

An Analysis of the Managerial Performance of the Councils in Sustainable Rural Development in Rostam City, Iran

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Abstract

After the Islamic Revolution, and especially since 1998 onwards, rural the Councils in country as the first civil institutions that arose from opinion of the majority of people in determining their fate have had noticeable role in the processes of management and development of the rural community centers. This study aimed to evaluate the performance of the Councils in the field of sustainable rural development of Rostam city in Fars province. This study was conducted by descriptive-analytical method and by using survey method. The statistical population includes 78 villages with the Councils of this city which is selected by stratified random sampling method and with appropriate choice of 50 villages. Then, the village council members (three) were studied and ultimately necessary studies have been conducted on 125 rural council members. The data collection tool was a questionnaire with open-ended questions and its face validity was confirmed and its reliability was also confirmed by Cronbach's alpha ($r=0.79$). The research results indicate that the performance of the Councils of studied villages in six dimensions of performance including socio-cultural, economic and resource, environmental, constructional and infrastructural, relationships with organizations and institutions and conductor plan has been in moderate level. The results of hierarchical regression analysis also showed that among the studied structures social capital, government support, and participation of people respectively, 0.20, 0.43 and 0.25 change the standard deviation of the Councils of studied villages.

Keywords: Village, sustainable development, The Councils, social development, Rostam city

Introduction

Nowadays, sustainable rural development is the main challenge of planners and policy-makers at different national and local areas of the country. Sustainable rural development is the management and conservation of natural resources in rural areas and giving orientation to the technological and institutional changes in a manner that continuous human need satisfying in the present and future to be ensured for people of the village (Abdullahi et al, 2009). Such development maintains the sustainability of land and water resources as well as plant and animal genetic resources in the region and does not lead to the deterioration of the environment; it is technically, economically and socially plausible (FAO, 2003). Therefore, sustainable rural development can be included in the process of social, economic and environmental changes that are designed for increasing long-term welfare in the society (Mosely, 2003). On the other hand, the World Bank (2000) considers the participation of rural communities to optimal utilization of existing resources in the village as the fundamental way in the implementation of sustainable rural development priorities. In fact, establishing organized groups (Ambe, 2001; Yarwood, 2002) like the Councils in the countryside can be known as one of the means to achieve sustainable rural development. Accordingly, the people of Iran in 1998 for the first time got opportunity to participate in elections of council members of city, town and village. Welcoming by millions of Iranians from this historic event indicates their long-standing interest in participation in politics issues and public service

(Azarbayjani et al., 2007). The present study with descriptive-analytical approach and conducting extensive survey operations such as interview and preparing questionnaire in addition to investigating and assessing the performance of village councils of Rostam city of Fars province in the field of achieving sustainable rural development intends to analyze the factors and structures affecting the performance of the Councils in the studied area.

Methodology

This study was developed by using survey method. The statistical populations of study were the villages with council in Rostam city so that initially villages including the Councils from four villages of this city (totally 78 villages) were identified and determined to separate villages and were placed in the table. In the next step 50 villages containing The Councils as statistical sample were selected by using the Patton Table (Patten, 2002) and through stratified random sampling method and members of the Councils (three persons) were examined in each village. Rostam city consists of two central and Sorna parts that the central part itself has two villages and totally 86 villages. This part has about 19,697 rural populations and each year about 2,000 people of the nomadic population reside in this part over half a year. In this part, 45 villages have the Councils, and 41 villages do not have it. Sorna part also consists of two villages and totally 88 villages. This part has about 11,212 people as rural population that its 33 villages have the Councils. So, among 78 villages with the Councils, 50 villages were selected and in each village, in addition to investigating the existing documents, members of the Council were interviewed. Thus, 141 council members of the selected villages constitute the statistical sample of the study that in the meantime due to the lack of accessibility, data collection was provided from 125 members of the Council. Face and content validity of the research tool were confirmed by using the views of experts and after conducting the necessary modifications. Pilot study was conducted to assess the reliability of research tool. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for different sections of the questionnaire was obtained more than 0.75, that respectively, indicating the desirable reliability of the questionnaire. The confirmed questionnaire was completed by using structured interview method from members of the Council. Data was coded after collecting and by using SPSS 17.5 software statistical processing and analyzes were performed. Frequency table and mean percentage were used in descriptive analysis method, and hierarchical regression and mean comparison test were utilized in the inferential analysis. The performance of The Councils of villages was considered in six dimensions of socio-cultural, economic and resource, environmental, constructional and infrastructural, communication with organizations and institutions, and conductor plan. For this purpose, performance of these councils in rural sustainable development path was calculated through the equation of the total performance index and according to the above six dimensions as following.

Relationship (1)

$$TPI = (\sum \text{PERFORM}) / 6$$

In this equation, TPI is the total performance index of the Councils, PERFORM1 to PERFORM6 is the Council's performance in six dimensions of the foregoing. Social - cultural dimension were measured through 14 components in attracting the participation of people, dispute resolution in the village, establishing promotional-educational courses, social security, public health, public culture, identifying social and cultural needs of village, increasing social capital and establishing social and cultural programs and celebrations in the village. On the economic and resources dimension 14 components regarding the rural and agriculture economy improvement, financial supports and governmental credit attraction, reducing poverty, increasing the quality of rural life, developing handicraft and manufacturing in village, adjusting annual budget for village assistance, setting the financial and credibility programs were considered. Environmental dimension

was evaluated through nine variables: Council's activities on the rural environment protection, preventing the destruction of natural and historical sites, beautification of rural environment, preventing water and soil contamination in villages, waste management, maintenance of vegetation and trees in rural areas and maintenance of rural water supplies privacy and on constructional and infrastructural dimension, as well as the conductor plan with 22 separate components, constructional and infrastructural structures such as educational, cultural, religious, health sites and consumption resources (gas, water, electricity), utilities (electricity, water, telecommunications), village improving (building street, alleys, parks, roads within and outside the village, drawing table) were examined. Additionally, the relationship with the organizations and institutions was analyzed with 11 components of participation and association of council with village assistance, registration, police force, and other organs in various issues.

Research Findings

Based on the analyzed data in Table 1, the mean of age of the subjects is 39.97 years (SD= 6.31). In other words, this finding indicates that the majorities of Council members are young and are able to play a determining role in various dimensions of the sustainable rural development. Frequency of education level variable also revealed that 36.70% of respondents were educated in diploma level, 48.12% were in elementary and secondary level, and others had a degree higher than diploma. The satisfaction of Council's member was also considered in this study. The level of satisfaction was measured with three questions of Likert scale (I agree, no idea, and disagree). The mean of council members' satisfaction was reported about 1.56 (SD= 0.29) and this finding shows the satisfaction of majority of members with their work and membership. The mean of members' knowledge about rules and regulations of the Council is 1.72 (SD= 0.39) which makes clear the consciousness of the majority of members from Council Law. Since social capital is the most important ingredients of rural development, it is considered in this paper. The results obtained from the analysis of individuals' responses to the social capital variable indicate mean 2.26 (SD= 41/0). This finding indicates that the Councils members have high social capital. Regarding the village and its context three variables including number of households, population of village and distance from village to city center were examined. Average Standard deviation

Table 1. The Councils' characteristics of the studied villages

Characteristics	SD	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
A) Individual				
Members age (years)	6/63	38	25	68
Council members' satisfaction with its membership	0/30	1/64	0	1/84
Knowledge of the rules and responsibilities of the Council	0/41	1/81	0/79	2
Social Capital of member	0/43	2/37	1/58	3
B) the context and environment of the village				
The number of rural households	43/87	49/57	21	196
Rural population	289/17	40	123	1375
Distance from village to city center (km)	17/46	49/51	5	100
C) support				
Public participation in the affairs of village	0/47	2/22	0/87	3
Receiving government support	0/45	1/41	1/05	3

Note: the score for council members' satisfaction with its membership, and knowledge of the rules of the Council, 0-2, social capital of village and its context and government support 1-3 and public participation is 0-3.

Source: Field findings of research, 2014

Results showed that the mean of family size 47/21 (SD= 41.78) and the mean population of the studied villages 282.29 (SD= 275.40) the distance of the nearest village to the city center 5 km and the farthest has been 100 km. Furthermore, the mean distance has been 47.15 (SD= 16.63). The supportive variables were also studied in two components of public participation in the council affairs and receiving governmental supports. Results showed that the mean of people's participation in the Council affairs is 2.22 (SD = 0.47) and the mean of governmental supports receiving is 1.41 (SD= 0.45). From these findings, it is concluded that the participation of the people in the village issues are acceptable.

