

Identifying and Studying Social Obstacles to Economic Development in Rural Areas in the East of Golestan Province (Case of Study: Villages in the Central Part of Gonbad-e Kavus County)

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Abstract: The main objective of this research is to identify and study social barriers to the economic development of the rural areas in the central part of Gonbad-e Kavus. The methodology of the present study is developmental-applied in terms of its objective and descriptive in terms of its nature. The statistical population included managers, planners, and policymakers active in rural development and faculty members informed in the subject, 22 of whom were purposefully selected and studied based on the theoretical saturation criterion. The results showed that the imbalance between the cities and the villages, unfair distribution of services, lack of attention to the social and economic opportunities and capacities of the villages, weakness of governmental institutions and managers, weakness of social participation of the villagers, ethnocentrism and traditionalism, conservatism and resistance to changes, promotion of consumerism, weakness of government social policies, lack of authoritative and dynamic participatory structures (non-governmental organizations) for rural communities, weakness of educational facilities, inattention to sustainable employment, urbanization of the villagers and their irregular migration are among the most important social obstacles to the development of the villages in the east of Golestan province. Empowering peasants, providing village organization plans, preparing programs to reinforce the financial strength of peasants, preventing irregular migration, paying attention to meeting the needs of the younger generation, especially employment, and education, utilizing the capacities of non-governmental organizations, developing rural manufacturing cooperatives companies, guaranteed purchase of agricultural products, and timely payment of demands are among the most important solutions for rural development.

Keywords: Social obstacles, economic development, rural areas, Gonbad-e Kavus.

Introduction

Development and underdevelopment are among the most significant challenges and concerns of policymakers, social planners, and governments of developing countries. Development means improving the collective natural, economic, social, cultural, and political conditions. Rocher considers development as a set of actions carried out to move society toward realizing a regular set of collective and individual living conditions and is recognized as a desirable matter related to some values (Rocher, 1997). In the 1975s, UNESCO defined development as being integrated and comprehensive, a perfect and multilateral process encompassing all aspects of the society's lives, its relations with the outside world, and its conscience and awareness. Michael Todaro also considers development a multidimensional process that requires basic changes in the social structure, treatment of the general public, and national institutions, as well as accelerating economic growth, reducing inequalities, and rooting out poverty (Todaro, 1996:135).

Rural development, as the foundation of society development, is a strategy formulated to improve the economic and social life of villagers. Of course, rural development is a concept for which many

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definitions have been provided. Some consider rural development equivalent to social development, while others consider rural development as a strategy to reform and improve economic and social life. Misra considers rural development a wide range of diverse activities and human mobilization that empowers people to stand on their two feet and eliminate existing structural disabilities (Saidai, 2008:112). The basic point is that, in each definition available on rural development, the development of villages, as centers of production and growth, is one of the fundamental prerequisites for planning and developing societies; and without rural development, achieving stable development will not be possible. Rural development includes several objectives, such as creating non-agricultural employment for unemployed or semi-unemployed villagers in a region, cooperating to prevent migration to urban centers, strengthening the economic foundations of rural centers, making full (more) use of the existing capacities of rural areas, processing local agricultural products, and providing basic inputs and consumer goods for farmers and other native people. Despite the many effects of rural development on improving the economic, social, and cultural situations of each society and reducing the duality and inequality between urban and rural areas of the country, the process of rural development is still slow in many developing societies, and the category of rural development encounters significant obstacles, including institutional and structural obstacles, economic obstacles, social and cultural obstacles, etc. This is why designing, implementing, and advancing rural development plans, as an important part of each country's development plans to transform the socio-economic structure of rural society, requires serious attention from governments. In this regard, conducting studies related to identifying capacities, opportunities, challenges, and obstacles to development is considered crucial which can help improve the rural people's situation and also provide opportunities for national development.

