

*Full Length Research Paper*

## Village development groups: Model based on participation in achieving rural development

Mahmoud Falsolaiman<sup>1\*</sup>, Hojat Sadeghi<sup>2</sup> and Mohammad Hajipur<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Geography Department, University of Birjand, Iran.

<sup>2</sup>Geography and rural planning, Isfahan university, Iran.

<sup>3</sup>Geography and rural planning, Kharazmi university, Iran.

Received 16 August, 2012; Accepted 15 April, 2014

Undoubtedly, cooperative society is a lever for economic development in rural areas. If this could be in line with government policies, it will be very effective to improve living conditions, employment production and income improvement and social status of rural people. The objective of this study is to observe the carbon sequestration project activities in cooperation with international organizations including UNDP and the GEF. Rangelands rehabilitation done for the Afghan refugees had been completely destroyed over a decade in Eastern Iran. In this project, cooperation and participation were formed by organizing people into groups called village development groups (VDGs), where men and women were separated and mixed as well. The cooperatives, which have reached up to 39 in their organizational structure, are micro credit fund whose financial capital is provided by the people's voluntary savings. Results of the cooperatives' performance during three years show that they protect and sustain rehabilitation of degraded rangeland, which are found by collecting of native seeds, creating and cultivating treasure trees and pasture. They also rely on one's training and micro credit fund provided by the government to help people achieve other income-generating resources that ultimately lead to few poor families, improvement in social and economic aspects and growth in human development index projects in the region.

**Key words:** Village development, carbon sequestration project, participation, village development groups, micro credit funds.

### INTRODUCTION

Development has a special place in programming system and accelerates all aspects of human life. It includes basic changes in organizational, social and official structures, public views as well as improvement in production and income rate. Development in most cases involves customs and beliefs of people (lehmann, 2001).

The goal of development is to help the proportion of households without access to clean water. A recent UN habitat report shows that meeting this target in large urban areas and small towns or large villages will require different approaches and governance systems, from the point of technical choices, appropriate institutional arrangements,

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: [H\\_sgeo@yahoo.com](mailto:H_sgeo@yahoo.com), [fall\\_mm@yahoo.com](mailto:fall_mm@yahoo.com). Tel: 098562-2502518.

capacity- building and sustainable financing mechanisms” (Nzengya and Aggarwal, 2013). Village development is a multidimensional and process which involves improvement and promotion in different poor and vulnerable human life quality (Azkia, 2004). Of late, rural development has assumed global attention especially among the developing nations (Gangopadhyay and et al., 2008). One of the methods of village development process is to enable participation in villages. Participation involves providing local people resources and supporting external data in programs for creating effective and useful impacts (lowe et al., 2005). Village, cultural, organizational and political sustainable development is an inseparable subject of rural development. Participation of people is a human asset (invest), which is the fundamental axis of change (langeroudi, 2003). Participation is an innate concept in human communities that needs planning from up to down and connection among all the present components for its strength. In fact, participation is the direct involvement of people in making decisions through some formal and informal mechanisms (Schatzow, 2002). The non-governmental organizations have extended remarkably all over the world; they reinforce participation of people in society in development process (Saidi, 2009). Some have defined cooperation as a process through which poor rural people can organize themselves (Ledesma, 1980).

Todaro, in a book on economic development of third world, size and importance of village development and its role on national development, said agriculture and village development is the main national development (Todaro, 1981). Robinson and Dokoreh, like Todaro, said village development depends on the condition of national development. Another theory on village development is the one put forward by Misra. Misra believes that urban, rural, industrial and agricultural development should be considered as a priority. He believes that the pattern of growth centers on the most desirable village development strategy (Hamed Moghadam, 2004). Rural development involves improving rural livelihoods by implementing a comprehensive development (Kanamaru, 2005). Without the participation of local communities and empowerment, it is not possible to plan and practice what is called participatory development (Shban Ali, 1999). In this way, everyone is involved in all stages of development because this type of social participation is a social, integrated, comprehensive, dynamic, and correlated multi-dimensional process (Shadi, 2003). Tolon also considered participation as a fundamental condition for village. In his opinion the first step for village development is to give major attention to real needs and the next step is to prioritize these needs by consultation with the villagers. In order to achieve these goals, planning and forming groups and village associations is required. With the allocation of substances to the 1303 trade act production and consumption cooperative, cooperatives

across the country quickly began to form including village cooperatives, which have role and a major plan in agricultural development. Due to the importance of cooperative sector as part of the country's economy, cooperatives gradually found position among the people. Growth and development of cooperatives such as village agricultural cooperatives can play a major role in sustainable agricultural development.

Regional development is the provision of aid and other assistance to regions which are less economically developed (Rahnama and Heydari, 2013). In a general sense, development is a sophisticated and comprehensive process that occurs in the social, economic, political and cultural life of society and it is the state of retardation of development appropriate to the situation that leads to accepting characteristics of rationality and wisdom is associated with age and the interaction logic, arithmetic and planning lies (Bradshaw, 2000). Sustainable development covers all the social and economic problems of the community. As we all know, the economy of third world countries including our country relies mostly on agricultural products and agricultural activities are often done in the villages. Sustainable development involves improving the traditional methods of agricultural production and optimum utilization of land and production resources and distribution of agricultural products; it also entails eliminating hunger and alleviating poverty. It is the building of new social and cultural villages which originate attention to human issues and political necessity. Village development issue and its importance are evident. This is why sociologists and researchers believe that the future of third world problems such as unemployment, poverty, lack of income, hunger, lack of production, etc. must be resolved in the villages. Thus, village development is important for the mentioned problems and especially the basic needs of rural. The role of village production is to give food security and assistance to industry and the role of non-oil exports in GDP of villages is to create job opportunities in the spatial dimensions for national development (Petr, 2001). The main goal of sustainable village development is to create unity between economic, cultural and environmental dimension in order to raise village people's livelihoods and welfare. Therefore, in our country, village development has been discussed for years as proposed agricultural development and the intellectual framework for efforts to improve life in village areas. Today's development as a process is the most discussed in countries, particularly developing countries. Realization also involves development of countries benefiting from the talent and active participation of people and their participation in the development process. Development and participation matters are intertwined. Stable and long development process is considered to be successful coupled with increased public participation (Moghanizade, 2000). In this regard, the development

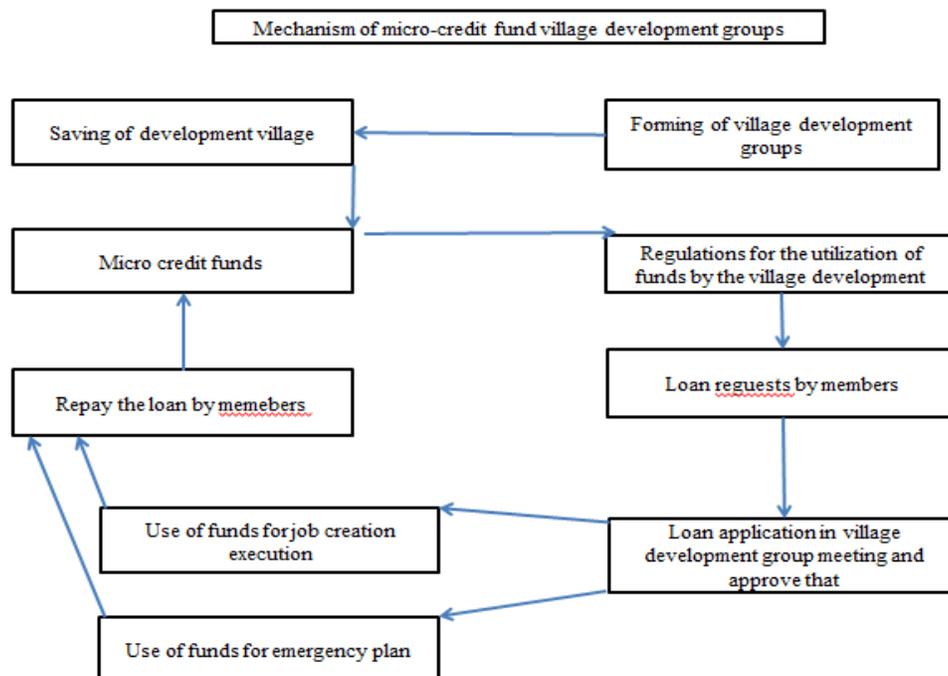


Figure 1. Mechanism of micro-credit fund for village development groups.

groups formed in rural areas are very effective measure for democratic process and rural participation in village development. The idea of comparing development group activities in rural areas than other area is very important. This is because these groups or institutions are on small-scale and local shortages can exist in their village. The plan to reflect the obstacles and problems in village development has also been a more successful operation. Since village development is towards human development and features orientation, it creates motivation in the rural people. One of the basic conditions required to achieve this purpose is the formation of organized groups, including village development groups and local rural groups. Forming groups of village is a major and important need for participatory planning in order to achieve village development. These groups are formed with great benefits for its members and an appropriate method to take care of their interests. On the other hand, the presence of group development is considered as a consultant in local decision making and management of village areas (DHV, 1995).

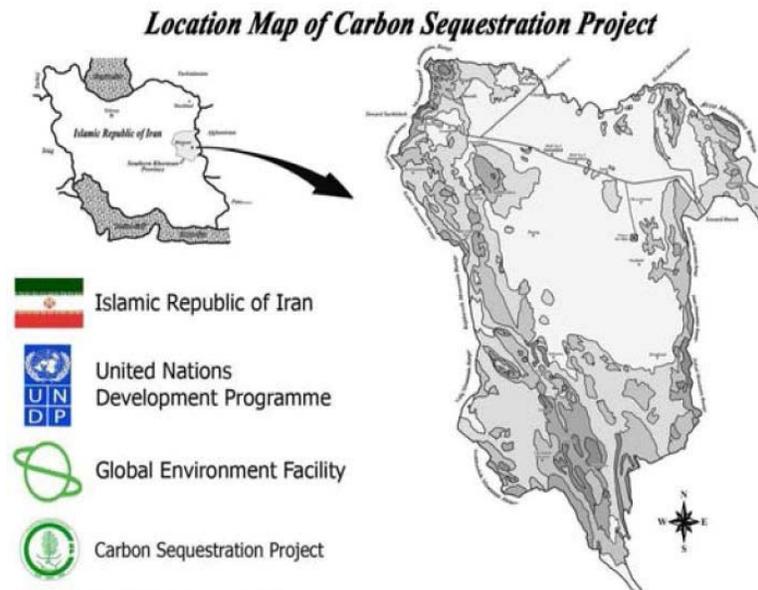
In today's world, suitable for cooperative is economic and social development that can optimize the productivity of living conditions, work and production and improvement of income levels and social status of the community effectively. Experience of developed countries shows that the best cooperatives are organizations that have managed to accumulate scattered tools to provide and disperse forces for talent and motivation (George, 2003).

By transferring authority to people, cooperatives can be said to lead to social development, protection and preservation of nature and creating job opportunities for advancement (Faiz, 2005).

This paper has introduced Hosseinabad region, its role, status and effect on village development. Before carbon sequestration projects were done in the area; there were human and environmental problems such as poverty, lack of resources, natural degradation, lack of precipitation, inappropriate transport etc. So after the implementation of international projects, there is need to examine its effects on the evolution of the rural area and the structural conditions of the various measures are to be determined. Research objectives include: to promote and improve rural life through the necessary training based on the special talents and capabilities of the region, to create mobility and empower local communities in order to attain goals and sustainable development, to reduce poverty and improve economic conditions and livelihood of rural family by creating employment to poor and low income people, to create micro credit fund to develop productive and social activities, to develop and promote production activities through the provision of entrepreneurship training programs (Figure 1).

