

The Framework for Enhancing Grassroots Social Governance through the Five-Society Linkage

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Abstract: In the current situation where China is vigorously promoting the shift of the focus of social governance to the grassroots level, the "Five-Society Linkage" is a major initiative for innovative research on grassroots social governance models. It aims to establish a new pattern of grassroots social governance characterized by co-construction, co-governance, and shared benefits, which is also the basic direction for advancing the modernization of the community governance system and governance capacity in China. To better utilize the role of the "Five Societies," the main actors should clarify their positions under the unified leadership of the grassroots Party committee and government, and construct a linkage mechanism and action framework with the community as the platform, social organizations as the carriers, social workers as professional support, community volunteers as auxiliaries, and social public welfare and charity resources as supplements. This will help leverage each entity's strengths to meet the diverse needs of residents, provide better services, build harmonious community order, promote good community relations, and drive community development and overall social "good governance" by forming a community of interests.

Keywords: Five-Society Linkage, Grassroots Social Governance, Social Work

1. Introduction

In national governance, the core and most critical aspect is grassroots social governance. Coordinating the balanced development of urban and rural communities and governing various towns and streets is crucial for modernizing the national governance system and capacity. To better implement relevant policies, strengthen the foundation of national governance, enhance governance effectiveness, and address various challenges during social transformation, the country needs to promote and encourage innovation in various grassroots social fields, thereby improving overall grassroots social governance efficiency. In 2021, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the "Opinions on Strengthening the Modernization of the Grassroots Governance System and Capacity," calling for a "mechanism for linking various resources such as social organizations, social workers, volunteers, and public welfare charities," and improving relevant systems and policies for social forces to participate in grassroots social governance. This not only provides a realistic foundation and policy basis for the "Five-Society Linkage" but also makes it a trend in grassroots social governance model innovation.^[1]

However, how to efficiently achieve synergy in community construction, cultivation of social organizations, building a team of social workers, orderly participation of community volunteers, and efficient use of public welfare resources, thus constructing an action framework for grassroots social governance, remains a significant issue that China has been actively exploring without substantial progress or coordinated arrangements in recent years. Based on this, this paper attempts to answer this question from the perspective of the "Five-Society Linkage."^[2]

2. Basic Connotation of the "Five-Society Linkage"

The "Five-Society Linkage" aims to promote interaction among multiple grassroots entities by addressing community issues, meeting residents' needs, providing diverse services, encouraging residents' participation in community construction, enhancing residents' cohesion, and ultimately achieving good community governance. The linkage in the "Five-Society Linkage" refers to the interaction among five elements: community, social organizations, social workers, community volunteers, and social charity resources. "Linkage" denotes the complementary, cooperative, and

interactive relationships among these elements, with "link" as the foundation, goal, and direction, and "action" as the process, result, and innovation.^[3]

Currently, scholars believe that the "Three-Society Linkage" mechanism mainly includes cooperation mechanisms, coordination mechanisms, and collaboration mechanisms. Most categorize social work actions into service governance and support construction strategies, primarily exploring them theoretically with a lack of empirical research. Therefore, this paper will specifically elaborate on the action framework of the "Five-Society Linkage" assisting grassroots social governance.

3. The Role of the "Five-Society Linkage" in Assisting Grassroots Social Governance

3.1. Leveraging the Community's Coordinating and Leading Role

The community, as the most basic unit of society, plays an important role in social governance innovation. As the basic space and field for people's daily activities and the fundamental unit of national governance and social construction, the community acts as the nerve fibers linking the Party, the government, and the public. It is also a key platform for continuous social governance innovation.

