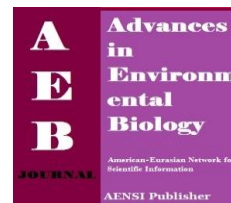




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### The Identification of Policy-Making Challenges of Rural Development in Kermanshah Province (A Delphi Study)

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#### ABSTRACT

Rural development plays an important role in the achievement of the national development goals. Although villages make up a considerable proportion of the country's population as well as being the primary source of food and exports, they are faced with a variety of challenges, including unemployment, rural migration, and low income. Since, in view of the experts, the solution to such problems lie in developing these areas along with changing the attitudes and strategies adopted in rural development programs, this study takes the aim of identifying the policy-making challenges of rural development based on the Delphi method. The population of this study consisted of experts, researchers and university lectures in Kermanshah Province. Based on the findings of the study, 27 key components of the inadequacy of rural development policy-making were identified. Some of the most important challenges of policy-making consist in: Non-use of existing potentials in rural areas, lack of relation between administrative, academic, and research centers on rural issues as well as the lack of an accurate, reliable, and up-to-date statistical database in the area of rural development

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#### INTRODUCTION

Development is a multidimensional process leading the society towards prosperity and advancement in a comprehensive and organized manner [11]). And if we consider the society a living and dynamic phenomenon, social and economic development of any society is the result of balanced development occurring within the components of this live and organic phenomenon [22]. There is no doubt that rural development holds significance to achieving national development goals. In other words, national development is meaningless without actualizing rural development. Many researchers and scholars perceive the rural development as the motor of development, especially in Third-World countries [8]. Since a large part of the population live in rural areas, rural development is an inevitable element of national development [17]. In Iran, 31/5 percent of the population lives in rural areas [14]. In Kermanshah Province, 70 percent of the population living in rural areas is involved with occupations associated with agricultural activities [23]. Although villages make up a considerable proportion of the country's population and are considered the primary source of exports (both agricultural and mineral) to developed countries as well as being the food producer and supplier of workforce to urban and industrial areas on a national level [2], we witness low incomes, high poverty and high unemployment levels in rural areas [8]. Also, the gap between urban and rural living standards among various sectors of the rural areas is steadily increasing and therefore the rural to urban migration has been accelerated [21]. In Kermanshah Province, 43 percent of the rural age population between 21 and 30 years are actively seeking work (Khorsandy, 2005). This leads to increased rates of unemployment, rural to urban migration as well as an increased proportion of people living beneath the minimal subsistence [21]. Researchers contend that solving these problems is possible through the development of these areas [21,14,20]. In his research entitled "The Role and Status of Agriculture in Rural Development", Mansoori [12] concluded that there exists a significant relationship between agricultural development and economic development with variables such as income, employment, and savings. And there also exists an indirect relationship between agricultural development and social development with variables such as level of education, partnership and migration. Jom'ehpoor [8] states

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that lack of proper thinking about rural development; lack of a clear strategy for rural development; the deficiency of a comprehensive approach towards rural development; an abstract and non-systematic thinking of village and rural development issues; lack of integrated and comprehensive rural development institutions, as well as the top-down process of preparing, formulating and implementing the plans for and projects on rural development consist in the fundamental problems of rural development. Rezavani [16] reached the conclusion that absence of five-year development plans at the local level, lack of a logical relationship between the national, regional, and local planning and top-down decision-making authority in this domain, sectional planning authority within the structure of rural planning, lack of public participation and NGOs in Rural Planning, as well as the deficiency of an integrated management in planning and development of rural areas account for the most important failures of the planning system. The results of the research by Shamsaei-Golsefidy [20] in the Ph.D. thesis entitled "Methods and Models for Sustainable Rural Development through Agricultural Sustainability", indicates that providing the basis for development of the regional agricultural sector, local administrators' attempts to create more physical facilities and infrastructure, encouraging private sector involvement and investment of resources and banking facilities in granting credit can be effective in regional development. Gheddissi *et al.*, [6] in their study concluded that the location of industrial projects in rural areas can fulfill a positive function in order to solve the economic, social, and cultural problems of these areas. For example, experience in the development of Third World countries, at least in the rural sector, shows that attitudes to develop methods and strategies are key to the success or failure of development plans. However, experiences in rural development planning in recent decades indicate that attitudes toward rural issues and rural development should be changed [8]. Many experts argue that the lack of success in improving rural community as well as failure in rural development plans lie with the attitude towards the rural development along with the adopted strategies and practices [5]. It seems to achieve such a model and strategy requires the realization of the constraints and problems of development plans that have been implemented or are being implemented in rural areas of Kermanshah Province. These challenges and dilemmas should be identified as until these problems and bottlenecks have not been identified, any move to rural development will fail, causing a waste of time and money. Identifying the problems and obstacles will pave the way for rural development planners and practitioners to be aware of each other's viewpoints, strengthening the strategic perspective among these individuals in order to set about planning for rural development with a clearer vision, and in doing so, create the conditions for rural development. This study can also lead to consensus views of those in charge of rural development as well as laying the groundwork for rural development planners and officials to become familiar with each other's standpoints without having to interact face to face. Therefore, the general aim of the research is to identify the challenges and bottlenecks of policy-making for rural development from the viewpoint of the experts in Kermanshah Province. To accomplish this, the following specific objectives are brought forth:

