

Capability Construction and Optimization Paths to Improve the Effectiveness of Rural Governance

Gong Yu^{1, a}

¹*School of Government Management, Beijing Normal University/ Rural Governance Research Center, Xijiekouwai Street, Beijing, China*

^a*905045599@qq.com*

ABSTRACT

The construction of rural governance capability has been given priority in the modernization process of national governance capability and governance system. Therefore, to improve senses of fulfillment, happiness and security shared by the rural people, basic-level governments need to strengthen their capabilities in five aspects concerning township (street) administrative execution, public service, discussion and negotiation, emergency management and safety construction. Although these five capabilities have directed the overall improvement of governance capabilities in basic-level governments, problem of unequal powers and responsibilities still exists in practice. Hence, the local governments must first, in light of the practical and realistic methods of thinking, working and leadership, identify the key points of capacity construction; then the pace of reforms should be controlled to lay a solid foundation for the continuous improvement of rural governance capabilities; last but not least, it is essential to discover and summarize the basic-level innovative experiences and practices as well as strengthen the encouragement and guidance.

Keywords: *rural governance, governance effectiveness, governance capability, rural reform*

1. INTRODUCTION

The overall goal of China's comprehensively deepening the reform is penetration in the modernization of national governance capability and governance system. It has been stipulated in "Proposals of the Central Committee on Formulating the Fourteenth Five-year Plan and 2035 Long-term Goals for National Economic and Social Development" deliberated and approved by the Fifth Plenary of the Nineteenth Central Committee that "The 'Fourteenth Five-year Period' will witness new improvements in national governance effectiveness". Against the backdrop that the world is experiencing unprecedented changes in a century and China is at the crucial stage of realizing national rejuvenation, the proposal concerning the modernization of governance capability and governance system proves to be an important strategic choice that conforms to the trend of the times, which is of great significance and far-reaching influence on political development and socialist modernization cause in China.

The reasons why rural governance occupies such an important position in the modernization process of overall governance capacity and governance system can

be explained in three aspects. Firstly, "Rural spatial governance has become an important part of the spatial governance system under the unified management of urban and rural spaces"^[1], whether or not rural reform and rural revitalization strategies can be smoothly implemented depends on rural governance. The improvement in rural governance capability and effectiveness not only facilitates the national and social assistance resources into rural society, opening up the "the last mile" of policy implementation, but also contributes to promoting the degree of farmer self-organization while accelerating the marketization process of rural elements; secondly, rural governance concerns the organizational guarantee for rural talents and business entities. On one hand, the development of agriculture and rural areas cannot be realized without the coordination and cooperation among new types of skilled farmers, new rural business entities and rural collective economic organizations. While on the other hand, the cultivation of rural talents and business entities objectively necessitates the improvement of rural governance capability, the organizational guarantee of which provides a favorable environment for various types of entrepreneurship; thirdly, "the development of the new agriculture impacts the inflow and outflow of the rural labor force, and

whether villagers remain in the village, which in turn affects rural governance and social stratification”^[2]. Since entering the stage of rural revitalization, the traditional agricultural links throughout the country have gradually expanded in processing depth and production chains, fostering a variety of new agricultural product consumer markets including town nest markets, online markets and overseas markets. As consumer demands increase, it is required that rural governance should further play its role in agricultural production and handle the relationship between market determination and governmental guidance to further increase the income of farmers through the development of rural industries.

2. CONSTRUCTION OF RURAL GOVERNANCE CAPACITY

Seeing the growing population in China's rural areas, positioning rural governance capability is an important part of the entire national governance system. The improvement in rural governance capability is closely related to the senses of fulfillment, happiness and security shared by the rural people. The overall goal of strengthening and improving rural governance was proposed in “Guiding Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Rural Governance” issued by the General Office of the Central Committee and the State Council in June 2019. This year marks the beginning of the “Fourteenth Five-year Plan” when the Central Committee and the State Council issued “Opinions on Strengthening the Modernization of the Basic-level Governance System and Governance Capability” (hereinafter referred to as the “Opinions”), serving as the basic compliance for promoting the modernization of rural governance system and capability in China. It is clearly stated in “Opinions” that it is essential to strengthen the capability construction of basic-level government governance centers on five capabilities concerning township(street) administrative execution, public service, discussion and negotiation, emergency management and safety construction. As “basic-level governance capability” was detailedly elaborated in programmatic document for the very first time, these five capabilities cover every aspect of people’s aspiration for a better life, highlighting the people-centered development concept.

