social sector the per capita GDP may grow by 0.1 percent; with 1 percent decrease of population growth the per capita GDP may grow by 0.36-0.59 percent; with universal primary education as the enrollment rate of school-aged children increase by 1 percent, the per capita GDP growth may grow by 0.35-0.59 percent. If both population growth decrease and education promotion are realized, the GDP growth rate may be rise 0.7-1.18 percent. (Quote in Hu & Zhang, 2003)

Another evidence-based research on contribution of education to economic growth (Mao & Xu, 2001) indicated that incremental GDP generated out of education in the western areas of China was 15.85 billion RMB Yuan during the period from 1990 to 1998 and the rate of economic return of education was 1.98 percent (See table 6). The educational contribution to economy has greatly risen with the higher level of educational promotion.

**Table 6. Comparison of Economic Contribution of Education in Western Areas (1990-1998)**

	1990		1998		Balance between 1990 & 1998	
	GDP yielded by education (billion RMB)	Contribution rate of education (percent)	GDP yielded by education (billion RMB)	Contribution rate of education (percent)	GDP yielded by education (billion RMB)	Contribution rate of education (percent)
Western Areas	3.904	0.59	38.124	2.60	15.85	1.98

*Source:* From Mao Rao & Xu Lang: Contributions to Economic Growth by Education: Comparison between Eastern and Western China, *Economist*, 2001. 2

### 2.2.2 Education for Increase of Peasants' Income

Education has been recognized a long-term development investment with both social and individual benefits. In particular investment in primary education gains even more individual returns.

A high level linear relationship has been identified between the farmers' educational attainments and their income level, shown by a evidence-based research conducted jointly by The National Policy Research Department and the Rural Observation Office of the Ministry of Agriculture in 2000. As part of it, they have undertaken a tracking monitoring survey of 22,000 rural families in 320 counties in 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities. The sample

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families were divided into five groups according to their income levels varying from the highest and the lowest. As revealed in Table 7 the relationship between income and education seems fairly self-justifying.

**Table 7 Relationship between Farmers' Education and Incomes**

Group	Percentage of farmers with lower secondary education or over (□ percent□)	Percentage of farmers with vocational training or education (□ percent□)	Average employment rate (□ percent□)	Percentage of income of each group (□ percent□)
Highest income	56.9	8.6	89.25	47.30
Second high group	52.3	5.4	80.12	21.0
Medium income	47.7	4.3	73.58	15.2
Second low income	44.8	3.9	68.57	10.9
Lowest income	39.3	2.9	62.34	5.6
Total	_____	_____	_____	100

*Source:* China Policy Research Department: Evidence-based analysis of farmers' income during Ninth-Five. China Rural Research, 2001.4, 2001.6. Zhang D. Y.: Knowledge Poverty and Educational Resource Allocation in Rural China, 2003.

As shown in the above table, farmers with high educational attainment earn more money. In the group of high income, the proportion of laborers with lower secondary and upper secondary education accounts for 56.9 percent. Also, the employment rate of farmers with both high educational attainment and vocational skills is much higher than the total average.

### **2.2.3 Educational Investment stimulates productivity growth and farmers' income generation to the end of narrowing the rural-urban economic gap between areas**

According to another study (Fan 2003), among the six categories of investments for rural development, agriculture R&D, irrigation works, roads, education, electricity and communications, the impact of investment in education on enhancement of productivity is slightly less effective than on agricultural R & D and but far more positive for productivity and poverty reduction as compared with other investments (See table 8).

**Table 8 Impact on the Agricultural Productivity and Poverty Reduction by Various Investment**

Investments	Impacts on the agricultural productivity	Impacts on poverty reduction
Agricultural R&D	7.97 (1)	3.36 (3)
Irrigation works	1.15 (6)	0.39 (6)
Road	4.91 (4)	2.96 (4)
Education	6.68 (2)	6.30 (1)

Electricity	3.90 (5)	2.92 (5)
Communications	5.29 (3)	4.02 (2)

*Source:* Fan S. G., Zhang L. X., Zhang X. B.: Growth, Inequality, and Poverty in Rural China—The Role of Public Investments.

