

# The role of people's participation in satisfying social, technical and institutional needs of local communities to accomplish rural development (A case of Hesar Kouchak village)

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**ABSTRACT:** One of the crucial factors determining the socioeconomic growth and development of a society, especially the rural communities, is the active role of people in village-related activities so that development would not be possible without people's participation. So, most countries are planning public policies, strategies and plans with an emphasis on non-governmental organizations. In this sense, the present study explores the role of people's participation in satisfying the social, technical, and institutional needs of the local communities in the village of Hesar Kouchak in Varamin, Iran. It was a case study with qualitative approach. The data collection tools included interviews, observation of people's activities, behaviors and actions, and the review of documents, and the statistical population was composed of the rural women and men who were sampled purposively. The results revealed that credits were the main requirement of agriculture sector, such institutions as consumers' cooperative had the highest importance among institutional needs from women's perspective, and Agribank and Jihad-e Agriculture Service Center were the top priorities of village-related organizations implying the connection of the village with execution and bank sectors. People's main problems in animal husbandry were the lack of loans and facilities and the lack of access to water supply system. It was revealed that villagers rely on the elderly as the information source, reflecting the unavailability of modern information technologies in the third millennium.

**Keywords:** participation, social needs, technical needs, institutional needs, local communities, rural development

## INTRODUCTION

Presently, no one can deny the effective role of people and their participation in the movement toward sustainable rural development. Obviously, the endeavor to accomplish sustainable, dynamic development belonging to present and future generations can be ensured if people themselves are satisfied with their enjoyment of development benefits, yet in a fair manner. Participation institutionalization among farmers is a key concept to rural development (Falsafi, 2011) and has gained extreme importance, though it is rooted in Aristotle. When he was analyzing how to administer urban areas in Greece, Aristotle learnt that the participation in the management of urban affairs and development is necessary for the culmination of human character (Misra, 1990; Reddy, 1987).

In other words, a very common concept in development is *participation* that has gained even more significance with the redistribution of political and economic power along the development. In this respect, participation has three main functions: social participation that ensures the sense of nobility among people in the first place; then, participation is regarded as an invaluable principle to mobilize and organize people's developmental activities; and the last is the participation as a network through which local groups and communities can find their way to macro decision-making circles (Ghorbani et al., 2017). Social participation in decision-makings and planning not only helps exploit the services but it also allows the maintenance of the services and facilitates the resolution of conflicts and society division (Abedi Sarvestani, 2012). This is the reason why it is claimed that sustainable rural development would be rendered impossible unless approaches based on people's participation at all society levels are adopted (Oakley & Marsden, 2002).

Despite the fact that *participation* and its practices have a long history in human societies, it was considered in the field of rural development much later. The application of the participation in rural development schemes can be traced back to the 1970s or maybe the 1980s (Saydaie & Dehghani, 2010). Some authors argue that participation means engagement (Mishra, 1992; Reddy, 1987). Others suggest that participation means people's involvement or engagement in decision-making, program fulfillment, sharing of development benefits and/or attempt for the appraisal of the programs voluntarily and desirably (Cohen, 1980). Also, rural people's participation is regarded as their direct involvement in political structure, which is perceived to be effective on nation's administration and their taking charge of their own livelihood. At the same time, the development of people's participation in service supply is essential to human development. It can be a tool for the people's character development and can be considered a basic human right since participation is a collective activity in which the involved people deliberately and freely strive to accomplish a common goal (Golabi et al., 2014). In other words, participation is to organize people in groups and organizations to enable them use the opportunities, to participate in collective activities for development, and to use its development benefits (Oakley, 1991). However, it should be noted that although participation is a social issue, its goal is to meet participants' personal interests, which is considered in terms of a tangible social objective and collective action (Nanbakhshi, 2003). Overall, participation has turned into a part of common literature on public and non-public development organizations (Pretty, 1995). There is no question that participation is the right of all communities of the society because the growth and development of all nations depend upon their deliberative, free, and volunteer participation in development schemes and their optimum enjoyment of their benefits. Accordingly, it should be said that there is no single, comprehensive definition of public participation. However, in a comprehensive view, *participation* is the social, technical and institutional process that is occurred by the involvement of communities in their own development and their active participation in the design, fulfillment and appraisal of development-specific schemes (FAO, 1997).