1. Identifying policy-making challenges of rural development in Kermanshah Province
2. Prioritizing the challenges threatening the future rural development plans in Kermanshah Province from the perspective of rural development experts
3. Identifying reasons for failure of rural development plans

#### *Methodology:*

In this chapter, we will explain the research method employed in this study. This research, in terms of paradigm<sup>1</sup>, is of the type of qualitative research and in terms of goal is of the development type. In this study, the Delphi method considered to be a type of qualitative research was utilized in identifying the policy-making challenges of rural development from the viewpoint of the experts in Kermanshah Province. The method is employed for consensus of experts on a particular subject [18].

#### *An Overview of the Delphi Method:*

Delphi method is carried out with the participation of individuals with knowledge and expertise in the research topic. Selection of eligible members for the Delphi panel takes account of the most important stages of the process, because the validity of the results depends on the competence and knowledge of these individuals [15]. This method takes the aim of investigating the attitudes and judgments of the expert group, without requiring the presence of the individuals in certain locations, using a questionnaire within a few steps along with creating harmony between the views, in order to gather the opinions of these individuals. Finally, summarizing, evaluating, and analyzing of the views and opinions of individuals provide a base for setting goals, planning, or making decisions [15]. Therefore, the Delphi method comprising several essential stages [4,19], involves selecting samples from a group of experts called the panel members [9] as well as gathering their opinions about a specific topic [1,13].

Appropriate number of members is another point that should be considered in the formation of the panel [1].

The next stage will be preparing a set of questions or problems about the item, and sending it to all the panel members. The questioning stage is done in two or more rounds and in each round we draw on the results

of the last round or rounds. Thus, in the second round, experts and specialists, influenced by the views and opinions of their peers as well as the results obtained from the previous round, answer the questions. After each round, results obtained based on a survey of the judging team were calculated and then would be applied in the following rounds and the results would be sent to all members of the panel [4]. Accordingly, it is possible to come to an agreement from the point of the diagnosis of the problems found. Finally, the report of the study, including the results of the Delphi study and predictions, as well as the plan policies selection, along with their strengths and weaknesses, will be offered [13].

#### *Formation and Composition of the Delphi Group:*

The society chosen for the study consists of all experts among the Chief Executive Officers of Agriculture, agricultural experts holding over 3 years of operational experience in rural areas, fellow experts in Eekarda projects and internal research projects, and researchers of research centers conducting research projects in various fields in rural areas as well as university lecturers and senior managers in all organizations, institutions, and agencies engaged in serving in rural areas. The researchers of the present study identified 135 people who were qualified for the above conditions, which among these people 87 individuals were selected for an interview through investigation and personal interview. Data collected during the interview stage were analyzed, using content analysis, and 41 cases were extracted from the 87 interviews. Further on the course of study, 52 individuals were willing to continue research in the subsequent rounds, which the procedure was carried out as follows.

In Table 2, the Delphi members' grouping is shown according to the type of work, qualification and their number.

**Table 2:** The Delphi members' grouping.

Row	Work Type	Degree	Number
1	Agriculture Experts	Bachelor's and Master's with an average of 18 years' experience	28
2	Researchers of the Research Centers & Senior managers in organizations	Master's and Doctorate with an average of 15 years' experience	14
3	University Lectures and Faculty Members	Doctorate with an average of 10 years' experience	10

#### *Procedure:*

In the first round, rural development experts were asked open questions to express the policy-making challenges of rural development and the reasons for the failure of rural development plans in Kermanshah Province. In the second round, the results of the first round of interviews were sent to the experts, using the content analysis method in the form of a structured questionnaire of three options (disagree, neutral, agree), and they were asked to express their level of agreement with the items raised. In the third round, the results of the second round, by calculating the frequency and percentage of responses for each question, resubmitted to the respondents, and they were asked to express their opinion again and then the questionnaires were collected and analyzed, and because at this stage the results of the second round were repeated and the experts reached consensus, the study was considered finished.

