

# Investigating of Residents Empowering in Physical and Environmental Improvements in Informal Settlements

## (Case Study: Nodeh Community, Mashhad, Iran)

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this paper is investigating the impacts of residents empowering in physical and environmental improvements in informal settlements. This place has some problems such as safety, health and environmental that Managers and municipal authorities should take action to fix them. In this regard The NGOs as an intermediary between the people and town officials could have a significant role in solving these problems by the participation of residents. "Hambaran" private institution as a N.G.O. organization decide to implement a project with a partnership approach to empower there that called "Sustainable Development Plan in Informal Settlements". This project is one of four design pattern in the institution which is trying to create safe and sustainable spaces with using public participation and local authorities in a decentralizing approach and an institutional development. Methodology of this research is descriptive – analytical. Objectives were questioned by questionnaire from people. Although the project for reasons such as changing in government policies and local authorities did not achieve all of goals, But succeeded in reducing crime rates in urban areas through the creation of attractive spaces, organizing urban centers and creating local institutions. The strategies employed in this neighborhood have the ability to refer to similar samples in Metropolises of Asia.

**Keywords:** *Participation, Empowering, Informal Settlements, Nodeh Community, Mashhad.*

## INTRODUCTION

Citizens' rights have not been taken advantage of to a sufficient extent in governance processes related to urban planning and city management (Stewart & Taylor, 1995, 125). This is a great mistake, as it has been stressed by planners and designers that architecture may not only be a vehicle of empowerment through community participation (Marschall, 1998, 40), but that inhabitants' participation may also: enhance the quality of our cities and make them more human (Gehl et al., 2006,15); develop new aesthetic ideals (Blundell-Jones et al., 2005,17-20); and lead to real future building development initiatives (Lyons et al., 2001,70). In the present article, we have concentrated on the concept of 'empowerment' (Andrews et al., 2006,73), how it is considered to have great value in the planning and management of local communities and how inhabitants are considered key actors in governance processes aimed at developing the city (Faga, 2006,75).

We have focused on empowerment issues in a specific context: the village with high poverty, inappropriate skeletal texture, lack of appropriate substructures, and lack of high school, dropout of students and vast abnormalities and serious social damages. main skeletal characteristics and other facilities of Nodeh is as follows: houses are only 50 square meters including one or two rooms without steel frames and are made of cement, bricks and steel roofs which are made by themselves, buildings are built without plans, streets has no canals and they are not covered with asphalt made into a water dam by a small rain drop, there is no drinking water available in the village, and there is no sport and recreational facilities, high school or police station in the village.

In this term, Empowerment strategies proposed as an approach to enable poorer citizens in outskirts to reach out to the municipal services (Laverack & labonte, 2008, 12), (Durand-lasserve, 2006, 7). To be successful in decentralization needs all beneficiaries such as central government, local government,

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public sector, private sector, non-governmental organizations and individuals as foremost beneficiaries, to participate in the program. One of these structures is community based organization which according to definition by Phill Bartel, are organizations formed and developed by local community and among itself and not by individuals outside that local community (Krogstrup, 1997, 23-24). The grounds of formation of such organizations has been available in Iran's classic systems but currently their reformation needs facilitation which is provided by non-governmental pragmatic organizations using the social mobilization knowledge. Formation of these organizations provides not only possibility of structuring the scattered people but also down to top development and the force to modify the decentralization structures which central government has prepared the legal grounds (Waisbord, 2005, 20).

