

Original Paper

The Value, Dilemmas and Optimization Path of the Village Affairs Public Disclosure System in Rural Grassroots Governance

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Received: March 24, 2025

Accepted: June 11, 2025

Online Published: June 28, 2025

doi:10.22158/assc.v7n3p145

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/assc.v7n3p145>

Abstract

The field of rural grassroots governance is a key area for realizing social fairness and justice. As an autonomous right endowed by law to farmers, the village affairs public disclosure system serves as an institutional guarantee for rural grassroots governance. As an important component of grassroots self-governance, the village affairs public disclosure system has undergone a development process of more than 40 years, and it is of great value and significance to the construction of grassroots democratic politics, grassroots people's livelihood, and grassroots social and cultural environment. The village affairs public disclosure system still faces many dilemmas in rural grassroots governance, such as insufficient motivation, inconsistent systems, and inadequate supervision. Taking the construction of the village affairs public disclosure system as an innovation point and breakthrough can help promote the institutionalization and legalization of rural grassroots governance.

Keywords

Village Affairs Public Disclosure, Institutional Construction, Rural Grassroots Governance

1. Introduction

Rural grassroots governance, as the last mile of national governance, is an effective way to safeguard the interests of grassroots masses and an important guarantee for realizing the modernization of national governance capacity and governance system. As an important part of the grassroots democratic political system, the village affairs public disclosure system plays a key role in rural grassroots governance. The reform of rural grassroots governance is a long-term process. As an old-member of the grassroots self-governance system, how the village affairs public disclosure system can exert new-energy in the construction of a new era countryside and continuously stimulate the vitality of the

rural grassroots self-governance system is a key issue that should be paid attention to in the comprehensive promotion of the rural revitalization strategy and the realization of the rule of law in rural governance.

2. The Value Orientation of the Village Affairs Public Disclosure System in Rural Grassroots Governance

Since the 1980s, the village affairs public disclosure system has experienced a process from the brewing of system construction, exploratory innovation to continuous improvement. It is not only an important part of the rural grassroots villagers' self-governance but also an important reliance for the modernization of rural grassroots governance.

2.1 The Village Affairs Disclosure System as a Guarantee for Implementing Democratic Politics

From the perspective of democratic politics, the openness, supervisability, and public participation of the village affairs public disclosure system are the touchstone of the grassroots democratic political system, the display platform for the work achievements of grassroots cadres, and an important means to restrict the power in the hands of grassroots cadres.

The principle of openness of the village affairs public disclosure system ensures that grassroots people have access to the promulgation of national policies, the arrangement of government work, the content of village-level affairs, etc., and is the basis for publicizing the operation of power under the sun. By disclosing the contents of democratic elections, village-level affairs decisions, etc., the work of rural grassroots organizations is in a fair, just, and open transparent state. This not only allows farmers to clearly understand the actual operation and implementation of rural grassroots work but also to a certain extent stimulates farmers' enthusiasm for managing their own affairs, ensuring that farmers solve relevant disputes in a more fair, objective, and reliable way. The principle of supervisability of the village affairs public disclosure system guarantees that farmers can effectively exercise their right to supervise, which is conducive to improving the top-down supervision system and promoting the construction of an integrated supervision system of superior supervision, peer supervision, and villagers' supervision. The principle of citizen participation in the village affairs public disclosure system is conducive to stimulating the enthusiasm and initiative of farmers as the main body of self-governance, and is the key to effectively realizing the linkage of mass supervision and promoting the effective implementation of the village affairs public disclosure system.

2.2 The Village Affairs Disclosure System as an Important Way to Safeguard Grassroots Livelihoods

From the perspective of social people's livelihood, the village affairs public disclosure system is a legal system for disclosing the implementation of national policies, displaying the implementation of rural government affairs, and benefiting the people's policies, and it is also the institutional support for ensuring the substantive construction of people's livelihood projects. The disclosure of funds such as agricultural subsidies, dilapidated house reconstruction subsidies, and land use subsidies issued by the state, as well as the use of rural three-capitals by grassroots organizations, which are related to the core

interests of farmers, restricts the use of national funds by grassroots organizations to a certain extent, so that grassroots organizations and grassroots cadres can effectively apply national policies to farmers, benefit all farmers with policy interests, meet the development needs of the economic life in grassroots areas, and contribute to the cause of building a new look of the countryside in the new era.

