



Empowerment of Rural Women

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Summary

1. The report of the empowerment of women – rural women in particular – and the necessity for its implementation has been provided by the Farhikhteh Empowerment Institute which is an active non-governmental organization on women and youth in Iran.
2. The empowerment of women means for them to have the necessary ability to undertake a number of tasks either individually or in groups, so that they have further access to and control of society resources, and through this means the elimination of discrimination between men and women can be achieved and or to have more influential role in confronting gender discrimination.
3. In view of the existing inequalities between urban and rural women and in deprived regions of Iran regarding access to economic, cultural, scientific and political resources of the society, the subject of empowerment and improvement of a desirable environment for the discovery of rural women's talents, calls for the further attention of governmental, non-governmental and international organizations.
4. Empowerment of the women will result in equal power sharing in economic, social and cultural realm between two genders which beside the women, all members of the society will benefit from these new concepts of social system.
5. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (article 100) and the 4th National Development Programme Act (article 95 and 98), emphasizes on the participation of the people in local development programmes, empowerment programmes particularly for the low income people and also on the promotion of social investment.
6. This report displays the method of the implementation of the "Empowerment of 40 Women in 40 villages in Ardebil province". In addition it describes project's core objectives and its achievements. And also this report has proposed a number of recommendations to the government and the Human Rights Council for further attention to the rural women's empowerment and the promotion of the culture of common responsibility.

About Farhikhteh Empowerment Institute

7. *Farhikhteh Empowerment Institute (FEI)* is a nongovernmental, non-commercial and non-profit organization that is established under name "Jamiat-e Javanan-e Farhikhteh" in 1998. This NGO was licensed by the Ardebil Provincial Government in 1999 and recognized by National Youth Organization as an NGO that is involved actively on youth issues in 2000, by Environmental Protection Organization in environmental issues in 2001, by the Presidency's Centre for Women's Affairs in women's issues in 2002 and finally it is registered by Ardebil Registration Bureau (certificate No. 190) as "Farhikhteh Empowerment Institute" in 2005.

8. The main goal of this Institute is promotion of people's social responsibility. To achieve its ultimate goal, the following objectives needs to be considered: (i) To increase self-confidence of local women and youth at local level, (ii) To decrease cultural-social restrictions facing people's participation, (iii) To increase women, youth and civil society's knowledge and skills on identifying and resolving of problems related to local communities, (iv) Effort to engage the women and youth in economic activities for the purpose of poverty alleviation, (v) To promote environmental issues and people's participation in sustainable development.

9. The main fields of activities of "FEI" is consultation, programming and operating services on (i) empowerment and capacity building of people specially youth and women, (ii) promoting the organizational sources of civil society in local communities in rural and urban areas, (iii)

empowerment of policy making, community mobilizing, management, fund rising skills for designated target groups (iv) facilitating their interactions with other beneficiaries and stakeholders. All of these activities are implemented through (i) holding seminars, workshops, (ii) implementing projects, (iii) membership in decision making committees at local and national level, (iv) designing, testing and promotion of community based development models by use of local and global related knowledge, (v) support of CBOs & organizing groups forming in local communities and (vi) participate in national and international sessions, meetings relevant to above objectives.

10. This Institute has 37 members who are active in following specialized units: (i) women's issue, (ii) environmental issues, (iii) research, (iv) Micro finance services, (v) Local community development. The auditing of this Institute is done by the internal auditing system.

11. Programmes that currently are being implemented or has been completed in the past areas follows: (i) Cooperation with TAK-Int. (the executive agency for Development of Micro Finance) in execution of the joint project (RMFSP) between IFAD and Agricultural Bank of Iran, (ii) Cooperation with UNDP in drafting of the civil society empowerment program in Iran, (iii) Participation to represent this institute in the World Bank and IMF annual meetings in (Dubai 2003) and (Washington DC 2009), (iv) Attending in Youth Employment Summit (YES) in (India 2004) & (Baku 2008), (v) Participating in orientation program of the NABARD bank's practices aimed to development of SHGs (self-help groups) in India in 2005, (vi) Establishing the Civil Society Fund in Ardabil, (vii) Strengthening of the family structure and emphasis on gender based violence reduction in the Salman Abad neighbourhood in Ardebil, (viii) Community based Poverty alleviation National Program in over 30 towns with the participation of the Welfare Organization.

