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Analyzing The Impact Of Cultural-Oriented Socio-Economic Programs Of Non-Governmental Organizations On The Improvement Of Multidimensional Poverty Indicators In Iran

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Abstract

The primary aim of this study is to examine the role and impact of socio-economic programs and policies of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with a cultural approach, on improving multidimensional poverty indicators in Iran. This research adopts a descriptive methodology, and the statistical population includes managers, experts, and consultants active in NGOs across the country. A sample of 400 participants was determined, and data were collected using a researcher-made questionnaire validated for content and construct reliability, demonstrating satisfactory reliability. The questionnaire was designed to evaluate the extent of NGOs' programs and policies in reducing poverty, as well as to identify existing challenges and opportunities. Regression analysis results indicate that the variables "meeting basic needs," "financial and credit assistance," and "empowerment of the poor" have a significant positive effect on poverty reduction. Conversely, the variable "social cohesion between the general population and the poor" exhibited a significant negative effect on poverty alleviation, highlighting serious challenges in socially fragmented contexts. Additionally, the variable "NGO capacity" did not have a significant impact on poverty reduction, reflecting potential structural and operational weaknesses within some organizations. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that sustainable poverty reduction requires strengthening NGOs' socio-economic policies, enhancing social cohesion in target communities, and institutional capacity-building of these organizations. Consequently, it is recommended that governmental and civil institutions adopt supportive measures and foster effective collaborative frameworks to enhance NGOs' capacity for poverty alleviation.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Poverty, as one of the most critical social challenges, not only affects the economic dimensions of individuals' lives but also poses significant threats to their psychological, social, and cultural well-being. This multidimensional phenomenon undermines economic and social foundations and presents serious challenges to sustainable development, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive and cross-sectoral policy design. Amartya Sen's capability approach conceptualizes poverty not merely as a lack of income but as deprivation of fundamental human capabilities, emphasizing the importance of empowerment and social participation strategies. In recent decades, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as voluntary and non-state actors, have played a key role in mitigating social vulnerabilities and improving multidimensional poverty indicators by leveraging social and community capacities. The global COVID-19 crisis further underscored this role; pandemic-related restrictions and economic downturns exacerbated multidimensional poverty in Iran, while culturally-oriented socio-economic initiatives by NGOs significantly supported vulnerable groups. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the role and effectiveness of culturally-oriented socio-economic programs implemented by NGOs in improving multidimensional poverty indicators in Iran, with the hypothesis that such interventions significantly enhance these indicators. The findings of this research can provide scientific and practical guidance for policymakers and civil society organizations in designing strategies to reduce multidimensional poverty and promote social justice.

Methodology

This applied research seeks to advance practical knowledge regarding the impact of culturally-oriented socio-economic programs of NGOs on improving multidimensional poverty indicators in Iran. The study employs a descriptive data collection method, assessing the current status and the relationships between variables. The statistical population comprised managers, experts, and consultants active in NGOs across the country. Considering the large population size (approximately 100,000 individuals), a sample of 400 participants was determined, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, using simple random sampling. Data were collected through a researcher-developed questionnaire validated for content and construct, with reliability confirmed via Cronbach's alpha. Correlation and regression analyses were conducted, with parametric assumptions such as normality and homogeneity of variances verified using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. This approach allowed for a detailed assessment of the role and impact of NGOs' programs on multidimensional poverty indicators.

Results and Discussion

The results indicate that culturally-oriented socio-economic programs and policies of NGOs, particularly in the areas of "meeting basic needs," "financial and credit assistance," and "empowerment of the poor," have a significant positive effect on reducing multidimensional poverty in Iran. Regression analyses suggest that these variables explain a substantial portion of poverty variations, whereas social cohesion between the general population and the poor exhibited a limited and negative effect, and NGO capacity showed no significant impact. Correlation analyses reveal that meeting basic needs, such as housing, nutrition, health, and education, is the most critical factor in poverty alleviation. Empowering the poor through skill development and economic opportunities plays an essential role in breaking the cycle of poverty. Financial and credit assistance is also effective but insufficient on its own, requiring complementary empowerment and cultural interventions. The findings further highlight the complex social and cultural effects on poverty, underscoring the necessity of multidimensional and comprehensive policy design. Sustainable reduction of multidimensional poverty in Iran requires multidimensional policies encompassing the provision of basic needs, financial and credit support, and individual empowerment. Meeting fundamental needs is a prerequisite for poverty alleviation and the promotion of social justice, while financial assistance alone, without empowerment and economic education, lacks a lasting effect. Empowering the poor, aligned with Amartya Sen's capability approach, enhances personal and social development opportunities, playing a key role in their economic and social participation. Limited or negative social cohesion reflects cultural and social challenges in fragmented communities, and the current capacity of NGOs alone is insufficient for poverty reduction, highlighting the need to strengthen institutional capacity and coordination with governmental and civil society institutions. Thus, integrated economic-social-cultural strategies provide an effective pathway for reducing multidimensional poverty.