

# The Folk United Operational Mechanism for Disaster Rescue in Southwest China

— by the Case Study of Yiliang “9·7” Earthquake

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**Abstract** - This paper uses the case study of Yiliang “9·7” Earthquake to illustrate and analyze the folk operational mechanism for united disaster rescue under the backgrounds of advocating high-efficiency social management and constructing resource-conserving society. The NGOs are playing an ever-increasingly important role in helping the government to conduct disaster relief work in the past five years. Through the investigations and interviews from the related NGOs and workers, this study discovers that NGOs’ united disaster rescue mechanism still has certain space to be refined and the related parties should widen the range of collaboration to gain more supports. Therefore, this article is to offer practical tips for NGOs to take lessons and sum up experiences from the relief work so as to better their united disaster rescue operation mechanism. It is necessary and meaningful for NGOs to possess a more perfect rescue mechanism to enhance their overall efficiencies on disaster relief work.

**Key words:** Yiliang “9·7” Earthquake, Folk operational mechanism, United disaster rescue, NGO

## I. Introduction

Since ancient times, scores of emergencies have posed a series of severe challenges and threats to people. In recent decades, spontaneous disasters have soared partly because of the changing climate and geology. However, various ways and scenarios could be witnessed in every process of rescue work, such as hurricane Sandy in the United States<sup>[1]</sup>, the 9.0 earthquake in Japan<sup>[2]</sup>, the tsunami in India Ocean<sup>[3]</sup>, the 7.0 earthquake in Haiti<sup>[4]</sup>, China's freezing disaster<sup>[5]</sup> and Lushan earthquake.

China, is a populous developing country, as well as one of the countries which has been grievously suffering from natural disasters in the world. Due to the complex topography, the global climate variation and rapid urbanization, the natural calamities which China need deal with have become more austere and complicated. Nevertheless, the catastrophes in Southwest China are most serious and intensive, where is also a huge seismic area. The casualties and losses caused by “5·12” Wenchuan earthquake were enormous and imponderable. In that event, folk united disaster rescue mode turned up in China, and the contributions of social strength highlighted out—the value of all donated materials and money was nearly RMB76 billion<sup>[6]</sup>.

Not only in destructive disasters can we realize NGOs’ significance, but also in other events, especially in small and middle-scale disasters. Giving the government are inclined to govern devastating catastrophe rather than small and medium-

sized ones, the roles only played by separate NGO are rather limited, hence it is necessary for NGOs to unify each other to handle social disaster relief issues. Over the past five years NGOs union workstation appeared in diverse collaborative models, which is of importance in emergency relief phase<sup>[7]</sup>, such as Yingjiang folk united disaster rescue workstation for Yingjiang earthquake rescue in Yunnan. This study gathered lots of related materials and information on rescue jobs from many organizations and workers. To enhance NGOs’ efficiency and productivity, this paper uses the case of Yiliang earthquake to analyze the current united disaster rescue operation mechanism.

## II. Literature Review

Varieties of unexpected incidents are likely to pose infinite threats to individuals’ lives and property, or even exert considerable impacts on the stability of society<sup>[8]</sup>. Along with richer disaster rescue experience, the concept and models for relief have changed dramatically. In the past times, almost only the governments could conduct disaster rescue work due to the consciousness of the responsibilities and the colossal workload, especially in China. It's not until late 1980s that some local governments still frowned on charities in China<sup>[9]</sup>.

However, with the improvement of awareness of disaster relief and the request from all society, the government could not satisfy victims' needs at all, which finally aroused the social strength<sup>[10]</sup>. What's more, the socialization reform of disaster relief work, which was proposed in the Tenth National Work Conference on Civil Affairs in 1994, paved way for the cooperation between the government and the market or even the whole society in the disaster rescue domain<sup>[11]</sup>. At that time, the leading principles of disaster rescue were saving people and satisfying victims’ basic needs<sup>[12]</sup>. Around 2000, there were lots of problems for social organizations to conduct disaster relief work, so that they just could do a little job in the process under the supervision and support of the government, such as raising funds and materials<sup>[13]</sup>.

After the past decade’s growth as well as the summary of the experience by the NGOs themselves, the structure and management of NGOs have refined systematically. Once Huimin Bian mentioned that the sudden catastrophe was able to provide a growth opportunity for NGOs’ development<sup>[14]</sup>. Some scholars discovered that disaster prevention and reduction work conducted by civil society to some degree

could make up for the lack of national functions<sup>[15]</sup>. In 2008, the NGOs developed the united disaster rescue model to fight against “5·12” Wenchuan earthquake<sup>[16,17]</sup>. Meanwhile, various other workstations emerged on Wenchuan earthquake rescue, such as New Homestead Workstation<sup>[18]</sup>. Though the united NGOs had made considerable contributions to Wenchuan rescue and reconstruction, they exposed many problems during that work process, some of which still exist in recent disaster rescue activities<sup>[19]</sup>. By this token, the NGOs still have a long way to go to conduct disaster relief work by this mechanism, which is also a turning point for them to ponder over this neoteric way from a comprehensive perspective to participate in social issues<sup>[20]</sup>.

In order to better apply this method in disaster relief work in the future, the NGOs need to refine its operational mechanism in the process of disaster rescue<sup>[21,22]</sup>. In current China, especially in disaster-prone Southwest area, it’s realistic and urgent for NGOs to conduct disaster rescue work with high efficiency and perfect operation.

### III . Theoretical Framework

According to the foregoing literatures and related studies, this study asserts that NGOs are high-efficiency supplements and collaborators of the government to perform disaster rescue work. Meanwhile, the government also has given more support to NGOs correspondingly. NGOs have acquired much more valuable experience from a kind of disaster rescue events, such as cross-border and cross-industry cooperation. These models were derived from the folk united disaster rescue workstation in the “5·12” earthquake. However, because the folk united disaster rescue operation mechanism is still a relatively novel disaster rescue model in today’s society, there are not enough articles to mention this mechanism. Based on letting more NGOs, enterprises and individuals to understand this mechanism so as to conduct disaster rescue work successfully and smoothly, this study uses the case of Yiliang earthquake to illustrate what the united disaster rescue mechanism is through its five aspects, including how it was implemented, what action principles and effects it had as well as the merits and some proposals.

This article aims to improve NGOs’ overall efficiency on the folk united disaster rescue field. Therefore, this study focuses on Yiliang “9·7” earthquake case to analyze the mechanism from different aspects by the investigations and interviews. Through the interviews, this paper also epitomized the features and tenets of the associated relief as well as some dimensions needed to be consolidated, which can offer guiding and realistic significance for NGOs to conduct relief work in union.

### IV . Case Study

On September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Yiliang county “9·7” earthquake occurred in Zhaotong, Yunnan, which is close to Guizhou province. There were two earthquakes on that day: the magnitudes are 5.7 and 5.6, and the focal depths were 14km and 10km respectively. Up to 2 pm on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012,

the earthquake had caused 183,000 households, a total of 744,000 people affected, among which 80 people died; 7,138 houses collapsed 30,600 rooms in all. Disasters brought about the economic loss of RMB3.704 billion directly<sup>1</sup>.

#### A. *The Implementation of Yiliang Folk United Disaster Rescue Workstation*

After the earthquake occurred, One Foundation<sup>2</sup>, the initiator, launched emergency response mechanism 30 minutes later after the 7.0 earthquake in Yiliang, then the folk searching and rescuing work carried out timely--48 hours later after Yiliang earthquake. With the help of NGODPC (NGO Disaster Preparedness Center)<sup>3</sup>, Huaxia Commonweal Service Center and some other NGOs, Yiliang earthquake folk relief joint workstation was formally founded. The strategy of the united relief workstation was to cooperate with enterprises and other non-profit partners to form a sustainable relief work platform, establish folk disaster relief supportive network, and build a disaster rescue linkage and echo mechanisms so as to reconstruct a warm home under the guide and support of the authorities. The workstation ensured that at least a number of supplies were able to delivered to disaster area every day. Some professional workers of the workstation took charge of disaster assessment and requirements research, then the rear workers purchased immediately according to the assessment work and shipped relief materials correspondingly. Though the united disaster rescue workstation emerged in Wenchuan earthquake, it matured in Yiliang.

In Yiliang united disaster rescue workstation, the labor divisions of each department were very specific and particular. Additionally, the workstation set up support platform, working platform and information platform to give full play to the function of resources coordination platform: the support platform aimed at providing necessary service for the volunteers from all over the country; the working platform was intended to go deep into the disaster area to conduct life emergency rescue, which consisted of launching the disaster evaluation work; the information platform was to supply stricken-area miscellaneous information services for philanthropic organizations and volunteers.

By this series of work, One Foundation allied with other 24 NGOs, who coordinated and integrated the relief supplies, worth up to RMB3.2 million, raised from Tencent Foundation, Baidu and other humanitarians. Meanwhile, the joint relief

workstation recruited 213 volunteers in all, and the volunteer service time was over 100,000 hours. By the statistics, the released relief materials benefited more than 25,000 people.

<sup>1</sup> <http://china.caixin.com/2012-09-07/100434668.html>

<sup>2</sup> One Foundation is an philanthropic organization launched by Lianjie Li in 2007, which is the only one private public-raising foundation in China. One Foundation’s strategic mode is a platform and three domains, namely focusing on disaster relief, child care and training public personne

<sup>3</sup> NGO Disaster Preparedness Center is mainly engaged in disaster emergency rescue; post-disaster reconstruction work, including the affected youth’s employment and entrepreneurship, community’s sustainable development, etc.

### *B. Action Principles of Folk Joint Relief*

To some extent, the guidelines to action have made definite contribution to the success and achievements of nongovernment united relief. Five dominating rules are listed as follows.

- (1) **Clear positioning**  
Relief work was a systematic project, which could not achieve the stated goal without effective cooperation and division. As for private organizations or volunteers, all of them must realize the periodical feature and specific requirements of disaster relief work, and carry out work according to their own capability, expertise and resources.
- (2) **Observing laws and disciplines**  
All activities held by the joint workstation must obey the national laws and regulations, which also should abide by local government's provisions and respect indigenous culture.
- (3) **Organizing cooperation**  
The staff and individual volunteers must comply with the systemic action principles. The workstation completely prohibited independent action and individual heroism.
- (4) **Communicating and consulting**  
The responsible person must disclose and maintain negotiable channels with relevant government departments and local commonweal groups. Besides, everything related with disaster relief was consulted and determined by all associated members equally.
- (5) **Doing according to their abilities**  
The workers launched all jobs in the premise of safety, and they never organize activities which beyond their resource capacity and technical ability.

### *C. The Effects of Folk United Rescue*

The civil united rescue was to improve the efficiency of civilian relief and offset government's deficiencies during the process of disaster relief. The main effects are listed as follows.

- (1) **Carrying out emergency rescue**  
The workstation arranged organizations and volunteers to launch professional disaster relief work, and they started life rescue work 72 hours later after the calamity. What's more, they mainly focused on the personalized needs of the vulnerable, especially the aged, the pregnant, the handicapped and the child.
- (2) **Introducing kinds of social resources**  
The federal workstation gave full play to coordinating individuals from the public, including some medical companies and food corporations.
- (3) **Promoting information circulation**  
When the relief needs could not be satisfied, the united office would release the news so as to get the support from the outside.

- (4) **Coordinating volunteers to participate in disaster relief work efficiently and orderly**

The workstation could capitalize on rich experience in disaster relief to help the local government authorities to better organize and manage volunteers.

- (5) **Providing direct social and community service**

The workstation organized volunteers to take charge of clearing debris, rescuing belongings and setting up tabernacles for refugees. Besides the direct work, they also offered personalized professional assistance, such as psychological counseling, especially in the schools.

Generally speaking, what the workstation organized and managed in the process of the disaster rescue work could supplement and perfect what the governments should do.

### **V. Analysis**

This paper will analyze the advantages and the disadvantages as well as the corresponding countermeasures of the folk united disaster rescue mechanism in the process of Yiliang earthquake relief.

