

Dilemmas and Optimization Paths of Villager Participation in the Practice of the Point-Based System for Rural Governance in City H

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Abstract: *The points-based system, as an important innovative tool for modernizing rural governance, plays a crucial role in stimulating villagers' participation and improving the effectiveness of grassroots governance. H City, a typical region characterized by multi-ethnic populations and uneven economic and social development, has integrated the points-based system into its rural governance practices. By leveraging points supermarkets, Party building integration, and digital empowerment, it has promoted villager participation and achieved initial success in improving the living environment, cultivating civilized rural customs, and promoting harmony. However, prominent problems remain, including insufficient role of villagers, limited participation channels, low awareness of rules, and weak incentive effectiveness. These problems stem from passive participation habits, unidirectional rule-making, insufficient publicity, and a simplistic incentive structure. This paper, based on participatory governance, incentive theory, and collaborative governance theory, and considering the regional and ethnic characteristics of H City, proposes optimization paths from four dimensions: transforming governance concepts, improving institutional mechanisms, strengthening the foundation for participation, and optimizing the points system. This provides empirical reference and theoretical support for improving the quality and efficiency of the points-based system in rural governance in multi-ethnic areas and activating villagers' intrinsic motivation for participation.*

Keywords: Rural Governance; Points System; Villager Participation; Multi-Ethnic Areas; Governance Effectiveness.

1. Introduction

Rural governance is the cornerstone of national governance. The points-based system, as an innovative governance mechanism that combines quantitative evaluation and incentive compatibility, has been repeatedly listed as a typical approach to rural governance in the Central Government's No. 1 Document, becoming a crucial tool for addressing weak villager participation and alienation from public affairs. H City, located in the northeastern part of Q Province, is a typical multi-ethnic area, with ethnic minorities accounting for more than half of the population. Rural governance in H City is characterized by its ethnic, regional, and complex features. Since implementing the points-based system for rural governance, H City has used points supermarkets as a platform to convert aspects such as living environment, rural civility, and public welfare participation into quantifiable points, initially forming a governance pattern led by Party building and involving diverse participants. However, in practice, due to constraints such as traditional governance models, population structure, and cultural differences, villager participation still faces many difficulties, and the effectiveness of the points-based governance system has not been fully realized.

Existing research largely focuses on the operational mechanisms and governance effectiveness of point-based systems, with limited specific studies on villager participation in point-based systems in multi-ethnic areas. Furthermore, the analysis of the suitability of point-based systems and the causes of participation difficulties in underdeveloped plateau regions is insufficient. This paper takes H City as the research object, and based on literature analysis, questionnaire surveys, and in-depth interviews, systematically reviews the current status of villager participation in point-based system practice, accurately identifies participation difficulties and their underlying causes, and proposes localized optimization paths

by drawing on advanced domestic experience. This not only enriches the empirical research spectrum of point-based systems in rural governance but also provides practical reference for optimizing villager participation paths in similar multi-ethnic areas.

2. Current Status of Villager Participation in the Point-Based System for Rural Governance in City H

2.1 Practical Basis and Policy Foundation of the Points System

H City has solid policy support and a strong regional foundation. At the national level, the "performance-based points" poverty alleviation model was promoted in 2018, and a special deployment for the promotion of the rural governance points system was made in 2020. The Central Document No. 1 from 2022 to 2026 continued to clarify the requirements for promoting the points system, providing top-level guidance for grassroots practices. At the local level, the "H City Grassroots Social Governance Promotion Regulations" incorporates the points system into the legal framework, requiring townships to quantify grassroots governance affairs and villages (communities) to implement them, thus promoting the points system from spontaneous exploration to institutionalized operation.

From a governance perspective, H City, with its 1,587 administrative villages, has established a governance system that combines self-governance, rule of law, and rule of virtue under the leadership of the Party organization. Relying on the "H Quick Service" digital platform and grid-based management, it provides organizational and technical support for the implementation of the points-based system. The city has already established 146 points-based supermarkets,

covering most administrative villages, forming a points-based governance model with regional characteristics.

