

Global South Modernization Forum

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From Poverty Reduction to Common Prosperity: What the Global South Can Learn from China's Development Experience

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Distinguished Colleagues, Esteemed Scholars,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning to everyone.

Thank you International Poverty Reduction Center in China for your kind invitation to speak at this forum.

It is a great honour to address this distinguished forum to share my views on how China's success story on poverty reduction could provide practical and valuable lessons for the Global South.

The theme of my speech, "*From Poverty Reduction to Common Prosperity: What the Global South Can Learn from China's Development Experience*", aims to invite us to reflect not only on China's remarkable transformation, but also on how developing nations can chart their own paths toward inclusive and sustainable growth.

According to a joint report by the World Bank and the Chinese government released on February 25, 2021, China has lifted more than 800 million people out of extreme poverty over the past four decades. This accounts for about 70 percent of global poverty reduction during that period — an achievement unparalleled in human history.

China's remarkable journey began with the launch of economic reforms in the late 1970s, when the nation opened its doors and embraced transformation with courage and vision. It reached a historic milestone in 2020, when China officially announced that it had eradicated extreme poverty under its national standard, marking the successful fulfilment of a mission that has not only reshaped the destiny of a nation, but also inspired the world's pursuit of inclusive and sustainable development.

This unprecedented achievement was no accident. It was the result of China's whole-of-nation approach and its people-centred development philosophy, which emphasizes that economic growth must serve everyone. No one should be left out in the pursuit of common prosperity.

When China launched its targeted poverty alleviation campaign in 2013, it faced immense challenges: vast regional disparities, fragile rural infrastructure, and millions still trapped in extreme poverty. Yet, within just eight years, by 2021, China had officially declared the elimination of absolute poverty — achieving the first of the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals a full decade ahead of schedule.

Behind this success lay a systematic, results-oriented approach — combining precise identification of the poor, or what is known as targeted poverty reduction (精准扶贫), long term planning and strict accountability mechanisms. It was a whole of nation campaign that mobilized every level of government, the private sector, and society at large.

But more importantly, it was guided by a moral conviction. The original aspiration of the Communist Party had explicitly stated that its mission is to improve the wellbeing of the people. Poverty is not destiny, and development should be inclusive, leaving no one behind.

With a huge population of 1.4 billion people, what made this transformation possible? How to achieve the objectives?

I think there are four key pillars that contribute to China's success story in poverty reduction.

1. Strong political commitment of the top leadership

The fight against poverty was not an optional choice but a central mission of national governance. Clear timelines, measurable targets and personal accountability, from central ministries to village officials are made accountable to ensure both focus and efficiency.

When leadership aligns with long-term vision, policies gain continuity. That continuity, across decades and administrations, allowed China to move steadily from subsistence agriculture to industrialization, urbanization, and modernization.

2. Inclusive development and empowering communities

China's economic development philosophy was never just about increasing GDP; it was about improving the overall wellbeing of the people. Economic growth was seen as a means, not an end.

Policies focused on fair access to education, availability of healthcare, affordable housing, and overall social security. Rural infrastructure - roads, electricity, clean water, and internet connectivity became priority investments. By empowering local communities, China turned beneficiaries into participants, fostering ownership and self-reliance.

3. Pragmatic policy experimentation and local adaptation

Another hallmark of China's approach was flexibility. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all model, the government often adopted the "cross the river by feeling the stone" approach, that is "trial before adoption." Local pilot projects were tested, evaluated, and scaled up only after proving effective.

This adaptive governance approach allows China to tailor policies to regional realities, whether it was developing e-commerce in Zhejiang, tourism in Guizhou, or relocation programs in mountainous provinces. It was development guided by evidence, by practical needs, not ideology.

4. Integration of markets and government support

China combined the dynamism of the market with the guiding hand of the state. Targeted subsidies, micro-finance, and industrial policy helped poor regions develop local industries and attract investment.