#### **2.2.4 Education Contributes to the Transference of Redundant Labourers in Rural Areas**

At present, there are 150 million redundant labourers in rural China, let alone 6 million new labourers every year. According to the goal of urbanization, 10 million rural population has to be transferred to urban areas each year. Transferring redundant labours from rural to urban areas is an important policy to reduce poverty. Statistics from National Statistics Bureau shows that the employed rural population in towns and cities has reached 88 million, among which youth and adults with secondary education attainment accounted for the majority. The transferring labourers have reached 23.85 million in 2002, among which 62.7 percent have got the secondary education attainment, 12.5 percent have received vocational training.

The above data shows, basic education empowered farmers out of ignorance and with ability for gathering knowledge and information, learning necessary skills and build up positive attitude and values (such as readiness to learn, confidence, entrepreneurship and cooperation, etc.) in an endeavor to step out of predicament of poverty towards better life.

In summary short, to extend compulsory education in rural China's rural contexts, especially in central and western poverty-stricken areas, has provided identified as highly cost-effective with positive social and economic benefit, both for the society and for the individuals in their pursuit for income generation with new skills and actively participation in community's life, responsive to needs of social and economic development. Thus, education is the most durable poverty alleviation strategy of human resource development which fully reflects social equity.

### **3. Driving Factors**

During last past two decades China has been persistently extending universal compulsory education as a strategic drive for poverty reduction, in the process of which abundant experiences have been accumulated.



### **3.1 Commitment and Leading Role of the Government Political Economy for Change**

**Firm Belief faith and Commitment** Universalizing compulsory education has been a commitment adhered to by the government ever since the foundation of P.R. new China. The central government holds the belief that basic education is the foundation for renaissance of Chinese people. Promoting UBE has an overall, fundamental, and leading effect on promoting elevating the nationals' quality civilization level, developing training all kinds of talents and eventually building advancing toward a comparatively relatively well-off society. China's government also holds firmly that UBE is also a most durable capacity building and effective poverty reduction strategy for poverty reduction.

In order to fulfill the commitment and China's responsibility obligation in the international world's "Universal Education EFA" initiative, China GOC established the national dual goals of "Two Basics", for extending universal nine-year compulsory education (UBE) NYCE and eliminating illiteracy among youths and adults of 15-45 age cohort and made it the core of recognized it as crux of China's education development since 1990s. Since the middle of 90s, as the national economy picked up, the central government tried even harder to made stronger and stronger investment decisions in the provision of NYCE to the rural areas, which proved to be very effective. The government also emphasized on the whole society's attention, support, promoting and participation in nine-year compulsory education to form a favorable environment. The emphasis on education is leading people in rural areas to the road to comparatively well-off society as in the sayings it is said "Enlightenment before poverty reduction, education before enlightenment". To eliminate poverty by eliminating fatuity and to eliminate fatuity by education", "Education should be the last to be affected by poverty and children should be the last to be affected by hardness", and "getting water of science and technologies by channel of education to water fields of richness". People have developed the concepts and values to participate in nine-year compulsory education, which could be also reflected in sayings such as "finishing junior high before finding jobs outside" and "school is a necessary way leading to well-off life".

Along with China's persistent endeavor to transform its population burden into productive human resource, universal basic education and literacy programs have been given top priority in policy agenda as a fundamental approach to national capacity building for poverty reduction. With such a political commitment, to universalize compulsory education throughout the nation has won a well-established legal status and the government has tried to assume and will continue to shoulder the primary responsibility for meeting the basic learning needs of all the population. However,

China, as a large developing country with insufficient resources, to fully ensure an equitable education provision for its younger generation in face of remarkable regional development disparities, seems undoubtedly a formidable challenge.

**Participation of all social sectors** Therefore, the central government has been dedicated to promoting the nationwide compulsory education expansion and, in the meantime, has tried its best to cater to the needs of the disadvantaged population groups in rural contexts. Apart from national programs, the government has been succeeded in mobilizing all social sectors to share the responsibilities. It is an extremely hard mission to promote NYCE in China with such a large population and backward economy. Facing the difficulty of limited economic development and resources supply, the government encouraged organizations and people from all social sectors to support the education for children in poor areas as well as being the primary provider of NYCE to all the children. International cooperation projects in education are also arranged in the western provinces.

