Factors Affecting Environmental Awareness of Rural People  
(Case Study: Jaghargh Dehestan in Binalud County)

Alireza Khaje Shahkouhi*1- Aliakbar Najafikani2- Zeynab Vesal3

1- Assistant prof., in Geography & Rural Planning, Golestan University, Gorgan, Iran.  
2- Assistant prof., in Geography & Rural Planning, Golestan University, Gorgan, Iran.  
3- MSc. in Geography & Rural Planning, Golestan University, Gorgan, Iran.

Received: 26 February 2014  
Accepted: 29 November 2014

Extended Abstract
1. INTRODUCTION
Today, the villagers' awareness of environmental issues is regarded as one of the most important national plans, particularly in developing countries, which is aimed at achieving sustainable development of the environment. Thus, this study seeks to identify and explain the factors affecting the environmental awareness of villagers living in the Jaghargh Dehestan in the Binalud County. Accordingly, the main research questions are presented: “How much are villagers aware of environmental issues?” “How much do socioeconomic features of rural households and environmental factors in the study area affect the environmental awareness of villagers?

2. THEATRICAL FRAMEWORK
Environmental strategies in rural planning include organization of activities and management of the natural resources with the aim of protecting and enhancing the environment in the context of environmental sustainability. Since the rural environment in many rural areas is faced with severe threats such as desertification, deforestation, changes in agricultural land use, reduced groundwater levels and landslides, among others, it has stimulated experts and authorities in charge of rural planning practitioners to pay special attention to raising the awareness of people in rural areas about their surrounding environment as one of the drivers and underlying factors of sustainable rural development.

Therefore, today the focus of new paradigms in sustainable rural development is on the important role of education based on raising the awareness of rural people as well as the equal accessibility of these people to information source. In this regard, the appropriate strategy is to find proper ways of disseminating information and knowledge among local people.

3. METHODOLOGY
The present study, practical in terms of its purpose, uses a descriptive, survey-based method of data collection. The population of study consisted of all rural households in Jaghargh Dehestan, which included 1477 households. A sample size of 160 people was selected using Cochran formula. The self-administered questionnaire was the main instrument for collecting data and measuring the study variables.

Data analysis and processing were performed by SPSS software and descriptive and analytical statistics methods were used for data analysis. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the study, with the result (0.80) demonstrating the desirable reliability of the questionnaire.

Also, the statistical analyses of the study were performed by SPSS software and consistent with the measurement level of variables, the correlation analysis, Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis and stepwise multiple regression were used.

4. DISCUSSION
The findings suggest that the villagers' awareness of environmental issues was at a desirable level (37.2%). Also, there was a significant relationship between independent variables (social, economic and environmental factors) and environmental awareness at a significant level of 99%. Among social variables, age, partnership and participation in training courses had the greatest impact on awareness. Further, among the economic factors, self-employed people due to the limited contact with the environment were less aware of the environmental issues. Also, there was a significant relationship between the type of cultivation and the extent of awareness so that there was not a significant difference between various cultivations.

Moreover, the cultivated acreage, income, savings and access to production factors contributed significantly to environmental awareness of individuals. On the other hand, among the
environmental variables, distance from county and environmental risks were the most influential variables. Also, the residents of Dashti Villages were more aware of environmental issues for a variety of reasons like extensive interactions, facilities and environmental potentials compared to people residing in rural foothills and mountainous areas.

The results of stepwise regression showed that ten variables of shape and type of rural area, environmental potentials, institutional communication, interaction with others, type of economic activity, and access to production factors, type of cultivation, geographical position and environmental risks had the largest share in explaining environmental awareness.

5. CONCLUSION
According to the findings, it can be concluded that the villagers’ awareness of environmental issues was at the desirable level. As for the factors affecting environmental awareness, it can be stated that the shape and type of village, environmental potentials, institutional communication, interaction with others, type of economic activity, access to production factors, type of cultivation, geographical position and environmental hazards explained a great deal of environmental awareness in villagers respectively.

Moreover, that four environmental factors remained in the regression equation suggests the importance of these factors along other social and economic factors in explaining and predicting environmental awareness.

According to the results of the study, the following suggestions can be presented for enhancing the existing situation:
1. Doing some groundwork for promoting the environmental awareness among various groups of society (women and men) of all ages and all levels of education, especially those without high school diploma in order to prevent environmental degradation and pollution.
2. To enhance the environmental awareness of the villagers, it is necessary to prepare the grounds for interaction and participation of local people in making decisions related to the environment at all levels, especially with respect to the management, design, implementation, and evaluation of projects related to the environment.
3. Given the importance of economic factors like jobs, income, savings and acreage, etc. on environmental awareness, it is essential to raise the awareness of people who have limited contact with the environment through distributing brochures, quarterly, etc. aimed at increasing their environmental knowledge.
4. To increase the environmental awareness of people residing in remote rural areas, modern education methods such as distance or mobile learning should be adopted. Of course, the realization of this plan required the contribution of village managers (Dehyari- Council).

Keywords: Environmental awareness, rural areas, Jaghargh Dehestan.

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How to cite this article:

ISSN: 2322-2514 eISSN: 2383-2495