

The Impact of NGO' functions on Women Participation in Capacity Building Programmes in Iran

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Abstract: Women, as citizens and human resources, have the same rights, duties, responsibilities and opportunities as men in all aspects of life and development activities. Thus, women's participation in society and their role in development have been accorded significant importance. Recently, policy makers and NGO programmers have realized how women can play an important role in the development of their society. However, some factors such as norms, beliefs, customs and values constrained the women participation, particularly in Third World countries. This study attempts to examine the effect of NGO's function to promote participation among women in capacity building programmes. Indeed, this paper discovered that the local NGOs have high impact on the participation of women in Shiraz, Iran. Data was collected from 195 women who involved in NGO's activities. The result of study revealed that the mean score of the women's participation are different among the four functions of NGOs, based on the mean score. The result of study also showed that the function of "mobilizing women to participate in programme" had higher impact compare to other functions. In short, the study concluded that the NGOs in Shiraz could act as medium to encourage women's participation and subsequently has the potential to empower them. [Journal of American Science 2010;6(10):752-761]. (ISSN: 1545-1003).

Keywords: non-governmental organization, NGO's function and activities, participation, Iran, women and empowerment

Introduction

Participation is a central concept in, and foundation principle of, community development. Community participation is sometimes used to indicate community activities, which are usually undertaken by government agency or the community on its own. Most important agencies of development emphasize on participation as a key concept on development, and they believed that without participation sustainable development difficult to achieve. Thus, participation occupies a central place in development thinking and practice. Governments, funding agencies, donors, and civil society actors including NGOs and multi-lateral agencies like the

World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have all arrived at a consensus that development cannot be sustainable and long-lasting unless people's participation is made central to the development process. Even, on the gender basic, participation among women in development is also paramount. Less participation and too dependent on man among women is problematic. Many feminists have noted the lack of economic power of women and their economic dependence on men as the heart of women's lower status and power (Burn, 2005).

Apparently, women are low in power and status economically and politically. For instance, in most countries, voting rights have only been awarded to

women in the last thirty years. According to Inter-Parliamentary Union (2003) only 15 percent of the worlds' lawmakers are women and fifteen countries had no women representatives. In stead, women, as citizens and human resources for development, have the same rights, duties, responsibilities and opportunities as men in all aspects of national life and development activities. International organizations like the World Bank and the United Nations have focused on women's issues, especially empowerment of women (World Bank, 2001). In this regard, women's participation in society and their role in development have been accorded significant importance. Thus, the issue of women's participation in decision making has become one of the focuses of several Non-Government Organizations (NGOs).

The previous researches have pay little attention to the NGO' functions and participation of women. Therefore, this paper attempts to highlight the functions of NGOs in promoting women's participation in capacity building programmes. The paper is based on a study which was carried out in Shiraz, Iran. The specific objectives of the study were to identify the level of women's participation and to determine which NGOs' functions have the high impact on women participation.

Literature review; Role of NGOs & participation

Western political theorists, sometimes, divide society into three basic components: the state, private enterprise and civil society. This has been represented by the metaphor of the prince, who represents governmental power; the merchant, representing economic power; and the citizen, who embodies people's power (Korten, 1990). Civil society has been further identified as the public space between individual citizens and the state, in which their activities occur collectively and in an organized form (Stewart, 1997). As their name indicates, non-governmental organizations are an important part of civil society and therefore, they are distinct from both the state and private enterprise; NGOs are nonprofit as well as non-governmental (Makumbe, 1998).

Nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs as they are commonly called, are increasingly making their presence known in the popular media as well as international politics. Non-governmental organizations play important roles, to involving and enabling communities to develop and use their own initiatives to develop themselves (Hbitat, 1998 in Agbola, 1994).

In addition, Strreten (1997) have mentioned that NGOs have been particularly determined to empower the poor, the weak, and the marginalized to encourage people to take decisions themselves, to become agents, rather than treating them as target groups or passive recipients of benefits.

Similarly, Pattnaik and Panda (2005) attempt to look at the role of grass-roots NGOs from the new social movement perspective. They have asserted that NGOs contributed toward new social movements through their intense campaigns, people's mobilization programs and effective networks. In the light of these, NGOs as a social force, facilitates collective action and people's mobilization (Sharan, 2006).

