

The Fulfillment of Government Responsibilities in the Collaborative Governance of Rural Water Pollution

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Abstract

Rural environmental pollution is becoming more and more serious, which has become an important problem to be solved urgently in our country under the background of the new era. Protecting the ecological environment is one of the important functions of the government, and protecting the rural water environment is the unshirkable responsibility of the local governments. As the main body of rural water pollution control, how to define and fulfill the local governments' responsibilities is of great significance to the advancement of the overall governance work. This paper starts from the local governments, which are the important main body of rural environmental governance. By comparing the similarities and differences between the performance of government responsibilities under the traditional governance model and the collaborative governance model, clarifies the governance responsibilities of the local governments. And further explores the effective measures for the government to play the main role, fulfill the main responsibilities, and participate in the collaborative governance of rural water pollution.

Keywords

Fulfillment of Government Responsibilities, Rural Water Pollution, Collaborative Governance

1. Introduction

Steadily promoting the improvement of the rural living environment is an important step in building a livable, business-friendly, harmonious and beautiful countryside, and it is also the key to building a modern socialist country in an all-round way. In December 2021, the General Office of the Central Committee

of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the “*Five-Year Action Plan for Improving Rural Living Environment (2021-2025)*”. The plan points out that it is necessary to clarify the responsibilities of local governments, responsible departments, and operational management units, and basically establish a long-term management and protection mechanism for rural living environment with systems, standards, teams, funds, and supervision.

Rural environmental pollution is becoming more and more serious, and water pollution control has become the top priority of the government’s environmental governance work. As the main body of rural water pollution control, how to define and fulfill the local governments’ responsibilities is of great significance to the advancement of the overall governance work. Fu Wenfeng *et al.* believe that the lack of main body of governance is the root cause of the ineffective rural water pollution control, and the government-led rural environmental governance model should be rethought [1].

Based on this, this article starts from the local governments, which are the important main body of governance, compares the similarities and differences between different governance models, to clarify the responsibility and role of local governments in the collaborative governance of rural water pollution, and to explore the effective measures for the government to fulfill the main responsibilities, and participate in the collaborative governance of rural water pollution.

2. Literature Reviews

Many scholars have conducted research on the legal norms and evaluation of government responsibility. The ambiguity and deviation in the positioning of governments’ responsibilities will affect the fulfillment of its responsibilities [2]. Liu Zhiren and Wang Jiaqi focused on the legislative perspective, explored the problems in the regulation and practice of the government’s ecological and environmental responsibility in the Yellow River Basin, and put forward the legal structure of responsibility practice [3]. Yan Jin preliminarily constructed a local governments’ environmental responsibility performance evaluation index system on the basis of scientificity, systematization, dynamics and measurability, enriched the content of local governments’ environmental responsibility performance evaluation, and encouraged local governments to carry out faster and better rural water pollution control [4].

From the perspective of collaborative governance, some scholars continuously improve research on accountability mechanisms and main bodies of governance. Yan Yunqiu explored the “non-synergy” of corporates’ and governments’ environmental responsibilities from six aspects, and put forward effective suggestions for building an environmental responsibility mechanism for both parties [5]. Huang Xisheng and He Jiang believed that the current environmental responsibility system does not match the supply and demand, and proposed to build and improve the environmental governance system of “governments and

corporates share the same responsibilities” on the basis of specific guiding ideology and principles [6]. The modes of multi-bodies collaborative governance are not the same. The choice of the main body should be combined with practical problems and adapt to local conditions. A more refined division of main body is sometimes more conducive to clearing and holding responsibilities. Jiang Yufeng analyzed the differentiation and diversification of the rights and objectives of rural governance subjects, and proposed the path to realize multi-subject collaborative rural governance from the aspects of value objectives and system design of collaborative governance [7]. Du Zhimin and Kang Fang focused on the practical dilemma of collaborative governance of multi-bodies, and proposed to build a multi-governance system with grassroots governments, Chinese Communist Party branch committees and village self-government committees, rural elites and ordinary villagers as the main bodies [8].

At present, the academia research on government’s environmental responsibility mostly focuses on the legislative level, institutional level, the norms of responsibility, the evaluation of performance, etc., and there are few studies that analyze the performance of the government’s specific responsibilities in rural water pollution control. Although the research from the perspective of collaborative governance of multi-bodies affirms the role of local governments in rural water pollution control, the researches on the definition of specific governance responsibilities and implementation methods are still relatively vague.