Statement of Problem

The role and position of villages in economic, social, and political development processes at the local, regional, national, and international scales, and the consequences of underdevelopment of rural areas, such as widespread poverty, increasing inequality, rapid population growth, unemployment, and suburbanization, have led to attention to rural development and even its precedence over urban development (Azkia and Ghaffari, 2007). Thus, rural development has always been a trouble for development thinkers and policymakers (Razvani et al., 2016). The village, as a social, cultural, residential, and capital unit that operates as a part of society towards efficient production, has attracted less attention in the field of development despite its effective role in the country's production and economic growth, and it can be seen an obvious difference in the development status of this sector compared to the urban sector. The importance of rural development in Iran is quite obvious, considering the position, significance, and role of the rural society in the development process. Although since the beginning of the last century, especially since the middle of this century, the share of the rural population has gradually decreased and urbanization has extended, according to the statistics provided, one-third of the Iranian population still lives in villages, facing numerous issues and problems. Undoubtedly, maintaining and stabilizing the population in villages requires the design, implementation, and advancement of rural development plans in various social, economic, and cultural dimensions.

Since development requires variations and development that aims to advance society will not occur without creating profound variations in socio-cultural structures, addressing rural development without considering social factors and obstacles to development will be fruitless and ineffective. This will be especially significant in the community under study (Gonbad-e Kavus city), which includes at least two groups of Persian-speaking people and Turkmen people with two religious traditions, Shia and Sunni, and with their subcultures, because to reduce ethnic gaps and distances and achieve a stable social order, cultural solidarity and cohesion, structural and functional coordination between actors and authorities in social organizations and institutions, emotional cohesion, and fair distribution and sharing of national resources and natural and physical capital at the regional level, we need a fair distribution of opportunities, which will depend on achieving holistic development.

Gonbad-e Kavous County, as one of the important rural and agricultural hubs of Golestan Province, consists of two districts (Central, Dashli-Borun), two cities (Gonbad-e Kavous and Incheh-Borun), 6 rural districts (Fajr, Baghlimaramah, Aqabad, Soltan Ali, Karand, Atrak), 167 residential villages and

10 uninhabited settlements. It has a population of more than 350000 based on the results of the National Census of Population and Housing 2016. The central district of Gonbad includes 4 rural districts and more than 140 villages with a population of about 200,000. It is obvious that implementing development programs for these villages to promote and improve their social and economic situation is a clear and necessary matter, and in this path, naturally, recognizing opportunities, challenges, obstacles, and threats can be very helpful. Concerning this, the main question of this research is: What are the most important social obstacles to the economic development of the rural sector of Gonbad-e Kavous County to provide a suitable platform to assist rural development planners in the country and the province with knowledge of this?

Research Questions

Main Question: What are the most important social obstacles to the economic development of the rural-central district of Gonbad-e Kavous?

Sub-Questions

1. How does rural elite migration affect the economic development of the rural sector?
2. What is the impact of the low level of education of villagers on the economic development of the rural sector?
3. What is the impact of the gap and imbalance between urban and rural areas on the economic development of the rural sector?
4. What is the impact of villagers' lack of awareness of the benefits of association on the economic development of the rural sector?
5. What is the impact of villagers' psychological attitudes on the economic development of the rural sector?

Theoretical Basics

Rural development continues to be a significant priority in developed and developing countries. The existence and survival of rural communities depend on the flourishing of all components and developmental mechanisms of rural development (Amini and Zahedi, 2: 2016). Rural development includes various activities and human mobilization that enable people to stand on their two feet and eliminate structural disabilities that have kept them captive to the unfavorable conditions of their lives (Sepahvand and Naderi Mehdi, 2021). Rural development has in itself the concept of prosperity, sustainable development, and human development simultaneously. Rural development can be considered the events through which villagers, relying on their abilities, can benefit from the existing material and spiritual blessings in equal conditions with others, without having to worry about hunger, poverty, disease, ignorance, lack of freedom, and other deprivations. Rural development eliminates the gap between cities and villages and brings the standard of living in cities and villages to the same level. (Khoda Moradpour et al., 2019) This type of development can help reduce poverty in urban areas by decreasing excessive population migration from rural areas. It is worth considering that the country's rural spaces still encounter instability in various environmental, socio-institutional, economic, and physical dimensions due to the dominance of sectoral planning and the lack of a systemic approach in the field of rural development, despite extensive activities carried out by relevant institutions (Imani et al., 2017: 68).

