Barriers of Agricultural Development in Iran: A Case study of Fars Province

Farshid Aref

Department of Soil Science, Firouzabad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran
farshidaref@yahoo.com, Tel: +989173383896

Abstract: This article attempts to illustrate the barriers of agricultural development in Fars, Iran. Agriculture is certainly a major contributor to rural development in many countries. It is one of the most important economic sectors in Iran. But, there are a significant number of barriers to effectively using agriculture industry as a tool for rural development. The findings through focus group discussion indicated that there are some organizational barriers in agricultural development in some villages in Fars. The finding can assist the local agriculture organizations for remove this problem in face of agriculture for rural development**.**
[Farshid Aref. Barriers of Agricultural Development in Iran: A Case study of Fars Province. Journal of American Science 2010;6(11):1034-1037]. (ISSN: 1545-1003). (http://www.americanscience.org).

Keywords: agriculture development, rural area, barriers

Introduction

According to the U.S agriculture census, agriculture is described as a place of three acres or more on which any field forage crops were harvested or vegetables were harvested for sales of $100 or more (Mills, 1984; Mwaijande, 2007). Agriculture can provide a way for improving the potential economic of rural communities. Agriculture is the core of the export market and it is accountable for one fourth to one-half of (GDP) gross domestic product in developing countries (Karbasioun et al., 2008).

About 25% of the Gross National Product, 33% of employment, 25% of non-oil exports and 80% of food requirements have been provided by the agricultural sector in Iran. Nevertheless, there are some evidence that agricultural development has some barriers. For instance, about 30% of the forests located in the North of Iran were destroyed during the last two decades. Furthermore, large portions of pastures and grasslands were rendered unproductive because of overuse by the cattle of the nomadic population and farmers (Darvishi, 2003; Karbasioun et al., 2008). Salinity of soil and water resources is a serious threat in many parts of the country (Siadat et al., 1997). The research of this study explores the policy constraints as institutional barriers within agriculture sectors. Roughly one-third of Iran's total surface area is suited for farmland, but because of poor soil and lack of adequate water distribution in many areas, most of it is not under cultivation. Only 12% of the total land area is under cultivation (arable land, orchards and vineyards) but less than one-third of the cultivated area is irrigated; the rest is devoted to dry farming. Some 92 percent of agro products depend on water (Wikipedia, 2010a).

Method

In this study the general purpose is to investigate the barriers of agriculture development in Fars' villages in Iran. Fars is one of the 30 provinces and known as Cultural Capital of Iran. It is in the south of the country and its center is Shiraz. It has an area of 122,400 km. In 2006, this province had a population of 4.34 million people, of which 61.2% were registered as urban dwellers, 38.1% villagers, and 0.7% nomad tribes. Agriculture is of great importance in Fars. The major products include cereal, citrus fruits, dates, sugar beets and cotton (Wikipedia, 2010b). Iranian agriculture is thousands of years old and this reflects the length of time during which soil and water resources of the country have been utilized for crop production. This study is based on quantitative methodology to investigate the barriers of agriculture development. Hence to achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher uses quantitative method. Some villages in Abadeh Tashk in Fars Province, Iran were selected as a case study area because it provided many opportunities to develop agriculture. *Jahan Abad, Koushkak, Hassan Abbad, Khajeh Jamali, Deh murd, Tashk, Dehzir, were* villages which have been chosen for this study (see the figure 1). Focus group discussion (FGD) was performed to collection data from local farmers. FGD is probably the most widely used technique of gathering qualitative data (Aref, 2010; Grover & Vriens, 2006). According to Rafipoor (2005) FGD technique is an appropriate technique in science research in terms of Iranian culture. FGD was conducted in a group setting and was used for obtaining a better understanding of participants' attitudes towards the barriers of agriculture development. There is no consensus among qualitative researchers on the optimal number of participants in FGD. Some researchers suggest the

number of studied argued four to twelve people (Mendis-Millard & Reed 2007). But the ideal number of participants in each FGD is six to ten. Participants of FGD were classified according to their place in the villages. All respondents were male. They ranged in age from 27 to 73 years. The researcher explained to them the objectives of the study and what questions would be asked. The researchers examined, categorized participants responses from each focus group of villagers that were recorded in video tapes.

