

Social Assistance in Response to Cross-domain Public Crises: Dilemmas and Relief

Zhenhui Liu

*School of Government, Yunnan University, Kunming, Yunnan, 650000, China
liuzhenhuiynu@foxmail.com*

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Abstract: The suddenness and complexity of cross-border public crisis events bring new ordeals to social assistance, and also provide opportunities to improve the governance capacity of social assistance system. Improving social assistance in cross-domain public crisis events as soon as possible, enhancing its emergency response ability, making it better adapt to economic development and meet the urgent needs of the people, is the first mission in front of our country. Taking the social assistance measures taken during the cross-regional public health crisis event as an example, this paper analyzes and finds that social assistance has realistic difficulties in dealing with cross-regional public crisis events, such as lagging legislation, fragmented governance, insufficient multiple aid forces, and inadequate assistance services and so on, and simultaneously puts forward alleviate strategies to shift towards rule of law assistance, integrated assistance, diversified assistance, and service-oriented assistance.

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the "instability" of the social environment has coexisted with the "rapid development" of the economy and society [1]. From the "SARS" incident in 2003 to the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, the snow and ice disaster in southern China, the international economic and financial crisis, and the recent major public health events, public crises have occurred frequently. It has brought great instability to the economic and social development of China and even the world, and profoundly affected people's lives. In the face of the deep evolution of global risk society, the frequent occurrence and superposition of cross-regional public crises, as well as the complexity of emergency management problems and the systematization of governance needs, researchers have paid more and more attention to how to ensure the basic people's livelihood in the event of cross-regional public crises and alleviate the destructive power and impact of cross-regional public crises on economic and social development. From the existing research results, most researchers have reached a consensus that social security is a stabilizer and safety net of the society and plays an irreplaceable role in public crisis management. Social security in crisis management, it has multiple functions such as prevention, relief, stability [2], reducing overall social risks, ensuring basic living needs, and consolidating social forces[3]. Social security projects such as social insurance and social assistance can provide economic support, service supply and

spiritual comfort to the hard-hit groups affected by the crisis, disperse and defuse social risks for the masses, and thus maintain social stability and economic development. [1] Existing studies have shown that the assistance provided by the state is the most important way to compensate the losses of victims in public emergencies [4]. In the post-recovery and reconstruction of medical and health emergency management, the comprehensive evaluation index of social security dimension is the highest [5]. It is obvious that in public emergencies, people are more acceptable to the basic living security provided by the government. However, most existing studies have explored the emergency mechanism for social security to participate in public crisis management from the perspective of social security and disaster relief. Faced with the trend of cross-regional increase of public crisis, few scholars have specifically discussed the participation of social assistance in cross-regional public crisis management. As an important part of social security, social assistance bears the functions of emergency relief and lifeline. However, in the face of the multiple characteristics of rapid development of public crisis events, multiple cross-domains, great damage and wide impact, as well as the emergence of new groups in need, some projects in social assistance emergency measures are not adaptable, focusing on the covered groups in need and failing to provide adequate protection. The function of social assistance in promoting cross-domain public crisis management cannot be fully reflected due to the lack of stable scientific connection between rescue resources and stability and emergency response [3]. Therefore, it is urgent to improve the emergency governance ability of social assistance to cope with major cross-domain public emergencies, and better protect people's livelihood are theoretical and practical problems that need to be solved. Based on this, on the basis of reviewing and analyzing existing research, actual needs and development trends, this paper takes the main emergency measures of social assistance taken in major public crises as practical cases to analyze the dilemma of social assistance participating in emergency management practice in cross-domain public crises. And the relevant relief paths are put forward, which is of great significance to improve the social assistance and emergency response capacity in cross-domain crisis events, better protect the basic life of the people in difficulties, and prevent the deterioration of the situation.

2. Measures for Social Assistance to Meet the Masses Urgent need in Cross-Domain Public Crises -- Take Major Public Health Emergencies as an Example