Undoubtedly, achieving rural development always encounters challenges and obstacles, one of the most important of which is social obstacles. Social obstacles include a variety of processes related to cognitive and normative constraints that prevent individuals or groups from searching for the most appropriate forms of adaptation (Table 1). A key aspect is related to the organization and structure of social institutions. Institutions in this context are considered the topics representing "behavioral rules" that govern belief systems, norms and behavior, and organizational structure. Social institutions are inherently diverse and can be observed in the form of local farmers' associations, indigenous knowledge institutions, or collective property rights over forest resources. Such institutions, to a large extent, dictate appropriate adaptation measures and the behavior of individuals when faced with threats posed by climate change and variability.

Table (1): Elements of social barriers to adaptation

social barriers	examples
Cognitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief that uncertainty is so significant that taking action to adapt cannot be ensured. • Lack of acceptance of risks related to implementing the act of adaptation • Change has not been seen as a problem until now; in other words, the temptation of waiting for a collision, then reacting.
Normative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural norms that discourage change and innovation; in other words, a reluctance to adopt new approaches • Traditional means of responding to climate pressures and shocks are no longer considered appropriate because cultural memory is lacking when the issue of future climate change is posed. • Restrictive traditional and religious norms (e.g. reliance on traditional means of weather forecasting and planning, limited role of women in the household/community, dependence on traditional means of coping with climate dangers)
Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional inequalities and social discrimination restrict access and entitlement for certain groups. • Social/cultural inflexibility: lack of institutional flexibility

Social sciences have long recognized that individual actions and behaviors can be deeply formed by culturally and socially embedded norms and regulations (Ostrom, 2005). Research literature believes that “obstacles to community or individual action do not lie primarily in the lack of information or understanding alone; rather, they lie in social, cultural, and institutional factors” (Tompkins and Adger, 2004). Therefore, it is important to remember that in understanding the barriers to rural development, social barriers should be paid serious attention in the three scopes i.e., cognitive, normative, and institutional.

Theoretical framework

In the theoretical explanation of development and underdevelopment and its obstacles, sociologists use two main categories of theories, each of which emphasizes specific dimensions of development. These two categories are sociological theories and anthropological approaches to development and social change. Sociological theories of development are presented in two areas: the functionalism approach and the conflict approach. Functionalistic theories include modernization and new modernization approaches. Conflict theories also include perspectives on dependency, new dependency, social formation, mode of production, and the world system (Peet, 2007: 420).

Functionalistic Theories

A - Modernization Theory

The modernization approach is based on Durkheim's views about the transformation of a mechanical solidarity-based society into an organic solidarity-based society and the social differentiation resulting from it. On the other hand, Weber's ideas on how industrial, de-traditionalized, and rationalist society emerged and Marx's ideas on the evolution and development of societies are among the classical theoretical foundations of this theory (Taylor, 1977:145). However, this view was formally proposed in the 1950s and 1960s by some functionalist scientists, the most important of whom was Parsons (Holmes and Turner, 1990:52).

Relying on Parsons' structural-functionalist approaches, modernization takes its main assumption as the balance and equilibrium of the social system and considers the concept of balance as the fundamental and ultimate reference point for the social systems' analysis that face external conditions. In his opinion, any change that disrupts the balance of the system will cause society to become disordered. The modernization theory believed that there were "uncivilized others (societies)" who must become civilized and equal to Western civilization. According to this approach, these "uncivilized others" must be forced to enter the path of development, since they cannot go through the stages of development due to internal obstacles. Therefore, modernization, as a coherent approach, tried to introduce Western culture as the final reference for civilization and civilized human culture and gradually acquired a political and hegemonic nature. (Tiryakian, 2001:105)

In general, modernization is "A change in traditional customs and social systems towards modern customs and social-institutional systems, whether this change and progress is voluntary or compulsory. The theory of modernization, to present universal versions of development, in its theoretical-philosophical principles and foundations, defined the theory of social change, the design of the word modern, evolutionary and changeable designs, the method of achieving development, and the role of agents and elites in institutionalizing and launching modernization, and presented a coherent theoretical perspective that has not lost its fundamental importance until today" (Brenestin, 2002:143).

B-New modernization theory

At the same time with the collapse of communism in the late 1980s, theories that came to be known as post-modernization theories emerged, and the theory of new modernization was one of them. In fact, before the end of the 1970s, when the intensity of criticism of the modernization school was gradually subsiding, a kind of revival in modernization studies appeared. New modernization theorists, on the one hand, have struggled against Marxists and on the other hand, have re-evaluated the basic principles of the classical modernization school. Based on this approach, the development of each of the Third World countries is presented and evaluated in its way. This new approach considers a more significant role for external or international factors. It also attaches greater importance to the phenomenon of social conflict and often considers factors such as class conflicts, ideological domination, and revolution in social analysis. (Sou, 2006:186)

Conflict theories

Conflict theories of development and underdevelopment have originated from Marx's theoretical basics and criticism of the capitalist system, and have emphasized the role of external forces in the process of development and modernization of societies, and even the international feature of the capitalist system. The main theorists of this school are Andre Gunder Frank, Paul Baran, Paul Suezzi, and Samir Amin. In explaining the causes of underdevelopment of third-world societies, these thinkers emphasize the extractive-exploitative effects of the consequences of capitalist influence. (Kandal, 1989:39)

A- Dependency Theory

The dependency school, which emerged under the influence of underdevelopment studies based on the Marxist-contradictory approach, investigates the state of development and underdevelopment, especially in Latin American countries, and the fundamental processes of exploitation and the functioning of capitalism towards these societies, in a more theoretical, wider and of course more profound way. Those who work in this Marxist school of development pay great attention to explaining the inequalities existing in the universal economy and the lack of development in Third World societies. According to the dependency approach, the lack of development cannot be attributed to the domestic obstacles or values of these societies in the field of modernization, but rather the process of underdevelopment is derived from a series of foreign issues and interventions, such that the growth of advanced industrial centers in the world today means the simultaneous underdevelopment of these countries that the West has extracted and exploited their economic surpluses (Peet 2007:17).

B-New Dependency Theory

To release the internal theoretical deadlocks of the dependency theory, which left no way out for Third World countries, the new dependency school theorists tried to consider the positive processes and consequences of dependency and capitalist influence. This theory is also called "dependent development". Cardoso and Falleto, as pioneers of this theory, believe that foreign domination in situations of national dependency can enable the "internationalization of foreign interests". However, Peter Evans, by coining the term "internationalization of imperialism", sought to explain that the system of domination associated with foreign forces as a domestic force can "manifest" through social practices, local groups and classes (Peet 2007: 6). According to Cardoso's theory, dependent development is generated through agreements, factions, and unions between the government and business investors, however, this type of open development occurs because both the government and the business sector pursue policies that operate based on an income concentration-based market and social exclusion of the majority of the population of a society. However, the conflict between the government and the business

sector is not as intense as that between the dominant classes and the people. (Rocha, 2002:86) Cardozo and Falletto consider the positive aspects of dependency and refer to it as dependent development. Cardozo believes that: "Monopoly capitalism, dependency, and development are not contradictory terms. A type of dependent capitalistic development occurs in parts of the Third World that is connected to new forms of monopolistic expansion.

C-Theory of social formation and mode of production

The theory of social formation with a Marxist basis also seeks to explain the underdevelopment of political, economic, and social formations in Third World countries. The basic concepts of this theory are: "mode of production" and "intermixture of modes of production." To expand this theory, French Marxists such as Phillip Rai and Louis Althusser adopted the concept of mode of production from Marx and utilized it to investigate the economic history of the world in more detail and in a more realistic way. They believed that modern-world capitalism did not simply acquire these new forms, but rather conquered the economic elements of other societies during the colonial period and extracted them for the benefit of its reproduction (Wilker, 1996:94).

According to the social formation approach, in every period of history, there is a kind of social formation based on the dominant mode of production, and history can be defined as the frequent sequence and replacement of social formations. Social variation requires a shift from lower-level modes of production to higher-level modes of production. Social formation theory believes that the capitalist mode of production is dominated by "anarchy" on the one hand and by the "iron law of capital" on the other hand. This dualism can be explained by referring to the "law of value" as the "natural law of society" (Kosonen, 1977: 372).

