

Research on the Improvement of Regional Volunteer Service System in the Post-Pandemic Era -A Case Study of Dinghai District, Zhoushan City

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Abstract: As one of the vital forces of social governance, volunteer teams play a significant role in the COVID-19 Pandemic prevention and control. On the premise of literature review and field research, the study investigated the current situation of volunteer service organization for pandemic prevention in Dinghai District, Zhoushan City in the post-pandemic era. We dives into realistic problems such as homogeneous volunteer model, professional efficacy of volunteers, inadequate participation of volunteers. The article analyzes the current situation and proposes some optimization paths, exploring its economic and social value effectiveness. In the post-pandemic era, the government of Zhoushan City should make efficient coping strategies for the COVID-19 Pandemic prevention and control and need to continuously optimize the details in the process of practice, so that the idea of volunteer service in pandemic prevention and control can take root and create a better post-pandemic era together.

Keywords: Post-Pandemic Era, Regional Volunteer Service System, Practical Problems, Optimization Path

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the white paper *Fighting COVID-19:China in Action* released by the State Council Information Office, “COVID-19 pandemic is a major public health emergency with the fastest infection speed, the broadest infection scope and the greatest difficulty in prevention and control since the founding of the People’s Republic of China”^[1]. Wang Zhuli, professor of Sun Yat-sen University, has explained that the post-pandemic era is featured by “lingering and changing pandemic situation, which will see breakout in a certain region at any time due to imported and seasonal cases”^[2].

On June 16, 2020, during a phone call with Emomali Rahmon, the president of Tajikistan, General Secretary Xi Jinping mentioned the word “post-pandemic era”. Xi emphasized that people’s life and health could be safeguarded only by establishing a strong public health system, improving the mechanism for early warning and response, comprehensively enhancing the capability of prevention, control and treatment, and building a line of defense against the virus.

To fully implement the important guidance and spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping in the prevention and control of the pandemic, meet the requirements of provincial Party Committee in fighting the battle against the pandemic, and follow the spirit of major leaders from municipal Party Committee, related work has been done to give full play to the role of volunteer service in pandemic prevention and control. Taking Dinghai District, Zhoushan City as an example, its volunteer service organization is featured by a flat structure: fewer organizational ranks with a large management scope, positive correlation between

organizational rank and authority, the appropriate delegation of power by line manager under a sound supervision and feedback mechanism, and the reflection of centralized authority typical of the Chinese government. With regard to non-governmental organizations, various volunteer service organizations actively respond to the appeal of the country and deliver assistance to communities and checkpoints in urgent need.

Thanks to the concerted efforts made by the Central Committee of the Party and units at all levels, China has led the world in entering the post-pandemic era. Based on the actual needs of health and security, the working group on pandemic prevention and control of Dinghai District, Zhoushan City has actively launched series of volunteer operations and achieved certain results in this regard. However, more work should be done to make further progress in volunteer service in pandemic prevention and control.

2. PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

2.1. Problem of Homogeneous Volunteer Model in Pandemic Prevention

Volunteer service organizations in various regions are facing the same problems of rigid operation model, simple available services and “homogeneous” operation type.

Taking Dinghai District, Zhoushan City as an example, homogeneous volunteer services are provided in pandemic prevention and control. The majority of volunteer organizations only provide services including guarding checkpoint and maintaining order in nucleic acid testing. Their monotonous services are restricted to certain areas. Influenced by traditional thoughts and habits, volunteer service tends to be impressive in words but inefficient in action, showing an obvious trend of formalism. With regard to the so-called “innovated” volunteer services, they have only changed their forms but not their contents. Such volunteer service has pooled too much personnel in the same direction and centralized resources in an excessive way, so it couldn’t consider the big picture and other volunteer needs, nor could it meet the requirement of innovation and high quality. Due to the homogeneous model, volunteer service only focuses on solving common problems without considering personalized and diversified services, which will make no progress in improving the form and quality of volunteer service in the end.

