

Research on the Institutional Innovation of Environmental Protection in China Rural Areas

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Abstract

The sustainable use of resources and the good eco-environment are the important symbol of sustainable development. With the economic development in China's rural areas in recent years, a lot of environmental problems have raised governments and people's concern. The serious environmental problems in rural areas have hindered the economic development, even the people's health in China's rural areas. Thus this paper analyses the serious environmental problems and its reasons in rural areas. The author of the paper argues that institutional innovation is an effective way of environmental protection in rural areas and puts forward the specific ways to realize institutional innovation.

Keywords: Environment; Environmental Protection; Institutional Innovation; Rural Areas

1. Introduction

As a big agricultural nation, there are more than 0.8 billion peasants in rural areas, so it is the priority among priorities to settle the work related to agriculture, rural areas, and farmer. The environmental protection in rural areas is touching on peasants' vital interests, the sustainable development of agriculture, the harmony and stability of rural areas, and the guarantee of peasants' basic life and comprehensive social progress. The China's twelfth five-year planning outline has clearly put forward that it is necessary to quicken the comprehensive improvement of environmental protection in rural areas, which points out the direction of environmental protection in rural

areas and put forward higher requirement for the work of environmental protection. Thus quickening the settlement of prominent environmental problem which has damaged peasants' health seriously has become a big social issue for China to confront with.

This paper aims to heighten the serious situation of environmental protection in China's rural areas through expounding the environmental problems in rural areas. The reasons for environmental deterioration are examined specifically from four aspects. The author of this paper argues that it is an effective alternative to implement environmental protection in rural areas through institutional innovation of environmental protection, especially the institutional innovation of environmental policies.

2. The Environmental Problems and its Reasons in Rural Areas

2.1. The Environmental Problems in Rural Areas

In generally, the work of environmental protection in rural areas has lagged its economic development. The major problems include soil pollution, soil and water loss, water pollution, air pollution, solid waste pollution and so on.

2.1.1. Soil Pollution

There are three major reasons for the soil pollution in China's rural areas, including heavy metal pollution, agricultural goods pollution and feeding pollution. At present, more than a hundred million square meter cultivated land were polluted by heavy metal such as tin, arsenic, chromium, plum bum and so on. Due to the irrational use of chemical fertilizer, pesticide and agricultural film, the

soil pollution is more serious and the quality and safety of agricultural products are threatened. Moreover, the large-scale livestock breeding has resulted in increasing pollution in rural areas [1].

2.1.2. Soil and Water Loss

According to the Bulletin on Environmental Protection in China in 2006, the gross areas of soil and water loss in China was 3560 thousands square kilometers in 2006, 37.1% of China's total area. Those factors have resulted in the food loss of about 2000 million kilogram each year. In addition, the land quality is decreasing, which has become the major reason for the decrease of food production.

2.1.3. Water pollution

According to the Bulletin On Environmental Protection in China in 2006, the gross emission amount of waste water in China was 46000 million tons, an increase of 4.7%, among which the emission amount of industrial waste water was 212400 million tons, an increase of 2.5%, and domestic pollutant in cities and towns was 24760 million tons, an increase of 6.6% [2].

2.2. The Reasons for the Environmental Problems in Rural Areas

2.2.1. The Low Awareness of Environmental Protection

Due to the whole educational level in China's rural areas, most residents including some of grassroots cadres in rural areas only pay more attention on the economic development whereas ignore the environmental protection, which is difficult to adapt to the new changes and challenges in the rural areas. The traditional model relying on consuming lots of resources placed undue emphasis on the economic growth index, ignored the quality of growth including environmental protection and used low agricultural technologies, which has inevitable brought a lot of environmental pollution in most of rural areas [3].

2.2.2. The Imperfect of Laws and Regulations of Environmental Protection

At present, a lot of laws and regulations about environmental protection and other related environmental issues should be established or improved as soon as possible. In China, there are not specific laws or regulations on the management of toxic chemicals, radioactivity pollution, natural resources and bio diversity protection. Thus it is necessary to improve or

establish the constitutive law and procedural law on environmental protection. The present procedural law is not beneficial for the just, rational and effective implementation of environmental protection laws [4]. In addition, the feeding pollution has become the major reason of agricultural pollution in rural areas. The soil pollution also is the important factor that has influenced the food security.