D-World system theory

This theory is a macro-sociological approach that seeks to investigate the economic and political dynamics of capitalism as a total social system and is linked to Wallerstein's work in this field in 1974. According to Wallerstein, the world system is a social system that has borders, structures, member groups, rules of legitimacy and cohesion, and its survival depends on a combination of opposing forces that maintain it with tension and contradiction. In this system, each group seeks its benefits. This system, like an organism, has a life cycle that changes in some aspects, remains stable in some aspects, and has its developmental characteristics. According to Wallerstein, based on the world system approach, three categories of societies or countries can be distinguished: capitalist core countries, peripheral countries, and semi-peripheral countries (Wallerstein, 1974: 189).

According to Wallerstein, the capitalist world economy requires geographical development and expansion, and creates a kind of pivotal division of labor in which each of the countries related to the above three categories must have a specific role. From this perspective, the role of peripheral governments in the global division of labor is to provide raw materials for the core countries, and semi-peripheral countries also play an intermediary role. However, peripheral countries can be promoted to the level of peripheral countries and perhaps even to the level of core countries as a result of development and transformation.

Research Methodology

The type of this research is qualitative research which is applied in terms of objective and is descriptive-cross-sectional in terms of nature. The statistical population of the research was managers and experts active in the field of rural development in Gonbad County and university professors who were knowledgeable and related to the subject, totaling 22 individuals, who were studied in a purposeful manner considering the theoretical saturation criterion. The data collection tool was a semi-structured interview, while the questionnaire was also used in documentary and library studies. For the validity and reliability of the tool, the method of investigation by research members, theoretical foundations, and research background were used to confirm and verify the data's accuracy regarding the study's validity. To this end, the researcher first studied the theoretical foundations and background of the research. Then, he/she obtained the ideas and guidelines of several experts. In this way, they were provided with the analysis results and categorizations obtained from the respondents, who confirmed them. The achieving techniques of theoretical saturation and Delphi analysis were used to determine the findings' external

validity (transferability). In this way, all points that may affect the transferability and increase the generalizability of the results to other areas and contexts were emphasized. Max QDA software was also used to analyze the obtained data.

Research findings

Based on the data obtained from the contextual and demographic information section, the respondents' age is 30 years and above. Of the total of 22 expert respondents, 32% were aged 40 to 49 years, 27% were aged 30 to 39 years, and 41% were 50 years and above. The frequency distribution of the respondents' gender shows that nearly 70% (18 people) were male and the rest were female. The frequency distribution of the respondents by job status and organizational position also showed that out of the total of 22 expert respondents, 14 people were planners and managers (64%) and 8 people were university professors and lecturers. The educational status of the respondents also showed that 13 people (59%) had a master's degree and the rest had a PhD degree.

The findings from the semi-structured interview showed that categories such as the gap in urban and rural facilities and the unbalanced development of these regions, the lack of development-oriented programs, injustice and inequalities in national development programs regarding rural areas, weak participation and weak human resources, ethnicism and traditionalism, psychological characteristics of villagers such as conservatism and resistance to change, lack of mutual trust, weak self-confidence, weak civil institutions and the lack of efficient non-governmental organizations, weak knowledge, and the existence of inappropriate and non-collective exploitation systems were among the most important social obstacles to economic development in the rural areas studied.

Table (2): Categories and concepts extracted from semi-structured interviews (Social obstacles to economic development in rural areas)

Statement	Concepts	Category
In terms of specialization, villages are mainly dependent on cities.	Dependence of the village on the city	The urban-rural gap
The developmental approach is only limited to cities.	Urbanism developmental approach	
There is an imbalance between urban and rural areas.	Urban-rural imbalance	
General poverty has increased in villages.	Intensification of poverty	
Villagers do not have access to public services.	Lack of public services	
Rural financial resources are restricted.	restricted financial resources	
The unbalanced relationship between city and village has historical roots.	Imbalance	
There are no amenities in the villages.	Welfare gap	Lack of development-oriented plans
The development process is from up to down.	Lack of understanding from managers	
The inattention of managers has led to an intensification of underdevelopment.	Managers' inattention	
Lack of attention to new employment opportunities in villages hampers development.	Neglecting new employment	
Natural and Godsend capacities are not utilized to the necessary extent.	Lack of attention to capacities	
The change in agricultural land use has harmed development in this sector.	Land use change	
Changing cultivation patterns confuse government institutions such as the Agricultural Jihad.	Changing the cultivation pattern	
Lack of planning is one of the main obstacles to underdevelopment.	Lack of plan	
There is no effective and practical model to support the employment sector.	Lack of efficient model	

