

Original Paper

The Analysis on the Construction Direction of the Coordinated Action System of Natural Disaster Volunteers

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Abstract

From the perspective of collaborative governance, it is found that volunteers have become an indispensable force in the process of responding to disasters. However, due to the late start but rapid development of emergency volunteer service, the current emergency management system lacks a coordination mechanism to ensure the orderly participation of emergency volunteers in disaster rescue, and there are problems such as the lack of the concept of polycentric governance, the disorder of self-organized behavior, the lack of coordination within the system, the excessive emphasis on the gratuitous nature of public welfare, and the lag in the construction of laws and regulations.

Keywords

natural disaster, volunteer, coordinated action system

1. Concept of Coordinated Action System for Natural Disaster Volunteers

From the perspective of the natural disaster relief process, there is in fact a structural contradiction between the effective role played by the emergency volunteer team in responding to major disasters and the supporting institutional mechanisms that support its role. Therefore, in order to solve this contradiction, it is necessary to establish a system of coordinated action of volunteers for natural disasters, which is an emergency management system under the leadership of the government, with the purpose of improving the efficiency of emergency rescue and resource allocation, and then making overall arrangements and unified command of the activities of various actors, and then jointly carrying out orderly and efficient emergency activities in accordance with the law, which is a supplement and improvement to the current emergency rescue force system with Chinese characteristics. From the perspective of Collaborative co-governance, this paper analyzes the practical problems faced by

Chinese volunteers in participating in natural disaster relief, and discusses the direction of the construction of the system.

2. Theoretical Perspective on Volunteer Participation in Collaborative Governance

The theory of Collaborative governance argues that due to the complexity and cross-cutting nature of modern social problems, it is increasingly difficult for a single government agency or the private sector to solve public problems independently, so it is necessary to co-govern through multi-stakeholder cooperation. The core elements of collaborative governance integrate the characteristics of the synergy and the governance theory, including the plurality of governance subjects, the diversity of governance authority, the collaboration of subsystems, the dynamics of the system, the coordination of self-organization, and the orientation of public interests. The theory of collaborative governance emphasizes open systems, collaborative subsystems, the purpose of collaboration, and the orderly results of collaboration. These are both necessary and lacking in the process of volunteering to participate in disaster relief (Ran & He, 2023). Therefore, considering the dilemma of many institutional problems faced by Chinese emergency volunteer team when participating in disaster management, it is more convincing to plan the construction path of Chinese natural disaster emergency volunteer coordination action system with the help of the theoretical framework of collaborative governance.

3. The Real World of Volunteers Involved in Natural Disaster Relief

3.1 Lack of the Concept of Polycentric Governance

The construction of emergency rescue forces has long presented the problem of unbalanced and insufficient development, and it is customary to rely on the government's single rescue force to play an all-powerful role in dealing with major disasters, while “social emergency forces and grassroots emergency rescue forces are still in their infancy,..... The situation of the whole society’s participation in emergency rescue has not yet been fully formed,” and the consciousness of social emergency response forces, especially volunteer emergency response forces, to participate in disaster management has been lacking for a long time. In today’s trend of catastrophes becoming more sudden, devastating, interrelated, and complex, the traditional emergency management system that relies solely on the “national team” as the main force is becoming more and more overwhelmed, and the “single-center governance” model is declining day by day, resulting in numerous contradictions and a lack of fairness in the rescue process.

3.2 Disordered Self-organizing Behavior

The theory of collaborative governance advocates the establishment of self-organizing organizations, the formation of self-organizing networks, and the adoption of self-organizing behaviors. The construction of emergency volunteer organizations, the coordination between volunteer organizations and government departments, and the participation of emergency volunteer teams in disaster relief all

have strong self-organization characteristics. The phenomenon of “volunteer failure” will still occur when emergency volunteer teams participate in disaster relief due to the lack of specialized organizational networks, including the lack of coordination between volunteer service organizations and government organizations, the utilitarian motivation and individualistic tendency of volunteer service, the serious formalism of volunteer service, the contradiction of volunteer service, and the identity crisis faced by volunteer organizations (Cui & Li, 2021).

