

Rural empowerment for sustainable agricultural development in Iran

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Abstract: This study provides a theoretical framework model of rural empowerment for sustainable agricultural development in rural areas of Iran. Rural empowerment is an important strategy, enabling rural communities to respond in order to improve agricultural development. In this way, the study demonstrates that the rural empowerment in three levels can develop agricultural industry in Iran. The author suggests that the model of rural empowerment used in this paper will be effective in helping to sustainable agricultural development and rural development by integrating the efforts of rural agricultural organizations, rural communities and farmers in rural areas.

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Introduction

Agricultural development has played an important role in the development of rural areas. Agriculture is an important component of most rural economies especially in the developing countries. Therefore, any successful rural development strategy will contain an agricultural development component; but they are not the same thing. While agricultural development aims at improving the welfare of rural populations through sustained improvements in the productivity of the agricultural sector, rural development aims at the improvement of welfare of rural populations through the sustained growth of the rural economy, which includes agriculture, but may not be its only component and not necessarily the most dynamic (Gustavo and Kostas 2007).

Some economists argued that agriculture plays an important role in development. One of the first arguments in favour of the role of agriculture in development was placed by Lewis (1954) who suggested that "there are large sectors of the economy where the marginal productivity of labour is negligible, zero, or even negative."

Later, Johnston and Mellor (1961), identified some active roles that the agricultural sector performs throughout the development path: i) agriculture provides food necessary for a growing economy, ii) agricultural exports generate the foreign exchange necessary to import capital goods; iii) agriculture, as the larger sector in less developed countries, is the only sector capable of generating the savings mass that the non-agricultural sector needs for capital accumulation; and iv) a growing agricultural sector creates a larger local market for the non-agricultural sector (Lewis, 1954). The agricultural development in

most Third World countries is faced with constraints with regard to achieving the goal of rural sustainable development, which promotes social and economic development of rural areas. In developing countries attempts to organize farmers into agricultural development have often failed, although rural areas have the potential to supply farm inputs and market farm products that are both important for agricultural development (Hoyt, 1989).

Agricultural development is generally considered as a tool for rural development. Due to the positive effects of agricultural, many rural communities have seen agriculture as a promising opportunity for reducing underdevelopment problems and as a means of modernizing their economic (Andriotis, 2005). In pursuing this direction, the concept of rural empowerment has become of particular importance in identifying priorities and opportunities for rural development (Victurine, 2000).

Rural empowerment in agriculture can be seen as the capacity of people to participate in rural activities (Cupples, 2005). Hence, rural development practitioners should give due regard to the concept of empowerment. The question is: How can the rural community offer a viable solution for agricultural development?

My answer to this question is empowerment. This answer is supported by the literature and research evidence from the fields of: Health (Chervin et al., 2005; George et al., 2007; Labonte & Laverack, 2001a; 2001b; Labonte et al., 2002; Maclellan-Wright et al., 2007; Poole, 1997; Raeburn et al., 2006; 2007; Seremba & Moore, 2005; Wickramage, 2006), Education (Harris, 2001; Smyth,

2009), and Tourism (Aref, 2011). Thus, empowerment is identified as one of the ways that **Empowerment for agricultural development**

The definition of rural development has evolved through time as a result of changes in the perceived mechanisms and / or goals of development. A reasonable definition of rural development would be: development that benefits rural populations; where development is understood as the sustained improvement of the population's standards of living or welfare (Gustavo and Kostas 2007).

This definition of rural development, however, has to be further qualified. To an effective rural development programs it is necessary to building rural empowerment. Empowerment is a central concern of both rural developers and residents (Marré & Weber, 2010). An important question in the development debate regarding rural development has been the relationship between agriculture and the rural economy (Gustavo and Kostas 2007).