Rodriguez et al, (1994) have been summarized advantages of NGOs in development. They are effective at service delivery; able to promote and motivate local participation; effective in reaching vulnerable groups such as women and minorities; quick and innovative in service delivery and, thus able to respond quickly to emergency situations; and able to accurately articulate and respond to the needs of the communities which they serve (Rodriguez et al., 1994).

Baccaro (2006) has mentioned that the NGOs are aiming to improve of people situation specially in poor countries through some activities and programmes such as funding projects, engaging in service provision and capacity building, contributing to awareness raising, promoting the self-organization of various groups.

Stromquist (2002) has pointed out three major functions for NGOs such as : (1) service delivery (e.g., relief, welfare, basic skills); (2) educational provision (e.g., basic skills and often critical analysis of social environments); and (3) public policy advocacy (e.g., lobbying for international assistance for specific purposes and monitoring or promoting pertinent state policies).

On the other hands, based on Craplet (1997), NGOs can intervene flexibly in all the fields of information, training, advocacy and assistance. He considered some services for NGOs such as: information centers (information to general public), counseling services; educational programs; and raising public awareness.

NGOs working at community level can play an important role in supporting women to challenge

customs, ideas, and beliefs which perpetuate unequal gender relations. In this relation, Desai (2005) referred to some activities and programs for NGOs that are: counseling and support services, awareness raising and advocacy, legal aid and microfinance services.

A review of the literature on participation as well as the ways in which participation is operationalized in different development interventions reveals that participation is conceptualized and understood differently.

According to Pretty et al (1995), participation can be considered as a spectrum with passive participation at one end and self-mobilization at the other end. Passive participation is where people are told what to do. However, self-mobilization is where the local people themselves are in total control. As one moves from passive participation to self-mobilization, the control of the local people and external agencies over the processes varies. In the case of passive participation, people's control is almost non-existent while at the other end, self-mobilization, people have almost total control over the processes and the role of external agency is at best minimal. It is also possible to have manipulative participation where people have no role in decision-making processes (Kumar, 2002).

Another typology of participation belongs to Arnstein's work. Arnstein (1969) proposed a model of participation which makes the contested nature of the concept clear. The implications of these different meanings for power are also clear from her 'ladder of citizen participation'. From that typology, it is clear that what may be referred to as 'participation' can range from manipulation by power holders to citizens having control over decisions which affect their lives. A typology of eight levels of participation is arranged in a ladder pattern with each rung corresponding to the extent of citizens' power in determining the end product. The bottom rungs of the ladder are (1) Manipulation and (2) Therapy; these two rungs describe the levels of 'non-participation' that have been pretend by some to substitute for genuine participation. Their real objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable the power holders to 'educate' or 'cure' the participants. Further up the ladder are levels of citizen power with increasing degrees of decision-making power. Citizens can enter into a (6) Partnership that enables them to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders. At the topmost rungs, (7) Delegated Power and (8) Citizen Control, noted that citizens can obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power.

On a similar vein, according to Cohen and Uphoff (1980), participation includes people's involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programs, their sharing in benefits of development programs and their involvement in the efforts to evaluate such programs. The real meaning of popular participation is the collective effort by the people concerned to pool their efforts and whatever other resources they decide to pool together, to attain objectives they set for themselves. In this regard, participation is viewed as an active process in which the participants take initiatives and actions that are stimulated by their own thinking and by deliberations over which they exert effective control. The idea of passive participation which only involves the people in actions that have been thought out or designed by others and controlled by others is unacceptable. This study made use of the Cohen and Uphoff model because of its compatibility with the objectives of this study.

Research methodology

The central theme of this study was to determine the women's participation and NGOs function with regards to developing them. This study used quantitative approach in the inquiry process to understand and explain the issues study. Survey research design was used in this study. it is a procedure in quantitative approach which help the researchers to administer a questionnaire in order to identify trends in the attitudes, opinion, behavior or characteristic of population (Creswell, 2005).

