Exploration of Paths for Promoting Poverty Alleviation in Severely Impoverished Areas via “Internet plus Agriculture”—Based on a Survey of Poverty Alleviation in Nanqiao Town, Xunwu County, Jiangxi Province

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Abstract. With the development of “internet plus agriculture”, promoting poverty alleviation through e-commerce marketing has become a hot topic. After investigating e-commerce marketing in Nanqiao Town, Xunwu County, Jiangxi Province, the poverty-alleviating team of Jiangsu University of Technology has discovered that operation environment, core competences and main operation subjects of e-commerce are major factors which hinder poverty alleviation of poverty-stricken areas. To bring functions of e-commerce marketing platforms into full play to promote poverty alleviation of severely impoverished areas, it is necessary to guide publicities, improve industry layout, optimize resource allocation and innovate marketing models.

1. Introduction

With the vigorous development of “internet plus” technologies, industries have yielded considerable economic benefits on internet platforms dependent upon powerful forces of internet technologies and flourished in an unprecedented manner. General Secretary Xi Jinping brought forth the important instructions of “seeking truth from facts, taking measures according to local conditions, offering classified guidances and alleviate poverty with targeted approaches” when he visited Xiangxi. The so-called “alleviating poverty with targeted approaches” means “giving priority to some measures specific to target poverty-stricken areas”. In Luoxiao Mountains of southern Jiangxi Province, China, there are still many poverty-stricken villages and townships due to comprehensive factors such as geographical locations and histories. There is still a far way to go to alleviate poverty of these areas. “Whether an area is well-off is particularly dependent upon its fellow townsmen.” All people of China are concerned about people’s happiness in old revolutionary base areas. How to take pertinent actions against targeted poor groups with “internet plus” technologies has become a focus of workers in charge of poverty alleviation. To alleviate poverty in rural areas, breakthroughs are supposed to be made in agriculture. It is put forward that “internet plus agriculture”, as an effective measure for alleviating poverty with targeted approaches in rural areas, means applying internet technologies in new modern agricultural products, new models and new business patterns in the whole agricultural chain ranging from planning, production and sales of agricultural products based on “internet plus” [1]. At present, developing rural e-commerce is a major strategy for alleviating poverty with targeted approaches in rural areas. Some rural areas under relatively favorable natural conditions and traffic environment have gained considerable progress and dividends in e-commerce. Nevertheless, in some old revolutionary base areas, ethnic minority areas, autonomous areas, border areas and poverty-stricken areas, especially rural areas which are underdeveloped in traffic, e-commerce has just started developing or develops slowly. Local ordinary people don’t have a strong sense of gain from e-commerce development, and their living conditions haven’t improved significantly.

How to alleviate poverty with targeted approaches through “internet plus agriculture” more efficiently in above areas? During the summer vacation of 2019, scientific and technological poverty alleviating team named “Luoxiao Mountain Fruit Flavor” (hereinafter referred to as the
“poverty alleviating team”) from Jiangsu University of Technology, which had remained true to their original aspirations for poverty alleviation, travelled far to Nanqiao Town, Xunwu County. Upon their arrival, they conducted a marketing survey on e-commerce and public welfare support event with the theme of “With old revolutionary base areas in mind · travelling far to share technologies”. They shared the latest agricultural technologies and marketing models with local villagers. Meanwhile, they explored the approaches for putting “internet plus agriculture” into practices in poverty-stricken villages of rural areas according to local actual situation.

2. Status quo of poverty alleviation in Xunwu County

2.1 Economic conditions of Xunwu County

Xunwu County, situated in the southeast of Jiangxi Province, is at the junction among Jiangxi Province, Fujian Province and Guangdong Province. With an area of 2,351km² and a total population of 330,000 people, it has 15 townships (towns), 173 administrative villages and 11 residential committees under its jurisdiction. In 2018, its gross domestic product amounted to RMB7.891 billion and increased by 9.3% on a year-on-year basis. It was as high as the average gross domestic product of the whole Ganzhou, ranked TOP10 in its growth all over the city. Rich in agricultural resources, Xunwu County achieved a total output of RMB335,300 from agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery, which achieved a year-on-year growth of 4.0%. The output from these industries increased by RMB2.194 billion. Calculated based on comparable prices, it increased by 4.0% on a year-on-year basis, and the value-added rate was up to 65.4%.

Xunwu County, as the “production area of tangerines in China”, “export base of navel oranges in China”, and “production base of green ecological fruits”, was the first county of Jiangxi Province where the per capita production of fruits was 2mu among the agricultural production. It is really a big and powerful county of fruit production. Planting navel oranges and tangerines over 500,000mu, Xunwu County almost yields 1/3 of navel oranges in Jiangxi Province [2].