In this respect, the governmental organizations have tried to involve local communities in planning and decision-making by fulfilling diverse schemes and projects. Although many institutions and organizations are active in this field, the most important and the main way to enjoy people's active participation in development is the non-governmental organizations that contribute as the third sector along with the private sector and public sector in the administration of the society (Rezvani, 2005). To answer which organizational framework is suitable for people's participation, Moris (1984) emphasized that the community itself is the best organization and entity for cooperative approaches. Local institutions are one of the levers for the administration of the country and the provision of the public services and have legality entity, independence, assets and specific entities distinct of the central organization of the government that can play an effective role in the creation of social participation (Moradkhani et al., 2015). Due to the fact that they are free of complicated bureaucracy of the public sector and the expediency of the private sector, these organizations are better suited than the public and private sectors for such activities as the fight against poverty and hunger, environment conservation, forestry, improved public awareness, welfare, society and family health, attention to women and children's affairs, alleviation of social problems, etc. (Falsoleiman, 2011). Other advantages of local organizations are the efficiency improvement of the programs, people's empowerment, and the achievement of expedient justice (Roling, 1988).

Since a great part of the Third World population live in rural areas, the importance of rural development and its vital role in the development of the countries cannot be denied. Villagers feel ownership and commitment to a plan when they are consulted or actively involved in planning. If local people themselves identify their needs and lead it to action, then they will contribute to meeting the needs. Otherwise, the needs will not lead to participation even if they bring about demand or request.

Local organizations depend upon diverse variables including membership and leadership, management, delegation and non-collectivism, access to education, communication channels, innovation and change, mechanisms for people mobilization, access to market, access to power and leverage, and other links and

organizational levels (including the role of the government (Crouch & Chamala, 1981). Obviously, people mobilization and their participation to overcome the problems and accomplish rural development are the most imperative ones among these variables because the realization of participation would mediate most variables and the relevant challenges. Therefore, the present research aimed to explore the role of public participation in meeting social, technical and institutional needs.

### **Materials and Methods**

The present work is a qualitative case study. A case study refers to an intensive description and analysis of a certain phenomenon or social unit like an individual, a group, an institution, or a society. A case is an enclosed, compound system. The present case study is narrowed to the village of Hesar Kouchak, Javadabad District in Varamin, Iran. The qualitative data include people's direct statements about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge that are collected by interviews, notation of their activities, behaviors and actions and also the review of the documents. Data collection always includes the selection of the samples and the use of the relevant techniques. Qualitative research usually uses various data collection techniques that are selected on the basis of the research type, questions, and theoretical framework. Deep structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, observations, the review of the documents, and the formation of participatory forums are among the most important data collection techniques mentioned by many researchers (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 2001). These are the techniques that we made use of them.

In addition to these techniques, participatory forums were scheduled for the studied village using some techniques to assess rural people's participation. The forums in consecutive days were devoted to specific questions in accordance with research objectives in order for villagers to discuss them. The researcher was the facilitator of the forums and the villagers contributed as the participants. The most important objectives of the forums included the drawing of the village map, the use of pairwise comparison matrix to prioritize the problems, the drawing of the Venn diagrams to assess the institutions of the village and their perceived importance by farmers, and the attempts to find potential fields for their participation and the pertaining obstacles. All discussions and conversations were video-recorded. The samples were taken by snowball technique. This technique (also referred to as chain or network sampling) is the most general form of purposive sampling in that the researcher asks each interviewee or participant group to introduce the next informed individuals for participation. During our observations in the study site, we asked informed people, the members of Rural Islamic Councils and some local officials to provide us with the names and addresses of observable samples, locations and activities that could supply us with relevant information. Then, they were scheduled for meeting.

The most basic form to report the research findings was descriptive quotation so that out of hundreds of pages of qualitative data, some were kept and others were discarded. Since description constitutes a key part of all qualitative research, some studies remain at this level of analysis. But, given the fact that our study was of the basic descriptive type, we were engaged with descriptive analysis of the data in addition to their categorization and conceptualization. In other words, data were analyzed contingently and the basic description was transferred to the next level of analysis, i.e. the construction of the categories or the pivots to abridge the way on the basis of data preponderance.

### *Research variables*

Esman and Uphoff (1984) enumerated four distinct categories of variables for local organizations: environmental variables, structural variables, functional variables, and participation variables. Obviously, the first three categories are measurable given their features. But, the last category does not easily lend itself to measurements. Thus, another group of variables known as performance variables is added by which the persistence of rural people's or farmers' participation can be measured. We used these criteria to measure the extent to which people's participation was institutionalized or persisted at various levels of participation. Figure 1 depicts these variables in local organizations that influence rural development.