Government institutions such as the Relief Committee and Welfare State make villagers even more needy.	Weakness of government institutions	
Credits are not distributed fairly.	Unfair distribution of services	Injustice
Standard and practical agricultural tools are not available to farmers.	Unfair distribution of tools	
The division of labor is incomplete and non-principled.	Lack of proper division of labor	
The number of unemployed people is increasing day by day.	Unemployment	Weakness of human resources
The frustrations of the younger generation have led to a lack of cooperation in development-oriented projects in the villages of Gonbad.	Neglecting the younger generation	
There are no skilled workers in the villages.	Weakness of human resources	
No attention is paid to the human capital available in villages.	Lack of attention to capacities	
The statistics and rates of disease in the villages are high due to underdevelopment.	Backwardness	
The weakness of teamwork is evident.	Weakness of teamwork	Weakness of participation
There is no single network of cooperation in the villages.	Lack of a single network	
There is a lack of sympathy among the people of the village.	Lack of empathy	
Rural youth compare themselves with urban and affluent youth through their presence on social networks.	The weakness of the younger generation	
The risk-taking spirit among villagers is shallow.	Weak risk-taking	
Ethnicity leads to a lack of empathy.	Weakness in empathy	
Lack of cooperation for each other's success hinders development.	Lack of cooperation	
There is a lack of knowledge and attitude regarding the importance of teamwork.	Lack of teamwork knowledge	
Lack of cooperation for each other's success hinders development	Lack of cooperation	
The form of social occasions in exploitative systems is uncertain.	Social occasions	
Family feuds and legal problems prevent social cohesion.	Family feuds	
Bigotry is one of the worst characteristics of villagers.	High bigotry	Ethnocentrism and traditionalism
Ethnocentrism prevents acceptance of criticism and mistakes.	Lack of acceptance of criticism	
The adherence of rural residents to certain traditions is one of the main causes of underdevelopment.	fidelity to traditions	
Fatalism is one of the worst features of villagers.	Fatalism	
Relying on traditional misconceptions has led to mustiness.	Traditionalism	
Ethnic and tribal prejudices lead to backwardness.	Ethnic bigotry	
Preferring immediate benefits over future benefits is one of the worst characteristics of villagers.	Shortsightedness	
Preventing girls from getting an education can be considered an obstacle to development.	Preventing girls from getting an education	
Traditional culture prevents the acceptance of new approaches.	Traditional culture	
Having a closed view contributes to underdevelopment.	Closed view	

Ignoring modern and unconventional rural issues contributes to underdevelopment.	Lack of attention to new issues	
Emphasis on ethnic identity will provide the basis for introducing indigenous identity and developing tourism.	Positive function	
If Ethnocentrism leads to contact with other ethnicities and the city, it will lead to backwardness.	Intra-group social capital	
Ethnocentrism creates a closed attitude among villagers.	Closed attitude	
The top-down attitude of some ethnicities	Pessimism	
Ethnic confrontation in a village leads to the reduction of participation.	tendency to confront	
Villagers resist change.	Without the change	Immutability
Villagers are very resistant to change.	Resistance to change	
Ethnocentrism has caused villagers to resist modern issues.	Resistance to change	
Self-confidence is very low among villagers.	Weak self-confidence	Social psychological characteristics
They are always waiting for external and government assistance.	Waiting for help from outside	
The carefree attitude of the villagers is one of the cultural characteristics of the region, which makes them lack the willingness for further activity.	Lack of foresight	
Consumerism as a social phenomenon has made young people less inclined to do hard work.	Youth consumerism	
The need for progress is weak in the rural culture.	Lack of feeling the need to progress	
Due to low self-confidence, participation is generally lower in villages.	Self-confidence	
Stonewalling blocks happen for the progress of others.	stonewalling	Limited good
Limited resources in the countryside intensify limited good.	Limited resources	
Conservatism and resistance to progress and change of outputs have limited good outcomes in villages.	Conservatism	
Limited good is one of the psychological features of villagers that is rooted in educational structures.	Educational structure	
The poor rural class, due to its inability to move up the ranks, will themselves hinder the growth of other (middle) classes.	hindering growth	
A culture of limited good leads to a decrease in rationality and rational decision-making.	Decreased rationality	
Low levels of aspirations exacerbate a culture of limited good.	Low level of aspirations	
Rural people's prudence has increased, and this has led to less participation.	Individual prudence	
Joint stock companies are bankrupt.	Bankrupt company	Civil institutions
Joint-stock companies cannot compete with central and state-owned firms.	Weakness of companies	

