



Research on the Willingness of Village Consolidation and Policy Supply from the Perspective of Urban-rural Integration in China

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Abstract: From the household contract responsibility system to village merging and relocation, the formulation of land policies in China has continuously innovated on a farmer-centered basis. The village consolidation and resettlement policy has led to more efficient land use, but it has also brought about issues related to people's livelihoods. Implementing village merging and relocation and carrying out comprehensive land management are effective ways to promote rural management system reform and production intensification. However, during the implementation of the policy, the demolition and relocation inevitably involve the reorganization of production factors, leading to social contradictions. Therefore, the implementation of the village merging and relocation policy must not only focus on decision-making, but also address the problems encountered during policy implementation, take into account villagers' willingness, and enhance residents' sense of identity.

Keywords: village merging and relocation, urban-rural integration, villagers' willingness

1. Introduction

With the development of productivity and scientific technology, traditional methods of crop production are gradually failing to meet the demands of national productivity. Dispersed operations are inefficient and difficult to ensure quality. Moreover, the rapid urbanization has led to a massive influx of young people into cities for settlement, exacerbating the problem of rural aging in China and causing the emergence of "hollow villages". On the one hand, "hollow villages" result in significant waste of land resources and reduced land utilization. On the other hand, the departure of young people from rural areas has led to a high proportion of elderly residents, making medical care and pension issues increasingly acute. The education of left-behind children and social security also urgently need to be addressed.

Chanan, a German modern sociologist, compares communities to small-scale social units, suggesting that sensory factors such as cognition, customs, and traditions play a dominant role in communities, whereas contemporary urbanization is predominantly driven by rational factors, often observable through interests and contracts[1]. In 2020, China's Ministry of Natural Resources issued the "Opinions on Improving the Work of Village Planning", and the term "village consolidation and residency" began to be widely known. In the same year, the Shandong Provincial Government released the "Notice on Further Deepening the Reform of the Household Registration System and Promoting Urban-Rural Integration and Regional Coordinated Development", which further delineated the promising prospects of China's socialist new countryside and new urban construction. The most straightforward understanding of village merging and relocation is to merge scattered villages into communities, aiming to transform old rural areas into new urbanized rural areas, improve rural management systems, shape a more scientific rural economic structure, and enhance the quality of life for residents, thereby reducing the waste of land resources while promoting agricultural economic development. "Village merging and relocation" thus holds significance for both urbanization and the construction of socialist new countryside.

This paper elaborates on the concept of "village merging and relocation," clarifies its goals and tasks, integrates villagers' wishes with the policy of village merging and relocation, and explores the issues and feasibility associated with it. From the perspective of urban-rural integrated planning, it provides policy recommendations to local governments for the smooth implementation of village merging and relocation.

2. Conceptual Definition

2.1 Village Merging and Relocation

When studying the issue of village merging and relocation, it is essential to clearly define concepts such as "community" and "rural community". The term "community" was first introduced in the book "Community and Society," where it is described as a close-knit social group or community formed by individuals with shared customs and values based on kinship,

geographical location, emotions, and free will. A "rural community" is a social group characterized by its reliance on primary industries, land as the fundamental means of production, and connections through kinship and geographical relationships[2]. "Village merging and relocation" is not merely about the aggregation of villages or administrative organization but represents a profound transformation in rural social structures, organizational forms, and lifestyles. It is an essential step in the rural-to-urban transition and reflects the rapid development of urbanization[3]. This process is part of rural revitalization policies aimed at improving agricultural production environments and enhancing farmers' quality of life.

2.2 Urban-rural integration

"Urban-rural integration" refers to the mutual promotion of urban and rural areas over a certain period to achieve a win-win situation for both. It aims to fully leverage the support and reciprocal benefits of industry for agriculture and the influence of cities on rural areas, establishing a long-term mechanism where industry promotes agriculture and urban areas drive rural development, thereby driving the overall planning and development of urban and rural areas. Urban-rural integration means transforming and discarding the previous mindset of "prioritizing cities over rural areas" and "separate governance of urban and rural areas". Instead, it focuses on reducing the urban-rural disparities through institutional reforms and policy adjustments. It prioritizes agriculture, rural areas, and farmers in policy formulation and implementation, taps into the potential of agriculture, expands rural employment, and guides the orderly transfer of surplus rural labor[4].

