



OBSTACLES TO FARMERS PARTICIPATION IN IRRIGATION AND DRAINAGE MANAGEMENT IN IRAN

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ABSTRACT

Experiences of 1950's and 1960's revealed the importance of public participation in success of development programs of developing countries. Based on new visions, a prerequisite of rural sustainable development is active, conscious and voluntary participation of farmer in the process of decision-making, planning and management of all programs. This sort of participation in decision making and handling of social affairs is both an effective factor on development and a product of development process.

Promoting farmers participation in management of irrigation networks merely consist a part of social interaction between different social groups, i.e. government and villagers. Therefore, before dealing with participation issue, one should first deal with social interaction of a given society. Since these interactions and their historical changes differ among different societies, applying the successful models for participation of a given country, would not necessarily lead to success in another country.

Throughout the history, Iran has had always a despotic government, and all social rights were exclusively determined by the government, and therefore all responsibilities and public issues were to be dealt by the government. Since people had no objective social rights, they felt no responsibility in front of the government. The result is a distorted view of government-nation relationship in which the nation considered itself as the servant of the government. This distorted attitude is still vastly spread among our people-specially farmers, and its perpetuation is the main obstacle in front of their active participation in management of rural issues. The prerequisite of farmer's active participation including participation in management of irrigation network is the change in this distorted attitude of state-nation relationship. Achieving such a change requires education and promotion of a new attitude towards participation, which is a long patience-demanding process.

Keyword: Farmers participation, despotism, absolutism, social interaction, private ownership, democracy, social status

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I- INTRODUCTION

The experiences during these two decades, 1950's and 1960's shows although the governments were effective in the growth of agriculture in the developing countries including Iran by establishing large water conveyance and water supply structures, the lack of farmer attendance in irrigation networks' management and planning caused several problems which were effective in the failure of the governmental growth and development plans of the developing countries.

The experiences of these years made it clear that the governmental organizations and the staffs are not interested in consulting and cooperating with local communities and always behave imperiously with them. Actually, the governmental agencies believed that farmers were not able to recognize their own good. So in order to insert the new ideas and methods, they must be persuaded to follow the expert's social and technical recommendations. This attitude is clearly against the modern aspects of growth and development. The new views consider active, awareness and voluntary attendance of public in the procedure of decision making, planning, executing and managing as one of the conditions for sustainable development plan. So in order to approach the rural development and productivity promotion on social and water resources depend on cooperation of all the authorities (public and government).

Thus the lack of farmers' participation in the rural affairs, (among them irrigation networks management) was known as one of the reasons for the failure of the development plans, consequently the concept of participation became the most important pre-condition for the growth and development plans which should be paid attention.

But the lack of farmers' participation in growth and development faced the authorities by the following question: Why the farmers don't have a tendency toward participation in their own community affairs. The problem has been cleared now.

What is the Reason for the Lack of Framers' participation in the rural Development plans?

What remained was to find the solution:

How can we persuade the farmers to be active in the development plans?

Then the experts seriously started investigating on the effective factors to attract farmers' participation in the development plans and encouraging them to participate in the rural affairs.

II- PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

The new development ideas, concern human power as the most important effective factor in the sustainable development and call it as "the human capital". This capital will flourish and help the development procedure when it has the right to make decision freely. Stiglitz announced "the effective factor in the sustainable development is public participation in the affairs. This kind of participation should be based on responsibility feeling and free dialogue "in the International Conference on Democracy, Market Economy and Development" which was held in Seoul, in 1999. Public participation in making decision and administrating the community affairs is both effective factor in

development and the result of development procedure. Actually there is a mutual causality between participation in the community affairs and the sustainable development. Farmers' participation attraction in the irrigation networks management means to transfer some of the responsibilities from a community sector (government) to another one (farmers) which actually cover a part of socio-economy interaction of different community groups. Thus before discussing about this issue, we should investigate and specifying the social interaction of certain social groups of the community. The experiences show without concerning the social interactions of social groups and their historical changes can not be sure about the success of participation plans. As far as the interaction of social groups and the historical changes in different societies haven't been the same, so taking the pattern from the methods of those successful countries may be fail in another country. For the same reason, it is necessary the selected methods of participation attraction in each country should be fit with the trend of historical changes of social interaction in that country. For this purpose we should investigate on historical relationship of the government and the public to know the willingness or unwillingness of the public to participate in the community decision making and consequently determine the degree of their responsibility acceptance.

III- HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PUBLIC RELATIONSHIP IN IRAN

I would like to mention to the historical background of the government and the public relationship, in order to explain the obstacles of farmers' participation in execution responsibilities acceptance in Iran- among them irrigation and drainage networks management and finally give some recommendations to defeat these obstacles.

