

The Advantages and Effects of Non-governmental Organizations in Emergency Management of Major Emergencies in China

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Abstract—This paper briefly introduces the connotation of China's non-governmental organization and major emergency, and explains the realistic background and significance of non-governmental organizations participating in major emergencies. Next, taking Wenchuan earthquake as a case, this paper analyzes the advantages of non-governmental organizations' participation in emergency management of major emergencies — grassroots nature: being close the public; impartiality: safeguarding social fairness; professionalism: providing professional services; flexibility: making faster response to crisis. Finally, the paper illustrates the role that non-governmental organizations should play in the emergency management of major emergencies.

Keywords—non-governmental organization; major emergencies; emergency management; Wenchuan earthquake

I. INTRODUCTION

How to make effective emergency management of major emergencies and reduce the negative impact of the incidents is a major problem that governments around the world must face and seriously deal with. As the representative of state power, the government is the main body of emergency management. It should be noted, however, that there are times when government "fails" and fails to provide all services. In response to emergencies, it is far from enough for the government to provide assistance, and the participation of other diversified actors is also needed. The non-governmental organization is an important subject that can play a role in the emergency management of major emergencies. The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) pointed out that "to build a pattern of social governance that is jointly built and shared by all the people" will be the leading idea to explore ways to modernize and realize China's social governance.

II. THE CONNOTATION OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND MAJOR EMERGENCIES

There are different international terms for the concept of non-governmental organization. For example, some call it non-profit organizations, some voluntary organizations, some civil society organizations, grassroots organizations, or

the "third sector" and so on, no fewer than 20 names. In China, many scholars are willing to call them "non-governmental organizations", "non-profit organizations", "societies", or "third parties". At present, the relatively authoritative definition is as follows: unofficial, not-for-profit, legal citizen voluntary organizations that serve public welfare undertakings. In view of the different terms for such organizations in different countries, in order to be faithful to the local usage and the content of the original text, this paper partly uses the term "NGO" when discussing relevant content, which refers to the same kind of organizations.

The concept of emergency is not passed down from ancient China or borrowed from other countries. In modern society, because many events often occur suddenly, there is great uncertainty and it is hard to prepare for them. Over time, people use the word "emergency" to describe such events. In recent years, with the occurrence of a series of emergencies, the Chinese government began to pay attention to management of this aspect, promulgated a number of response bills, therefore "emergency" as a basic concept was formally defined. "Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of China, which came into effect on November 1, 2007, defines emergencies in its entirety: The term "emergency" as used in this law means a natural disaster, an accident, a public health event or a social security event that occurs suddenly and causes or may cause serious social harm and requires emergency measures to be taken." This expression defines the types and nature of emergencies in China in the form of law, which is concise and authoritative. Therefore, the author adopts this definition. Major emergencies, as the name suggests, mean that the impact on social stability and the safety of citizens' life and property is more serious than general emergencies. However, its connotation is basically consistent with "emergency event", "public emergency event" and even "public crisis". Therefore, the author uses "major emergency" as the unified title to reduce the possible differences.

III. REALISTIC BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

In the 21st century, various natural disasters, accidents, disasters, public health, social security and economic crises and other public emergencies are exerting great influence on

the personal and property safety of citizens as well as the stability of the country and society. How to make effective emergency management of major emergencies and reduce the negative impact of the incidents is a major problem that governments around the world must face and seriously deal with. At present, China is in a critical period of economic transition and social transformation, as well as a high incidence of various major emergencies. If these emergencies are not properly handled, they will seriously affect the safety of people's lives and property, and even affect the authority of the government and social stability.

