

Challenges of Women's Career Advancement in Iranian Agricultural Extension Organization

M. Moradi Kafraj^{1*}, S. H. Movahed Mohammadi¹

ABSTRACT

Since women hold a small share in Iranian agricultural extension administration, it is necessary to seriously facilitate women's participation in development programs and improve the policy of job opportunities and educational equity. The purpose of this study was to identify the challenges of women's career advancement in Iranian Agricultural Extension Organization (AEO). Survey study was applied as the methodology of research. The statistical sample consisted of 135 female agricultural field officers in AEO. Statistical sample was selected through stratified random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was used as the research instrument. The face validity of the instrument was confirmed by a panel of specialists. Questionnaire reliability was estimated by calculating Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.92$). The results showed that: "giving key positions to men", "offering routine and simple tasks to women", "limited willingness of male colleagues toward women career advancement", "administrators' weak belief in female experts' competencies", and "limitation to visit villages" were recognized as the first five preventive variables by respondents. Also, based on factor analysis, attitudinal aspects, male-dominated organizational structure, time limitation, and adaptive factors were recognized. Under a collection of preventative challenges such as managerial discrimination, negative attitudes and norms regarding women's role and abilities, severe conflict between work and family duties and personal willing, the female experts have low share in managerial positions in AEO. Therefore, the empowering plans must be focused on these areas.

Keywords: Agricultural extension management, Gender equality, Gender empowerment, Women's career barriers.

INTRODUCTION

Women work more than men across the world (Schein, 2001). In the East Asia and Pacific region, women work more hours and devote more time to caregiving and housework than men, while men specialize in market-oriented activities. Despite the vital role of women in agricultural production activities, they relatively have less access to information, technologies and resources such as credit, extension, seed supply, and labor saving devices (World Bank, 2010). In terms of Gender Inequality

Index (GII), Iran achieved 88th ranking among 187 countries of the world (UNDP, 2011). There are 23 million occupants in the agriculture sector of Iran out of them 40 percent are women. Agricultural Extension Organization is a part of Ministry of Agriculture (Jihad-e-Kaeshavarzi). AEO plays a major role in the improvement of farming systems productivity. AEO recently has formulated many strategies such as: structural adjustment in the extension system, with emphasis on the participation of farmers, empowerment of rural women, training of extension personnel, vocational and technical training of rural youth, and

¹ Department of Agricultural Extension and Education, College of Agricultural Economics and Development, University of Tehran, Karaj, Islamic Republic of Iran.

* Corresponding author, email: moradi6013@gmail.com



enhancing the role of female extension workers in the national extension system. There are about 6497 extension workers in the AEO, out of which only 7 % are women, which is less than the global average of 13 % (APO, 2013). Research findings show that in agricultural organization level, in Iran, less than 10 percent of agricultural extension administrators are female (Allahyari, 2008; Asadi *et al.*, 2008). Thus, it is necessary that national development strategies enhance active participation of women in economic and political sectors. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the challenges and barriers faced by women's career advancement in the AEO.

There are many studies about the challenges of women participation in economic activities. Table (1) shows the findings of many of these researches. In general, legal, family responsibilities and time limitations, traditional norms or cultures, limitation in level of education and professional dimensions, and male-dominated structures in social and economic institutions are the most important challenges and barriers faced by women. One of the main recognized and restrictive factors is 'time factor'. Whereas men are able to focus predominantly on their single productive role and conduct their other roles sequentially, women are more likely to play these roles simultaneously and have to balance competing uses of their time (Blackden and Wodon 2006). On the other hand, family responsibilities restrict women participation in paid employment opportunities, especially in developing

countries. Female labor force participation and its determinants vary over the life cycle. Early in their careers, women are similar to men in terms of their decisions to join the labor market, but their participation begins to differ as their domestic responsibilities increase (World Bank, 2012). Maurer-Fazio *et al.* (2011) has shown that child care costs have a negative impact on female labor force participation, particularly in families without the support of familial networks. The main effect of family responsibility on in paid employment for women is the rate of combination of family and work responsibilities. In poor agricultural economies, the female participation tends to be high because agricultural work and family responsibilities can easily be combined (Tam, 2011). Traditional norms are another restrictive factor. Fernández *et al.* (2004) findings have shown that societal perceptions of women in the workplace and gender norms strongly influence labor force participation decisions. The main purpose of this study was to identify the challenges of women's career advancement in Iranian AEO. Other objectives included:

- Recognizing demographic characteristics of female agricultural extension experts in AEO,
- Priority setting of career advancement barriers of women in AEO, and;
- Recognizing the main restrictive factors for women's career advancement in AEO.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Table 1. Classification of women's barriers to social and economic participations.

Author(s)	Subject of study	Nature of barriers
Squire (2002)	Barriers to women's participation in sustainable agricultural development	Legal, Family, Cultural, Educational
SeEVERS and Foster (2004)	Barriers experienced as a female extension agent	Cultural, Organizational, Personal, Managerial
Effa and Herring (2005)	Reasons for not women's participating in micro finance	Personal, Legal
Akeredolu <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Constraints to the production activities of women	Cultural, Family, Educational, Managerial
Wasaq <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Cultural barriers in women empowerment	Family, Cultural, Educational

