



DOI: [10.71854/soc.2025-1215460](https://doi.org/10.71854/soc.2025-1215460)

A Sociological Analysis of the Challenges to the Development of Rural Cooperatives

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Introduction

In general, with the help of rural cooperatives, they have effectively reduced poverty through their members' economic and social progress and indirectly, through economic mobility and the development of the social foundations of the communities in which they operate. Rural cooperatives have a modern, relatively scientific, specialized organization and management. It is in the form of such an organization that the scattered energies and forces of the countryside enjoy unity and general collective cohesion, and a suitable opportunity arises for them to participate, cooperate, and mutually assist each other while preserving their individual and family identities and motivations. Strengthening cooperatives is, in fact, a guarantee of a healthy national economy in countries. Considering the above explanations and the basics of the subject, it is necessary to pay more attention to rural cooperatives and the rural cooperative community. Previous studies show that, given the presence of cooperatives in rural areas for many years and their essential role in providing services to these areas, the development of these companies still faces many challenges, and many obstacles in their development have reduced their efficiency and effectiveness. Accordingly, the present study seeks to conduct a sociological analysis of the challenges facing the development of rural cooperatives using the grounded theory method; the case study is Shahrekord County. Therefore, considering the above explanations, the main research question is: What are the challenges facing the development of rural cooperatives in Shahrekord County from the perspective of sociological analysis using the grounded theory method?

Method

The present study uses techniques such as interviewing and participatory observation using the grounded theory method (GTM). The grounded theory method was chosen because the research topic (challenges of rural cooperative development) lacks a coherent theoretical model and indigenous theorizing. The study aims to produce a theory derived from field data in a complex, multidimensional, and social context; therefore, the grounded method, suitable for discovering new concepts and relationships from data, was an appropriate and necessary approach for this study. For this purpose, information was collected using the purposive sampling method in the first step. In this method, individuals are considered links in a chain that introduce each other, and new data collection units are selected as complements to previous units. This method is usually used when it is impossible to prepare a statistical framework and, on the other hand, the sample members know each other. In this step, in-depth interviews were conducted with experts from cooperative companies in Shahrekord city. In a specialized interview, it is assumed that the experiences of the person being studied in a specific area are stored in semantic and narrative knowledge and recalled when necessary. The main component of this interview is that the researcher repeatedly asks the interviewee to narrate the situations for him.

Findings and Conclusion

The study results showed that one of the most fundamental challenges facing the development of companies is economic problems, lack of liquidity, lack of government support, and inappropriate interference. According to the interviewees, lack of capital is one of the most fundamental factors in cooperatives' slow movement and expansion. For this reason, financial assistance from the government to cooperatives is necessary in many cases. Cooperatives operate by collecting capital and savings from members, and over time, by providing the resources they need, they can become large companies and offer a large volume of diverse products and services. On the

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other hand, sufficient capital in cooperatives can lead to the growth of the quantity and quality of goods and services and their ability to compete in the market. Therefore, cooperatives, like other companies, must provide capital at the desired level to gain competitive power and strengthen their activities. In this regard, obtaining capital and financing has always been a serious problem for rural cooperatives. In this section, it is worth mentioning that the results of this study were consistent with the results of research by Norouzian et al. (2019), Treasure (2016), Arayesh (2011), Shahriari Moghadam et al. (2018), Binaian et al. (2015), Rezaei et al. (2015), and Garavandi and Ali Beigi (2012). Due to the many problems cooperatives face in developing countries, our country is also facing these problems. Experts and sociologists believe that in the current situation, where the slogan of a smaller government for a better future is seriously being raised, more attention should be paid to strengthening the cooperative sector for two reasons: First, intense public supervision is applied in the cooperative system and the power pyramid in it is from the bottom up, and as a result, the government's responsibility and supervisory costs are less, and supervision takes on a more precise and broader meaning. Second, a new competitor is found for the private sector, which can, in turn, play an essential role in increasing the quality of production and the greater efficiency of this sector. However, over the past few years, cooperatives have been unable to play an effective role and find their proper place in the Iranian economy. The results of this study are in line with the results of Rostamzadeh (2010), Sebhato et al. (2020), Benturaki (2001), and Malaim (2003).

According to the interviewees, the weakness of the information and communication infrastructure is another challenge for developing rural cooperatives in Shahrekord County. Cooperatives have specific communication and information needs due to their unique ownership and supervision structures. Cooperatives involve a range of individuals in decision-making and management processes. As a result, communication in cooperatives must be continuous and effective and involve all elements (including board members, CEO, and employees). In this regard, it can be said that the results of this study are in harmony and consistency with the research of Nazaripour and Hosseini (2010), Baghbani-Arani and Maghsoudi (2018), Samian and Movahedi (2018), Arianpour et al. (2013), Sultana et al. (2020), Mastronardi et al. (2020), and Baldaschino et al. (2018). These challenges have led to irreparable consequences, which, according to the results of this study, include: increased immigration, decreased employment, class divide, underdevelopment and inequality, widespread despair, widespread corruption, and lagging behind modern technology that affects villagers and, more broadly, the entire society. Based on the results of this research, strategies such as providing facilities, optimizing the information system, government support, education, participation, management, and facilities and infrastructure can compensate for some of these challenges and inequalities.

Therefore, the results of this part of the research can be considered in line with the research of Danesh Mehr et al. (1400), Robles (2019), Goodarzi et al. (2017), and Afonso and Fernandez (2008). Many factors can be mentioned as strategies for developing rural cooperatives.

Keywords: Challenge, Development, Rural Cooperative Company, Grounded Theory, Shahrekord County