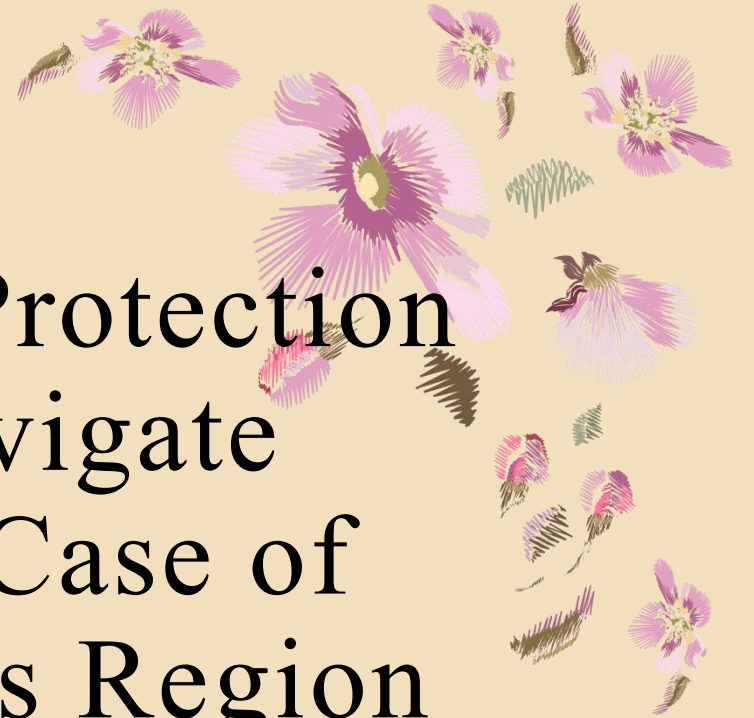


An Overview of Social Protection in China and How to Navigate Climatic Disasters: The Case of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region

Professor Tao LIU, School of Public Affairs at
Zhejiang University



Contents

1.Introduction: Institutional Evolution of Social Protection and Disaster Assistance in China

2.Context: Disaster Risks and Geographical Profile of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region

3. Practices: Emergency Response and Implementation Mechanisms of Disaster Assistance in Ningxia

4.Key Findings and Model Refinement

5.Conclusion



1.Introduction: Institutional Evolution of Social Protection and Disaster Assistance in China



A brief historical review



In the year of 1951: "Labor Insurance Regulation of the PRC" promulgated

The emergence of the modern social protection during the process of transition to a socialist market economy

- Formally, it is termed “social security” in China. This concept emerged in the early 1980s, during the initial phase of China’s reform and opening-up when the country began to open its doors to the outside world. It was during this period that Chinese intellectual elites were first exposed to the concept.
- As China transitioned towards a market-oriented economy, it gradually established its social protection system.

Primary pillars of Chinese social protection

	Targeted Groups	Financial Mechanisms	Eligibility
Social Insurance	Employees with formal employment relationship	Contribution fees	Previous payment of insurance contributions
Social Assistance	National citizens	State fiscal revenues	Means test
Social Welfare	Some special vulnerable social groups	State fiscal revenues	Social attributes
Preferential treatment and resettlement	Service members and veterans	State fiscal revenues	Services for national interest

Social assistance: Eight sub-types

-



-

Disaster Assistance:

Disaster (victim) assistance in China is a comprehensive system designed to provide targeted support to individuals affected by adverse climatic conditions and natural disasters, ensuring their basic living needs are met and aiding in their recovery and resilience.

