

# Research on the Participation of Charitable Organizations in the Educational Assistance of Children in Difficult Circumstances from a Collaborative Perspective: A Case Study of the Guilin Aid Association

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## Abstract

With the increasing societal attention on vulnerable groups, the educational issues of children in difficult circumstances have gradually become a focal point of social concern. Charitable organizations, as an important force in social assistance, play an indispensable role in the educational assistance of these children. However, from a collaborative perspective, charitable organizations face numerous challenges in their participation in this area. This paper delves into the issues faced by the Guilin Aid Association in its efforts to assist children in difficult circumstances and proposes corresponding countermeasures and suggestions, aiming to promote the better functioning of charitable organizations in the educational assistance of these children.

**Keywords:** collaborative perspective, charitable organizations, children in difficult circumstances, educational assistance, challenges research

## 1. Introduction

Children in difficult circumstances refer to those who face adverse living and educational environments due to factors such as family economic hardship, parental divorce, disability, or illness. These children often encounter numerous educational challenges, including a lack of learning resources, insufficient family support, psychological stress, difficulties in integrating into school life, and economic pressures. Charitable organizations, as a significant component of social forces, play a crucial role in providing educational assistance to these children. However, in reality, there is a disconnect between "institutional assistance" and "non-institutional assistance," leading to a lack of unified organization and implementation. This results in fragmented efforts among government departments and social organizations, with insufficient integration and coordination. Consequently, the participation of charitable organizations in educational assistance has not been able to enhance the precision, continuity, and efficiency of such assistance. How to organize charitable organizations to participate in educational assistance from a collaborative governance perspective, thereby forming a new synergy between charitable and government assistance to better integrate children in difficult circumstances into society, is a question worthy of in-depth theoretical and practical exploration.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Educational Assistance for Children in Difficult Circumstances

Educational assistance refers to the system in which the state, social groups, or individuals provide material and financial aid to impoverished regions and students at different stages to ensure their access to education. Domestic research in the field of educational social support has largely focused on aiding impoverished students. However, there is a lack of specific research on the support needs of impoverished students at the primary and secondary school levels, and the universality and severity of these needs are not fully recognized. Currently, the group of impoverished children can be roughly divided into two categories: those whose social functioning is limited by physical disabilities, making it difficult for them to integrate into mainstream peer groups, and those who, due to the loss of family protection, live in relatively isolated environments with severely deficient early social support systems, thereby exacerbating the fragility of the "family-school-society" ecosystem. Examining the history of social protection and assistance for children in difficult circumstances in China, the understanding and classification of these children by the government, families, and society have continuously deepened, expanding

from the initial focus on abandoned infants, orphans, impoverished children, and street children to a broader group that includes de facto orphans, disabled children, and abandoned infants.

The core focus of educational support for children in difficult circumstances lies in two dimensions: first, the material deprivation caused by "economic hardship," which leads to a mismatch between educational resources and the external educational environment or ecosystem, resulting in educational guidance challenges; second, the educational guidance difficulties arising from "cultural disadvantages," particularly the psychological deficits caused by cultural factors, manifested in delayed cognitive development, lack of social and emotional experiences, exclusion and isolation within subcultural groups, and the resulting behavioral issues and socialization barriers. Traditional educational assistance models often emphasize basic survival guarantees, with a fundamentally passive assistance philosophy that lacks a development-oriented assistance mechanism. As societal attention to the educational issues of children in difficult circumstances continues to grow, the scale of charitable organizations' participation in educational assistance has gradually expanded, with more organizations beginning to focus on and engage in this area, thereby addressing the shortcomings of traditional educational assistance.

### *2.2 Participation of Charitable Organizations in Educational Assistance*

Non-institutional assistance from social forces is a necessary complement to government institutional assistance. Charitable organizations, as an important part of social forces, provide educational assistance to children in difficult circumstances through fundraising and the provision of educational resources, which is significant for improving their educational conditions. The "Interim Measures for Social Assistance" published in February 2014 proposed that "the state encourages social forces such as units and individuals to participate in social assistance through donations, the establishment of assistance projects, the creation of service institutions, and the provision of volunteer services," thereby encouraging the involvement of "non-institutional assistance" on the basis of government "institutional assistance." In 2020, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on Reforming and Improving the Social Assistance System," explicitly proposing the "establishment of a mechanism for the connection between government assistance and charitable assistance." In the same year, the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Ministry of Finance jointly released the "Draft Social Assistance Law (Draft for Solicitation of Comments)," which included a dedicated chapter on "Social Forces Participation," further requiring that "local people's governments at or above the county level establish a mechanism for the connection between government assistance and charitable assistance, providing convenience for charitable organizations to carry out charitable assistance." It also clarified the role of government procurement of social assistance services, the role of social organizations and social workers in social assistance, and the preferential policies that social forces should enjoy when participating in social assistance. In 2023, the Ministry of Civil Affairs issued the "Guiding Opinions on Strengthening the Effective Connection between Government Assistance and Charitable Assistance," proposing to support charitable organizations in providing targeted services such as home visits, psychological comfort, rehabilitation training, and capacity building through government procurement of services.