The practical experience of such activity in Iran is the activity of "Hamyaran" non-governmental institute in Nodeh village in Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province. This organization has attended to perform local community reinforcement pattern designs aiming to decrease poverty in four cities in the country: Seven district of Ardekan, Baravat Olia after massive earthquake in Bam, Six jungle villages of Ramsar Safarud, and Nodeh village in suburbs of Mashhad. Most important characteristics of Nodeh pattern design was the participation of all beneficiaries including government, Mashhad Municipality, Islamic Council of Nodeh, governmental service organizations, benefactors, and more importantly the people of district in management and preservation of the village. This model was a sample of inter-sectional participation towards down to top development in order to create changes in municipal service organizations and to create access for marginalized people to necessary facilities and the opportunity of their dynamic participation, contact and collaboration with local authorities and their interference in regional development plan despite Mashhad's marginal regions administrative office vanishing. This design was presented as a successful pattern in surveys of architecture and urbanism of TU University in Germany in 2006 spring. The chairman of Nodeh village council was elected as representative of chairmen of Mashhad central districts in 2005. Also the report of this design was accepted in national conference on community based collaborative plans, Ardebil, 2005. This design if continued can be considered and used as a model for successful implementation of decentralization. The implementation of design in this village is performed according to local community capacitating approach with the following goals:

Development of collaborative approach among all involved governmental and private sectors, urban institutes and local communities.

Reinforcement of self-esteem and self-reliance morale among people.

Modification of government role from being a supervisor to a facilitator in a way that participation of the people and associations is incorporated in decision makings.

Utilization of civil structured capacities for development and stabilization of developmental plans.

Utilization of benefactor's capacities and charity institutes in implementation of poverty reduction activities on occupational axis.

### **Empowerment in Informal Settlements as a Multidimensional Concept**

Community empowerment refers to the process of enabling communities to increase control over their lives. "Communities" are groups of people that may or may not be spatially connected, but who share common interests, concerns or identities. These communities could be local, national or international, with specific or broad interests. 'Empowerment' refers to the process by which people gain control over the factors and decisions that shape their lives. It is the process by which they increase their assets and attributes and build capacities to gain access, partners, networks and/or a voice, in order to gain control. "Enabling" implies that people cannot "be empowered" by others; they can only empower themselves by acquiring more of power's different forms (Stenberg, 2004, 13). It assumes that people are their own assets, and the role of the external agent is to catalyze facilitate or "accompanies" the community in acquiring power. Community empowerment, therefore, is more than the involvement, participation or engagement of communities. It implies community ownership and action that explicitly aims at social and political change. Community empowerment is a process of re-negotiating power in order to gain more control. It recognizes that if some people are going to be empowered, then others will be sharing their existing power and giving some of it up (Khalifa, 2015, 17), (Baum, 2008). Power is a central concept in community empowerment and health promotion invariably operates within the arena of a power struggle.

Community empowerment necessarily addresses the social, cultural, political and economic determinants that underpin health, and seeks to build partnerships with other sectors in finding solutions. Globalization adds another dimension to the process of community empowerment. In today's world, the local and global are inextricably linked. Action on one cannot ignore the influence of or impact on the other. Community empowerment recognizes and strategically acts upon this inter-linkage and ensures that power is shared at both local and global levels (Blundell-jones et al., 2005, 12). Communication plays a vital role in ensuring community empowerment. Participatory approaches in communication that encourage discussion and debate result in increased knowledge and awareness, and a higher level of critical thinking. Critical thinking enables communities to understand the interplay of forces operating on their lives, and helps them take their own decisions (Swyngedouw, 2005, 17)

This track of the conference will focus on the conceptual and practical issues in building empowered communities. Through examples and case studies it will analyze how successful

Table 1: Dimensions of Community Empowerment (Andrews, et al., 2006, 17)

| Dimensions (A community that is) | Strategies (We can contribute by)   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| “Confident”                      | Working in ways which increase people’s skills, knowledge and confidence, and instill in them a belief that they can make a difference                                    |
| “Inclusive”                      | Working in ways which recognize that discrimination exists, promote equality of opportunity and good relations between groups and challenge inequality and exclusion      |
| “Organized”                      | Working in ways which bring people together around common issues and concerns, in organizations and groups that are open, democratic and accountable                      |
| “Co-operative”                   | Working in ways which build positive relationships across groups, identify common messages, develop and maintain links to national bodies and promote partnership working |
| “Influential”                    | Working in ways which encourage and equip communities to take part and influence decisions, services and activities   |

partnerships with communities can be forged even in the environment of vertical health programming. It will examine how empowerment oriented health promotion can be practiced both in local and global settings (Table 1).

