

Research on the Support Mechanism of Social Work for Rural Revitalization in the Context of Urban-Rural Integration

Yang Liu

School of Marxism, Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, Hainan, 571126, China

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Abstract: Urban-rural integration and rural revitalization are important strategies in the current socio-economic development of China. They are not only necessary steps for achieving sustainable economic and social development but also essential pathways for improving the quality of life for farmers and realizing common prosperity. The participation of social work in rural revitalization helps to develop villagers' autonomous participation, tap into the mobilization capacity of local culture, and encourage urban residents to engage in labor and production in rural areas. This paper will explore in detail the theoretical foundations related to urban-rural integration and rural revitalization, clarify their connotations, goals, development backgrounds, and interrelationships, and investigate the practical pathways through which social work supports rural revitalization, aiming to provide feasible solutions and suggestions for promoting rural revitalization.

1. Introduction

The “14th Five-Year Plan for Promoting Agricultural and Rural Modernization” states: “Strengthening the relationship of 'industry supporting agriculture' and 'cities driving rural areas' further enhances the new type of urban-rural relationship characterized by mutual promotion between industry and agriculture, complementarity between urban and rural areas, coordinated development, and common prosperity. A dual flow and equal exchange mechanism for urban and rural elements will gradually be established, injecting new vitality into the promotion of agricultural and rural modernization” [1]. The proposal of the rural revitalization strategy is of great significance for advancing urban-rural relations into a new era. Unlike past strategies of urban-rural coordination and integration, urban-led rural development models, or paths focusing on the optimization of resource allocation such as “rural urbanization”, the rural revitalization strategy requires relevant rural construction efforts to be oriented towards urban-rural integration. The perspective of urban-rural integration provides a theoretical basis for the continuous promotion of social work participation in rural revitalization. Integration refers to the resonance between humans and nature, the preservation of spatial forms of cities and villages, and the continuity of culture. Urban-rural integration and rural revitalization, as important strategies in the current socio-economic development of China, are necessary steps for achieving sustainable economic and

social development and essential pathways for improving the quality of life for farmers and realizing common prosperity. Today, how to effectively implement the rural revitalization strategy and leverage the positive effects of this policy is a significant challenge we face. The implementation of the rural revitalization strategy must be combined with practical realities, utilizing scientific knowledge and theories to inform policies and employing scientific methods for policy implementation. As a professional discipline, social work has a complete theoretical foundation and set of working methods. The integration of social work into rural revitalization represents an innovation and advancement at both theoretical and practical levels [2].

2. The Theoretical Foundation of Urban-Rural Integration and Rural Revitalization

2.1 The Concept and Connotation of Urban-Rural Integration

Urban-rural integration refers to a new type of integrated development model formed by the interdependence and mutual promotion between urban and rural areas, rather than a simple binary structure. This is achieved through industrial linkages, resource sharing, and population mobility. In recent years, with the acceleration of urbanization in China, the necessity of urban-rural integration has become increasingly evident. Urban-rural integration is not only a requirement for economic development but also a reflection of social progress and the comprehensive development of individuals [3].

The connotation of urban-rural integration mainly includes three aspects:

(1) Economic Integration

The industrial integration between agriculture and non-agriculture, as well as between rural and urban areas, aims to achieve coordinated economic development through effective resource allocation and flow. For example, developing rural specialty industries, promoting modern agriculture, and facilitating agricultural product processing.

(2) Social Integration

Emphasizing the sharing and interaction among urban and rural residents in education, healthcare, culture, etc. By improving the educational and health levels of rural residents, it promotes social recognition and a sense of belonging among urban and rural residents, achieving harmonious social development.

(3) Spatial Integration

Through coordinated urban and rural planning, optimizing land use, and realizing the integration and redevelopment of urban and rural spaces. Encouraging the flow of urban capital, technology, and talent to rural areas promotes the joint development of cities and villages.