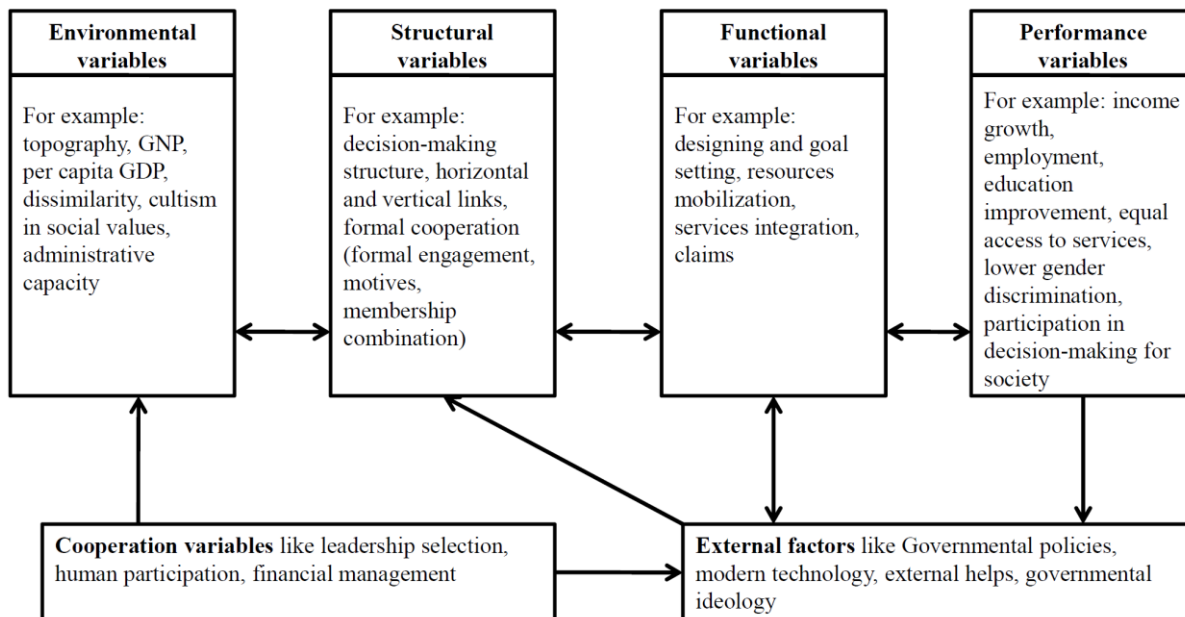


Figure 1. Source Esman & Uphoff, 1984

**Validity and reliability**

The validity of the research was improved and determined by the application of triangulation technique (the use of multiple researchers, multiple sources, and/or multiple methods), the sharing of interpretations with interviewed or observed individuals, residence in study site for a specific period of time, request from peers for recommendations on research findings, and the involvement of participants in all research phases (Merriam, 2001). The reliability of the research implies the rigidity and persistence of research findings. We enhanced our reliability by such techniques as Researcher’s Status in social fields, Triangulation and Audit - Trail.

**Results**

**Environmental history of the village**

The village of Hesar Kouchak has a long history of suffering from water deficit. Feudalism system was transformed to land division among people after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. However, local agriculture has always faced the challenge of inadequate available water, leading to severe migration of people to urban areas.

**Government’s activities in the village**

The development of water and power supply networks and road construction are the major public activities of the government for the village. Also, telecommunications have been made available for the village. However, all these utilities have been almost worn out and need rehabilitation.

**Villagers’ needs**

Most families of the village have migrated to the rural areas and just one-member lives in each house. The village does not possess a health center. It has 15 houses, but their families have migrated to cities. Nonetheless, production activities are still ongoing.

