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VI. Interconnected Roads Bring Prosperity to All Industries, and Help Improve People's Lives and the Environment in Rural Areas

Rural roads help to connect beautiful scenery, drive the development of local industries, grow the local economy, and benefit the local people. The construction and development of rural roads provides strong support for the comprehensive development of the rural economy and society, and lays the groundwork for advancing all-round rural revitalization and accelerating agricultural and rural modernization.

1. Creating a Path to Prosperity for Rural People

"If you want to become better-off, build a road." Guided by poverty alleviation programs and policies, China has taken extraordinary steps and made an enormous effort to expedite the development of rural transport in poor areas. Since 2014, more than 1.4 million km of rural roads have been built or upgraded in previously poor areas, and more than 45,000 towns, townships and administrative villages have joined the list with access to bus services. All towns, townships and administrative villages where conditions allow had been connected to paved roads by 2019, and all such villages had been connected to bus services by 2020, fulfilling the promise that no region would be left behind because of inadequate road coverage on the journey towards prosperity. Better transport has cleared the bottlenecks that had long delayed economic and social development in poor areas, and has laid a solid foundation for rural people to realize moderate prosperity in all respects.

The steady improvement of transport facilities in rural areas has attracted more capital, projects and talent to the countryside, creating more job opportunities and broadening the avenues for income growth. In order to expand employment channels further, and help rural people to find jobs close to their homes and boost their incomes, local governments have encouraged disadvantaged people to work on rural road construction projects (see Panel 9) and developed public welfare posts in rural road maintenance. At present, rural road construction projects provide work for about 80,000 people in need as a form of relief, enabling an annual average per capita income increase of around RMB8,500; and about 850,000 jobs are provided in rural road management and maintenance, offering an annual average per capita income of approximately RMB13,000.

Panel 9. Promoting Work Relief Programs in Rural Road Construction and Maintenance

Work-relief programs are a policy measure for people in need to earn an income from working on government-funded infrastructure projects instead of receiving direct relief. The main goals are to provide wages to them through employment, offer them skills training, and help them find jobs in places close to their homes and boost their incomes.

Investment in rural road construction and maintenance is a large-scale initiative, bringing a wide range of benefits and driving the huge potential to create jobs for local people. In recent years, the government has strengthened organization and guidance, and issued notices to promote work-relief programs. Implementation guidelines for work-relief programs have been formulated to provide clear definitions and instructions regarding the scope, target beneficiaries, procedures and activities of work-relief programs.

Work-relief programs in the construction and maintenance of rural roads have achieved remarkable results, providing growing numbers of projects and attracting more rural residents every year. By providing local jobs and skills training, the programs help to motivate people in need to earn their living and become prosperous through work.

2. Advancing Rural Revitalization Across the Board

Thriving businesses are an important pillar of rural revitalization. The government continues to integrate rural roads into the overall economic development of rural areas, ensuring that the vast countryside is finding greater prosperity and becoming more attractive.

Supporting modernization of rural industries.

Based on the local availability of resources in rural areas, and taking into account territorial space planning at county and township levels, the government continues to coordinate the network of rural roads and the layout of industrial parks, accelerate the construction of rural roads connected to major local businesses, improve traffic access to key economic nodes in the countryside, and develop the model of Rural Roads Plus Local Industries, ensuring agricultural modernization.

Boosting rural tourism. Taking into account local natural landscapes and cultural heritage, the government emphasizes rational planning of rural roads. It works to connect rural roads with cultural and tourist resources, create high-quality themed tourist routes (see Panel 10), expand the comprehensive added value of rural road services, create popular tourist destinations from beautiful landscapes preserved by generations of villagers, and boost rural revitalization through rural tourism.

Making efficient use of distinctive resources in rural areas. Efforts have been made to promote the model of Rural Roads Plus Local Resources, which integrates the development of rural roads with local natural resources such as energy and minerals. Transport departments have been committed to providing better access to local industries in order to integrate roads and businesses and create new momentum for rural economic development.

3. Creating a Beautiful and Harmonious Countryside Where People Want to Live and Work

Building a beautiful and harmonious countryside with complete infrastructure, inclusive public services, and prosperous rural culture, where people want to live and work, is a prerequisite for rural people to live a modern life close to their homes, and a requirement for fostering greater social etiquette and civility in the countryside.

Panel 10. Using Roads to Transform Tourist Resources into a Growth Driver for the Rural Economy

As one of the 33 pastoral banners in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Otog Front Banner of Ordos City is located in the autonomous region's western part and boasts abundant natural landscapes and a profound cultural and historical background. In recent years, Otog Front Banner has developed a "rural roads derivative economy" by creating tourism circuits, opening up resource routes, and activating industrial chains.