At the same time, China is currently in the transition period from "omnipotent government" to "limited government", and public goods and services in social governance are no longer simply provided by the government. Devolution of some powers to society, non-governmental organizations and individual citizens is a major trend in the development of modern civil society. Under the circumstance of emergencies, it is far from enough for the government to implement management alone, but also the participation of other multiple subjects is also needed. And non-governmental organizations are an important subject that can play a role in the emergency management of major emergencies. As a part of social governance that cannot be ignored, emergency management of major emergencies is a realistic need that should be adapted. By introducing the extensive participation of social forces, and giving full play to the advantages of social non-governmental organizations, the government and society can form a cooperative governance network, so as to better achieve the goal of governance. This is of great practical significance for promoting the benign development of China's civil society and promoting the process of democratization.

IV. THE ADVANTAGES OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OF MAJOR EMERGENCIES

On May 12, 2008, at 14:28 (Beijing time), a precipitate earthquake hit China's Sichuan province in Wenchuan county. The earthquake lasted more than a minute, with a magnitude of 8.0. The areas of severe damage exceeded 100,000 square kilometers, including 10 counties (cities) in the worst-hit areas, 41 counties (cities) in the severely afflicted area and 186 counties (cities) in the general disaster areas. As of September 18, 2008, May 12 Wenchuan earthquake had left a total of 69,227 dead, 374,643 injured, 17,923 missing, and caused economic losses of up to 845.1 billion yuan. It is the most destructive earthquake since the establishment of the People's Republic of China which caused the most serious casualties after the Tangshan earthquake. After the earthquake, the Chinese government immediately launched the emergency plan; the government departments made coordination and dispatch day and night; the people's liberation army quickly rushed to the disaster area; and all kinds of social organizations and rescue force also joined the disaster relief operations with unprecedented enthusiasm. Different from previous emergencies, China's non-governmental organizations participated in the disaster

management with unprecedented scale and actions after the earthquake, and went to the forefront of earthquake relief collectively. They played an amazing role and became the most powerful helper of the government. The rescue efforts of non-governmental organizations have shown to the world the great potential of China's civil society. Some people have called 2008 the first year of Chinese NGOs. Next, the author will take the performance of non-governmental organizations in Wenchuan earthquake as an example to analyze the advantages of non-governmental organizations in emergency management.

A. Grassroots Nature: Being Close to the People

Non-governmental organizations are similar to the government in the function of public administration, but their organizational system is completely different from that of the government. First, the decision-making and behavior of non-governmental organizations are not subject to the administrative control of the government and other institutions; secondly, non-governmental organizations are close to the grassroots with a small space distance with the public, so it can have more extensive contact with society; finally, non-governmental organizations provide public welfare activities in accordance with the purpose of the organization and assume corresponding public responsibilities, which may transcend national boundaries, serve and influence the world. Since the members mostly come from grassroots with volunteer spirit, non-governmental organizations have the characteristics of public welfare and sociality. Compared with government organizations, non-governmental organizations can better grasp the interests and appeals of the public and express them for the public, thus building a bridge between the government and the public. After major emergencies break out, volunteers from grassroots non-governmental organizations have a strong affinity, and understand the thoughts of ordinary people, thus they can better mobilize other social members to join the organization and participate in the response to emergencies. After the Wenchuan earthquake, in order to comfort people in the disaster area and calm down their panic, the non-governmental organizations, based on their grassroots nature, were more able to communicate with the victims than the government and engaged in a large number of spiritual comfort work for the people there. The Yingxiu social work station in Guangzhou, with its expertise and characteristics in psychological support, bases itself on the community in the post-disaster reconstruction process, carries out psychological assistance work for community residents and school students, and builds up confidence for the victims to resume normal life.

