

Perceived Impact of Education on Poverty Reduction in Rural Areas of Iran

Abrisham Aref

Science and Research Branch
Islamic Azad University, Fars, Iran
abrishamaref@yahoo.com

Abstract: Education and learning are widely recognized as essential to processes of development and poverty reduction. In many developing countries, issues of educational access, equity, and quality have been identified as prerequisites to the achievement of development goals. The objective of this study is, through reviewing the available evidences and analyses in the role of education in rural poverty reduction, to identify weaknesses pertinent to basic education achieving poverty reduction and to come out with some conclusions that can be taken into consideration in planning successful basic education for poverty reduction. The findings through focus group groups indicated that there are some rural structural barriers in educational system on rural poverty reduction.

[Abrisham Aref, **Perceived Impact of Education on Poverty Reduction in Rural Areas of Iran**, Life Science Journal. 2011; 8(2):498-501] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>

Keywords: Education, poverty reduction, rural development

Introduction

One of the main issues in rural development debates is how to tackle rural poverty. More than 70 percent of the world's poor are to be found in rural areas where hunger, literacy and low school achievement are common. Education for a large number of people in rural areas is crucial for achieving sustainable development (UNESCO, 2002). As the majority of the world's poor, illiterate and undernourished live in rural areas, it is a major challenge to ensure their access to quality education. The lack of learning opportunities is both a cause and an effect of rural poverty. Hence, education and training strategies need to be integrated within all aspects of sustainable rural development, through plans of action that are interdisciplinary (Gomes & Câmara, 2004).

The constraints to developing the rural areas as well as the problems of this critical sector have come to loom very large (Oyeranti, 2005). Education is widely recognized as essential to processes of poverty reduction. Education, needless to say, is a priority sector in every well-meaning society. Burtch (2006) referred to it as a major force in economic, intellectual, social and cultural empowerment. Its value in bringing about character and attitudinal change ranks as important as its ability to reshape human potentials for desired development (Jaiyeoba, 2007).

Education is one of the mechanisms to empower people to take part in poverty reduction. It was launched as a key strategy of rural development. Increased the education is a means to achieve development to resolve the rural problems (Lasker,

Weiss, & Miller, 2001). Education may directly influence rural agricultural productivity via one or more of the routes described above (Weir, 1999). Education may increase the probability of success in each of these endeavours and, in so doing, diversify household income sources to reduce risk and improve economic security. Since farming is the primary activity in rural Iran, this paper will focus on the part played by education in poverty reduction (Aref, 2011). World Bank studies also demonstrate education raises the production of farmers (Hegtvedt-Willson, 1984).

A rural community cannot foster development without an educated people. Businesses, large or small, are unlikely to choose to invest in rural areas if skilled or trainable human resources are unavailable. Similarly, a community cannot retain educated people without an attractive economic environment (Atchoarena & Gasperini, 2003). Education in rural development can support and uphold local culture, tradition, knowledge and skill, and create pride in community heritage (Lacy, Battig, Moore, & Noakes, 2002).

The paper stresses that education in rural areas is the foundation for both poverty reduction. Although, education has economic and noneconomic benefits to educated individuals and to the social as a whole, this study intended to focuses on the aspect of economic benefit of education to rural areas for poverty reduction. It reviews some critical issues that are related to education in the context of poverty reduction in Iran. The main purpose of the study was to investigate the perceived contributions of education to poverty reduction.

Literature review

It is a general belief that education plays a vital means in achieving rural development. In many countries, education has provided a dependable leverage for rural development. Raji (2004) described education as both a social and private good. It is an investment that is capable of yielding benefits that have some externalities (Jaiyeoba, 2007). Education has emerged as an essential prerequisite for reducing poverty and living conditions of rural people (Abdulahi, 2008). The rural poor face three fundamental problems: (i) few opportunities for productive employment in agricultural or nonagricultural activities; (ii) inadequate nutrition, poor health services and absence of educational opportunities; and (iii) lack of sufficient levels of organization needed to lobby effectively for rural interests (Abdulahi, 2008).

Recent research shows that improvements in education boost local development prospects (Echeverría, 1998). Education has a desirable controlling influence over development of the rural individual, community, and society, leading to reduced poverty, income and controlled unemployment (Navaratnam, 1986). Education is a phenomenon of affluent contemporary societies is a particularly difficult concept in rural communities in developing countries to grasp (Fägerlind & Saha, 1986). Much of the theoretical debate about the role of education in poverty reduction has focused upon whether education is productive in an economic sense.

There is much evidence that levels of education amongst the population are highly correlated with levels of economic development (Oxaal, 1997). Helliwell and Putnam (1999) found that education is correlated with social capital: trust and social participation. However, only recently have studies attempted to determine whether education exerts a causal influence on poverty reduction (Riddell, 2006). Education is a critical part of poverty reduction. Individuals who have had some education are better farmers and more capable of finding off-farm employment. The rural sector also benefits from the overall development of the national economy and the alleviation of poverty, in which basic education is essential (Moulton, 2001).