In the framework of the "Five-Society Linkage," the "community" is an essential component, typically referring to the most grassroots organizations, namely community Party organizations and residents' committees. Due to their special political identity, these organizations have advantages in resident recognition, information acquisition, and basic resources, playing a role in coordinating and guiding other governance entities. Therefore, the Party and the state propose the "Five-Society Linkage" initiative, aiming to scientifically guide social organizations, social workers, and volunteers, effectively utilize community public welfare resources in community management and services, and achieve positive interaction and complementarity among social organization groups and various governance entities. Practical implementation can be carried out in the following aspects:

In practice, grassroots governments should give full play to the leading and exemplary role of community party organizations, and encourage other community governance entities to continuously gather on community platforms, which can provide strong support for the construction of grassroots social governance communities.^[4]

On one hand, the Party organization should establish a diversified democratic decision-making and discussion system and build an organizational platform for the "Five-Society Linkage" to provide institutional guarantees for resource integration. On the other hand, the residents' committee, as the "mouthpiece" of the residents, should actively listen to residents' voices, turn their diverse and individualized needs into specific projects for the government to purchase and social organizations and social workers to execute, and monitor and evaluate the processes and outcomes. Additionally, the community should actively cultivate community social organizations, mobilize community volunteers, absorb community public welfare and charity resources, and provide social work services based on professional social work theories and methods, transforming these organizations into a part of the professional social work talent pool.

3.2. Utilizing Social Organizations as Carriers

In the process of strengthening community governance system construction, social organizations are crucial for providing public services, improving community governance mechanisms, reflecting residents' demands, and promoting community construction. Therefore, the cultivation and development of social organizations have become fundamental tasks in modern social governance. Social organizations are key participants in grassroots social governance, effectively serving as carriers for innovative public service supply models. They can maximize social vitality and fully unleash social space.^[5]

Due to their non-profit nature, strong professionalism, flexible structure, and high autonomy, social organizations have unique advantages in providing public services and cultivating civic virtue. Specifically, they can be strengthened in the following areas:

First of all, grassroots governments or political governments can enhance the vitality of social organizations in undertaking government functions, participating in community governance, providing residents' services, and promoting community development through government procurement of services, public welfare entrepreneurship projects, and social organization service contracts.

Second, grassroots governments should enhance the overall strength of social organizations at the grassroots level, especially in government public welfare and public service projects.

Thirdly, from a long-term perspective, social organizations should provide more in-depth and meticulous services to meet the diverse and individualized needs of contemporary society. They should also mobilize residents to actively participate in community construction, enhance residents' enthusiasm for participation, cultivate residents' sense of social responsibility, and strengthen residents' autonomy, which is essential for promoting healthy community development.

3.3. Strengthening the Supporting Role of Social Work

Social work talent, as an important pillar of the "Five-Society Linkage," provides professional social work knowledge support and resource connections for community residents, holding significant importance. Professor Wang Sibin from the Department of Sociology at Peking University stated that "the core advantage of social work lies in its value of helping people help themselves, its scientific and pragmatic theoretical knowledge, and its working methods."

Social work inherently possesses the professional characteristics of "serving at the grassroots, rooted in the front line, and close to the people," as well as professional traits like psychological counseling, emotional comfort, functional restoration, and social integration. Promoting the professionalization and vocationalization of social work has greatly contributed to adjusting social relations, restoring social functions, alleviating social conflicts, promoting social integration, and enhancing social governance capacity.^[6]

Firstly, social work emphasizes tapping into the potential of those being helped, stimulating their intrinsic motivation, and focusing on team empowerment and self-management capability development.

Secondly, social work methods are scientific. Social workers tailor services to the personalized needs of service recipients, set overall and specific goals, customize plans, design activities, link resources, and supervise and evaluate service projects, enabling them to identify and solve problems in a targeted manner.

Finally, social work can promote the participation and cooperation of multiple governance entities. Under the action mechanism of the "Five-Society Linkage," social work serves the community by cultivating social organizations, developing volunteers, and helping residents, which inevitably attracts more community stakeholders, facilitating better communication and understanding, thereby accelerating the integration and utilization of management resources.^[7]

3.4. Mobilizing the Participatory Advantages of Volunteers

Community volunteers are individuals who utilize their expertise to contribute their time and resources to social volunteer services within urban and rural communities. They are rooted in the community, understand residents' needs, and have a broad grassroots foundation and local advantages, acting as "conveners" in the "Five-Society Linkage" and providing crucial talent support.