**METHODS**

The general research methodology is based on field studies conducted with the help of different observation techniques,



**Figure 2.** Location map of Carbon Sequestration Project.

interviews and questionnaires. After the collection of data, they were recorded on computer. For efficiency, (SPSS) statistical index software was used for entering the data in the system; the desired frequency tables and other indicators for updating the data were derived. To achieve more comprehensive and accurate information, 25 rural development departments (VDG)<sup>1</sup> in the research area were involved in the study and focus groups help facilitate training and local expensive projects that have been studied; comprehensive information from social institutions (VDG) was obtained.

## RESULTS

Carbon Sequestration Project of Hossein Abad is a joint work of government (UNDP) and Global Environmental Facility (GEF). Hossein Abad plain catchment area (Ghynab, 144,000 hectares) is located at Sarbisheh City, politically (Figure 2). Its average basin elevation is 1,700 meters. This plain exposure to 120-day winds of Sistan causes intense erosion, from June to October each year; its causes major damage to natural vegetation, agricultural fields and products. The region with serious effects of drought has left. It has severe negative economic and social impact on the lives of the inhabitants of the village and towns. This desert established village has a population of about 32, 800 households, who take livestock and agriculture as their main occupation.

Participation management approach has been adopted by local communities and societies. Participation and partnerships create a spirit of cooperation among local people, which is the basic principle of the strategy of this Carbon Sequestration Project. Carbon Sequestration

Project requires public participation and participative management is a necessary infrastructure for partnership. Building of educational institutions was discussed in several meetings in each of the rural and nomadic community in the study area to create motivation to form a social organization. Simple methods were used to teach (teaching aids) the people of the importance of partnerships, solidarity and cooperation in international affairs and its impact for realizing opportunities location. Despite all the initial problems associated with ethnicity and social and cultural conditions of local communities, with the passage of time and multiple programs that encourage community education, rural development was gradually formed known as Village Development Groups (VDGs), consisting of men and women.

Micro credit funds help members of each group by providing what they need for their production and living activities independently. Interested groups have learned how to implement it for job creation. Micro credit fund is given mostly to the low-income group and rural women for job generating activities.

Village development groups were targeted as the based members; and the project, skills training for men and women were selected as one of the basic tools of employment and income creation. There was initial funding of work based on training or activities that people are willing; credit fund consists of small savings. Weekly meetings were conducted to rotate and use the funds for productive activities the groups got involved in. Others who need another opportunity were taken care of by the local community. On the other hand, funding was given to the groups based on the projects they request for as well as the necessary incentives for their activities.

<sup>1</sup> - village development groups

**Table 1.** Change in the process of village development groups in Plain Carbon Sequestration Project.

Row	Title	2009	2010	2011
1	Number of groups created	25	-	39
2	Number of monitoring groups	25	25	25
3	Number of women groups in monitoring plan	7	7	7
4	Number of mixed groups in monitoring plan	11	11	11
5	Total number of members in Monitoring	928	929	961
6	Total number of meetings since the formation	654	1081	1539
7	Growth of savings than the initial savings	14.3	23.2	32.3
8	Amount of fund savings of village development groups(women)	3815600	5576150	9222250
9	Amount of fund savings of village development groups(men)	3823000	6766250	6132860
10	Amount of fund savings of village development groups(mixed)	3788825	5850567	10515905

Source: Carbon Sequestration Project (2012).

Finally, local community organizations lead to their mobility and capacity. In addition, education and awareness has caused visits and gathering of information needed.

