

Original Paper

The Dilemma and Practice Paths of Multi-entity Participation in
the Rural Living Environment—A Case Study of District Y in
Chongqing

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Abstract

The remediation of the rural living environment is not only an important aspect of comprehensively promoting rural revitalization but also directly influences the villagers' sense of happiness and attainment. This paper, taking District Y in Chongqing as an example, explores the practice paths of multi-entity coordinated governance in the rural living environment. The paper affirms the leading role of the government, participation responsibilities of the market, social organizations, and villagers, thereby constructing a multi-entity coordinated governance mechanism to effectively address the prominent problems currently faced.

Keywords

remediation of rural living environment, Multi-entity, coordinated governance, practice paths

1. Introduction

The 20th Party Congress Report states: Building “livable and business-friendly beautiful rural areas” requires continuous improvement of rural public services and diligent efforts to enhance the rural living environment. In recent years, China’s rural living environment has been continuously improved, with further popularization of sanitary toilets, effective treatment of domestic waste and sewage, and a gradual improvement in the rural ecological environment. However, there are still problems, such as a lack of cooperation among multi-entities and insufficient overall participation. From the perspective of government-led efforts, the role of the government in improving the rural living environment is to formulate policies, promote their implementation, support financial investment, guide and mobilize various forces, and supervise assessments. The government needs to fully play its role in top-level construction, grasp the overall trend of rural living environment governance, guide the effective

participation of multiple entities, rather than playing a “solo act” by the government. From the perspective of villager’s autonomous participation, rural living environment governance needs to grant certain autonomy to the masses, guide and organize farmers to independently build beautiful homes. The improvement of villagers’ self-governing system can provide a more solid institutional guarantee for comprehensively promoting rural revitalization. From the perspective of third-party participation, active participation of third-party organizations is essential for improving the quality of life and building beautiful rural areas. Their participation can achieve the operation of the interest appeal, interest development, interest coordination, and interest protection system.

Therefore, this paper takes the rural living environment as the core, through the perspective of multi-entity participation. It discusses the governance practice paths of multiple entities such as party organizations, government, social organizations, and villagers from the four dimensions of diversity of participating entities, diversity of participation methods, consistency of participation objectives, and coordination of participation mechanisms. This aims to stimulate the vitality of all entities involved and promote a comprehensive improvement in the governance level of the rural living environment.

2. Basic Status of the Remediation of Rural Living Environment in District Y

2.1 Road Construction Situation

By the end of 2021, District Y had constructed 3800 kilometers of rural roads. The accessibility rates of towns, incorporated villages, merged villages, and villagers’ groups, as well as the rate of bus service between towns and villages, all reached 100%. It took the lead in Chongqing to achieve “cement road access for every group” and became one of the first national demonstration areas for the “Four Good Rural Roads”.

2.2 Rural Waste Treatment Situation

The government of District Y has established a model of “household collection, village concentration, town street transportation, district transfer processing”, increasing capital investment, and unifying the transportation of all town domestic waste to incineration power plants for treatment, essentially achieving the goal of “zero landfill, full incineration”. Furthermore, it has carried out solid and profound village cleanup actions mainly consisting of the “three clearings and one change”, with a cumulative cleanup of over 8000 tons of domestic waste, over 2100 kilometers of ditches, 1252 ponds and weirs, and over 1700 tons of agricultural production waste by 2023. It has also added trash cans, dumpsters, and garbage trucks in accordance with national standards. By organizing full-time rural cleaning teams at the village (community) level, effective treatment of rural domestic waste has been achieved, and villages have generally achieved cleanliness, tidiness, and order.

2.3 Progress of the Rural “Toilet Revolution”

District Y has compiled the “Guide for the Construction of Rural Public Health Toilets in District Y (Trial)”, chosen toilet transformation models based on local conditions, and comprehensively promoted the rural “Toilet Revolution” by leading the transformation of public toilets in towns (market towns) and

village convenience service centers. By 2022, over 20,000 rural household toilets have been newly built or renovated in the district. To motivate rural residents to reform toilets, District Y has adopted a method of the government subsidizing a little, the village collective raising a little, the benefiting household contributing a little, and self-help saving a little to solve the required materials and funds. This has further improved the rural living environment, effectively enhancing the people's sense of happiness and attainment.

3. Analysis of Insufficiencies and Causes in Multi-entity Participation in Rural Living Environment Governance in District Y

3.1 Predominantly Government-led, Low Participation from Other Entities

The governance of the rural living environment ultimately relies on villagers' autonomy. However, all aspects of the governance of the rural living environment in District Y are basically arranged and guided by the government, with the township government playing an "all-capable" role, while other entities act as "mouthpieces" and "passive" executors. The government has unconsciously become the "big manager", taking on all the governance work. The government-led governance approach has resulted in low participation from other entities. The governance of the rural living environment should mobilize all parties to participate, otherwise the participation rights of other entities cannot be fully exercised, leading to weak autonomy.