With the development of the social economy, social assistance should not be limited to material aid. As China enters a new stage of relative poverty, the social security system and assistance measures for low-income groups should not only focus on material aid but also expand to collaborative cooperation with charitable organizations to provide more detailed and diversified support services. By implementing assistance and developmental aid projects for vulnerable groups, the intrinsic potential of children in difficult circumstances can be effectively stimulated, and optimal strategies can be adopted to promote their social integration.

Additionally, theoretical research emphasizes that building a social support system for children in difficult circumstances requires mobilizing multiple forces and establishing a collaborative support framework led by the state, integrating the participation of individual citizens, non-profit organizations, and various social sectors, aiming to achieve effective resource complementarity and comprehensive integration of activities. However, from a collaborative perspective, charitable organizations face numerous challenges in their participation in the educational assistance of children in difficult circumstances, which urgently need to be addressed. Some children in genuine need of assistance may be overlooked for various reasons, while some who do not meet the assistance criteria may receive aid resources, not only failing to fully fulfill the bottom-line function but also lacking in development promotion and capacity enhancement. There is a serious "welfare gap," affecting the healthy operation of the social assistance system. The key to the participation of multiple subjects in collaboration lies in breaking the "dual-track" or "multi-track" system caused by the lack of coordination and integration among social subjects.

### **3. Current Status of the Guilin Aid Association's Participation in the Educational Assistance of Children in Difficult Circumstances**

The high-quality development of social assistance is related to the realization of the bottom-line guarantee for people's livelihoods and the goal of common prosperity. Among these, educational assistance is one of the main ways people participate in assisting children in difficult circumstances. The government and social groups hope to change the current living conditions of these children through knowledge. "Knowledge changes destiny" is an important way to change their future quality of life. However, the social assistance system has always followed the goal of survival guarantee, and the assistance philosophy remains a passive, non-developmental assistance system orientation.

#### *3.1 Scale and Forms of Educational Assistance*

Since its establishment in 2011, the Guilin Aid Association has rebuilt and renovated 9 schools, improved the teaching conditions of 67 mountain schools, built 93 campus libraries, provided long-term one-on-one financial aid to 151 students, installed a "1 Yuan Story" bedtime story broadcasting system in 171 mountain boarding schools, benefiting 110,000 students. By the end of 2017, the association added the "Book Plan - Rural School Book Corner" public welfare project, which has now donated 93 book corners to rural schools in Guilin, with a cumulative donation of 20,000 books. In April 2018, the association launched the "Dream Stone Painting" public welfare project, which has now delivered 1,817 sets of "Dream Stone Paintings" to children in 35 rural schools in Guilin. The association has raised over 5 million yuan in donations, with public welfare footprints spanning 13 counties inside and outside the region, nearly 60,000 hours of volunteer service, and nearly 500,000 kilometers of public welfare mileage, achieving significant social impact. However, due to limited resources, the coverage and depth of educational assistance still need improvement. The Guilin Aid Association still faces numerous challenges and difficulties in its participation in the educational assistance of children in difficult circumstances.

**Identification of Children in Difficult Circumstances:** The Guilin Aid Association primarily identifies children in difficult circumstances through internal recommendations from members who encounter these children in their daily lives, followed by on-site investigations and voting to confirm the aid recipients. There is a lack of unified identification standards, and the coverage is limited due to reliance on member recommendations.

**Fundraising for Assistance Resources:** The Guilin Aid Association is a non-profit, volunteer-initiated civil charitable organization that faces difficulties in applying for projects and raising funds.

#### *3.2 Policy Environment and Support*

The government has played an important role in promoting the participation of charitable organizations in the educational assistance of children in difficult circumstances. By formulating relevant policies and regulations, providing financial support, and establishing cooperation mechanisms, the government has created a favorable policy environment for charitable organizations. However, there are still some issues in the implementation of policies, such as inadequate policy promotion and implementation, which affect the enthusiasm of charitable organizations to participate in educational assistance.