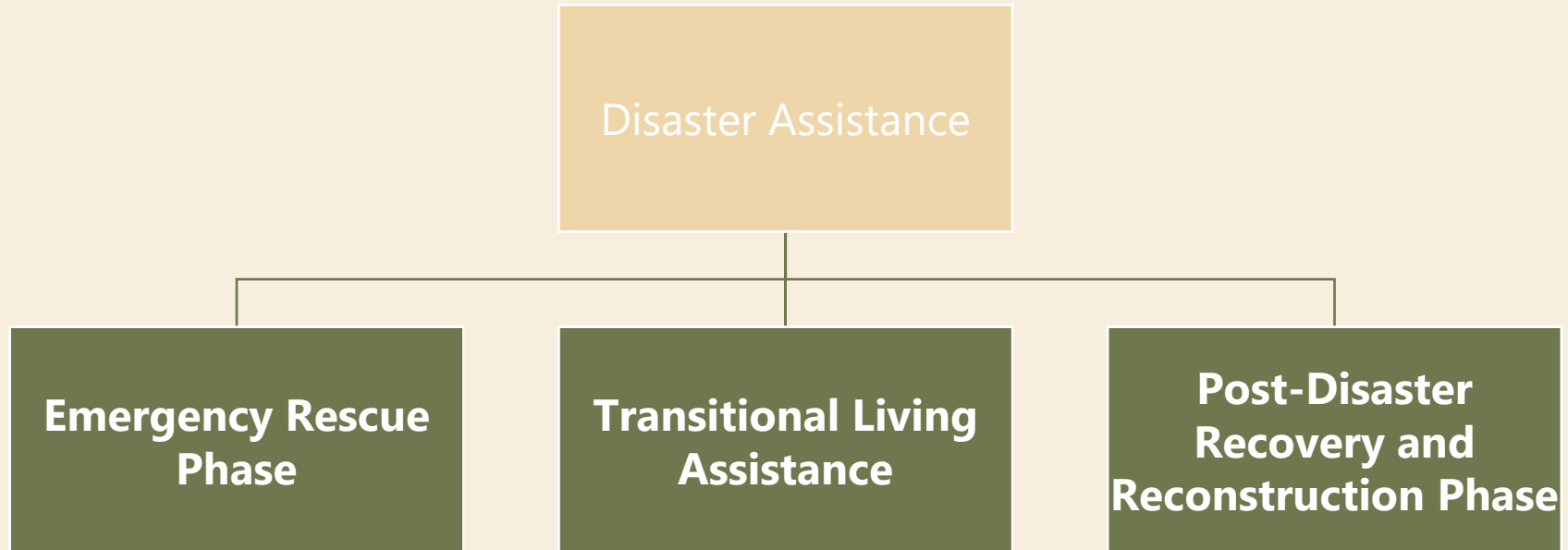
Bureaucratic Administration

China's disaster assistance has undergone significant administrative reform. Previously, disaster assistance was primarily the responsibility of the civil affairs departments, which were in charge of formulating disaster relief policies, organizing and coordinating relief efforts, and managing disaster relief funds and materials. However, **with the institutional reform in 2018**, the disaster relief responsibilities of the civil affairs departments were transferred to the newly established **Ministry of Emergency Management**.

