

Original Paper

Research on the Implementation Dilemma and Promotion Path of Rural “Coal to Electricity” Policy

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Abstract

Based on the multi-dimensional perspective of Smith's policy implementation model, this paper analyzes the complicated factors in the implementation process of coal-to-electricity policy in rural areas of H Province and J City. The analysis focuses on four dimensions, namely, the rationality of policy design, the effectiveness of the executive body, the acceptance of the audience and the external environmental conditions, and reveals the four major challenges facing the current agricultural policy implementation: Execution obstacles in hierarchical transmission, strategic execution at the grass-roots level under the pressure system, lack of policy identity caused by collective action problems, and hierarchical differentiation of government trust exacerbated by information asymmetry. To overcome the dilemma, it is necessary to optimize the local adaptation of policies, enhance the effectiveness and innovation of implementing agencies, deepen the awareness and participation of target groups, and improve the implementation environment. Through these measures, the aim is to promote the effective implementation of the coal to electricity policy and help ecological optimization and green development.

Keywords

Rural “coal to electricity”, Policy implementation, Smith model

1. Question Raising

With the continuous advancement of China's industrialization process, the demand for energy consumption continues to rise, resulting in environmental pollution, ecological damage and resource shortage and other problems are increasingly serious. In recent years, “green development” as an important concept has been promoted to the national strategic level. All localities actively introduced and comprehensively promoted the “coal to electricity” policy, which gradually replaced the traditional heating method with its safety, health, comfort, green, low-carbon, intelligent and other significant advantages, and became a healthy natural, high-quality heating choice. Local governments have

successively issued relevant implementation plans according to national policy requirements. As a clean energy heating method, “coal to electricity” has attracted wide attention from the academic community. The main research focuses on three aspects: rural “coal to electricity” heating technology, engineering benefits and management model innovation. However, the perspective of existing studies is limited to the “coal to electricity” project itself, ignoring the social resistance in the process of policy implementation and the lack of decision-making by the government as the leader of the project, and lacking dynamic analysis of the policy implementation process, it is difficult to deeply explain the dynamic process and constraints of the implementation of the “coal to electricity” policy in rural areas. Based on the field investigation in the implementation process of “coal to electricity” policy in rural areas of H Province and J City, this study uses Smith’s policy implementation process model to deeply explore the implementation dilemma of “coal to electricity” policy in rural China, in order to provide useful reference for optimizing the implementation effect of the policy.

2. Analysis Framework: Smith Policy Implementation Process Model

In 1973, American scholar Mars Smith, in his book *The Process of Policy Implementation*, innovatively constructed an analytical framework for policy implementation, called the Smith policy implementation Model. The model deeply analyzes four core factors that affect the effectiveness of policy implementation: idealized policy design, implementation body, target audience and policy implementation environment. Specifically, idealized policy focuses on the scientificity, rationality and reality of the policy itself, covering policy form, category, social cognition and other aspects. The executive agency refers to the organizational system responsible for the implementation of policies; The target group refers to the organization or individual whose institutionalization level, leadership attitude and past policy experience are the key factors; The policy environment covers all external factors that can influence or be adversely affected by policy implementation.

The unique value of Smith’s model is that it transcends the limitations of traditional policy research, not only examines the merits and demerits of the policy itself, but also extends the perspective to external factors such as implementing agencies, target groups and environment, and builds a multi-dimensional and dynamic interactive analytical framework. The division of the four elements has both theoretical depth and practical operation, which provides a powerful analytical tool for in-depth understanding of the dilemma of policy implementation.

Based on this, this study attempts to use Smith’s policy implementation process model to systematically analyze the challenges and dilemmas encountered in the implementation of the “coal to electricity” policy in rural areas of China from the perspectives of the rationality of the policy structure, the effectiveness of the implementation agency, the acceptance of the target group and the adaptability of the external environment, with a view to providing academic insights and practical guidance for improving the efficiency and effect of policy implementation.

3. From the Perspective of Smith Model Analysis, the Rural “Coal to Electricity” Policy Implementation Dilemma

As the cornerstone of the national administrative system, township governments bear the heavy responsibility of transforming the national strategic idea of “coal to electricity” into local practice. In recent years, although the “coal to electricity” policy has been intensively introduced, it has encountered many challenges at the grass-roots level. This study focuses on how this policy penetrates from the central to the local level to the township level, and how township governments combine the actual situation to integrate the “coal to electricity” and the measures to benefit the people. At the same time, we are concerned about the acceptance of the “coal to electricity” policy by the farmer community, and how external environmental factors shape the implementation of the policy.

