Analysis of Rural Economic Empowerment and its Determinants  
(Case Study: Rice Producer's in Rasht County)

Moosa Aazami\textsuperscript{1*} - Mehdi Khayyati\textsuperscript{2}  
\textsuperscript{1} Associate prof, Agricultural Extension and Education, Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran  
\textsuperscript{2} PhD Student in Agricultural Development, Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran

Received: 2 July 2013  Accepted: 24 March 2014

Extended Abstract

1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of empowerment has become a central concept in development issues since 1990s. This notion seems to have been so popular that is considered as undisputed objective of development programs. Despite growing interest and increased investments in empowerment, the development of instruments and indicators with which to monitor and evaluate empowerment processes and outcomes is still at an early stage; There is growing evidence that indicates the linkages between empowerment and development outcomes. However, there remain many questions about what empowerment means, how it applies in rural development, and what actions should be undertaken to move the empowerment agenda forward.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Empowerment is of intrinsic value; it also has instrumental value. Empowerment is relevant to the individual and collective level, and it can be economic, social, or political. The term can be used to characterize relations within households or between poor people and other actors at the global level. In its broadest sense, empowerment is the expansion of freedom of choice and action. It means increasing one’s authority and control over the resources and decisions that affect one’s life. As people experience real choices, their control over their lives will increase. If a person or group is empowered, they possess the capacity to make effective choices; that is, to change their choices into desired actions and outcomes.

Capacity to make an effective choice is primarily influenced by two sets of factors: resources and opportunity structure. Resources is defined as an actor’s ability to make meaningful choices; which means the actor is able to envisage options and make a choice. Opportunity structure is defined as the formal and informal contexts within which actors operate. Working together, these factors give rise to different degrees of empowerment. Resources and opportunity structure are hypothesized to shape the degree of empowerment that a person or group might experience. Degrees of empowerment can be measured by assessing (1) whether a person has the opportunity to make a choice, (2) whether a person actually uses the opportunity to choose, and (3) once the choice is made, whether the choice brings the desired outcome, once it is made.

3. METHODOLOGY

The main goal of this study was to introduce and test the World Bank empowerment model for assessing the economic empowerment of rural people and to identify contexts and factors affecting it. Therefore, a survey was conducted through questionnaires. The required data were collected from the rice producers of Rasht County, of whom 185 were selected using multistage cluster sampling. Formal and content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by a panel of experts and its reliability for various items, was estimated between 0.69 and 0.88 via Cronbach’s alpha.

4. DISCUSSION

The results showed a positive and significant effect of opportunities structure. On economic empowerment. Access to production inputs, markets, credits, and available opportunities for learning and participation would improve desirable outcomes and economic empowerment. However, opportunities created by the government policies and programs would not have statistically significant impact on empowerment. In addition,
resources such as economic, social, and human assets would have direct influence on economic empowerment, as well as indirect impact on the dependent variable through the structure of opportunities.

5. CONCLUSION

There is a fundamental question about economic empowerment and that is if there is any opportunity for farmers’ empowerment? Farmers will not achieve empowerment if input supply is insufficient. Also they should be able to finance it. Access to markets and marketing is another dimension of empowerment. There will be raise to producers’ income and capacity to finance production in the coming season because of adequate markets and ability to access them. Due to farmers’ financial weakness, it is suggested that government run useful programs in order to improve farmers’ marketing abilities and to increase their access to markets. The results of this study indicate that there is a positive relation between economic empowerment and credit access. Therefore, it is strongly recommended to develop financial-credit institutes-which provide small loans to poor and low income rural people- in order to improve access to credit especially for smallholder farmers. These institutions should extend their types of collateral and substitute acceptable forms of them such as marketable assets with other forms such as group guarantees.

Results from this study illuminate the fact that executed plans and policies did not meet the real needs of local communities. Due to low level of stakeholder participation, it is suggested to pay more attention to this issue since the stakeholder participation in agricultural development projects would ensure the success and effectiveness of these programs. It should be noted that there are intertwined relations among opportunity structure elements and changing one component might affect the other components.

Keywords: Economic empowerment, structure of opportunities, assets, path analysis, rice producer of Rasht County.

References:

---

**How to cite this article:**

**ISSN: 2322-2514  eISSN: 2383-2495**