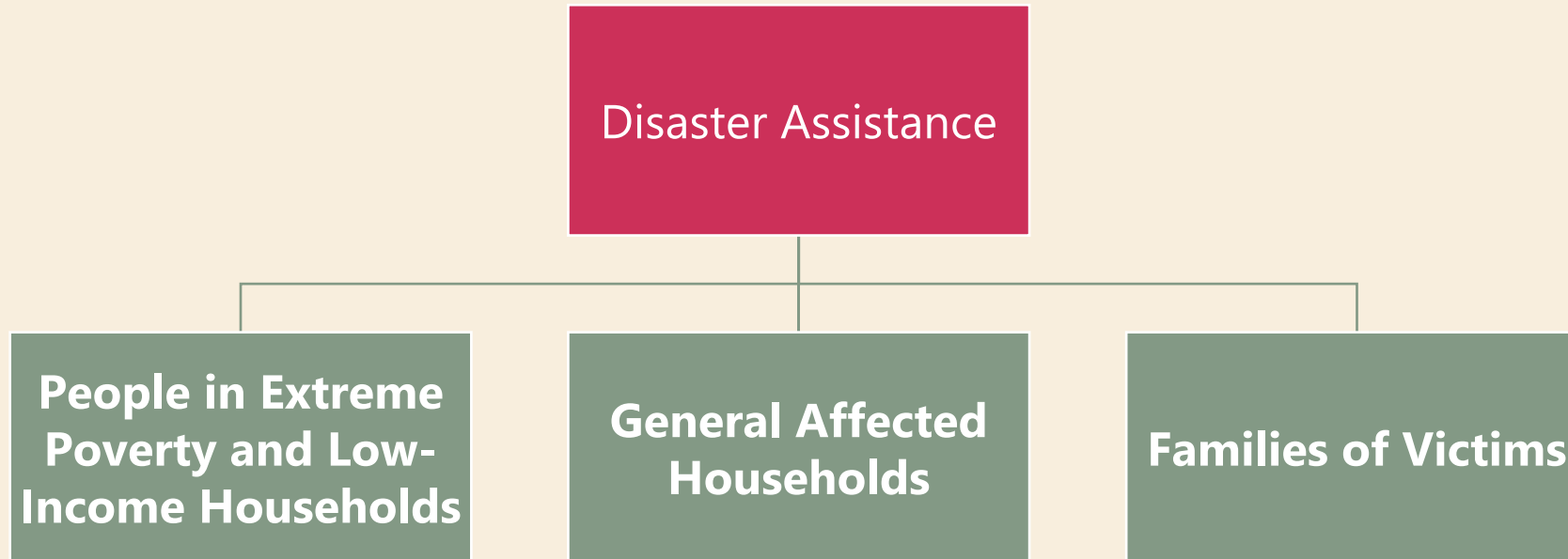
The Ministry of Emergency Management integrated 13 functions from 11 departments, including the disaster relief functions of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, **forming an "all-hazards, big emergency" management system** that takes overall responsibility for **natural disaster relief** and **work safety accident rescue**, among other tasks. This reform has enhanced the authority and coordination ability of the emergency management system, clarified comprehensive regulatory measures, and resolved the issue of previously vague responsibilities.

- After the reform of 2018, responsibilities such as natural disaster relief, disaster verification and assessment, and central disaster relief material reserves were transferred from the MCA to the MEM, while the MCA retained non-disaster-related social assistance responsibilities. Under the new system, the MEM took unified command of the entire disaster "prevention, response, and relief" chain, integrated the central disaster relief material reserve system, and strengthened real-time disaster information sharing mechanisms with departments such as water resources, natural resources, and meteorology. The MCA then focused on long-term social assistance for people impoverished by disasters, creating a connection with the MEM's short-term disaster relief efforts.

