

# *Discussion on Promoting the Modernization of the Governance System and Governance Capacity of Township Government*

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**Abstract:** The Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council released a plan on promoting the modernization of the grassroots governance system and governance capability in 2021. The plan pointed out that grassroots governance is the cornerstone of national governance, which is the basic project to realize the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity. As the basic level of China's administrative system, the township government is not only the forefront of the implementation of various reform policies, but also a key link in promoting the modernization of the grassroots governance system and governance capacity. However, in the process of modernization of grassroots governance, the township government faces a series of problems. In order to complete the modernization of the governance system and governance capacity of the township government, this paper explores the existing problems of the township government, and deeply discusses the countermeasures to solve them.

## **1. Introduction**

Township government is the most grassroots political organization in China's national governance system, which has the closest and most extensive contact with the people. Therefore, it is very critical in grassroots governance, and plays a first-line role in promoting the modernization of grassroots governance system and governance capability.[1] The effectiveness of township governance is an important manifestation of the modernization of China's national governance system and governance capacity, which is directly related to the image of the government and affects people's livelihood. In the process of accelerating the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity, work focus and resources have been put to grassroots government, which further improves the efficiency of grassroots governance. Nevertheless, as China's modernization has entered a new stage of development, township government governance faces new situation and challenges. It is of great significance to analyze the new situation and challenges, so as to strengthen the modernization of the governance system and governance capacity of township government.

## **2. Significance of Promoting the Modernization of Grassroots Governance System and Governance Capability**

The implementation of the "Opinions on Promoting the Modernization of the Grassroots Governance System and Governance Capability" aims to strengthen the Party's overall leadership over grassroots governance, and to build an unified grassroots governance system and mechanism containing the Party's leadership, the people's position as masters of the country, and law-based governance. It's crucial to promote the modernization of grassroots governance system and governance capability. First of all, it enhances the people's sense of gain, happiness, and security. In addition, it consolidates the grassroots foundation for the party's long-term governance and the country's long-term stability. Last but not least, it upholds and develops the advantages of the grassroots governance system of socialism with Chinese characteristics. [2]

## **3. Difficulties in Promoting the Modernization of the Governance System and Governance Capacity of Township Government**

As the bottom layer of China's government system, township government is an important part in implementing the party and state policies, which is responsible for the party and government as well as the people at the bottom. Therefore, it takes the leading responsibility in the modernization of the grassroots governance system and governance capacity. However, in practice, due to the lack of self-construction ability, the imperfect assessment and supervision system, the restricted financial system, and the scarcity of talents, the township government is faced with a number of grassroots governance problems.

### **3.1. Outdated Governance Mindset**

It will take a long time for China's township government to transform its mindset from "omnipotent management-oriented government" to "service-oriented government". According to the current situation, there are four deficiencies in the concept of grassroots governance in China's township government. Firstly, governing with interpersonal relationships. For example, in village and group elections, the township government generally takes advantage of interpersonal relationships to lobby, talk to the masses, and gather township cadres, so as to unify their thoughts. Secondly, excessive use of control methods. When it comes to governance, some township governments do not pay attention to service, efficiency and fairness, but management and control. Without the boundary awareness of administrative power, and excessive control over various fields lead to the generalization and abuse of administrative power. Thirdly, limited administrative idea. While performing their duties, some township governments do not respect reality, and ignore diversified and individual needs, which results in the phenomenon of one-size-fits-all. Finally, scanty concept of sustainable development. An important task of the township government is to provide support for economic development, but it may ignore sustainable development when develop the economy. For example, in order to speed up local economic development, some township governments introduced high-polluting and energy-intensive industrial enterprises. [3]

### **3.2. Limited Governance Funds**

The difference between grassroots governance and traditional self-governance or management is that the grassroots government not only plays the role of policy planning and implementation, but absorbs external participants in governance and acts as the coordinator of public resources and public services.[4] With the transformation of government orientation from management-oriented to

service-oriented, the township government as a grassroots political organization has become an important carrier for accomplishing this mission.[5] In this context, the social management functions and public service functions of township governments have expanded, social management has expanded, service concept has been enhanced, and service items have increased, which means that the township government should increase financial investment in social management and public services. Nevertheless, the financial distribution of the township government has not been adjusted with the expansion of governance functions, which has led to increased tension between expanded functions and financial input.