Authorities approach and legality

12. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, article 95 & 97 & 98 of the 4th Development Programme, has adopted attitude to guarantee positive approach towards the people's participation in local development programs and empowerment.

13. Article 95 of the 4th Development Programme that defines the preparation of the empowerment programmes, as follows:

- Planning of special programmes for employment, empowerment, mobilizing of social participation, training of job and lifestyle skills, particularly to low income people of the country
- Adoption of empowerment and local participation approach, based on fundamental development patterns and recognition of needs by communities for the provision of social services through the impetus system for small development projects in proportion with local capacities, by way of the application of the aforementioned cases in local levels and with the attraction of public participation.

14. Article 98 of the 4th Development Programme that defines the promotion of social investment and participation and supervision of the people on sustainable development as follow:

- Adoption of necessary executive mechanisms for increasing social investment that includes public trust, social accord, observation of the law, and individual and social conscience.
- Drafting and adoption of comprehensive empowerment and protection of women's rights (legal, social and economic aspects) programmes and their implementation in relevant authorities.
- Drawing of a comprehensive people, organizations, NGOs and Islamic town councils participation and supervision in national sustainable development and the facilitation of the possibility to expand civil society institutions in quality and quantity by application of encouragement policies.

Methodology

15. While stating the necessities for the empowerment of women, rural women in particular, this report details the implementation method of the "Empowerment of 40 Women in 40 Ardebil Province Villages" project, and the quantity objectives, results and achievements.

16. The indicators of the selection of the target villages, appointed rural women for this project and statistics tables have been presented in this report.

Necessities of Issue

17. Since we live in a period where the legitimacy and acceptance of governments is assessed with the level of participation of the people – women in particular- therefore it is natural that for exploring women's depressed potentials (as half of the human resource of society), we need to program an effective plan and investment to promote women's knowledge and skills, in order to make them to be active and influential individuals in local and national development arena.

18. The empowerment of women is associated with furthering preparation and partial control over resources and interests of women. The empowerment process means, increase of influence of the target group on specific issues, determining the outcome that accomplished through increased knowledge, skills and abilities of the target group. In other word empowerment is an abiding process which takes place with specific intent so enabling them to have further control over society's resources. Therefore it can be stated that empowerment occurs when the target group can determine their own fates and accomplish their objectives through access and control of resources. In fact this term means overcoming of fundamental inequalities. (Presidency's Women's Affairs Bureau and the Ministry of Health and Treatment and UNICEF – 1993 & 2005, quoted from Portable Site of Iranian Women and CBPR first congress book)

19. The empowerment of women who make up about half of the women's population of the country, in particular rural women who in comparison to urban women they have lesser access to economic, scientific, cultural resources, is required the further attention of governmental and nongovernmental and international organizations. With the raising of women's awareness, knowledge and skills, furthering participation and presence in various social arenas and also confrontation with restrictions on women's activities in society that is more visible in rural areas, that improved positively social justice and human rights.

Introduction of the project: "Empowerment of 40 Women in 40 Villages"

20. This project was implemented in 2005 with the partnership of the Presidency's Women's Affairs Centre, Farhikhteh Institute. And also the involving parties on this projects were the Tavan Local Development Institute, the Women and Family General Offices of Ardebil Provincial Government, the Governorships and Departments of Ardebil Province, local governmental institutions (education department, agricultural campaign, welfare department, health centre, aid committee, agricultural bank). The project lasted for two years until 2007 with a budget of approximately 120 million Rials.