2.1 Background and Problems Arising from Major Public Health Emergencies

In 2020, at the peak of returning home for the Spring Festival, a major public health emergency swept the world. This cross-domain public health event has obvious characteristics of suddenness, joint, complexity, uncertainty, and long duration, and it still repeatedly impacts every field of social life. After the outbreak of a major public health crisis, under the unified arrangement of the CPC Central Committee and the government, various regions had successively launched a level 1 response to major public health emergencies, and governments at all levels of all provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government had immediately initiated the establishment of crisis prevention and control teams, and urgently implemented emergency prevention and control work nationwide. The grass-roots government actively responded to the superior scientific plan of "early detection, early reporting, early treatment", deeply implemented the treatment requirements of "concentrating patients, concentrating experts, concentrating resources, and concentrating treatment". The whole country jointly built a prevention and control system nationwide. Quarantine prevention and control is the most effective means of public crisis prevention and control, but in practice, it has also brought inconvenience to the broad masses and triggered some highly concerned incidents. For example, during public health emergencies, children without guardians cannot be taken care of, assistance and care measures that

open green channels for medical treatment of special groups were not taken, and the distribution of assistance materials and resources was unfair. During public health emergencies, the economy was also down, the labor force was idle, the source of income was interrupted, and a huge new group of aid was formed. Obviously, the above situation exposed the new problems that social assistance confronted with ensuring the basic life of the people living in hardship in the face of major cross-regional public crises, and brings complex and severe challenges to social assistance.

2.2 Social Assistance Countermeasures in Major Public Health Emergency Events

After the outbreak of major public health crises, adhering to the principle of "strengthening the backstop guarantee for people in need, and focusing on the care of patients, especially families with loved ones who have been killed", we implemented various measures to guarantee the backstop guarantee for people in need during public crises, and actively carried out assistance to ensure the basic needs of the people, demonstrating the superiority of the social assistance system with Chinese characteristics. Medical insurance departments, civil affairs departments, health departments and other relevant departments of the central and government organs have formulated and issued a series of emergency measures and policies for social assistance and protection of needy groups and assistance and protection of children in need of custody during public health crises, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Main assistance measures taken during Major Public Health Emergency Events

serial number	Classification	Assistance Measures
1	Comprehensive document on social assistance to emergency response	Ensure the basic living standards of people in need during public health crises, provide scattered care services for those in extreme poverty, increase assistance to affected families, timely distribute temporary subsidies, ensure the basic living standards of external personnel, and provide basic care services for special personnel. Take various measures such as increasing payment, delaying withdrawal, and optimizing procedures to ensure the living standards of people in need; Strengthen the service and care of dispersed special impoverished support personnel; Temporary assistance efforts affected by public health crises can be implemented in a case by case approach.
2	Emergency medical assistance documents	Clarified the targets and standards for traditional Chinese medicine treatment assistance in public health crisis events, expanded the scope of aid object identification, and required all regions to first treat patients seeking medical treatment in other places, and settle accounts after the crisis ends. For confirmed patients, after the basic medical insurance, serious illness insurance, medical assistance, etc. are paid in accordance with the regulations, the part of the personal burden shall be subsidized by the finance.
3	Emergency documents of social assistance institutions	Comprehensively strengthen the emergency measures of civil affairs service agencies, strengthen the organization and leadership of public crisis incidents, simplify procedures, advance assistance guarantee, and refine the specific measures and work processes of crisis management. Ensure that people in need have access to help and receive timely assistance.
4	Emergency protection documents for special groups of social assistance	Special care will be given to children affected by public health crises resulting in lack of guardianship, and efforts will be strengthened to carry out thorough investigation, assistance and support, and to strengthen the assistance and protection of children who are affected by the crisis due to lack of guardianship.
5	Social forces participating in assistance documents	In accordance with the unified deployment of the joint prevention and control mechanism, fundraising activities are carried out, and charitable organizations at all levels are encouraged to give full play to their advantages to provide support to areas affected by public health crises, and charitable organizations determine fundraising plans according to needs.

During public health crises with prominent cross regional characteristics, the emergency measures for social assistance are mainly reflected in the following aspects: first, continuous and stable normal assistance. It requires all localities to strengthen the screening of people in need, comprehensively guarantee the basic livelihood of people in need, simplify the examination and approval procedures of assistance on the basis of the existing assistance system, promote online processing of the whole process from application to enjoyment of assistance, extend the regular verification of family finances, and increase care services for groups with special difficulties. Temporary assistance will be provided to those who are stranded in other places during crisis from the place of emergency, in the form of cash assistance and material supplies, to ensure that people in need have access to assistance and receive assistance in a timely manner. The second is to give full play to the function of temporary relief to "support the bottom line and rescue the emergency." Temporary assistance is the bottom line in the backstop guarantee, with the characteristics of strong pertinence, strong flexibility, and few conditions for assistance, which plays a very important role in ensuring the basic survival of the masses when they face sudden, urgent and temporary difficulties. During the public health crisis, many people have difficulties in basic life due to isolation, unemployment, and inability to work, and have urgent needs for relief. The advantages of temporary relief to pick up the missing and rescue the emergency vividly reflect the lack of flexibility and mobility of normal relief. Third, we will increase medical assistance. The diagnosis and treatment costs from suspected diagnosis to cured discharge are reimbursed by medical insurance, serious illness insurance, and medical assistance, and some of them are borne by the state finance, implementing comprehensive security to ensure timely treatment of infected patients, giving full play to the overall effect of medical assistance, and playing an important role in protecting people's life safety. The fourth is to actively guide social forces to participate in the rescue. Volunteers, social charitable organizations and the Red Cross Society are encouraged to actively participate in social assistance, give full play to their functional advantages in drawing social resources, expanding financing channels, providing voluntary services and psychological intervention, and carry out psychological counseling and donation and relief for the people suffering from crisis, make up for the shortage of materials in the crisis, and promote the effective implementation of crisis management measures.