2.2. Problem of Professional Efficacy of Volunteers in Pandemic Prevention

Through telephone interview and filed investigation of volunteer organizations in some areas, the project group has learned that those organizations have the problem of choosing volunteers with inadequate professional capability and underutilizing the professional efficacy of volunteers.

For some civil volunteer organizations, the overall quality of their members is relatively low and uneven. Carrying forward volunteer service in pandemic prevention and control cannot only rely on the zeal of volunteers. Volunteers with weak professional knowledge and backward service approach will easily lower the general level of volunteer team. Meanwhile, there are relatively fewer people with professional skills in volunteer team, which greatly hinders the further improvement of service efficiency. Some volunteers lack the knowledge and skills required by the post in pandemic prevention and control. With low professional level and poor service quality, they find it hard to provide professional and efficient services for people, so the efficiency of assistance to pandemic prevention and fighting against the pandemic in front line will both be reduced.

On the other hand, for some volunteer teams, although they have a large number of members with high overall quality, they cannot give full play to those members. During pandemic prevention and control, some volunteers from health and education field have professional capabilities, but they are still involved in “common” service work that is rather simple and lacks professional contents.

With the continuous change and development of pandemic situation, the conflict between diversified requirements for volunteer service and monotonous service structure with limited devotion is increasingly obvious, which has hampered the efficient delivery of volunteer service.

2.3. Problem of Inadequate Participation of Volunteers in Pandemic Prevention

Compared with other volunteer services, low enthusiasm and recoil mentality of volunteers in pandemic prevention is a major problem of volunteer service system in China. Volunteers are more unwilling to participate in pandemic prevention and control compared with other volunteer services. There are the following four main factors that cause volunteers’ recoil mentality:

1. Some volunteer posts in pandemic prevention and control may pose risks to people's health, especially the work related to operation of hospitals and transfer of patients, such as disposing medical waste, cleaning medical facilities and transferring infected people. Any carelessness will lead to the damage to life and security.

2. The incentive mechanism for volunteers in pandemic prevention and control should be improved. The newly-revised *Regulations on Voluntary Services in Shanghai* released in 2019 has stipulated that "volunteers can receive appropriate subsidies for transportation and catering from volunteer service organizations when participating in volunteer activities. Receiving some supplies and subsidies does not change the identity of volunteers or the nature of volunteer activities"^[3]. In addition, more efforts should be made to carry out the incentive mechanism. Since the funds of volunteer service organizations mainly come from financial subsidy of government and donation of good-hearted people from all walks of life, the implementation of incentive mechanism requires more funds.

3. Safeguard mechanism for volunteers requires further improvement. According to the *Regulations on Volunteer Services*, "before arranging volunteers in volunteer activities that may contain personal risks, volunteer service organizations should provide personal accident insurance for volunteers"^[4]. However, many volunteer service organizations in pandemic prevention cannot provide volunteers with such insurance, which is another reason for volunteers to recoil.

4. China still needs to make further cultural and ideological progress so that every Chinese people will follow the spirit of collectivism. Volunteer service in pandemic prevention does not generate any personal interests but contains huge risks. Therefore, some volunteers who pay too much attention to personal gains will hesitate to press forward.

Failing to encourage volunteers to take an active role in pandemic prevention and control will exert a negative influence on the general situation. The "jointly-built beautiful world in the post-pandemic era" described by General Secretary Xi must rely on a nationwide campaign against the pandemic; otherwise, it will only be empty talk.

3. IMPROVEMENT APPROACH

Thanks to the joint efforts of volunteers and professional personnel, Dinghai District, Zhoushan City has achieved outstanding results in pandemic prevention, with no confirmed case under its jurisdiction. To grasp the direction of improvement approach, members of this project have distributed questionnaires and collected 227 valid ones. According to the statistics collected through questionnaires, there are still 5.29% of respondents thinking it unnecessary for volunteers to work as the major force of pandemic prevention and control. Therefore, members of this project have put forward five improvement approaches, in order to build a sound volunteer service system related to pandemic prevention in Dinghai District and win the recognition of government and people as soon as possible.