On the one hand, in terms of function distribution, the township government undertakes a large number of social functions, and many kinds of power that should not have been undertaken by township government have been moved down, so its responsibility involves many areas of rural social governance. On the other hand, in terms of financial rights, township-level finance is a typical "eating" type of finance. Regardless of whether it is an infrastructure construction or a people's livelihood project, it is necessary to win the funds and project support from the superior. However, problems such as poor information, weak planning, insufficient scale, and insufficient supporting funds make it difficult for township-level finance to obtain funds. What's worse, the amount of transfer payment allocated to each township government by the higher-level government is limited, which is unable to support the development of various social undertakings and economic development in the villages. The problem that township government expenditures are highly dependent on financial transfer payments, and the township government lacks financial autonomy makes the township government basically become the "executive department" of the county-level government.[6] This also leads to the phenomenon that the township government does not willing to report its problems. Because even if it reports problems truthfully, the higher-level department does not provide financial support, so the township government needs to solve the problem by itself. The township government lacks funds and cannot solve the problems. As a result, many problems it faces have not been truly responded to and dealt with.

### **3.3. Poor Governance Environment**

As the lowest level of China's governance system, the township government is facing not only heavy administrative pressure and diverse social needs, but also unfair treatment and frequent assessment, which has brought great pressure for the township cadres, and affected the effectiveness of the township governance.

#### **3.3.1. Heavy Task and Great Responsibility in Township Governance**

For one thing, due to the limited authorized strength of township governments and the frequent transfer and secondment of higher-level agencies, township personnel are stretched thin. Faced with various development and governance tasks assigned by superiors, township cadres are often overwhelmed, and one person has several jobs, thus have brought greater work pressure for them. For another, due to the vague definition of the functions and the weakening of the powers of the township government, the township cadres have limited power but bear great responsibility. In administrative practice, county and district governments and their functional departments often squeeze a large number of assessment indicators and tasks to township governments. They carry a large number of affairs such as investment promotion, social security, people's livelihood services, comprehensive stability maintenance, safety production supervision, food safety, etc. The phenomenon of a needle below and a thousand lines above is formed. However, the administrative power, especially the administrative law enforcement power, has not been delegated, and still

belongs to the functional departments of the county and district. This contradiction has seriously affected the normal township work to a certain extent.[7]

### **3.3.2. Unreasonable Treatment and Frequent Assessment in Township Governance**

On the one hand, due to the lack of an effective salary mechanism that is balanced with the level of economic development and the intensity of grassroots work, the salary of township cadres cannot be improved in time. When the income is relatively lower compared with people in other industries, township cadres will inevitably feel unfair and anxious. Besides, township cadres are difficult to be promoted, which makes some aspiring township cadres gradually lose their passion and motivation to work at the township government, and appear content with the status quo and absent-minded towards work. On the other hand, with the advancement of the construction of a service-oriented government that the people are satisfied with, the central government has also strengthened the assessment and supervision of local governments. Although the intention of assessment and supervision is to promote the implementation of various policies at the local government and provide better public services for the people, some higher-level organs shift their responsibilities down and pay too much attention to the results. Consequently, "responsibility letters" are signed by the township government at every turn, and all the tasks assigned by the higher-level organs are handed over to the grassroots level, which further increases the work burden of the township government. Faced with the stress, some township cadres have been in a state of psychological tension for a long time, and the effectiveness of the township governance has been greatly reduced.

