

## Rural women empowerment in developing countries

<sup>1</sup> Mojtaba Sadighi, <sup>2</sup> Ghasem Nikbakhsh and <sup>3</sup> Mohammadreza Ghaffari

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Damavand Branch, Islamic Azad University, Damavand, Iran  
Corresponding author: [sharif11070@yahoo.com](mailto:sharif11070@yahoo.com)

**Abstract:** In the rural community of Iran, there are gaps between the ruling class (capital owners) and villagers, between literate and illiterate, and between men and women. Especially in villages women have fewer possibilities in terms of investment and less power and credit. Role of rural women, over of men, is more influenced with different economic, social, cultural and ecologic factors. Rural women are considered as a noticeable potential in the community either directly (crops production, livestock, handicrafts, cottage industries) or indirectly by helping the agricultural sector (as labor). About 5.6 million women are involved in agricultural production, and activities related to planting... harvesting, preparation of animal food, and taking care of livestock and poultry and some certain activities related to trading and marketing are all different fields of rural women's role and participation. Based on current statistics, women in rural area participate about 50% in conversion industries, 22% in producing crops and livestock, 75% in handicrafts and in areas related to planting...harvesting , respectively, 25, 24 and 4.26. And also in activities related to livestock, they handle 23% of livestock grazing, 42% of animal care and 100 percent of total poultry in the village. Therefore their role in achieving food security is undeniable. But, like most developing countries, this crucial role in society and in process of rural development, is not obvious. In Iranian rural community, about 80% of women work, but they are mostly considered as housewives, unpaid employment, domestic workers, family workers, or independent employers. The statistics often do not take into account seasonal, part-time, unpaid employment, and housekeeping activities. In economics and social sciences, those of women's activities that have emerged out of house and affected national economy, are the ones to be noticed. In most research and statistics men are known as the heads of household and they are also the owners of lands and fields. That only 1% of the rural lands are belonging to women does confirm such matter.

[ Mojtaba Sadighi, Ghasem Nikbakhsh and Mohammadreza Ghaffari. **Rural women empowerment in developing countries**. Report and Opinion 2011;3(7):18-22 ]. (ISSN: 1553-9873). <http://www.sciencepub.net>.

**Keywords:** empowerment, developing countries

### Introduction:

For an active participation of women in development, first we need to give a definition for their role in development and then barriers related to their role will be discussed. Although apparently there is no difference of gender in development programs but reality is that women are less considered in participatory programs and most of these plans are planned for men. Finally, planner's optimistic look toward women's participation will be greatly helpful improve rural family budget and will increase the difference between urban and rural families. If, by credit, loans and other financial facilities, rural families are able to build up their own business and make a living through the income and become financially self-reliance or independent, no doubt we will witness some social, economic and cultural changes in villages (Varzgar and Azizi, 2001). participation is to guide people caught by disability, to help them realize their potentials and to empower them to make the best use of life.

According to preceding definition of participation, and the ability of participation to turn potential into imminence power, women should participate more actively in economic affairs.

Statistics regarding women and girls' activities, especially in rural areas, are always presented much lower than the real numbers (Ghaffari, 2000).

Village with the word "woman" removed will lose its literally in production and economic activities, their everyday activities in different fields all are evidence of woman being required in rural production. Rural girls and women are responsible for a variety of roles and duties including wife, mother, producing crops, livestock and agricultural activities, making and marketing handicrafts which are common in each area, and food preparation.

Daily activities of girls and women in different fields all are evidence of woman being required in rural production sector. Women are the major potential for developing the rural economy which leads to further growth of rural production. Increasing awareness towards the role of this class in production and towards necessity of their broader participation in economical and social development, have forced the countries to consider and support their activities while making new rural, Local and national policies (Rahmani Andalibi, 2001).

Being aware of women and girls' important role in rural activities, many countries have

established institutes and organizations to advance women's progress. These organizations try to remove legal barriers that prevent women to participate in development activities as much as men. And finally improve their social, political and economic status in society. With continues evaluation and analysis of current development plans, we can provide especial conditions to ease women's access to production recourses and social services, and considering women's social situation in every society, we can provide the opportunity for them to increase their participation, share income like men, and take part in decision-making(FAO, 1998 ).

If rural women could provide a job for them by getting credits, loan and other financial convenience, through their income they can get self-reliance or financial independency and we will see social, cultural & economic change in village. The question here is that if these changes have positive or negative aspects in the village? It's natural that every change in social phenomenon has both positive and negative aspect, but which is Important here is that which aspect is more than the other and it depends to different condition in various societies. In our rural society there is an especial social & cultural kind that it's outcome maybe different and in some case inconsistent. With these actions rural women could be in idealistic economic condition and they could live with out dependency to their husband's income. In most of the villages in Iran there is patriarchy in the families which is not acceptable for the most of the rural people and groups. When rural women became financially independent, it's acceptable to see its cultural & social outcomes.

Giving the right that women make decision, independency to their family, increasing the cultural knowledge among them& making relation with new institutions, having independency in making decision about marriage, occupation, migration & something like this are the right that women have got it.

#### **Criteria of empowering women:**

Enabling as a theory of policy making for women, in it present five criteria:  
Welfare, access, Concientisation, participation and control.

##### **1- welfare criteria :**

In this criteria, men and women as human resources of development should enjoy of desirable welfare conditions and equality (Paknazar, 2000).

Most of timing developmental programs, have worked on base of women's welfare. They have considered and provided some services for women who were passive recipient of these services. But

these services were limited to physical needs and mostly were considered to revive their role of productivity, again. sometimes , it has been said that this approach has begun at colonial era and has considered women from poor country and intended services for them that dose not exceed from that poverty level . Agricultural and industrial projects were designed for men and social programs for women and children. Most of welfare programs were inadequate or its success was limited. Considerable point in this criteria is that men and women as human resources of development should enjoy equality and desirable welfare conditions. At this stage, women's material welfare and their enjoyment of welfare programs, compared to men (nutrition, death rate and ...) were considered. And women's role as producer to supply their own needs isn't very important.

##### **2- access criteria :**

Lack of access or limited access for women to sources including (fields, job, capital and training) cause that their functions at production is less than men (Paknazar 2000). Access to facilities, sources, designed program and projects for women and access to schools and ... are in this part. Just whenever most of other legal, cultural and social issues being solved, men and women would equally access to sources and facilities. Concept of enabling at this stage is that women have equal right to access to sources at family and greater society.

##### **3- Concientisation criteria**

Women should know that their problems aren't due to their individual inefficiency and shortage but it has emerged by social system in which discriminations has become formal and acceptable issue. (Araghzadeh, 2002). This stage is more critical and important than other stages. Because women can participate at development activities not just be passive users. Women have real equality at development, just when be aware. Concientisation will help to increase women's ability to equality at participation at society. At this stage, women face with critical analysis with society and will find that what has been considered natural and unchangeable reality, is changeable. (Bakhshoodeh, 2005).

##### **4- Participation criteria**

One the most important items that this criteria has considered , is men and women's equal participation at decision making process of affairs of family at society (Paknazar 2000 ) . Men and women both should participate at process of assessment needs, designing, performing and evaluation of projects and development programs (UNICEF, 1998). In summary, this criterion means women's

participation at all stages of surveying needs, detecting problems, planning, management, performing and valuation.

### 5- Control criteria

This criterion emphasize on this point that in addition to equal access of men and women to development sources , they must have adequate control on these sources that this issue is balance criterion , between men and women so that no one exceed other one (Paknazar 2000 ) . Women should have opportunities for decision making at workplace and home. If woman is producer, should be shared with part of her interest and wage. Women like men, should be able to choose her individual and social field and able to make decision and also development activities should be facilitator of these processes. FAO (food and agricultural organization) addresses these three purposes as strategic goals while enabling women:

- 1- equality between men and women to access production sources
- 2- women's participation at policy and decision making
- 3- decreasing rural women's workload and increasing job opportunity and income for them (Paknazar 2000 )

Within theoretical framework of enabling women , having control on sources is presented as highest stage at women's participation process on development , but existing data at most developing countries , indicates that not only rural women haven't any control on financial resources of family but even they were deprived to access to sources and credits , specially through formal credits system (Shaditalab, 2002 ) .