3.1. Smoothing Information Channels in Pandemic Prevention, and Realizing Centralized Management

Aiming at homogeneous volunteer services and underutilization of volunteers' professional skills, members of this project have proposed the improvement approach of smoothing information channels in pandemic prevention.

First, to smooth information channels, high and new technologies across Zhejiang Province and its sound network platform can be used to build a volunteer service platform that is available all over the country, such as an APP or a website with a fixed operation mode. People can seek help on such platform, through which volunteer organizations receive help information and recruit volunteers. In addition, a public participation platform should also be established for volunteers engaged in pandemic prevention and control. In the post-pandemic era, homogeneous volunteer services are reflected by monotonous volunteer activities and rigid service models. The majority of volunteer organizations are only responsible for taking temperature at checkpoints and delivering supplies. Before providing volunteer services, volunteer organizations haven't investigated the requirements of people, so they cannot meet their diversified needs in the pandemic. Meanwhile, smoothing information channels has the same effect with requirement investigation. If the personal information of people who seek help can only be shown to the volunteer organization that receives this help information, people will seek

assistance on platform without any concerns. Furthermore, in the post-pandemic era, volunteers may live everywhere, so a unified volunteer service platform can provide great convenience for volunteer organizations in different regions to arrange volunteers.

Second, to smooth information channels, more efforts are required to promote and encourage people to participate in volunteer service in pandemic prevention and control. With the help of traditional media such as newspapers and new media such as official accounts on WeChat, MicroBlog and TikTok, volunteer organizations can report and follow volunteer services in the pandemic, so as to attract more people to join their teams. Besides, through the cooperation between government and schools, local volunteer activity can be promoted from top to bottom in schools, in order to recruit young volunteers, encourage students to walk out of their comfort zone, and feel the difficulty in pandemic prevention and control.

3.2. Improving Incentive Mechanism for Pandemic Prevention, and Creating Positive Environment for Volunteer Service

The incentive mechanism for volunteer service is positively linked with its implementation. Although volunteer service is a kind of grant and spontaneous aid in nature, during the pandemic, when volunteers are recognized or awarded for their selfless devotion by the society, they will obtain a sense of achievement both in self respect and self fulfillment^[5], thus generating strong internal driving force, initiative and potential to provide volunteer service on a regular basis. In a word, flexible economy is a basic principle for efficient volunteer service. Currently, the volunteer service system in China pays little attention to incentive mechanism, which will harm the long-term development of public welfare in China. Therefore, the project has proposed the following measures to improve the incentive mechanism for volunteer service in pandemic prevention and control:

Volunteers should be given additional spiritual incentives. Concerned departments can adopt the incentive method based on social honors, such as issuing certificate for volunteer service and giving public promotion and commendation, or the incentive method based on subsidies, to improve the rewarding and feedback mechanism for volunteer service, and enable volunteers to feel the value of volunteer work.

Volunteers should be able to fulfill their inner satisfaction. In the process of designing specific volunteer activities, volunteer organizations should take into account social needs and the need of volunteers to seek self fulfillment and development in the post-pandemic era. During the volunteer service, platforms such as Zhiyuanhui can be used to record hours of service. To bring sense of achievement to volunteers, incentive factors should be focused on while ensuring hygiene factors, and transform the administration-led volunteer service into a spontaneous behavior of volunteers, thus “helping people” by “helping themselves”.

Volunteer organizations should strengthen their construction, so as to encourage more people to join volunteer service through a sincere attitude. Volunteer organizations themselves should give more attention to volunteers in pandemic prevention, such as arranging team building activities and enhancing communication between managers and team members, so as to increase the sense of belonging among volunteers and pool strengths together. Since promotion is a priority, volunteer organizations should make more efforts to promote their work through mass media, including their volunteer activities and environment, in order to attract more volunteers to join the fight against the pandemic. Volunteer organizations should build their own cultures, and commit to the volunteer spirit of “providing mutual help, centering on people’s life and uniting the whole country”. In addition, they should also award their members to stimulate the initiative of volunteers.

