

# THE PATH ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL COMPONENTS IN ECONOMIC EMPOWERING OF RURAL WOMEN IN IRAN

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©Ontario International Development Agency ISSN: 1923-6654 (print)

ISSN 1923-6662 (online). Available at <http://www.ssrn.com/link/OIDA-Intl-Journal-Sustainable-Dev.html>

**Abstract:** Empowering has been considered as a tool to privilege the people in the third millennia to obtain social, economic and cultured development, especially for those living in rural areas. This has become a great concern for most governments which would like to change the structure of villages under the crisis situation. Education and occupation are two important parameters which can be used to measure the efficacy of empowering the people in these areas. The focus of some governments and authorities is women in these areas as the hidden and silent stratum of the society. It is believed that letting women play a role in their finding their status can help them to change the economic power of the family and improve the arrangement of society. By doing that, the society can enjoy the energy and thought of a part which can strengthen the other part. After the Islamic revolution in Iran, the motto of empowering women has so widely spread that there have been implemented different programs and plans for women to improve their status in the society. Women, in rural areas, have had a different situation from those living in urban areas. The family restrictions have imposed many limitations on women's participation in social activities. Establishing special schools for illiterate women has helped them to become more aware of their situation and find solutions to improve their economic problem. On the other hand, official pressures make more women involved in economic activities have provided more opportunity for women to the present paper aims to answer some questions to clarify the trend ahead; (1) What is the rate of indices of economic empowerment and social capital in statistical samples in Iran? (2) What extent of rural women's economic empowerment is determined by

social capital indices? This research is a quantitative, non-experimental and instrumental study in which the statistic sample is consisted of 45334 rural women in Hamedan, Iran. From each parish, based on class attributes, 13 villages were chosen randomly and the selected statistical sample became 256 persons. To determine the validity of questionnaire, 30 questionnaire were completed by rural women. The results showed that the research tool is of great ability for gathering the data and there is a significant and positive relationship between the components of social resources and economic empowerment. The variables introduced in analysis model explained 42% of economic empowerment variations. It can be definitely concluded that there is a long path to pave for empowering the women in rural areas. The most direct influence of empowering plans in rural areas of Iran can be seen in the downsizing of families as the women are aware of educational system and the family handling more and more. Unfortunately, the distribution of social capital has been unfair in different regions of Iran. Due to the negative policies, most concentration has been on megacities, leading to undue growth of big cities and overwhelming immigration.

**Keywords:** empowering, Iran, social capital, women.

## INTRODUCTION

Most scientists believe that there is pronounced difference between economic development and economic growth[1]. While economic growth pays attention to the capacity of a nation to become wealthier through the production of more goods and services, economic development refers to the citizens' being better off. According to Todaro and

Smith before the 1970's development was based on economic affairs in which rapid increase in the gross national product would trickle down to the population in the form of employment or other economic opportunities. Then the question comes out if economic growth or development is associated with a movement in to better social status and empowerment , especially for women as the hidden labour force in some countries such as Iran[2].

The main resource of development has been considered to be as social capital and its distribution among the different parts of the people in the country. Over the last 25 years the concept of social capital has drawn increasing attention by scholars and practitioners across disciplines.[3] The works of Pierre Bourdieu , James Coleman , and Robert Putnam have significantly influenced the theoretical development of social capital, and brought the concept to the attention of scholars across disciplines. Social capital serves to capture how people interact with each other, and how these social interactions in turn yield benefits for the individuals and collectively [4,5,6,7,8,9]. As social capital became increasingly popular, however, the range of its application was also progressively broadened. While there is agreement on the meaning of social capital at a generic level (i.e., the notion that social interactions yield benefits to actors), the emphasis at the empirical and research level varies. Thus social capital has been observed at many levels (e.g., at the individual or household level, at the group, community or neighbourhood level, at the regional level, and at the national level), in all kinds of fields, and in various settings (initially in industrialized countries and later in the developing world), and has been the focus of inquiry both as a dependent and an independent variable. On the one hand, the extensive proliferation of research on social capital has advanced our understanding of the concept and proven its applicability to a variety of places and contexts. At the same time, this versatility has resulted in conceptual stretching, prompting some debate about appropriate ways to conceptualize social capital, and in some cases, about the usefulness of the concept. Social capital has empirically been linked to positive outcomes in a variety of domains such as adaptation to climate change. The issue of women in development approaches and planning to improve their life was not at the center of attention by most theorists but it was gradually known that women, especially rural ones, have been neglected in development program. In the late 1980's, the term invisible women in development was used for rural women while the implementation of development program was carried out in the third world countries. In 1990's, the researchers concern about neglecting the women's needs in rural development increased

and they tried to allocate specific attention to this issue. It was known that rural development programs followed an anti-feminist trend while based on ILO reports, women constituted 78% and about half of agriculture labour force in Sahara of Africa and Asia, respectively. According to international statistics, 33% of Iranian women are involved in the economy sector in contrast with 77% of men. 34% of women are involved in agriculture sector versus 23% of men [10]. Apart from neglecting the women's contribution in production of agricultural products, their limited access to credit-propagation services , deposits and other services and productive resources are known well. In rural development programs, it was always assumed that women can recognize their needs and priorities by facilitators out of the village to apply for their favorite grounds, but it didn't happen in practice. Development and growth in any definition were directed toward the men. The presence of male bias has been proved in all development of basic functions and women's capability components the most common concept of which is empowering women in such a way that the development program has stated the enhance of gender equality and women's empowerment as a key aim in the third millennia. Based on researches' opinion, women empowering is meaningful when they can define and choose their interests and see themselves able to reach them.

There appear four capitals (resources) for women to pave the empowerment trend, (a) Social capital including social participation and neighbourhood support networks, formal and informal groups, formal law and common norms in society , women's participation in family and society decision - making. (b) Human capitals including factors such as health, correct nutrition, knowledge and necessary skills for life (c) Monetary capital such as accessing the savings, work with income and access to microcredits. (d) Physical capital for women such as access to road , shopping , recreation services, land , transportation , safe shelter, information and agricultural products outcomes.

Social capital is regarded to be the resource of power for women and helps them to protect themselves against undesirable events. Among the grounds in which the literature of social capital is feeble is that of gender and social capital, which has remained gender blind and there is less attention to gender issues of social capital within groups, its effect on family and power distribution and hierarchy in groups. Therefore, the general aim of this paper is to recognize the role of social capital related to economic empowerment of rural women focusing on specific issues: Individual, economic and social features of rural women, the relationships of individual components and social capital indexes

with economic empowerment of rural women and their direct and indirect effects

### **Theoretical Basis and Framework**

The concept of social capital was first introduced in 1916 explaining local supports for rural schools to show the social integration and people's investing in society. This concept was neglected for half a century. Then in 1961, in a social networks in administering local associations and political group, it was reintroduced. In the 70's sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu introduced this term in economic and cultural issues calling it symbolic capital. In the late 90's World Bank paid special attention to it in research programs and development project in different societies. Social capital is a sociological concept which focuses on the communication within social networks in micro level and between different social networks in macro level. It is of two kinds; cognitive and structural. The former guarantees the utilization of all people in family social networks by dividing the norms, values and attitudes while the latter facilitates the efficacy of collective action through establishing social roles and social networks complemented by rules. These two kinds of social capital reinforce each other. Social capital is defined as productive resources emerging from social networks. Putnam played a great role in generalizing this concept while introducing it in economics. Social capital is the effect of civic participation on local government performance. Recently, World Bank considered social capital as the quality and quantity of civic organizations in society. Empowerment is to delegate authority to person or to give equipment and the ability to manage it. Empowerment is believed to spread people's ability to make basic choices in life, in the grounds they have deprived of making decisions about. These are two elements in empowerment: 1) focus on the procedural kind of empowerment due to change from disempowerment to empowerment 2) Interaction of humans in choices of life. In this respect, social capital provides the economic empowerment of rural women in three functions: increasing the income through economic activities of members in local groups, 2) controlling the income 3) developing collective social and economic activities. There are few studies focusing on social capital in rural environments while there is a tendency towards poor people. The role of every person in the family is becoming important especially when the government programs fail to work in underprivileged regions. Some studies have investigated the effects of social capital on the increase of rural families' income while neglecting the social networks in villages. The administrative arrangements and roles of different agencies in the development process are defined in the various Iranian regulations and procedures. In order to

conform to legal requirements, serious efforts have been made over the years to assess the environmental and social impacts of development projects. A Department of Environment (DoE) was established in Iran as early as 1971 to research and survey the projects of improvement in rural areas [11].

Today, the DoE remains as the main actor for development plans, with responsibilities for protecting the women, ensuring legitimate and sustainable utilization of resources to guarantee sustainable development, and bringing about equal opportunities for both men and women. Social capital is measured by social participation, the number of associations or social networks and trust among members. In this study, the indices were social trust, social awareness, social participation, economic participation and rural women's social-economic status. First we define these terms to get a unanimous trend.

**Social trust:** trust is the core of social capital formation and necessary element of successful social structure. Trust facilitates the social exchange in uncertainty conditions and brings about social order among members which spreads the social relationship with other individuals. In fact, it shows fair, just and reasonable behavior of participants in social networks. Trust is a communication phenomenon which increases individual's participation and their tendency to participate increases the trust, the process through which social capital is increasingly generated. Trust in sociology is defined and measured in terms of situation and role which trust plays in different social systems. Four dimensions are considered for trust, interpersonal trust, generalized institutional trust, and trust into environment.

**Social awareness:** Social awareness will help people know what others think about them. In fact, everyone can assess his or behaviour constantly through others' eyes.

**Social participation:** it is the observable part of social capital measured by density of social organizations in each geographical region or by asking the people how they are engaged in official and non-official activities. Social participation is an organized process in which people participate voluntarily and consciously considering certain goals which lead to contribution in power resources. About rural women, social participation consists of women's psychological situation such as self-confidence, and self – efficacy power feeling, related to their attitude to their own position.

### **Economic Participation**

Rural women's participation in economics is a complex phenomenon dependent on various variables which are divided in to two groups of internal

(psychological) and external (socioeconomic) variables. Among external variables influential on rural women's economic participation are economic factors and family features and among internal variables influential on women's economic participation are individual characteristics of women and their spouses, and cultural beliefs related to gender. Most families in rural areas are formed based on patriarchy and women do not see themselves as an independent identity ;therefore, their economic freedom is something out of imagination. They can only participate in economic activities of their husbands to be help or temporary worker.

### **Socioeconomic Status**

SES is a compound index which expresses the working experience, social economic and situation related to other persons in society divided in to high, medium and low. This index has long been used as a variable to study inequalities in aggregates and the accessibility to development resources. There are found many ways to assess SES such as direct indices including monthly income and occupation type, and indirect one, used in development studies, including the properties owned by people. These variables are considered separately for women and men and for urban and rural dwellers. For example, the variable of farming land property is more suitable to assess the SES of villagers.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research is quantitative in nature, experimental in terms of controlling variables and applied in terms of aim. The population sample was all the women over 10 years living in Hamedan villages, Iran, totalling 45334, based on 2008 census. First, there was applied an elementary study on 30 respondents to specify the variance of considered attribute (economic empowerment). Then, the sample volume was determined to be 256 using Cochran formula with confidence level of 95% and probable accuracy of 5%. The sampling method was class attribution. 13 villages were randomly chosen. Data collection was done by questionnaire in 2008, the reliability of which was confirmed by Cronbach's  $\alpha$  ( $\alpha > 0.82$ ) and its validity by rural development experts of Tehran university, women in villages and Agricultural center (Jihad). Through interview the questionnaires were completed by the researchers. As the path analysis is a type of applied regression known as structural equation model and provides the test of causal relationship between two or more variables in communicational causal relationship (dependent, independent, discrete or continuous, hidden or over) in a linear equation, it was used to do this research. Spss was used to analyses the data.

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Individual Features**

Research findings show that rural women in the population of consideration are in the age range of 15-70, averaging 37 with the most women placed in 21-30. It was known that 66.8% of respondents were at most 45 years old, 6.6% (17 persons) family guardian and 92% married. The age difference of 6-10 years with their husbands, allocating the greatest class. 256 rural women were illiterate (28%), and 27 under the auspices of literacy corps education (ability to read and write) while 87 had education up to fifth grade, 41 in secondary level, 19 in high school level and 5 had diploma. Accordingly, 72.7% did not have noticeable education and were in the level of low literate or illiterate

### **Economic Features**

In this research, the rural women, who were involved in 15 profitable economic activities , consisted 80% of statistical population. Selling dairies and weaving making profit for 104 persons are considered to be profitable for women. The monthly revenue for rural women showed that 30.83% of women had revenue less than 1500000 RLS, 25.85% between 1500000 to 2000000 RLS and 43.41 % more than 2000000 RLS. The economic – product skills of women were surveyed, too. Processing the dairy and gardening products along with vegetable growing are three skills which most women have the ability to do while keeping honey bees, mushroom growing and working with computer are least observed skills. Today, 58.2% have low economic skills, 34.4% medium economic skills and 7% high economic skills. The rate of economic empowerment of 3.2%, 47.7% and 19.1 of women were recognized to be at low, medium and high level, respectively. Summing the economic individual indices of women (age, individual income from non-agricultural activities contribution in agriculture), we can calculate the index of women's economic participation index. It was found 34.8% of women had low level of participation, 38.3 medium level of participation and 26.2 % high level of participation. Summing women's social-individual indexes, (age, self -confidence, self -efficacy and feeling of power, their attitude to themselves, traditional and religious participations health centers and mosques), we found that 34%. 35.2 % and 30.9% had low, medium and high economic participation, respectively.

### **Social Trust**

Trust is emerging as an important facet of relationships in social networks and therefore plays a central role across the society classes and aggregates from family to friends. Summing the related components, (people's trust to their families, friends, neighbours, good attitude to the strangers, trust to

country authorities, trust to environment risk taking) we can calculate the social trust index. Social awareness can be obtained by summing components such as usage of mass media (radio, TV, newspaper and book) and awareness from social and political situation. To measure the complex concept of social capital, a multidimensional scale was devised through combination of some simple and compound indices which have been defined in terms of one or more variables. Social capital is the summation of indices of awareness, social trust, and institutional trust. The economic growth of the country in general has helped the rural areas in Iran to enjoy the services of mass media more than before. According to our survey, only 7% of rural areas used TV in 1970 while this figure is about 90% now. More than 30% of villagers use satellite communication. These have created a milieu of awareness and familiarity with socialization and breaking up the fences of isolation.

### Social Awareness

The results showed that the women did not consider any role for social gatherings and were deprived from social support by their peers. The low level of education did not let them form the social networks in job, education and knowledge. The lack of NGOs in rural areas could be due to the fact that transmission of knowledge in these regions took place horizontally among family members. The economic systems set up at domestic level have helped women to become familiar with the necessity of increasing knowledge and feel secured to change their social interaction.

### CONCLUSION

Our research evaluated the application of social and economic development in rural area projects in Iran at both policy and practical dimensions. At the policy level, the review of the legislative and theoretical bases of empowering plans confirmed that social development is meant to be an integral component of development plans to empower women in Iran, but is yet to be as firmly established in comprehensive planning. There are very evident conceptual and practical shortcomings in the current national plans that affect the standing of social development. A high standard of economic progress along with women's empowering practice will only be achieved when the

role of women is considered appropriately and suitable measures are taken to implement the grounds of empowering women. Traditional views of women as a housekeeper has remained stable in the urban areas and can act as a barrier to change the women's status in the society. The improvement of household economics through simple skill training to women can make the winds of change blow.

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