

## Rural Empowerment: An Approach for Development in Rural Areas

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**Abstract:** The main objective of this study provides a strategy for rural development in rural areas of Iran. Empowerment of rural areas has emerged as an important issue in recent times. The economic empowerment of rural is being regarded these days as a sine-quo-non of progress for a country; hence, the issue of empowerment of rural areas is of paramount importance to community developers, social scientists and social reformers. Empowerment can enable the local people to participate in the economic, political and social sustainable development of the rural communities. The findings of this investigation can assist rural developers in the implementation of rural development strategies based on rural empowerment.

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### Introduction

Empowerment means people and communities, especially those frequently marginalized, having the capability to participate effectively in social, economic and political spheres (Helling, Serrano, & Warren, 2005). The term 'empowerment' is a contested concept which connotes different meanings depending on different perspectives of looking at it (Asnarulkhadi & Aref, 2009). The World Bank has suggested that empowerment should be a key aspect of all social programs (World Bank, 2001). The empowerment of rural means for them to have the necessary ability to undertake a number of tasks either individually or in groups, so that they have further access to society resources. Empowerment is recognized as an essential strategy to strengthen the well-being of individuals, and communities, (Aref, 2010). In other word empowerment is an abiding process which takes place with specific intent so enabling them to have further control over community resources (Rezaei, 2007). Numerous studies emphasized on empowerment as means for community development. (Aref & Ma'rof, 2009; Aref et al., 2009; Gillman, 1996; Gore, 1992; Humphries, 1994; Lennie, 2002; Peters & Marshall, 1991). Empowerment is the expansion of the capabilities of the poor people to: participate in, influence and control the institutions that affect their lives. Elements of empowerment is the rights, resources and support to: Information, participation, and organizational capacity (Hamyaran, 2006). This literature suggests that rural researchers need to adopt a more critical approach to the concept about the processes they claim have facilitated empowerment. This requires the development of useful models of empowerment and effective methods for empowerment (Anderson, 1996).

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### Rural empowerment

Rural development is closely linked to development of the local economy. Improving local food security, household income, and the quality of livelihood options as well as encouraging growth in the number, scale, and profitability of both formal and informal sector businesses are important aspects of local development (Helling et al., 2005). In addition to its contribution to household welfare, growth in production and commerce provides the base for local resource mobilization to finance the provision of public services. Economic growth also contributes to the capital stock for investment in local development, including human capital from investment in the education and health of farmers, workers, and entrepreneurs and social capital from the strengthening of relationships among financial institutions, suppliers of inputs, producers, and purchasers of goods and services in the marketplace (Helling et al., 2005).

Rural Empowering are a challenge. Empowering in rural area can help to meet these challenges. Empowering not only enhance national productivity, employment but also help to develop economic independence, personal and social capabilities among rural women. Following are some of the social capabilities, which were developed as result of taking up empowerment among rural areas.

- Improved standard of living
- Self confidence and enhance awareness
- Sense of achievement
- Increased social interaction
- Engaged in political activities
- Improvement in leadership qualities
- Involvement in solving problems
- Decision making capacity (Sathiabama, 2010).

The major types of empowerment can be summarized into four groups (Lennie, 2002).

**Social empowerment:** Access to new knowledge, Developing new skills, abilities, confidence and competence, obtaining the friendship and support of other women, participating in various activities with other women.

**Organizational empowerment:** New knowledge and awareness about new benefits of technology for rural development through rural tourism development or development of agriculture cooperatives.

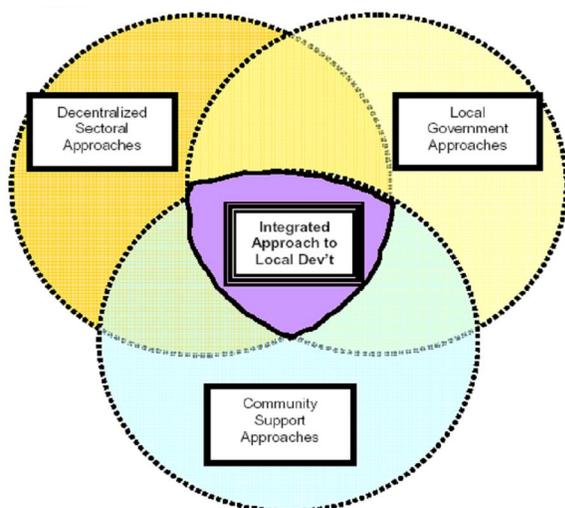
**Political empowerment:** Influencing other government policies and decisions that affect on rural communities, changing town-based people's beliefs, networking with people in government and industry and other women to discuss issues affecting rural women and rural communities.