3.2 Absence of Grassroots Autonomous Organizations

The Village Committee is the most extensive grassroots autonomous organization in rural China, characterized by self-management, self-education, and self-service. Its essence determines it as a mass organization directly led by the township government. Under this nature, the Village Committee in District Y often acts more as a mouthpiece for the township government, passively implementing the work handed down from above. This greatly undermines the autonomy of the Village Committee, rendering villagers' autonomy in name only. As a result, the autonomy of the Village Committee in District Y and the democratic rights of the villagers face serious challenges. The Village Committee members' unclear roles and responsibilities in rural environmental governance, along with the loss of villagers' subject status, greatly impact the effectiveness of rural environmental governance.

3.3 Low Consultation Among Various Entities

Currently, District Y has not yet formed consistent, clear participation goals for rural environmental governance. The cognition and behavior towards governance goals still need to be further reinforced. There are differences in understanding the governance issues among different entities, which to some extent, restricts the long-term development of the village. Moreover, grassroots democratic consultation work is not in-depth enough, and democratic consultation has not been actively conducted on some issues related to villagers' vital interests in habitat environment governance. A sound consultation mechanism has not been established, which leaves villagers, as the main entities, excluded from environmental

governance, severely restricting the further advancement of rural living environment governance and making it difficult to reverse the government's long-term "one-man show" governance model.

3.4 Poor Synergy and Cooperation in Multi-Entity Participation Mechanism

The participation of social organizations is highly dependent on the government, with many of them participating in the management of the rural living environment through the government's directives. Due to the low level of rural economic development and lack of funding and resource support for rural social organizations, it is difficult to carry out specific activities. Therefore, the participation of social organizations in rural living environment governance is still in the primary and initial stages, with flaws in its own development and imperfections in the system, mechanism, and law. Moreover, very few enterprises in District Y are actively involved in rural environmental governance. Those participating have low participation levels, few channels of participation, and simple projects. Some companies participating in governance mostly do so under compulsory requirements. As rational economic entities, these enterprises neglect their social responsibilities, and the quality and level of the projects they provide are not high. Some companies would rather endure penalties than invest in pollution control.

In summary, in the remediation work of the rural living environment, there is a lack of a perfect coordination mechanism. Apart from the government, the autonomy of other entities is greatly restricted. There is a lack of communication and equal cooperation mechanisms among different entities, and a multi-governance mechanism has not yet formed.

4. The Implementation Path of Multi-Entity Participation in Rural Residential Environmental Governance

Based on the analysis of the problems and causes in the practice of residential environmental governance in District Y of Chongqing, from the perspective of multi-entity participation, the following implementation paths can be summarized (as shown in Figure 1):

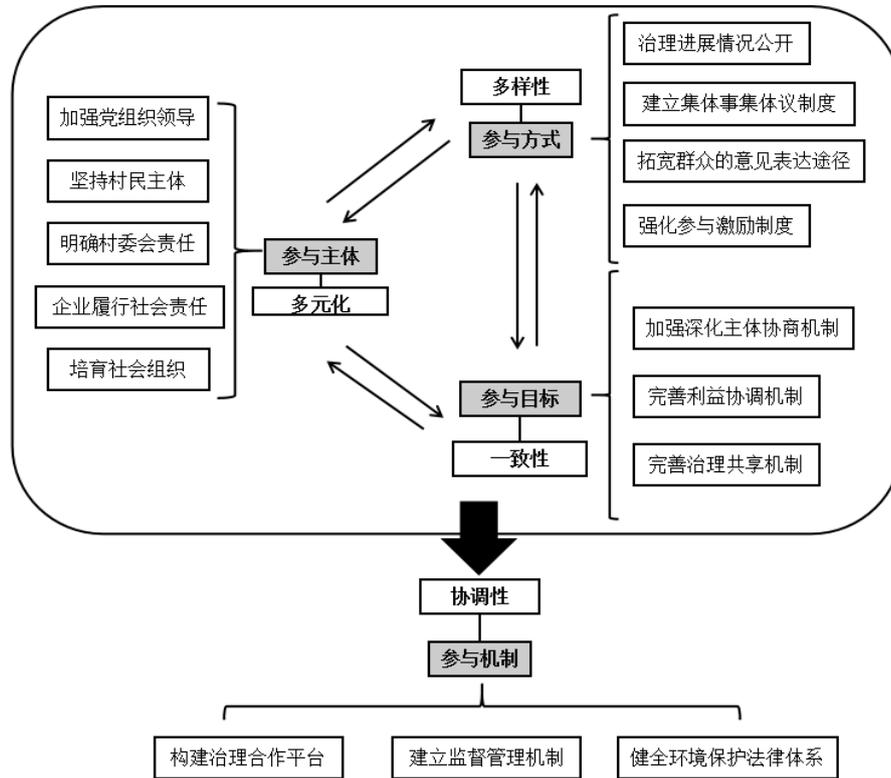


Figure 1. Implementation Path of Multi-Entity Participation in Rural Residential Environmental Governance

4.1 Clarifying Subject Responsibilities, Improving the Diversification of Participating Subjects

First, it is necessary to strengthen the leadership of Party organizations. We should encourage Party members to enthusiastically join the work of residential environmental governance, permeating the exemplary role of Party members into every aspect of rural residential environmental governance, increasing the proportion of Party members in grassroots residential environmental governance, and fully play the role of grassroots Party organizations as fighting fortresses and pioneers in rural residential environmental governance.