2.3 The Village Affairs Disclosure System as an Important Tool for Shaping Social Culture

From the perspective of the social and cultural environment, the village affairs public disclosure system is not only an important channel for shaping social culture and atmosphere but also an important system for implementing social fairness and justice. The village affairs public disclosure system is not only the simple implementation of policies and legal texts but also a necessary means to eliminate the atmosphere of corruption and establish a clean culture. As the main channel for farmers to understand the arrangement of village-level affairs and supervise village affairs, the village affairs public disclosure system can fully protect the right to know, the right to participate, and the right to supervise of grassroots people on the one hand, and can effectively restrict the operation and implementation of power on the other hand. At the same time, the village affairs public disclosure system is an important way to promote the construction of a clean government culture and strengthen the self-discipline of staff, which is conducive to deepening the comprehensive promotion of the construction of the rule of law and realizing good governance in the countryside.

3. The Realistic Dilemmas of the Village Affairs Public Disclosure System in Rural Grassroots Governance

The village affairs public disclosure system is progressing from initial exploration to continuous improvement, but there are still many non-standard places in actual operation.

3.1 Insufficient Cognitive Understanding and Weak Motivation for Village Affairs Disclosure

The village affairs public disclosure system is an important part and work form of the grassroots democratic political system. The effective implementation of any system is inseparable from social recognition and actual implementation. In rural grassroots governance, rural grassroots areas do not pay enough attention to the village affairs public disclosure system, and the internal motivation for carrying out village affairs public disclosure work is not strong.

Rural grassroots self-governing organizations are the key nodes in the rural grassroots governance system. As the backbone force undertaking rural grassroots governance, they are not only the connectors and intermediaries between government administrative management and rural self-governance but also the specific organizers for farmers to realize self-management and development, undertaking various grassroots governance functions such as organization, guidance, coordination, management, and service. Although the village affairs public disclosure system is an important part of the rural grassroots self-governance system, which requires and reflects the requirements and mastery of farmers' right to know and right to participate, under the continuation of traditional ideas, farmers are willing to hand over their rights to grassroots cadres for management, and

transfer the right to disclose to grassroots organizations and grassroots cadres. In actual life, it is not uncommon for village committees to excessively interfere with the rights of villagers. Farmers have a weak awareness of controlling their own rights, do not have a strong willingness to implement village affairs public disclosure, and even do not think of the need for disclosure.

At the same time, rural grassroots cadres still have problems such as weak legal awareness, lack of legal concepts, and unclear understanding of institutional concepts. There are even individual extreme situations where grassroots cadres regard themselves as the "local emperors" in the local area, take a one-size-fits-all attitude towards matters related to village affairs public disclosure, have a weak awareness of disclosure, and even use non-implementation of village affairs public disclosure as a way to avoid supervision and cover up corruption. "Selective" disclosure or even non-disclosure seriously affects the authenticity and effectiveness of village affairs public disclosure, and is also a major pain point in the practice of village affairs public disclosure.

3.2 Low Timeliness and Insufficient Detail in Village Affairs Disclosure Content

From the perspective of the specific implementation of the village affairs public disclosure system, the most serious and prominent problem is that the content of village affairs public disclosure does not comply with regulations, and the problems of low timeliness of public disclosure content, false disclosure, hidden disclosure, and non-disclosure occur from time to time, which not only hinders the normal progress of village affairs work but also buries actual hidden dangers for grassroots governance. Firstly, from the perspective of the content of village affairs disclosure, the incompleteness, selectivity, and one-sidedness of the disclosed content are major challenges faced in practice. Most of the content disclosed involves public affairs, finances, and party affairs at the village level, while matters and policies related to township, county, or higher levels are not disclosed to rural villagers. The content to be disclosed undergoes review by the village committee, villagers' representative assembly, and village-linking cadres. Content related to their own interests is often concealed. Within their own power range, grassroots cadres expand their power and abuse public authority, which not only leads to the alienation of villagers' autonomy but also serves as an important trigger for grassroots corruption.