When reviewing policy documents over the years, it is evident that the focus of policies at both the national and local levels has largely been on material guarantees, while support in non-material areas, especially in terms of humanistic care, has been relatively weak. Children in difficult circumstances, as a vulnerable group in society, often face issues such as low self-confidence, lack of security, and negative emotions such as pessimism, fear, depression, and loneliness. These psychological problems have long plagued them, and if not addressed and intervened, they may have a potential negative impact on society. The educational assistance work carried out by the Guilin Aid Association is not limited to economic support but also includes the implementation of "one-on-one" assistance projects, strengthening interaction and communication with vulnerable groups, allowing children in difficult circumstances to feel warmth while receiving necessary educational support in their studies and lives, thereby fundamentally eliminating their vulnerable psychology and promoting their mental health development. However, charitable organizations have limited interaction with the schools and communities of children in difficult circumstances during the assistance process. The understanding of these children by charitable organizations mainly comes from the parents and the children themselves, and the organizations cannot obtain effective support from the children's surroundings to carry out various assistance tasks.

### **4. Challenges Faced by Charitable Organizations in Participating in Educational Assistance**

#### *4.1 Resource Integration: Dispersed Assistance Forces*

The identification of children in difficult circumstances is a prerequisite for charitable organizations to participate in assistance. However, in practice, due to the lack of unified identification standards and effective identification

mechanisms among charitable organizations and social organizations, charitable organizations face difficulties in identifying aid recipients. The lack of information sharing among government departments and organizations may result in some children receiving double assistance while others are overlooked, making it difficult for charitable organizations to expand the coverage of assistance. In the process of participating in the educational assistance of children in difficult circumstances, charitable organizations face the challenge of resource integration. On the one hand, due to information asymmetry and poor communication among different charitable organizations, educational resources cannot be effectively integrated and shared; on the other hand, due to the "independent operation" of other social forces such as the government and enterprises in participating in educational assistance, charitable organizations lack effective support in resource integration.

#### *4.2 Policy Support: Lack of Adequate Guarantees*

Due to the imperfection of relevant laws and regulations, charitable organizations lack clear legal basis and guarantees in their participation in educational assistance. The legal system construction of China's charity sector is relatively lagging, and there has long been a lack of specialized social assistance legislation and a systematic legal framework for charitable organizations. Although the "Charity Law of the People's Republic of China" enacted in 2016 filled the legislative gap in related fields, its provisions on the participation of social organizations in assistance activities remain at a macro level, with obvious deficiencies in specific implementation mechanisms and operational norms. In terms of organizational form, social groups, foundations, and social service agencies, as the three main bodies in the charity sector, rely mainly on the "Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Groups" and other administrative regulations for their legal status. These regulatory documents are relatively low in legal hierarchy, with insufficient binding force and normative power, making it difficult to effectively support the practical needs of charitable organizations to deeply participate in social assistance.

#### *4.3 Department Coordination: Unclear Division of Responsibilities*

In the process of participating in the educational assistance of children in difficult circumstances, charitable organizations also face the challenge of policy coordination. On the one hand, the coordination and cooperation among different government departments are not close enough, resulting in difficulties for charitable organizations in applying for projects and obtaining funds; on the other hand, after analyzing policy documents issued by the government over the past decade, it is evident that the educational assistance work for children in difficult circumstances often involves multiple government departments. However, unfortunately, there is currently a lack of a department specifically responsible for comprehensive planning and coordination. This situation of multi-headed management has led to unclear division of responsibilities, dispersed assistance forces, repeated coverage of aid recipients, and low efficiency in the utilization of assistance resources.

#### *4.4 Social Perception: Insufficient Social Support*

In the process of participating in the educational assistance of children in difficult circumstances, charitable organizations also face the challenge of social perception. On the one hand, due to misunderstandings and prejudices about charitable organizations, charitable organizations encounter difficulties in fundraising and promotion; on the other hand, due to insufficient social attention to the issues of children in difficult circumstances, charitable organizations lack effective means to gain social support and participation.

### **5. Building a Collaborative Governance Framework for Educational Assistance**

In recent years, China's charity sector has flourished, with various charitable organizations actively participating in social assistance practices, making significant contributions to the improvement of the multi-level social security system. Research shows that charitable organizations play an important supplementary and promotional role in the field of educational assistance. However, through in-depth investigation, it is found that the current social assistance work of charitable organizations still faces issues such as insufficient systemic connection, imperfect system design, and weak practical links. Based on this, this study systematically explores countermeasures and suggestions for improving the effectiveness of charitable organizations in social assistance from the dimensions of system optimization, mechanism innovation, and resource integration.

#### *5.1 Strengthening Internal Resource Integration and Sharing*

Charitable organizations themselves, as providers of support services, meet the needs of vulnerable groups. On the other hand, charitable organizations also serve as intermediaries for assistance, providing social support from the state, enterprises, and the market to vulnerable children. As an important role in providing assistance resources, the establishment and improvement of internal management have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the social assistance provided by charitable organizations.

Charitable organizations should strengthen cooperation and communication with other charitable organizations, government departments, enterprises, and other social forces, establish effective resource integration and sharing mechanisms, actively connect with the government, schools, communities, and enterprises, promote the connection among assistance subjects, assistance processes, and assistance methods, and avoid the fragmented phenomenon of "independent operation" in the educational assistance of children in difficult circumstances and the overlap of assistance projects. This will maximize the utilization of educational resources and achieve maximum benefits.