3. Analysis of Issues in the Village Merging and Relocation Policy

Despite achieving high satisfaction among most farmers through surveys of the village merging and relocation work, there are still issues in the implementation of the policy. The political, economic, and social risks arising from imbalanced interests need to be properly managed. Among these issues, the irregularities in the demolition work are particularly prominent, including inadequate compensation standards, demolition without prior approval of resettlement sites, and untimely disbursement of demolition compensation[5]. The problems in the current implementation of the "village merging and relocation" policy can be summarized into the following dimensions:

3.1 Policy Promotion Dimension

Before the official implementation of the village merging and relocation policy, the government should consider farmers' knowledge levels and cultural backgrounds to thoroughly publicize the policy details. Although the policy was proposed in 2008, it wasn't widely known among farmers until 2020, as local governments did not conduct preliminary promotions. Even after the demolition work in the planned areas for merging villages and resettling farmers was basically completed, many farmers still had limited understanding of the policy content and misunderstood its significance.

3.2 Compensation Dimensions for Demolition

Compensation for demolition is a major concern for people. In areas where the "village merging and relocation" policy is implemented, different compensation standards are applied based on the construction structure of the houses. However, these standards are not as detailed as the house type classifications published by natural resource departments. The issue of house depreciation is not reasonably considered in demolition compensation. In recent years, some dissatisfied farmers who have renovated their houses often feel that the policy execution is unfair. Additionally, if the local area is affected by fiscal constraints and demolition payments are delayed, it can easily trigger social conflicts and generate negative public opinion about the "village merging and relocation" policy[6].

3.3 Resettlement Dimensions

The farmers' concerns about increased expenses after moving into residential buildings are justified. In many areas undergoing "village merging and relocation", the resettlement sites are often not constructed or even approved before the demolition begins. Farmers face two moves: from the demolition site to a temporary location, and then from the temporary location to the resettlement site. During these moves, many items are inevitably damaged or lost, and the cost of purchasing new items is substantial. Additionally, the principle of "square-for-square" in resettlement means that farmers with smaller original house areas may need to pay extra for a resettlement home, and the cost of redecoration also worries many farmers. Although the government has policies to provide economic compensation to residents after resettlement, it still imposes a significant burden on most farmers, hindering their participation in village merging and relocation.

3.4 Lifestyle Dimensions

Rural society is primarily a society of acquaintances and human connections, especially in villages with a long history, where farmers have a deeper sense of attachment to their hometown. The long-established lifestyle has made it difficult for

farmers to adapt to the community life in residential buildings after village merging and relocation. Farmers living on the second floor or above lose their courtyards, leading to challenges in storing farming tools, drying and storing grain, and safely parking large agricultural machinery and equipment.

4. Policy Recommendations

Village merging and relocation are crucial for improving rural living conditions, enhancing residents' well-being, reforming rural management systems, advancing sustainable and intensive rural development, and achieving common prosperity. The following recommendations are suggested:

First, the Government must adhere to the principle of “serving the people wholeheartedly” and keep in close touch with the people. It is essential to thoroughly implement policy promotion efforts, ensuring that every household involved understands and comprehends the policies. Second, the Government should adhere to the principle of “being accountable to the people”, and should take into account in detail the criteria for compensation for demolition and relocation and give thorough consideration to the matter. It should maintain a working style of "from the people, to the people" by actively listening to the voices of the community, understanding their demands, and promptly addressing any issues that arise during the process. Third, the government should prioritize planning and avoid blindly copying measures from other regions. Planning should be based on the actual conditions and unique characteristics of the villages in the area, with the aim of constructing communities with distinct economic development points. The approach should be tailored to local conditions, avoiding a "one-size-fits-all" strategy. Not all villages under its jurisdiction should be subject to consolidation blindly. For culturally renowned villages with rich historical resources, the government should strengthen cultural development and protection. Fourth, the government should fully respect the will of the people, prioritize protecting farmers' rights, and take the improvement of rural production and living conditions as the fundamental starting point, adhere to the villagers' dominant position, adhere to the principle of voluntary participation, acting according to one's abilities, and promoting in accordance with the law.

The merging of villages into communities has become an inevitable trend in social development. We must adhere to the laws of social development and keep pace with the times. The implementation of the village merging policy should aim to fulfill the people's aspirations for a better life, prioritize the interests of the people, unite and rely on them, and work together to achieve rural revitalization.

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