2.2 Main Goals and Content of the Rural Revitalization Strategy

The Rural Revitalization Strategy is an important strategy proposed at the 19th National Congress, aimed at achieving the goals of strong agriculture, beautiful rural areas, and prosperous farmers, and promoting new pathways for rural development in the new era [4]. It is not only an essential component of achieving socialist modernization but also an important guarantee for meeting the people's growing needs for a better life.

The main goals of the Rural Revitalization Strategy can be summarized as follows:

(1) Enhancing agricultural competitiveness and farmers' income levels through the development of modern agriculture and rural industries, achieving optimization of the industrial structure.

(2) Emphasizing ecological environmental protection, promoting rural environmental remediation and beautification, and achieving harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

(3) Guiding the flourishing development of rural culture, promoting outstanding traditional

culture, and enhancing farmers' cultural confidence and moral quality.

(4) Establishing and improving the rural governance system, promoting the modernization of rural governance, and enhancing rural social governance capabilities.

(5) Gradually narrowing the urban-rural gap by increasing farmers' income levels, achieving comprehensive wealth and a happy life for rural residents.

The strategic connotation of rural revitalization is reflected not only in the specific goals set but also in the development concepts and pathways it embodies. The realization of rural revitalization requires a holistic understanding of the direction and focus of rural development, emphasizing the organic combination of industrial development, ecological protection, cultural inheritance, and social governance.

2.3 Basic Theories and Development History of Social Work

Social work is a professional activity aimed at improving the lives of individuals, families, groups, and communities. Its core concept is to promote the self-development and social adaptation of vulnerable populations by providing various forms of support and assistance. Social work originated in the 19th century in the West, initially responding to social issues arising from industrialization and urbanization. With the continuous changes in social needs, social work has gradually evolved into an independent discipline and profession. In China, social work as a discipline and professional practice started relatively late, but with the deepening of reform and opening up, its development has gradually received attention and plays an increasingly important role in urban-rural integration and rural revitalization.

2.4 The Interrelationship between Urban-Rural Integration and Rural Revitalization

There exists a close complementary relationship between urban-rural integration and rural revitalization. Urban-rural integration provides a favorable external environment and development opportunities for rural revitalization, while rural revitalization injects vitality and momentum into urban-rural integration [5]. This is specifically reflected in: Economic Linkage: Urban-rural integration provides market demand and technical support for rural revitalization through resource flow and industrial connection. Rural areas can leverage urban market demand to develop rural specialty industries and increase farmers' income. Urban-rural integration strengthens the flow of population between urban and rural areas, prompting the concentration of talent, capital, and technology in rural areas, thereby providing human resources and intellectual support for rural development. Rural revitalization enhances the attractiveness of rural areas by improving social security facilities such as education, healthcare, and culture, promoting mutual understanding and recognition among urban and rural residents.

3. Practical Pathways for Social Work to Support Rural Revitalization

The empowerment social work theory that emerged in the 1990s aims to combine changes at the individual level with improvements at the societal level, achieving enhancement through a multi-dimensional approach that includes personal, interpersonal, and political aspects. By optimizing the external environment of service recipients and fostering collaboration among social workers, it aims to elevate the capabilities of those being served. Empowerment social work emphasizes the logic of service empowerment in practice, making it highly relevant during the implementation of China's rural revitalization strategy [6].

(1) Implementing the will of the Party and the state to improve the rural social structure, providing a favorable external environment for empowering rural social work service recipients

The introduction of the rural revitalization strategy provides institutional guarantees for rural social development and the improvement of farmers' living standards across political, economic, cultural, social, and ecological dimensions. The previous urban-rural dual system resulted in unequal resource distribution and negative perceptions internalized by some farmers, creating a vulnerable rural population. With the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy, a series of new public policies and laws have been introduced, giving farmers equal development opportunities alongside urban residents. This creates a necessary external environment for the empowerment of social work in rural areas, allowing service recipients to enhance their social identity and feel that they too can live a "city dweller's life" with no worries about basic needs or health issues, gradually increasing their confidence in coping with their environment.

