

Individual Factors Affecting Farmers' Motivation to Participate in Date Growers' Organizations in Khuzestan

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Abstract: Khuzestan Province has a great share in Iran's date production in which many rural households are directly dependent to dates production. However, small holding system has led to a lot of challenges faced by small scale farmers whereas much potential of date production and marketing lost every year. Despite of strong felt need to social capital development and government's recent activities in order to help farmers to organize themselves, there is not so much interest in this connection generally. So, the purpose of this study was to provide a framework for understanding the individual factors affecting farmers' motivation to participate in date growers' organizations. The population of the research consisted of 584 members of five present date growers' organizations. By the use of Cochran Formula, 120 farmers were randomly selected as research sample. Data were gathered through a researcher-made questionnaire and analyzed by the use of SPSS software. The results of multiple regression analysis indicated that three independent variables namely "degree of formal education", "attendance in extension-education courses" and "years of date growing", predicted 62% of variation of farmers' total motivation to participate in date growers' organizations.

Key words: Farmers' Organization (FOs), participation, rural development, multiple regression, date growing

INTRODUCTION

Social living is one of the innate characteristics of human being. Integrating their abilities, people join each other in order to meet their common needs. At present, the process of vicissitudes in human's life increases the extent of interdependencies more and more so that, the necessity of some kinds of organized affiliation is becoming evident more than ever (Shahbazi, 1996). However, in parallel to advancement in various arenas in technology and creation of new methods for individual production, many of contemporary societies have not been able to find suitable alternatives to preserve human cooperation in modern organizational forms so that group working has become one of the greatest challenges faced by modern human.

In this thoroughly changing world, agricultural sector as a giant and complex organization has been forced to undergo certain symmetrical adjustments in all its subdivisions in order to preserve its survival which social capital development can be noted as the most important one (Qamar, 2002; Malekmohammadi, 2008). Because nowadays, small scale farmers who form the majority of beneficiaries of agricultural sector, have lost a great deal as the result of legal structures weakness to demand their lost rights from other sections of the society. Furthermore, many present governments have realized that due to reasons such as budget deficits, limited resources and changes in the prevailing philosophy of the appropriate extent of public enterprises, they are not able to provide

all agricultural services as before (Rivera and Cary, 1997; Ajieh *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, current changes such as governments withholding to direct support of farmers, decentralization, privatization and market liberalization, has severely changed the production condition for the rural poor and has worsened the already difficult situation for them (World Bank, 2008). In such a turbulent situation, many rural development scholars believe that food shortages and poor livelihoods in most poor rural communities, is risen from the lack of appropriate farmer groups and associations (Rose, 1996). Consequently new agricultural extension approaches concentrated to decentralization and attract more and more participation of FOs in a pluralistic manner (Anderson, 2007). In the historical context, global experiences related to rural development strategies especially in industrial countries show the significant roles of organized farmers' groups in their success. Where, many government agencies provided national policies for rural development and designed a policy framework to help people to organize so that the delivery of services could be channeled through the various types of farmers' groups. Also, well-meaning policies provided blueprint structures for FOs in the form of cooperatives in order to provide various input, marketing, and educational services to the farmers (Shingi and Chamala, 1997). However in non-industrial countries, farmer's associations have not been formed or did not have the necessary impact. Thus, in these countries, helping to set up effective FOs will be at least important

as much as a new technology about production (Van Den Ban and Hawkins, 1988). In Iran, despite of significant background in cooperative groups to overcome natural forces and regulate production relations among beneficiaries in agriculture area, effective FOs have not formed as expected and this void has been greatly felt regarding small scale farmers in deprived areas including the date palm areas in Khuzestan (Alimirzaei, 2010).