Secondly, from the perspective of the procedures for village affairs disclosure, the system has corresponding and clear execution procedures. A complete execution process helps improve the efficiency of rural grassroots governance. However, in actual work, rural grassroots cadres may simplify or even omit procedural steps such as reporting village affairs disclosure to the villagers' representative assembly and seeking review from village-linking cadres due to various reasons such as rushing time, fulfilling tasks, or going through formalities. In practice, to reduce workload, grassroots cadres only conduct a formal review of the content of village affairs disclosure without meticulously examining its substantive content. Neglecting or glossing over the content of village affairs disclosure, along with insufficient disclosure, vague content, and irregular procedures, significantly increases the difficulty of standardizing and legalizing rural grassroots governance.

Thirdly, from the perspective of the timing of village affairs disclosure, laws and regulations specify

disclosure times such as annual, quarterly, and monthly disclosures, with different disclosure times stipulated according to different matters. Given the particularity of rural grassroots governance, the state grants rural grassroots areas more freedom and decision-making power. Many regions maintain an attitude of disclosing when they want to, disclosing at any time, not disclosing on time, or not disclosing at all towards village affairs disclosure, directly leading to the bypassing of the time regulations in the village affairs disclosure system and preventing grassroots people from obtaining effective information and policies according to legal times. In addition, laws and regulations do not impose uniform mandatory regulations on the methods of village affairs disclosure. In many villages, disclosure is carried out through bulletin boards, but the lagging information on bulletin boards and their inconspicuous positions affect the role played by village affairs disclosure to some extent.

3.3 Weakened Village Affairs Disclosure Supervision System and Lack of Effective Remedy Channels

The effective operation of any system relies on a strong supervision and feedback mechanism, but the actual operation of village affairs supervision is not ideal, mainly manifesting in the following aspects. Firstly, the internal structure of the village affairs disclosure supervision system is incomplete. According to legal provisions, the village affairs supervision system still belongs to macro-level content, with limited targeted guidance for implementation in grassroots governance. In actual work, formality reviews outweigh substantive reviews in village affairs supervision. To reduce work pressure, some rural areas directly cancel the establishment of village affairs supervision committees, resulting in the inability to fulfill their duties. Meanwhile, based on the special status of rural grassroots organizations in China's governance system, village affairs supervision relations belong to internal rights and obligations arising from the grassroots democratic autonomy system. The non-statutory nature of endogenous institutions actually leads to a lack of effective remedies when village affairs supervision conflicts with villagers' rights.

Secondly, township government supervision intensity is weak, and the coordination between village affairs supervision and government supervision is not high. An important source of autonomous rights for rural grassroots autonomous organizations is villagers, and the other is higher-level governments. The alienation of supervision rights in village affairs disclosure leads to the rupture of relations between township governments and grassroots autonomous organizations. The lack of attention paid by township governments to village affairs disclosure system supervision results in the loss of a strong guarantee for the autonomous rights of grassroots organizations, to some extent contributing to the problem of village affairs supervision.

Thirdly, villagers' supervision content is absent, and there is a lack of synergy between village affairs supervision and villagers' supervision. Members of the village affairs supervision committee come from the villagers' assembly or villagers' representative assembly. In actual life, members of the village affairs supervision committee often cross-appoint with personnel from grassroots autonomous organizations. Villagers' lack of attention to democratic rights not only leads to confusion in the appointment of village affairs supervision committee members but also plants hidden dangers for

corruption in grassroots governance. Meanwhile, the quality of village affairs supervision committee members largely falls short of that of the village Party branch committee and the villagers' committee. In village affairs, the "village two committees" hold absolute power, leading to peculiarities such as village affairs supervision committee members not supervising, daring not to supervise, not knowing how to supervise, or even supervising in a chaotic manner, seriously weakening the original functions of village affairs supervision.