**Psychological empowerment:** An increase in self-confidence and self-esteem, Greater motivation, inspiration, to develop new skills and knowledge, to keep pushing for better services for rural people

The local development paradigm is comprised of three main activities:

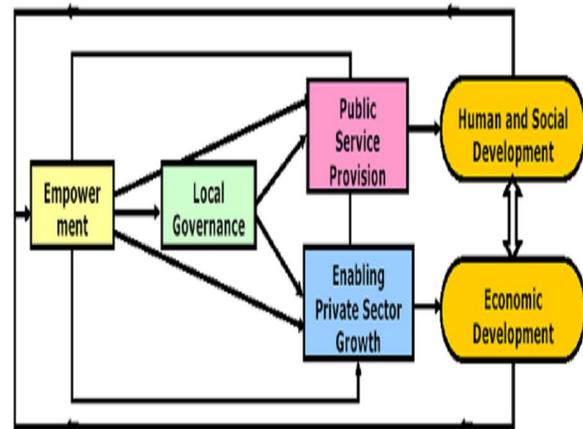
- Empowerment through capacity building
- Provision of Services to the community
- Local Governance (Hamyar, 2006).

Three alternative approaches to local development; decentralized sectoral, local government, and community support approaches (Figure 1), emphasize many of the same principles: empowerment of the poor and other marginalized groups, responsiveness to beneficiary demand, autonomy of local institutions associated with greater downward accountability, and enhancement of local capacities.



**Figure 1:** Integrating Approaches for rural development. Source (Helling et al., 2005)

A sustainable local human, social and economic development can be achieved through community empowerment and local governance reform that will in turn enhance the efficiency of public service provision and encourage private sector growth (Figure 1). A favorable national policy and institutional environment, an enhanced capacity of all local protagonists and institutions, along with adequate transfer of resources are the exterior catalysts necessary for local development to fall on track and to take its course as smoothly as possible (Hamyar, 2006; Helling et al., 2005).



**Figure 2:** A Conceptual Framework for Rural Development. Source: (Helling et al., 2005)

**Empowerment in Rural Areas of Iran**

Empowerment is the starting point for local development. Empowerment is the process of enhancing the real possibility that an individual or a group can make and express choices, and transform their choices into desired actions and outcomes (World Bank, 2004). Individuals, households, and communities need both opportunity and capability in order to be truly empowered (Helling et al., 2005). The empowerment in rural area of Iran, as in many other countries, may be divided into two categories. First, there are those which arise in the context of daily human interactions within the societal arena for the fulfillment of common needs, fending of natural disasters, or responding to traditions and religious beliefs. The second is the result of conscience personal decision making and the desire to partake in activities outside one's immediate circle, specifically those which have communal ramifications. Institutionalization of communal participatory activities in the form of unions, forums, councils, societies, and voluntary groups fall within this category. Poverty and societal necessities have been factors contributing to people rallying around and organizing themselves into groups in Iran, in order to

better confront such maladies and inefficiencies. Historically, Iran has repeatedly fallen victim to devastating invasions by foreign armies. Internal tribal and regional conflicts have also been the cause of persistent instabilities, jeopardizing lives and livelihood. Maintaining security for one's immediate and extended family has thus been another driving factor towards people conglomerating into groups. The most basic form of group activity has been coordination for irrigation, cultivation, and production. Lack of mechanized means of production, particularly within the agricultural sector, which required focused manual labor within certain periods of time in the course of the year, necessitated cooperation and partnership. The thought of establishing community organizations in Iran dates back to the Constitutional Revolution (1906) where it found expression as part of an addendum to the first constitution of the country with regards to the right of establishment of provincial councils. Even though due to the overall declining state of events at that juncture in time such councils did not achieve permanence, they nevertheless became a forum for the voicing of people's opinions with regards to matters of their concern and an official venue for their political and social cooperation. The topic of people's empowerment is addressed and elaborated in the constitution of Iran:

-With specific reference to guidelines stated within the Quran, the Rural Islamic Councils have been described as "pillars of decision making and administration in the affairs of the country".

-For efficient planning and implementation of programs in production, industrial and agricultural establishments, councils should be elected which include representatives from workers, farmers, other employees and managers; and in educational, administrative, service establishments similar councils should be formed.

-Strengthening of people's participation had been the professed qualitative goal of the first two development plans that were promulgated and implemented by the Islamic Republic of Iran (1983-1987 and 1995-1999). The following were among its salient guidelines:

-Increased legal support for people's participation with emphasis on attracting private investment.

-Encouraging increased participation of women in social, cultural, educational and economic affairs while safeguarding family values.

-Establishment of Islamic provincial, township, municipal, and village councils with the supervisory power over every cultural, reconstructive, executive and economic affairs within their area of their jurisdiction (Hamyan, 2006; Helling et al., 2005).

## Conclusion

Empowerment increases people's capabilities to make and express choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. People's capabilities to participate effectively in local development are determined not only by individual resource endowments, but also by social capital that provides the basis for collective action (Helling et al., 2005). The result of this study is suitable for the rural development for take control of the management of rural areas. Because with the empowerment of rural areas, the elimination of gender discrimination and the creation of a balance of power between men and women, will not only be beneficial to women, but society as a whole shall benefit politically, economically and culturally. The results of this review suggested a range of strategies that could enhance rural empowerment.

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