#### *Results and Conclusion:*

##### *The First Stage:*

In the first stage, the questioner was once again available to the panel members so that they expressed their feedbacks regarding the policy-making challenges of rural development. The results of this stage are presented in Table 1.

**Table 3:** Views of the expert panel regarding the policy-making challenges and constraints of rural development in Kermanshah Province.

The lack of state support for investment in the rural sector	Failure to use the existing potential of rural areas
Failure to allocate resources (machinery and equipment) across the village for rural development	Lack of relation between administrative centers and academic research on rural issues
Inadequate rural transport	The lack of an accurate, reliable and up to date statistical database in the area of rural development
Inappropriate rural communication networks	Inheritance law, the reason for fragmentation of agricultural land
The Province leaders' incredulity toward agricultural sector	One-dimensional rural development planning
Not assigned more subsidies for villagers, farmers and the rural sector	Lack of coordination of local authorities for rural development plans
The absence of a coordinating body as a trustee of Rural Development	Lack of attention to the development of micro-credit fund for villagers
The poor performance of government agencies involved in rural development	Lack of applied research in rural development
Failure to plan land	Lack of attention to processing industries, processing and packaging of agricultural products
The lack of a comprehensive, long-term plan for rural development in the province.	The lack of organization and coordination among government agencies involved in rural affairs

Failure to establish and equip workshops in rural farming	Not paying attention to potential, talents and impediments in each region
Failure to establish a think tank in the city or province for identifying talents and implementing plans applicable to the circumstances of the region	Agricultural graduates lack the collateral necessary for participation in rural development projects
Lack of planning for rural development	The lack of centralized monitoring of development process of rural development
Conflict with the instructions and rules	Failure to notify the relevant authorities of the village of rural development plans in the area under their responsibility
Lack of developed studies in the field of rural development	Lack of expertise in implementing rural development
Not to pursue rural development plans to accomplish the outcomes	Lack of balance between local and regional policy-making
Lack of institutions responsible for rural development	
Parallel operation between executive agencies in rural areas	The administrative bureaucracy of using banking facilities
The sectional nature of the decisions involved in rural development	Lack of attention to geographical, social and cultural differences. . . And composing a single version for all regions
Lack of coordination between industry development, completion, and maintenance of agricultural products	Failure to establish farming complexes
Lack of attention to rural tourism	Not having a valid title for many agricultural land to be used as bank collateral

### The Second Stage of the Delphi Method:

After collecting, sorting, merging, and removing non-relevant matches, 41 items were found that the members of the panel expressed in response to the above question. After this step, the structured questionnaire of three options (disagree, neutral, agree) was sent to them in order to rate their agreement or disagreement with each of the items expressed. The results are presented in Table 4. At this point, to determine a consensus among panel members, Kendall's coefficient was used. At this stage, the items were accepted, gaining over 66 percent of the agreement of the experts [3].

**Table 4:** Level of agreement or disagreement of the panel with the specified priorities.

Items	Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
The poor performance of government agencies involved in rural development	51/9	27	32/7	17	15/4	8
Parallel operation between executive agencies in rural areas	53/8	28	36/5	19	9/6	5
Lack of planning for rural development	46/2	24	44/2	23	9/6	5
Lack of developed studies in the field of rural development	46/2	24	48/1	25	5/8	3
Failure to plan land	40/4	21	48/1	25	11/5	6
Conflict with the instructions and rules	40/4	21	57/7	30	1/9	1
Failure to notify the relevant authorities of the village of rural development plans in the area under their responsibility	51/9	27	36/5	19	11/5	6
The Province leaders' incredulity toward agricultural sector	23/1	12	42/3	22	34/6	18
Not assigned more subsidies for villagers, farmers and the rural sector	57/7	30	25	13	17/3	9
The lack of state support for investment in the rural sector	51/9	27	44/2	23	3/8	2
Inappropriate rural communication networks	50	26	21/2	11	28/8	15
Failure to allocate resources (machinery and equipment) at the village level for rural development	36/5	19	42/3	22	21/2	11
Inadequate rural transport	59/6	31	34/6	18	5/8	3
Inheritance law, the reason for fragmentation of agricultural land	90/4	47	7/7	4	1/9	1
The lack of a comprehensive, long-term plan for rural development in the province.	78/8	41 41	15/4	8	5/8	3
Lack of coordination of local authorities for rural development plans	69/2	36	25	13	5/8	3 3
The lack of organization and coordination among government agencies involved in rural affairs	84/6	44	13/5	7	1/9	1
The lack of an accurate, reliable and up to date statistical database in the area of rural development	92/3	48	5/8	3	1/9	1
One-dimensional rural development	71/2	37	23/1	12	5/8	3