2.2.3. The Lag of Environmental Infrastructural Construction

For a long time, the gap of environmental protection between cities and countryside is prominent. The government paid more attention on the environmental protection in cities, so the serious environmental problems in rural areas have not been taken into account. In recent years, although the environmental protection in rural areas has been quickened rapidly, the whole situation of environmental protection is worried. The environmental problems have been a significant social issue that is hindering the healthy and harmonious development of rural economy. At present, there are more than 9000 million tons domestic sewage and 280 million tons domestic garbage in China's rural areas each year. However, most of that pollutant is emitted at random without disposal. About 47000 thousand tons fertilizer was used in rural areas each year with the utilization rate of less 35%. Moreover, most towns in China have not established the infrastructural construction of environmental protection.

2.2.4. The Weak Environmental Management in Rural Areas

Firstly, the investment on environmental protection in rural areas is not enough. There are about 600 thousand villages in China and at least 200 thousand villages need manage as soon as possible at present. But the fund investment still is not accordance with the needs. Secondly, the management level in rural areas is relative low. The specific organization that is responsible for the environmental protection in rural areas has not been established in most provinces. There are not organizations of environmental protection in 95% towns. Thus the work of environmental protection in rural areas is difficult to implement effectively [5].

3. Institution Innovations as an Effective Way of Environmental Protection

So-called institution refers to a kind of law, customs, usage, organization or other factors which have been established or come into being gradually in the political or social life of a certain ethnic group. The institutional innovation is to realize social sustainable development and innovation of reform through creating new and effective institutions and regulation systems in the existing context of production and live environment. All these innovations have to rely on institutional innovation and continuing stimulation. According to the notion of sustainable development, the laws related to environmental resources have been revised and formulated in China. Some systems such as control system of pollutant, control system of sources of pollution, system of economic incentives for the prevention of environmental pollution, public anticipation system, system for clean production, environment label system, market-driven system of environmental protection industries and so on through reforming or innovating the environmental protection systems [6]. However, when there are conflicts between environmental protection and economic development, it will be more important to protection environment effectively. Thus how to implement effective innovation on the environment protection and realize environmental protection and sustainable economic development is also the significant social problem for every country in the world to confront with.

3.1. Improving Environmental Protection System and Realizing Institutional Innovation

Strictly speaking, the environmental protection is a whole system, not only includes technologies of environmental protection, investment of environmental protection and policies of environmental protection, but also involves the establishment and improvement of system of environmental regulation. China has established a system of environmental protection standards at both the national and local levels. National-level environmental protection standards include environmental quality standards, pollutant discharge (control) standards, and standards for environmental samples. Local environmental protection standards include environmental quality and

pollutant discharge standards. By the end of 2005, the State had promulgated over 800 national environmental protection standards. The municipalities of Beijing and Shanghai, and the provinces of Shandong and Henan had promulgated over 30 local environmental protection standards [7]. But there are a lot of systematic problems which needs to settle through institutional innovation. These problems include the delimitation of property rights of environmental resources and the development of environmental protection industries. All these systems, alternatives of environmental protection or institutional innovations will basically seek to protect eco-environment effectively.

3.2. Implementing the System of Governmental Leadership and Public Participation

China has implemented an environmental management system, whereby governments at all levels are responsible for the environmental quality of the areas within their jurisdiction, the competent administrative departments in charge of environmental protection have the power of overall supervision and management, while other relevant departments exercise such supervision and management functions according to the provisions of the law. The Chinese government should endeavor to boost public participation in environmental protection. The Environmental Impact Assessment Law requires public participation in the work, and demands appraisal meetings or hearings be held or other forms be taken for any plan or construction project that may cause an unfavorable impact on the environment to collect the opinions of the relevant authorities, experts and the public on the EIA report. In February 2006, the environmental authorities released the Provisional Measures for Public Participation in Environmental Impact Assessment, which clearly stipulates the scope, procedure and form of organization regarding public participation.

