

## Rural Women Cooperative and its Development Impacts in Khorashad Village, Birjand in South Khorasan Province - East of Iran

Farhood Golmohammadi<sup>1</sup> and Yalda Honari<sup>2</sup>

1. Asstt. Prof., Agricultural Extension and Education, Islamic Azad University, Birjand Branch, Birjand, IRAN. 2. Ph.D. Scholar, Agricultural Extension and Education Course, Islamic Azad University, Sciences and Researches Branch, Tehran, IRAN  
Corresponding author e-mail: farhood.gol@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

*Cooperatives provide the opportunity for poor people to raise their incomes; they are democracies empowering people to own their own solutions; they increase security for the members; and they contribute directly and indirectly to primary education for children, gender equality and reducing child mortality. Rural women cooperative in Khorashad village is one of the most successful organizations in grassroots level that during 17 years ago played a major role in enhancing socio-economic status of its members and creating various job opportunities for them, organizing marketing their productions and finally enhancing revenues and welfare of their members' families. In this article, authors studying and assessing development impacts of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village, Birjand in south khorasan province - east of Iran. Statistical population of this research, include rural women that were active members of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village during 2011- 2013 (about 280 rural women). Findings of the Research showed that rural women cooperative in Khorashad village, played a major role in empowering rural women in this region because of by it, they could get various loans with low level of interest and establishing various vocations by these loans such as carpet weaving and various aspects of handicrafts, confectionery, and etc. Also rural women in Khorashad village by their cooperative, accessed to higher socio-economic situation in their families and local community and more independence from their wives because of their income generation and better situations and more opportunities for continuing education of their children in Khorashad village, Birjand city and other places in the country.*

**Key words:** Cooperative; Development; Rural women;

The decision by the United Nations to declare 2012 as the International Year of Co-operatives will increase the global focus on cooperatives. The UN points to the role of cooperatives, of many kinds, in promoting participation in the economic and social development of all people. Agricultural cooperatives are a significant form of business enterprise. The role of agricultural cooperatives as a critical dimension of market structure in agriculture must periodically be assessed to determine the future viability of the cooperative form of business. Cooperatives provide a strong democratic medium to empower the people

(Golmohammadi, 2011 & 2013). Cooperatives have assets and qualities in areas, which cannot be claimed by other types of organizations. These include:

- Self-initiative,
- Sensitivity to local needs,
- Reducing the need for public regulation (Golmohammadi, 2011 & 2013).

Rural women are key agents for achieving the transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. But limited access to credit, health care and education are among the many challenges they face, which are further

aggravated by the global food and economic crises and climate change. Empowering them is key not only to the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also to overall economic productivity, given women's large presence in the agricultural workforce worldwide. UN Women supports the leadership and participation of rural women in shaping laws, strategies, policies and programs on all issues that affect their lives, including improved food and nutrition security, and better rural livelihoods (Golmohammadi, 2011 & 2013).

In Iran as like as many other developing countries, many young rural men have left their villages for achieving jobs in cities, with women remaining behind to take up farming. The International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food Program under the initiative "Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women". It aims to empower rural women to claim their rights to land, leadership, opportunities and choices, and to participate in shaping laws, policies and programs. Evidence shows that this spurs productivity gains, enhanced growth and improved development prospects for current and future generations. The initiative also engages with governments to develop and implement laws and policies that promote equal rights, opportunities and participation so that rural women can benefit from trade and finance, market their goods and make a strong contribution to inclusive economic growth (Golmohammadi, 2011 & 2013).

In many developing countries such as Iran, rural women, who are active in various trades of agriculture, dairying, farming, food processing, handicraft, construction, micro credit etc. Though highly productive, economically active and enterprising; individually they are weak as are (a) unrecognized (b) long working hours with low returns, (c) limited access to equipments, markets, productive resources, opportunities (d) restrictive social protection (e) low representation (f) low inclusion in labor & economic policies etc. Thus there is a need to organize informal sector women workers. A key solution for overcoming this problems that recommended by many scientists and researchers is building their own economic organization such as rural women cooperatives that are very successful in villages of Iran during 17 years ago (Golmohammadi, 2011 a&b).