planning						
Failure to use the existing potential of rural areas	94/2	49	5/8	3	0	0
Lack of relation between administrative centers and academic research on rural issues	90/4	47	9/6	5	0	0
Lack of expertise in implementing rural development	78/8	41	21/2	11	0	0
Lack of Applied Research in Rural Development	67/3	35	26/9	14	5/8	3
Sectional nature of the decisions involved in rural development	76/9	40	19/2	10	3/8	2
Not paying attention to potentials, talents and impediments in each region	84/6	44	13/5	7	1/9	1
Lack of attention to geographical, social and cultural differences. . . And composing a single version for all regions	84/6	44	15/4	8	0	0
Failure to establish and equip workshops in rural farming	75	39	21/2	11	3/8	2
Lack of attention to processing industries, processing and packaging of agricultural products	80/8	42	17/3	9	1/9	1
Lack of coordination between industries development, completion, and maintenance of agricultural products	82/7	43	15/4	8	1/9	1
Failure to establish farming complexes	69/2	36	25	13	5/8	3
Lack of attention to the development of micro-credit fund for villagers	71/2	37	21/2	11	7/7	4
Failure to establish a think tank in the city or province for identifying talents and implementing plans applicable to the circumstances of the region	69/2	36	28/8	15	1/9	1
Lack of attention to rural tourism	86/5	45	13/5	7	0	0
Administrative bureaucracy of using banking facilities	80/8	42	13/5	7	5/8	3
Agricultural graduates lack the collateral necessary for participation in rural development projects	75	39	17/	9	7/7	4
Not having a valid title for many agricultural land to be used as bank collateral	75	39	17/3	9	7/7	4
Lack of institutions responsible for rural development	69/2	36	23/1	12	7/7	4
The lack of centralized monitoring of development process of rural development	84/6	44	13/5	7	1/9	1
The absence of a coordinating body as a trustee of Rural Development	71/2	37	25	13	3/8	2
Not to pursue rural development plans to accomplish outcomes	90/4	47	7/7	4	1/9	1
Lack of balance between local and regional policy-making	86/5	45	13/5	7	0	0

Thus, 13 items which their level of agreement was less than 66% were removed, and the results obtained through identifying policy-making challenges of rural development entered the third stage of the Delphi technique.

#### *The Third Stage of the Delphi Method:*

At this point, after excluding the items that the level of agreement with them was less than 66 percent, the policy-making challenges and dilemmas of rural development from the viewpoints of the experts were prioritized. For prioritization, the two statistics of mean and standard deviation were used. Thus, the items that had the highest mean and the lowest standard deviation were placed in the highest priority, and those who had the lowest mean and highest standard deviations were placed lower in priority. The results are shown in Table 5.

The results of the prioritization show that failure to use the existing potential of rural areas and lack of relation between administrative centers and academic research on rural issues, as well as the lack of an accurate, reliable, and up-to-date statistical database in the area of rural development hold the highest priority respectively in the region. And also, the lack of attention to the development of micro-credit fund for villagers, and lack of

applied research in rural development, as well as the absence of a coordinating body as a trustee of rural development have the lowest priority.

**Table 5:** Prioritizing the challenges and dilemmas of rural development policy-making from the viewpoint of the panel.

