

## Research Paper

# The Impact of Social Capital on the Participation of Villagers in Rural Development Programs with the Mediating Role of the Perceived Effects of Plans and Projects

\*Naser Shafie Sabet<sup>1</sup>, Sogand Khaksar<sup>2</sup>

1. Assistant professor, Department of Geography and Rural Planning, Earth Science Faculty, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.
2. MA, Department of Geography and Rural Planning, Earth Science Faculty, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.



**Citation:** Shafie Sabet, N., & Khaksar, S. (2019). [The Impact of Social Capital on the Participation of Villagers in Rural Development Programs with the Mediating Role of the Perceived Effects of Plans and Projects (Persian)]. *Journal of Rural Research*, 10(2), 258-275, <http://dx.doi.org/10.22059/jrur.2019.276097.1331>

**doi:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.22059/jrur.2019.276097.1331>

Received: 15 Feb. 2019  
Accepted: 12 June 2019

## ABSTRACT

Paying attention to social capital in the management of environmental resources by people and participation in various development programs are the important elements of rural management and development. These elements can solve socioeconomic problems and optimally distribute services and facilities to increase welfare and comfort. However, the importance of social capital and participation of villagers is not properly recognized. In this regard, the role of the people and their participation in accelerating development processes is not taken into consideration. This research aims at the relationship between the improvement of the social capital of villagers and their participation in sustainable rural development on one hand and the environmental, physical, economic and cultural mediating roles of villagers perceived through the implementation of programs and plans in Tehran Province. The study is of a descriptive-survey type conducted with a questionnaire as the data collection tool. The research sample consisted of 400 households in 33 villages. The results indicated the positive effect of social capital on villagers' participation in rural development programs. In other words, through the improvement of social awareness, social trust and social networks in connection to the implementation of community-based programs and projects by local managers, it is possible to enhance the participation of villagers in projects, social activities, and investment in rural areas. This, in turn, leads to improved sustainable development of villages.

### Key words:

Rural development plans, Social capital, Trust, participation, Sustainable development

Copyright © 2019, Journal of Rural Research. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-noncommercial 4.0 International License which permits copy and redistribute the material just in noncommercial usages, provided the original work is properly cited.

## Extended Abstract

### 1. Introduction

S

o far, many definitions have been proposed for social capital. What is usually emphasized in most of them is the ability of community members to cooperate

with each other so as to achieve productivity. The concept of social capital has been taken into consideration by policymakers, social policy officials and local governments in the process of globalization and the weakening of the role of national governments as an effective solution at the level of local communities to cope with development problems (Warner, 1999). In a community located in a certain geographical region, social capital can be promoted

### \* Corresponding Author:

Naser Shafiei Sabet, PhD

Address: Tehran Province, Tehran, Velenjak, District 1, Daneshjou Boulevard, Shahid Beheshti University, Faculty of Earth Sciences, Human Geography Departments.

Tel: +98 (912) 6722482

E-mail: n\_shafiei@sbu.ac.ir

through the promotion of social awareness, social solidarity, social networks, and social trust. This ultimately leads to the formation of social groups and their collective partnership. These come through providing norms that enable social organizations to help one another to achieve their goals (Coleman, 1998; Putnam and Gass, 2002). Therefore, the main issue in this research is to respond the question ‘what is the effect of social capital on the participation of villagers in rural socio-economic activities for sustainable rural development?’.

## 2. Methodology

The present research is an applied study in terms of purpose, a descriptive survey in terms of data collection method and quantitative in terms of nature. Indeed, a descriptive-analytic method was used to accurately deal with the research question and hypothesis, to provide a meaningful framework on the status of local governments in promoting the indices of rural social capital, and to evaluate the perceived ecological, physical, social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts on the participation in sustainable development programs. Also, a field survey method was used to collect field data on the significant indices in the promotion of social capital indicators and participation in plans and projects for sustainable rural development. The statistical population of the study consisted of the villages around Tehran metropolis with semi-formal institutions (e.g. village councils) and independent local managers.

## 3. Results

In order to investigate the effect of social capital on the perceived ecological, environmental, socio-cultural, economic and physical conditions in rural plans and projects, multivariate linear regression was done in a step-by-step approach. Only after the first variable, namely social awareness, was considered, the model could predict the order of 33.7, 22.8, 37.1 and 40.9 percent of change in the plans and projects of the sustainable rural development process. To investigate the effect of social capital on sustainable rural development in the context of the perceived dimensions of the villagers, multivariate linear regression was performed in a step-by-step manner. The results showed that, after the social awareness variable was introduced in the model, it alone could account for 26.1% of the variations of sustainable rural development. The multivariate linear regression analysis which was done to explain the effects of the perceived dimensions of plans and projects for participation in sustainable rural development programs showed that, the perceived eco-

logical environment variable alone could predict 26.66% of rural participation changes in the process of sustainable rural development.

## 4. Discussion

This study was done to investigate the effect of promoting social capital on the participation of villagers in the plans and projects of sustainable development in some rural areas of Tehran Province. The study also evaluated the mediating roles of ecological, environmental, socio-cultural, economic and physical variables. In this regard, six hypotheses were tested. In the first four hypotheses, the relationship between the improvement of social capital on one hand and how effective those mentioned variables would be in rural plans and projects was examined. The results showed that there is a positive and direct relationship between social capital and ecological, environmental, socio-cultural, economic and physical parameters involved in rural development programs. In the fifth hypothesis, social capital affected by the local government function proved to have a significant positive role in sustainable rural development. As to test the sixth hypothesis, the role of improving social capital and involving villagers in rural development plans was examined in connection with the mediating roles of ecological, environmental, socio-cultural, economic and physical parameters. The results confirmed the presence of relationships in this regard. Based on these results, all the hypotheses of the research were approved.

## 5. Conclusion

This research is devoted to the concept of social capital as a tool for sustainable rural development. If social capital is considered as an infrastructure for sustainable rural development, the negative impacts of implementing development plans and projects can be reduced. Therefore, appropriate plans to increase social capital can contribute to the process of sustainable rural development. According to the literature and the results of this research, social capital is necessary for sustainable rural development. It is also found that sustainable development serves as a factor contributing to the creation of social capital. This two-way relationship makes it important enough to pay attention to the collaboration of management and the local community in sustainable rural development processes.

## Acknowledgments

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest