

# **Social Work Intervention Strategies for the Sustainable Development of Community Volunteer Teams: A Case Study of Organization X in S City**

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**Abstract:** This study takes the volunteer team of Organization X in S City as a case, employing literature review and semi-structured interviews. Grounded in empowerment theory and the strengths perspective, it systematically analyzes the team's sustainable development dilemmas and corresponding social work intervention strategies. The findings reveal four interwoven dilemmas: insufficient resource acquisition, difficulties in human resource retention, lagging institutional development, and weak external collaboration. The essence of these dilemmas lies in insufficient empowerment and underutilized strengths at the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and community levels. In response, this study proposes intervention strategies across four dimensions: establishing a diversified resource acquisition system, consolidating the human resource base, refining management and operational mechanisms, and building long-term external collaboration patterns. Specific measures include community asset mapping and resource capacity building; person-post matching, diversified incentives, and team-building activities to achieve individual and interpersonal empowerment; quantitative assessment and systematic training for organizational empowerment; and exploring low-fee services and enterprise cooperation based on complementary strengths. Through empowerment and strengths excavation, social work can potentially activate the team's endogenous momentum, facilitating its transition from episodic activities to a normalized organization, thereby achieving standardized, professionalized, and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Social Work; Community Volunteer Teams; Sustainable Development;

**Empowerment; Strengths Perspective**

## **1. Introduction**

Volunteer service is a significant indicator of social civilization and progress. As a crucial vehicle for delivering volunteer services at the community level, the sustainable development of community volunteer teams is of key importance for improving the grassroots social governance system [1]. The <Opinions on Improving the Volunteer Service System for the New Era> issued in 2024, explicitly calls for establishing a volunteer service system that adapts to the requirements of the new era and features Chinese characteristics [2]. However, community volunteer teams currently face common practical dilemmas such as insufficient active participation, lack of professional service capabilities, lagging team autonomy cultivation, and low resource integration efficiency, which severely constrain their sustainable development [3].

Some scholars point out that the core philosophy of social work – “helping people help themselves” – along with its professional methods, can both strengthen the endogenous motivation of volunteer team members and enhance team collaboration. Through systematic institutional design and resource linkage, it can break the development bottleneck of volunteer teams being “scattered, chaotic, and weak,” facilitating their transition from “episodic activities” to “normalized organizations” [4]. Against this backdrop, exploring how social work can effectively engage in the construction of community volunteer teams is not only a positive response to macro-policy directions but also requires in-depth observation based on specific practical fields.

Organization X in S City is a public service unit funded entirely by the government, the cultivation of community volunteer teams is one of its core functions. This study focuses on the

community volunteer team development practices of Organization X, aiming to explore how social work can systematically resolve the sustainable development dilemmas faced by the team across resource, human resource, institutional, and collaboration dimensions. Specific objectives include: first, to delineate the operational model and current characteristics of cultivating community volunteer teams in Organization X; second, to diagnose the key problems in their sustainable development; and third, based on the diagnosis, to design a set of social work intervention strategies informed by empowerment theory and the strengths perspective, aimed at enhancing the team's autonomous operation capacity.

## **2. Theoretical Basis and Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Basis**

(1) Empowerment Theory: It was first proposed by Solomon in 1976 as a conceptual framework for working with oppressed communities, this theory advocates for social work interventions that systematically enhance clients' self-efficacy and agency while actively reducing their sense of powerlessness and marginalization within social structures [5]. He further proposed three dimensions of empowerment: fostering positive self-cognition, constructing a critical understanding of the social environment, and cultivating resources and strategies for achieving goals [6]. In this study, the theory will be applied across three levels of analysis: individual efficacy, team collaboration, and resource acquisition.

(2) Strengths Perspective: Systematically articulated by Saleebey, this perspective emphasizes that everyone has capacities and resources; rather than focusing on deficits, social workers should activate clients' potential through equal partnership and collaborative discovery of their inherent assets, thereby fostering sustainable change rooted in the individuals' and communities' own strengths [7]. Its core concepts include strengths, empowerment, membership, resilience, and dialogue. This study will use the strengths perspective to guide the systematic inventory and cultivation of existing resources in Organization X, local community capital, and individual volunteers' talents.