Second, we must uphold the principle of villager-centered governance. It is essential to fully promote the subjective status of farmers, encourage villagers to actively participate in the government’s decision-making and supervision of various projects, and regularly convene yard dam meetings, joint meetings, etc., to provide advice for the local government to formulate related policies, and guide villagers to actively participate in the environmental governance around them, making use of kinship, geographical proximity, and professional relationships for environmental protection propaganda.

Third, we need to clarify the responsibilities of the Village Committees. The Village Committee serves as a bridge connecting the government and the farmers, and should timely reflect the issues of rural residential environmental governance to the government, continuously strengthen the study of policy

theory, improve their professional level, and demonstrate creativity. They should be willing to make contributions to the village, do good deeds, and handle matters effectively, reasonably mediating interest disputes.

Fourth, businesses must fulfill their social responsibilities. Besides the government, enterprises are the primary providers of products and services and the main source of the rural living environment. Enterprises should vigorously promote clean production, develop a circular economy, establish environmental protection concepts, comprehensively establish a green, civilized ecological development perspective, and integrate the environmental evaluation system into the enterprise's decision-making system.

Fifth, social organizations should be cultivated. As the third force in social governance, social organizations play a pivotal role in expressing opinions, volunteering, environmental protection, and public welfare. The government should strengthen its support for social organizations, assist their healthy, orderly development, provide policies, funds, simplify approval procedures, lower entry barriers, and inject fresh blood into social development.

4.2 Broadening Participation Channels and Promoting Diverse Participation Methods

Firstly, progress of the management process should be publicized. The status of the rural living environment management must be timely disclosed to achieve transparency and openness. The village committee should inform villagers about the progress, the use of funds, and the management objectives, ensuring villagers' right to be informed and voluntarily accepting their supervision. This can promote villagers' sense of participation and stimulate their enthusiasm. Secondly, a system of collective discussion for collective matters should be established. All stakeholders need to be guided to participate in all aspects of social life. Only by participating personally in the management process can one truly cherish the results. Establish a collective consciousness of discussing collective matters in setting objectives, planning projects, implementing management, and supervision and evaluation. Respect all stakeholders' participation and decision-making rights and fully listen to their opinions. Thirdly, expand the avenues for public opinion expression. The rural living environment management is a complex project that involves villagers' immediate interests. Various perspectives are inevitable and deserve sufficient attention for effective management. Thus, it's necessary to provide villagers with a good platform to express their opinions. Fourthly, reinforce incentive systems for participation. Build a comprehensive, operable incentive mechanism that encourages farmers, enterprises, and village committees to actively participate in community management. Government funding, social donation, and part of the working capital of village committees can be used as special funds for rural living environment management. Tax reduction policies should be implemented for enterprises to actively contribute to rural living environment management.

4.3 Maintaining Integrated Planning and Promoting Consistent Participation Objectives

Firstly, deepen the stakeholder consultation mechanism. People's democratic consciousness is increasing, and the previous method of the government taking care of everything no longer satisfies people's needs. Hence, strengthen grassroots consultation, improve the democratic consultation system at the grassroots level, build a consultation platform for grassroots party organizations, governments, in-district units, and villagers. Ensure everyone can legally participate in rural environmental governance. Secondly, improve the interest coordination mechanism. The government and party organizations should fully coordinate and resolve conflicts of interest among governance stakeholders, and on this basis, actively seek a balance of interests. Establish equal consultation, effective cooperation, and unified rights, responsibilities, and interests with all stakeholders in policy formulation, service supervision, environmental assessment, and environmental management. Thirdly, improve the governance sharing mechanism. Construct a comprehensive governance process sharing mechanism among stakeholders, build an information and data management platform and database, and achieve information sharing among governments, enterprises, social organizations, and villagers.

5. Constructing Collaborative Pathways, and Enhancing the Coordination of Participation Mechanisms

Firstly, a management cooperation platform should be built. The government should take the lead in providing a good communication and coordination platform for all sectors of society. Make full use of the strengths of enterprises, groups, and the public in the region, and actively participate in all aspects of governance. Enable all parties to maximize efficiency through this platform, and achieve a new era of living environment rectification work pattern of co-construction, co-management, and co-sharing. Secondly, establish a supervision and management mechanism. Define the responsibilities of related departments according to their duties, establish a corresponding accountability system, and hold departments accountable in accordance with accountability procedures. Meanwhile, improve the mutual supervision mechanism and smooth the reporting channels. Through mutual supervision, foster a strong atmosphere of mutual trust among all responsibility subjects and achieve comprehensive and full-time supervision and inspection. Assist relevant responsibility subjects in formulating effective rectification measures. Thirdly, a complete environmental protection legal system should be enhanced. Legislation on rural living environment is an inevitable trend, but the current related laws and regulations are still not comprehensive. The legislative work for rural living environment management needs to incorporate normative documents into the rule of law. Based on policy documents, further clarify the responsibilities of the government as the main body and the rights and obligations of other participants, thereby forming a complete legal system.

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