From this perspective, it is evident that education has significantly contributed to the mobilization and distribution of human capital by creating opportunities for people. In rural areas of low-income countries, the problem of access to education is acute and, in order to take on the enormous challenges involved in providing education for all, a more holistic view of education is needed. In particular, the issue of educational development in

rural areas cannot be properly addressed without mentioning the upheavals that have occurred in the agricultural milieu (Atchoarena & Gasperini, 2003).

Education issues are central to rural poverty reduction in the rural area of Asia. Hence, it is important for government to understand that rural educational system also face barriers that can hinder its progress in responding and recognizing the priorities of rural communities (Aref, 2011). Involving rural communities in the education planning requires facing and tackling a number of challenges (Moulton, 2001). These issues include:

- Rural schools are farther apart, requiring many children to walk long distances or pay for transportation and to lose valuable time in walking that could otherwise be spent helping at home.
- Relatively weak extension services in some countries.
- Low levels of basic education and agricultural education among farmers.
- Inadequate initial training and continuing education for rural people.
- Long distances, poor roads, and inadequate shipping vehicles make it difficult to get building materials, furniture, equipment, and textbooks to rural schools.
- Even where a primary school is accessible, there may be no secondary school within commuting distance.
- While urban parents and communities sometimes play an active oversight role in their schools, this rarely happens in rural communities, where parents are less skilled at holding officials accountable, reviewing financial statements, and even feeling confident that they can ask questions.
- Communication between ministry offices and schools is difficult, so school principals and teachers get little if any guidance from a professional support network.
- The curriculum may not be relevant to rural communities.
- Support services for remote rural schools are not always fully institutionalized. The ministry often lacks the resources to help these links function as channels of support (Flor, Hazelman, & McLean, 2006; Moulton, 2001).

Methodology

The population of the study includes staff of local education and school teachers, in Abadeh Tashk, Shiraz. This study is based on quantitative methodology to investigate the barriers of education related to poverty reduction. To achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher uses quantitative method. Focus group discussion was performed to collect data from local residents. Focus group is probably the most widely used technique of

gathering qualitative data (Grover & Vriens, 2006). Focus group was conducted in a group setting and was used for obtaining a better understanding of participants' attitudes (Aref, 2010). All respondents were male. They ranged in age from 25 -51 years. The researcher explained to them the objectives of the study and what questions would be asked. For this study, pertinent articles and reports on critical issues of education in poverty reduction also are reviewed.

Result

The aim of this study was to demonstrate the contribution of rural education to poverty reduction in rural areas. Information for this study was gathered from school teachers in 12 villages in Abadeh Tashk, Shiraz. A qualitative analysis was undertaken to determine viewed the impacts of education on poverty reduction and also barriers of rural education on poverty reduction. According to the collected baseline data, there were overall 96 participants with an average of 35 years old, 61% were male and 39% were female. They were chosen because of their engagement in educational programs. The questions were asked about to contribution of education in poverty reduction and barriers of education. In terms of education on poverty reduction; they believe that rural education does not have important role in their villages especially on poor people.

The respondents referred to variety barriers of education for poverty reduction in their villages. The below items were provided from the focus group discussions.

-Immigrations of rural educated to urban areas as main obstacles for rural poverty reduction. In fact the educational system is the cases of this issue in rural areas of Iran.

-Lack of educational resource and curriculum.

-The participants mentioned to lack of suitable skill and knowledge as one barrier of education for rural poverty reduction.

-Lack of access to secondary school or high school for for majority of rural peolpe.

-Lack of capacity of local educational organizations; especially local organization was behind the failure investment for poverty reduction.

-Lack of participation rural educated people in process of poverty reduction.

-Lack of rural involvement; especially women in process of rural development.

The findings of this study are consist with the findings of Flor, et al. (2006) and Moulton (2001); that they belived the rural areas of Asia have some barreirs of poverty reduction throghu rural educational system. Based on the findings; although education has an positive impacts on rural poverty reduction, but as poverty is a multidimensional; rural

educational system cannot solve the poverty problems.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to demonstrate the contribution of education to poverty reduction in Iran. Education and learning are widely recognized as essential to processes of development and poverty reduction. In many developing countries, issues of educational access, equity, and quality have been identified as prerequisites to the achievement of development goals. Education helps to alleviate poverty by affecting labor productivity and via other paths of social benefit. It is therefore a vital development goal (Flor et al., 2006). The findings indicated the lack of local organizational capacity as main barriers related poverty. Hence, Education contributing to rural development must be locally controlled, practical, applied, problem-posing, and focused on functional specialization. Although; education has an important role in poverty reduction but as poverty is multidimensional; education cannot solve all problems. This suggests that poverty reduction efforts must be multi-targeted and are expected to show wide and diverse dimensions. Solutions to rural poverty have to straddle different disciplines and must encompass economic, social, political and institutional factors.

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