### **3.2 Institutional Innovations**

The successful promotion of NYCE in in China's rural areas has been effectively driven by a series of major institutional restructurings.

**Practicing inspection and supervision.** *Law for Compulsory Education* for the first time embodied the commitment of the government and the whole society as well as working principles to implement nine-year compulsory education in form of law. The law made compulsory education shared obligation of the community, schools, families and individual learners. In March 1992, the State Council issued *Rules for Enforcement of Law for Compulsory Education* that made the law more operational. In order to ensure the actual implementation of the *Law for Compulsory Education* a complete inspection system has been established at national, provincial, municipal and county level. Governments' performance in compulsory education, esp. funding support, has been regularly assessed as a critical indicator for government accountability. Practicing inspection and supervision has been proved to be an effective warranty for promoting compulsory education in rural areas.

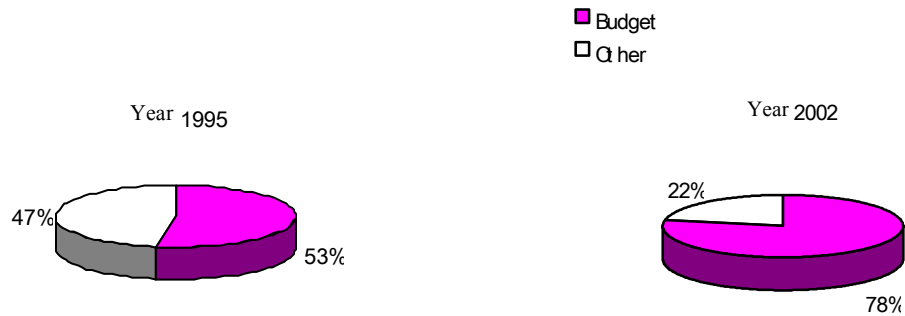
Contextualized implementation strategy. In view of the remarkable regional development disparities in economy and education, the implementation of compulsory education has been allowed to achieve the objectives according to different timetable thus to respond to the local context in terms of planning, timing and supervision/evaluation. Such a contextualized approach has led to a national plan feasible to cope with disparities while maintaining the overall progress.

**Readjustment of management and financing system.** Education management and financing system has been a key component of rural basic education reform as a part of overall governmental reform in 1980s. The responsibility of basic education was then delegated to the governments at the local level) for funding and management of rural schools. Such an attempt proved effective to mobilize the rural community, particularly in economically better-off communities, to support the schools vis-à-vis relatively inadequate funding from the government.

Starting from 1991, especially after the reform of taxation system in rural areas, the state gained more capacity in macro control over finance and the old administration system could no longer meet the requirements of the taxation reform and the further development of compulsory education in rural areas. Thus arose a series of problems such as delaying teacher's payment, illegal educational fees, and increasingly bigger gap between schools in urban and rural areas.

Based on the changed situation, the new rural compulsory education administration system relying mostly on county level was established to relieve the burdens from rural people. An attempt was made to delegate management of actions, people, and funds to the county level, while the central government, the provincial government, town, and county governments share the funding burden. According to statistics, the in-budget allocation for compulsory education in rural areas increased from 32.5 billion in 1995 to 99 billion in 2002, which is doubled in a seven-year period. The percentage of the allocation to the total expenses for compulsory in rural areas increased from 52.6 percent to 78 percent (figure 8). Thus "UBE by people" was shifted to "UBE by government".

**Figure 8. Growth in Budget Allocation for Compulsory Education in Rural Areas, 1995–2002**



**Establishing efficient operational mechanisms.** According to the *Law for Compulsory Education*, governments at different levels formulated their local policies and plans in response to the local economy and social development. Government organizes regular meetings to decide plan and budget for NYCE, to review the progress, and to disseminate successful practices.

A dual assessment system (objective-based assessment and annual assessment) on performance of compulsory education was established to assess governments of all levels and education administrative departments, in which performance in compulsory education is listed as one important indicator for assessment of top leaders and even plays the role of “voting down” while reviewing governments work. Moreover, resources of various organizations, such as trade union, women union, youth league are encouraged to support promoting compulsory education.