3. The Realistic Dilemma of Social Assistance Participation in Emergency Response in Cross-domain Public Crisis Events

In the face of a variety of major cross-domain public crises, the social assistance emergency measures taken by the government have played a huge role in guaranteeing people's health, basic life, comfort services, and maintaining social stability. However, it has also exposed many problems of social assistance of our country in coping with cross-domain public crises.

3.1 Lack of Legal Authority in Social Assistance Emergency Response

The existing administrative regulations of the "Interim Measures for Social Assistance" in China have a relatively low level, and many problems lack clear provisions, and the conditions for safety standardization are not met. From the rescue related documents released during the sudden public health crisis, it can be seen that the relevant rescue measures and regulations are basically issued in the form of notices, with strong temporary nature or only staying at the level of conceptual advocacy. The ambiguity of the goals poses great difficulties for grassroots institutions to carry out implementation. The lagging legislation has led to the reliance on administrative intervention in the implementation of assistance, with greater discretion, arbitrariness, and subjectivity. For example, workers who cannot return home in time for the Spring Festival in the crisis, and people who are

stranded in temporary difficulties in different places, due to the specific conditions of minimum living security, most of these groups in temporary difficulties are excluded, but they do face practical difficulties and need temporary assistance. However, China's "Interim Measures for Social Assistance" do not clearly stipulate the scope and standard identification of temporary assistance targets, and in ordinary times, it mainly targets disaster relief personnel and homeless beggars; Relevant emergency laws and regulations, such as the "Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of China" and the "Emergency Regulations for Public Health Emergencies", have not yet clearly defined the issue of social assistance emergency mechanisms in cross regional public crises, resulting in a lack of clear assistance basis for temporary difficult populations in cross regional public crises.

3.2 Fragmentation of Social Assistance Governance in Cross-regional Public Crises

At present, China's social assistance system formed on the basis of traditional public administration, the government led, civil affairs department led, various departments coordinated, hierarchical classification, territorial management based management mechanism, has played an important role in protecting the poor masses in small-scale public crisis events within regional jurisdiction, and maintaining social harmony and stability. The impact boundaries of cross-domain public crisis events tend to cross administrative boundaries and departmental boundaries, leading to the problem of "fragmentation" in social assistance response to cross-domain public crisis, which is mainly manifested in fragmentation of emergency measures, fragmentation of departmental functions, fragmentation of resource allocation and fragmentation of interest orientation in cross-domain public crisis management, insufficient resources and unclear responsibilities. The problem of poor integration of functions. In cross-domain public crisis events, these fragmented defects are amplified infinitely, resulting in the loss of backstop function. For example, in the "Yancheng Incident", in which a child with cerebral palsy in a serious public health crisis was left without care and resulted in serious consequences, his father tried to seek help by contacting the local Disabled persons' Federation, health center and village committee, but finally failed to provide effective care for Yancheng due to the lack of clear responsibility departments, grassroots departments' failure to fulfill their responsibilities, insufficient supplies and other reasons, leading to the tragedy.

3.3 Multiple Assistance Forces Have Not Yet Formed

American scholar Julie Fisher concluded from the analysis of governments and non-profit organizations in third world countries that non-profit organizations are an important force to promote the development of civil society [6]. The experience of foreign developed countries shows that effective cooperation between the government and social organizations can maximize the effect of social assistance [7]. With the cross-regional prominence of public crisis and the increasing uncertainty, as well as the long-term complex system of social assistance itself, relying on the government to provide assistance has become increasingly inadequate. For a long time, strong government intervention has acted as a "safety net" for social harmony and stability, but through the many cases of difficult groups who failed to obtain assistance services in a timely manner in the desperate situation of the public crisis, it also exposed the phenomenon of "powerless, willing and powerless" government assistance, and it is urgent to deploy a wide range of social resources to participate. The formation of a "government-led - departmental cooperation - social forces" all-round participation in the social assistance system is of great significance for resolving social risks and maintaining social fairness and justice. However, in reality, social forces participating in social assistance are limited by insufficient information resources, blind disorder and disconnection

between supply and demand, which should be solved quickly.