The question that arises here is that what relation is there between enabling women and micro-credits programs? Nowadays, micro-credits are considered as effective mechanism to eradicate poverty for women. Interests of micro-credits further increasing women's income, include:

- improving women's role in family
- Increasing women's confidence, not only through obtain financial success through business activity, but through increasing women's access to social services and communication with other women.
- Changing at social level (social class) at perspective of women's role.

### Conclusion:

Some barriers to women's participation which can be categorized in 3 groups of personal, familial, and social include: law literacy level, large volume of work both inside and outside of home for many reasons including seasonal migration of men and the great diversity of rural women's activities(nursing, housekeeping, agriculture, handicrafts, livestock,...), malnutrition, law health indicator, Patriarchal structure of society, father or husbands disagreement with a woman's participation in social and economic activities for various reasons like cultural reasons or unwilling to lose the labor force at home, negative attitudes towards women's abilities, gender discrimination, family's poverty, superstitious beliefs, misleading customs like fatalism, law access of women to credit and facilities, inaccessibility of extension services, men-orientated social activities and participation plans, deficiency of professionals needed to educate rural women, problems of access to health services and social facilities, low income of rural women compared with men, lack of non-governmental organizations dealing with rural women's problems, few women managers in rural area. (Rahimi, 2001)

In researches that conducted by Nanda (2004) became clear that women participation in credits programs had positive effects on their demand about health care. Fiona Steele and et al (2008) in researches that conducted as called " influences of credits programs on empowering women at Bangladesh , found that women who joined to credits programs , have participated in more educational programs and have married with more educated men and also they have saved more and they had more cash .

Shahnaj and Chaudhury(2009) in research as "credits and its role on empowering women " concluded that there is meaningful relation between attending in credits programs and empowering women , at economical dimensions .

Thus it is obvious that credits programs and its educational and empowering programs can be affective on social, humane and economic development or rural society, if it be associated with proper and gradual practices and base on reciprocal communications principles and apply opinion of local society.

A study conducted by Chabokru et al (1384) shows the crucial importance of micro-credits for farmers who do not possess physical financial assets (land, building, livestock, well...) and work in agricultural sector because of environmental conditions (such as living in a village) or because it's their ancestral occupation.

So today, women's participation in sustainable economic, social, and cultural development in rural areas is not optional but an essential matter. Those communities that have not seriously considered the necessity of participation faced failures and delayed community's development, welfare and security process. In any community, village, or social group, broad participation of every women in decision-making and any other matter related to national or local development programs, is a key variable in social sciences and in the last few decades, it has interested many scholars of socio-economic and especially cultural issues, and is considered as one of the most fundamental democratic rights of women in a society. As we know in a popular participation, all people are given the opportunity to participate in planning and decision making for their society and for their own future. When in practice women feel that they can be involved in planning, policy making and deciding or solving problems in the society certainly they'll feel more solidarity and become more interested in social, economic, and cultural development programs.