World's export of dates is more than 400,000 tons annually which is worth approximately 300 million dollars of which Iran has a 30% share (Iranian Ministry of Commerce, 2009). Dates exports include 30% of total exports of dried fruit and make 10% of non-oily exports in the country of which Khuzestan's share is approximately 30% annually. From total date production in this province, over 85% is achieved from three counties namely Abadan, Shadegan and Khorramshahr (Iranian Ministry of Agriculture, 2006). Despite of great achievements such as high production and rich and varied genetic resources, the date industry in Khuzestan has different problems. The prevailing pattern of land ownership has led to miss many opportunities and capacities of the production annually. In addition, many other problems faced by date growers such as the lack of easy access or high cost of inputs, the lack of appropriate infrastructures, low bargaining power, local broking, prices vacillation and insurance problems of the products (Alimirzaei, 2010). Furthermore, produced dates of the region faced tough challenges in the world market arena. So much so that Iran's dates which have the highest weight and third total value of date export in the world, occupy the ninth place for price mark and Khuzestan's dates are no exception in this regard (Shajari, 2008). In fact, date growers in Khuzestan faced different problems which cannot be solved on an individual manner and need a collectivized approach and sharing of small capabilities which can only be achieved when and if farmers joint together and form their associations such as cooperatives and other FOs. Capable farmers' organizations are the useful instruments for improving livelihood, the key element in increasing farm income and the main component of employment creation in the rural areas which have the best potential for developing participatory management. Also, they can be very effective in meeting the genuine needs of the rural communities (Swanson, 2008). FOs can help agricultural producers to increase their abilities to reaction with competitive challenges and commercial opportunities of the market. Also, FOs help farmers to develop production, gathering, packaging, transporting and other farm-related processes so that they can earn higher benefits. In addition, FOs can play a vital role to support farmers and represent their interests in decision-making processes and can undertake main part of tasks and responsibilities of the agricultural extension system in a pluralistic service delivery framework (Rondot and Collion, 2001).

Considering the importance of FOs and their vital role in the successful rural development experiences all over the world, there has been recently positive moves to encourage and persuade farmers to organize themselves in FOs in Iran that have led to the establishments of some formal FOs (especially cooperatives) throughout the country include the date growers' organizations in Khuzestan Province. However, local date grower's community has not been very interested to join this movement so that at present, the number of date grower's organizations is fewer than half dozen. So, the main concern of this descriptive-survey study was to investigate the individual factors affect on farmers' motivations to participate in date growers' organizations. The economic importance of dates for the country, the important role of date growing in providing the livelihood for many rural families in the region, many problems faced by date growers and their inability to overcome these problems trough an individual way coupled with the lack of clear research background regarding effective factors on farmers' motivation to taking part in date growers' organization in the region and even at the country level, are the reasons which make the necessity of doing this research unavoidable.

Taherkhani and Arani (2005) introduced local leadership and successful background in relation to local organized associations as two important factors which affect individuals' motivation to participate in rural organizations. Amini and Khayati (2006) concluded that providing appropriate education and informing beneficiaries are key elements to improve their participation. Shahroodi and Chizari (2006) found that some individual variables such as level of education, cultivated area, income, and extension contacts have a positive relationship with farmers' attitude to participate in cooperatives. According Narayan (1995) good experiences, information and needful skills have a critical role in attract farmers to participate in agricultural cooperatives. The study of Koppen *et al.* (2002) in India showed that the size of farmer's field as an accommodator variable has a positive effect on farmer's motivation to participate. Finally, according to Qiao *et al.* (2008), membership in local executive institutes, access to relevant knowledge and information, the level of literacy and agricultural share in household's income are important variables that affect farmer's motivation to participate in their local associations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted during the summer 2009 in Khuzestan Province at the southwest of Iran. The population of this study consisted of 584 members of five date growers' organizations located in the three main counties in terms of date production in Khuzestan namely Abadan, Shadegan and Khoramshahr. By using Cochran