Non-governmental organizations and volunteers are an important force in public participation so governments at all levels should fully encourage the development of non-governmental organizations and volunteers and strengthen the function of supervision on environment. Governments also can improve the public environmental

awareness and establish system of public supervision [8].

3.3. Protecting the Environmental Rights of the Public

By the end of 2005, the four municipalities directly under the Central Government, 312 prefecture-level cities, 374 county-level cities and 677 counties had opened hot-lines for environmental pollution reports, covering 69.4 percent of the administrative divisions above the county level. Since 2003, the environmental authorities at various levels have received 1.148 million complaints on environmental pollution through the hot-lines, 97 percent of which have been dealt with, and 80 percent of the people making such complaints in major cities are satisfied with the results. Along with the public's increasing awareness of the importance of protecting the environment and demand for a better environment, the number of complaints lodged by letter or interview about infringements on the people's environment-related rights keeps increasing [9].

However, the environmental rights of the public are not accepted generally by most people in China, due to the weak environmental and legal awareness. In a word, the public will protect their own environmental rights if they participate in environmental protection. When the environmental rights are infringed, people can protect their own rational rights through dispute resolution of environmental dispute or law processes.

3.4. Further Strengthening the Innovation of Laws and Regulations

Over the past two decades, the system of environmental law in China has formed gradually, but some related environmental laws and regulations still should be improved at present. There are some contradictions among environmental laws or regulations, thus a whole environmental protection law should be established as soon as possible.

Although the state has formulated or revised laws on environmental protection, such as those on prevention and control of water pollution, marine environment protection, prevention and control of air pollution, evaluation of environmental impact, and prevention and control of radioactive publication, as well as laws closely related to environmental protection and so on, China should constantly strengthened checks on the

enforcement of environmental legislation, and improved administrative laws enforcement [10]. Especially, China should integrate the present administrative regulations, laws, and environmental policies into an improved environmental law which is convenient to be implemented in rural areas. In the same time, some new laws should also be established, such as the laws on chemical pollution, soil pollution and so on.

3.5. Implementing Strict and Effective System of Environmental Management

The system of environmental management refers to the direct intervention into environmental protection by state political power through the establishment of environmental quality index, legislation and administration. The legal ways of environmental protection include legislation and enforcement. Although the legal ways of environmental protection are not as effective as economic measures, the environmental laws are the only way to realize the aims of public policies in some situations. In addition, as a legalized economy, the realization of the market economy efficiency should depend on perfect laws and regulations. The governments at all levels have played an important role in environmental protection, especially when the legal and economic measures can not correct the undue resources allocation. The administrative measures on environmental protection include investment on environmental protection, supervision and management on environment, comprehensive decision-making mechanism on eco-environment construction, the short-term or long-term planning on environmental protection and so on [11].

4. Conclusion

Generally, it is should be fully aware of the grave situation of environmental protection in China's rural areas, because the country is now at a stage of accelerated industrialization and urbanization when the contradiction between economic growth and environmental protection is particularly prominent. In some rural areas, environmental pollution and ecological deterioration are still very serious. The discharge of major pollutants has surpassed the sustaining capacity of the environment in rural areas. The Chinese

government should mobilize all forces available to solve the pollution problems that are causing serious harm to people's health. Its overriding task in the control and prevention of environmental pollution is to ensure that people have access to safe drinking water. It will take the most stringent measures to dispel potential risks of pollution of the sources of drinking water. The Chinese government should actively speed up “three changes” : First, change from emphasizing economic growth but ignoring environmental protection to emphasizing both environmental protection and economic growth; second, change from environmental protection lagging behind economic growth to synchronizing environmental protection and economic growth; and third, change from mainly employing administrative measures in environmental protection to comprehensive use of legal, economic, technical and necessary administrative measures to solve environmental problems. Economic, social and cultural systems will be established featuring stable economic growth, minimal cost to environmental resources and high awareness of the environment. As regards spatial distribution, economic growth and the sustaining capacity of the environment will be coordinated to form development patterns with their own characteristics. The Chinese government should make sure that the environment is effectively protected in the course of development, and that protective measures will in turn promote development. It will adhere to a policy of safe, clean and resources-efficient development so as to realize a sustainable development.

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