3. Fulfillment of Governments’ Responsibilities under Different Modes

The status of the government in social governance is self-evident. It is the key main body of diversified governance of rural water pollution. The definition and fulfillment of local governments’ environmental responsibilities is the key to improving the rural water environment and accelerating the construction of beautiful countryside. Government responsibilities can be mainly divided into two parts: “responsibilities to be fulfilled” and “responsibilities to be assumed”. As the name suggests, “responsibilities to be fulfilled” refers to the responsibilities that the government should fulfill in order to achieve the goals of rural water pollution control. “Responsibilities to be assumed” refers to the responsibilities that should be borne when the government doesn’t do its job effectively, and the governance work fails to achieve the expected results or produces adverse effects.

3.1. Fulfillment of Governments’ Responsibilities under the Traditional Governance Model

Traditionally, rural water pollution control is a governance model that is purely government-led, only the government follows the lead, and there is a lack of communication between various main bodies. Under this governance model, local governments mainly adopt rigid control methods when performing their

own responsibilities, such as rigid assessment and regulations [9].

Rigid administrative assessment is mainly manifested in the top-level design based on environmental governance, the higher-level government communicates the relevant policies and goals of rural water pollution control to the local governments in accordance with the instructions of the central government, and sets a series of strict administrative assessment standards for the effect of the grass-roots government's later-stage governance. Local governments usually pay more attention to the assessment indicators and ignore real governance goals, turning the abstract work of governance into a "digital" examination. Relying on their own authoritative status, the local governments constantly exert pressure on the peasants, forcing them to quickly solve the pollution sources in a short period of time, forcing farmers to install a piece of expensive pollution control equipment. Using various simple but crude methods to meet quantitative standards. Therefore, the formalism of dealing with inspections is gradually spreading among the peasant groups.

Rigid administrative regulations are manifested in the local regulations on pollution control promulgated by the government, which stipulate a large number of "prohibited things", which not only restrain the main role of farmers, restrict the behavior of farmers, but also consume the enthusiasm of farmers to participate in rural water pollution control. In addition, local governments will be lazy in oversimplifying higher-level policies and one-sidedly interpreting higher-level regulations. Ignoring local actual conditions, abusing typical governance models and pollution control methods. "One size fits all" for polluting enterprises, reducing local pollution index by shutting down and rectifying. In the traditional governance model, local governments are used to dealing with problems in a rigid manner, enterprises and farmers are also accustomed to participate passively driven by the government.

The government takes its own decision as the guide, ignores the actual needs of other main bodies, ignores the response to the demands of the main bodies, and makes other main bodies lose the vitality and motivation to reflect their opinions and self-interest demands. There is little interaction between the local governments and other main bodies of enterprises and farmers, and the power of each main body cannot be effectively integrated. It is neglected that pluralistic co-governance is a good strategy to give full play to the main power of all parties, resulting in waste of resources.

In this model, the division of responsibilities between different levels of government is emphasized, orders are often issued quickly and efficiently, the governance cycle is short, and there are traces of accountability. However, governments at the same level or departments within the government stick to their own responsibility boundaries, lack the overall awareness of environmental governance, and cannot achieve effective linkage. Although it has the advantages of rationality and high efficiency, there are also problems that need to be improved [10].

3.2. Fulfillment of Governments' Responsibilities under the Collaborative Governance Model

Rural water pollution control under collaborative governance is a governance model that is led by the government, with enterprises as the main body, and follows the principle of the supremacy of farmers. Under this governance model, local governments pay more attention to playing their overall guiding role when fulfilling their responsibilities.

As the backbone of the rural water pollution control work, the government's overall planning of the overall work is the most critical link. From the vertical perspective, the central government plans the layout from the long-term perspective of environmental development, and conducts top-level design from the aspects of laws and systems to provide powerful institutional, financial and technical support for lower-level governments. Local governments formulate more specific and detailed governance plans according to local conditions, based on higher-level planning. The overall governance process has clear governance goals, but unlike the traditional governance model, there is no distorted administrative assessment under the collaborative governance model, and governance does not look at the surface but the actual effect. From the horizontal perspective, various departments within the local governments actively cooperate to assist the implementation of specific plans in terms of finance, resources, and technology. Multi-body collaborative governance is truly implemented in all aspects of governance work, and full linkage and coordination can be achieved between all levels and departments within the government.