Iran is a vast country , located in a dry and semi-dry region where the rural communities are mostly far from each other. Most of these rural communities are located in the dry regions. Actually they didn't have considerable surplus production in the past. The scattering state of rural communities and the scares of surplus product haven't let to establish an independent and powerful feudalism. Actually, only an active military force could collect the surplus product of those scattered villages and turned it to a powerful central government; and this active military force could mostly be prepared by the tribes. All these governments have been despotism ones during the history of Iran.

Before continuing the discussion I would like to point out the difference between absolutism (as it was organized in Europe) and the despotism (as it was dominated in eastern countries among them Iran). In absolutism, private ownership (specially land ownership) was respected and secured, while in despotism, the private ownership wasn't secure and most lands belonged to the government and land ownership wasn't an unclaimed right, but was a privilege which was granted by the government.

“Francois Bernier” the special physician of Orang Zib Mongol was written in his itinerary “king himself was the only owner of all the lands.”

During the past, a large part of agricultural lands always belonged to the government and the government transferred them to the people. Actually the agricultural lands ownership was not a right, it was a privilege which was granted to government's agents and any time they wished they would take them back. Of course there was some piece of lands which belonged to land lords, but even those lands could be expropriate very

easily. Even the wealth of people and their social status needed the approval of the government.

From the view point of sociology, although the absolute government depends upon influential of social classes of the society and the existence and legitimacy of the government would be on the hands of influential social classes and their satisfaction, the high social classes of the society and their wealth were indebted to the king of the despotic government.

In Iran, the will of the despotic king didn't have any restriction. Although there were some regulations in Iran, but there was no written legal criteria. The specialty about the despotic government was: "lack of equality in front of laws". Caloshkin, the Russian permanent delegate during Nader Shah, (1741) wrote: "the king successively changes the ministers, governors and commandeer their properties on behalf of him. I can say I have never seen even one of the commanders to be secured after losing his status." The most recent despotic government of Iran was Ghajar dynasty. Lord Croson pointed out "king can do what ever he wants and his words are as law... he can depose or assign all the ministers, officers, employees and judges. The life and death of all the members of royal family and all the civil and military personnel without any trial were in his hands. The properties of those who were executed would be granted to the king. In order to get a high position in the government, depend on the cost you should pay some bribery and gift."

The main differences of despotism and absolutism can be summarized as follow.

Absolutism	Despotism
1- Law oriented	1- Law disoriented
2- Although the king has absolute right in legislation, there are some main rules which should be fallow.	2- The king is free to do what he wants without concerning any rules.
3- Privet property, especially land property has been respected and is secured.	3- Land property is not a right; it is a privilege which is granted to the people.
4- The government is relevant to high social class of society.	4- The high social class of society is relevant to the government.

As far as the whole rights of the society have been in the hands of despotic government during the past history of Iran, all the responsibilities and public tasks had been undertook by the government. In other words, because the people didn't have any rights, so they didn't feel any responsibility in front of government.

IV_ PUBLIC ALIENATION FROM GOVERNMENT IN IRAN

The result which has been concerned from what have been discussed was the alienation of the social classes from government. This kind of public alienation from government has been continued up to now, in spite of changes after constitutional revolution (1906). This historical alienation has caused an inverted understanding from the relation between the nation and the government in Iran.

In European countries, the government is elected by the nation as an employee of the public to serve the society since industrial revolution and establishing democracy. While the continuation of despotic government in Iran has drawn an inverted vision from the relation between the nation and the government in the public's mind. In other words, as far as the central government has been the only owner of the public's wealth, the people have been stipendiary, servant and peasant of the government under certain hierarchy. This kind of inverted understanding from the relationship between the nation and the government has been remained in the mind of the majority of the people in our country yet. Still the people think of the role of government as governor and ruler. The farmers' expectation from the government as a supporter and benefactor have been increased specially after revolution and caused to strengthen the same inverted understanding from the relationship between the nation and the government. The continuation of the same understanding is the main obstacle of active participation of the farmers in the rural affairs, especially in development affairs and responsibility acceptance.

Although because of limited area, population density and urban living significant in the cities, the people have more or less believed in order to manage the complicated affairs of the city all the people should participate and work together. But this belief has not been justified in the rural communities yet, still the farmers haven't accepted that they have to perform and participate in a part of services which have been executed by the government and some of the government agencies so far.

V-PRECONDITION OF FARMERS' ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE RURAL AFFAIRS

Participation in the irrigation networks management, as the preconditions of farmers' active participation in the rural affairs, requires attaining the new attitude of the relation of the government and the public and inverting those imaginations which have been existed so far. As far as this new attitude has been based on democracy, the separation of farmers' participation procedure and the expansion of democracy cause to make transient decision and policies which is just wasting time and manpower. We shouldn't expect the procedure of participation attraction to be faster than the procedure of democracy expansion. At most the procedure of participation can be forwarded in step with democracy in the society. Regarding the causality of these two issues, it should be mentioned in order to stabilize the public participation in the community affairs- among them farmers' participation in the irrigation networks management should be patient and take steps slowly but making the farmers participate in the irrigation networks management without feeling deeply the necessity and benefits of participation will be a kind of unsustainable participation which will be broken up by any changes in the government existing policy. It is impossible to make the farmers participate in the rural

affairs administration either by force or granting some financial privileges. The only way to encourage the farmer to participate in the rural affairs is to make them understand the necessity and the benefits of cooperation and participation in decision making.