Nowadays, very little is yet known about what works to bridge the gender gap in agricultural extension

education programs. Extension education known as an important vehicle for integrating women into official development efforts throughout the world and for empowering them as human beings. Thus, we're interested in the process of development, women's empowerment within this process, and role of extension education in advancing women's empowerment and their development. For effective, efficient, and sustainable, development goals require that extension education services recruit and train women professionals, develop programs for women farmers, specifically target women to provide access to extension education services, establish linkages with rural women's groups, and encourage women farmers to participate in extension education programs and activities (Golmohammadi, 2013).

*Role of training courses in promoting participation members of cooperatives* : Rural women cooperatives are a significant form of business enterprise. The role of rural women cooperatives as a critical dimension of market structure in rural economy must periodically be assessed to determine the future viability of the cooperative form of business. Rural women cooperatives provide a strong democratic medium to empower their members. Rural women cooperatives have assets and qualities in areas, which cannot be claimed by other types of organizations. In terms of rural women cooperatives and rural development; the notion of participation has main impact on development of cooperatives (Golmohammadi, 2013).

*Home employment of rural women as an solution for empowerment of them* : It has been experienced that the rural women has to depend upon multiple employment / skills to earn their livelihood. Nowadays equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the Iranian nation is a focal point in all of the development plans and projects. This includes equal access of women to healthcare, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc. also strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women. This also include mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process, elimination of

discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations. Since women comprise the majority of the population below the poverty line and are very often in situations of extreme poverty, given the harsh realities of intra-household and social discrimination, macroeconomic policies and poverty eradication programs will specifically address the needs and problems of such women. There will be improved implementation of programs which are already women oriented with special targets for women. Steps will be taken for mobilization of poor women and convergence of services, by offering them a range of economic and social options, along with necessary support measures to enhance their capabilities. In order to enhance women's access to credit for consumption and production, the establishment of new and strengthening of existing micro-credit mechanisms and micro-finance institution will be undertaken so that the outreach of credit is enhanced. Other supportive measures would be taken to ensure adequate flow of credit through extant financial institutions and banks, so that all women below poverty line have easy access to credit. In view of the critical role of women in the agriculture and allied sectors, as producers, concentrated efforts will be made to ensure that benefits of training, extension and various programs will reach them in proportion to their numbers. One of the main domains works of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village is home employment of rural women as an solution for empowerment of them (*Golmohammadi, 2011 and 2013*).

*Rural women empowerment through cooperatives:* The status of women in any society is determined by the interplay of various socio-economic factors. In many developing countries such as Iran and India especially in rural regions, The saying "Butter for boys, Buttermilk for girls" is still a reality. Due to discriminatory social customs and lack of proper education and professional training women cannot earn their own livelihood and hence have subjected to ill treatment and enslaving. Statistical data regarding declining sex ratio, literacy, female feticide, anemia, HIV, trafficking, sterilization methods, crimes against women, domestic violence, unequal wages, income and property reveals that the discrimination against women is evident and disparity is measurable and obvious (*Golmohammadi, 2011& 2013*).

Economic empowerment of women leads to development of family and community especially in changing climatic conditions which had a direct and indirect impact on economic conditions of a family. It is a well established fact that in changing climatic conditions a combination of farm and non farm income at household level provides resilience against adverse situations in either of the sectors, where women play an important role. Studies show that productivity and profitability in non-farm sector is generally higher than in farm sector (*Sandhu and Singh, 2012*).

It is observed that rural women in many developing countries such as Iran and India face a number of constraints in gaining knowledge and approaching extension (*Nikhila Bhagwat, 2012*)

The position of women in the Iran society is in the process of transformation and will have an important impact on future social development. In the recent past, there has been an increasing awareness about the longstanding patterns of discrimination that created conditions for women which threaten their lives even before birth, limit their opportunities for education and training, deny them choices, restrict their economic participation and curtail their social, political and economic rights. When compared to a son, a daughter is perceived by society to be of negative worth. Sons, in the Iranian context, are traditionally seen as assets in economic, political and ritualistic terms by a male dominant society. The norms, values and customs make the girl the lesser child. The girl child is neglected decreasing her chances of survival and as an adult she experiences trials and tribulations as a reproductive being. At what age she marries and how many children she bears how many she avoids by using contraception, influences her health and limits her abilities.