Otog Front Banner has built high-quality roads between Chengchuan and Tongshi, Angsu, and Sanduandi, connecting historical sites, traditional grasslands, folk culture, and desert scenery in the process, and enabling more than 1,000 households of farmers and herders along the routes to benefit from tourism. Since 2019, Otog Front Banner has welcomed approximately 5 million tourists and realized tourist revenues of over RMB10 billion.

The rapid development of rural roads has become a new engine driving the growth of cultural and tourist industries and boosting the incomes of farmers and herders in Otog Front Banner, leading the local people on the march towards prosperity.

Building roads to make the countryside more attractive. In the planning and design of rural roads, transport departments focus on integration with the natural environment and local culture and customs. They continue to improve the environment of rural roads and carry out roadside greening and beautification programs. Beautiful rural roads connect natural and cultivated landscapes, and blend in with distinctive rural homes, helping to build a large number of villages and towns that are desirable places to live and work, and painting new scenes of rural harmony and beauty.

Extending basic public services. Safe, convenient and efficient rural transport facilities allow the extension of basic public services such as education and medical care to rural areas. The development of rural transport has made it safer and more convenient for rural people to travel and obtain medical services. Personalized transport services, including dedicated shuttle routes and customized school buses, have reduced problems for students in remote areas and supported equal access to education in urban and rural areas.

Accelerating urban-rural exchanges and integration. The development of rural roads has effectively shortened the distance and travel time between urban and rural areas, and promoted the two-way flow of personnel, materials, funds, information and culture. It has enabled mutual promotion between urban and rural areas, transformed the rural lifestyle, working pattern, and social landscape, and broadened the outlook of rural people, thereby helping form a new model of urban-rural relationship characterized by complementarity, coordinated development, and common prosperity.

VII. China's Contribution to Rural Transport in Other Developing Countries

At present, a number of developing countries are still afflicted by poverty. They are searching for ways to develop, but rural transport is still a bottleneck. The Chinese government has worked to strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation on transport in the international community. In 2018, a resolution initiated and promoted by China – Eradicating Rural Poverty to Implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – was adopted by the UN General Assembly, emphasizing further poverty reduction efforts through infrastructure construction. Over the years, through sharing its development experience through international cooperation mechanisms and helping with the construction of rural road infrastructure in other developing countries, China has contributed substantially to reducing poverty, improving people's wellbeing, and promoting sustainable global development.

1. Providing Technical Standards for Highway Engineering that Suits Different National Conditions

Standards are the fruit of humanity's progress. They are also a universal technical language that strengthens global connectivity. In recent years, China has made great efforts in standardization and promoted innovative, cooperative, green and open development powered by standards.

In support of its rapid, large-scale development of road infrastructure, China has established a world-leading system of technical standards and specifications for highway engineering. Based on China's experience from its transport construction projects, these standards represent theoretical advances in China's highway engineering and involve technological innovations in techniques, equipment and materials. At the same time, they are highly practical and adaptable as they come from diverse projects covering China's vast territory with complex geology and terrain.

Committed to staying connected with the world and abreast with the times, China aims to meet the world's growing demand for transport development by boosting connectivity and sharing knowledge and experience. While strengthening "hard connectivity" in infrastructure with other countries, it is also promoting "soft connectivity" by sharing Chinese standards.

In 2012, ten industry standards for highway engineering were released in foreign languages for the first time, including Technical Standard of Highway Engineering, General Specifications for Design of Highway Bridges and Culverts, and Technical Standard of Low Volume Rural Highway Engineering. To date, a total of 73 industry standards have been released in English, French and Russian, covering major technical fields including survey, design, construction, maintenance, and quality inspection and evaluation of highways, bridges and tunnels. They represent a systematic effort in building industry standards in foreign languages, and contribute to highway construction in other developing countries.

China's highway standards have been applied in hundreds of projects in dozens of countries around the world, including Indonesia's Surabaya-Madura Bridge Project and Mozambique's Maputo-Katembe Bridge Project. Chinese standards have also been applied in China-aided construction of rural roads in countries such as Nepal and Mozambique. These affordable, dura-



The Maputo-Katembe Bridge in Maputo, Mozambique's capital, in 2019. The bridge, which was opened in 2018, applied China's highway standards. ZHANG YU / XINHUA

ble, safe and comfortable roads have provided benefits to local people (see Panel 11).

2. Sharing Experience in Rural Road Development

With the goal of improving the wellbeing of humanity, China has played an active role in building new platforms and mechanisms for global transport cooperation and in promoting knowledge and experience sharing. It has met its responsibilities as a major country with practical actions.

Panel 11. Applying Chinese Standards on the Karakoram Highway

The Karakoram Highway is an important land route on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Its challenging geological conditions imposed a high difficulty of engineering that required complex construction techniques. Applying Chinese standards, the Karakoram Highway Phase II built by Chinese enterprises has won the Best Bridge/Tunnel Award in the Engineering News-Record (ENR) Global Best Projects competition.