### **3.4. Unclear Governance Policy**

The bureaucracy caused the failure of information transmission due to the long hierarchical chain, which in turn affected the efficiency of decision-making and execution. It is reflected in the governance of the township government as follows:

First, many top-down departmental policies and tasks are vague and principled. Some governance systems have abstract goals and lack operational details. For example, in 2017, the central government issued the "Opinions on Strengthening the Service Capacity Building of the Township Government", which aims to promote the modernization of the township governance system and governance capacity, and improve the modern public service capacity of the township government. However, some requirements are too principled and broad to take into practice. The central government emphasizes satisfying the people's yearning for a better life, while the township government misunderstands it as a "nanny-type government". This contradiction makes it difficult to transform the service functions of the township government.

The second is that the "large department" type of institutions only remains in form. China's early reforms have optimized and adjusted the township party and government institutions and the administrative institutions. From the perspective of standardizing institutional settings and integrating management resources, these reforms are very necessary. But in practice, some township governments still divide their internal offices independently in order to facilitate their work, which is not conducive to the communication and implementation of various policies.

## **4. Countermeasures for Promoting the Modernization of the Governance System and Governance Capacity of Township Government**

Township government is an irreplaceable part of the administrative system, which plays an important role in communicating information, conveying policies, allocating resources and organizing the masses. [8] Based on the analysis of the above-mentioned grassroots governance

problems faced by the township government, we can effectively relieve the pressure of grassroots cadres and further enhance grassroots governance capability from the following aspects.

#### **4.1. Modernize the Governance Mindset**

First of all, change the governance mindset of township cadres by eradicating the "official-based" value of township cadres, strengthening the awareness of serving the people wholeheartedly, and developing a positive view of political achievements. Next, strengthen the training and use of township cadres. In the process of the transformation of township government functions, it is necessary for township governments to cultivate and use high-quality comprehensive talents. Township governments should raise their assessment criteria when selecting and recruiting talents, and carry out corresponding training timely after recruitment, so as to improve the quality of township cadres, which will help speed up the modernization of the governance system and governance capacity of township government.

#### **4.2. Allocate Governance Resources to the Grassroots**

Sufficient governance resources such as human, materials, and finances should be allocated to the grassroots level, so that the township government can carry out work more efficiently. Since the reform and opening up, the township government has undertaken more and more public services, social security and other affairs, and many township government departments have the functions and tasks to directly serve the people's livelihood. In order to better serve the people's livelihood and maximize the convenience of the people, governance resources should be distributed to the grassroots to ensure the expansion of the functions of the grassroots regime. It is necessary to focus on public services, innovate service methods, and provide high-quality governance resources, so as to promote the modernization and transformation of township government functions.

#### **4.3. Improve the Governance Environment**

China's current administrative system and its operation process urgently need reform and innovation. With the continuous advancement of the comprehensively deepening reform, it is necessary to continuously improve the power and responsibility system that matches the reality of the grassroots level, so as to reduce the burden on the township government. What's more, it is vital to improve the cadres' incentive and guarantee system and create a good governance environment.

#### **4.4. Strengthen the Smart Governance Capacity**

Make use of modern science and technology, such as digital and information technology to conduct intelligent governance at the grassroots level. Firstly, promote the construction of a grassroots governance platform featuring grid management, refined services, information support, and openness and sharing. Besides, focus on integrating data resources. On the basis of comprehensive collection, improve basic data such as township and village geographic information, promote the sharing of grassroots governance data, and promote "Internet + grassroots governance". At last, taking into account the fact that the elderly and some vulnerable groups are not used to and cannot use modern technological means, the necessary offline service channels are reserved.

## 5. Conclusion

In a word, in the context of the modernization of China's national governance, advancing the modernization of township government governance faces corresponding challenges. In order to strengthen the modernization of grassroots governance, the township government should focus on the sinking of governance power and governance resources, improve the township cadre training and selection mechanism, build a smart governance model, and implement modern governance concepts, so as to promote the modernization of the governance system and governance capacity of township government.

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