

Research Paper

The Social Construction of Drought among Farmers: A Case Study of the Central and Western Parts of Isfahan Province

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ABSTRACT

In this research, a socio-economic analysis of drought was conducted from the perspective of farmers in *Isfahan* Province. The research was based on an interpretive-constructive approach, and its method was qualitative. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The sample size was 35 farmers in the central and western parts of *Isfahan* Province who were selected based on the purposeful sampling of the maximum diversity. The basis for the completion of the interviews was theoretical saturation. To analyze the data obtained from the interviews, a systematic field theory analysis was done. The results of the study indicated that, from the farmers' point of view, drought is a multifactor phenomenon induced by multiple causes. In general, the farmers enumerated four main factors as the causes of drought, including ineffective water management, self-centered agriculture, climate change, and fatalistic causes.

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Drought is a multidimensional phenomenon, and various factors may play a role in its occurrence. At the same time, it can affect various structures and factors. In this respect, the role of people, especially farmers, is very important. They are the most

important potential assets for fighting droughts. On this basis, the study of how people and, in particular, farmers understand drought is of fundamental importance to research on the phenomenon. In the present research, a socio-economic analysis is conducted of the drought phenomenon from the perspective of farmers in *Isfahan* Province based on an interpretive-constructive approach. In environmental sociology, social constructivists believe that environmental issues are largely developed within society and in a socially constructed manner. Given that

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these constructivists paradigmatically belong to interpretive-constructive paradigms, they emphasize creative actors. In this sense, they believe that environmental issues are constructed by the society and understood by actors. The main question that the present study seeks to answer is how farmers understand and interpret a drought and what makes them think about its occurrence as they do.

2. Methodology

The method of the present research is qualitative. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The sample size was 35 farmers in the central and western parts of *Isfahan* Province who were selected through the purposeful sampling of the maximum diversity. Attempts were made to select farmers who had experienced water shortage, water stress, or drought. Also, theoretical sampling was used. In fact, the categories that were initially coded in the interviews were used as the base, and, to fill the gaps in these categories, some samples were subsequently chosen. In this process, some initial categories were removed and new categories were discovered. The basis for the completion of the interviews was theoretical saturation. To analyze the data obtained from the interviews, a systematic field theory analysis was conducted. Coding the interviews was done in three stages including open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The coding unit was rows. The first step, i.e. open coding, involved crushing, comparing, naming, conceptualizing and categorizing the data. In the axial coding step, the goal was to establish a relationship between the categories produced in the open coding step. In the case of selective coding, the axial category was systematically connected to the other categories, the relationships were clarified in a communicative framework, and the categories that needed further improvement were modified.

In the present study, the evaluation was based on fitness criteria, and attempts were made to derive the concepts from the data rather than imposing them on the data. In this respect, the most important thing was to enter the field with an open mind together with the theoretical sensitivity that the existing literature would not be imposed on the data and the coding process. Furthermore, based on the communication criterion, sufficient evidence (including numerous citations) was provided for the detected categories. Using the "Triangulation" technique, the broadening and deepening of the data was made possible by the continuous mental involvement of the researchers with the data. In the same vein, after the data were coded by the researchers, two other persons were asked to recode some of the interviews to evaluate the validity of the coding and

the resulting categories. The results indicated that, in most cases, the findings were almost identical.

3. Results

The results of the study indicated that, from farmers' point of view, drought is a multifactor phenomenon with multiple causes. In general, the participating farmers enumerated four main factors as the causes of drought, including ineffective water management, self-centered agriculture, climate change, and fatalistic causes. In their opinion, the interaction of these factors would lead to the phenomenon of drought. In this respect, ineffective management of water and the agricultural sector was reported as the most important cause.

4. Discussion

Lack of balanced farming patterns in the country, inconsistency of farming with market demands, inappropriate crop farming with regard to the region's climate, and wrong policymaking particularly in pricing agricultural crops are the most important cases of inefficient management in the agricultural sector which have led to an increase in water consumption in agriculture and, thus, the doubtful state of production efficiency in this sector. Unsustainable management of water resources, granting unauthorized permits to drill wells, making laws that absolve unauthorized wells, inconsistency of water development projects with the climate of the region, corrupt water projects, populist water management, inefficient monitoring, and agricultural and industrial development beyond the ecological potential of the region are of the most important examples of inefficient water management.

5. Conclusion

Drought and the way it is encountered is a social and indigenous issue. In the field of water management, agriculturally related policies should be reviewed and reformed with a multidimensional and global perspective. According to the findings of this study, farmers' opinions about the problem can be very helpful. Indeed, the farming community can participate democratically in solving the water crisis.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest