

The Level of Local Participation in Rural Cooperatives in Rural Areas of Marvdasht, Iran

Fatemeh Allahdadi

Science and Research Branch
Islamic Azad University, Fars, Iran
fatemeharef@gmail.com

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to describe the level of community participation in rural cooperatives. The paper is based on the survey questionnaire carried out among 250 cooperatives members in rural areas of Marvdasht, Iran. The findings revealed that the level of local participation in rural cooperatives is low. Therefore, the rural residences especially, the cooperatives members have little contribution to the development of rural cooperatives and rural development as well.

[Fatemeh Allahdadi. **The Level of Local Participation in Rural Cooperatives in Iran**. Life Science Journal. 2011;8(3):59-62] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>.

Keywords: participation, rural cooperatives, rural development

1. Introduction

Local participation is considered as an important factor for successful and prosperity of rural development. The greater proportion of people in the world lives in rural environments. The World Bank (1975) defined rural development as a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people- the rural poor. The contribution of rural areas to economic development is usually limited; however, the future potential for their contribution is great, especially in developing countries. A number of researchers have highlighted the role of people participation in rural development (Aref & Sarjit, 2009; Chizari, Lindner, & Bashardoost, 1997). According to Aref & Ma'rof (2009), without community participation, there are obviously no accountability, no development, and no program. Participation plays a crucial role in developing rural development as well as promoting rural and agricultural cooperatives. This is basically reflected in the attempts of international agencies to enhance people participation. This study attempts to highlight a relationship between rural participation and rural cooperatives.

2. Literature Review

Rural cooperatives are the groups of people who work together voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs (Tanzanian Federation of Cooperatives, 2006). The International Cooperative (ICA) (1995) defines a cooperative as "an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise" (ICA,

1995). Rural cooperatives are generally considered as a tool for rural development. Many developed countries such as England, France, Germany and United States largely depend on incomes earned through rural cooperatives (Aref A, 2011). Rural cooperatives have played an important role in the development of agriculture in industrialized countries as suppliers of farming requisites, marketers of agricultural commodities, and providing services such as grain storage and transport. It appears that many of these agricultural cooperatives are adapting their operations to the rapidly changing economic environment characterized by technological change, industrialization of agriculture and growing individualism (Ortmann & King, 2007). However, the rural cooperatives in most developing countries are faced with some constraints and barriers. In this way, participation plays a crucial role in development of rural cooperatives (Aref A, 2011). Ashley and Roe (1998) describe community participation as a spectrum ranging from passive to active involvement to full local participation, where there is active community participation and venture ownership. Arnstein (1969) also defines citizen participation as the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. Meanwhile, some scholars such as Pretty (1995), Oakley (1991) and (David & Wandersman, 1990), provided a typology of participation, but the most suitable typology that is suitable for urban issues is Arnstein's ladder. Arnstein's ladder of participation is the most well-known continuum of citizen participation which frames participation in terms of citizen power (Arnstein, 1969).

Table 1: Level of citizen participation in rural cooperatives

Levels	Types	Description
Citizen-power	Citizen control	This range is the highest level. People have the degree of power which guarantees the participation in governing a program from citizens (Arnstein, 1969).
	Delegated power	Local participation is performed through negotiations between local people and authorities, this results in positive role the citizens played in partial decision making with the authority over a particular plan or project (Arnstein, 1969).
	Partnership	Power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between local people and power-holders (Arnstein, 1969).
Tokenism	Placation	Placation is a stage that people begin to have some degree of influence though tokenism is still apparent (Arnstein, 1969).
	Consultation	People are invited to give their suggestions; this rung of the ladder is still a sham since no assurance is offered. Concerns and ideas of citizens will not be taken into consideration (Arnstein, 1969).
	Informing	Authorities inform citizens of their rights; However, more emphasis is put on a one-way flow of information (Arnstein, 1969).
Non-participation	Therapy	With respect to group therapy, masked as citizen participation, should be on the lowest rung of the ladder because it is both dishonest and arrogant (Arnstein, 1969).
	Manipulation	Based on so-called citizen participation, people are placed on rubber stamp advisory committees (Arnstein, 1969).

Source: Arnstein, (1969)

Rural cooperatives and people participation in local areas reinforce each other and also contribute towards promoting the rural development. Putnam (2000) states that the more the people are engaged in social activities the more likely they are to participate in rural cooperatives activities (Putnam, 2000). This is because, participation as a main component of community capacity building, enables participants to work together more effectively to pursue shared objectives at the community level (Aref, 2011). Although, people participation is affected by community engagement, but people participation also plays a crucial role in promoting rural cooperatives, as well as in development of local development. Pedersen (2000) identify the effective role of participation of poorest social sectors, women, youth, and indigenous people.

3. Research Methods

This study is based on quantitative method to investigate the level of community participation in rural cooperatives. This study was carried out in rural areas of Marvdasht, during the March and April 2010. Marvdasht is one of the northern cities and also counties of Fars province. The city is located 45 kilometers north of Shiraz and has an altitude of 1620 meters above the sea level. The county has an area of 3687 square kilometers . Marvdasht as a county is divided into four districts: Central, Kamfirouz,

Doroudzan and Seydan. Marvdasht has a cold weather in the hilly areas and moderate climate in other regions (Wikipedia, 2011). Agriculture is the major development sector in Marvdasht (Allahdadi, 2011). Marvdasht is among the foremost city which established rural cooperatives in Iran. The study used survey design, where a questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was structured around a Likert scale. The respondents answered each statement based on five scales. Each statement was situated on a 5-point scale as recommended by Dong-Wan and William (2002), and Aref (2010) with 1 representing a response of “strongly disagree” and 5 representing “strongly agree.”

The respondents were 250 cooperatives member where each respondent was chosen based on cluster sampling. The population of this research was rural residents, including the cooperatives members of in rural areas of Marvdasht, Iran. The respondents were asked to answer these questions which were constructed to gauge their level of participation in rural cooperatives.

The questionnaire was piloted tested to have its contents validated. Statements for level of participation were tested for their validity using Cronbach’s alpha. Descriptive analysis was employed to determine the level of people participation in rural cooperatives in rural areas.

4. Results

This study determines the level of participation in rural cooperatives through descriptive statistics. Table 2 reveals the mean score of eight domains of the participation. Table 2 reveals the findings of the analysis, which show the differences between domains of the participation. Using the mean of the total score as a standard indicator, it was found that generally participation levels in tokenism and citizen-power was low, whereas in non-participation (manipulation and therapy) was high.

Table 2: Total scores of the level of participation in rural cooperatives

Levels	Dimensions	Mean
Citizen-Power <i>Mean=0.63</i>	Partnership	0.70
	Delegated Power	0.59
	Citizen control	0.52
Tokenism <i>Mean=1.39</i>	Informing	1.37
	Consultation	1.60
	Placation	1.21
Non-Participation <i>Mean=4.50</i>	Manipulation	4.83
	Therapy	4.18

Table 2 showed the differences in the levels of participation (non-participation, tokenism, and citizen- power). Using the mean it was found that participation level in non-participation dimension was higher than tokenism and citizen-power (4.50, 1.39 and 0.76 respectively). Levels of local participation in tokenism and citizen-power dimensions, which are genuine participations, have low scores as compared to non-participation level. It shows citizens cannot collaborate with the local government organizations and have not been empowered to influence policies and expand their opportunities in rural organizations. Generally, the findings reveal that the level of community participation in rural cooperatives is low and people are mostly involved in the non-participation stage. This means that most citizens are not involved in the decision-making process, and do not attempt to voice their views and hold the local government accountable.

For rural residence to be effective in rural cooperatives, they should come together and interact with governing bodies collectively. Local residence should be more involved in community activities and influence decision-making processes that affect their lives, their communities. They need to interact with the rural cooperatives and foster active relationship with local organizations. However based on descriptive results, it was revealed that the level of local participation in rural cooperatives is low.

However people are more interested to participate in rural organization activities, such as rural and agricultural cooperatives.

As Putnam stated the term 'local participation' is related to collaboration of people in rural cooperatives (Putnam, 2000). On the other hand, strong rural communities generate rural capacity, and connect local people with government. Therefore, based on the mean scores of participation, it could be concluded that in this study they do not have significant contribution towards development of rural cooperatives and rural development as well.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the level of participation in rural cooperatives was examined. The basic argument was that effective local participation in rural cooperatives. Community participation is considered as an instrument for rural cooperatives and a foundation for empowerment of local people. In addition, participation in rural cooperatives is essential for rural development activities, as, it strengthens the relationship between rural areas and local organizations and provides the space for their partnership. From the findings of this study, it is noted that the level of participation in rural cooperatives is low. In other words, people do not participate at the decision-making level, are not able to interact with councilors and they are not interested to engage in civic activities. Hence, it could be concluded that they have limited contribution towards rural cooperatives.

References

- Allahdadi, F. (2011). The Contribution of Agricultural Cooperatives on Poverty Reduction: A Case Study of Marvdasht, Iran. *Journal of American Science*, 7(4), 22-25.
- Aref, A. (2011). Barriers of Local Participation in Rural Cooperatives A Case Study of Fars, Iran. *Journal of American Science*, 7(1), 670-673.
- Aref, F. (2010). Residents' attitudes towards tourism impacts: A case study of Shiraz, Iran. *Tourism Analysis*, 15(2), 253-261.
- Aref, F. (2011). Barriers to community capacity building for tourism development in communities in Shiraz, Iran. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(3), 347-359.
- Aref, F., & Ma'rof, R. (2009). Community leaders' perceptions toward tourism impacts and level of building community capacity in

- tourism development. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 2(3, Nov), 208-213.
- Aref, F., & Sarjit, S. G. (2009). Rural tourism development through rural cooperatives. *Nature and Sciences*, 7(10), 68-73.
- Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of American in statute of planners*, 35(4), 216-224.
- Ashley, C., & Roe, D. (1998). Enhancing community involvement in wildlife tourism: Issues and challenges: IIED Wildlife and Development Series No. 11, International Institute for Environment Development, London. .
- Chizari, M., Lindner, J. R., & Bashardoost, R. (1997). Participation of rural women in rice production activities and extensions education programs in the Gilan province, Iran *Journal of International Agricultural and extension education*.
- David M, C., & Wandersman, A. (1990). Sense of community in the urban environment: A catalyst for participation and community development. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 18(1).
- Dong-Wan, K., & William, P. S. (2002). A structural equation model of resident's attitudes for tourism development. *Tourism Management*, 23(5), 521-530.
- International Cooperative Alliance (ICA). (1995). Statement on the Cooperative Identity. *Review of International Cooperation*, 88(3).
- Oakley, P. e. a. (1991). *Projects with People. The practice of participation in rural development*: International Labour Office (via Intermediate Technology Publishing, London).
- Ortmann, G., & King, R. (2007). Agricultural Cooperatives I: History, Theory and Problems. *Agrekon*, 46(1).
- Pretty, J. N. (1995). Participatory learning for sustainable agriculture. *world development*, 23(8), 1247-1263
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York.
- Wikipedia. (2011). Marvdasht. Retrieved 2, Jan, 2011, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marvdasht>
- World Bank. (1975). *Rural development: Sector policy paper*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

9, May 2011