



INSIDE

• Greening the Inner Mongolia deserts > p12

Xi's idea transforms lives of farmers

A resettlement proposal by the president 20 years ago helps rural residents beat the poverty trap

By **WANG HAO** and **WANG HUAZHONG** in Yinchuan

Five years ago, Hai Guobao's life was difficult, but not because his family did not work hard.

Generations of the family had farmed mountainous land in Northwest China's Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

There, summer is arid, yet rainfall is excessive during autumn harvests. Yields were decided virtually by fate, locals say, after they had invested a whole year's worth of labor.

"We felt satisfied when we had enough to eat, but drought frequently drew us back to poverty," said Hai, who is in his 60s.

Hai's grandchildren did not go to primary school until age 8 because the 8-kilometer round trip to school was too long for younger ones.

"We could never change our lives without the Party's migration policies," he said.

In May 2012, all eight members of Hai's family moved to Minning township in northern Ningxia as part of the region's plan to relocate 350,000 people out of mountains and valleys in Guyuan.

Hai, along with 67 others in his village, spent only 12,800 yuan (\$1,925) to build a new house of 54 square meters, excluding a courtyard, thanks to a government subsidy.

Soldiers based nearby also helped to move the family's belongings under the Party's command.

"I felt so happy to find that my new home is connected to electricity and tap water," Hai said.

"The school is only minutes walk away. I'm illiterate, my son is half-literate, but I hope one day my grandchildren can go to college."

In the past two decades, more than 60,000 immigrants settled in Minning, which did not exist 20 years ago.

President Xi Jinping proposed moving people in villages to the new settlement in 1997 when he made a survey trip to Ningxia as deputy Party chief of East China's Fujian province.

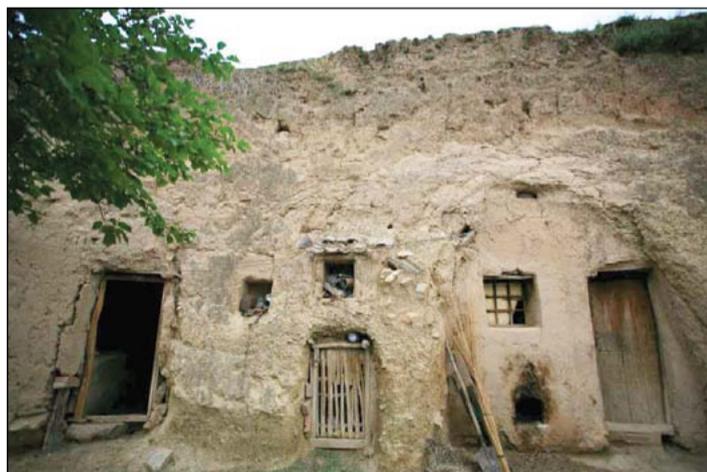
He was deeply concerned with the way people were living in Guyuan, and the United Nations also defined the situation as unfit.

Minning township is located between the eastern foothills of the Helan Mountains, which fend off cold air from Inner Mongolia, and the Yellow River, which is used for irrigation.



Hai Guobao, a resident of Minning village of Yinchuan, in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region, recalls President Xi Jinping's visit to his house in July last year.

FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY



Hai's old house (left) and outside his new home, which was built with government help. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



In July 2016, Xi revisited Ningxia and called for no one to be left behind regardless of geography or ethnic group as the nation strives to comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society by 2020.

Xi also visited Hai's home. Hai recalled that Xi went into his kitchen to check his access to water and to

lift a pot lid to see what they were having for dinner.

Xi also checked whether Hai's *kang*, a traditional brick bed that can be heated from underneath, worked well.

"I was speechless when seeing him. It was like seeing one of my family members returning after a

long period of time," he said. "It was just like a dream."

Hai's eldest son now drives agricultural machines for a vineyard nearby and his other son is a construction worker in the town. The family of eight people earns about 80,000 yuan a year.

"We don't farm now but we eat

better than we used to as farmers," Hai said.

According to Minning's government, locals' per capita annual income rose from 500 yuan in 1997 to 10,732 yuan in 2016, surpassing the average for rural residents in the region.

The local economy has also benefited in recent years from investments from Fujian province and other regions to boost industries and promote modern farming techniques.

Taking advantage of the abundant sunshine, many rooftops are covered with solar panels. Local residents also help to grow high-priced raspberries and wine grapes with the help of the dry climate.

A major auto company has also set up a car parts factory to offer more jobs to the migrants. "We will have better development and a better life," Hai said.

Contact the writers at wanghao@chinadaily.com.cn