Since 2007, a variety of activities in line with economic and social development have been done in the region. 25 Village Development groups (VDGs) in 15 villages and micro credit funds have been formed. Now, Carbon Sequestration Project has been done in 25 Village Development Groups made up of 39 persons (7 females, 8 males and 24 mixed group). One goal of creating micro credit funds in Village development groups is to improve members' livelihood and assist in their production activities; therefore, independently each of the village development groups (VDGs) members who have necessary training apply for loan schemes to create job. In this project considering the poverty of the people, through this project granting financial facilities are granted in the form of loans to a number of people in Village development for employment opportunities. After three years of the project implementation, the basic question: will the economic and social objectives of Carbon Sequestration project be fulfilled or not? This article seeks to probe into it.

Village Development Groups (VDGs) formed as a social capital and micro credit funds as well as a major financial capital is a significant topic in the performance evaluation of Carbon Sequestration Project. The direction of the Carbon Sequestration Project is for local community empowerment in order to improve natural resources. The permanent presence of people is considered as an attempt to engage in participatory activities and responsibility. In this context, one of the major participatory activities that mobilize and empower the local community support for community groups is village and micro credit funds (the result of savings). These issues are important aspects of social, humani-tarian, financial and environmental activities. The participation of women is obvious in

this movement. They are not only in development group but have made up their own credit funds or mixed with men. They have important role in micro credit funds formed in direct and indirect activity. This transference of responsibility to local people in order to be more reliable and responsible to manage and monitor natural resources rehabilitation, providing livelihoods, employment and income and pursue their own affairs has caused a new intellectual space on the dominant environment. Village Development Groups status and micro credit fund in successive years are written as follows.

The most important result is in line with developments related to the formation of groups and micro credit fund in project area during the years of assessment (2009-2011) as follows:

1- Number of village development groups has increased from 25 groups in 2009 to 39 groups in 2011 in the region. Village development group consists of 7 women and 11 mixed groups (men and women) with a membership of about 50 percent of women. It has not only indicates extreme religious and secular struc-ture adjustment on women's participation in social and economic activities but also is a sign of identity and creating confidence in women in patriarchal society.

2- Development groups have had a total number of meetings (1539) (Table1); the various issues groups, micro credit funds, review requests and loans provision. Each group has held 20 meetings in a year.

3- The total amount of savings within the group of micro credit fund increased from 11,427,425 dollars in 2009 to 25,871,015 in 2011, reflecting increase. This shows the desire and willingness of the people to save and their financial contributions to help other members of the group.

Micro credit funds give loans to members for projects such as breeding and poultry production, melon planting,

**Table 2.** HDI index and the parameters of the project implemented.

Parameter	Before 2007	2009	2010	2011
Literacy index	0.276	0.287	0.385	0.413
Income index	0.327	0.338	0.341	0.358
Life hope index	0.69	0.70	0.71	0.741
Human development index	0.431	0.441	0.478	0.504

Source: Carbon Sequestration Project (2012).

carpet weaving, carpet weaving, barbering, embroidery, knitting, herbs etc. So far they have rotated 15 million.

4- The amount of savings by women in the micro credit fund has increased from 3,815,600 in 2009 to 9,222,250 USD in 2011. The success of this project is based on gender segregation.

5- The consent of members of village development shows the performance of micro credit funds; 55 percent of members' performance in micro credit funds has high quality index; 25 percent, moderate; 9 percent is low, and 11 percent, none (Table 1).

## DISCUSSION

One of the goals of creating micro credit funds for village development groups is to improve members' livelihood and help them to be independent in their productive activities. Therefore, each member that has the necessary training will be given loan. Carbon Sequestration Project has helped the members in this way:

1- Total number of loans produced by the project and micro credit fund was about 99 in 2010 and increased to 181 in 2011; this had favorable a trend of average 60.

2- Total loan production transferred to the lower classes and low income in 2009 was 27, 37 in 2010 and 25 in 2011; the total was 270. 33% was allocated to the poor and low income group.

3- Total number of active projects 89(66%) in 2011 while was 63 (63%) in 2010.