Through the Five-Year Action Plan for Technical Cooperation on Highway Engineering Between China and Pakistan, Pakistan has developed its urgently needed standards for highway engineering in stages with the help of China. Based on Pakistan's actual conditions, these standards have drawn on Chinese technologies, standards and specifications as well as results from China-Pakistan scientific research cooperation.

Building platforms for cooperation and exchanges. In 2021, China hosted the Second United Nations Global Sustainable Transport Conference, with a focus on the enabling role of transport in poverty reduction and eradication. In 2023, China hosted the Global Sustainable Transport Forum, emphasizing common development that leaves no country or no one behind. At the forum, it shared experience with other countries and showed its determination and sense of responsibility in developing rural transport in more extensive and detailed fields. China has established the Global Sustainable Transport Innovation and Knowledge Center as a platform for cooperation and exchanges and for sharing China's experience in rural road development with the international community.

Engaging in international organizations. China has sent experts to the Technical Committee 2.2 Roads for Equity, Accessibility and Mobility in Rural and Inter-urban Areas of the World Road Association (PIARC). It has also shared its experience in developing rural roads through other international organizations including the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program, urging countries to attach more importance to the safety and accessibility of rural roads.

Conducting international training sessions. China has contributed to the sustainable highway development of other developing countries by helping to train technical professionals. China has held 28 training sessions for more than 800 people, including a training program on road design and management in Botswana, an advanced training program on highway engineering for countries along the Belt and Road, a training program for technical personnel in highway engineering in other developing countries, and a training program on road network planning.

3. Supporting Rural Road Construction in Other Developing Countries

China has supported and participated in rural road construction projects, and provided aid and assistance to a large number of rural road infrastructure projects in other developing countries, contributing its strength and experience to global rural road development. By participating in construction projects and providing technical and human resource support, China has helped improve the rural road infrastructure of other developing countries (see Panel 12), make travel much easier for local people, reduce logistic costs by a large

margin, strengthen interaction between urban and rural areas, and facilitate the market access and flow of agricultural products. These efforts have contributed significantly to local poverty reduction and alleviation, improved people's wellbeing and living standards, promoted local economic and social development, and received wide acclaim from local people. For example, the road construction project on the fringes of the capital of Madagascar, supported by free aid from China, has made it easier to transport eggs from the town of Mahazaza and facilitated the development of local poultry farming. It is known by the locals as the "egg road".

Since 2018, China has supported 24 developing countries including Cambodia, Serbia, Rwanda, Namibia, Vanuatu and Niger in highway and bridge construction and maintenance. These efforts have helped such countries improve transport infrastructure.

Panel 12. Supporting Post-Earthquake Reconstruction in Ecuador

Implemented by the Ministry of Transport and Public Works of Ecuador following a magnitude 7.8 earthquake in 2016, Phase I of the post-earthquake reconstruction project was located in the intersection of four provinces – Pichincha, Imbabura and Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas provinces in north-central Ecuador, as well as the coastal province of Esmeraldas.

Phase I involved reconstructing, upgrading and expanding an existing 33.8-km-long gravel road and constructing a 177-m-long bridge. Completed in 2023, it connects all traffic arteries in north-central Ecuador and is now the most convenient route connecting Ecuador's north-central region and Pacific coastal areas in the west. Surrounding the Phase I site were the main production areas of agricultural products such as palm, sugarcane and cacao, served by gravel roads. Phase I has greatly facilitated the transport of local agricultural products, upgraded road safety, and stimulated the social and economic development of local rural areas.

Phase I was the first step in implementing the bilateral diplomatic initiative of China's President Xi Jinping and a major result of Ecuador's post-earthquake reconstruction with China's support. It has significantly improved access to transport for around 1.5 million people along the route and strengthened Ecuador's national road network and the local economy. It is an excellent example of deepening friendship and cooperation between China and Ecuador.

Conclusion

Today, as China embarks on a new journey of promoting national rejuvenation through Chinese modernization, the country's rural road endeavors have entered a period of historic opportunity. China will implement a new round of rural road upgrading programs covering road network expansion, road safety, transport capacity, governance ability, public services, the road environment, the integrated development of transport and local industries, and the growth of employment and rural incomes. These efforts will improve the modern rural transport system, open a new chapter of rural road development, and build up China's strength in transport.

As China's modernization advances, by 2035, the country will have in place a rural road transport system with a sound scale and structure, high-quality infrastructure and services, and rational and effective governance. By the middle of the century, China will have become a great modern socialist country with a safe, convenient, green and beautiful rural road transport system. The system will be adapted to the modernization of agriculture and rural areas, developed in tandem with eco-environmental conservation and rural cultural progress, and integrated with modern information and communication technologies.

In a spirit of openness and mutually-beneficial cooperation, China will strengthen international exchanges and collaboration in exploring new models and paths of rural road development, further contributing to global rural road development and poverty reduction, and building a global community of shared future.