Table 1: priority of motive variables

Variable	Mean	Priority
Eliminating the middle men in the regional market through increase bargaining power	4.48	1
Facilitating access to agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, insecticides and so on	4.43	2
Increasing date production	4.29	3
Easier access to governmental grants (such as special loans for cooperatives)	4.16	4
Assistance to and coordinate with other date growers to overcome joint hardships	4.14	5
Better and stronger reflection of real needs and priorities to the relevant authorities	4.11	6
Improving the process of date export	4.09	7
Easier and cheaper access to agricultural machinery and the relevant services	4.05	8
Reinforcement and development of transportation of dates in the region	3.99	9
Assistance to fight the prevalent palm groves, diseases and pests	3.98	10
Assistance to local community development and prosperity	3.81	11
Facilitating and improving the storage process of date production	3.76	12
Increasing the employment security in the region	3.72	13
Prevention or decrease of date production wastage in the region	3.71	14
Facilitating communication with other date growers on local, regional, or national level	3.57	15
Increasing social security of the date growers	3.56	16
Establishment of date packaging and processing workshops and value added production	3.53	17
Access to official recognition in local relations	3.40	18
Increasing the quality of dates production	3.35	19
Facilitating and improving the process of harvesting and collecting of dates	3.27	20
Better access to knowledge, information and extension services	3.06	21

formula and applying stratified random sampling, 120 individuals were selected as research sample. Data were gathered through a researcher-made questionnaire. Content validity and reliability of research instrument were confirmed by relevant experts and calculated Cronbach alpha coefficient respectively ($\alpha = 0.78$). On the basis of literature and findings from local interviews, 21 statements were developed to measure degree of farmers' motivation to joint date growers' organizations in general (Table 1). The respondents were asked to report their point of view by choosing a number from a 5-point Likert scale. Next, the total mean of 21 statements calculated as a dependent variable (farmers' total motivation). Also, multiple regression analysis (stepwise method) was used to investigate the relationships between the dependent variable and independent variables included age, the number of date palm (cultivated area), degree of formal education, level of mass media utilization, background of participation in local associations, level of attendance in extension- education courses related local associations, years of date growing, membership in the local executive institutes and having second job (similar to motive factors, independent variables were developed on the basis of literature and findings from local interviews). In order to investigate the share of each independent variable in predicting farmers' total motivation to participate in date growers' organizations, at first, correlation analysis was done. Then, those independent variables which were meaningfully correlated with the dependent variable, were entered into the stepwise multiple regression analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the descriptive results, the average age of the sample was 52 years. Regarding the level of

education, 38.8% of this group were illiterate and only 3.9% had high school diploma or higher than. Also, the averages of date growing background and membership period in date growers' organization were 35.4 and 4.11 years, respectively. The mean of the number of farmers' date palm was 371 and the average production of dates for these participants was 3292 Kg annually. About 6.4% of these individuals had never taken part in extension-education courses about the importance and necessity of local organization. Against that, the other 93.6% of sample attended at least in one of these courses.

Priority of motive variables: According to the calculated means, the motive variables that persuaded farmers to participate in the date growers' organizations were prioritized (Table 1). As shown in the table, the most strong motive variables were directly related to economic ends. In the other words, the main incentives of farmers to partake in the date growers' organizations were earning more revenues and increasing their income. As oppose to that, the mean of variable "better access to knowledge, information and extension education services" was significantly lower than all other variables and located at the bottom of the priority list.

The results of correlation analysis (Table 2) showed that there was significantly a positive relationship between farmers' total motivation and the level of their formal education at the 0.01 level. Similarly, the relationship between level of farmers' attendance in extension- education courses about local associations and dependent variable was positive and meaningful. At opposite, age, years of date growing, and having second job, had significant negative relationships with dependent variable at the 0.01 level. Also, there was significantly a negative relationship between farmers' total motivation and their background of participation in local associations

Table 2: significant correlations between date growers' motivation and independent variables

Independent variable	r	Sig.
Age	- 0.54**	0.00
Level of formal education	0.71**	0.00
Background of participation in local associations	- 0.26*	0.03
Level of attendance in extension-education courses	0.69**	0.00
Years of date growing	- 0.69**	0.00
Having second job	- 0.46**	0.00

Table 3: multiple regression analysis

Model	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Beta	t	Sig
Constant	-	-	-	90.08	0.00
Level of formal education	0.53	0.53	0.41	5.08	0.00
Level of attendance in extension education courses	0.61	0.6	0.35	4.81	0.00
Years of date growing	0.62	0.61	-0.16	-2.40	0.00
F=68.691	Sig = 0.00				

at the 0.05 level. However, the relationships between farmers' motivation and other independent variables were not significant statistically.