4- Total number of inactive production projects was 45 (34%) in 2011 while it was 37 (37%) in 2010.

5- The payment of loans in the year 2011 was 24.3% with no delay, there was 59.5% loans repayment with delay between 1 to 4 months and 16.2% loans with a delay of more than four months. These are the amounts in 2010 respectively, 43, 48 and 9%.

6- The local repayments of loans by borrowers in 2011 shows that 61 percent of borrowers using loans and 39 percent from other income sources attempt to repay in installments. These amounts were 35 and 65% in 2010.

7 - Feedback from members of development groups on the income shows that in 2011, 15% of members had

high income good; 35.4%, moderate; 23.6 and 26%, less. This is because to get to the profitability level, they have no income to execute their plans. These rates in 2010 were respectively, 9, 36, 33 and 22%.

8- The rate of part-time employment produce the loan in 2011 was 152 (54%) for women and 70(46%) for men, amounting to 1386. There were 125 (64%) women and 45 (36%) men.

9- The loans given to women in 2011 were used for the following: carpet weaving (25.6%), 22% sewing and weaving (22%), heavy animal fattening scheme (17%), light livestock fattening scheme (12%), poultry (5.8%) and 6 others (14.6%). This situation in 1386 was as follows: carpet weaving (37.5%), sewing and knitting (22.5%), light and heavy fattening (19%), poultry (11%) and other items (10%).

10- Total number loans given in 2011 from the project was 130(98%) and 32 from the micro credit funds. compared to the year 1386 it has increased by about 25 percent. Another good result in this region is reduction of poverty, improvement of the living level conditions of the people and overall income index improvement. Growth of Index income during the years besides other index has been remarkable, including literacy and hope, leading to improvement of human development index. Privation and poverty index will be assessed in terms of human life quality called Human Development Index (HDI). Therefore, the standard values provided by the UNDP are calculated from human development index action (Table 2),

(Life Expectancy index\* literacy index\* income index)<sup>1.3</sup>=HDI

Calculations indicate the fact that the region's HDI index reached .431 in 2007 and .504 in 2011. Searching the motivation of the people to participate in affairs is an important social and cultural component. An index cannot only be used to evaluate their belief in stable decision, but it also necessary to create confi-dence in programmers and administrators so that in their absence, the civil- participation organization will be protected and continue their jobs. In the research, community has been used for a long time to create the most important

**Table 3.** Why households become members of the village development groups.

Rank	Name of village	Membership of the village Development Groups			
		With my choice (determination)	Project suggestion	Following others	Sum
1	Hemat Abad	22	14	3	39
2	Perang	9	2	-	11
3	Hosseini Abad	3	4	-	7
4	Totak	4	1	1	6
5	Kondrood	25	10	3	38
6	Tajmir	12	17	5	34
7	Behamarz	6	3	4	13
8	Nazdasht	59	53	6	118
9	Chah Afzal	2	8	4	14
10	Chah Afshin	10	6	1	17
11	Chah1	9	10	3	22
12	Chah2	14	6	7	27
13	Hassan Kolangi	4	3	-	7
14	sum	179	137	37	353
15	percent	%51	%39	%10	%100

Source: Research achievements (2012).

participation organization; which is development group through cultural-instructional and promotional activities. It is important to motivate people to accept group membership. Based on the obtained results from 25 development groups, 51% people accepted membership by their own determination and based on their personal decision; that this is a good satisfying credit for development groups' stability. Also, 39% accepted based on project suggestion and 10% of other people accepted membership in village development groups (Table 3).

This project was successful. It creates the concept of participation, development of rural men and women, organizing village development groups, micro credit funds, with people getting involved in planting and natural resources. These are examples which show the concept of participation. Results of the cooperatives' performance during three years show that they protect and sustain rehabilitation of degraded rangeland, which are found by collecting of native seeds, creating and cultivating treasure trees and pasture. They also rely on one's training and micro credit fund provided by the government to help people achieve other income-generating resources that ultimately lead to few poor families, improvement in social and economic aspects and growth in human development index projects in the region.