### **2.2 Literature Review**

Domestic research has examined individual motivation, organizational management, and external environment dimensions. At the individual level, He and Qi noted that value-based rewards were the core incentive for sustained volunteer participation, while excessive material rewards could reduce willingness [8]. At the organizational management level, Chen and Wu pointed out that teams relied on government funding or temporary donations, lacking stable recycling mechanisms [9]. Regarding pathways out of dilemmas, Pan proposed a "dual circulation mechanism," where internally, resident needed feedback optimizes services, and externally, coordination with government and social organizations was formed [10]. In terms of social work intervention, Peng suggested intervention from three dimensions: incentive mechanisms, interaction patterns, and self-management [11]. International research focuses more on theoretical construction and motivation model refinement. Frisch based on a study of Red Cross volunteers, proposed a three-factor theory of "egoism-altruism-social responsibility" [12]. At the management mechanism level, C. Traeger and K. Alfes pointed out that high-performance human resource practices enhanced volunteer engagement through two mediating pathways: empowerment and organizational identification [13]. Regarding inter-generational succession in teams, S. Lambert et al. highlighted the importance of inter-generational succession awareness, promoting team transition from "individual-driven" to "organization-driven" through three pathways: experience transfer, core member cultivation, and culture shaping [14].

Synthesizing domestic and international research, existing studies have accumulated rich theoretical resources and practical experience, yet gaps remain: first, most studies focus on macro-policy analysis or the community level, lacking refined strategies for how specific organizations can systematically intervene in volunteer teams; second, existing cultivation frameworks are often summaries of phased experiences, lacking detailed design of capacity-building content for volunteers at different development stages; third, there is a disconnect between theoretical research and practical operation, with insufficient in-depth analysis of key aspects such as role transition and dynamic adjustment in the social work intervention

process. Therefore, this study uses Organization X as a case, focusing on analyzing the evolving roles of social workers and core intervention strategies at different stages of community volunteer team development, building a bridge between theory and practice, and exploring contextually appropriate social work intervention pathways.

### **3. Research Methods**

#### **3.1 Literature Review**

Through systematic review of relevant domestic and international academic books, journal articles, and internal organizational archives (e.g., volunteer management manuals, service ledgers), we comprehensively synthesized the research trends and practical foundations of sustainable development of community volunteer teams, including a critical assessment of theoretical gaps and empirical findings from both Western and Chinese contexts, providing a theoretical basis for subsequent dilemma analysis and strategy design. This review also identified recurring themes such as volunteer motivation, organizational capacity, and external resource dependencies, which directly informed the analytical framework employed in this study.

#### **3.2 Semi-Structured Interview**

Interviewees were divided into three core roles: team leaders, core volunteers, and ordinary volunteers. It follows the “maximum variation principle” [15], the researcher has selected participants with diverse roles, ages, occupations, and service backgrounds, interviewing a total of 15 people (aged 13-61, including students, enterprise employees, homemakers, retirees, etc.). To ensure data richness and contextual depth, each interview was conducted in a quiet, private room with comfortable seating and minimal distractions, and participants were encouraged to elaborate freely on their experiences. Sample size was determined based on the principle of theoretical saturation [16]. Each interview lasted 30-60 minutes and all recording materials were organized within 24 hours after the interviews, including verbatim transcription, initial coding, and cross-checking for accuracy by two independent researchers.

#### **3.3 Data Analysis Method**

Thematic analysis was employed, drawing on the three-level coding strategy of grounded

theory (open, axial, selective coding) to enhance analytical rigor. Open coding extracted initial codes such as “utilitarian motivation” and “passive resource dependence” which emerged directly from participants’ verbatim statements. Axial coding integrated these into main categories such as “resource acquisition dilemma” and “human resource retention dilemma”, while also examining causal conditions, contextual factors, and intervening conditions. Selective coding identified “insufficient empowerment and absence of strengths” as the core logic, forming an analytical framework structured around four dimensions: resource, human resource, institution, and collaboration. This framework was subsequently used to guide both the presentation of findings and the design of targeted interventions, ensuring alignment between diagnosis and action.

### **4. Findings: Core Dilemmas in Sustainable Development of Community Volunteer Teams**

#### **4.1 Resource Acquisition Dilemma: Insufficient Community Empowerment and Idle Assets**

The team faces funding shortages and a lack of stable material supplies. Leader 01 stated: *“The most urgent need is funding and stable supplies. The organization can only provide basic activity venues... some necessary activities rely on self-funding through charity sales.”* This passive adaptation and self-funding operational model reflects a clear state of resource dependence. From an empowerment theory perspective, this dilemma indicates a severe lack of empowerment at the community level, with insufficient capacity to actively link and integrate resources. From a strengths perspective, the team has fallen into a “problem-oriented” mindset, neglecting to explore potential community assets such as local enterprises, merchants, and professionals.

#### **4.2 Human Resource Retention Dilemma: Dual Deficits in Individual and Interpersonal Empowerment**

(1) Instability: Leader 01 noted: *“It’s hard to retain volunteers... most join for league membership or school admission points... very few are willing to stay.”* Short-term utilitarian motivation leads to an inefficient cycle. From an empowerment perspective, volunteer services

fail to provide value identification or capacity building beyond utilitarian goals, resulting in low self-efficacy.