In according to the results of stepwise multiple regression analysis which advanced up to three phases (Table 3), three independent variables included level of formal education, level of attendance in extension-education courses about local associations, and years of date growing, were entered into the equation respectively which totally, predicted 62% of the variation of farmers' motivation to participate in date growers' organizations. Other information relating to the multiple regression analysis and its equation model is shown below:

$$Y = 3.526 + 0.104 x_1 + 0.094 x_2 - 0.003 x_3$$

Y : Farmers' motivation to participate in date growers organizations

X₁ : Level of formal education

X₂ : Level of attendance in extension education courses about local associations

X₃ : Years of date growing

The average of the members' age revealed that in general, young farmers did not have a significant participation in this set up. At the same time, the existence of the negative relationship between the dependent variable and individuals' age denoted that young members had a stronger motivation to participate in date growers' organizations. Therefore, there were probably some limitations for new membership in these FOs. On the other hand, the negative relationship between date growers' motivation and their participation background in local associations revealed that the past experiences were probably unable to meet the needs and expectations of the date growers. While the education level had the biggest share in expressing the variation of dependent variable, following up the high average of age, about one third of the FOs' members were illiterate. In the other words, it seems that individuals with higher level of education had a better understanding about potentials and capacities of

collective actions and therefore, they had stronger motivation to participate in date growers' organizations. Furthermore, the results of multiple regression analysis indicated that extension-education courses through improving farmers' knowledge and information regarding the importance of social capital creation, had a key role in strengthen date growers' motivation to participate in mentioned local organizations.

CONCLUSION

Farmers' organizations as membership associations which created by given groups of farmers are intermediary structures between local communities and their environment which act to regulate the relations between farmers and external actors and provide various services to their members such as information, facilitating access to inputs and market, credit, support for storage, processing and marketing services and so on. They can be valuable instrument to push the development process forward as many rural experts believe that FOs are the only solution for the present rural poor to pull themselves out of poverty. Therefore nowadays even more than ever, the powerful need for active participation of grassroots' organizations in agricultural sector is tangible. In this regards, the main purpose of this descriptive-survey study was to investigate the individual factors affect on farmers' motivations to participate in date growers' organizations in Khuzestan Province. Results showed that three independent variables namely level of formal education, level of attendance in extension- education courses, and years of date growing predicted 62% of the variation of farmers' total motivation to participate in date growers' organizations. As it can be seen, successful FOs are the result of effective training in all its guises. So, according to the findings, it is suggested that for the purpose of reinforcing the social capital such as FOs in rural areas, the government attempt more and more to improve the formal education services in these regions. Also, by including the relevant content connected to the importance roles of local associations in the educational

curriculum of the learners, government should try to promote the knowledge of the villagers in this respect. According to results, it seems that face to face communication as compare with mass media has a greater effect on farmers' motivation to participate. So, the non-formal education should be reinforced in both qualitative and quantitative aspects in order to illustrate the important role of FOs in promoting rural sustainable development process.

Since the main part of farmers' motivation was related to achieve economical interests, it is suggested that in first, the government provide the appropriate incentives and necessary support services to meet these tangible needs. Undoubtedly in such situation, non-member farmers will encourage to participate or join together and form new date growers' organizations.

The findings of this study provide a better understanding about individual factors affecting farmers' motivation to participate in local organizations. So, the results of the research can be useful for policy makers and other people who are engaged in rural development processes, in Khuzestan specially.

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