3.1 Policy Framework: Implementation Obstruction under Hierarchical Transmission

In the policy implementation chain, the “responsibility isomorphism” system prompts the policy to decompose from top to bottom step by step, forming a typical “contract system” implementation mode. The central government sets the macro-direction, “contracts” down to the provincial and municipal level, and finally the township government as the specific implementation of the “coal to electricity” policy is responsible for taking root at the grassroots level. However, in this process, township governments, as a bridge between policy and practice, face multiple challenges.

The research reveals that despite the diversity of policy sources, township governments are always the ultimate responsible body for policy implementation, and need to integrate various administrative tasks, work closely with higher environmental protection departments, and translate macro policies into concrete actions. However, there is a significant gap between the ideal state of the policy text and the actual practice, especially at the level of resource allocation and project implementation, the separation of levels, the complexity of grass-roots governance, and information asymmetry, which lead to frequent obstruction in the implementation process, deviation from the original intention of the policy, and a significant gap between the actual effect and the policy expectation.

3.2 Executive Agencies: Strategic Execution of Grass-roots Governments under the Pressure System

The grass-roots government, as the terminal of the policy implementation system, is not only the key node of the interaction between the state and the countryside, but also the core force of the implementation of the rural modernization policy. However, under the pressure system structure, the township government, as the ultimate responsibility bearer, is subjected to layers of tasks from the higher government. This way of strengthening supervision through performance appraisal, target responsibility system, etc., builds a strict top-down pressure system, and urges the grass-roots government to seek the maximization of self-interests in the implementation.

From the perspective of game theory, in the face of potential conflicts between policies and local interests, grass-roots governments may adopt strategic implementation methods. For policies that are profitable or meet local development needs, grass-roots governments will actively implement them and strive to maximize “policy dividends”. For policies with large resource consumption and low benefits, alternative

means may be adopted, such as selective implementation or formal response, to reduce their own burden. In the implementation of the “coal to electricity” policy, this phenomenon is particularly obvious. In order to pursue political achievements and resources, some township governments may be inclined to prioritize the allocation of policy resources to enterprises with strong strength, while ignoring the comprehensive evaluation of the service quality of enterprises. In addition, the policy information transmission is not smooth, the lack of effective communication mechanism between enterprises and communities, cadres and villagers, resulting in residents’ dissatisfaction with the effect of policy implementation and follow-up services, such as insufficient maintenance of heating equipment.

3.3 Target Group: Policy Identity Barrier under Olson’s Paradox

Olson’s dilemma reveals the profound contradiction between individual rationality and collective rationality in collective action, that is, in large groups, individuals are often out of selfish considerations, and it is difficult to form a unified action to promote collective interests. In the case of the implementation of the policy of “coal to electricity” in rural areas of J City, this paradox is particularly significant. As the target audience of the policy, the farmer group focuses on the gain and loss of personal interests rather than the achievement of the macro objectives of the policy. When the implementation effect of the policy is not up to expectations, especially when faced with practical problems such as equipment maintenance and electricity subsidy, the villagers’ recognition of the policy is significantly reduced, and even conflict. In order to complete the policy tasks, township governments may take compulsory measures or inducements to promote the process of “coal to electricity”, but this practice often ignores the actual needs and feedback of villagers, leading to intensified contradictions in the process of policy implementation. In particular, the design and implementation of subsidy policies, such as the installment of equipment subsidies, the limit and timeliness of electricity subsidies, failed to effectively alleviate the economic burden of villagers, but intensified their dissatisfaction with the policy.

Specifically, the structural characteristics of rural houses (large, high, and empty) limit the efficiency of electric heating and increase the cost of energy consumption, and the inadequacy of subsidy policies (such as limited subsidies and untimely payment) cannot fully alleviate this economic pressure. This not only fails to achieve the original intention of the policy, but also causes the inefficient allocation and waste of social resources.

3.4 Environmental Factors: Differences in Government Trust Caused by Weak Policy Interpretation

Under the background of differential government trust, the public’s trust attitude towards central and local governments shows a significant divergence. People generally tend to see the central government as an enlightened and connected ruler, whose policies are designed to benefit the people. Local governments, on the other hand, are often seen as likely to deviate from the interests of the people or even act as antagonists. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the implementation of the “coal to electricity” policy, which the public expects the central government to benefit them, while the implementation process of local governments has caused many doubts.