At the same time, this study also employed qualitative technique to answer and understand the function of NGOs. As Creswell mentioned the qualitative method is very much dependent to nature of research questions, thus the researcher used the qualitative technique in attempt to understand the NGOs activities, programs, functions and approaches to impact the empowerment of women. The researcher uses the in-depth interviews with principals of NGOs in order to collect perspective information as mentioned above. In other words, NGO's functions in this study were identified through the qualitative method. A total eleven in-depth interviews with eleven NGO's principals were conducted. By examining their program and activities, they were categorized into some functions groups which will be discussed in next chapter.

The model of participation which has been chosen in this study was adopted by Cohen and Uphoff (1980). According to this model participation

includes some levels such as, problem identification, setting goals, strategies, implementation and evaluation. The first three levels were equal to decision making in Cohen and Uphoff model.

Problem identification: it is refers to identify the community problems. To identify the level of women's participation three items based on five point Likert scale were used. The items are "Normally, the NGO identifies what's problem", "The women play important role to identify the problem", and "NGO takes the women's opinion and then they identify their problems together".

Setting goals: it is a part of decision making process and relates to identify the objective of the programmes in community. To determine the level of women's participation in these process three items based on five point Likert scale were applied. The items are; "Usually NGO decide about the goals of programs", "Women identify the purpose of programmes", and "NGO to set the goals of the programmes after giving the women's opinion together".

Strategies: to examine the level of women's involvement in strategizing the project in community three items based on five point liker scale were performed. The items include; "Since the women are lack of expertise knowledge, so NGO provide the strategies to solve the women's problem", "The women present some strategies to NGO, and NGO use of these strategies", and "Women and NGO together recognize the strategy to achieve their goals".

Implementation: it is refers to implement of the project at the community level. To identify the level of women's participation in implementation of a project three items were applied such as "Actually, the women will implement the programmes by themselves", " Women can not perform the programmes, thus, the NGO will do for them", and "NGO with collaborate of women implements the programmes".

Evaluation: it is the evaluation of the programmes carrying out in the community. To determine the role of women in evaluating process, three following items were comprised. "Women will evaluate and monitor the programs", "Women and NGO together monitor the programs", and "Only the NGO can evaluate the progress of programs".

Each of items had a response category that is, strongly agree (5), agree (4), neither agree nor

disagree (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). Some of the questions were asked in a reverse manner, so that the scores would have to be adjusted accordingly. Scores of the scale formed by the combination of all items ranged from 15 to 75. The scale had a Cronbach's Alpha value of .933, indicating that it had a very high degree of reliability or internal consistency.

Findings

NGO's functions

This part discusses the function of NGOs in which was acquired after in-depth interviewing with principals of NGOs, review the activities of NGOs and study of vision and mission. In this study, four functions were discovered for NGOs. However, the division of the function is not mutually, exclusively, this is due to some of the functions may be similar or overlap with each other. The functions include, developing individual ability, educational functions, awareness building and mobilizing women to participate in projects. The following discussion below is the deliberation of the respective function.

Developing individual ability stresses on the need for development of women's abilities and potentials. NGOs performed some roles and organized activities such as increasing women's self-esteem and making decision about themselves and their family that shape the personality of women. Below are the details of the explanations.

Increase the women's self-esteem: The principal NGO of 'Kimiyyat Salamat Pars' (Pars Prosperity Alchemy) said,

'We build up the women's self-esteem through some activities such as consciousness raising and increase the knowledge of women'.

Another NGO that is related to this function is 'Anjoman Omid' (Esperance Association). The principal of this NGO says,

'We conduct some sessions that help the women be aware of their ability, when they were not able to discover their potentialities by themselves, however, we provide them with some useful books to improve their self-esteem'.

Increase the ability to make decision: The NGOs also help the women to make better decision about their lives. The principal of 'Kimiyyat Salamat Pars' (Pars Prosperity Alchemy) states that

‘We do some activities such as counseling meetings, educational class regarding family issues in which help women to get more information and knowledge about their roles and situations at the household and society level’.

These activities develop the ability of women to make decision towards the improvement of their lives.

