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## Evaluating The Role Of Social Capital In The Development Of Rural Areas In Kermanshah Province

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### Abstract

The present study evaluates the role of social capital in the development of rural areas in Kermanshah Province. In terms of purpose, the research is applied; in terms of data collection time, it is cross-sectional; and in terms of method or nature, it is descriptive-survey. The data collection tool is a researcher-made questionnaire, consisting of seven main components and 44 items derived from the literature review. Its reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha (0.84), and its content validity was verified by experts. The statistical population includes the entire rural population of Kermanshah Province (47,000 individuals). Cochran's formula was used to determine the sample size. Using multi-stage cluster sampling, 85 villages were selected, and within them, based on the per capita population, respondents were chosen to complete the researcher-made questionnaire on social capital in the development of rural areas of Kermanshah. For data analysis, two statistical software programs were used: SPSS version 26 and structural equation modeling software (PLS-Smart). The results showed that social trust has a positive and significant effect on social capital and agricultural knowledge management. Social trust enhances both knowledge management and social capital. Furthermore, social cohesion has a positive and significant impact on agricultural knowledge management and social capital, leading to their growth. Social participation also has a positive and significant effect on social capital and social development, contributing to their enhancement. Social development, in turn, positively and significantly influences economic development. The development of rural areas promotes both social development and environmental productivity development, and environmental productivity development also positively impacts the economic development of the community.

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## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

In recent decades, the development of rural areas has become one of the main challenges in the developmental policymaking of countries, especially in less developed regions. In this regard, social capital, as one of the intangible and non-material components of development, plays an increasingly significant role in empowering rural communities. Social capital encompasses social networks, trust, shared norms, and social participation, which lead to effective cooperation among community members to achieve common goals. Unlike physical and human capital, social capital does not diminish with use; rather, it is strengthened through increased interaction and participation. Given the unique cultural and social characteristics of Kermanshah Province—such as its ethnic structure, history of local participation, and geopolitical position—studying the role of social capital in the development of its rural areas is essential. This research aims to analytically examine the extent and manner in which the components of social capital influence the rural development process. Accordingly, based on existing documentation, the researcher seeks to scientifically answer the following question through the present study: What appropriate interpretation can be offered for assessing the role of social capital in the development of rural areas in Kermanshah Province? And does a suitable model for evaluating the role of social capital in the rural development of Kermanshah Province exhibit a good fit?

### Methodology

The research method, in terms of purpose, is applied; in terms of the time of data collection, it is cross-sectional; and in terms of the data collection method or nature, it is descriptive-survey. The data collection tool is a researcher-made questionnaire consisting of seven main components and 44 items derived from a review of the literature, with a calculated Cronbach's alpha of 0.84, indicating reliability. Its content validity was confirmed by experts. The statistical population of this study includes the entire rural population of Kermanshah Province (47,000 people). To determine the sample size, Cochran's formula was used. Through multistage cluster sampling, 85 villages were selected, and based on the population of each village, respondents were chosen to complete the researcher-made questionnaire assessing social capital in the development of rural areas in Kermanshah. For data analysis, two statistical software programs were used: SPSS version 26 and Smart-PLS for structural equation modeling.

### Results and Discussion

The results showed that there is a significant positive correlation between social capital and rural development (sustainable agriculture) with a significance level of 0.000. Rural development is influenced by the components of social capital. Currently, the importance of social participation, as one of the key dimensions of social capital in achieving rural development, has been a growing focus of many studies in recent years. A prerequisite for the progress of any society—especially rural communities—is the expansion of social participation and, most importantly, mutual trust between individuals and the government, both of which are essential components of social capital. Typically, when economic challenges are discussed, the lack of physical (material) capital is often cited as one of the greatest problems, and the role of social participation is rarely acknowledged. However, in conditions of "recession and inflation," the need for social participation—based on trust-building—is felt more than ever and can help remove many unresolved social barriers to development. Another part of the research showed that the indicator of social cohesion and connectedness has a beta coefficient of 0.542, making it the second most influential factor on the dependent variable, explaining 52% of the variance in agricultural development in rural areas of Kermanshah. In explaining these findings, it can be said that social cohesion refers to a condition in which the components of a society are connected in such a way that they form a meaningful and effective whole. In other words, social cohesion is a form of social arrangement that ensures individuals, groups, and social classes reach a shared understanding (a common mental model), abide by its rules and norms, benefit from its opportunities, and in return, recognize and cultivate their own abilities based on multiple intelligences and capacities. This leads to active and meaningful participation in society, which in turn enhances the community's capabilities and overall development. In such an environment, the conditions become favorable for embracing new ideas, applying and testing them, accepting scientific thinking, and placing greater emphasis on planning and policymaking centered on productivity and efficiency. All these criteria positively contribute to economic growth and development. Therefore, it is recommended that the formation and strengthening of local councils—with the involvement of community elders, youth, women, and socially influential individuals—be used for planning and implementing development projects. This approach can enhance social capital and foster public trust and participation. Additionally, by holding training courses and workshops on topics such as teamwork, civic engagement, conflict resolution, and sustainable development, the existing social capacities in rural areas can be activated, and the sense of belonging and social responsibility can be reinforced.