The effective performance of government responsibilities under the collaborative governance model is absolutely inseparable from the active participation of other main bodies.

Enterprises are an effective force to promote the vigorous development of the national economy and an important main body of ecological civilization construction. In the rural environmental system, enterprises are not only an important main body of environmental pollution, but also an essential role in environmental governance. The main bodies of enterprises in rural water pollution control should include not only the enterprises that pollute the rural water environment, that is, "polluters", but also the enterprises that provide various supports for water pollution control, that is, "governors". Different from the traditional governance model, the local governments under the collaborative governance model changes the original control method, that is, "one size fits all", giving priority to guidance and supplemented by punishment, distinguishing enterprises that play different roles, and using different methods to guide enterprises to participate in rural water pollution control. Through publicity and education, help polluting enterprises change their concepts of economic development, strengthen the implementation of the concept of green development in their production, provide certain technical support and financial support for them, and help enterprises decreases emissions of pollutants from the source. By

guiding the communication between enterprises which governance pollution and farmers, it helps enterprises understand the gaps in farmers' actual needs, precisely improve their technical capabilities, establish a good image, give play to brand effects, and realize the double harvest of technology and word of mouth, obtain considerable economic benefits while helping farmers to control pollution accurately, and achieve a win-win situation on the basis of a game of interests.

Farmers are the main force in rural social production and life, and they are an indispensable and important main body in the rural environmental system. Water pollution has a direct impact on farmers' life. Farmers play multiple roles in the process of rural water pollution control. Farmers are not only the "manufacturers" of pollution, but also the "governors" of environmental pollution. They are also the "beneficiaries" of environmental improvement [11]. The willingness and effectiveness of farmers' participation in governance has a direct impact on the progress of water pollution governance. Under the traditional governance model, the rigid control of local governments makes farmers lack the enthusiasm to participate in governance, resulting in passive participation of farmers. The local governments under the collaborative governance model pay attention to playing their own overall role, attach importance to the key position of farmers as the main body of the rural areas, and strive to mobilize farmers' enthusiasm for actively participating in rural water pollution control through various methods. Together with all walks of life, innovate the models of publicity and education, explore new methods of publicity and education, increase the publicity of environmental protection knowledge, broaden the channels for farmers to broadly understand environmental protection knowledge, and convey more environmental protection knowledge to them in a way that farmers like to hear. Helping farmers change their inherent concepts and increasing their enthusiasm for participating in governance.

Local governments under the collaborative governance model actively play the role of "leader" in the process of rural water pollution control. Clarifying their responsibilities of environmental governance, and doing a good job in overall planning and governance matters. Paying attention to guiding the communication between different main bodies, listening to different voices extensively, trying to integrate the demands of different main bodies, and actively responding to the governance needs of different main bodies. Striving to maximize the benefits, trying not to cross the boundary, and not to fail in responsibility.

4. Effective Measures for Local Governments to Fulfill Their Responsibilities

4.1. Correcting the Government's Cognitive Bias in Fulfilling Its Responsibilities

Wrong forms and concepts of responsibility performance such as passive performance are constantly eroding the sense of responsibility of local governments. It is imperative to change the concept of government's responsibility perfor-

mance and strive to create a “promising government” [12]. The evolution and development of forms such as negative responsibility performance mainly come from the extremely single and superficial method of performance appraisal. In this method, although local governments carry out water pollution control work, they still regard the level of economic development as the ultimate goal. Getting themselves tickets to promotion by achieving rapid economic growth, leading to serious deviations in the perception of responsibility.

4.1.1. Innovating the Way of Government Performance Evaluation

One of the effective ways to correct the above-mentioned cognitive deviation is to innovate the way of government performance evaluation, change the wrong concept of political performance of local governments, and establish a correct concept of responsibility fulfillment. Abolishing the old promotion-based assessment mechanism and choose more scientific and reasonable assessment indicators [13]. Then, it is necessary to clarify the government’s tasks in collaborative governance, establish a correct concept of responsibility performance, and create a stable environment for the collaborative governance of rural water pollution.