2.2 Core Dimensions and Approaches to Villager Participation

H City's villager participation in the points-based system revolves around five core dimensions: First, improving the living environment, including participating in courtyard cleaning, public area sweeping, and ditch maintenance; second, village-level public affairs, including participating in deliberation and consultation, conflict mediation, and community service; third, rural social development, including practicing changing customs and habits, neighborly assistance, and respect for elders; fourth, industrial revitalization, including participating in specialty planting, skills training, and the development of the village collective economy; and fifth, the inheritance of ethnic culture, including participating in folk activities and ethnic unity practices.

In practice, four regular participation pathways have been established: First, regular participation is achieved through physical points supermarkets and charity supermarkets, where villagers accumulate points through positive behavior and redeem them for daily necessities; second, a "Party building + points" integration model is constructed, with Party members linking with households and neighbors working together to encourage villagers to participate in Party-masses co-governance; third, a path for integrating digitalization and marketization is explored, simplifying the points process through WeChat groups and mini-programs, and collaborating with enterprises to expand redemption channels; fourth, integration into the community mutual aid network is adopted, with points earned through volunteer assistance and neighborhood cooperation, forming a collaborative participation pattern.

2.3 Practical Effectiveness of Villager Participation

The points-based system has effectively revitalized rural governance in H City. First, it has improved the living environment, with villagers actively participating in environmental cleanup, breaking the pattern of "cadres doing the work while the masses watch," and achieving a 97% coverage rate for rural household waste collection. Second, it has fostered civilized rural customs, incorporating the changing of customs and moral norms into the points system, resisting outdated practices such as exorbitant bride prices and extravagant weddings, resulting in a continuous increase in the number of households awarded five-star civilized status[1]. Third, it has promoted ethnic harmony, with the points system taking into account the customs of multiple ethnic groups, encouraging the participation of people of all ethnicities in public affairs, and consolidating the foundation for ethnic unity. Fourth, it has improved governance efficiency, with the points system simplifying management processes, increasing transparency in village affairs and enhancing villagers' trust, and achieving a 96.3% success in mediating village-level conflicts[2].

3. Challenges and Causes of Villager Participation in the Point-Based System for Rural Governance in City H

3.1 The Real Dilemma of Villager Participation

3.1.1 Insufficient active participation and a strong tendency towards passive involvement

Villager participation largely relies on village officials' appeals and material incentives, with a low rate of proactive participation and a structural imbalance in the participating group. The majority of participants are middle-aged and elderly villagers over 45 years old, while most young and middle-aged adults work away from home. Ethnic minority villagers have lower participation rates due to language and cognitive differences. Participation is limited to the point-based system implementation; participation rates in system design, scoring and supervision, and optimization are all low, relegating villagers to passive executors rather than active participants in governance.

3.1.2 Inadequate participation channels and insufficient matching of supply and demand

Participation channels are mainly offline notices and bulletin boards, with online channels covering only a small number of villagers. Dedicated participation channels for migrant workers and ethnic minority villagers are lacking. The channel operation mechanism is imperfect, with delayed information transmission and low feedback efficiency. Over 40% of villagers reported not receiving a response after submitting suggestions, resulting in a lack of a closed loop for expressing their demands and a continued weakening of their willingness to participate.

3.1.3 Insufficient understanding of the points system and significant information asymmetry

Villagers' understanding of the points system is fragmented. While the vast majority of villagers are aware of the point-earning process, they lack sufficient knowledge about the specific point values, review procedures, and appeal channels. Significant differences in understanding exist among different groups. Villagers over 60 years old have a lower awareness rate, as do ethnic minority villagers, and migrant workers have the lowest awareness rate due to information gaps.

3.1.4 Insufficient incentive effectiveness and difficulty in matching diverse needs.

The incentive structure is simplistic, primarily relying on material rewards such as rice, flour, oil, and daily necessities, with a severe lack of spiritual incentives. The types of rewards have not been updated in a long time, leading to a continuous decline in their attractiveness. The incentives lack universality, with high redemption thresholds and long cycles; the uniform standards fail to meet the differentiated needs of the elderly,

young adults, and disadvantaged groups. Overall, villagers' satisfaction with the incentive effects falls short of their expectations, and some villagers have indicated that insufficient incentives affect their continued participation.