By sharing information with local grassroots governments, civil affairs departments, social work agencies, and schools, create systematic archival materials for children in difficult circumstances, present the developmental stage characteristics of these children, and provide support for systematic development assistance and guidance. This will meet the diversified and in-depth needs of children in difficult circumstances.

### *5.2 Improving the Legal System for Educational Assistance*

When charitable organizations are involved in the field of social assistance, the adoption of the third-sector theory is particularly important to strengthen the construction of their external environment. At the institutional level, the "independent operation" model among assistance subjects has led to the "segmented management" of social assistance activities and the "one-sided presentation" of assistance outcomes. The root cause of these drawbacks lies in the discreteness of assistance objects and the mismatch of assistance processes. Therefore, the government needs to increase policy support and coordination for charitable organizations' involvement in the educational assistance of children in difficult circumstances, establish and improve relevant policies, regulations, and institutional guarantee frameworks.

At the same time, strengthen the supervision and guidance of charitable organizations to ensure that their educational assistance activities comply with laws and regulations. To improve the standardization level of assistance work for children in difficult circumstances, it is urgent to establish and improve a standardized management system. This system should clearly define the responsibilities, service scope, and operational norms of charitable organizations in the field of educational assistance to meet the innovation and development needs of social assistance work in the new era. At the same time, efforts should be made to improve the participation mechanism of charitable organizations, optimize the implementation plan of educational assistance based on the differentiated needs of regional children in difficult circumstances, and streamline work processes. It is recommended to build a unified local information database for children in difficult circumstances and establish a digital management platform to provide data support and decision-making basis for charitable organizations to accurately carry out assistance services.

### *5.3 Establishing Government-Society Collaborative Relationships*

Under the framework of public service contracts, the government adopts a service procurement strategy, delegating specific functions to charitable organizations for execution, and ensuring the effective provision of support services needed by children in difficult circumstances through regulatory means. In the field of assistance for children in difficult circumstances, building a trust system between the government and charitable organizations is crucial. To this end, it is necessary to clarify the common goals and value orientations of both parties, while establishing a standard system for the government to evaluate the rationality of assistance projects for children in difficult circumstances. In addition, optimizing the communication mechanism between the two parties is also essential. The government should establish an information sharing platform for charitable organizations, the educational public service system, local communities, schools, and other parties to integrate charitable resources, efficiently collaborate, and provide more precise educational assistance to children in difficult circumstances.

### *5.4 Enhancing the Credibility of Charitable Organizations*

In the process of public service procurement, government departments tend to prioritize non-governmental organizations with sound evaluation mechanisms and good social reputations as partners. Especially in the field of assistance for children in difficult circumstances, social welfare organizations play a crucial role in credibility-building, given that their service targets are mainly impoverished and vulnerable groups. An organization's social recognition not only influences the level of trust from government departments but also determines its ability to obtain continuous social resource support. Based on this reality, charitable organizations should focus on strengthening their self-construction from the following aspects:

To enhance organizational credibility, systematic measures should first be taken internally. Firstly, establish and improve a financial information disclosure mechanism by regularly publishing annual operational reports, detailed income and expenditure statements, and fund-raising data to achieve full traceability of fund flows. For the use of funds in key projects, a dynamic publicity system should be established to actively accept social supervision.

Secondly, always uphold the mission of public welfare and provide precise and diversified assistance programs tailored to the differentiated needs of children in difficult circumstances, thereby gaining recognition and support from all sectors of society. Thirdly, construct a diversified supervision system, which, while strengthening government regulation, broadly engages enterprises, media, and the public in supervision to broaden supervision channels. Fourthly, improve the internal governance structure by standardizing the code of conduct for practitioners, advancing organizational professionalization, and continuously enhancing service efficiency. Furthermore, charitable organizations should actively engage in promotional and educational activities to increase societal attention and awareness of issues facing children in difficult circumstances. At the same time, strengthen cooperation and communication with media, enterprises, and other sectors of society to garner more social support and participation. By organizing volunteer services, public welfare activities, and other forms, enhance the public's awareness and participation in public welfare.

## 5. Conclusion

Charitable organizations play a significant role in participating in educational assistance for children in difficult circumstances but still face numerous challenges from a collaborative perspective. The implementation of measures such as strengthening resource integration and sharing, improving the legal system for educational assistance, establishing government-society collaboration, and enhancing the credibility of charitable organizations can effectively promote the better functioning of charitable organizations in educational assistance for children in difficult circumstances. Meanwhile, this also requires concerted efforts and support from multiple parties, including the government, social organizations, and the public.

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