### NGO & Residents Participation

One important point is that who are these people and how and to whom local government has to make contact and interact with. The answer to this question is that, people are those individuals who are scattered in a society or a local community and it is not possible to contact them individually and in case of being together and forming a structure the possibility of interaction with them is facilitated and provided. One of these structures is community based organization which according to definition by Phill Bartel, are organizations formed and developed by local community and among itself and not by individuals outside that local community. The grounds of formation of such organizations has been available in Iran’s classic systems but currently their reformation needs facilitation which is provided by non-governmental pragmatic organizations using the social mobilization knowledge. Formation of these organizations provides not only possibility of structuring the scattered people but also down to top development and the force to modify the decentralization structures which central government has prepared the legal grounds. The scope of non-governmental organizations in this area is affected by laws and foundation available for their activity and the background of democratic regime in each country. As an example, in India by more than half a century background of democratic regime, the possibility of active partnership is available for non-governmental organizations and one of active organizations in decentralization program is the International Centre for

Learning and Promotion of Participation and Democratic reign (PRIA) which is established in 1982. One major activities of this center is capacitating the marginalized local communities, mobilize them and form them into local organizations in order to successfully run decentralization via development approach from down to top. This organization is also responsible for modifications in local institutions, councils, and small and medium municipalities of six states of India. Accordingly, the activity of this organization in both realm of capacitating and reinforcement of individuals of local communities and capacitating the experts and operators of decentralization plan in public and governmental institutes is founded in order to create modifications. The practical experience of such activity in Iran is the activity of “Hamyaran” non-governmental institute in Nodeh village in Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province. This organization has attended to perform local community reinforcement pattern designs aiming to decrease poverty in four cities in the country: Seven district of Ardekan, Baravat Olia after massive earthquake in Bam, Six jungle villages of Ramsar Safarud, and Nodeh village in suburbs of Mashhad. Most important characteristics of Nodeh pattern design was the participation of all beneficiaries including government, Mashhad Municipality, Islamic Council of Nodeh, governmental service organizations, benefactors, and more importantly the people of district in management and preservation of the village. This model was a sample of intersectional participation towards down to top development in order to create changes in municipal service organizations and to create access for marginalized people to necessary facilities and the opportunity of their dynamic participation, contact and collaboration with local authorities and their interference in regional development plan despite Mashhad’s marginal regions

administrative office vanishing. This design was presented as a successful pattern in surveys of architecture and urbanism of TU University in Germany in 2006 spring. The chairman of Nodeh village council was elected as representative of chairmen of Mashhad central districts in 2005. Also the report of this design was accepted in national conference on community based collaborative plans, Ardebil, 2005 (Baum, 2008, 125-126). This design if continued can be considered and used as a model for successful implementation of decentralization. A summary of the design is provided as followed.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper presents a systematic approach which seeks to illustrate the rate of resident's participation in a community empowerment project, especially the effect of an NGO and its impact on citizens' responsibility for achieving objectives. The first section explains about the background what this study address. Then, the second section reviews literatures of each idea. The result is extraction of a questionnaire on achieving the goals in form of open/ close questions. Questionnaires were distributed at specific locations. The following section are data analysis according to the current situation and objectives to

find the most appropriate reasons and problems. Last section will collect the main idea of this study into several conclusions in a simple model. Finally, further researchers can extend or develop new research based on this study. Ideas can be found in that section to give initial insights.