3.2 The underlying causes of the difficulties in villagers' participation

3.2.1 Long-standing habit of passive participation

Villagers have long been in a passive state of acceptance, forming a "wait-and-see" mentality and lacking awareness of actively participating in public affairs. The mentality of "fear of offending people and reluctance to speak up" in a close-knit community further weakens villagers' initiative, causing their participation to become a mere formality.

3.2.2 Rules are formulated unilaterally, lacking consensus among villagers

The point-based system is mostly formulated from top to bottom by the village committee, without democratic consultation, and is detached from the village's actual conditions and villagers' needs. The rule design is one-size-fits-all, failing to consider ethnic customs, industrial characteristics, and group differences, resulting in low villager acceptance and insufficient motivation to participate. Surveys show that only a portion of villagers recognize the democratic nature of the rule-making process.

3.2.3 Insufficient publicity and inadequate information dissemination.

Publicity efforts are characterized by phased and campaign-style approaches, with subsequent adjustments not being promptly communicated. The forms of publicity are limited, primarily relying on written notices, lacking adaptable formats such as dialects, bilingual formats, and graphic elements. This makes it difficult for the elderly and ethnic minority villagers to access effective information, exacerbating the information barrier and the participation gap.

3.2.4 Imbalanced incentive structure and lack of long-term mechanism.

Incentives emphasize material rewards over spiritual rewards, and short-term gains over long-term benefits. A linkage mechanism between points and honors, policies, and services has not been established. Funding relies on government appropriations and village collective income, making it easy for under-resourced villages to experience a loss of rewards. The channels for converting points into value are narrow, failing to create a sustainable incentive effect.

4. Lessons Learned from Domestic Experiences in Point-Based Villager Participation Systems

4.1 Practical Experience in Typical Regions

Guyuan City in Ningxia has cultivated new social customs through a "small points" system, establishing a villager-led points-based evaluation mechanism. This system incorporates

changing customs and improving the environment into the points system, providing both material and spiritual incentives. Points are also linked to honors and awards, and the city has been selected as a national model case for rural governance. Jinshi City in Hunan Province has innovated a "three-fold linkage" model, using a "red savings book" to incentivize Party members, a "green savings book" to promote environmental protection, and a "love savings book" to cultivate volunteerism. Points are linked to industrial development and public services, achieving collaborative governance among multiple stakeholders[3].

4.2 Lessons Learned

First, we accurately address the needs of villagers by localizing and differentiating the points system. Second, we transform the role of governance entities from managers to service providers and guides. Third, we streamline the operational mechanism and build a closed-loop management and multi-faceted supervision system. Fourth, we strengthen the diversity of incentives by combining material and spiritual incentives to activate the villagers' intrinsic motivation.

5. Optimization Path of Villager Participation in Rural Governance Point System in City H

5.1 Enhance Awareness of Governance and Service, and Empower Villagers with Principal Status

5.1.1 Conduct thorough investigations into villagers' needs and customize flexible systems

Establish a regular mechanism for door-to-door visits and needs assessments, and set up differentiated point-based programs for groups such as the elderly, young adults, and ethnic minorities to lower the participation threshold for special groups and achieve flexible and adaptable point rules that allow for participation by all.

5.1.2 Appropriately delegate authority and broaden participation channels

Delegate the authority to formulate points rules, supervise scoring, and optimize adjustments to villagers, and establish village councils, online suggestion platforms, and bilingual consultation channels to ensure villagers' right to know, participate, and supervise, and promote the transformation from "cadre-led" to "village co-governance."

5.1.3 Enhance the quality of governance personnel and transform governance concepts

Conduct specialized training on points-based management, ethnic affairs, and community work to encourage grassroots cadres to adopt a service-oriented approach, abandon administrative control thinking, use villager satisfaction as the core of assessment, and strengthen service awareness and execution capabilities.