Row	Policy-Making Challenges & Problems of Rural Development in Kermanshah Province	SD	Mean	Prioritization
1	Failure to use the existing potential of rural areas	.23544	2.9423	1
2	Lack of relation between administrative centers and academic research on rural issues	.29768	2.9038	2
3	The lack of an accurate, reliable and up to date statistical database in the area of rural development	.35753	2.9038	3
4	Inheritance law, the reason for fragmentation of agricultural land	.37853	2.8846	4
5	Not to pursue rural development plans to accomplish the outcomes	.37853	2.8846	
6	Lack of attention to rural tourism	.34464	2.8654	5
7	Lack of balance between local and regional policy-making	.34464	2.8654	
8	Lack of attention to geographical, social and cultural differences. . . And composing a single version for all regions	.36432	2.8462	6
9	Lack of attention to processing industries, processing and packaging of agricultural products	.45952	2.8462	7
10	The lack of organization and coordination among government agencies involved in rural affairs	.43028	2.8269	8
11	Not paying attention to potential, talents and impediments in each region	.43028	2.8269	
12	Agricultural graduates lack the collateral necessary for participation in rural development projects	.39796	2.8077	9
13	Lack of attention to processing industries, processing and packaging of agricultural products	.44451	2.8077	10
14	The lack of centralized monitoring of development process of rural development	.41238	2.7885	11
15	Lack of expertise in implementing rural development	.41238	2.7885	
16	Administrative bureaucracy of using banking facilities	.55572	2.7500	13
17	Sectional nature of the decisions involved in rural development	.52824	2.7308	14
18	The lack of a comprehensive, long-term plan for rural development in the province.	.56414	2.7308	15
19	Failure to establish and equip workshops in rural farming	.53638	2.7115	16
20	Failure to establish a think tank in the city or province for identifying talents and implementing plans applicable to the circumstances of the region	.51340	2.6731	17
21	The absence of a coordinating body as a trustee of Rural Development	.55026	2.6731	18
22	Not having a valid title for many agricultural land to be used as bank collateral	.61743	2.6731	19
23	One-dimensional rural development planning	.59027	2.6538	20
24	Lack of coordination of local authorities for rural development plans	.59504	2.6346	21
25	Failure to establish farming complexes	.59504	2.6346	
26	Lack of attention to the development of micro-credit fund for villagers	.62713	2.6346	22
27	Lack of Applied Research in Rural Development	.59914	2.6154	23
28	Lack of institutions responsible for rural development	.55026	2.6731	24

#### Conclusion and Suggestions:

The main issue in this study lies in exploring the challenges and dilemmas of rural development policy-making from the viewpoint of the experts in Kermanshah Province. To this end, the results of the study indicate that 28 challenges hold great significance to rural development policy-making. In the second stage of the Delphi method, the panel members expressed their level of agreement and disagreement with 41 challenges identified in the first phase of the Delphi technique. In this stage, 13 items which their level of agreement was less than 66% were removed. In this case, items such as the Province leaders' incredulity toward agricultural sector, failure to allocate resources (machinery and equipment) across the village for rural development, and lack of developed studies in the field of rural development bore a less degree of consensus. In the third stage, by prioritizing the major challenges from the previous stage, the importance of each of them was determined. According to the experts' view, policy making challenges such as non-use of existing potentials in rural areas, lack of relation between administrative, academic, and research centers on rural issues, as well as the lack of an accurate, reliable, and up-to-date statistical database in the area of rural development held the highest importance. But challenges such as lack of attention to the development of micro-credit fund for villagers, lack of applied research in rural development, and the absence of a coordinating body as a trustee of Rural Development were of less importance. Thus, according to the results of the study, it is suggested that:

Empowering rural communities would not be possible unless the managers and planners of rural development issues tap into the views of the relevant experts in order to find a more comprehensive understanding of the needs, possibilities, and potentials of rural areas.

In order to develop a comprehensive plan for rural development, partnerships with other institutions such as the private agricultural sector, and banks are required.

Since the information flow and its being up-to-date play an important role in creating and improving networking among organizations involved in the process of rural development, thus, having access to the database and documentation available make further improvements in the coordination and monitoring of rural development plans.

Linking administrative, academic, and research centers with each other on rural issues, promote learning between organizations and create a dynamic environment for rural development.

More robust oversight by the responsible bodies in following up and accomplishing the rural development projects will lead to greater coherence in planning for rural areas, and preventing parallel operations, as well as creating greater coordination among them.

Managers and planners require a systematic and holistic perspective and attitudes in order to consider all human capacities and capabilities (rural women, rural youth) as well as material potentials (agricultural equipment, processing and complementary industries, etc.).

In terms of the nature and conditions of the loan recipients, it is better to also take the people with less land access, landless, and without any valid title into account.

Providing material and moral incentives for the private agricultural sector in the form of agricultural advisory services consisting of mainly agricultural graduates will pave the way for this sector to develop greater partnership in the process of rural development.

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