(2) Promoting the "three social interactions" mechanism, improve social work institutions, and build a solid organizational foundation for empowering social work in rural areas

Following the 18th Central Committee's Third Plenary Session, which called for strengthening the modernization of the national governance system and capabilities, various levels of government have begun innovating grassroots governance. They established the "three social interactions" mechanism involving social workers, social organizations, and urban-rural communities, which has received widespread recognition and support. Social work institutions serve as vital links and strongholds connecting social workers with rural social work service recipients. In February 2021, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on Accelerating the Revitalization of Rural Talent," clearly stating, "Accelerate the construction of social work service stations in towns and villages, increase the government's purchasing of services, attract social work talents to provide professional services, and vigorously cultivate social work service-oriented social organizations." This implies that funding support for rural social work will be comprehensively enhanced through government purchasing of services and diverse social funding channels. At the same time, social work institutions will be vigorously developed in rural areas of China. The widespread establishment of social work stations in towns and villages can effectively promote teamwork and collaboration among social workers, enhancing their psychological empowerment and sense of value, thus providing the necessary organizational foundation and continuity for empowering social work in rural areas.

(3) Seizing opportunities for urban-rural integration, promoting a shift from "external borrowing" to "internal cultivation," and nurture social work talents for empowering social work in rural areas

In May 2019, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued "Opinions on Establishing and Improving the System and Policy Framework for Urban-Rural Integration Development," proposing to "establish and improve a system conducive to the equitable sharing of basic public services between urban and rural areas." In China, social work has become a significant component of public services provided by civil affairs departments, and social workers are now an essential force in social governance and public service. Relying on urban-rural integration development, the mature social work mechanisms and talents developed in cities can be introduced into rural communities to support the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy. On one hand, projects funded by government purchases can attract external social workers to rural areas; on the other hand, encouraging educated youth to return to their hometowns for employment can cultivate local social workers. Local social workers are more familiar with rural society and can better understand the social realities perceived by service recipients, which is a crucial starting point for conducting empowerment social work.

(4) Emphasizing interactive collaborative growth, enhance the professionalism of methods, and provide diversified services for empowering social work in rural areas

Advancing the alignment of basic public service systems between urban and rural areas has

created new opportunities for social work to engage in rural revitalization. The disparities in public service levels and resources between urban and rural areas have been narrowing, especially after China achieved comprehensive poverty alleviation in 2020. To ensure effective connection with rural revitalization, social work services have transitioned from a focus on poverty alleviation to more diversified offerings. Rural social work service recipients no longer seek simple resource connections and material assistance; they require social workers to provide diverse services such as capability enhancement, emotional support, relationship adjustment, and social integration. Social workers should not present themselves as "experts," but rather as "collaborators," accompanying service recipients in their growth. Through interaction with service recipients, social workers can understand their needs and rely on the recipients' awareness enhancement, behavioral reflection, confidence building, and capability improvement to enhance the effectiveness of empowerment social work.

4. Social Work Support Mechanisms in the Context of Urban-Rural Integration

4.1 Policy Support Mechanism

To achieve rural revitalization and urban-rural integration, the government must formulate clear policies to support the development of social work. Policy support not only reflects the national emphasis on social work but also provides social workers with guarantees of rights and obligations, ensuring they can play a positive role in the process of rural revitalization. First, at the national level, a comprehensive legal and regulatory framework needs to be established to clarify the responsibilities and rights of social workers. For example, the implementation of the "Social Work Service Law" provides a legal basis for social work and promotes the standardized development of the social work industry. The establishment of these policy frameworks not only provides a platform for services in rural communities but also encourages more social workers to participate in rural revitalization. Second, local governments should formulate corresponding local policies based on their actual conditions to support the development of social work [7]. For instance, some local governments can set up special funds to support the implementation of social work projects, encouraging social organizations and volunteers to participate in rural construction. Additionally, local policies should align with the specific goals of rural revitalization, developing social work service projects with local characteristics to enhance the self-development capacity of rural areas. Finally, the execution and evaluation of policies are also crucial. The government should regularly assess the implementation effectiveness of social work policies and adjust relevant policies in a timely manner based on evaluation results to ensure their adaptability and effectiveness. For example, by establishing a social work evaluation system, regular assessments of social work projects in rural revitalization can be conducted to ensure effective use of funds and reasonable allocation of resources.

4.2 Funding and Resource Allocation Mechanism

The development of social work is inseparable from financial support. In the context of urban-rural integration, a reasonable funding and resource allocation mechanism is key to ensuring the effective implementation of social work services. Therefore, a diversified funding guarantee mechanism must be established to meet the financial needs of social work during rural revitalization. First, the government should raise funds through multiple channels to provide stable financial support for social work. This can be achieved by establishing special poverty alleviation funds, utilizing fiscal allocations, and attracting social capital investment. For example, the government can collaborate with public foundations and enterprises to establish a social work project fund for

rural revitalization, combining social responsibility with corporate profits to provide financial support for rural revitalization. Second, in terms of fund usage, a transparent and open fund management system should be established to ensure that the funds for social work projects are used reasonably and effectively, avoiding misuse and waste of funds. Furthermore, the government should regularly publish the funding usage of social work projects to accept social supervision, thereby improving the transparency and efficiency of fund usage. Additionally, resource integration and sharing are also part of fund allocation. To avoid redundant waste of resources, cooperation and collaboration among social organizations, enterprises, and government departments at all levels should be strengthened to establish a social work resource sharing platform. Through resource integration, sharing of information, technology, and experience can be achieved, enhancing the overall effectiveness of rural revitalization.

4.3 Professional Talent Development Mechanism

In the context of urban-rural integration, professional talent is an important guarantee for the sustainable development of social work. Therefore, a sound talent development mechanism is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed. Only by cultivating high-quality social workers can we better serve rural revitalization. First, a comprehensive talent training system for social work professionals should be established, including specialized education in higher education institutions and continuing education training. Educational institutions can set up relevant specialized courses based on the needs of rural revitalization, cultivating talents with capabilities in rural development, social services, and management. At the same time, in-service social workers should be encouraged to participate in regular vocational training to enhance their professional competence and practical skills.

Second, establishing internship and practical opportunities is an important way to improve the quality of social work professionals. Colleges and social work institutions should establish cooperative relationships to provide students with opportunities to intern in rural areas, allowing them to learn how to solve practical problems through hands-on experience. This practical experience not only enhances students' professional abilities but also helps them understand the actual needs of rural development and strengthens their sense of responsibility towards rural revitalization. Finally, the career development and incentive mechanisms for social work talent should also be given attention. The government and relevant institutions can establish effective incentive mechanisms to attract outstanding talents to engage in social work. By offering competitive salaries, career development opportunities, and professional growth prospects, the attractiveness of social work in rural revitalization can be enhanced.

4.4 Social Participation and Volunteer Mechanisms

In the process of urban-rural integration and rural revitalization, the participation of social forces is indispensable. Social work does not solely rely on professionals; broad social participation can bring more resources and innovative ideas. First, the government and social organizations should encourage and support the development of volunteer teams, attracting more volunteers to engage in various aspects of rural revitalization. For example, by organizing community activities and promoting the concept of social work, public enthusiasm for social services can be stimulated. At the same time, relevant organizations can provide training and support for volunteers, helping them better adapt to the needs of rural work. Second, social enterprises, as a bridge connecting social work and the market, can also play an important role in rural revitalization. Through the involvement of social enterprises, commercial activities can be combined with social services, providing funding support, job opportunities, and technical services for rural revitalization, thereby

promoting local economic development.

5. Conclusion

In summary, under the context of urban-rural integration, the mechanisms supporting social work encompass multiple aspects, including policy support, funding and resource allocation, professional talent cultivation, and social participation. To achieve the goals of rural revitalization, it is essential to fully leverage the power of social work, integrate resources from various parties, and promote comprehensive rural development through effective support mechanisms. In the future development process, governments at all levels, social organizations, and individuals should strengthen cooperation to jointly contribute to the role of social work in rural revitalization.

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