*Basu (2011)* suggested that the only way to overcome the problem of dowry is by educating girls and making them independent.

The decision by the United Nations to declare 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives will increase the global focus on cooperatives. The UN points to the role of cooperatives, of many kinds, in promoting participation in the economic and social development of all people. Cooperatives provide the opportunity for poor people to raise their incomes; they are democracies empowering people to own their own solutions; they increase security for the members; and they contribute

directly and indirectly to primary education for children, gender equality and reducing child mortality. Agriculture and rural cooperatives are generally considered as a tool for rural development. Many developed countries such as England, France, Germany and United States largely depend on incomes earned through rural cooperatives. The agriculture and rural cooperatives in Iran in the recent years have diversified themselves into various areas of socio-economic activities. The failure of the government sector and various limitations of the private sector have compelled the policy-makers to pin their faiths on the cooperative system (*Golmohammadi, 2011 and 2013*).

*Major objectives and goals of this research* : The intention of this research is to bring to discussion the development impacts of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village, Birjand in south Khorasan province - east of Iran, in order to empower them. Major objectives of this investigation are recognizing major cultural, economical, political, social, organizational and etc. barriers that hinder these rural women in order to empower them and diagnosing the ways that rural cooperatives will can improve their situation in above aspects and increasing their welfare and empowering them. Also researchers consider following objectives for this research work:

- i. Studying and assessing development impacts of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village.
- ii. Studying and assessing situation of job creation and income generation by rural women cooperative in Khorashad village.
- iii. Studying and assessing effects of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village in empowering its members.
- iv. Studying and assessing amount of accommodation supplied services by rural women cooperative in Khorashad village with real needs of its members.
- v. Comparison of technical efficiency obtained for rural women that being member of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village and other rural women that not being.
- vi. Determining effective factors on non-efficiency and classify rural women that being member of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village based on impressive level of any of them on increasing women's empowerment and expanding and

improving situation of these rural women.

*Main problems of research* : We can categorize main problems of this investigation as following cases: Cultural, economical, political, social, organizational barriers. These problems and barriers cause hindering rural women in rural women cooperative in Khorashad village for answering questionnaires and gathering proper information by the researcher. Also some organizations in Birjand in South Khorasan Province that relating their work to rural women because of some organizational difficulties and barriers didn't give necessary information and data for doing this research.

## METHODOLOGY

Statistical population of this research, include rural women that were active members of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village during 2011- 2013 (about 280 rural women). the main field of the research is in Khorashad village in Birjand in south Khorasan province. Also for getting guides and advises of the guide professor by the researcher and comparing to similar works in this domain, authors visited other professors in Tehran. Type of the research is mainly qualitative and less than is quantitative. Statistical society of the research includes rural women that had membership in rural women cooperative in Khorashad village during 2011-2013. Questionnaire for rural women that had membership in rural women cooperative in Khorashad village was one of the main sources for gathering information and data for this research. Also observation and participation of authors in these rural regions of Khorashad village are two important another important tools for gathering information. Plus gathering information and data from governor offices in Birjand in the field of rural women cooperatives in the south Khorasan province region by the researchers. Validity of the research measuring system was proved through interview with promoting and training agricultural and cooperatives professors and experts working in south Khorasan province. Stability of the questionnaire was proved through a preliminary test and evaluating its Alpha Cronbach. For achieving Reliability of the questionnaire, 30 of them got to the respondents in rural women in statistical society of this research. Coefficient of ALPHA SCALE ( $\alpha$  cronbach) achieved 90 percent that was very good. On the next level, After achieving Validity and Reliability of the questionnaire and doing a

little correction in it, final questionnaire distributed among rural women in statistical society. About 130 questionnaires that completed and returned were usable for data extraction.