3.3 Lack of Inter System Synergy

Different from the relationship between management and management, control and control in the traditional social management model, collaborative governance emphasizes the relationship between the government and other subsystems, and lacks a coordination and linkage mechanism for multiple subjects, which will lead to the little effect of multiple collaborative governance in emergency management. In the 2023 Zhuozhou rainstorm and flood incident in Hebei Province, some emergency volunteer teams could not participate in the rescue “legally” without invitation letters and official seals, there was no local person to dock after the volunteer team arrived, many volunteer teams lacked excellent technology and material equipment to adapt to the difficulty of disaster relief, disaster relief materials could not provide sufficient support for the huge emergency volunteer team, and the number of teams was saturated, forcing the local government and the emergency command to no longer accept new rescue teams, and road blockage rescue, and there is a lack of unified scheduling of the team, and it is impossible to enter the affected areas in an orderly manner.

3.4 Overemphasis Is Placed on the Gratuitous Nature of Public Welfare

In the process of participating in natural disaster relief, a large amount of materials need to be consumed, and it is difficult to rely on the enthusiasm of volunteer organizations to support their repeated participation in rescue activities, not to mention the early volunteer skills training, rescue equipment maintenance, rescue material reserve and update, later volunteer team evacuation, rescue material replenishment, etc., all require a large amount of capital investment. In particular, the system of government investment, rescue compensation, incentives, rewards and punishments to ensure the sustainable and healthy development of emergency volunteer rescue forces is not perfect, and if the gratuitous and public welfare nature of volunteer service is overemphasized, it is very easy to ignore the vulnerability of sustainable regeneration of volunteer service. At the same time, the content of the emergency management system is insufficient, and there is a lack of legitimacy support to ensure the sustainable development of emergency volunteer service.

3.5 Obsolete Laws and Regulations

In the process of fighting disasters, the government, social organizations, the public and other multiple subjects cooperate to form a disaster management community, and in the process of disaster management, the rule of law has become an important means to ensure the normalization, systematization and standardization of coordinated disaster management. At present, although many emergency management laws pay more and more attention to the potential and advantages of volunteer

subjects in all stages of natural disasters and emergencies, and some laws explicitly stipulate a “co-governance” emergency management system (Qi, 2010), Chinese disaster legislation as a whole still presents a relatively obvious government-centric, with very detailed provisions on the responsibilities and obligations of the government, while the rules for social participation are relatively vague, especially the provisions on the identity and governance obligations of non-government entities are not perfect (Liao, 2023). First, many emergency management laws need to be revised, and the rights and obligations of volunteers are not clear. Second, with the reform and adjustment of institutions, the huge and complex emergency management laws and regulations need to be integrated urgently. Third, the identity of volunteers in natural disaster management is unclear. Fourth, there is a lack of rights and interests protection for emergency volunteer teams to participate in disaster rescue. Fifth, there is a lack of statutory coordination mechanisms between government departments and emergency volunteer teams.

4. Suggestions on the Direction of the Construction of the Coordinated Action System of Natural Disaster Volunteers in China

4.1 Dimensions of Goals and Values

The goal of Chinese natural disaster volunteer coordination system is clear, which is to improve the efficiency of emergency rescue and resource allocation, coordinate several emergency volunteer teams from different regions and fields, and jointly carry out emergency volunteer activities such as emergency rescue, post-disaster reconstruction, and order restoration in an orderly and efficient manner under the leadership of the government. The clear and clear objectives have the following specific functions: first, to promote the rationalization of the structure of coordinated action and the system of authority and responsibility of emergency volunteers. Second, it is necessary to establish and standardize objective standards for the evaluation of rescue. The third is to strengthen the coordination and integration capacity of the organizational system, and unite a large number of emergency volunteer teams involved in disaster relief. Fourth, it is necessary to stimulate the rescue enthusiasm and sense of cooperation of the emergency volunteer teams within the organizational system.