Based on the obtained results from 25 village development groups, 51% of people accepted membership in groups by their own choice and personal decision. This is a good and satisfying credit for group activities treasury and rehabilitation activities. 90,000 plants of Tagh (plant of typical), root plant, Atriplex and Haloxylon pot plant

have been produced. Most of these seeds have been used for seeding and planting in rehabilitation area with people participating in them. Totally, during the last 5 years, women's participation in social activities has been increased in a way that 63% of women are interested in attending collaborative and group activities, 64% believed that usually group activities result is better and 51% said that they usually attend the lecture meetings which are held in the village.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

### REFERENCES

- Azkiya M, Ghaffari, G (2004). Rural development with emphasis on rural community of Iran. Nai Publishing, Tehran, Iran.
- Bradshaw TK (2000). Complex Community Development Projects: Collaboration, Comprehensive Programs and Community Coalitions in Complex Society. *Commun. Dev. J.* 35(2):133-145.
- DHV Consulting Engineers of the Netherlands (1995). guidelines on planning in village centers, *Jihad*, 3:41-43.
- Faiz P, Mohammad A (2005). Elected essay of cooperation, employment and development, Yazd University publication, Iran.
- Gangopadhyay D, Mukhopadhyay AK, Pushpa SC (2008). Rural Development: A strategy for poverty alleviation in India, India, Science and Technology, S&T for Rural India and Inclusive Growth, india. *site: http://www.nistads.res.in/indiasnt2008.t6rural.t6rur3.htm*
- George O (2003). Regional development in Place, District Capitals (small towns) and decentralized development in Ghana, a rhetorical perspective, Norway, tromso.
- Langeroudi H (2003). Rural planning, with an emphasis on Iran. *Jihad Mashhad of University Publications, Mashhad, Iran.*

- Ledesma AJ (1980). 350 Million Rural Poor--Where Do We Start? (A Review of Three U. N. Initiatives in Asia) Bangkok: ESCAP. <http://www.amazon.co.uk/350-million-rural-poor-initiatives/dp/B0007BEP12>
- Lehmann D (2001). *Development Theory: Four Critical Studies*. Routledge Library Editions: Development Series. London, England.
- Lowe P, Ray C, Ward N, Wood D, Woodward R (2005). *Participation in Rural Development*. Center for Rural Economy publication. Department of Agricultural Economics and Food Marketing. University of Newcastle.
- Moghanizade MH (2000). "NGOs to participation organize in civil society." Collection of articles the role of NGOs in the field of national and international activities in Tehran. Studies Office and Ministry of interior Political Research. 132-144.
- Nzengya D, Aggarwal R (2013). Water accessibility and women's participation along the rural-urban gradient: A study in Lake Victoria Region, Kenya, *J Geography and Regional Planning*, 6(7) : 263-273.
- Petr G (2001). *Leadership "Theory and Practice"*. International Educational and Professional publication, London, England.
- Rahnama MR, Heydari A (2013). North west border cities of Iran and regional development: A case of Kurdistan Province, *J Geogr. Regional Plann.* 6(5):184-192.
- Saidi M (2009). *Barriers to the growth and spread of non-governmental organizations in Iran*. Ph.D. Thesis, College of Human Sciences, University of Modares, Tehran, Iran.
- Schatzow S (2002). *The Influence of Publican Federal Environment, Decision Making in Canada in Public Participation in Planning*. John Wiley & Sons Press, Canada.
- Shadi TZ (2003). Participation op people in watershed, *Jihad Magazine*, Year 13:162-169.
- Shban Ali H (1999). Evolution of concepts and assessment of village developmentgoals and evaluation of participatory village development, *Jihad Magazine*, 19 Year, 226:22-28.
- Todaro M .(1981).*Economic development in the third world*, Longman publication., London, 624.