Result

Information for this study was gathered from rural residents through FGD. A qualitative analysis was undertaken to determine viewed the barriers of agriculture development. According to the collected baseline data, farming is the most common occupation in the 7 villages in *Jahan Abad, Koushkak, Hassan Abbad, Deh e Murd, Khvajeh Jamali, Tashk, Dehzir, Chah-Ghaz, Ghah- Sorkh*, There were overall 65 participants with an average of 57 years old. All participants; were males. They were chosen because of their engagements in agriculture products. The questions were asked about to barriers of agriculture development. The findings showed that agriculture development in their villages is without any certain planning for rural development. Although the FGD respondent referred to variety barriers in terms of agriculture in their villages but in this study we refer to some common barriers which have been discussed in majority of FGD groups. The most barriers in terms of agricultural development were including:

1) Salinity of water: The majority of FGD participants believed there is no suitable water for irrigation in their village. They believe that their villages have many lands, but they don't have enough water to irrigation of these lands. Another problem associated with the expansion of irrigated farming is the overdraft of ground water. In support of this finding Sadat et al (1997) also state that the sustainability of our agricultural production is highly dependent on the "health" of our soil and water resources. But, the future of these resources is highly threatened by salinization and eventual decertification (Siadat et al., 1997).

2) Lack of resources: The most participants in FDG groups mentioned to this issue as main obstacles to agriculture development. Lack of credit resources also was another barrier to develop agriculture development in their area.

3) Lack of human resource development. Most of young villagers immigrated to the citied and so however, there are many educated people from the rural area of Iran but they don't have apathy to engage in agricultural activities.

4) Lack of government support: lack of government support to provide funding for poor farmer to develop their activities. Focus groups often complained about the lack of agricultural organization support to provide adequate facilities for farmers.

5) Lack of agricultural organization capacity: FGD respondents believed the lack of capacity of agriculture was behind the failure investment for their agriculture product. However in the end of any discussion they refer to the barriers of agriculture development through government policy as well as local organizations.

6) Lack of agricultural knowledge: However, in agricultural modern the role of knowledge is important. But regarding the discussion with famers, they stated that government did not support them with new knowledge. Base on my observation the farmers had traditional knowledge in agriculture. With mention to above focus group discussion about barriers of agriculture development, I summarized these barriers in two groups: community barriers and organizational barriers.

Conclusion

This paper has identified the barriers agriculture development. Lack of capable organizations and community resources were an important element contributing to limited agriculture development. They refereed to government policy and lack of local organizational capacity as main barriers related agriculture development. Clearly, the described barriers may not be only specific to Fars province; some of them may also be considered as common general problems of agriculture development in other communities in Iran. Base on the findings, it can be suggest that rural empowerment can be a tool for agriculture development in Iran. The findings of this study can be useful for academics, researchers and all stakeholders involved in designing, assessing or promoting agriculture projects which are in any way associated with general development goals. An understanding of the existing barriers of agriculture provides basic information for setting a policy agenda to enhance agriculture.

Figure 1: The map of Bakhtegan (the case study)

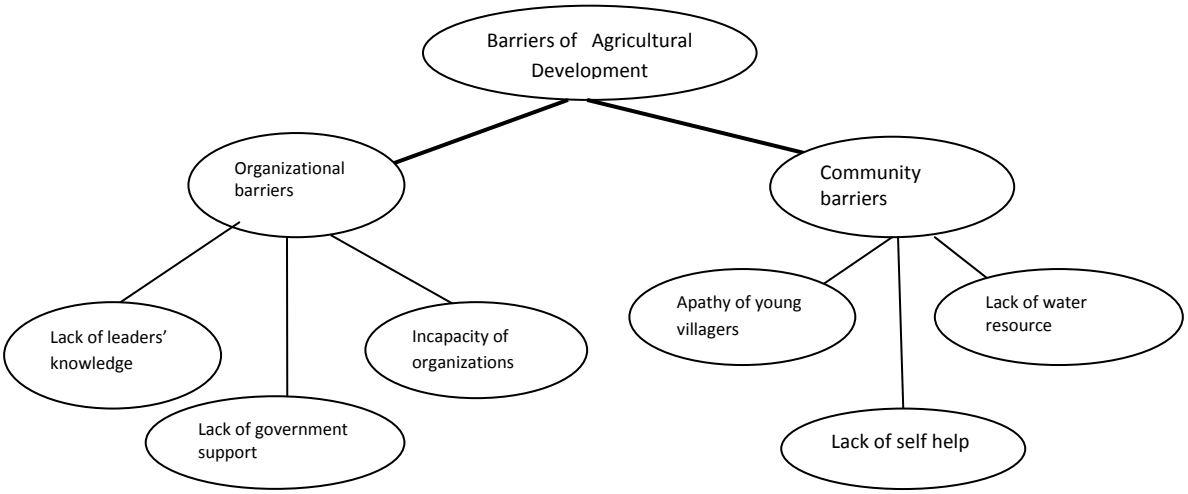

Figure 2: Summarize of barriers of agricultural development

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Date Submission: 22, October 2010