#### *A. The Advantages of the Folk United Operational Mechanism*

Based on the previous experience, the united disaster rescue workstation not only owned explicit and flexible structure, but also cooperated with much more enterprises and individuals in diverse realms. This study lists the following main five merits:

- (1) The union office possessed an effective and orderly organizational structure. Once the joint relief office set up, the general coordinator convened staff meeting to discuss and make a variety of ideal rules and regulations in the shortest time.
- (2) Its foundation prevented resources overlapping, information asymmetry, inefficient volunteer service and unsmooth communication with the government such problems from appearing in the rescue process.
- (3) The internal organizational structure of workstation and the division of staff's duties were more distinct and legible than before.
- (4) The workstation's scale and internal organizational structure could be adjusted flexibly. Furthermore, the workers of each functional team also can be flexibly adjusted according to the workload and the dimension of the organization.
- (5) The office regarded the public's interest as the top priority, and each NGO knew its own expertise. Therefore, workstation could take full advantage of all participating NGOs to launch and organize disaster rescue work in accordance with their own cases.

With the development and improvement of NGOs in disaster rescue domain recently, the NGOs have gained wider credibility in society, which was clearly reflected in Lushan "4·20" earthquake rescue work.

### *B. The Disadvantages and the Corresponding Proposals of the Folk United Operational Mechanism*

Though this model indeed contributed a lot to disaster rescue, post-disaster reconstruction and society's growth, there are still some aspects needed to be refined.

Firstly, there were no clear workstation service principles in written, standard financial management system or volunteer management regulations. Secondly, there was no prescriptive meeting system or relief materials and warehouse management systems, either. Thirdly, the workstation did not provide abundant support for volunteers, such as sufficient professional skill trainings and service certificates.

However, these principles, systems, supports and regulations are very important for related parties to decide whether they would join in the united disaster rescue team or not.

Besides, there are other four matters needing attention: (1) NGOs need take pains to offer public courses of disaster prevention and reduction for children as well. By virtue of education, the public can develop a positive and favorable habit to face and handle disasters. (2) All participating institutions need to be familiar with the joint rescue system and related knowledge, especially the emergency practices. (3) The united rescue workstation need exploit a set of effective emergency command system to standardize and unify members' actions, to overall coordinate the resources among the members so as to form a unified command joint rescue system with complementary advantages. (4) The workstation need have more communication with the governments and the outside, which is conducive for NGOs to launch disaster relief work.

For attracting more support, resources and funds, the NGOs need try their best to notice and refine these aspects analyzed above. Only in that way can they make a remarkable progress and success in disaster rescue domains.

### **VI. Conclusion**

To enhance NGOs' efficiency on disaster rescue work in Southwest China where earthquakes are rather usual and serious, this study researched and analyzed the united disaster rescue mechanism by Yiliang "9·7" earthquake relief. Though its potential functions and operation principles were somewhat key points for NGOs to make certain success with the victims' trust and the support from all circles of the society, this paper also pointed out some main problems and corresponding proposals to related parties. Therefore, this article is likely to have a realistic guiding function for NGOs to deal with disaster rescue work for maximum defending people's life and assets.

In addition, given the disaster rescue work is only a tip of the iceberg for NGOs to handle all kinds of social affairs, it's intensely crucial for NGOs to leverage triumphant experience from the united disaster rescue both in disaster relief field and in other realms. In this respect, the united disaster rescue mechanism also has a methodological as well as theoretical meaning to be a model for NGOs and individuals to handle

disaster rescue work and fulfill other social issues, for instance, poverty alleviation and social security.

To some degree, the folk's collaboration in conducting social matters can avoid some regrets, create a brighter future and alter a might-have-been outcome. This paper is expected to be beneficial for NGOs to perfect the united disaster rescue model and better perform other social affairs according to the research on this mechanism. Through NGOs' unremitting efforts and valuable experience, the disaster relief work will not only go smoothly and successfully, but also guarantee it to be carried out as people think and expect. Though the road ahead is arduous, the future of united action in every field is luminous. Therefore, NGOs should stick to exploring sustainable and broad united operational mechanism in disaster rescue and other suitable fields.

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