Typology according to episodes



Typology according to affected persons



Typology according to disaster type and specific needs



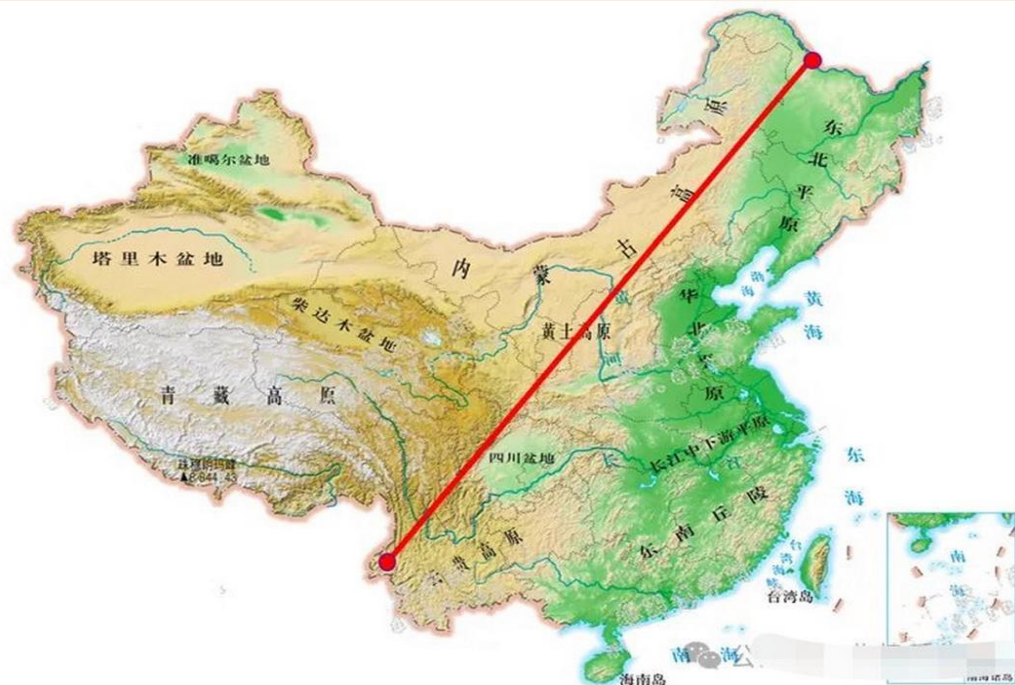
Level	Laws and Regulations	Main Content
National Level	Law of the People's Republic of China on Emergency Response	Regulates emergency response activities, including the overall principles and mechanisms for disaster assistance.
	Regulations on Natural Disaster Relief	Specifies the principles, responsibilities, relief measures, and post-disaster recovery and reconstruction for natural disaster relief.
	National Natural Disaster Relief Emergency Plan	Guides national-level disaster relief efforts, outlining emergency response procedures and measures.
Specialized Fields	Law of the People's Republic of China on Flood Control	Regulates flood control activities and ensures smooth implementation of flood disaster relief.
	Law of the People's Republic of China on Seismic Disaster Prevention and Mitigation	Basic law for seismic disaster prevention and mitigation, covering earthquake disaster relief.
	Law of the People's Republic of China on Meteorology	Provides legal basis for meteorological disaster prevention and relief.
	Law of the People's Republic of China on Forests and Law of the People's Republic of China on Grasslands	Covers disaster relief for forest and grassland fires.
Local Level	Natural Disaster Relief Measures	For example, the "Anhui Province Natural Disaster Relief Measures," which refine relief measures based on local conditions.
Supporting Policies	Interim Measures for Social Assistance	Comprehensive social assistance regulations covering disaster relief, clarifying assistance targets, standards, and procedures.

2.Context: Disaster Risks and Geographical Profile of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region