**Keeping poverty areas as priority.** Poverty-stricken areas have been kept as the priority in access to provincial, national and international special programs (such as National Compulsory Education Programme for Poor Areas (NCEP), stipend, boarding schools, exemption of tuition and miscellaneous fees, encouraging private provision of education, etc.). Various measures have been

taken to provide equal rights for disadvantaged groups, for compulsory education as a special aid for empowerment of the poor.

### **3.3 Learning and Piloting**

**Learning advanced management concepts and method** In the process of universalizing NYCE, plenty of numerous research projects have been initiated by Chinese government in the aspects of policy studies, best practice studies and international comparative studies. It should be noted that a series of special research on comparative study on universalizing compulsory education in different countries was conducted by institutions and research departments and experts from MOE, which provided valid lessons for China's practices (Wu D. G. 1991, 1997; MOE. 1992). It was based on concepts and modes of project managements learned from "Basic Education Project" aided by World Bank that NCEP has achieved such high cost-effectiveness.

**Principle of piloting before disseminating** Any educational policy has to go through experimentation for a period of time before practicing in larger area. For example, the new basic education administration system relying on county level efforts established in 2001 was based on abundant pilots and experiences. The taxation reform also experimented in Anhui province before being carried out across the country. Likewise, the "Programme of distance education for rural schools" was initiated first in Shaanxi, Hebei, and Guizhou in 2003 to get experiences before expanding to larger scope. Basic education curriculum reformation heavily impacting quality of compulsory education is another example of years of pilots for investigation, curriculum development, small-scale piloting before final nationwide extension.

**Participation and support of professional organizations.** Educational and pedagogical research institutions at various level, teaching training institutions as well as other professionals have been closely involved in the process of universalizing compulsory education in poor areas. Over past two decades, NYCE in poor areas has been a priority of national education research planning. Beijing University, Beijing Normal University, Northwest Normal University and Southwest Normal University located in heart of poor areas, as well as educational research institutions in Shanghai, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Chongqing, Xinjiang and Tibet has undertaken a number of investigation and research round the most concerned issues of compulsory education, which generated many feasible policy recommendations and plans for governments. Moreover, some institutions go down to grassroots of poor areas to engage intervention projects, which are affirmed positively by their counterparts from home and abroad.

### 3.4 External Catalysts

Enlisting effective international cooperation, China's compulsory education in rural areas has been strengthened with the devoted and professional assistance from the international community. Many international agencies, such as UNESCO, the World Bank, UNICEF, UNDP, Asia Development Bank, DFID and the Ford Foundation and many others have started their cooperation with China for promotion of UBE in poor rural areas, through school facilities improvement, teacher training, curriculum development, promotion of education for girls, school capacity building and improvement of management system. International cooperation has been proven to be a great catalyst in strengthening the UBE development in poor areas and international cooperation to promoting UBE has become one of the basic strategies in China's educational poverty reduction.

Effective international cooperation has made significant contribution to China's UBE effort both for infrastructural improvement and for technical assistance. One of the effective lessons that the Chinese partners obtained from our international peers is their professional competencies and performance displayed throughout the project implementation cycle.

China has also learned enormously from the worldwide movement on education for all from the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien in 1990 and the International Forum on EFA in Dakar in 2000. The constructive dialogues and interactions among E-9s also proved a mutual learning process. China benefited enormously from the concept of "education for all", the basic principle of meeting basic learning needs, the policies and practices outlined in *Education for All Program*, and the experience exchange among all members. *The Chinese Citizen Education Action Plan (2001-2015)* is a result of learning world-wide experiences. On the other hand, China's experiences in promoting UBE have also been acknowledged by international professionals of the same occupation.

## 4. Lessons, Problems and Challenges

### 4.1 Lessons Learned

Reviewing the development process of China's universalizing compulsory education in rural areas, the following experiences could be concluded:

Universalizing compulsory education as a critical long-term strategy for poverty reduction. Chinese government has always tried to keep the compulsory education as a basic investment in human resources for improvement of labor productivity and realizing the target of sustainable

development. Responsive to strategic needs for enhancing national human resources, the goal of ‘two basics’ was established for universalizing compulsory education and eliminating illiteracy among adults.

Second, contextualized approach has been maintained to address the varied regional economic and social development. Considering the existing remarkable regional gap in economy and social development, strategy of regional planning and incremental implementation has been adopted. Considering national financial status, the responsibilities of central, provincial and county governments in providing compulsory education have been strengthened.