#### Corresponding Author:

Mojtaba Sadighi

Damavand Branch, Islamic Azad University,  
Damavand, Iran

E-mail: sharif11070@yahoo.com

#### References:

1. Araghzadeh, M. institutions active in the field of providing financial services to rural women. Conference Proceedings rural women micro-credit. (Volume II), 2002. 167-153.
2. Bakhshoodeh M. and Habibullah Salami. Article "The role of agricultural banks in reducing poverty with emphasis on micro-credit." Conference on rural development and poverty reduction, agricultural banks, Tehran, 2005.
3. Balali, L. Mission Trip Reports samples producing rural women (rural women's efforts Affairs Ministry of Agriculture) to India and meeting with the board of directors and senior managers National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) self-employment Women's Association (SEWA), and the Empowerment Institute rural women (CARE), 2005.
4. Banihashem, F. Rural women, education, association and participation. Jihad Journal village, 14 years, No. 310, 1999, p. 21.
5. Changizi Ashtiani, M. Including the share of women in producing countries. Journal of Agricultural Economics and Development, the third year, special role of women in agriculture. Tehran: Ministry of Agriculture publications, 2003, Pp 83-81.
6. Ellen Vor der Bruegge, Maureen Plas, Christopher Dunford and Kathleen E. Stack. Credit with education: a self-financing way to empower women, 2009.
7. Fakhraee, S. Economic and social effects of their financial reliance of women in rural communities, 2002.
8. FAO. Women in agricultural development. (Translated by: Saleh GH ancestry). Publisher: Management studies and studies and promoting people's participation Deputy Agriculture (the former). Pp 46-42, 1998.
9. Fiona Steele, Sajeda Amin and Ruchira T. Naved. The Impact of an Integrated Micro-credit Program on Women's Empowerment and Fertility Behavior in Rural Bangladesh, 2008.
10. Ghaffari, GH. The role of women and social development. Women's Magazine, 2000, No. 10, p. 15.
11. Goetz, A. and Rina Sengupta, R. "Who Takes the Credit? Gender, Power, and Control over Loan Use in Rural Credit Programs in Bangladesh." *World Development* 24 (1), 2003, 45-63.
12. Jameela v. a. Micro credit, empowerment and diversion of loan use, 2010.
13. Lahsaeizadeh, A. Sociology of rural development. Tehran: Publication Days, 2000, p. 58.
14. Moazami, M, Rahimi A. and Azam tayefe Heidari. "Coverage and sustainability of micro-credit programs, case study of rural women micro-credit fund" Research Center for Rural Women and Rural Affairs Ministry of Agriculture, 2005.
15. Najafi. M (2006). Participatory evaluation of rural women micro-credit fund scheme, the organization promoting education and agricultural research.
16. Nanda. P. (2004). Women's participation in rural credit programs in Bangladesh and their demand for formal health care: is there a positive impact? Center for Health and Gender Equity. USA.
17. Navab Akbar, F. The role of rural women in the past decade. Journal of Agricultural Economics and Development, conference papers, women participation and Agriculture

- 1400, Journal No. 3, Publishing Ministry of Agriculture, 1997, P. 186.
18. Rahmani Andalibi. S. "Need, principles, mechanisms and advantages of micro-credit programs in small business development and improvement of rural women." Conference Proceedings Volume II of rural women micro-credit and promoting people's participation Deputy Ministry of Agriculture - Bureau of Women Affairs in collaboration with Al-Zahra University, Agricultural Bank, Tehran, 2001.
  19. Rahimi, A. Review of micro-credit properties. Conference Proceedings Volume II of rural women micro-credit and promoting people's participation Deputy Ministry of Agriculture - Bureau of Women Affairs in collaboration with Al-Zahra University, Agricultural Bank, Tehran, 2001.
  20. Ruhail Amin, Yipping Li and Ashraf U. Ahmad. Women's credit programs and family planning in rural Bangladesh, 2010.
  21. Saadi. H, Arab Mazar A. Paper "role in accelerating the process of micro-credit in rural development: comparing two perspectives." Conference on rural development and poverty reduction, agricultural banks, Tehran, 2005.
  22. Samadi Afshar, S. Factors affecting rural women's participation in training programs and extension services in agriculture in West Azerbaijan Province 82-81. MSc thesis, Islamic Azad University, Science and Research, 2004.
  23. Shahnaj Praveen and Sajedur Rahman Chaudhury. Micro-credit intervention and its effects on empowerment of rural women: the Bangladesh experience, 2009.

6/22/2011