4.1.2. Establishing a Correct Concept of Resource Allocation

When the government fulfills its own governance responsibilities, it must establish a correct concept of resource allocation, the limited resources for pollution control should be used correctly, well, and practically. Resources should not be excessively allocated to projects that can improve the level of economic development but inhibit the long-term development of the ecological environment. The government should follow the principle of fairness to maximize the use of limited resources in the process of collaborative governance of rural water pollution. According to the actual pollution situation of the local area and the government’s governance capacity, the resources for pollution control should be allocated reasonably, the local governments’ excessive dependence on the higher-level governments should be weakened, the governance capacity of the local governments should be exercised, and the efficiency of pollution control should be improved.

4.2. Improving the Restraint Mechanism of the Government’s Responsibility Performance and Standardizing Its Behavior

The effectiveness of local governments’ decision-making is of great significance to the fulfillment of its responsibilities, and decision-making deviations will affect the realization of the ultimate policy goals. Standardizing the decision-making behavior of local governments and formulating precise policies for water pollution control is a key step for the government to effectively fulfill its responsibilities.

4.2.1. Accelerating the Innovation of Local Governments’ Decision-Making Mechanism

Accelerating the innovation of local governments’ decision-making mechanism. On the basis of establishing local officials’ concept of the scientific decision-making, improving the decision-making mechanism and standardizing the decision-making

procedures, and better carrying out rural water pollution control [14]. To build a whole-process constraint system for government's decision-making, create multiple outlets for the expression of the main body's demands for water pollution control, open up supervision channels for multiple main body, and use the government information platform to summarize effective information.

In the stage of policy formulation, integrating multiple demands, listening to the actual needs of farmers for rural water pollution control, and at the same time paying attention to the difficulties and needs of enterprises in the process of pollution control, condensing the common interests of the main body, and forming a reasonable plan that can meet the interests of most main bodies.

In the stage of policy implementation, opening the complaint mailbox to listen to the evaluation opinions and suggestions of various parties on the implemented policies, and to improve the policies about water pollution control in a timely manner. Strengthening the openness of government affairs in the whole process of decision-making, making government's decision-making open, transparent, and consciously accept the supervision from other main bodies.

At the same time, all departments in government should integrate ecological concepts into the whole process of decision-making, and fully consider the ecological consequences of decision-making, not just economic results. While emphasizing the correctness of decision-making, efficiency should not be neglected. We should give full play to the advantages of the chief executive responsibility system, and improve the efficiency of government's decision-making on the basis of emphasizing public opinion.

4.2.2. Strengthening the Construction of Multiple Normative System

Strengthening the construction of a multiple normative system for the fulfillment of government responsibilities, and building a new accountability system. Emphasizing the important role of other main bodies in collaborative governance, taking enterprises and farmers as the judges of the fulfillment of government responsibilities, and changing the status quo of local governments' performance of responsibility that only favors the top and not the bottom. At the same time, higher-level governments should pay attention to the standardization and fairness of accountability to local governments [15]. After accepting accountability, local governments can trace the causes of adverse consequences to other main bodies, but they cannot shirk their responsibilities, and must be brave enough to take responsibility. At the same time, the effective accountability of other responsible entities by local governments is also the key to fulfilling their own responsibilities and promoting rural water pollution control. Local governments should continue to strengthen their actual effectiveness in pursuing accountability.

4.3. Strengthening the Cooperation and Exchanges and Building a Community of Responsibility Fulfillment

Modern rural environmental governance should not be confined to the govern-

ment, a certain enterprise or a certain group. Everyone is an essential part of the ecosystem, and no one can be immune to ecological environment problems. In the process of rural water pollution control, we should not rely too much on the local governments to drive the overall work of rural water pollution control. Instead, we should strengthen the coordination and cooperation of multiple main body on the basis of giving full play to the government's overall planning and guiding role, and build a community of responsibility fulfillment. It is necessary to pay attention to the effective connection of the responsibility boundaries of different main bodies, and strengthen the two-way and multi-directional interaction between the government and the government, the government and the enterprises, the government and the farmers, the enterprises and the farmers, and the three parties.

1) Effective interaction among governments

Different levels of governments should pay attention to the uploading and distributing of pollution control information.

Governments at the same level are supposed to strengthen resources sharing, improve the utilization efficiency of pollution control resources, and avoid vicious competition among governments. Governments at the same level should also strengthen learning and exchanges, learn governance models together, discover commonalities and differences with typical cases, find effective governance methods suitable for the local area, and realize cross-regional linkage governance under possible conditions.