The principal of Anjoman Omid (Esperance Association) evaluates the ability of women to make decision is not good. She notes that there are some activities help women to improve abilities such as increase the women knowledge, and holding problem-solving workshop. She mentioned that organization held many workshops and seminars to improve this ability among the women. After reviewing the activities and programmes conducted by these NGOs, it is possible to categories the NGOs under this function, developing individual ability. Therefore, two NGOs were classified under this function are; Kimiyaye Salamate Pars (Pars Prosperity Alchemy), and Anjoman Omid (Esperance Association). These NGOs emphasized on developing individual abilities. This function is also similar to some services such as counseling service as reported by Craplet (1997) and Desai (2005) who pointed out that NGOs proposed a range of different kind of counseling and support including guidance on marriage and divorce, anger management, and working to relive stress.

Educational function was another NGOs’ function which was discovered in this study. It was related to projects and programs that organized by the NGOs to empower women. In this sense, many roles and activities such as educational program and teaching of skill in different context were held by the NGOs as deliberated below.

Educational program: The principal of Alzahra’s Rahpooyan Charity (Al-Zahra Charity) states that,

‘Beside the charity activities we have many educational program that help the women to improve their lives such as, organizing religious class, counseling sessions, family education class, art-cultural education and some workshops’.

The principal of Anjoman Hami Khorshid (Association of Sun Sponsor) as another NGO has noted many educational program like Alzahra Charity. She says,

‘We organized many educational classes related to women empowerment, psychological and

counseling workshops, life skills. We invite some psychologists and consultants to provide these classes and workshops’.

Mosharakate Zenan Nikokare Ryhane (Reyhane Association) organized a range of educational programs to help the women who were supported by the NGO. The principal of this NGO says,

‘We have many classes and workshops to assist the women such as, holding the self-esteem classes, life skills education, religious and cultural activities, some educational workshops, education of health issues, holding the sport classes and other activities’.

All these program and activities will help women to improve their lives, educate them, and finally become empowered.

Teaching of skills: Teaching of skills is another role of educational functions. NGOs teach a range of different skills to women to get job, to earn income, to learn life skills etc. Anjoman Hami Khorshid (Association of Sun Sponsor) offers many skills to help the women. The principal of this NGO mentioned,

‘We provide some skill training for women such as, tailoring skill, carpet making, knitting skill, computer training and life skill’.

According to her, women participated and learned in this programme are able to seek for a job and subsequently have a better situation in their lives. Meanwhile, Alzahra’s Rahpooyan Charity has the same activity and skill training like Anjoman Hami Khorshid (Association of Sun Sponsor). The manager of this NGO said,

‘Our programs include the tailoring skill, packing of food materials, teaching of life skill, artifacts education and so on’.

Mosharakate Zenan Nikokare Ryhane(Reyhane Association) is another NGO that help the women to learn some skills for improving their lives economically, socially and individually. According to the principal of this NGO, they educate some skills such as; tailoring skills, household management, life skill training and so on.

Another NGO that works in relation with teaching skills is Hamyaran Salame Ravan Ejtemaee (Helpers of Mental Health). The most important function of this NGO is on the teaching skills and

knowledge of the women in a broader context. The principal of NGO mentioned that.

“ We conduct some activities such as, holding educational class in different contexts, holding group discussion and stimulating the women to participate in discussion, sharing experience, teaching skills to find a job, and the handicraft skills such as carpet making, tailoring, food packaging, teaching the life skills such as how to control stress, how to manage the home, how to make a good relationship with husband and children are some of activities that organized by NGO toward improve the situation of women”.

Based on interviewing the leaderships of these NGOs and after reviewing of their programmes and activities, five NGOs have been placed under this function, i.e. educational function. They are, Alzahra's Rahpooyan Charity, Anjoman Hami Khorshid (Association of Sun Sponsor), Mosharakate zenan nikokare Ryhane (Reyhane Association) and Hamyaran Salamat Ravan Ejtemaee(1&2) (Helpers of Mental Health1&2). This function is accordance with Stromquist (1998) who has pointed out one of the major functions for NGOs is educational provision (e.g., basic skills).

Community awareness building is related to increase the knowledge of women about their situation in the community and society. By conducting many activities, the NGO helps the women to raise their consciousness and equipped them with information about themselves, their problems and find solutions to their problems.