**Table 1.** Pairwise comparison matrix of the needs in Hesar Kouchak village (women)

Needs	Health center	Basic facilities	Animal diseases	Water supply system	Education requirements	Transportation costs	Environment health	Health drinking water	Power shortage	Cultural activities	Vehicles
Health center	—	←	←	↑	←	←	←			←	
Basic facilities	—	—		↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Animal diseases	—	—	—	↑	↑	←	↑	←	←	←	←
Water supply system	—	—	—	—	←	←	←	←	←	←	←
Educated requirements	—	—	—	—	—					←	↑
Transportation costs	—	—	—	—	—	—	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Environment health	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	←	←	←	↑
Health drinking water	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	↑	←	↑
Power shortage	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	↑
Cultural activities	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	←
Vehicles	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Score	6	0	6	10	3	3	7	7	3	3	6
Priority	3	5	3	1	4	4	2	2	4	4	3

Our findings regarding women’s opinions about village requirements reveal that the top priority is the development of water supply network and that the development of health facilities in environment and drinking water constitute the second priority with equal importance.

The next priority is the development of animal health and disease center and vehicles with equal importance followed by the educational facilities and transportation costs being ranked in the next priority. Women prioritized the basic facilities in the last rank (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Prioritization of the village requirements and challenges from women’s perspective

Requirements	Score	Priority
Water supply network	10	1
Environment health	7	2
Healthy drinking water	7	2
Health center	6	3
Animals disease	6	3
Vehicles	6	3
Education requirements	3	4
Transportation costs	3	4
Power shortage	3	4
Cultural activities	3	4
Basic facilities	0	5

**Table 3.** Pairwise comparison matrix of agricultural needs in Hesar Kouchak village (men)

Agricultural challenges	Water shortage	Credits	Machinery	Land leveling	Education	Traditional stream	Electrification of water pumps	Disputes settlements
Water shortage	—	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Credits	—	—	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Machinery	—	—	—	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Land leveling	—	—	—	—	↑	↑	↑	↑
Education	—	—	—	—	—	↑	↑	↑
Traditional stream	—	—	—	—	—	—	↑	↑
Electrification of water pumps	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	↑
Disputes settlement	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Score	5	7	2	1	0	3	5	5
Priority	2	1	4	5	6	3	2	2

Men’s opinions about agriculture requirements show that credits are the top priority followed by electrification of the water pumps and settlement of the disputes among owners in the next priority. On other hand, the existence of a traditional stream in village was ranked the next. Men mentioned the machinery as their next important need. Also as the next priority, the lands were noted to need leveling. The last priority was devoted to the education. These findings are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Prioritization of the agriculture challenges from men’s perspective

Requirements	Score	Priority
Credits	7	1
Water shortage	5	2
Electrification of water pumps	5	2
Disputes settlement	5	2
Traditional stream	3	3
Machinery	2	4
Land leveling	1	5
Education	0	6

**Table 5.** Pairwise comparison matrix of off-village organizations in Hesar Kouchak village (women)

Off-village organizations	Jahad-e Agriculture Service Center	Jahad-e Agriculture Organization	Nomads Organization	District Administration	Governorship	Consumer Cooperative	Oil Company
Jahad-e Agriculture Service Center	—	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Jahad-e Agriculture Organization	—	—	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Nomads Organization	—	—	—	↑	↑	↑	↑
District Administration	—	—	—	—	↑	↑	↑
Governorship	—	—	—	—	—	↑	↑
Consumer Cooperative	—	—	—	—	—	—	↑
Oil Company	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Score	0	2	3	4	5	5	3
Priority	5	4	3	2	1	1	3

Women ranked off-village organization in terms of their effective role in village development in the order of Consumer Cooperative and Governorship as the first rank, District Administration as the second rank, Nomads Organization and Oil Company as the third rank, Jihad-e Agriculture Organization as the fourth rank, and Jihad-e Agriculture Service Center as the last rank. These are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Prioritization of off-village organizations from women’s perspective

Requirements	Score	Priority
Consumer Cooperative	5	1
Governorship	5	1
District Administration	4	2
Nomads Organization	3	3
Oil Company	3	3
Jihad-e Agriculture Organization	2	4
Jihad-e Agriculture Service Center	0	5

**Table 7.** Pairwise comparison matrix of animal farming challenges in Hesar Kouchak village (men)

Challenges	Lack of pasture	Lack of grazing permission	Lack of loan provision	Construction permission	Lack of on-time services	Security	Veterinary	Animal platform health
Pasture	—	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Grazing permission	—	—	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Loan provision	—	—	—	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Construction permission	—	—	—	—	↑	↑	↑	↑
On-time services	—	—	—	—	—	↑	↑	↑
Security	—	—	—	—	—	—	↑	↑
Veterinary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	↑
Animal platform health	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Score	4	4	7	2	2	4	3	2
Priority	2	2	1	4	4	2	3	4

