

Text 6

Abstract of “Government Responsibility for the Protection of Vulnerable Groups”

Title: Government Responsibility for the Protection of Vulnerable Groups

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Source: *Journal of Jiangxi Administration Institute*, 2007 (3)

Abstract:

As a distinct social class, vulnerable groups concern both the government and the community. It is necessary to explore government responsibility for vulnerable groups specific to China's society.

I. Characteristics of Vulnerable Groups

The overall characteristics of China's current vulnerable groups are as follows: (1) physically vulnerable groups account for a large proportion of the whole vulnerable groups; factors such as old age, disease, and disability all contribute to the formation of this kind of vulnerable groups; (2) vulnerable groups resulted from social factors account for the main part of the whole vulnerable groups; unemployment, marginalisation, land acquisition etc. have worsened their situation; (3) low levels of income and consumption as well as hard life are the essential characteristics of vulnerable groups; (4) vulnerable groups lack social and economic resources, being at a disadvantageous position in the face of social competitions; (5) vulnerable groups have low influence on politics, few opportunities to participate in political activities, and few opportunities to express their demands; and (6) they are extremely sensitive and psychologically fragile, easy to lose confidence in life.

II. Classification of Vulnerable Groups

Scholars mainly classify vulnerable groups into two types: physically vulnerable groups and psychologically vulnerable groups. The former is composed of the elderly, minors, the disabled, and those who are ill while the latter consists of off-farm workers in cities, farmers and laid-off workers.

1. China's largest vulnerable group is composed of farmers. Farmers also account for the majority of the whole population in China.

2. Off-farm workers are referred to as a new social class and are largely neglected in cities. Although they contribute greatly to the prosperity of cities, their interests are not properly protected.

3. Issues related to minors, old people who are living alone, street children etc. can also greatly influence social stability and prosperity. The government should pay sufficient attention to the protection of these groups.

III. Government Responsibility

1. The government should strengthen and improve political and legal protection. The household registration system is a major cause of delay in developing rural and urban areas in China, making cities and

rural areas two completely different worlds and depriving farmers from development opportunities. Therefore, it is beneficial to abandon the household registration system, giving equal development opportunity to farmers and improving farmers' status. It will also benefit the smooth transfer of China's rural labour force and the early realisation of urban-rural integration.

2. The government should improve relevant policies. The urban-rural gap is constantly widening and the government is still implementing biased economic policies for urban and rural areas, making farmers' weak position more obvious. Farmers are deprived of political protection, facing dual problems of "market failure" and "policy failure". To begin with, farmers should be given equal treatment with that of city people and also equal survival opportunities as well as equal development opportunities. In addition, since farmers have fallen into vulnerable groups, it requires sympathy and support from the government and the community to change the farmers' current situation.

3. The government should establish relief systems, providing social security for vulnerable groups.

Compared with other social classes, vulnerable groups are more easily affected by the negative effects of economic reform. The government should take the responsibility to compensate for their lack of social welfare.