Various departments within the government must also clarify their responsibilities and actively cooperate to help implement specific plans in terms of finance, resources, and technology. Reasonably planing local governments' budgets, increasing income and reducing expenditures, preventing and resolving local governments' contradictions between fiscal revenue and expenditure, paying attention to the construction of hematopoietic projects for rural water pollution control, providing more pragmatic grassroots cadres and professionals for rural areas, and providing more comprehensive support for rural water pollution control.

2) Interaction between the government and enterprises

The government strives to fulfill its responsibilities, exerts its coordinating role in governance work, and provides strong support for technological innovation and talent introduction of enterprises. Enterprises should also respond to the government's requests with a proactive attitude and make good use of the resources provided by the government. Both the government and the enterprise should actively communicate and negotiate with each other when encountering problems.

3) Interaction between the government and farmers

The government pays full attention to the actual needs of farmers in the process of water pollution control, and accurately compensates for the loss of interests to reduce waste of resources. Farmers should also play their main role

in pollution control work, clarify their main responsibilities, reduce emissions consciously, and participate in it actively.

4) Interaction between enterprises and farmers

Both polluting enterprises and pollution control enterprises must pay attention to technological innovation, one is to reduce pollution at the source, and the other is to provide pollution control technologies and measures that are more in line with farmers' wishes in the process, so as to achieve a win-win situation.

5) Cooperation and interaction of the three parties

Efforts should be made to overcome the common and stubborn problems in the process of the tripartite cooperation between the government, enterprises and farmers, preventing the problems in advance and avoiding them reasonably. Pursuing a more refined cooperation mechanism, comprehensively considering the common interests of the three parties, providing channels and platforms for equal communication, building a community of responsibility together, and maximizing benefits through equal cooperation.

5. Results and Discussion

The problem of rural water pollution is a hot topic that is widely concerned by all walks of life. It is urgent to effectively solve the problem of rural water pollution and return the clear water and blue sky to farmers. As the main body of rural water pollution control, the local governments' definition and fulfillment of its responsibilities affect the process of the overall control work.

As mentioned earlier we found that: the rural water pollution control under the traditional model is purely government-led, only the government follows the lead, and there is a lack of communication between the main bodies. Under this governance model, local governments mainly adopt rigid control methods when fulfilling their responsibilities. The rural water pollution control of the collaborative governance model is a governance model that is dominated by the government, takes the enterprise as the main body, and follows the principle of the supremacy of farmers. Under this governance model, local governments pay more attention to playing their overall guiding role when fulfilling their responsibilities.

Additionally, we found the role played by the government under different governance models should not be underestimated, and the specific methods of fulfilling their responsibilities are quite different. By comparing the similarities and differences of government responsibilities under the two models, the governance responsibilities and main roles of local governments are further clarified, and effective measures for local governments to further fulfill their main responsibilities and effectively participate in the collaborative governance of rural water pollution are found, that is, to innovate the way of government performance evaluation and establish a correct concept of responsibility performance. What's more, improving the restraint mechanism of the government's responsibility performance and standardizing the government's behavior of responsibility performance. In addition, strengthening the cooperation and exchanges between

the main bodies to build a community of responsibility fulfillment.

Based on the perspective of collaborative governance, from the view of fulfillment of local governments' responsibilities, this article provides supplementary measures for effective fulfillment of responsibilities in the process of participating in the collaborative governance of rural water pollution, but the content of this article also has shortcomings. First, whether the collaborative governance of water pollution can achieve remarkable results is closely related to the efforts of each main body. This paper only focuses on the analysis of the responsibility fulfillment of the government, ignoring the fulfillment of the responsibilities of other main bodies. In future research, different main bodies such as enterprises, farmers, and social groups should be included in the responsibility system of water pollution control, and the research results of existing literature should be summarized to sort out the different main bodies' responsibility boundaries and clarify their responsibilities. Secondly, this paper does not fully point out the problems existing in the process of fulfilling the responsibilities of the government. In future research, reasonable evaluation indicators should be selected, and practical problems should be listed.

This paper affirms the important position of local governments in rural water pollution control. From the perspective of collaborative governance, it compares the similarities and differences between the fulfillment of government responsibilities under the traditional governance model and the collaborative governance model, and puts forward three effective points for local governments to better perform their responsibilities. These measures have enriched the research on the fulfillment of local governments' responsibilities.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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