The Principal of Anjomane Sibe Kal (Unripe Apple Community) said that,

“We organize the social and cultural activities that help the women to increase awareness and encourage them to participate in these activities. The NGO holds some seminars and workshop focusing on social and cultural situations. We also prepare some books, magazine for women. Through these activities, the awareness of women increased”.

The Principal of Naranan's NGO (Naranan NGO) also asserts that,

“The most important activity of our NGO is to raise the consciousness and awareness about the women's problems, their situation and roles and seeking solution to improve their quality of life. Thus, we organized some workshops and classes. The

women share experience and knowledge with other members”.

Two NGOs in Shiraz laid their emphasis on awareness building of community. They were Anjomane Sibe Kal (Unripe Apple Community) and Naranan.

The activities conducted and organized by the respective NGOs as described above possessed certain functions. The functions resembled the study carried out by some scholars of NGO. For example, Bodja (2006) has noted that information access has been largely widened as a result of an activity commonly referred to as 'awareness rising' by the NGOs. Streeten (1997) mentioned that NGOs are contributing to the reduction of human suffering and to development in poor countries (Streeten, 1997) through some activities such as, contributing to awareness raising. Further, NGOs through awareness raising and information provision programme enable the individuals, the households, and communities to address their immediate needs. NGOs raise awareness building among poor people about equality, social justice, gender sensitivity (Desai, 2005).

Mobilizing women to participate in projects was the last function of the NGOs. The NGOs encourages women to take part in the projects that organized by the community. Through participation in a project the women will be actively involved in the community and then they can play important roles in society. Thus, by conducting some activities, the NGO are able to mobilize the women to be more active participate in the projects from the initiation, implementation and maintaining the projects.

The principal of Moasesse Atiye (Atiye Community Based Organization) said,

“When we have a celebration, we appreciate the women who have been active in the NGO and we give them present and reward in front of others’. Through these activities we stimulate women to be active in the NGO's programme”.

Mosharakat Ejtemaee Banovane Fars (Association of Women Participation) is another most active NGO that encourages women to participate in social and cultural activities in Shiraz. The principal of NGO says,

“We prepared some opportunities that stimulate women to involve in these activities. We justified and explain the benefits of program to women and

encourage them to participate in the projects. We organized some exhibitions that manage and held by the women. We performed some cultural shows and other activities that help of the women”.

The two NGOs that were involved in mobilizing the women to participate in NGO’s programmes are; Mosharakat Ejtemae Banovane fars, (Association of Women Participation) and Moassesse Atiye(CBO) (Atiye Community Based Organization). The function performed by the respective NGO in Shiraz is similar to that described by Panda(2007) who noted that mobilizing people to participate in a projects is a major strategy adopted by NGOs. NGOs acting as pressure groups organize people to stage protest against adversarial decisions and the policies that go against local interests, their environment and habitat.

According to Pattnaik and Panda(2005) who attempt to look at the role of grass-roots NGOs describe it as New Social Movements through their intense campaigns, people’s mobilization programs and effective networks. In the light of these, NGOs as a social force, facilitates collective action and people mobilization.

2. Women’s participation

The participation in this study was adopted based on Cohen & Uphoff (1980) model combined of fifteen (15) items, five point Likert scales. The variable ranged from 32 to 64 with the mean score of $M=51.00$ and standard deviation $SD= 6.95$. Table 1 shows the mean score, standard deviation, minimum, maximum and normality of level of women participation. The data obtained from the Table showed that the distribution of all dimensions were normal.

Table 1: Women participation and its Mean score, SD, Minimum, and Maximum

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness
Women’s participation	51.00	6.95	32	64	-.67

Table 2 illustrates that most of the respondents (48.7%) participated at the NGO’s programme at the moderate level. And less than half of the respondents (38.5%) were at the high level of participation. It can be concluded that the level of

women participation tend to be high level among the women in Shiraz.