## Case Study: Nodeh Community

This village with 500 years of history and a 20000 population at the time of implementation of the design is located at northeast of Mashhad and on the brink of old Ghuchan road and tomb of Ferdowsi. Most of its inhabitants are farmers and ranchers of south and north of Khorasan who emigrated to this village after being jobless due to draught. This village has other characteristics such as: family depth is 5/5 persons, the people are from Turk, Kurd, and Fars races, most of people are engaged in and farming, most of the population is consisted of young generations, 98 percent of them are Shiites and 2 percent are Sunnis, 90 percent of them are in lower living conditions and others are in middle living conditions, 25 percent of the population are illiterate, 35 percent has elementary education, 20 percent secondary education, 17 percent high school education and 3 percent has passed university education (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1: Location of case study, Nodeh (Mashhad, 2014)



The main problems of the village are increased poverty, inappropriate skeletal texture, lack of appropriate substructures, and lack of high school, dropout of students and vast abnormalities and serious social damages. Main skeletal characteristics and other facilities of Nodeh is as follows: houses are only 50 square meters including one or two rooms without steel frames and are made of cement, bricks and steel roofs which are made by themselves, buildings are built without plans, streets has no canals and they are not covered with asphalt made into a water dam by a small rain drop, there is no drinking water available in the village, and there is no sport and recreational facilities, high school or police station in the village. Despite increase of population and expansion of the village there are only five clinics serving only outpatients and others are transferred to Mashhad. Main threats to health of inhabitants are the existence of cattle ranches, house wastes, unpaved roads, building waste, and house sewage. Nodeh was equipped with a pharmacy only after follow-ups of its council.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Local community capacitating plan for Nodeh which is now turned into marginalized districts of the city was started after analyses of the design expert and suggestions of scholars regarding the increased expansion of marginal districts of Mashhad, Isfahan, and Shiraz. Mashhad was selected for having a marginal regions administrative office as target region. From winter of 2003 after several meetings with chief authorities of the province, necessary licenses was obtained and workshops were held for governor experts and according to prepared indexes, Nodeh was selected for implementation of the design.

### The Process of Project Implementation

After selection of location and obtaining necessary certificates, first phase of the plan should be to form leadership committees

of county and then forming local leadership committees. These two committees are considered as main prerequisites of institutional development. This diagram shows the interaction of these committees to other beneficiaries. The aim was to inform, sensitize, support and connect higher provincial authorities to local leadership committee (people of Nodeh). Although the objective of this design was promotion of viewpoints and abilities of people, but the facilitative role of government, endorsement and support of local authorities are undeniable in successful implementation of the design. Especially the aim of such design was decentralization and to promote local capacities and propagation of the plan in government construction. Therefore in order to benefit from support of provincial authorities and exploiting their ideas, the members of leadership committee of county were selected by governor and suggested by Hamyaran Institute as follow: Governor, County committee chairman, county perfect, ministry of education regional chairman, governor consultant in women affairs committee, health center, president of marginal regions administrative office of Mashhad Municipality, governor technical and civil specialist, and chairman of Nodeh council. Also on a case by case basis and as per governor's discretion and based on agenda of the session representatives from following offices in the sessions: Khorasan Razavi Management and Planning Organization, social and elections affair office of Khorasan Razavi governorate, Khorasan Broadcasting, welfare organization, Imam Khomeini Relief foundation, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, endowments and charity affairs organization, healthy city campaign, and Hamyaran Institute. This committee was consisted of 23 people and some of them were selected as main core and others were invited to sessions as deemed necessary. Chairman of Nodeh council was participating as a permanent member in all sessions (Fig. 2).