B. Impartiality: Safeguarding Social Fairness

Being impartial and safeguarding social fairness is the unshirkable responsibility that civilian organization shoulders¹. Compared with governments and enterprises,

¹ Yu Qili. The role of NGOs in public crisis management. *Co-operative Economy & Science*, December 2008 (total no. 358). (in Chinese)

non-governmental organizations tend to have more lofty ideas, more flexible organizational structure, more efficient operation mechanism and broader space for activities. Therefore, they are able to conduct activities in the social public sphere according to law, play a just role, improve the quantity and quality of social public service, and thus promote the better development of social undertakings. However, as the subject of public power, the government mainly focuses on the interests of the majority in the handling of public affairs. The interests of those vulnerable groups in society are often ignored by the government because those people have little way to express them. However, many non-governmental organizations take social vulnerable groups and marginal groups as service objects. After major emergencies break out, they can better take into account the interests of vulnerable groups, thus promoting social welfare and maintaining social equity. For example, after the Wenchuan Earthquake, Tianjin Hetong elderly welfare association established the first nursing home for the elderly after the earthquake, providing professional rescue and health care services for the disabled elderly. This is the embodiment of non-governmental organizations meeting the needs of vulnerable groups in society and maintaining social fairness and justice.

C. Professionalism: Providing Professional Services

Compared with the government, the characteristics of social organizations lie in their ability to provide various personalized and professional services for the public². Most non-governmental organizations aim to focus on a certain kind of social problems, and have relevant experience and skills. As a result, a variety of different organizations are formed to deal with various social problems. The Women's Federation, which protects the rights and interests of women, the Disabled Persons' Federation, which is dedicated to protecting the rights and interests of the disabled and charitable organizations dedicated to helping underage children are all examples. These non-governmental organizations have professional talents and experience in dealing with problems, and can provide various professional services in a timely manner according to different situations after an emergency occurs. Especially in places where the government has no time to take into account or fails to take into account, non-governmental organizations can effectively cover these areas, carry out relevant relief services according to local conditions, and ensure that special vulnerable groups can also receive timely assistance and enjoy personalized professional services. After major emergencies, non-governmental organizations can enter into areas beyond the reach of the government in post-reconstruction and make up for government's deficiencies. For example, after the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, a large number of non-governmental organizations voluntarily stayed in the local areas to participate in the reconstruction. Some provided food for the victims through voluntary labor, while some took advantage of their psychological expertise to provide

psychological counseling and counseling for people suffering from psychological trauma. The professional advantages of non-governmental organizations make social services more diversified, reduce the burden of the government, and play a role in filling the gaps.

D. Flexibility: Making Faster Response to Crisis

The government, as the representative of the bureaucratic system, adopts a crisscrossing grid management mode, in which decisions from the higher level are transmitted to the lower level and public opinions from the lower level are reflected to the higher level, all of which require quite tedious procedures and a long time. After major emergencies, time is the most precious resource. It is often the case that while people are waiting for instructions from superiors, the situation has changed rapidly. In practice, it takes time for professional government rescue personnel to arrive at the scene of the accident. In this period of time, the community organizations, volunteer organizations or citizens nearby can carry out self-help and mutual aid, which can play a multiplier effect. For example, the two hours after the earthquake is the most precious time for life saving. In the time later, the rescue effect will be geometrically decreasing. And during this period of time, the rescue work mainly depends on the self and mutual medical aid of the neighborhood, the volunteers and the community. The management structure of non-governmental organizations is relatively flat, with simple inter-departmental mobilization and relatively convenient communication, therefore their response to emergencies is faster than that of government departments. This enables the non-governmental organizations respond more quickly to an emergency.

V. THE ROLE THAT NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD PLAY IN THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OF MAJOR EMERGENCIES

A. Integrating the Resources and Supervising

After major emergencies, non-governmental organizations can extensively mobilize the society to raise funds and receive a large number of materials and funds from the public so it can integrate the resources³. After the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, the Red Cross Society of China and the China Charity Federation received a large number of materials and cash donations from the public, which were of great significance to the recovery and reconstruction of the disaster-hit areas. While integrating resources, non-governmental organizations will also supervise the use of resources. This includes whether the government uses resources wastefully or not and which resources are in short supply, which should be timely reported to the government for improving and making up for. In the case of the Indian Ocean tsunami, for example, the Transparency International found problems in monitoring the use of aid funds. Oxfam UK also assessed international aid

² Zeng Runxi, Chen Qiang. Research on the role of NGOs in emergency mechanism. *Journal of Wuhan University of Technology*, vol. 23 (1). (in Chinese)

³ Zhang Qiang, Lu Qibin, Zhang Huan, et al. Catastrophe and NGO — challenges and responses from a global perspective [M]. Peking University Press, 2009. (in Chinese)

delivery in the aftermath of the tsunami and made recommendations to aid agencies to further improve their services.