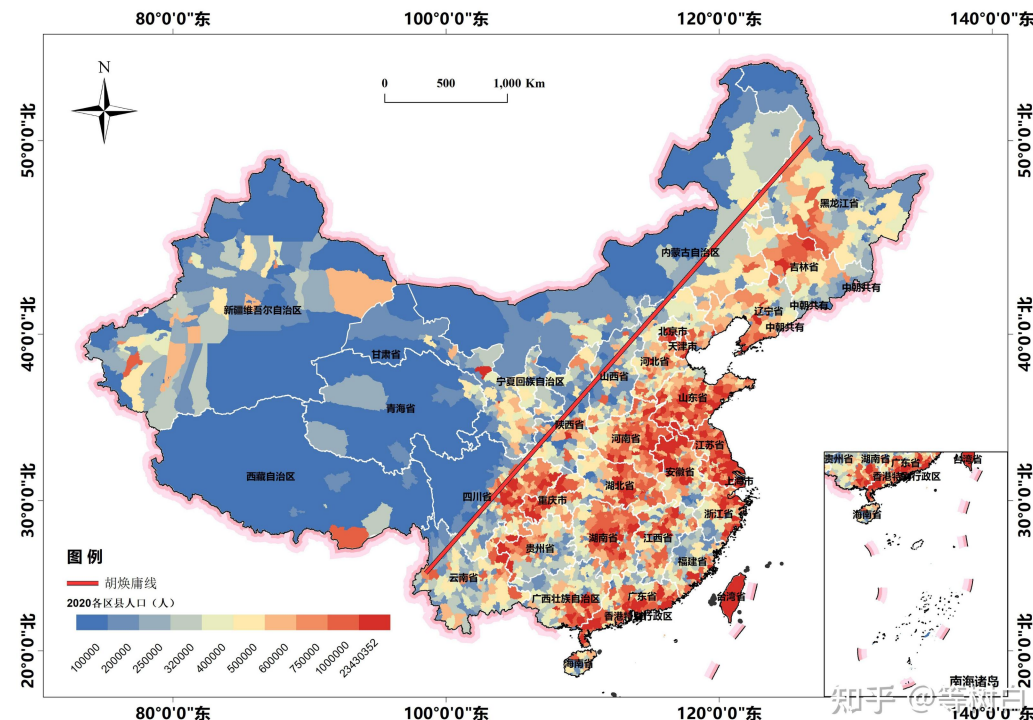
Ningxia
topographic map

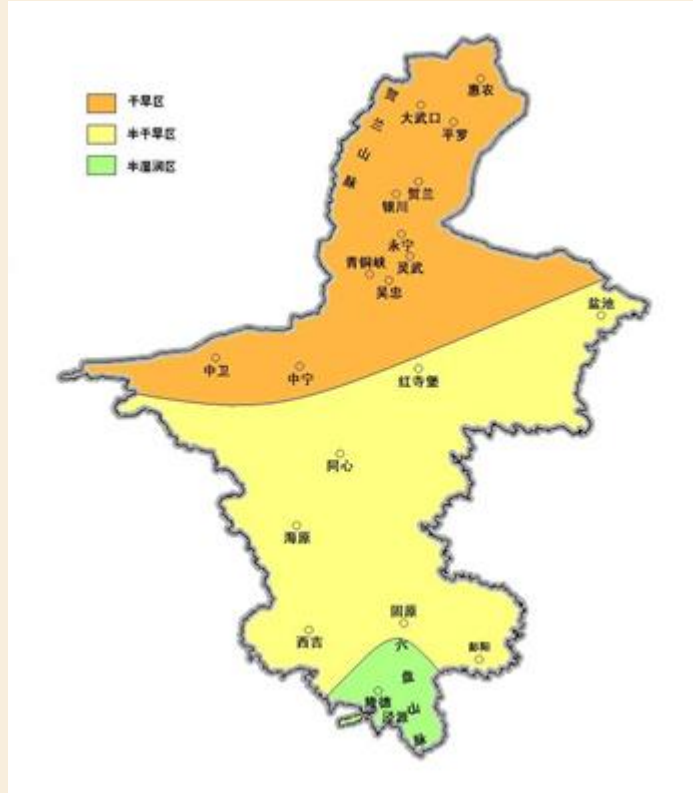




The Hu Huanyong Line

The Hu Huanyong Line, proposed by Chinese geographer Hu Huanyong in 1935, is an important geographical demarcation line that reveals the differences in China's population distribution. It roughly coincides with the 400 mm annual isohyet, clearly distinguishing the densely populated and resource-rich eastern regions from the sparsely populated and relatively arid western areas.





Hu Huanyong Line

Degree of drought in
Ningxia, China

3. Practices: Emergency Response and Implementation Mechanisms of Disaster Assistance in Ningxia



The Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region is subject to a variety of natural disasters, including drought, heavy rain, floods, sandstorms, earthquakes, hail, and frost. These disasters have diverse impacts on agricultural production, people's lives, and the ecological environment. However, **as Ningxia is located to the northwest of the Hu Huanyong Line**, it is predominantly affected by drought. While occasionally heavy rains and floods do occur, **the main challenges the region faces are related to drought and insufficient rainfall**. Therefore, strengthening disaster prevention and emergency management is essential to ensure regional security and sustainable development.

Disaster assistance: Response and material allocation

1. Tiered Emergency Response Mechanism: Ningxia has established a tiered emergency response system based on the severity of drought disasters. When a mild drought occurs, the county-level government initiates the emergency response; for moderate droughts, the city-level government takes charge; and in the case of severe or higher-level droughts, the regional government of Ningxia is responsible for initiating the response. Each level of government organizes forces swiftly to carry out drought relief operations according to the response level.
2. Disaster Relief Material Allocation: Ningxia has set up disaster relief material storage depots, which stockpile a large quantity of drought-resistant equipment and living supplies. In the event of a disaster, these materials can be rapidly allocated to ensure the basic living needs of the affected population. For instance, water pumps, water conveyance pipes, water storage tanks, and other drought-resistant devices, as well as drinking water, food, tents, and other essential living supplies, are transported to the affected areas.