3.4 There is a "Vacuum Zone" between the Supply and Demand of Assistance Services

The challenge brought by cross-domain public crisis to social relief work is reflected in the fact that the new emergence of relief needs causes the diversification of relief needs to accelerate the alienation in a short period of time. In the absence of preference mechanism, the relief system cannot accurately target the actual needs of different groups in emergency situations, resulting in the dilemma of resource duplication or "service vacuum" [8]. At present, the most basic and common ways of social assistance are mainly relief money and in-kind assistance, and they are also doing better in reality. However, in this cross-domain public crisis, due to the special requirements of crisis management, market-oriented care services were forced to be suspended during the public crisis, which led to the tragic events of children with cerebral palsy being left without care, a 6-year-old child eating biscuits, and the shortage of materials under the crisis, giving priority to the distribution of supplies to the local people, etc. It exposes the defect that the supply of rescue services is difficult to fill the vacuum between the urgent survival and living needs of needy people who are at risk due to major crisis events.

4. The Relief Strategies of Social Assistance in Response to Cross-regional Public Crisis Predicament

The urgency and extensiveness of cross-domain public crises require the improvement of the social assistance system. In view of the problems exposed by social assistance in dealing with cross-domain public crises, this paper attempts to propose a way to alleviate the difficulties of social assistance in dealing with cross-domain public crises, which will help the social assistance system to better play the backstop guarantee function, and is also a requirement for improving national governance capacity.

4.1 Shifting from Policy-based Assistance to Rule-based Assistance

Improve the level of social assistance legislation, accelerate the formulation and introduction of a unified national "Social Assistance Law". From the entire system and target audience of social assistance projects to the specific implementation of assistance work, relevant supervision, and the implementation and assumption of responsibilities, corresponding legal norms need to be adjusted to achieve the legalization of social assistance. Taking the social assistance legislation as an opportunity, the needy groups in major cross-regional events are clearly defined as emergency temporary relief objects, or the connotation of disaster relief is extended to various cross-regional emergencies [2]. The regulations on social assistance agencies' participation in emergency response and rescue emergency procedures in cross-border public crisis events are clearly defined [9], so as to ensure that people in difficulties can receive emergency assistance in a timely manner in cross-domain public crises.

4.2 Shifting from Decentralized Salvage to Integrated Salvage

The holistic governance theory proposed by British scholars Perry Hicks and Patrick Denrive on the inheritance and criticism of the new public management theory emphasizes the public interest and focuses on solving the fragmentation problem caused by the emphasis on professional management in the new public management theory in the 1980s. By adjusting functions horizontally and vertically, integrating resources, reshaping processes, and other measures, conflicts

of interest can be resolved and the overall governance of the government can be achieved[10-11]. Obviously, the holistic governance theory points out a way to solve the fragmentation problem of social assistance participation in cross-domain public crisis management and improve the social assistance system. Some scholars have proposed to set up a departmental coordination committee, integrate departmental functions, and build a unified information management platform in response to problems such as "controlling water with many dragons" and system segmentation in social assistance [12]. This paper believes that social assistance emergency response is a systematic work, which requires all departments to work together and use information technology to integrate relevant functional departments in different regions into the unified emergency command and dispatch system of social assistance, so as to realize unified action and mutual cooperation among departments, which generally includes the overall operation mode such as strategic planning, joint monitoring, coordinated response and resource sharing (as shown in Figure 1). It can provide ideas for coping with cross-domain public crisis integration and rescue and solving fragmented emergency response. The state should establish and develop a unified national database of families in difficulty, and integrate the databases scattered in various departments to speed up the realization of timely and accurate assistance under special circumstances and emergency forms. Based on a unified emergency command and dispatch system and a unified database of families in need, various departments have established a flat and flexible multi agent network governance system for cross-border public crisis social assistance. All departments work together to achieve cross-agency and cross-department peacetime services, emergency response in times of disaster, and overall efficient operation, which will help improve the emergency governance capacity and cover the bottom level of social assistance. It is of great significance to effectively solve the differentiated difficulties of the difficult groups in the crisis, so as to ensure the social fairness and justice in the emergency supply of social assistance.