Most importantly, community volunteer service can continuously leverage their advantages while also increasing residents' participation, fostering a sense of ownership and volunteer spirit among the public, and establishing a multi-entity cooperative and interactive governance model, thus promoting the construction of China's social governance community.

Compared to the overall guiding function of community "two committees" in social governance, social organizations and social workers are more professionally distinctive, while volunteers are more mobilizing and grassroots-oriented. Social workers and volunteers are highly complementary, and their interaction and mutual assistance can improve the quality and efficiency of volunteer services and structurally enhance volunteer services. On one hand, community volunteers can expand their services under the professional guidance of social workers. On the other hand, the professional services of social workers can also be expanded through the assistance of volunteers.

First of all, in terms of volunteer management, grassroots governments should establish a professional volunteer team, improve the service ability of volunteers, and provide them with professional training.

Secondly, establish volunteer management systems and norms. The community should establish a

sound volunteer management system, formulate effective mechanisms for volunteer recruitment, training, service, assessment, and incentive, and gradually standardize volunteer service behavior to ensure long-term and effective volunteer services.^[8]

By mobilizing the enthusiasm of residents to participate, the government encourages volunteers to bring their families and friends to participate in volunteer services, creating an atmosphere of "whole-of-society volunteering". Community social organizations and social workers should guide and train community volunteers to form a diverse volunteer team, including residents, organizations, units, and various enterprises in the community. The government has further promoted the professionalization and institutionalization of volunteer service by building a team of professional volunteers to improve the service capacity of community volunteers.

3.5. Efficient Use of Social Public Welfare and Charity Resources

With the continuous deepening of the development of public welfare and charity organizations, the positive effects of these organizations participating in community construction and social governance have become increasingly apparent. The significant feature of social public welfare and charity resources in assisting grassroots social governance is that they effectively serve as supplementary resources for grassroots social governance entities, bridging the gaps left by government social services and meeting residents' growing demands for a better life.

First, the government should integrate public welfare resources and support the main body of the "five societies" to give full play to their respective advantages. Establish an effective linkage mechanism, strengthen cooperation among public welfare and charitable organizations, optimize the allocation of resources, and avoid waste and duplication of work.^[9]

Second, the government shall establish and improve mechanisms for the management of public welfare and charitable resources. The community should establish an effective management system for public welfare and charity resources to ensure their standardized, transparent, and efficient use, enhancing the credibility of public welfare and charity organizations.

Third, government departments shall encourage public interest charitable organizations to carry out diversified services. These organizations should fully leverage their advantages in terms of resources, specialization, and flexibility to provide diversified and personalized services for community residents. This includes carrying out poverty alleviation, educational assistance, medical and health services, elderly care, and other public welfare projects, actively promoting community cultural construction, and enhancing the cultural soft power of the community.

Finally, social organizations and governments should mobilize and encourage community residents to participate in public welfare and charitable activities. The community should create a good atmosphere that values public welfare and charity, encourage residents to actively participate in related activities, and promote the spirit of "everyone participates, everyone benefits." This not only meets the material and spiritual needs of residents but also strengthens community cohesion and fosters a sense of belonging among residents, laying a solid foundation for the modernization of grassroots social governance.^[10]

4. Conclusion

In summary, the "Five-Society Linkage" is an innovative measure for grassroots social governance. Under the unified leadership of grassroots Party committees and governments, it constructs a linkage mechanism and action framework with the community as the platform, social organizations as carriers, social workers as professional support, community volunteers as auxiliaries, and social public welfare and charity resources as supplements. This mechanism helps leverage each entity's strengths, meets the diverse needs of residents, provides better services, builds harmonious community order, promotes good community relations, and drives community development and overall social "good governance." By forming a community of interests, it effectively enhances the grassroots social governance system and governance capacity, providing new ideas and methods for the modernization of grassroots social governance in China.

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