

Performance Evaluation of Rural Production Cooperatives on the Sustainable Agricultural Development (Case study: Nishabour County)

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Extended Abstract

1- INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Razavi Khorasan province is a region in which many of rural production cooperatives (RPCs) have been established. One of the main tasks of the RPCs is to eliminate the problems of the subsistence farming. These problems can be reduced by providing infrastructure services in rural areas. In the view of number and infrastructure services to rural areas, Nishabour RPCs are in the first place in the Razavi Khorasan province. A comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of RPCs on the sustainable agricultural development has not been done yet. The main objective of the present study is to analyze the performance of RCP sin agricultural infrastructure development and its effect on sustainability. Accordingly, the RPCs of 12 villages covered by the RPCs of Nishabour to we have been investigated. Thus, the main objectives of the current study are:

- 1- To evaluate the performance of RPCs in providing the agricultural infrastructure services.
- 2- To analyze the role of RPCs in sustainable agriculture.
- 3- To compare the sustainability of the villages based on the provided services.

2- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sustainable agricultural development is based on farming system transformation. Land reform in Iran caused major changes in rural and agricultural sections. This led to fragmentation and dispersal of agricultural land and created many problems in agricultural development. In 1349, RPCs were established to solve these challenges. The main purpose of RPCs is sustainable agricultural development through agricultural infrastructure services in the villages. RPCs play an important

role in the efficient use of water and soil resources and sustainable agricultural development. Sustainability framework includes economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Participation is the only way to achieve sustainability. One of the participation patterns is agricultural cooperatives. These cooperatives are able to manage sustainable resources. Many investigations have been carried out in the world and Iran on the role of RPC sin the sustainable agricultural development. In this context, some studies have emphasized the positive impact and some studies have pointed out the challenges and problems of cooperatives. The effects of Nishabour RPCs on the sustainable agricultural development have also been investigated.

3- METHODOLOGY

To investigate the role of RPCs in sustainable agriculture, the impacts of RPCs in sustainable agricultural development are analyzed, with respect to many indicators, including 13 economic indicators, 16 social indicators, and 20 environmental indicators. These indicators were evaluated based on the view of 168 cooperative members.

By means of TOPSIS technique, 11 infrastructure indexes in 12 villages covered by RPCs have been assessed and ranked. These indexes include basic studies (phase zero and phase 1), land accumulation, land leveling, new irrigation patterns, stream covering, construction of communication routes between farms, spring revival, agricultural machinery, training courses, and conversion industries. The obtained data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, and standard deviation).

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4- DISCUSSION

The analytical results indicated that, the performance of rural production cooperatives has been relatively successful in most villages. Three cooperatives, including Fooshanjan, Simorgh No. 5, and Simorgh No. 4, have provided the highest services with the performance ratio of 0.896, 0.471, and 0.398, respectively. Villages covered by these cooperatives have had higher sustainability in comparison with other villages.

In view of members, the average of the three dimensions of economic, social, and environmental sustainability was calculated as 2.74, 2.41, and 3.33. Based on the results, the influence of the cooperatives on the social, economic, and environmental sustainability is high, medium, and low, respectively. The results indicated that, villages covered by RPCs have higher sustainability in comparison with other villages.

5- CONCLUSIONS

RPCs can accelerate the process of development and participation of rural population in their activities. In Iran, RPCs can play a very important role in the development of investment in poor

farmers. They are also able to organize and optimize limited resources to increase their income.

The results indicated that, in Razavi Khorasan province, RPCs in Nishabour has been in the first place from quantitative (number of cooperatives) and qualitative (providing infrastructure services) views. The analytical results indicated that, the performance of the RPCs in most villages has been relatively successful.

The present study led to some recommendations for promoting and developing the structure of RPCs:

1. According to the needs of the farmer to establish RPCs, more attention should be paid to the development of cooperative activities.
2. Government should increase the financial and technical support to provide a favorable background for the development of RPCs.
3. To achieve these goals, continuous and long term planning along with technical expertise is necessary.

Key words: Production cooperatives, agricultural infrastructure, sustainable agriculture, Nishabour.

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