21. One of the accomplishment of this project was the increase of 40 rural women's knowledge and skills with regards to the evaluation and analysis of the local community (first phase) and also needs assessment and prioritisation methods (second phase). (It must be said that the third phase of the project included the planning and the application of intervention debate which was abandoned due to failure in funding from the partners)

22. The project implementation stages included: the setting up of an executive team (made up of 5 members of the Institute and 3 lecturers and facilitators); selection of 40 target villages from 8 towns of Ardebil Province; interview with vulnerable women and the selection of one woman from each village as ; preparation and distribution of necessary educational materials; holding of educational workshops in capital cities of each province; follow up on the workshops outcomes and the review of the work process of 40 women in the designated villages , and the preparation of documented report from entire project more specifically from the empowerment of women in each village.

23. The project target villages were selected with the consideration of their being close to the provincial capital, having large households and populations, high general education of the village, and the existence of young educated women in these villages. And the selection of the villages indicators were studied in the form of comparison of 2 to 2 of these indicators in the effectiveness aspects towards the project objectives, and their final success, and thus they were weighed: number of households living in village (weight 5), village general literacy level (weight 4), distance of village from provincial capital (weight 3), village existing facilities (weight 2), village economic situation (weight 1).

24. While consulting with experts from the Agricultural Campaign offices, the Health Centre, Agricultural Bank, Imam Aid Committee, Lieutenant Governor's Office, Education and Training Department, a list of at least 10 villages which conformed to the project criteria, and based on the most important indicator (number of households was prepared, and following that the information related to each indicator for these 10 villages based on the 2003 the statistics of the Agricultural Campaign offices, the Health Centre, Agricultural Bank, Imam Aid Committee of each provincial town were extracted, and the following scores from 1 to 10 were given:

- Regarding the population of the village, the more the difference of the number of the households is less than 150 households, the higher the score.
- With regards to general literacy, at first the two factors of the illiteracy percentage and also the percentage of individuals with high school and university education in the villages were determined, and then the average basis of scoring of this index is located in each village. Thus villages that have low literacy percentages and have a high percentage of individuals with high school and university education, have had a higher score.
- With regards to the distance from town, the closer the village is to the town the higher its score has been.
- With regards to the village facilities, in the event of the existence of sub-factors that included asphalted roads, health centre, the number of schools, agricultural campaign home, waterpiping, electricity, telephone network, gas pipeline, women's promotion counsellor, girls high school, one point was allocated for that village, and thereafter the more points the village had, the higher the scoring.
- With regards to the economic conditions of the village, at first the percentage of sub-factors related to the size of the farmlands, the number of farming equipment, the number of farm animals and households under the cover of the Imam Khomeini Aid were all determined, and then each sub-factor was given a point, and the average of these points resulted in final scoring of the village.

25. Based on the score and weight giving which were given to the determining indicators from the collected data, the final score of 10 villages were extracted from the result of the points of each indicator, and thus were prioritised. As a result 40 villages that had received the highest points were selected as target villages.

26. The rural women liaisons were interviewed and selected by the operations team based on the following indicators: having the necessary interest and incentive to develop their own villages, higher education and young, being confirmed by the village council, local trustworthy person, ability to communicate with the people of the village and relevant governmental departments. The indicators considered for the selection of the women from target villages were studied and given weight by way of comparison of 2 by 2 of these indicators in the effectiveness aspects for the project objectives and final success. The key individual confidence and belief weight of the village (5), literacy levels (4), communication skills (3), individual interest (2), age (1).

27. Two education workshops on "evaluation and analysis of the society" and "needs assessment and prioritisation" for the rural women liaisons were held in the provincial capital of Ardebil Province, the education materials of which were: drawing of map of local resources; preparation of society's profile; drawing of social map; changes to the locality over time; daily activities timetable; seasonal calendar; household income and spending table; interaction of local institutions and needs assessment and prioritisation methods.