4.2 Dimensions of Organizational Structure

Chinese emergency volunteer service started relatively late, and the superstructure in related fields is relatively backward, and there are big gaps in institutional mechanisms and organization and coordination. In the process of Zhengzhou flood and Hebei rainstorm relief, a large number of various types of emergency volunteer teams participate in disaster rescue, but most of the teams do not understand the local disaster situation, do not have a clear rescue direction, and can not accept unified command and dispatch, so we should set up a standardized and integrated natural disaster volunteer coordination action platform led by the government, as a bridge and link between the emergency volunteer team and the government, through the way of organization and construction can effectively achieve the goal of the natural disaster emergency volunteer coordination action system and great

Resolve the structural contradiction between the emergency volunteer team and the current emergency management system.

4.3 The Dimension of Coordinated Action

The first is to integrate the coordination system of natural disaster emergency volunteers into the construction of the emergency command system, give priority to the “design of command rules” in the emergency volunteer coordination action system, explore the construction of a joint command and action system between the government-led rescue forces and volunteer rescue forces, and study and formulate unified command norms and guidelines for natural disasters. The second is to rely on the national natural disaster emergency volunteer coordination action platform, implement a rescue team grading system for many volunteer teams with different rescue capabilities and different rescue equipment, accurately allocate rescue tasks according to rescue capabilities, give priority to teams with urgently needed materials and equipment for disaster relief to be put into on-site rescue, and ensure that rescue operations are contacted in advance and teams fully interact with each other. Third, it is necessary to establish a chain of command between “unified” and “on-site”, clarify the ownership relationship between the emergency command center and the emergency volunteer team, establish and improve the communication and information management system and resource management system for complex scenes, and explore and solve a series of bottleneck problems such as joint command, internal coordination, information management, force integration, and resource support.

4.4 Dimensions of Motivation and Protection

The incentive system is a positive feedback loop mechanism that stimulates the enthusiasm and enthusiasm of emergency volunteers to participate in natural disaster relief, which plays an important role in improving the sense of achievement of emergency volunteers in volunteer activities and then making them repeat volunteer behaviors. A complete incentive system includes the integration of spiritual incentives and material incentives. At the level of spiritual incentives, government departments need to set up a reward mechanism to reward emergency volunteer teams when they participate in disaster relief activities, so as to stimulate their enthusiasm and efficiency in participating in disaster relief activities, and then generate self-motivation, such as using official media to give positive publicity to social emergency response forces to participate in disaster relief, giving outstanding rescue volunteer teams the title of key commendations, inviting them to carry out public welfare publicity and lectures on disaster prevention and mitigation, and improving the protection of the rights of emergency volunteers. At the level of material incentives, we should increase investment in the construction of social emergency response forces, improve the financial guarantee mechanism for emergency volunteer teams, provide relief materials for emergency volunteer teams, and rely on feedback and incentives from the market and social benefits to form a chain of continuous and effective incentives, a chain of social support and a social support network.

4.5 Dimensions of Laws and Regulations

The key to supporting the role of the coordinated action system of natural disaster emergency response volunteers lies in improving Chinese emergency management legal system, especially continuously improving the legal and normative system of emergency volunteers, so as to ensure that the rights and obligations of emergency volunteers participating in natural disaster relief can be based on laws and laws. The first is to speed up the revision of the Basic Law on Emergency Management. The Law on Responding to Emergencies should first make basic provisions on the role positioning, basic rights and obligations of emergency volunteers, so as to enhance the role of macro guidance for volunteer activities. The second is to integrate the current relatively loose regulations on emergency volunteers, speed up the introduction of special laws and regulations, and standardize the daily norms, rescue procedures, command relationships, and management systems of emergency volunteer teams, so as to provide legal guarantees for emergency volunteers to participate in natural disaster rescue. The third is to stipulate the relevant legal rights and obligations of emergency volunteers to participate in natural disaster relief, such as enjoying financial support, material replenishment, skills training, personal safety guarantees, obeying government commands, reporting disaster information, abiding by rescue norms, and accepting supervision and evaluation.

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