4. The Optimization Path of the Village Affairs Public Disclosure System in Rural Grassroots Governance

At present, rural grassroots governance is facing a critical moment of transitioning from institutionalization to legalization, with institutional reform being urgent. To improve the village affairs disclosure system, it is necessary to adhere to a combination of rigidity and flexibility, institutional improvement, and cultural change, promoting the transformation and perfection of rural grassroots governance.

4.1 Taking Cultural Innovation as a Gripper to Deepen the Legalization of Village Affairs Disclosure

The rule of law is an important foundation for the national governance system and governance capacity, as well as the ultimate guarantee for rural grassroots governance. In rural areas where disputes are often settled through personal connections and customs, with the development of the economy, changes in social governance models, and updates in ideological culture, the original self-mediation model is insufficient to cope with new social situations. The autonomous entity needs to use the rule of law to restrict and regulate the abuse of power.

The rule of law provides institutional support and guarantees for building a clean government, while a clean governance culture creates a favorable social environment for legalization. The two complement each other in national governance. To deepen the legalization of village affairs disclosure, on one hand, it is necessary to further improve existing legal norms regarding village affairs disclosure in the legislative system, further standardizing and perfecting the grassroots governance legalization system through the linkage between the regulatory system and anti-corruption laws, utilizing the leading role of legislation, and driving legal innovation in grassroots governance through legislation. On the other hand, in law enforcement, it is necessary to strictly regulate illegal and irregular phenomena in village affairs disclosure, utilizing judicial means and the credibility of the judiciary to continuously push the village affairs disclosure system towards legalization, strengthening the implementation of a clean governance culture and governance concepts in grassroots governance through judicial regulation.

4.2 Taking Institutional Innovation as a Driving Force to Improve the Operating Mechanism of Village Affairs Disclosure

To realize the effective operation of the village affairs disclosure system, it is necessary to innovate in all aspects such as disclosure methods, timing, and procedures, coordinating disclosure time, content, and methods to promote the authenticity and effectiveness of the village affairs disclosure system.

Firstly, with the continuous development of the intelligent and refined era, "digital and intelligent rural construction" has become a new direction and model for grassroots social development. Exploring the use of new media technologies in the big-data era, further modularizing and refining the management of natural villages through a grid-based management system, establishing rural management groups through WeChat clients, pushing village affairs information through WeChat clients, ensuring the maintenance of villagers' rights through Weibo feedback mechanisms, strengthening the combination of villagers' disclosure awareness and village affairs disclosure content, taking villagers' demands as the primary standard for disclosure content, requiring that disclosed content aligns with villagers' expectations, being focused and targeted, and particularly disclosing in detail issues such as national policies for assisting farmers, the implementation and planning of grassroots economic development, hot information topics of concern to villagers, and the implementation of village finances and party affairs to avoid the occurrence of information vacuum phenomena. On the basis of the original simple disclosure methods, expanding approaches such as villagers' group meetings, villagers' broadcasts, villagers' handbooks, WeChat public account pushes, and official Weibo to further make disclosed information real-time, convenient, accurate, informational, and open, allowing villagers to access first-hand information on village affairs more conveniently and effectively.

Secondly, strengthening the coordination and linkage between government affairs disclosure and village affairs disclosure. Only by establishing a linkage mechanism between the dual disclosure of government affairs and village affairs can a long-term mechanism be formed. Driving the orderly operation of village affairs disclosure through township government affairs disclosure, effectively implementing the timing regulations for village affairs disclosure, disclosing village affairs at specific times, and disclosing them when villagers deem it necessary to ensure the transparency, openness, comprehensiveness, and integrity of grassroots information, avoiding the omission and blind spots of information, fully-mobilizing villagers' enthusiasm, and more effectively promoting rural grassroots governance towards good governance by integrating multiple subjects into the governance system.