In terms of enhancing the people’s senses of fulfillment, the administrative execution capability has further lowered the focus of governance to strengthen the leadership of the party, optimized the powers of the basic-level government and improved the supervision model. A standardized and long-term system design is adopted to break through implementation blockage of people-benefit policies and resources, which effectively enhances people’s senses of fulfillment with the “the last mile” problem of serving the people solved.

In terms of improving people’s senses of happiness, the discussion and negotiation capability requires

basic-level cadres to actively listen to the opinions and suggestions from the people and standardize the channels for public opinions, thus realizing the goal of “coming from the people”; the capability to serve the people requires that basic-level party members and cadres must always prioritize what the people think and want and take the initiative to integrate into the people, thus realizing the goal of “going into the people”. These two abilities are combined to continuously consolidate and develop the relationship between cadres and the people under the guidance of addressing people’s concerns and constitute the solid foundation for governance, which effectively enhances people’s senses of happiness.

In terms of boosting people’s senses of security, emergency management capability calls for the establishment of a response system, organizational system, security system and support system to reduce people’s losses in emergency; safety construction capability necessitates the improvement of comprehensive management center, security control and prevention system and service mechanism to protect the interests of the people in daily life. The emergency state is combined with the daily state to jointly weave a safety net to protect people’s lives and property, continuing to enhance people’s senses of security.

3. THE MAIN DILEMMAS OF IMPROVING RURAL GOVERNANCE CAPACITY

The five capabilities concerning township(street) administrative execution, public service, discussion and negotiation, emergency management and safety construction have directed the way for the comprehensive improvement of basic-level political governance, in which the “administrative execution capability”, with the function of outline and guidance, facilitates the roles of other capabilities. Taking township administrative execution capability as an example, constant improvement has been made in “three basics” functions of basic livelihood guarantee, basic-level social governance and basic social services along with the development of civil affairs. Especially after the victory of poverty alleviation, although the governance capability of rural basic-level political power has improved significantly, various in-depth contradictions gradually appear in township.

The most central problem reflected in township is “unequal power and responsibility”, that is “thousands of lines above but only one needle below”, which remains as the core dilemma that hinders the further development of rural capability construction and the vitality of rural governance capability reform. “Thousands of lines” represents great responsibility while the image of “one needle” refers to the current situation of “lack of multi-subject governance model”^[3] and funds, talents, suspension of power. For example, in some areas, the financial impact makes it difficult for town-level

gerocomiums and village-level happiness complexes to carry out reconstruction and expansion and attract professional nursing workers; while most rural elderly tend to be unwilling to live in county-level comprehensive care centers even sufficient beds are offered. The township civil servants in some areas undertake great responsibilities and suffer heavy pressure without appealing salaries, resulting in the serious loss of young talents. While in some other areas, the key tasks of various industries and departments are ultimately concentrated at the township level, lessening the burden alleviation effect at the basic level; forced burden alleviation, otherwise, results in the situation that “once alleviated, laxity appears” without sufficient endogenous power.

So as to resolve the problem of “unequal power and responsibility” in township, the “Opinions”, proceeding from the in-depth contradictions in the development of agriculture and rural areas, clearly strengthens “the leadership of the township (street) party (working) committee over the construction of basic-level political power”, and intensifies the township (street)’s right to participate and raise suggestions over major decisions, major plans and major projects with corresponding powers directly assigned to township (street), which leverages the advantage of the close connection between basic-level organizations and the people to understand people’s in-depth demands and deep contradictions within the jurisdiction. In this way, people can be served more thoughtfully, discussions and consultations be conducted more conveniently, crisis and response be handled more clearly and the shortcomings and weaknesses of safety construction be detected more subtly. “The interactions of different formal institutions in rural China explain the final decisions and implementations related to rural development”^[4], the construction of “administrative execution capability” is the top priority, serving as the prerequisite foundation for cultivating other capabilities.