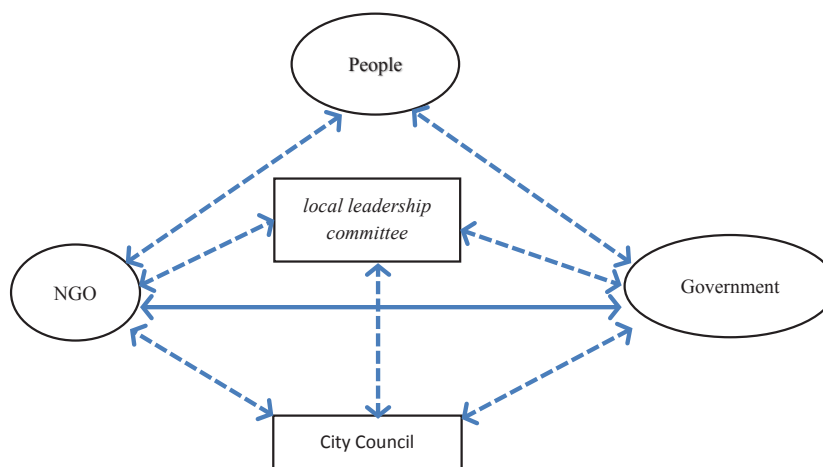


Fig. 2: The interaction between organizations and individuals

### Basic Studies

In order to be informed of economic, social and skeletal characteristics of Nodeh, central sheriff dom attended to a survey along with Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. Among main information obtained was this fact that Islamic council of Nodeh has not enough admissibility and legitimacy between people. Therefore in order to avoid working in parallel and to reinforce local structures, they decided to strengthen Islamic council. Later, in order to prepare grounds for launch of the design, a meeting was held with Islamic council and in this session the issue of inadmissibility was raised. Fortunately, the members of the Islamic council, who consent the problem, were eager to find a solution to it. After meetings and consultations with trusted individuals of Nodeh for selecting the geographical realms of the plan and selecting representatives from each section, it was decided to publish a section based map of Nodeh. In this meeting blocking approaches was taught to them and they considered some criteria for classification of district and the village was classified into 5 sections.

### Establishing Local Leadership Committee

After classification of village by those trusted individuals, they were asked to invite people to gather in the mosques and to define the plan for them. In these sessions people were requested to nominate representatives and the criteria for their selection was appointed by people and 12 men and 10 women was selected to form local leadership committee. After local leadership committee being elected, the education and capacitating phase was initiated for people of the village and especially for local leadership committee members. According to level of literacy and awareness of participants, participative and applied approach was used in all teachings. Teaching sessions were held during several workshops by expert facilitator of “

Hamyaran” Institute in Mosques or houses of representatives. By holding the workshop of capacitating concept and basics of participation, everybody learned that how they can cooperate and what is their mutual responsibility. Then via workshop of facilitating and representative role, people were familiarized to their role and responsibilities in relation to each other and were taught about methods of contacting each other, authorities and government during workshop of techniques of negotiation. They also attended in workshops such as collaborative needs assessment and problems rooting and other necessary workshops and in all these workshops people and members of Islamic council played important roles. The representatives of districts decided to choose two sections as pilot design and perform what they have been taught on these sections. In section 2 and section 4 representatives gathered people together and began to perform collaborative needs assessment and then tried to prioritize needs with the help of people. These priorities were classified in five main groups of security, hygiene, education, social-cultural, and civil (Fig. 3).

Next step after assessment of needs and priorities of people was planning and executive actions toward elimination of needs by people themselves. In this step workshops were held about capacitating rules and designing basics and civil plans were designed. One another project performed was collaborative survey which led to poverty map of region by house by house referral. The criteria for poverty were established by people as inability of buying on Kilogram of bread every day. Furthermore, indigents, women in charge of a family, and also drug addicts were identified. According to the survey, in section number 2 the women in charge of families were 46 and in section 4 were 87 people. The report of all mentioned cases was provided for county committee and in this committee was appointed that no urban and civil plan is

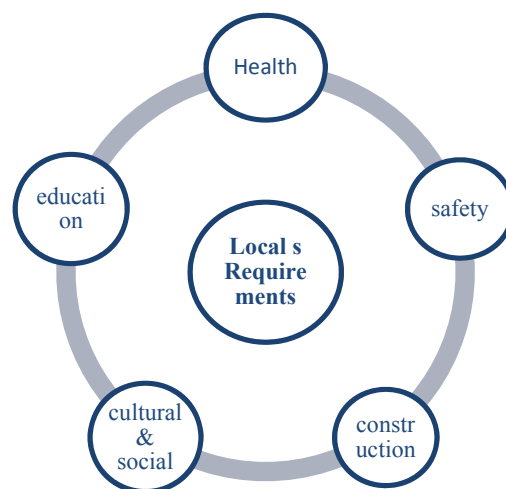


Fig. 3: Local s Requirements of “Nodeh”

executed but the proposed needs of people which are done by help of people and support of governmental organizations and Mashhad Municipality.