Empowerment helps to promote the concept of self-help and community capitals that enables the development of community-led service provision that can be more sensitive and responsive to community needs. Empowerment has been defined in a variety of ways. However, "there is little clarity about the meaning of empowerment in practice (Chakin, 2001). Much of the literature defines empowerment broadly as a measure of the ability of a community to adapt to challenges or opportunities and/or effect changes according to community goal (Clinch, 2008).

Rural empowerment is about enabling people to develop their individual and collective potential as contributing members of society. In some interpretations, empowerment refers to the capabilities that exist within the organizations, individuals and communities that strengthen individuals to define their values and capacities to act on these.

Ferguson & Green (2000) identified several definitions for rural empowerment such as: improve the ability of individuals, organizations, businesses and government in their community to come together, learn, and decisions making about the community's present and future, and to work together to carry out those decisions. Rural empowerment programs have been used in the developed world as well as in developing countries (Crabbe et al., 2010; Kaplan et al., 2006; Rogers et al., 2007). While there are other studies exploring empowerment in health promotion activities and in the agriculture industry, it is worth exploring rural empowerment in the context of agriculture. This is because rural empowerment can act as a force to stimulate the development of the cooperatives in Third World countries. However,

stimulates rural development processes and addresses agricultural development.

there is very little literature, which discusses the practical application of approaches that have been successfully used to measure rural empowerment for agricultural development.

Therefore, I undertook rural empowerment around agricultural development programs that involved organization, communities and rural people. From this perspective, rural empowerment can be use in three major categories: community, organizational and individual levels. The depictions that follow are simple models that do not precisely represent the intricacies and complexities of reality, but serve to illustrate the relationships between components of empowerment and their application in agricultural development.

At the farmers level

The farmers level referred to rural people residing within the geographical location of a particular rural area (Aref, 2010). Individual capacity can develop rural cooperatives through enhancement of skills and knowledge, and sense of community (Aref, 2011).

At the organizational level

This level focuses on rural agricultural organizational assets and resources as well as needs. In every rural community, there are different organizations with varying levels of operational management connectedness with community residences (Mora & Diaz, 2004). Community organizations can play a critical role in supporting agricultural development. They can provide financial support, grant schemes, employ community workers, provide facilities, contract voluntary organisations to provide services and encourage community engagement through rural cooperatives development (Beazley & Smith, 2006). Hence, developing community organizations will help promote rural agriculture towards sustainability (Aref, 2011).

At the rural level

The rural level refers to local groups bounded geographically. The rural level supported local people, groups and organizations in specific areas. It is supposed that developing community level acts as an engine for empowerment towards elevating agriculture through participation, power, and rural structures. Interaction between all levels of empowerment can provide increased capacity for agricultural development. Rural communities with high organizational capacities are able to distribute external resources to individual community members.

And communities with strong individual capacity have the ability to articulate their needs, resources, and access external resources to meet their needs (Weil & Reisch, 2004).

Conclusion

Rural empowerment is an important strategy, enabling rural communities to respond in order to improve agricultural development. The ability of rural community to mobilize resources from within and to negotiate resources from beyond is an important step toward developing the skills and community structures necessary for rural empowerment. Prioritization also is essential because rural communities do not usually have the resources at their disposal to address all the domains, unless assisted by an outside agent. This theoretical study increases our understanding of successful agricultural development programs. In summary, I suggest five areas for development of agricultural development in Iran

1. Iran should increase investments in rural infrastructure (including transport and information technology that connects villages) and agricultural (leading to improved technologies for farmers). This is our most important suggestion.

2. Iran should reorient its social safety nets to create more employment in rural areas; help strengthen the human resource base through education, nutrition, and empowerment of women; and build physical infrastructure.

3. Iran agriculture faces promising opportunities in the production and marketing of high-value livestock products, fruits and vegetables, and fishery. To exploit these opportunities, Iran must liberalize its marketing and trade policies to encourage vertical coordination between farms, and firms, facilitate increased flow of rural credit, especially to smallholders, through, say, nonbanking financial intermediaries; and withdraw any special concessions in support of food grain policies.

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