Disaster assistance: Rescue and material support

1. Rescue Team Development: Ningxia has established specialized drought response teams, comprising hydrological experts, firefighters, and volunteers. These teams are capable of rapidly deploying to affected areas during drought disasters to conduct emergency rescue operations. For example, they assist local communities in repairing irrigation facilities, laying water supply pipelines, and organizing artificial rainfall.

2. Livelihood Support Measures: During the disaster period, Ningxia employs various methods to ensure the basic living needs of the affected population. In areas with water shortages, water tankers are organized to deliver clean drinking water. Additionally, temporary assistance stations are set up to provide essential living supplies such as food and clothing to the affected communities.

Social assistance amidst the disaster: Assistance to affected populations

1. Temporary Relief Measures: Following the onset of a drought disaster, the civil affairs departments in Ningxia activate temporary relief mechanisms, providing categorized assistance to affected populations. For households facing difficulties due to drought, temporary relief funds are distributed to help address basic living needs.

2. Support for Vulnerable Groups: Special attention is given to vulnerable groups, such as rural low-income households, those supported by the Five Guarantees (a social welfare system), and people with disabilities. These groups are provided with essential living supplies and medical assistance to ensure that their basic living conditions are not compromised. For example, free drinking water and food, which are essential for daily living, are supplied to these vulnerable groups.

Social assistance amidst the disaster: Participation of Social Forces

1. Mobilization of Social Organizations: Ningxia mobilizes social organizations to participate in drought relief efforts. Charitable organizations and volunteer associations, among others, provide support to affected areas through fundraising and the donation of supplies. For instance, some charitable organizations have donated large quantities of drinking water, food, and drought-resistant equipments to affected populations.
2. Volunteer Services: Volunteers are organized to go deep into the affected areas to assist local residents in drought resistance and self-help. Volunteers help lay irrigation pipelines, repair water conservancy facilities, and deliver water and supplies to those with mobility difficulties.

Social assistance in the post-disaster period

1. Long-Term Assistance Policies: In the post-disaster phase, Ningxia continues to implement long-term assistance policies for affected populations. Families whose incomes have decreased and are facing difficulties due to drought are included in the rural minimum living standard guarantee (rural *Dibao*) program to ensure their basic living needs are continuously met.
2. Employment Support Measures: To address the employment difficulties of affected populations, Ningxia has adopted a series of employment support measures. For example, it organizes labor export to help affected populations find employment in other areas and conducts vocational skills training to enhance their employability.

Additional assistance (in the post-disaster period)

- **Psychological Support and Counseling:** Recognizing the psychological impact of disasters, Ningxia provides psychological support and counseling services to affected populations. This includes setting up community-based counseling centers and deploying professional psychologists to help individuals and families cope with stress and trauma.
- **Education Support for Children:** Ensuring that children from affected families do not fall behind in their education, Ningxia offers educational support programs. These include providing scholarships, school supplies, and transportation assistance to ensure that children can continue their education without interruption.
- **Healthcare Services:** Post-disaster healthcare support is crucial for affected populations. Ningxia enhances medical services in disaster-affected areas by setting up temporary clinics, providing free medical check-ups, and distributing essential medicines. Additionally, health education campaigns are launched to prevent the outbreak of diseases.
- **Housing and Infrastructure Support:** For families whose homes were damaged or destroyed, Ningxia provides housing assistance. This includes financial support for reconstruction, provision of temporary shelters, and coordination with construction teams to ensure that homes are rebuilt to withstand future disasters. Infrastructure support is also provided to restore access to clean water, electricity, and sanitation facilities.

POST-DISASTER RELIEF MEASURES

Category	Type of Assistance	Assistance Standard
Disaster Relief	Transitional Living Assistance	50 yuan per person per day, for a maximum of 3 months; after 3 months, transition to other forms of assistance
Disaster Relief	Winter-Spring Living Difficulty Assistance	100 yuan per person per occurrence
Disaster Relief	Reconstruction and Repair Assistance for Collapsed or Damaged Housing	28,000 yuan per household for reconstruction of collapsed or severely damaged housing; 2,000 yuan per room for repair of damaged housing, with a maximum of 6,000 yuan per household
Social Assistance	Livelihood Support for Affected Populations (Long-Term Assistance Policy)	Families whose incomes have decreased and are facing difficulties due to drought are included in the rural minimum living standard guarantee program to ensure continuous basic living support
Social Assistance	Temporary Living Difficulty Assistance Due to Disaster	Township governments provide temporary living assistance to each affected family based on their level of difficulty

4.Key Findings and Model Refinement



Integrated assistance model: Combining Short-term and Long-term Support

1.