(2) Single Incentive Mechanism: Existing incentives are mainly spiritual, such as hour recording and annual recognition. Ordinary volunteer 03 remarked: *“Besides recording hours, there could be some tangible rewards or certificates.”* Incentives are disconnected from diverse functional needs, lacking skill training, emotional bonding, and other interactive empowerment.

(3) Lack of Team-Building Activities: Ordinary volunteer 02 expressed: *“I hope there could be team-building activities to foster a sense of belonging.”* Insufficient interpersonal empowerment fails to build peer support networks, and individual strengths are difficult to translate into team cohesion.

#### **4.3 Institutional Development Dilemma: Organizational Empowerment Deficit and Hindered Strengths Utilization**

(1) Coarse Assessment Management: Leader 02 stated: *“Assessment is mainly based on attendance and participant feedback, but there is no clear quantitative indicator system, making implementation subjective.”* Coarse assessment fails to achieve the empowerment goal of promoting individual growth through evaluation. Management authority is overly centralized, and volunteers lack channels for participation.

(2) Lack of Systematic Training: Core volunteer 02 noted: *“The organization does hold training, but it’s fragmented and unsystematic. Much of our experience is self-learned.”* Ordinary volunteer 05 also said, *“There is no dedicated training.”* This lack of training results in dual deficits in individual and organizational empowerment and fails to transform core members’ experience into institutionalized training resources.

#### **4.4 External Collaboration Dilemma: Reliance on Community Empowerment and Broken Strengths Matching**

(1) Over-reliance on Government Resources: Leader 01 explicitly stated: *“We rely heavily on government resources.”* Policy changes or project application failures directly affect operations, placing the team in a passive position within government-community collaboration, with limited autonomous development space.

(2) Shallow Enterprise Cooperation: Leader 02

noted: *“Enterprise cooperation is superficial, mostly one-off activities, making it hard to form long-term stable relationships.”* The complementary strengths of both sides are not realized. The team lacks an equal bargaining position and has not designed cooperation plans based on mutual strengths.

#### **4.5 Summary of Findings**

The study identifies four interrelated dilemmas hindering the sustainable development of the community volunteer team. First, a resource acquisition dilemma characterized by funding shortages, unstable material supplies, and passive dependence on organizational support, reflecting insufficient community-level empowerment and a problem-oriented mindset that overlooks local assets. Second, a human resource retention dilemma marked by volunteer instability driven by utilitarian motives, a single incentive mechanism limited to spiritual recognition, and a lack of team-building activities, resulting in dual deficits in individual and interpersonal empowerment. Third, an institutional development dilemma featuring coarse assessment management without quantitative indicators and unsystematic training, leading to organizational empowerment deficits and failure to institutionalize experienced members’ knowledge. Fourth, an external collaboration dilemma involving over-reliance on government resources and shallow, one-off enterprise partnerships, which prevents the realization of complementary strengths and limits autonomous development space. These dilemmas collectively reinforce one another, trapping the team in a vicious cycle of dependency and low sustainability.

#### **5. Specific Social Work Intervention Strategies**

Based on the above dilemma analysis, and guided by empowerment theory and the strengths perspective, this study proposes systematic intervention strategies across four dimensions.

##### **5.1 Building a Diversified Resource Acquisition System: Strengthening Community Empowerment and Asset Activation**

(1) Community Asset Mapping and Activation: Social workers act as enablers, guiding volunteers to complete personal strength cards to

form a “Volunteer Strengths Resource Inventory”; organizing community walks to survey physical and hidden human resources within the catchment area, creating a “Community Asset Map” to break information barriers.

(2) Capacity Building for Independent Resource Expansion: Social workers take on an educator role, conducting training in resource negotiation skills using role-play to simulate communication scenarios; guiding volunteers to carry out “micro-public crowdfunding practices” around specific service projects, enabling them to master resource operation and project management skills through hands-on experience, facilitating the team’s shift from passive resource acquisition to active resource expansion.

### **5.2 Consolidating the Human Resource Base of Volunteer Teams: Achieving Individual and Interpersonal Empowerment**

(1) Enhancing Team Stability: Social workers act as enablers, distributing strength-recognition questionnaires and establishing a “Volunteer Strengths Profile” to achieve precise person-post matching (e.g., assigning communicative individuals to outreach, meticulous ones to documentation), allowing volunteers to gain a sense of value in well-suited roles.