Joint-stock companies have uneducated manpower .	Lack of skilled manpower	
The willingness of villagers to join cooperatives is low.	Unwillingness to join	
Civil institutions have no place in the mentality and attitude of villagers.	Lack of attitude	
The lack of civil institutions in villages has led to a decrease in the social tolerance of villagers.	Reduced toleration	
NGOs play a role in facilitating government policies.	Facilitation	
Due to the changing scientific nature of universities and the poor output, most educated people do not have a high ability to cooperate and improve the situation in the villages.	University weakness	Knowledge and information
Theoretical knowledge has no role in rural development.	The university is not operational.	
Knowledge must be indigenous to play a role in rural development.	Lack of Indigenous knowledge	
The consistency between academic disciplines and rural needs is low.	Inconsistency	
The level of knowledge and literacy among rural people is low, and this in itself hinders development.	Low knowledge	
Educational facilities in rural areas are weak and unstructured.	Weak educational facilities	
Villagers are reluctant to benefit from new technologies.	Technology weakness	
Weak knowledge of the exploitation system is not cost-effective due to the high rent of agricultural land.	High rent	Exploitation systems
The issue of integration is faced with difficulties due to the low participation of villagers.	Lack of integration	
There is no specific plan defined for the exploitation system.	Lack of a single plan	
Agricultural land is becoming smaller and smaller every day compared to the past.	Separation of agricultural lands	
Problems in legal issues of ownership have faced the development of agricultural systems with difficulties.	Legal problems	
peasant subculture has become a dominant model, and this model hinders development.	peasant subculture	
Exploitation systems without considering social contexts are doomed to failure.	Neglecting social attachments	

As the findings from semi-structured interviews with experts represent, social structural factors such as rural-urban social gaps, urbanist attitudes towards development, and the fact that urbanization is considered equivalent to development, the imbalance between cities and villages in various economic, social, and cultural areas, along with the weak planning of policymakers, officials, and managers active in the field of rural development, have been among the most significant social obstacles to the economic development of the villages studied in the east of Golestan province. Weakness of human resources due to various reasons, including aging and senility of the permanent population in villages, low literacy, and low awareness of villagers regarding how to achieve development and its positive outcomes, which has also led to their weak social participation, are other social obstacles to rural development. In addition, the socio-psychological characteristics of villagers such as fatalism, preference for immediate

benefits over future benefits, conservatism, narrow-mindedness, and lack of risk-taking, which are some elements of Rogers' peasant subculture and Foster's theory of limited good, can be objectively observed in this regard, have naturally prevented the development of rural areas in the east of the province. The weakness of civil institutions and the lack of non-governmental organizations in rural areas, which are considered one of the main factors of development in today's modern world, are also considered serious obstacles to the development of villages. Finally, the existence of inappropriate exploitation systems that are affected by rural cultural, social, and economic conditions and lead to the fragmentation of agricultural lands and low productivity are among the social obstacles to development in the studied rural areas, according to experts.

Table (3): Rural development solutions from the experts' perspectives

An agricultural-focused tourism strategy can be a solution.	Tourism strategy	Development solutions
Making a platform to increase income generation plays a key role in development.	Enhancing revenue generation	
In the water sector, optimal water allocation must be done.	Solving the water crisis	
Requiring villagers to perform social and group works to benefit from government services will play a crucial role.	Encouraging teamwork	
Smallholders should be encouraged to move towards integrated farming and group production.	Integrated cultivation	
The government should rapidly pay farmers' claims to increase villagers' trust in government institutions.	Payment of claims	
Local markets should be established to sell agricultural products permanently.	Local market	
Development should encourage self-reliance.	Self-reliance	
The presence and strong role of women in home workshops plays a role in development.	The presence of women in the production process	
Development should not destroy the natural environment.	Stable development	

Regarding rural development strategies, specialists and experts have emphasized strengthening tourism strategies, enhancing income generation, creating sustainable employment, land integration, paying farmers' demands by the government, developing local markets, and paying attention to the role of women.