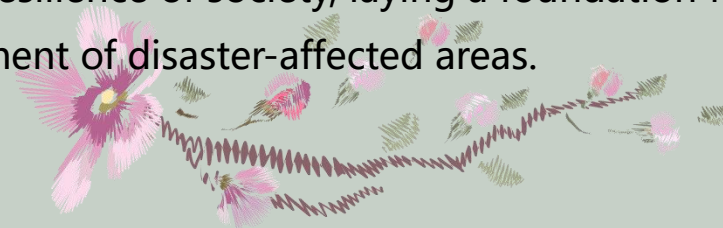
The combination of short-term relief and long-term support has created an "integrated assistance" model. This model not only provides immediate emergency supplies and living support after a disaster but also offers long-term policy support (such as inclusion in the MLSG) and employment assistance measures to help affected people restore their livelihoods and enhance their disaster resilience. This integrated relief effectively meets the immediate and long-term needs of affected people, providing continuous support for post-disaster recovery.



Resilient Disaster Response: Combining Temporary and Institutionalized Measures

2.

The combination of temporary measures and institutionalized measures has established a resilient disaster response system. Temporary measures, such as emergency material allocation and special assistance, can quickly respond to immediate problems caused by disasters. Meanwhile, institutionalized measures, such as the social assistance system and long-term protection policies, provide stable safety nets for affected people. This combination not only enhances the flexibility of disaster response but also strengthens the overall disaster resilience of society, laying a foundation for the sustainable development of disaster-affected areas.



Collaborative Governance and Holistic Governance: Government Coordination and Integration of Government and Society

3.

The coordinated efforts among various government departments and the in-depth integration of government and social organizations have formed a collaborative governance and holistic governance model. Through efficient collaboration among emergency management, civil affairs, finance, and other departments, as well as the extensive participation of social organizations and volunteers, resources are optimized, and the efficiency of relief is improved. This model not only enhances the scientific and effective nature of disaster response but also promotes the broad participation of social forces, creating a powerful synergy for society to collectively address disasters.



Duality: Interconnection of two systems



5.Conclusion



For the Global South: Integrating Disaster Relief with Poverty Alleviation — Insights from Ningxia

1. For developing countries, the most lasting impact of disasters is the transformation of temporary "disaster victims" into long-term "poor populations." Ningxia's experiences point to a fundamental solution: **deeply integrating disaster management with social protection systems**, so that emergency response automatically activates long-term livelihood support — thereby breaking the vicious cycle of *poverty caused by disasters and hindered recovery due to poverty*.
2. The core of this model lies in **institutionalized pre-integration**. Through a unified legal framework and data sharing, responsibilities are clearly defined: emergency management departments lead short-term rescue efforts, while civil affairs departments take over long-term safeguards, forming an institutional closed loop. When disasters strike, information on affected populations can be directly converted into social assistance lists, and emergency funds can smoothly transition into living subsidies and employment support — achieving a seamless shift from "**saving lives**" to "**restoring livelihoods**."

3. This is not merely an improvement in efficiency but a paradigm shift in governance. It offers a practical framework for fiscally constrained governments: **using one system, one database, and one integrated funding pool** to simultaneously address sudden disasters and chronic poverty — thereby maximizing the resilience benefits of public resources.
4. For Global South countries severely affected by climate disasters, Ningxia's case demonstrates that **the best post-disaster recovery begins with pre-disaster institutional design.**

Thank you for attention!

Professor Tao LIU

Director of the Institute of Risk
Management and Labour Protection

School of Public Affairs

Zhejiang University

Hangzhou, China