The Councils's performance in the villages

The equation total performance index (TPI) was used to evaluate the Councils' performance in the field of sustainable development regarding their activities in these six dimensions: Social - cultural, economic and resources, environmental, constructional and infrastructural, communication with organizations and institutions and conductor plan. For this purpose, the status of the above six dimensions was gathered and then was divided on their number (six) to obtain the mean of total rural Councils. Results showed that the mean of total the Councils' performance in the path of sustainable and comprehensive development of studied villages is 2.86 with standard deviation of 0.45. Considering that the total performance scope was determined between 1 and 5, it can be concluded that the performance of these Councils in the course of sustainable development is in the medium to high level; actually, Councils have been relatively successful in sustainable development of villages covered. Moreover, in this study the performance rate of different aspects of the Council's activities in various dimensions of socio-cultural, economic, civil, and environmental sustainable, association with institutions and organizations and implementing conductor plan were studied. Table 2 shows the mean of the realization of the six activities of rural Council. The findings of this part of study determine that the Councils members activate more in what areas.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of the various aspects of the Council's activities in different dimensions (N = 125)

Indicators	Rank	coefficient of variation	SD	mean
Social - cultural	1	0/16	0/5	3/14
Economic	2	0/19	0/55	2/95
Civil and infrastructural	5	0/22	0/61	2/85
Environmental	6	0/22	0/59	2/77
Contact with organizations	4	0/22	0/62	2/89
conductor plan	3	0/21	0/63	3/06

Note: The mean scope is from very low (1) to very high (5). The coefficient of variation (cv) which obtained from dividing the standard deviation on mean is used to rank the variables.

Source: Field findings of study, 2014

The coefficient of variation (CV) was calculated for the six indices and ranked accordingly. As seen in Table 2, it can be found that the area of socio-cultural sustainability with mean of 3.14 (SD= 0.5) has attracted the most attention of the rural Councils. After that the area of rural economic stability with mean of 2.95 (SD= 0.55) is located at the second level. The third place is for the variable of implementing the conductor plan with mean of 3.06 (SD= 0.60). The area of relationship with organizations and institutions with mean of 2.89 (SD= 0.62) is in fourth place and civil and

infrastructural area with mean of 2.85 (SD= 0.61) is in the fifth rate. The lowest activity related to environmental sustainability with mean of 2.77 (SD= 0.59).

The mean comparison test of two groups was used to compare the extent of rural need to performing activity in six areas and the amount of performed activities in each of these areas. The results in Table 3 shows that in all dimensions of sustainable rural development, there is significant difference between the amount of rural need in that dimension and the amount of activities performed by rural council. In other words, The Councils could not meet the rural development needs appropriately. By looking at this table, mean comparison test results in the socio-cultural dimension show significant differences ($t=25.50$ and $p = 0.0001$) in the rural need to perform the activity in this dimension and the social-cultural performance rate of Council. In other words, the need of studied villages to the council's activity in this dimension ($X=4.56$) refers to the performance of council ($X=3.14$). Also, research findings on economic area indicate meaningful difference in rural need to economic development and current performance of The Councils ($t=27.45$ and $p=0.0001$). In other words, the need of villages to sustainable economic development ($X=2.81$) has been higher than the performance of the Councils ($X=2.95$). This condition can be seen regarding the civil and infrastructural development in villages. Means comparison test indicates that there is significant difference in the need of rural areas to civil development and performed activities by the studied Councils ($t=24.12$ and $p=0.0001$). The condition is similar about the environmental area ($t=22.60$ and $p=0.0001$) and association with other organs ($t=16.39$ and $p=0.0001$) so that the studied the Councils performance has been less than the need of village to activity in this dimension and areas.

Table 3. Means comparison test between the two groups (Status - need) in various dimensions of sustainability

Variables	t-statistics	Needs of village		Status quo		Sig.
		SD	Mean	SD	Mean	
Social - cultural	25/5	0/45	4/56	0/5	3/14	0/0001
Economic	27/45	0/45	4/52	0/55	2/95	0/0001
Civil and infrastructural	24/12	0/48	4/42	0/61	2/85	0/0001
Environmental	22/6	0/58	4/21	0/59	2/77	0/0001
Contact with organizations	16/39	0/58	4/38	0/62	2/89	0/0001
conductor plan	16/91	0/55	4/34	0/63	3/06	0/0001

Note: The mean scope is from very low (1) to very high (5).

Source: Field findings of research, 2014

Conductor plan and its implementation in studied villages are also considered as dimensions of sustainable rural development. Research findings show that the Councils' performance was less in conductor plan area ($X =4.34$) and is so essential ($t =16.91$ and $p =0.0001$). According to the Table 3, and due to the high value of means on the need of village and major difference of these values with means relevant to the status quo, it can be concluded that the need for more work in different dimensions by council is understood in studied village.