Besides, a series of laws and regulations have been established, such as Law for Compulsory Education, Statute on Eliminating illiteracy, Rules for Assessment of Compulsory Education Performance and Accreditation for “Two Basics” to regulate rural compulsory education administration and funding system.

Third, effective operational mechanism has been developed to promote the accountability of compulsory education provision. Regular national working conferences on UBE have been held annually by the government to exchange best practices. Evaluation reports from inspection and evaluation missions are used as critical facilitating mechanism for more desired government’s NYCE performance. Overseas best practices were introduced and implemented, such as quality assurance, children’s learning assessment and gender parity. Meanwhile, professional agencies were resorted to in some cases of policy study, special interventions, summarization and dissemination of successful experience.

Forth, Promotion of quality education as approach to improve quality of compulsory education. In the process of universalizing compulsory education, emphasis was placed upon teaching quality and outcomes. In the late 1990s, while establishing the goal of quality education, curriculum reform as well as teacher professional development has been placed as primary strategy of improving quality of compulsory education followed by large-scale pilot.

Fifth, special favorable policies for disadvantaged have been adopted to promote the equity of education provision. Aiming at equal access to education for all school-aged children in rural areas, (esp. sparse population, minority children and girls) GOC has mobilized national, community, individual and international assistance resources for NCEP, rural urban mutual aid project, renovating dilapidated school buildings as well as to provide children from poor families, esp. girls with stipend and free textbooks.

Sixth, Progress of Chinese compulsory education in rural areas should also be partly attributed to international community's constructive support. Many international organizations have been productively engaged in the cooperation with China in the aspects of school facilities improvement, teacher training, curriculum development, education quality, school capacity building and improvement of management system. International agencies and external assistance, such as the World Bank, UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, ADB, DFID as well as many other cross-national players have served as a catalyst resource to demonstrate alternative and innovative approaches for UBE in rural areas.

Seventh, mass media has played a positive function in publicizing the national political vision, policies and laws on NYCE and proved helpful in mobilizing all the members of the society to care about and to support rural education in China.

#### **4.2 Problems and Challenges**

In spite of the praiseworthy achievement, UBE in rural China is still faced with many problems and challenges:

Challenge with wide gap between rural and urban educational status. Among others, a most difficult problem lies in rural urban divide. Up to 2002, 372 counties failing in achieving goal of "Two Basics" all concentrated in the disadvantaged rural western regions.

Challenge with county-based funding and management system. Although the Chinese government has made great efforts in mobilizing resources for compulsory education program, the total investment is still low when compared with international standards. The new administration system relying mainly on county-based management is facing up with many difficulties, esp. basic education provision system appears less operational in those poor rural counties due to lack of fund-raising capacity.

Challenge with educational quality. The current basic education endeavors still remain less equitable in some poor communities. Studies (Teng, 2003; Zhang, 2003) reveal that the equitable distribution of learning opportunities both quantitatively and qualitatively, especially in poor rural areas, will be a more demanding challenge.

#### **4.3 Actions in the future**

To cope with these identified problems and challenges the State Council convened the National Working Meeting on Rural Education in September 2003. The universalization of nine-year



compulsory education was put on the top of the agenda. As a series of special measures for the promotion of UBE in rural areas, the following policy interventions have been proposed:

- To redefine the specified responsibilities of the government and all parties involved for UBE in rural areas so as to ensure the expenditure of the compulsory education in rural areas are fully met;
- To Establish the guarantee mechanism of compulsory education in rural areas, strengthen the obligation of central and province financial departments' investment in the compulsory education in rural areas;
- To strive to achieve “Two Basics” in western regions, ensure the attainment of NYCE in all counties thus for equitable education provision;
- To promote quality education through the experiment of the national new curriculum and massive in-service teacher training programs;
- To initiate the national priority project on rural distance learning in all rural schools, with supplies of a set of CD Rom with curriculum package for each village school (or class), satellite receiver and relay facilities for each complete school, and a computer classroom in each lower secondary school; and,
- To mobilize more extensive cooperation and partnership with domestic professional institutions and international agencies thus to form a supporting and facilitative mechanism for up-grading China's performance in extending the compulsory education in rural areas.

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