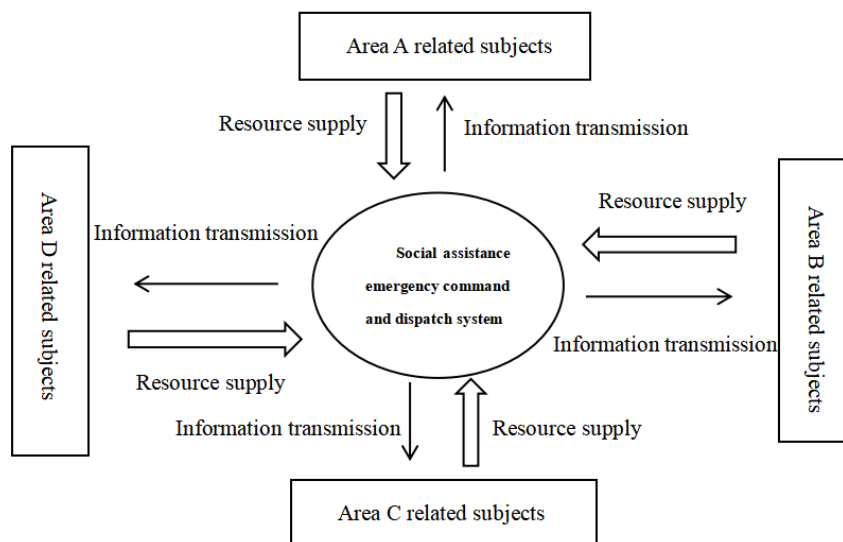


Figure 1: Overall governance mechanism for social assistance in cross-domain public crisis events

4.3 Shifting from Government Assistance to Diversified Assistance

The complex system theory emphasizes that the out-of-order state of the social system of emergency management must be reconstructed through the coordinated actions of different subjects [13]. The cross-domain public crisis is urgent, has wide impact and great harm, and the government alone is far from being able to meet the needs of care and humanistic care for groups with special difficulties. Therefore, it is necessary to build a system in which multiple subjects participate in

social assistance in cross-domain public crisis events. It is clear that the main position of the government's primary responsibility remains unchanged, and social mutual assistance between ngos and the public is emphasized as a necessary supplement to government assistance. The government provides relevant support such as information resources and policy documents, encourages the development of charitable undertakings, social groups, non-profit organizations and individuals to actively participate in social assistance undertakings, establishes two systems of government assistance and social assistance respectively, forms complementarity and expands the socialization of relief channels, so as to make up for the lack of government assistance input and strength, thereby improving the standards of assistance in public crises and meeting the goal of meeting the people's needs for a better life.

4.4 Shifting from Managed Assistance to Service-oriented Assistance

When the market supply and demand relationship is affected by the public crisis, currency cannot be easily converted into corresponding products and services, so services need to be provided directly [2]. Therefore, it is urgent to optimize the rescue service mode and provide emergency rescue service. The special social risks and characteristics of cross-domain public crisis events have sounded the alarm for us. As the last safety net of the society, the social relief system should expand the types of relief methods, give consideration to cash assistance and service assistance, and ensure the supply of various relief services. In the special environment of closed management, it is common to implement in-kind assistance and service assistance for people with cross-domain difficulties in emergency areas, simplify the application procedures in different places, and achieve the goal of full rescue. It is also possible to set up a mutual assistance group for special groups in the community to build a platform for communication and mutual assistance for special groups, so as to help grassroots departments identify and meet the actual needs of groups in cross-domain public crisis events [14]. What needs special attention is that public crisis events will bring psychological and spiritual fluctuations to the masses to a certain extent, and the psychological trauma caused by them should be fully mobilized by social forces during and after the good deeds, to help them recover their ability to develop as soon as possible. In addition, the government should make full use of the Internet plus social assistance model and add emergency rescue guarantee functions to the existing rescue platform. Through the establishment of emergency rescue network declaration, the full use of big data support, research and judgment of assistance needs, we need to strengthen the regulation of emergency assistance resources, optimize cross-regional emergency assistance procedures, so as to improve the guarantee efficiency.

5. Conclusions

With the frequent occurrence of cross-domain public crisis events, new demands have been put forward for the social assistance system, and opportunities have been created for high-quality social assistance and the modernization of national governance capacity. The measures taken in the obviously cross-regional public crisis of the major public health crisis events not only highlight the development achievements of social assistance and the advantages of the social assistance system with Chinese characteristics, but also expose the difficulties of social assistance such as insufficient legal authority, fragmented governance, diversified assistance has not yet formed, and service vacuum. In the future, we should actively change the governance model of social assistance, continuously improve the social assistance management mechanism that combines normal and emergency periods in the national governance system and governance capacity, weave a more tensile and elastic social security network, and maintain the bottom line of people's livelihood security.

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