The successful implementation of the policy is highly dependent on the understanding and recognition of the people. However, when the “coal to electricity” policy only stays on the surface of the propaganda, the lack of in-depth and detailed interpretation, the public will be difficult to form a clear understanding of the policy, and then question the fairness and transparency of the policy. In addition, the population structure of rural areas in J City is special, and the outflow of young and middle-aged people leads to the obstruction of information dissemination, which aggravates the villagers’ ignorance of policy details. At the same time, in the case of limited resources, grass-roots governments tend to adopt acute publicity strategies to cope with the assessment of superiors, rather than building long-term information communication mechanisms, which further weakens the effectiveness and credibility of policies.

4. The Improvement Path of Rural “Coal to Electricity” Policy Implementation

Based on the analysis of Smith’s policy implementation process model, it is necessary to comprehensively enhance the grass-roots government’s “coal to electricity” policy implementation from the aspects of the applicability of the policy framework, the executive ability of the executive agency, the acceptance of the target group and the influence of social and environmental factors.

4.1 Optimization of Policy Structure: Deep Integration Strategy of Top-level Planning and Grass-roots Implementation

The key to the successful implementation of the “coal to electricity” policy lies in the close fit between the top-level planning and the grassroots practice, so as to ensure the effective docking of the policy concept and the practical soil, so as to promote the smooth transformation of the policy goal into practical results. The primary task is to balance the interest pattern between the top-level design and the grass-roots implementation. In view of the role positioning of the grass-roots government as a “rational economic man”, its policy implementation behavior often contains its own interests. Therefore, it is necessary to clearly define the boundaries of powers and responsibilities between governments at all levels, eliminate redundant and overlapping functions, and achieve a harmonious coexistence of macro guidance and micro flexibility. The grass-roots government should take the initiative to feedback the actual situation and public demands of the “coal to electricity” project to the superior to support the scientific and practical closeness of the superior decision; At the same time, higher departments should strengthen communication and interaction with the grassroots to ensure that policy formulation is closer to the grassroots reality.

In addition, it is crucial to build a “two-way interaction” policy decision-making model. Although the traditional “top-down” elite decision-making model has its advantages, its limitations are increasingly prominent in the face of complex and changeable implementation environment and increasingly diverse social needs. With the awareness of public participation, “bottom-up” democratic participation has become an indispensable part of policy improvement. Therefore, the integration of the two decision-making paths should be promoted, that is, while maintaining the strategic guidance of the high-level, integrate the wisdom of the grassroots and the will of the people, and form a top-down linkage and

complementary decision-making mechanism. This integration not only enhances the science, rationality and feasibility of the policy, but also enhances the social recognition and implementation efficiency of the policy, which is an important direction for the optimization of the policy framework of “coal to electricity”.

4.2 Strengthening of Implementation Effectiveness: The Way to Improve the Policy Implementation of Grass-roots Governments

In order to ensure the continuous and steady progress of the rural “coal to electricity” project, the key is to optimize and enhance the policy implementation capacity of the grass-roots government. The first step is to strengthen the professional literacy and capacity structure of policy implementors. At present, it is particularly urgent to build a grass-roots cadre team with noble morality, excellent ability and executive consciousness. The traditional simple implementation method relying on administrative orders can no longer meet the needs of modern policy implementation, and more diversified and comprehensive means, such as ideological and political education, economic incentives and legal protection, should be adopted to enhance people’s trust and support for policies. Therefore, strengthening the training of grass-roots cadres, improving their ability of policy understanding, situation judgment, organization and coordination and innovative thinking, is the cornerstone of optimizing the execution efficiency.

At the same time, optimizing the grass-roots government’s “coal to electricity” policy implementation strategy can not be ignored. In the process of implementation, we should uphold the principle of seeking truth from facts, conduct in-depth research, respond flexibly, and avoid mechanization and formalization of policy implementation. It is necessary to accurately grasp the essence and requirements of superior policies, but also closely combined with the local reality, in-depth analysis of new problems and new challenges, to ensure that policy implementation is in line with the superior orientation and local reality, so as to achieve the effective landing and efficient implementation of policies at the grassroots level. This process reflects the wisdom and flexibility of grass-roots governments in implementing policies, and is also the key to improving the effectiveness of policy implementation.