Discussion and Conclusion

The rural sector in developing countries is one of the significant economic sectors that play a key role in economic and social development. However, the political, social, cultural, economic, and infrastructural obstacles can disorder the development of the rural sector. To overcome these obstacles, managers and planners must implement plans that are effective in removing these obstacles and facilitating the process of economic development of the rural sector. In this regard, for the economic development of the rural sector, attention should be paid to social factors and proper plans should be implemented to remove obstacles and improve the conditions of this sector.

Since in the field of economic development of the rural sector, there are many social obstacles such as the imbalance between the city and the village and the gap in economic, social and cultural facilities, unfair distribution of services, lack of attention to the social and economic opportunities and capacities of villages, weakness of government institutions and managers, weakness of social participation of villagers, ethnocentrism and traditionalism, conservatism and resistance to changes, promotion of consumerism, weakness of government social policies, lack of capable and dynamic participatory structures (non-governmental organizations) in rural societies, weakness of educational facilities, disregard for stable employment, urbanization of villagers and irregular migrations, lack of social and business networks, insufficient level of education and awareness of the local community in the field of entrepreneurship, lack of coordination and cooperation between individuals and different centers, and lack of trust in others, and these factors have a great influence on the quantity and quality of rural development, therefore, policy makers, planners and managers active in the field of rural development

should take steps to eliminate these obstacles and facilitate more in order to improve the situation of villagers.

Empowering villagers, providing village organization plans, preparing plans to strengthen the financial strength of villagers, preventing irregular migration, paying attention to meeting the requirements of the younger generation, especially employment and education, utilizing the capacities of non-governmental organizations, developing rural production cooperatives, utilizing rural tourism strategies, strengthening income generation, creating stable employment, integrating lands, paying farmers' demands by the government, developing local markets, and paying attention to the role of women, guaranteed purchase of agricultural products and timely payment of claims are among the most significant rural development strategies that proper actions must be taken to implement them. In fact, the governance system in rural development must focus on managing social barriers to enable sustainable rural growth and development.

Suggestions

Research Suggestions

- Study of economic barriers to social development in rural areas
- Investigate the impact of communication networks on the economic development of rural areas
- Identify the economic effects of social policies on the development of the rural sector and identify obstacles.

Practical suggestions

- Participatory rural development plans. For the economic development of the rural sector, policymakers, planners, and executive managers should consider the social participation of villagers in all stages of development plans from the beginning of design to the end of assessment. Only then will development plans be implemented according to the real needs of villagers.
- Promoting entrepreneurship and creating job opportunities. Given that a large part of the rural youth population, which is a productive and efficient population, migrates to cities for various reasons, including unemployment, it is necessary to contribute to rural development by promoting entrepreneurship and supporting rural employment-generating projects, providing skills and entrepreneurship training, developing entrepreneurial networks, and providing suitable financial and tax facilities as supporters of entrepreneurs. Especially, creating job opportunities has the greatest impact on the economic development of the rural sector. Therefore, planners and managers should attempt to create new job opportunities by developing handicrafts, agriculture, animal husbandry, and other occupations.
- Encouraging investment: Managers can reduce the economic problems of villages by providing facilities and encouraging investment in the rural sector.
- Improving the level of education and awareness of villagers. Given that one of the obstacles to rural development is the psychological characteristics of villagers, including low risk-taking, conservatism, narrow-mindedness, and the like, the responsible authorities must take steps to strengthen development-oriented attitudes in various ways, including using mass media and virtual social networks, holding educational and promotional courses, helping to increase formal education, etc. to improve the attitudes of villagers regarding spontaneous and governmental developmental plans and, consequently, increasing the empowerment of villagers, which will facilitate economic development.

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