Despite being far from its final steps, this plan could perform some actions with participation of people and to the extent of available financial and capacity limits. In fact after collection, documentation and prioritization of needs and preparing the draft of the plans, people decided to help financing the inexpensive plans by themselves. They started their first plan as to naming the streets and numbering the houses which was done by overall participation of inhabitants in best possible way. This plan provided the valuable experiences and enough motivation for individuals to participate in other plans. The successes of plan until 2005 are as follows:

Participation of people with decentralization approach;

A pattern of management of marginalized outskirts of the city supported by county leadership committee in Mashhad governorate and Mashhad Municipality administration office of marginalized areas as secretary;

Local community capacitating upon entrance for administration of their potential and actualize the potential;

Local institutionalizing in cooperation with organizations and available structures such as local councils and reference groups;

Shared capacitating for people and local institutes for knowledge interaction and transferring experiences to participants;

Selected local institutes regarding the recognition of current situation and elimination of obstacles and limitations and utilizing local community resources and capacities tried to interfere creatively in decision making and handle its problems via collaborative management.;

Surveying and collaborative supervision of people was provided.

In order to improve the living standard of people all efforts were made to interact with all beneficiaries and contributors including governmental and private sectors and benefactors.

In this plan, the council of Nodeh village was reinforced as the center of poverty reduction to test the plan of decentralization in this village more effectively. Serious contribution of people in improvement of life quality led to these results:

Asphalt of 70 thousands square meters roads with participation of people;

Donation of 4000 square meters of land with participation of people for sport saloon;

Managing badgers who were considered bothersome in shape of Friday market.

Delegation of management and security to trades people;

Improving, cleaning, and renewing curbstones of the roads;

Skeletal identification of district was a big necessity and needed less money and with the help of people streets and avenues were named and numbered.

House numberings was also important and people could provide it with minimum expenses.

Management of garbage disposal system

Institutionalization of collaborative management to reach sustainable development.

Support of people from councils in all plans and to interact between them and authorities.

Inviting local committees to attend official meetings of governorate and county leadership committee.

## CONCLUSION

“Hamyaran” institute initiated this plan voluntarily and all colleagues tried their best in their job. Despite limited financial potency all expenses were provided with help of people themselves and a small amount was provided by the company. This plan was facing many difficulties which most important ones are financial deficit, change in management system and higher managers of government and unfamiliarity with plan which exist currently. Consequently we can name the difficulties as follows: Financial limitations, management change in the province, breakup of city administration studies office, and lack of commitment of governors to their assurance regarding financial funding of the plan. Experts realized that support of influential local individuals and their presence and participation in the public sessions, encourages people in a great extent and guarantees the success of plan. Existence of a powerful structure and institute and deep-seated in the spot such as council of the village and its reinforcement by local committee, other than administrative possibility of creating a decentralization pattern, leads to solidity and stability of execution of plan. The importance of this is more visible when we consider that reaching success in people-centered social development plans requires longer process. To this reason these programs should be supports even after developers leave the location. In this plan, reinforcement of Islamic council and their active participation causes the people’s bind not to be loosened despite serious challenges such as financial resources deficit and structural and management changes in government authorities’ level. Since people are more aware of their own problems than outsiders, first step toward sustainable development is the needs of people become identified and categorized by themselves, development plan be designed, executed and surveyed by themselves and in the next step with their cooperation and support of senior authorities of districts needs be answered. To this end the culture of dialogue should be stabilized inside people and they have to keep in mind that if they want, they can despite all problems, solve their problems hand in hand. One of lessons taught by this plan is that society based capacitating plans will only become successful if all policy makers and authorities have their national determination to the end of the plan.

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