Results of the pairwise comparison matrix of animal husbandry challenges from men’s perspective in the studied village showed that the lack of loan provision was perceived as the main challenge. The lack of pasture, the lack of grazing permission and the lack of security were mentioned as the next priority. Veterinary was the next most important challenge. Finally, the least important challenges were mentioned to be the construction permission and the lack of on-time health services in animal platforms. These findings are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Prioritization of animal husbandry challenges from men’s perspective

Requirements	Score	Priority
Loan provision	7	1
Pasture	4	2
Security	4	2
Grazing permission	4	2
Veterinary	3	3
Construction permission	2	4
Animal platform health	2	4
On-time services	2	4

**Table 9.** Pairwise comparison matrix of village-related organization in Hesar Kouchak village (men)

Challenges	Agribank	Jahad-agriculture service center	District administration	Water organization	Azar rural cooperative	Oil company	Ministry of power	Veterinary
Agribank	—	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Jahad-agriculture service center	—	—	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
District administration	—	—	—	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Water organization	—	—	—	—	↑	↑	↑	↑
Azar rural cooperative	—	—	—	—	—	↑	↑	↑
Oil company	—	—	—	—	—	—	↑	↑
Ministry of power	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	↑
Veterinary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Score	6	6	2	5	3	2	2	2
Priority	1	1	4	2	3	4	4	4

Men in the studied village were asked to prioritize the relevant organization. Pairwise comparison matrix (Table 10) reveals that Agribank and Jahad-e Agriculture Service Center were the first priority following by Water Organization, Azar Rural Cooperative Company, Oil Company, Ministry of Energy, Veterinary, and District Administration in the next ranks.

**Table 10.** Prioritization of animal husbandry challenges from men's perspective

Requirements	Score	Priority
Agribank	6	1
Jahad-agriculture service center	6	1
Water organization	5	2
Azar rural cooperative	3	3
Oil company	2	4
Ministry of power	2	4
Veterinary	2	4
District administration	2	4

**Table 11.** Pairwise comparison matrix of information sources in Hesar Kouchak village (men)

Challenges	Parents' experiences	Other people's experiences	Educational courses	Experts	Television broadcasts	Radio broadcasts	Books and magazines
Parents experiences	—	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Other people's experiences	—	—	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Educational courses	—	—	—	↑	↑	↑	↑
Experts	—	—	—	—	↑	↑	↑
Television broadcasts	—	—	—	—	—	↑	↑
Radio broadcasts	—	—	—	—	—	—	↑
Books and magazines	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Score	5	5	0	0	4	3	2
Priority	1	1	5	5	2	3	4



The prioritization of information sources by rural men showed that they rely on the parents and others' experiences as the main information source. Television broadcasts were found to be the next priority followed by radio broadcasts in the next rank. The next rank was allocated to books and magazines and the last priority was found to be educational courses and experts as shown in Table 12.

**Table 12.** Prioritization of information sources in village from men's perspective

Requirements	Score	Priority
Parents experiences	5	1
Other people's experiences	5	1
Television broadcasts	4	2
Radio broadcasts	3	3
Books and magazines	2	4
Educational courses	0	5
Experts	0	5

### Discussion and Conclusion

Nowadays, public participation and its nature, executive mechanisms and quality are an integrated part of the literature on development as a lesson learned by government in different regions, especially in villages, says that when people are not involved in planning, they do not feel commitment to their accomplishment. Focused on public participation in responding to social, technical, and institutional needs of local communities of the village of Hesar Kouchak, this research considered the needs and problems of local community of the studied village to identify their challenges and emphasizes on future planning by relevant organizations.

The analysis of the basic needs of the local community showed that the village suffers from deficiency of drinking water. On the other hand, the prioritization of environment health facilities and healthy drinking water in the same rank by local community implies the significance of biological needs for rural people and their satisfaction by government through effective planning. Rural women thought that the basic facilities were the last priority, showing that the studied village possesses adequate basic facilities for living and that the basic and infrastructural needs play an essential role in the success of projects during the rural development process. Also, results for the challenges faced by farmers reveal that credit availability to equip farmers and to develop agricultural sector in this village is a serious challenge for farmers. In addition, since the water pumps are not electrical, the water is drawn from the wells in a traditional manner. The farmers face serious problems with respect to land ownership, too. However, the interesting point is that training is ranked the last in farmers' list of problems. It indicates that either farmers' training in agricultural sector is in an acceptable level or training is perceived by the studied farmers as a less important problem in the face of more significant challenges like credit.