28. In the study conducted by the operations team that was conducted one month after the evaluation and analysis workshop, the list of the things that the village liaison women had done included: allocation of local resources; drawing of local map; drawing of social map; the positive and negative developments of the village; local institutions and their interaction with each other table; income and spending table; allocation of daily activities times for men and women in summer and winter; seasonal calendar; profiling.

29. The continuation of the project and further cooperation of the facilitators with women in the villages, further communication of women with local institutions in the application of the results of the trainings, further provincial governorship's support for empowered women in dealing with their villages problems and issues, were the most important views and recommendations of the target group.

30. One of the most important obstacles and problems in the implementation of the project was the big time gap between the first and second phase of the project, due to not being able to provide the necessary funds, and the marriage of a number of the individuals from the target group in their villages, the travelling distance between the addressees and the project facilitator and lack of ongoing communication for the provision of guidance.

Conclusions and achievements

31. Education and empowerment of 32 rural women on the evaluation and analysis of society, education and empowerment of 24 rural women on needs assessment and prioritisation, design and production of two education modules on local development subjects, the creation of local development primary cells in 6 villages of project implementation location by empowered women and with the cooperation of a number of the dwellers of the same villages, success of 3 liaison women in the village council elections, promotion of the status of the women in the family and also the village society and increase of society's individuals trust towards empowerment and abilities of women in dealing with village issues, were all the important achievements of the implementation of the Empowerment of 40 Women in 40 Villages of Ardebil Province.

Challenges

32. The length of time in the decision making process and the provision of necessary funds for the implementation of the project and non-continuation of the activities conducted for the empowerment of rural women, which caused the disheartenment and distrust of the

target group, and also the undermining of all the efforts, were some of the main challenges in the way of the activists in the field.

33. Dominant incorrect traditional beliefs towards women's abilities and non-existence of a suitable basis for the utilisation of the capacities of the empowered women, in many instances prevented women's presence in the local development activities arena.

Recommendations and suggestions to the government

34. Parallel to Iranian government slogan asserting social justice, it is necessary to improve the condition of deprived rural women and underdeveloped regions. And it should be included in national policies and development plans. So inclusion of the empowered rural women to such programs will influence the establishment of appropriate environment for the use of their knowledge and capacities in local development (which have been emphasized in Islamic Republic of Iran's legal system).

35. Attention to the empowerment debate, the utilisation of the capacities of local communities, the accumulation of comprehensive empowerment documents and the implementation of community based projects within municipalities, ministry of Housing, Welfare Organization and other bodies can be a positive approach. By the (i) Elimination of excessive administrative bureaucracy, expatiating the implementation process and governmental institutions to interact more closely with each other and with NGOs and (ii). Designing of a single model for local empowerment and development for prevention of waste of resources, for creation of solidarity in the procedure and for prevention of perplexities of the target groups. All of these will guarantee benefiting of the society through the implementation of these types of projects.

Recommendations and suggestions to the Human Rights Council

36. In view of the existing inequalities for rural women's access to economic, scientific, cultural resources and communications facilities, this sector needs further attention and support. Therefore it is recommended to the Council to provide further technical and scientific assistance for the empowerment of rural women and the promotion of culture of common responsibility in Iran which will ultimately result in the advancement of the human rights situation and the elimination of gender discrimination. Some practical programs such as support of holding training workshops, community facilitators in rural areas and possibility for study of some experiences in other countries.

Conclusion

37. The preparation of a suitable basis for the empowerment of rural women for the inclusion of the talents of this vast sector of society in a way that they can take control of the management of local development in their own villages is a sign for all governmental, nongovernmental and human rights activist. Because with the empowerment of women, the elimination of gender discrimination and the creation of a balance of power between men and women, will not only be beneficial to women, but society as a whole shall benefit politically, economically and culturally.