Factors affecting the performance of the Councils in sustainable development

Totally, six successive structures entered into the equation to investigate the determinant structures of the performance of the Councils through the hierarchical regression that its results can be seen in Table 4. In the first stage, social capital variable was entered into the equation. The results show that 7% of variation in the Council's performance is explained by this variable. In the second stage, the village and its context were entered into the regression equation. The addition of this

variable explains 0.3% of the variations in Council's performance. This indicates that the mentioned variable has no prediction power. In the third stage, variables related to governmental support in the form of loans, grants and facilities were entered into the equation. By entering this variable into the equation, the prediction power of the model is suddenly faced with a major change; in a way that this variable alone explains 14% of variations in the Council's performance.

Table 4. Hierarchical regression results on the performance of village councils

Model	Changes in coefficient of determination	Consistent coefficient of determination	coefficient of determination	Significance level of changes
1a	0/074	0/061	0/071	0/022
2 (b)	0/003	0/050	0/077	0/668
3 (c)	0/147	0/190	0/224	0/001
4 (d)	0/002	0/180	0/226	0/728
5 C	0/024	0/193	0/250	0/156
6 c	0/040	0/225	0/291	0/063

Note: The dependent variable is the performance of village councils.

A. predictor: (remaining) and social capital

B. predictor: model 1 and village and its environment

C. predictor: model 2 and government support

D. predictor: model 3 council members' satisfaction with its membership

E. predictor: model 4 and Council members' knowledge of relevant rules

F. predictor: model 5 and the turnout of people in the affairs of the Council

Source: The analytic findings of research, 2014

In the fourth stage, the variable related to the members' satisfaction was entered into the regression equation that this variable only explains 0.2% of the variations in the Council's performance. In the fifth step, the knowledge of the members about the Council's rules and regulations was proposed.

Table 5. Regression coefficients of final model determine the performance of the Councils

Model	t	Standardized coefficients	Standard error	Non-standard coefficient	Sig.
(Fixed amount)	3/724	-	0/469	1/665	0.001
Social Capital	1/835	0/204	0/127	0/222	0/044
Village and its context	-0/500	-0/165	0/140	-0/201	0/165
Government support	4/121	0/431	0/114	0/452	0/0001
Council members' satisfaction with its membership	0/689	0/081	0/216	0/142	0.540
Knowledge of relevant rules	1/202	0/132	0/137	0/155	0.269
Public participation in the affairs of village	2/004	0/246	0/125	0/237	0/034

Note: The coefficient of determination = 0.277, F= 4.93 (P <0.0001) dependent variable: the Councils' performance

Source: The analytic findings of research, 2014

The results show that this variable explains 3.2% of the variations of the Councils' performance. In the final stage, the variable of people's participation rate in Council affair was entered into the equation which this variable explains 3.8% of the changes in performance of the

Council. The final model was developed with entrance of the variable of people's participation rate in rural affairs into the equation which its details are presented in Table 6. As it can be seen in Table, the null hypothesis of the coefficients of the model is rejected ($F = 22.97$ and $P < 0.0001$). Furthermore, the standardized coefficients (Table 5) shows that the standard deviation of the change in the value of social capital, government support, and people's participation in the affairs of the Council could cause 0.20, 0.43, 0.25 changes in the standard deviation of the performance of the Councils of the village. Due to the significant level of variables, the total village council performance is a function of social capital, government support and participation of the people in the council.

Conclusion

Research findings show that the mean of total council performance on sustainable and comprehensive development of studied villages is equal to 3 with standard deviation of 0.47. In other words, these Councils' performance on sustainable development is evaluated in the intermediate level while the highest performance is reported in the area of socio-cultural sustainability later economic stability of the villagers and then the implementation of conductor plan allocate the most activity to itself. Also, results show that less attention has been paid to the environmental dimension. Comparing the village need rate to activate in mentioned six areas and the amount of performed activities in each of these areas revealed that there is significant difference between the village need rate in that dimension and the amount of village council performance in all dimensions of sustainable rural development. In other words, the Councils could not suitably meet the development needs of rural coverage. As the results indicated, it is realized, on the one hand, by the moral and financial support of the government and on the other hand by people's participation in the activities of the Council. Furthermore, the results of the hierarchical regression analysis showed that the variables of social capital, government support, and participation of people in the affairs of councils are the most important predictors of the Councils' performance on the path of sustainable rural development. This is in such a way that with the standard deviation of the change in the value of social capital, government support, and people's participation in the affairs of the Council respectively lead to the 0.20, 0.43, 0.25 change in the standard deviation of the Village Councils performance.

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