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The Role of Participation in the Economic Empowerment of Rural Areas with Emphasis on Agriculture Sector (Case Study: Upper Ijroud Dehestan - Zanjan Province)

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Abstract

Today, to operationalize rural economic empowerment, it is essential and indispensible to give due attention to the participation approach. Providing necessary teachings and learning background, participation plays an important role in transmitting information and recognizing decision making abilities in farmers, and can make way for optimal utilization of resources and facilities. As villagers' failure to recognize and optimally appreciate the resources and facilities is among the main causes of economic underdevelopment in rural areas; it is critical to focus attention onto this approach, so that the rural economy may get out of current situation.

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Therefore, using a comprehensive approach in a descriptive-analytical method, this study tries to investigate the role of participation in the villager's empowerment process in agricultural sector of 14 rural settlements in Upper Ij-rud Dehestan, in Ij-rud County. Data were collected through the questionnaires completed by a sample size of 330 people. SPSS relevant tests were employed for data analysis. Studies showed that participation level with an average of 1.87 is lower than expected. The results suggest that awareness of production factors, one's command of market economy and decision-making skills, respectively, with significance levels of 0.025, 0.001 and 0.030 are directly correlated with economic empowerment. In addition, the level of villagers' economic empowerment in the agricultural sector (1.76) shows that necessary conditions have not yet been provided. Thus, it is essential to improve the villagers' understanding of optimal utilization of production factors, familiarity with market mechanisms and decision making skills.

Keywords*:* rural economy, rural participation, decision making skills, economic empowerment, agricultural sector, Ij-rud of Zanjan County