3.3. Setting up Threshold for Volunteer Service, and Upgrading Volunteer Service Quality

Pandemic prevention and control bears on national welfare and people’s livelihood. Since the country has raised specific requirements across all areas in pandemic prevention, volunteers in this endeavour, as a major force in the post-pandemic era, should also be strictly required. Unfortunately, most volunteer organizations in Dinghai District, Zhoushan City have no specific requirements for volunteers, so the recruited volunteers present varied performances and some of them are inadequate for tasks, which will further reduce the efficiency of pandemic prevention and control. That is also a reason for the question about “no-threshold volunteer”. To solve this problem, members of this project have proposed the following improvement approaches:

The most important thing is to conduct emergency training for volunteers. Through short-term emergency training, volunteers can learn knowledge and skills that will be transformed into asset. Different from other forms of volunteer service, volunteer service related to pandemic prevention and control requires volunteers to grasp certain knowledge and skills as well as a sense of self-protection. Training for many people is low in cost, high in feasibility and quick in returns, so it can be carried out in a comprehensive and thorough way.

Second, the supervision and feedback mechanism for volunteers should be improved. Avoiding “formalism” in feedback will contribute a lot to volunteer service in pandemic prevention and control. Even the volunteers themselves have criticized the “formalism” of feedback mechanism and its failure in playing its due role. Improvement should be made from supervisors and feedback mechanism: supervisors should fulfill their duties rather than holding an indifferent attitude and leaving out small mistakes; and feedback mechanism has the problem of discontinuity, so every feedback should be recorded and summarized to establish a flowing mechanism based on specific information and create personal assessment record.

Last, the volunteer integrity record can constitute a part of the credit system, and the dishonest conduct of volunteers can be restrained through laws and public opinions. Time is valued as life in pandemic prevention and control. However, some volunteers betray the conventions on volunteers and disregard disciplines, which has severely hindered pandemic prevention and control. A credit mechanism should be set up to record the integrity of volunteers and take warning or restrictive measures against those with low credibility.

4. VALUE OF RESEARCH

China is still in the shadow of the pandemic, and the whole world is also troubled by its lingering effect. This project studies the volunteer service system for pandemic prevention and control in Dinghai District, Zhoushan City as well as the improvement approach for the system. By keeping pace with the changing times, this study has great practical significance.

4.1. Alleviate Burden on Economy to Meet the Personnel Requirements of Pandemic Prevention

The fast mobilization mechanism that rallies people’s strengths can create advantages in human resources, solve the problem of “manpower shortage” in the post-pandemic era, and complete the task that requires a large number of people and lasts a long period of time. During the outbreak of the pandemic in a small region, people engaged in pandemic prevention and control must do a good job in epidemiological investigation and nucleic acid testing, and efficiently implement all prevention and control measures according to high standards. With the help of volunteers, the shortage of manpower will be alleviated and the supervision efficiency will be strengthened. In addition, the post-pandemic era is featured by the outbreak or recurrence of the pandemic in some regions caused by imported or seasonal cases. If volunteers have flexibility in time and space arrangement, they can finish basic tasks such as area lockdown and health code check with the fastest speed in emergency outbreak, thus reducing the number of infected people and infection risks to the greatest extent.

Pandemic prevention and control should be carried out at every level in society, so the sum of funds required by this endeavour is huge. Due to the voluntary nature of volunteer service, volunteers do not seek any material, money or interest reward. In addition to providing supplies related to pandemic prevention such as masks and disinfectant fluid as well as insurance for volunteers, volunteer service organizations do not need to pay salary to them, which can effectively reduce the financial expenses of government. For volunteers who have participated in professional training or have skills in assistance, they can put forward reasonable responses and measures in emergency, which can also save government spending compared with employing professional medical personnel.