At the same time, information resources are also the resources that cannot be ignored in emergencies. After an emergency occurs, the regular information transmission, collection and release channels are often damaged, and the normal information collection channels of the government are also hindered. Therefore, the non-governmental organizations with specialized knowledge, small scale and diversity can make use of their advantages in personnel and public welfare to make volunteers go deep into the disaster areas, obtain accurate information from the public and the scene, and report to the relevant government departments. The non-governmental organizations can also give play to the advantages of modern information technology, and release accurate and true information in the form of web page announcement, news, push, etc., so as to better supplement the omission of mainstream media and make up for the lack of information exchange and other problems.

B. Mobilizing Personnel to Deal with Emergencies

The participation of non-governmental organizations in emergency response is more conducive to mobilizing social forces and drawing more people into action, which is not easy for government agencies⁴. It mainly benefits from the non-governmental organizations' advantage of being close to the masses and responding rapidly. Taking the 5.12 Wenchuan earthquake as an example, according to the preliminary statistics of the joint office of earthquake relief work of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League and the China youth volunteers association, as of June 3, 2008, a total of 5.612 million people had signed up for volunteer services in earthquake relief through youth groups at various levels, and 4.914 million people had participated directly or indirectly in earthquake relief. College students, migrant workers, company employees, business executives and other walks of life, there were people in all classes involved in the earthquake relief operations, in which the mobilization ability and personnel integration ability of non-governmental organizations were indispensable.

C. Communication Between the Government and Citizens

Non-governmental organizations are between the government and the public playing the role of "bridge". On the one hand, non-governmental organizations should establish cooperation models with the government, follow the guidance of the government after major emergencies, and act as the government's collaborators to convey to the public the concerns of government. On the other hand, the personnel of non-governmental organizations are closely connected with the public. The personnel of non-governmental organizations are mainly from the public, so they can get close to the public and express their interests

⁴ Xie Yang and Wang Congcong. 4.91 million volunteers participated in earthquake relief nationwide [J]. China Youth Daily, 2008. (in Chinese)

and demands to the government. For example, in the response to public crisis events, no matter how scientific and reasonable the response measures formulated by government organizations are, they cannot play a role without public recognition and support. If the measures are implemented by executive order compulsorily, they will fail to make expected results sometimes and can even be counterproductive. In addition, there can be some blind spots that government forces cannot reach if the actions only depend on the government departments to convey relevant opinions through formal channels. Through the publicity and guidance of non-governmental organizations which are close to the public and have strong penetration, can the implementation of government decisions be promoted.

Therefore it's easy for non-governmental organizations to gain trust from both the government and other non-governmental organizations as intermediate organizations, so as to pay the role of communication and coordination bridge.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the 21st century, due to the increasing dense of population and economic activities, the impact of major emergencies has become increasingly large. The traditional model of emergency management with the government as a single subject has been unable to meet the needs of social development. Developed countries have already applied non-governmental organizations as a subject of emergency response in practice and have made remarkable achievements. Non-governmental organizations have the advantages of grassroots nature, impartiality, professionalism and flexibility, so they can play the role of resource integration and supervision, mobilizing personnel for emergency response and communicating with the government and citizens. The government must give some space to the society, give more support to and explore cooperation with civil organizations, so as to let non-governmental organizations give full play to their potential as a managing body. In this way can the impact of major emergencies be defused, and the rights and interests of the people can be better protected so as to reduce the loss caused by emergencies and realize the goal of good governance.

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