4. THE OPTIMIZATION PATHS OF RURAL GOVERNANCE CAPABILITY

The research perspectives of the academic circle on how to improve rural governance capability are divided into researches on governance transformation and optimization paths. Transformation research focuses on the impact of the environment on rural governance system while optimization paths centers on the further improvement of the internal structure and process within rural governance system. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that “it is the strong basic-level governance that determines a strong country, and it is the security in the basic level that guarantees a safe world”, therefore, various areas should, in accordance with the requirements of the “Opinions”, construct the five capabilities

including township (street) administrative execution capability from three aspects, as described below.

The first aspect lies in seeking truth from facts. The practical and realistic thinking, working and leadership methods must be upheld to properly handle the relationship between top-level design and basic-level exploration. As the Party Central Committee has clarified the top-level design for the modernization of the basic-level governance system and governance capability, local governments should resolve the implementation problems and work out implementation plans conforming to actual situations as soon as possible. Although the top-level design of governance capability construction gradually approaches maturity, and “the main body of rural governance in China has gradually changed from single to diversification”^[5], the exploration of governance capability reform in various areas remains relatively lagging. It is necessary to raise villagers’ awareness of the rule of law and morality, strengthen publicity of the rule of law, build a platform for law popularization, carry out rural law enforcement in various forms, and cultivate a law enforcement team and legal supervision organization that handles affairs according to the law and strictly enforces the law, jointly creating a law-abiding atmosphere in the rural areas.

The second aspect is to grasp the rhythm, “cherishing the sound development situation while consolidating the favorable momentum”. This year marks the first year to move towards the Second Centenary Goal with the first realized. Basic-level governance, as the foundation of national governance, is of great significance concerning the overall situation. It is necessary to, starting from a political perspective, implement the new development concept, build a new pattern of rural governance reform and development, carry out the new development concept of the rural revitalization stage, laying a solid foundation for the subsequent improvement of rural governance capability. In terms of the implementation of the five governance capabilities, two aspects of short-term capability supplementation and long-term capability development should be taken into account. Driven by the goal of “effective governance”, short-term governance capability supplementation highlights the unity of key points and comprehensive consideration. Key tasks focused on rural and village conditions in the field of rural governance should be clarified, a specified work leading team should be established and villager participation mechanism should be improved.

While the third aspect is to encourage innovation, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that “the greatest vitality of reform and innovation lies in the basic level and the people.” In the construction process of basic-level governance capability, basic-level exploration is a manifestation of the wisdom of crowds. Under the premise of guaranteeing people’s livelihood and social stability, it is necessary to encourage and guide

the new things and new methods innovated by the basic level. The improvement in the innovation level in rural governance capability also calls for the further release of the dividends of "safe" rural construction and rural society stability as well as more attention to the importance of creating a stable and harmonious rural environment, laying a solid foundation for rural governance subjects and objects to carry out innovative activities. It is also necessary to preserve and then refine the outstanding achievements of basic-level innovation in the form of institutionalization guarantee and construct a case library and knowledge base of rural innovation in the whole society to continuously advance the promotion and transformation of rural governance innovation achievements.

5. CONCLUSION

Long-term governance capability development refers to the establishment of a rural governance system in line with the modernization of agriculture, rural areas and farmers. On the basis of "three governance integration", the leading function of the Party should be exerted to give full play to the important role of intelligent governance and information governance in rural governance. "China is facing an important period of rural governance innovation"^[6], the rural governance concept centered on comprehensive revitalization should be formed and practice should be theorized to form an uninterrupted iterative development of knowledge achievements that are compatible with the rural revitalization process.

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