Then gathered data was analyzed by statistical methods such as means comparison, Spearman and Pearson correlation, and multiple regressions in SPSS.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study focused on the studying and assessing development impacts of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village, 35 km distance to Birjand city- center in south khorasan province - east of Iran. Findings of this research showed that between age, education level, type of agricultural production, and type of community responsibility of rural women and their attitudes about development impacts of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village there are meaningful relations. Also between land farm extent and amount of their participation in rural women cooperative in Khorashad village, there is meaningful relation.

The most important priorities of rural women in programs of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village, were (education of animal husbandry), (education of household nutrition), and (education of horticulture). The most important priorities of rural women in future for them were (education of animal husbandry), (education of household nutrition), and (education of handicrafts and carpet weaving). Results of the study showed that for designing and implementing ideal and good rural women cooperative in Khorashad village, extension experts and agents must consider and attending more for absorbing rural women participation in rural women cooperative in Khorashad village, in order to better understanding their attitudes and needs.

Main job of rural women respondents is civil servant, that its major reason is limitation of farming lands and shortage of water in this village. Later frequent jobs of them were self employment and agriculture (Table 1).

Most positive economic impacts of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village in development of its members, in order of them, are supporting from women employment, growth of trade between village and city and income generation and poverty alleviation. Later positive economic impacts are growth of home workshops and employment, increasing employment in village, strengthening power of economic competition,

investment of people in non-farm affairs, making diversity in economy of village, reducing costs of production, help of people to rural women cooperative, and more equitably income distribution (Table 2).

Whole Findings of the Research showed that rural women cooperative in Khorashad village, played a major role in empowering rural women in this region because of by it, they could get various loans with low level of interest and establishing various vocations and jobs by these loans such as carpet weaving and various aspects of handicrafts, confectionery, bakery and etc. also rural women in Khorashad village by their cooperative, accessed to higher socio-economic situation in their families and local community and more independence from their wives because of their income generation and better situations and more opportunities for continuing education of their children in Khorashad village, Birjand city and other places in the country. And finally major of rural women of statistical population in this research, stated that rural women cooperative in Khorashad village played a significant and positive role for enhancing their income and whole welfare of families and forwarding them toward sustainable livelihood, increasing local production and creating more opportunities for jobs and employment. and finally according to observations, experiences and findings of author in this research and etc., rural women cooperatives are one of the most popular, effective and important tools for strengthening empowerment of rural women in various aspects specially in economic and social dimensions in rural regions of Iran.

**Table 1. Frequently distribution and percentage frequently of respondents in their main jobs**

Main job	No.	%	Cu.%
agriculture	24	18.5	18.5
Self employment	44	33.8	52.3
Civil servant	62	47.7	100
Total	130	100	

As we see in Table 1- main job of rural women respondents is civil servant, that its major reason is limitation of farming lands and shortage of water in this village.

As we see in Table 2- three most positive economic impacts of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village in development of its members is supporting from women employment and growth of trade between village and city and income generation and poverty alleviation.

**Table 2. Descriptive index of positive economic impacts of rural women cooperative in Khorashad village in development of its members**

Subjects	Mean	S.D.	Priority
Income generation and poverty alleviation	4/42	.735	III
Investment by people in non-farm affairs	4/24	.730	VII
Help of people to rural women cooperative	3/98	.871	X
Increasing employment in village	4/29	.736	V
Growth of home workshops and employment	4/39	.643	IV
Growth of trade between village and city	4/42	.729	II
Supporting from women employment	4/47	.714	I
Strengthening power of economic competition	4/26	.759	VI
Reducing costs of production	4/11	.938	IX
More equitably income distribution	3/83	.749	11
Making diversity in economy of village	4/21	.691	VIII

## CONCLUSION

Agriculture and rural cooperatives are generally considered as a tool for rural development. Many developed countries such as England, France, Germany and United States largely depend on incomes earned through rural cooperatives. The agriculture and rural cooperatives in Iran in the recent years have diversified themselves into various areas of socio-economic activities. The failure of the government sector and various limitations of the private sector have compelled the policy-makers to pin their faiths on the cooperative system (Golmohammadi, 2011 & 2013).

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*Figures of the research :* Author during his research showing rural women cooperative in Khorashad village and various enterprises and SMEs that its members established them by loans and helps of this cooperative during 2013-2015).





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