Table 2: Level of women’s participation

Level	frequency	%
Low(32-42)	25	12.8
Moderate (43-53)	95	48.7
High (54-64)	75	38.5

3. The effect of NGO’s function on women’s participation

One- way ANOVA was performed to examine the difference of the mean score of women’s participation among the four NGO’s functions namely developing individual ability, educational functions, awareness building, and mobilizing women. The results of the ANOVA test in Table 3 indicated that there is statistically significant difference in women’s participation score among four groups of NGO’s functions, $F(3, 191)=14.85$, $P=.000$.

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA Summary Table of NGO’s function and women’s participation and its Scores

Functions	N.NGOs	N=195	Mean	P	η^2	F
Developing individual ability	2	45	48.57	.000	.189	14.85
Educational functions	3	55	48.07			
Awareness building	3	35	51.65			
Mobilizing women	3	60	55.13			

Furthermore, to evaluate the differences between the mean score of women’s participation, post hoc multiple comparisons were selected (Table 4). The result of test revealed there is statistically significant difference in the mean between the following pairs only; mobilizing women and educational functions, mobilizing women and developing individual ability, and awareness building and educational function since $p<.05$ were reported for the three functions. These comparative result suggested that the mean scores of participation at the function of mobilizing women ($M=55.13$, $SD=5.01$) was significantly higher than educational functions

($M=48.07$, $SD=7.31$) and developing individual ability ($M=48.57$, $SD=6.75$). On the other hand, awareness building ($M=51.65$, $SD= 6.02$) was significantly higher than educational functions ($M=48.07$, $SD=7.31$). Based on Cohen (1988) guidelines,

mentioned previously, the effect size (eta-squared) of NGO's functions as independent variable was .18 indicating that the mean differences between items is high.

Table 4: Post hoc multiple comparison of NGO's functions and women participation

Dependent variable	(I)NGO's functions	(J)NGO's functions	Mean difference	Sig
Women's participation	Developing individual ability	Educational functions	.50	.979
		Awareness building	-3.07	.137
		Mobilizing women	-6.55*	.000
	Educational functions	Developing individual ability	-.50	.979
		Awareness building	-3.58*	.046
		Mobilizing women	-7.06*	.000
	Awareness building	Developing individual ability	3.07	.137
		Educational functions	3.58*	.046
		Mobilizing women	-3.47	.050
	Mobilizing women	Developing individual ability	6.55*	.000
		Educational functions	7.06*	.000
		Awareness building	3.47	.050

These differences might be due to the NGO's activities that help to mobilize the women. The NGOs those have classified under this function, have applied some activities such as holding some cultural show and other meetings, explaining about projects and its benefits, stimulating people to participate such as giving the present in front of others, holding some exhibitions, and giving responsibility to women. All these activities encourage the women to participate in the project organized by NGOs. This sort of people involvement, according to Panda (2007) is an indicator of bottom-up approach. Bottom-up approach, according to Finger (1994) emphasizes community participation, grassroots movements and local decision making. Indeed, bottom-up approach has the high effect on participation.

Conclusion

This study revealed that NGOs are able to promote women participation in programmes. Though the existence of women NGO's in Iran is a new phenomenon, this study uncovered that they can play multiple roles such as addressing some issues concerning on social needs, raising public awareness and conducting educational activities and tackling tough social issues with extensive community participation.

Four functions carried out by women NGO's in Iran, namely developing individual ability' (2 NGOs), 'educational functions' (3NGOs), 'awareness building' (3NGOs), and 'mobilizing women to participation' (3 NGOs). The results revealed that NGOs could contribute to encourage the women to participate in programmes.

Nevertheless, the study discovered that those NGO's focusing on 'mobilizing women' has greater

effect on participation. This finding is in line with the Finger (1994) who mentioned that the mobilizing people in participation are considered as an indicator of bottom-up approach. This indicates that participation from the below is important to implement the successful programmes towards improvement of women's situation, as suggested by Kabeer women must be an agent to change their situation. This finding also, supported by Oakley (1989) who mentioned participation as an end is created and moduled by the participants. It is an active form of participation, responding to local needs and changing circumstance. More generally, participation as an end in itself presupposes the building-up of influence or involvement from the bottom up wards (Also see, Nikkhah & Ma'rof, 2009). In short, since in Iran tradition women are not welcome to get involve in social, economic and political activities, but through NGO is problem could be enlightened which ultimately is a medium to empower local Iran women.

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