5.2 Improve Systems and Regulations and Build a Democratic Decision-making Mechanism

5.2.1 Improve the rules and regulations for the points-based

system, and clarify the rights, responsibilities, and procedures.

Formulate detailed implementation rules for the points-based system at the city, county, and village levels. Standardize the entire process of points recording, review, public announcement, and appeals, clarify the rights and responsibilities of each entity, and ensure that the system operates in a regulated, fair, and just manner.

5.2.2 Adhere to the principle of guidance rather than domination, and streamline governance relationships

The government fulfills its responsibilities of top-level design, resource guarantee, and supervision and assessment. It does not interfere with specific village-level operations, and builds a governance structure of "government guidance, village-level leadership, and villagers as the main body," ensuring space for grassroots independent innovation.

5.2.3 Strengthen full-process supervision and ensure openness and transparency

Establish a village supervision group to supervise the entire process of scoring, redemption, and public announcement. Publicize score information through multiple online and offline channels, and establish a mechanism for handling objections within a limited time to eliminate villagers' doubts and enhance the credibility of the system.

5.3 Strengthen the Foundation for Participation and Improve the Governance Guarantee System

5.3.1 Cultivate villagers' sense of ownership and stimulate intrinsic motivation

Through exemplary publicity, case demonstrations, and deliberative practices, reverse the inertia of passive participation. Establish the sense of ownership that "everyone is responsible for rural governance," and shift villagers from "I have to participate" to "I want to participate."

5.3.2 Optimize publicity efforts and eliminate information barriers

Employ diverse publicity methods such as dialect presentations, bilingual explanations, loudspeaker announcements, and door-to-door explanations. Regularly push out information on rule adjustments, points updates, and redemption details to ensure everyone is aware and fully understands.

5.3.3 Establish role models and strengthen exemplary guidance

Select model households and governance leaders, and publicly commend and widely publicize them. Use role models around us to motivate everyone to participate and create a positive atmosphere of learning from and surpassing each other.

5.4 Optimize the Points System to Achieve Precise Incentive Matching

5.4.1 Scientifically design the points system, taking into

account special groups, and construct a points system of "basic items + special items + ethnic items"

Add special items such as filial piety and love for family, inheritance of ethnic culture, and industrial assistance, and set up low-threshold points items for the elderly, disabled, and disadvantaged groups to achieve full coverage and precise matching.

5.4.2 Adhere to a dual-track incentive system and enrich incentive forms by combining material and spiritual incentives

Material rewards include daily necessities, production materials, and skills training, while spiritual incentives are linked to honors, policy support, and priority service, thereby enhancing the value and attractiveness of points.

5.4.3 Dynamically optimize rules and ensure long-term operation: Establish an annual adjustment mechanism for the points system

Update projects, points, and redemption standards based on villager feedback and governance needs, and build a diversified funding guarantee mechanism to promote the sustainable operation of the points system.

6. Conclusion

The points-based system is an effective tool for revitalizing rural governance and promoting villager participation in H City, and it has unique practical value in multi-ethnic areas. Currently, villager participation in the points-based system in H City still faces challenges such as weakened stakeholders, limited channels, insufficient awareness, and ineffective incentives. These challenges can be partly attributed to traditional governance inertia, inadequate system design, weak publicity and support, and an unbalanced incentive structure.

Optimizing the village participation pathway through the points-based system for rural governance in H City requires basing it on the characteristics of a multi-ethnic community and a plateau region. This involves transforming governance concepts as a prerequisite, improving institutional mechanisms as the core, strengthening the foundation for participation as a guarantee, and optimizing the points system as a key approach. Through empowerment, democratic decision-making, precise incentives, and diversified publicity, the challenges to village participation can be overcome, and intrinsic motivation can be activated. Ultimately, the points system should be deeply integrated with rural governance, ethnic integration, and industrial development, transforming villagers from passive participants to active co-builders, enhancing the modernization level of the rural governance system and governance capacity, and laying a solid foundation for the comprehensive revitalization of rural areas.

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