2.2 Progress of poverty alleviation in Xunwu County

Since the reform and opening-up of China, Xunwu County has achieved considerable economic and social development. However, impacted by natural and historical conditions, no fundamental change has occurred to its underdevelopment and late development. Xunwu County is still a key target of poverty alleviation and development in China. It is poor and backward as before, which are still its basic features. With a great lack of infrastructure, it has problems such as simple industrial structure and weak financial strength. In this country, there are still many severely impoverished areas. At present, Xunwu County still has 65 poverty-stricken villages and 28,819 poor people, while the poverty incidence is 10.5%. Poverty alleviation is and will be the most important political task in this county.

These years, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China has successively dispatched three central ministries and commissions (namely the Central Propaganda Ministry, the National Bureau of Statistics, and the All China Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives) as well as related national departments to support Xunwu County. With the great support from the ministries and commissions, the poverty alleviation of Xunwu County was speeded up. The number of poor people in this county declined from 65,728 at the end of 2013 to 14,432 at the end of 2016, and the poverty incidence almost dropped by 25% [3].

In the course of poverty alleviation, Xunwu County has actively explored new paths, constantly innovated its working mechanism for innovation of poverty alleviation, formulated and promulgated a range of policies for poverty alleviation. Meanwhile, prominent outcomes have been achieved in trial application of e-commerce marketing models in several villages. The e-commerce service station in Nanlong Village, Nanqiao Town, has become a typical case to be publicized by the Central Propaganda Ministry. It may be said that e-commerce has turned into a crucial method
for poverty alleviation to be actively promoted in townships and villages of Xunwu County. The “internet plus agriculture” has been gradually deeply rooted in people’s minds as a new idea.

2.3. Survey on E-commerce operations in Nanqiao Town

The poverty alleviating team from Jiangsu University of Technology visited and surveyed 110 families in Chetou Village and Nanlong Village, Nanqiao Town, Xunwu County. They conducted a questionnaire survey and individual interviews concerning “e-commerce sales intentions and operation status”. The major issues and data acquired from the survey are mainly as follows:

Small-scale fruit plantation. According to the survey, local farmers embarking on plantation and cultivation approximately account for 45.6% of the interviewed farmers, including only 9.0% of farmers planting fruits.

Lack of innovation in sales models of agricultural products. “The agricultural products reserved and sold in part” account for 72.7%, while “the purchased agricultural products” occupy 25.3% and only 0.91% agricultural products are sold on e-commerce platforms.

Poor understanding of e-commerce. 11.8% farmers “have learned about e-commerce marketing”. 22.7% farmers “are willing to receive e-commerce training”, and 44.5% farmers “want to sell products on e-commerce platforms”. As to “the reason for their unwillingness to sell their agricultural products through e-commerce”, 62.7% farmers reported “lack of agricultural products”.

3. Problems with local E-commerce development and main causes

After investigating e-commerce services of Nanqiao Town, the poverty alleviating team has summarized problems with local e-commerce development as follows in combination with the actual situation of Chetou Village and Nanlong Village.

3.1. Poor objective environment of E-commerce operations

Levelds of the villagers’ committees are supposed to strengthen publicity of scientific and technological poverty alleviation. Due to their poor educational attainment, the leaders haven’t done much work to popularize technologies and organize e-commerce training. Apparently, they haven’t made enough efforts to publicize e-commerce platforms. It is mainly because most village leaders’ knowledge about e-commerce, especially the relationships between e-commerce and poverty alleviation, isn’t thorough enough. Without attaching great importance to e-commerce, they still think that e-commerce can be hardly promoted. Without great enthusiasm, it is beyond doubt that their publicities towards villagers have been rather limited.

The industry layout remains to be optimized. For instance, in Chetou Village, all farmers plant fruits such as passion fruits and olecranon peaches on a small-scale basis by themselves. As a result, the agricultural products are scattered. There is a lack of high-quality “hit products” which can yield high benefits in large quantities. It is primarily because villagers’ “fear” is still not expelled, and they only have limited abilities to withstand negative impacts such as natural disasters and sales obstacles. A majority of farmers consider that the greening disease that occurred to navel oranges several years ago is the major cause of their fear.

3.2 Lack of core competences in E-commerce operations

Support is needed in terms of planting technologies. Compared with other areas, soil of Chetou Village is more suitable for planting fruits such as olecranon peaches and passion fruits. However, in practices, Chetou village doesn’t significantly outperform other areas in product quality. It is mainly because the villagers planting technologies remain to be improved. As a consequence, fruit yield and quality are directly impacted. The fruit farmers are in urgent need of technical experts’ field guidance.