VI-TRADITIONAL COOPERATION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE MODERN SOCIETIES

However from many years before the cooperation and participation in the rural affairs have been dominated in the country, the land reform performance in 1963 changed the infrastructure of rural community and this kind of traditional cooperation has gradually faded. Some new phenomena have entered in the economical and social life of the village since 1960 decade, after performing land reform where the most important one was the attendance of government and the relevant agencies. From that time we have been the evidence of gradual weakening of traditional cooperation patterns in the rural area, because in many cases the governmental plans for rural development were dissimilar with the pattern of farmers' traditional cooperation.

Whenever we talk about farmers' participation in irrigation and drainage networks and the relevant problems, some opinions have been paid attention to the rural communities and revival of this traditional cooperation structure as the solution to the problem of farmers' participation attraction in the modern establishment management of irrigation and drainage networks. But it should be paid attention the active participation in modern irrigation networks administration is different from the traditional cooperation, because solving these days problems with traditional methods are impossible. In traditional cooperation, there are a limited individuals belong to rather homogeneous communities who are cooperated together in the frame of individual or relationship, which cooperation and participation means consciously acceptance of continues cooperation with other members of the society and responsibility acceptance in order to access to the group objectives in nowadays large and inhomogeneous communities.

Actually consciously acceptance is the most important phenomenon of participation. People should consciously feel the necessity and benefits of participation and use their energies for a common objective without any obligation. For this purpose the issue of participation should have harmony with their benefits and interests; besides people should be in decision making as well.

The meaning of cooperation in the participation procedure is much more expanded one. When a person accepts a certain task, it is not necessary to perform that job, actually he promises not to disagree with. But cooperation needs a kind of action and interaction which asks necessarily for collaboration. In order to create such an interaction it is necessary the people do not feel that participation arrangement will be a threat against their benefits and social status and finally responsibility acceptance means unity with the people on the one hand and the project success on the other hand. In order to create such feeling the benefits of participation should be higher than the costs.

Here are some examples for participation and cooperation attraction of farmers which have been applied by the higher level authorities by establishing rural cooperatives, equity centers, cultural centers and other similar semi-governmental institutions.

In this trend the people are ignored, in other words the relation between the government staffs and the farmers are as commanders and obedient and instead of leaving the farmers in the different levels of participation decision makings, their tasks are applied to them. So by this method the independency of farmers to the government will be increased.

The most suitable form of participation in the society affairs is to establish executive agencies by the public intention on behalf of their clients. The municipalities can be the most important ones in the modern communities. Farmers' participation attraction should be performed by such executive institutions which are established by the farmers' intention. Only this kind of participation can help the growth and sustainable development of the rural areas. We can't expect, the farmers undertake the management of repair, maintenance and water distribution in the main canals besides the difficult job they have in agricultural affairs. Actually one of the problems of farmers participation attraction is the interference of these activities in the irrigation networks management. There should be a mediator service institution to undertake the executive management of the modern irrigation and drainage networks on behalf of farmers in order to overcome this problem.

For this purpose we can hire the qualified manpower in order to establish private service agencies to operate the installments and the irrigation and drainage networks. The present governmental organizations will be replaced by these agencies as the farmers' executive organization. Establishment of this type of professional agency shouldn't be the way is happened today. In order to secure the success of this method, we should create a kind of motive in farmers as the first stage to appear voluntarily as applicant for those services. It is obvious the governmental organizations can also be very effective in technical supervision and establishment of professional agencies of private sector. Encouraging the farmers to step forward in this line, we should dominate the culture and the new view of participation in villages before. But besides the farmers, the authorities in rural affairs should expand the horizon of their view about participation and shouldn't limit theirs just on farmers' financial one.

It is valuable to motion to the view of one of the executive authorities of one of the water conveyance projects about a questionnaire which was provided for gathering the farmers' opinions and intentions to participation.

“The questions are to be placed in a form, so that the participation does not seem as a voluntary subject. During the interview, the farmers are to made ready for accept the participation”

As you notice in the above phrase, participation has been concerned as an obligation, not a voluntary affair.

VII- CONCLUSION

At the end, once again it should be emphasized that the most important thing which should be done to attract the farmers to participate in irrigation and drainage management is to train and promote the participation culture; of course it takes time and asks for patience.

The new understanding of participation has been trained in many countries these days. There should be also some training agencies in different level to train and promote participation especially in the rural communities in Iran. This procedure takes time and need patient to progress step by step.

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