(2) Improving the Diversified Incentive Mechanism: Build an incentive system comprising “spiritual recognition + tangible rewards + capacity building + political participation.” Establish quarterly special awards; develop a “Volunteer Time Bank” system to realize a “service-accumulation-reward” cycle; link external training resources, prioritizing active volunteers; advocate for seats on community councils, allowing outstanding volunteers to participate in community decision-making.

(3) Enriching Team-Building Activities: Using group work methods, conduct “cohesion enhancement” group activities (ice-breaking, trust-building, communication and collaboration, team challenges); regularly organize cross-team building and exchange activities to expand volunteers’ social networks.

### **5.3 Refining Team Management and Operational Mechanisms: Promoting Organizational Empowerment and Institutionalization of Strengths**

(1) Advancing Refined Management and

Assessment: Establish a “point + star” quantitative assessment system, breaking down indicators into basic points, quality points, and growth points; use digital tools for QR code check-in and automatic data aggregation, creating “one file per person”; select core members as “rotating duty leaders” and implement a “point confirmation system” to involve volunteers in management; organize quarterly growth review meetings, establishing a team growth archive.

(1) Building a Systematic Training System: Implement an “Internal Instructor Cultivation Plan” to identify senior volunteers as instructors and design micro-courses; establish a daily “senior-to-junior” mentoring mechanism, assigning experienced volunteers as mentors in each activity; implement a post-service debriefing mechanism, compiling a “Volunteer Service Experience Manual.”

### **5.4 Establishing Long-term External Collaboration Patterns: Deepening Community Empowerment and Strengths Matching**

(1) Expanding Resource Supply Channels: Social workers act as brokers, guiding the team to identify their core strengths and services, forming standardized “service product packages”; select low-cost, stable-demand services for low-fee pilots, with revenue entering a “Volunteer Fund” managed by a volunteer-representative fund management team responsible for accounting and approval, achieving self-financing and democratic oversight.

(2) Developing Long-term Collaboration Mechanisms: Lead core volunteers to visit local enterprises, understand their pain points, and create an “Enterprise Needs List”; organize “Collaboration Plan Co-creation Workshops” to design cooperation plans based on complementary strengths, with volunteer representatives negotiating with enterprises to establish long-term stable partnerships.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Research Conclusions**

This study, using the volunteer team of Organization X in S City as a case and applying empowerment theory and the strengths perspective, systematically analyzed the core dilemmas in sustainable development of

community volunteer teams and corresponding social work intervention strategies. The conclusions are as follows: Community volunteer teams possess diverse membership and a good service foundation, but their developmental potential is not fully realized due to insufficient empowerment and underutilized strengths. The team faces systemic, mutually reinforcing dilemmas across four dimensions: resource, human resource, institution, and collaboration, forming a vicious cycle of “insufficient resources-human resource loss-institutional lag-weak collaboration.” The essence of these dilemmas lies in insufficient empowerment at the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and community levels, as well as inadequate identification and utilization of internal and external strengths. Therefore, this study proposes a dual-core social work intervention centered on empowerment and the strengths perspective, which can effectively address the above dilemmas. Through strategies such as resource mapping and capacity building, person-post matching and diversified incentives, refined assessment and systematic training, and service productization and long-term collaboration, synergistic empowerment across four dimensions can activate the team’s endogenous momentum, promoting its development toward standardization, professionalization, and sustainability.

### 6.2 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following practical recommendations are offered:

- (1) Strengthen the allocation of full-time social work positions. It is recommended to institutionalize full-time social work positions, clarifying their responsibilities in needs assessment, capacity building, resource linkage, and supervisory support for volunteer team cultivation, with corresponding evaluation and compensation mechanisms.
- (2) Build a regional resource coordination platform. Led by departments such as Civil Affairs and Youth League committees, establish a digital volunteer service coordination platform integrating functions like demand posting, resource matching, and hour certification, facilitating long-term mutually beneficial cooperation among enterprises, communities, and volunteer teams.
- (3) Improve internal team governance mechanisms. Promote “point+star” quantitative

assessment, digital file management, and the “internal instructor” training system to enhance the refinement and professionalization of management; simultaneously establish diversified incentives such as the “time bank” to strengthen volunteers’ sense of belonging and willingness for sustained participation.

(4) Promote university-community cooperation and core member cultivation. University social work programs should link with community practice bases, integrating volunteer team cultivation into practical teaching; regularly conduct core member training camps to cultivate a group of core volunteers, facilitating the team’s transition from external empowerment to autonomous development.

### 6.3 Limitations and Future Directions

This study is a single-case qualitative study with limited sample representativeness, and the intervention strategies have not yet been validated through practice. Future research could conduct multi-case comparative studies, integrate quantitative methods to measure intervention effects, and use action research to test the operability and effectiveness of the strategies, providing stronger empirical support for the sustainable development of community volunteer teams.

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