Marketing models need to be innovated. At present, farmers primarily sell their agricultural products to middlemen, who purchase the products from them at low prices. Low operation efficiency, narrow sales channels and low yield greatly affect the farmers’ poverty alleviation.
3.3 Lack of subjects of E-commerce operations

The subjects of e-commerce operations are expected to master basic information technologies and innovation skills, with pioneering spirit for daring to do and try. At present, aging is generally a severe problem in rural areas, where most young people are reluctant to stay. As a result, there is a lack of human resources for e-commerce operations in rural areas. According to the above survey, young people are unwilling to stay in rural areas, mainly because in their opinions, rural areas are not fascinating enough for them, or there is no space for young people’s development. Lack of appeal and development potential mainly arises from insignificant cultural impacts of rural areas. In Chetou Village, ancestral halls and units of cultural relics are roots and lifeblood of rural cultures. They urgently need to be particularly protected. Nonetheless, shortage of funds is the biggest barrier to protection of rural cultures. Without cultures, there are no roots. Without a doubt, rural countries are hindered from development since they don’t have roots.

4. Exploration of paths for alleviating poverty through E-commerce

4.1. Strengthening publicity and guidance to change farmers’ innate ideas

The key for farmers to become wealthy consists in village leaders’ guidance. Village leaders ought to take initiatives to learn policies on poverty alleviation, understand them thoroughly and publicize them widely in words which are easy to understand by villagers. They are supposed to impart new technologies and ideas helpful for villagers to alleviate poverty to the masses. Furthermore, they shall act as role models and leaders to gradually change villagers’ innate ideas, in order that villagers can understand and practise the new ideas and technologies. Township and county governments ought to reinforce training of village leaders, organize deep learning and widespread surveys. They shall go out of villages to view the world and jump out of their circles to see the global situation, to really alleviate poverty with targeted approaches. The poverty alleviating team regularly pushes the latest information on agricultural technologies to Xunwu County, Nanqiao Town and Chetou Village. They send their interpretations of national policies about poverty alleviation to village leaders and fund villagers’ committees to prepare brochures, to impart new information, technologies and changes to villagers.

4.2. Expanding development ideas and optimizing industry layout

Towns and villages exhibit their respective strengths and characteristics. Villagers’ committees have to fully explore their villages’ characteristics and strengths. They ought to vigorously expand and diverse development paths from different perspectives. Besides, they shall continuously optimize industry layouts, maintain their villages’ strengths and build their own brilliant brands. On one hand, they are expected to bring comparative advantages of local products into full play and fully explore added value of products; on the other hand, they ought to understand local natural and cultural resources from multiple perspectives to make appropriate publicities. Owing to soil problems, Chetou Village doesn’t have prominent advantages in quality of their agricultural products, but it is not in a disadvantageous position in this aspect. Moreover, this village is surrounded by mountains and waters. With terrific natural landscapes and abundant humanistic landscapes, it has certain strengths in tourism. Therefore, this village can provide rural tourist services for urban residents of Ganzhou and Meizhou on the premise of guaranteeing basic earnings from agricultural products, so as to further increase villagers’ overall income. The poverty alleviating team photographed landscapes and short videos of Chetou Village. They pushed the photos and videos on media to increase awareness of Chetou Village and Nanqiao Town, which laid a foundation for industry upgrades of this area.

4.3. Increasing awareness of sharing and integrating villages’ resources with towns’

Villages have to bring their strengths into play, concentrate on characteristic development, and invest their limited funds and energy in cost-effective industries in wars for poverty alleviation. In
the course of development, town governments ought to be good at integrating and coordinating resources of villages, to bring villages’ strengths into full play. Pursuant to the survey, Nanlong Village, which is a few kilometers away from Chetou Village, has achieved relatively mature and large-scale development in e-commerce. It has become a pilot village of e-commerce services designated by the Central Propaganda Ministry. Nanqiao Town may make use of this village’s strengths, extend e-commerce services to nearby villages from Nanlong Village, and develop this village into a centralized center of e-commerce services in that area to sell agricultural products to other villages, in order that other villages will not over invest in e-commerce.

4.4. Brainstorming for Innovating Marketing Models

Throughout social and economic development, consumer habits have been changing rapidly. Nowadays, more and more people are keen to purchase models such as “group buy”, “online streaming” and “C2C”. Network platforms, including “Tik Tok”, “Eating Show” and “Pinduoduo” have become critical carriers for sellers to promote products and directly communicate with buyers. Farmers will progressively fall in mire of poverty alleviation if they fail to promptly keep up with trends and master the latest promotion technologies. Hence, village, town, county and city leaders, especially young leaders, are supposed to brainstorm and make concerted efforts to make contributions to local sales of agricultural products. The poverty alleviating team will regularly push seasonal agricultural products of Xunwu County, Nanqiao Town and Chetou Village on publicity platforms of Jiangsu University of Technology, including assistants and the Students’ Union of Jiangsu University of Technology. In addition, they will organize marketing competitions inside the university to develop markets for selling local agricultural products and promote poverty alleviation of old revolutionary base areas.

References