4.3 Mobilization and Participation of Target Groups: The Social Basis for optimizing Policy Implementation

Evaluating the effectiveness of the “coal to electricity” policy should not only be based on the perspective of policy makers, but should go deep into the villagers, based on their interest demands and cognitive logic, and promote the active participation of farmers in the implementation of the policy, in order to accurately evaluate the performance of the policy and promote the realization of the goal of clean rural heating. Firstly, it is necessary to construct multiple paths for villagers to participate in policy implementation. By broadening the channels of social participation, activating the potential of various social subjects, clarifying the responsibilities of all parties, promoting cross-departmental collaboration, forming a joint force, and jointly promoting the in-depth implementation of the “coal to electricity” policy. The government can play a leading role by using various platforms such as forums, public welfare education and social media to enhance villagers’ overall concept and environmental awareness, and

stimulate villagers' enthusiasm and initiative in participating in policy implementation through field research and hearings.

Secondly, the establishment of a sound problem feedback and response mechanism is the key to improving the efficiency of policy implementation. The inter-departmental communication mechanism should be optimized to ensure the smooth flow of information, and coordination and cooperation should be strengthened. In particular, attention should be paid to the immediacy and effectiveness of feedback from villagers, and villagers should be encouraged to actively offer suggestions and put forward criticisms and suggestions on problems in policy implementation. Township governments, relevant departments and enterprises should improve the visit system, attach great importance to the operation subsidies, equipment quality, after-sales service and other issues that villagers are concerned about, and set up special posts to answer the hotline and receive visits to ensure that the problems are solved in a timely and effective manner. For the problems that are difficult to deal with in the short term, the timetable should be clearly resolved, to avoid the intensification of contradictions, and to ensure the continuous optimization and improvement of the "coal to electricity" policy in a harmonious and stable environment. This process not only reflects the social inclusiveness of policy implementation, but also promotes the deep integration of policy and social reality, and enhances the scientific and effective implementation of policy.

4.4 Optimization Strategy of Environmental Factors: Strengthen the Credibility of grassroots Governments

In the process of the "coal to electricity" policy deepening to the grassroots, the distorted transmission of policy information has become an obstacle, weakening the cornerstone of people's trust in the grassroots government, therefore, it is urgent to strengthen the credibility of the government to overcome this challenge. The following are two key strategies: First, fine-grained policy dissemination to enhance public awareness and acceptance. The grass-roots government should adopt a comprehensive and refined policy publicity strategy, aiming at deeply planting the actual benefits of the "coal to electricity" policy in the people's hearts, and promoting the in-depth understanding and broad support of the public. Specific practices include: detailed interpretation of various elements of the subsidy policy, such as the specific amount of subsidies, payment mode and time frame, to ensure the accuracy of information; The use of new media, radio and other diversified media, widely spread the use of electric heating equipment guidelines and safety maintenance knowledge; Through direct communication such as organizing symposia and resident representative meetings, as well as encouraging college students to participate in relevant social practice activities, the "coal to electricity" policy is promoted in a form closer to people's lives, and the enthusiasm and motivation of people to participate in the transformation is effectively stimulated. Second, strengthen the transparency of policy implementation and build a trust and cooperation mechanism. In order to ensure the fairness and efficiency of the implementation of the "coal to electricity" policy, grass-roots governments must disclose relevant policy information in accordance with the law, covering the full text of the policy, the implementation progress and the display of results,

so as to enhance the credibility of the policy with transparency. At the same time, an efficient communication and feedback mechanism should be established to respond to people's concerns in a timely manner and reduce misunderstandings and doubts caused by information asymmetry. This open and transparent implementation mode can not only enhance the public's trust in the policy, but also promote the positive interaction and cooperation between the government and the public, and lay a solid foundation for the comprehensive and in-depth implementation of the "coal to electricity" policy. This is not only in line with the trend of transparency and democracy in modern governance, but also contributes to the transformation of the energy structure and the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The implementation process of "coal to electricity" policy in rural areas is a multi-dimensional and multi-level complex system, and its effect is not only related to the long-term interests of ecological environment, but also directly affects the in-depth implementation of rural revitalization strategy and the realization of green development goals. Based on the analysis framework of Smith's policy implementation model, this paper deeply analyzes the difficulties and challenges in the implementation of coal-to-electricity policies in rural areas of H Province and J city, and puts forward strategic approaches such as optimizing the local adaptation of policies, enhancing the effectiveness and innovation of executive agencies, deepening the awareness and participation of target groups in policies, and improving the environment for policy implementation. In the future, with the continuous deepening of policy practice and the continuous follow-up of theoretical research, it is expected to build a more scientific, efficient and sustainable rural "coal to electricity" policy implementation system, so as to effectively solve the current implementation difficulties and promote the comprehensive achievement of policy objectives.

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