The private sector, social organisations, and volunteers all played active roles in poverty reduction campaigns. The result was a synergistic model of state coordination and social participation, align with whole-of-society development governance and in line with China's whole-process people's democracy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While eradicating absolute poverty was a monumental success, China's journey is far from over. Common prosperity is the ultimate aim. The pursuit of common

prosperity is about narrowing relative inequality and ensuring that the benefits of development are shared more equitably among all citizens and no one is left out in the process .

Common prosperity does not mean egalitarianism. It means fairness of opportunity, inclusiveness in growth, and dignity in life. It seeks to balance efficiency with equity, wealth creation with redistribution, and innovation with social responsibility, not just among the people, but also regionally .

This new phase is about upgrading the quality of development, shifting from the quantity of growth to the quality of life. It involves strengthening the middle-income group, revitalising rural areas, and ensuring that every person, whether in a metropolis or a remote village — has access to education, healthcare, housing, and security.

Common prosperity also extends beyond economics. It encompasses cultural enrichment, social cohesion, and ecological sustainability, creating not just a richer society, but a more humane and harmonious one, which is deep rooted in the traditional Chinese philosophy of “天人合一”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poverty reduction is the precondition for balance economic growth. Therefore, China’s success story in poverty reduction offers valuable insights for the global community, especially for developing countries seeking to accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals.

There are four key lessons we can learn from China’s success story in poverty reduction.

1. Political will and continuity matter.

Development is not and cannot be achieved overnight. It requires long term planning with vision, consistency, and persistence across decades. China’s experience shows that poverty eradication must be treated as a long-term national mission, not just a campaign for one electoral cycle.

2. Growth must be inclusive.

Economic growth alone does not automatically reduce poverty. In fact, without inclusive policies which covers education, healthcare, rural infrastructure, and social safety nets, growth could widen inequality.

China's model demonstrates that targeted, people-centred development delivers both economic efficiency and social justice.

3. Development must be adapted to local realities.

There is no universal blueprint for success. Each country must find its own path based on its culture, resources, and institutions. China's approach of "crossing the river by feeling the stones" reminds us that experimentation and adaptation are key to effective governance.

4. Global cooperation is essential.

Poverty is a global challenge. In today's interconnected world, no nation can prosper in isolation. China has actively shared its experience through South–South cooperation, offering training, infrastructure, and capacity-building to partner countries.

Initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, and the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, all reflect a commitment to shared development and mutual benefit.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

China's story of poverty reduction is ultimately a story of human dignity. It reflects a universal aspiration – that every person, regardless of where they are born, should have the chance to live a decent life.

Global inequality remains severe. According to the World Bank, more than 700 million people worldwide still live in extreme poverty, and many developing economies are burdened by debt, climate vulnerability, and technological barriers.

The world needs a renewed commitment to global justice, a system that prioritises development, equity, and cooperation over confrontation and zero-sum competition.

In this sense, China's journey from poverty to prosperity is not just a national success; it is a global inspiration. It challenges us to think differently about development, to see it not merely as an economic process, but as a moral and human endeavour.

The concept of a community with shared future for mankind connects naturally with the vision of common prosperity. Both emphasise interdependence, fairness,

and inclusiveness. Both affirm that humanity's progress should be shared by all, not just to serve a few, or those who are rich and powerful.

As developing nations rise and the Global South becomes a dynamic force in the world economy, we have an opportunity to reshape global governance, to make it more representative, more equitable, and more attuned to the real needs of people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

China's success proves that poverty is not inevitable, that history can be changed through vision, hard work, and collective will.

The journey from poverty reduction to common prosperity is not just China's path – it is a path that offers hope to all nations striving for inclusive development.

The task before us is to learn, to adapt, to share and to cooperate, to translate this experience into a global movement for equity and human dignity.

As an African saying reminds us, "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together."

So, let's us go far – together.

Let us build a world where development is shared, prosperity is inclusive, and no one is left behind.

Thank you.