Finally, actively promoting the construction of village-level "sunshine engineering" and establishing a clear list mechanism for village affairs disclosure. Institutions serve as a framework for safeguarding and restricting power. Constructing a clear list of responsibilities for rural grassroots cadres, disclosing power under the sunlight, promoting transparent and constrained mechanisms for the power of grassroots sunshine government work, clarifying and stipulating the powers they possess, delineating their power boundaries, making the functions and powers of village cadres transparent, clear, and concise, keeping power within the cage of institutions, and allowing power to operate under the sunlight. Utilizing big-data platforms to fully disclose and record village affairs and government affairs, further expanding villagers' channels for filing petitions, avoiding the neglect of villagers' reasonable demands, giving full play to network information supervision, utilizing big-data supervision platforms, combining the network with rural areas, and transforming rural governance towards a new modern rural governance model. Combining the actual situations of township work and village affairs work,

summarizing, sorting out, and auditing the distribution and operation of grassroots cadres' work, establishing a dynamic power operation management mechanism for village affairs, fully displaying the actual operation of micro-powers at the grassroots level under the sunlight, and establishing an information feedback mechanism for grassroots people, fully utilizing existing forms such as information feedback mailboxes, leadership mailboxes, grassroots visits, and petition systems to expand channels for grassroots people to provide feedback on their situation, mobilizing villagers' initiative in autonomy rights and enthusiasm in supervision rights.

4.3 Taking Supervision Reform as a Guarantee to Perfect the Supervision and Disclosure Linkage Mechanism at All Levels

Utilizing the deterrent effect of higher-level supervision, applying the management effect of peer government supervision, and stimulating the autonomous effect of villagers' self-supervision to form an all-round, diversified, and broad-based supervision pattern.

Firstly, making good use of the self-supervision mechanism of grassroots people's autonomy, enhancing the transparency of power operation mechanisms, reducing the randomness of power utilization, strengthening the enthusiasm for self-supervision, and effectively implementing and operating village affairs under the supervision of grassroots people. Villagers are the main bodies of rural grassroots governance and the main bodies for effectively promoting the rural revitalization strategy. Rural grassroots governance must always adhere to the development concept of taking the people as the center, fully safeguarding and implementing villagers' rights to know, supervise, participate, and express as autonomous subjects, taking villagers' autonomous supervision as the pillar of the village affairs disclosure supervision system, and continuously injecting strength from villagers themselves into the perfection of the supervision system.

Secondly, improving the construction of village affairs supervision committees and strengthening the self-supervision mechanism of grassroots organizations. Attaching importance to the selection of members of village affairs supervision committees, implementing the recusal system for relevant personnel, adhering to the principles of fairness, justice, and openness in electing personnel with professional knowledge in finance, auditing, etc., further refining personnel appointment regulations, comprehensively considering factors such as age, quality, education level, and ideology. Meanwhile, strengthening the education of members of village affairs supervision committees, utilizing various channels such as external learning, township inspections, and party and government learning to provide professional training on party regulations, laws and regulations, villagers' autonomy, and various institutional regulations for village affairs to committee members, continuously improving their supervision abilities and levels, making the village affairs supervision committee no longer an "accessory" of the village two committees, and enabling the village affairs supervision committee to not only supervise but also dare to supervise and be good at supervising.

Thirdly, strengthening the linkage between township supervision and village affairs supervision, and enhancing the overall control of anti-corruption efforts nationwide through inspection systems.

Through the supervision and accountability of township disciplinary inspection committee, the current situation of insufficient punishment by village affairs supervision committees will be improved. The timely intervention and strong legal guarantees provided by the disciplinary inspection committee will further enhance the deterrent force of supervision effects and mechanisms. In the process of comprehensively deepening reforms, strengthening the perfection and development of supervision systems and inspection systems, allowing higher-level supervision to truly be implemented at the local level, enabling peer supervision to play its role, further strengthening the intensity of central supervision and inspection tours at local levels, and giving full play to the bright-sword purification function of inspection tours.

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