The examination of off-village organizations that are connected with local community showed that Governorship and Consumer Cooperative are prioritized equally. It implies that the services provided by Consumer Cooperative are as important as those provided by Governorship. In other words, it can be asked whether Consumer Cooperative has succeeded in satisfying villagers' demand for consumer commodities or Governorship has been successful in the provision of services to villagers. On the other hand, the prioritization of Jihad-e Agriculture Service Center at the bottom of the list of off-village organizations implies that it has failed to build a constructive relationship with the village and vice versa. Given the role of such centers in the development of the agricultural sector, this connection needs to be revised. These findings are consistent with Ahmadi (2016) with respect to the relationships and participation among public organizations like Jihad-e Agriculture Organization and Governorship and their interactions with users.

This research showed that the most eminent challenge of animal farmers was the lack of loan provision, showing the lack of credits in animal husbandry sector. Therefore, it is imperative to take essential actions in economic aspect and to satisfy the required costs. Similarly, Nadali and Ranjbar (2011) highlighted the need for considering economic aspects including production income and cost. This problem is partially associated with the villagers' unfamiliarity with the procedure for the allocation of financial resources and the maze of loan granting to villagers in banks. On the other hand, the lack of proper pasture and grazing permission can prove the relationship that there is no proper pasture in the village for the animals which is by itself the reason why no grazing permission is granted to villagers. The problem of security for animal farmers in the village was mentioned as an important priority, showing the lack of security for them which, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, can be a key factor in the employment of villagers to animal husbandry.

The interesting point about the organizations related to the village is the ranking of Azar Rural Cooperative Company over District Administration, Ministry of Energy, Veterinary, and Oil Company, proving the important position of this cooperative among villagers and its relation with the satisfaction of their needs. Hence, the facilitation of the initiation of non-governmental associations can lay the ground for farmers' participation and empowerment in the face of the challenges in addition to their role in marketing and providing agricultural services. All these activity can pave the way for rural development. In this sense, our findings confirm Latifian (2006) and Hendrikse (2005)'s reports about the impact of cooperatives on the accomplishment of sustainable rural development. Furthermore, the ranking of veterinary in the last priority in spite of animal farming in the village and the important role of veterinary in serving the animal farmers in terms of their knowledge enhancement and animal health can be a matter of question. However, the fact that the villagers mentioned the use of their parents' experiences or those of individuals who are known as superior knowledge sources among the villagers as the preferred knowledge source suggests that the knowledge is still conveyed by the traditional face-to-face system. This tradition system has its own limitations including high education costs, long knowledge transfer time, and inability to communicate with farmers. Similar findings were reported by Ommani et al. (2008) with respect to the traditional knowledge transfer system and its limitations. Additionally, this knowledge transfer method reflects the lack of access to modern communication facilities of the third millennium which is itself influenced by various factors. Similarly, Sedighi et al. (2007) state that cultural factors, personal motivation, and access to information technology are the most important factors underpinning knowledge transfer. Thus, attempts to promote IT-based knowledge transfer can lead to the improved awareness and knowledge in rural community.

### Recommendations

Given our finding that people are the main information source and also, with respect to the decisive role of participation in the satisfaction of social, technical and institutional needs, the following recommendations can be proposed to help the realization of participation and rural development in the studied village:

1. Further research should be taken on the role of local knowledge in knowledge transfer to rural people aimed at accelerating the rural development.
2. Since Agribank was found to be the effective organization, it is recommended to install an ATM in the village to streamline the services.
3. Given the role of credits in activities, especially in entrepreneurship and job creation in rural areas, it is recommended to facilitate financial credit giving procedure as low-interest bank facilities through relevant institutions and banks in order to encourage employment in different agricultural and animal farming sectors as well as in other sectors like tourism and handicrafts.
4. Since the objective of participation is to empower people in satisfying their technical, institutional, and social needs, the establishment of such institutions as Producers' Cooperatives can enhance people's participation and improve the satisfaction of village's needs.
5. Given the top priority of institutional sector, especially cooperative, as a factor underpinning participation and a serious challenge in villagers' perspective, it is imperative to establish systemic collaborations between organization and relevant people with cooperatives and to extend their interactions.

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