Organizing volunteers to participate in pandemic prevention and control will help to reduce government spending and alleviate pressure caused by the pandemic. Since volunteers come from grassroots, people who have experienced the pandemic know better how to prevent it and are more likely to act with a high sense of responsibility as masters, which will help to promote knowledge of pandemic prevention, facilitate the implementation of security policy and enhance national cohesion.

4.2. Create Social Environment to Cultivate Citizens' Volunteer Spirit

The participation of volunteers in pandemic prevention and control has not only helped solve problems in supplies, but also made great contributions to cultivating citizens' volunteer spirit, building a civilized society and promoting socialist core values. From three perspectives, members of this project have elaborated the significance of improving volunteer system in developing cultural progress.

From the perspective of volunteers, participating in pandemic prevention and control will make them protect their country as their home and enhance their sense of responsibility. Through volunteer work, volunteers have made their contribution to pandemic prevention and control, which is a key priority for our nation, and have enriched their inner world.

From the perspective of people who receive assistance, they will feel the warmth and brilliance of humanity through volunteer service, and raise their hope for a harmony society again. Traditional virtues of Chinese nation require us to show kindheartedness, do good deeds and be ready to help others. Those virtues also reflect our value and pursuit of the true, the good and the beautiful.

From the perspective of the whole society, improving volunteer service system in pandemic prevention and control is one of measures to build socialist culture and ethics. Laws maintain the stable order of the world, while good virtues are changing people's ideologies and values. *Program for Improving Civic Morality in the New Era* has stated that "we should follow the guidance of socialist core values"^[6], pursue great virtues, observe social morality and be strict in self-discipline; create a social environment that praises good virtues, encourages learning from people of virtue and promotes good moralities around the world; and call for full participation and conscientious practice of people. Volunteer service in pandemic prevention and control requires a "dedicated and friendly" social environment, so as to develop harmonious culture and ideological progress.

4.3. Provide Good Ideas for Domestic and International Development

In the post-pandemic era, China has controlled the pandemic and entered the stage of "regular pandemic prevention and control". But some foreign countries and regions still cannot see promising prospects, and even "let it be" due to inefficient fight against the pandemic for a long time. Improving the volunteer service system of Dinghai District, Zhoushan City and promoting it as an effective and independent approach in a region will help to carry out independent prevention and control work in populated areas and provide good ideas for international partners in this regard. In addition, if the volunteer service system is successfully promoted, it will certainly exert huge influences across the world, improve the reputation of China in the world and enhance its international status. The improvement of volunteer service system in pandemic prevention and control will create favorable conditions for the rejuvenation in the post-pandemic era. In the process of achieving the Two Centenary Goals, developing health undertakings has always been the basis. In the post-pandemic era, people's safety lays a foundation for national security, and improving volunteer service system is beneficial to the development philosophy centered on people, which will play a significant role in promoting social harmony, facilitating the transformation of government functions, achieving rapid economic and social development, and building an image of great power with cultural progress. The building of domestic volunteer service system in pandemic prevention and control will provide examples and references for countries around the world, strengthen cooperation between domestic volunteer service organizations and their international counterparts, comply with the concept of international community, build a good image of China as a great country, prompt all countries to follow the true multilateralism, create a beautiful future in the post-pandemic era and build a common community with a shared future for mankind.

5. CONCLUSION

In the post-pandemic era, the management system for volunteer service organization in China has undergone great changes. As more expectations and responsibilities from the society are given to volunteers and volunteer service organizations in their role and function in pandemic prevention and control, it is urgent to facilitate the improvement of volunteer service. Volunteer service organizations in Dinghai District, Zhoushan City need to keep pace with current situations and make adjustments, so as to educate people with the volunteer spirit, set volunteer service as a highlight of China, and rally all forces to build a beautiful world with strong confidence and devotion.

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