This investigation is qualitative and quantitative in its nature; applied in type and survey in design. To achieve the study aims, the interview method was used with female experts working in AEO in Isfahan and Lorestan provinces of Iran. For this purpose, 21 female experts were asked to explain their views about the issues that prevented their career advancement and were special for women and not the case for their male co-workers. They were asked to describe these problems in six categories, namely, legal, personal, family, social, organizational, and cultural factors. Thus, semi-structured interview was the method used. The interviewees mentioned many reasons as barriers of their career advancement. Their explanation was classified and, finally, 25 different reasons were extracted (Table 2). In quantitative phase a questionnaire with 25 items in a five-point Likert type (very low=1 to very much=5) was formulated based on data obtained from qualitative phase. The face validity of the instrument was confirmed by a panel of specialists and the questionnaire reliability was estimated by calculating Cronbach's Alpha. By eliminating three statements, the alpha coefficient increased to 92% and the questionnaire statements decreased to 22 items. Statistical population included 409 female agricultural field officers in AEO in western and central provinces of Iran (Lorestan, Isfahan, Kermanshah, Illam and Kurdistan) according to the report of the administrative office of each organization. Finally, 135 women agricultural experts that had at least three years of work experience were selected as statistical sample based on calculation of Cochran formula. Statistical sample was selected through stratified random sampling technique. Each province was taken as a class and within each province the townships were selected randomly. Data were analyzed using SPSS software in two sections: descriptive, including mean and standard deviation, and inferential, including factor analysis.

RESULTS

Analysis of the demographic characteristics of the respondents showed that the age of the respondents ranged from 26-40, the mean age was 32.26 years (SD=4.93). The mean of work experience in AEO was 6.2 years (SD=5.20), with 14.1% of the respondents holding M.Sc., 65.9% holding B.Sc., and the rest (20%) were high school graduates. About 71.2% (n=80) of respondents worked at county level and the remaining worked at province level (15.8%).

Respondents were asked to determine the importance of each statement in preventing their career advancement on a five point Likert-type scale. The replies were prioritized based on mean index. Table 3 shows the priority setting of barriers of women's career advancement in AEO. According to the findings, "*giving key positions to men*" with mean of 4.82 (S.D.=0.35), "*little willingness of male colleagues toward women career advancement*" with mean of 4.79 (S.D.=0.52), "*offering routine and simple tasks to women*" with mean of 4.67 (S.D.=0.49), "*administrators' weak belief in women experts' competencies*" with mean of 4.56 (S.D.=0.63) and "*limitation to visit villages*" with mean of 4.43 (S.D.=0.71) were recognized as the main five barriers, respectively.

Likewise, "*time limitation to participate in extracurricular activities*" with mean equal to 3.29 (S.D. = 2.25), "*information and knowledge weakness*" with mean of 3.21 (S.D. = 2.28) and "*limitation for overtime work after working-hours*" with mean of 3.11 (S.D. = 2.37) were recognized as the three barriers with the lowest importance. These findings confirm results of many other researchers' findings. Seevers and Foster (2004) in studying barriers of female extension agents reported many similar barriers such as: lack of acceptance from

**Table 2.** Barriers of women's career advancement that were extracted in the qualitative phase.

Challenges	No. of believers	Justification
Little participation in the party and political activities	8	Process of managerial appointment in the AEO is done based on being adherent to assembly candidates
less participation in extracurricular activities	9	Cultural and extracurricular activities usually take place during and after praying ceremony, and women prefer to use this time to be informed about the family condition and controlling it
Limitation to participate in the full-time courses due to family responsibilities	16	Handling home, husband, guests and child affairs prevent women to participate in full-time training periods such as training courses and workshops
Paucity of women experts working in the AEO	9	Because the number of men working in the organization is more than women, it is expected men to be in priority to be chosen for managerial position and so long as the number of women is limited cannot expect appoint a women in a management positions
Farmers' weak belief about women's professional competencies	9	Farmers often consult men experts. This issue will result in well-knowing of men among farmers and so in the organization
Administrators' weak belief about women experts' competencies	12	Administrator have weak belief about women's professional capabilities, therefore they are appointed less in the important positions
Clients' referral to male colleagues	11	The clients (farmers) seek male experts when refer to the organization and prefer to speak with them about their technical issues
Limitation for overtime work after working-hours	5	Working overtime is done after the termination of working hours (since 2pm and thereafter). In these hours the organization is empty of people and normally and ethically women should not have presence in such places. This issue leads the female considered as less active labor force
Limitation of continuing education	14	High level education means higher technical capabilities and capacities for senior managers. Women in this area face great limitations.
Limitation in interacting with male clients	14	Women experts pay attention to social and religious norms while interact with male clients. It results in that women experts have little interaction with male addressers and thus decreases women popularity
Limitation in interacting with male colleagues	10	limitation in interacting with male colleagues has prevented their professional career success
Little motivation of women employees to more activity	5	Salary and reward are paid unjustly to men and women, therefore women have little motive to work further
Intensive concentration of ethical and discipline control	5	because they are more under ethical and discipline controls than men, so they pay more attention to this case/complication until be questioned without any reason
Little conformity between working hours and family responsibilities	15	The beginning of daily work (8 am) and its end (2 pm) coincide with the beginning and end of their children/husband school activities. They are forced to choose one of these two responsibilities and mostly this issue has put females work personality under question before administrators.
Involvement between maternal and job tasks	12	A woman is always concerned about her children and family challenges during working hours in the office. Therefore, she sacrifices for it with the personal motivation of career advancement
Limitation to visit villages	8	As a woman she suffers several limitations for visiting the farms of farmers whenever it is necessary. Therefore, mostly they stay at the office and less advance in their career
Little tendency of male colleagues to women career advancement	15	Male co-workers have little tendency to females advancement in their jobs. They stated that male co-workers did not show necessary cooperation in most such cases.
Offering important missions to men	7	There are missions that relate to solving main problems of farmers (distributing fertilizer, introducing farmers to bank to receive credits ...) and result in the employees' publicity and administrators often give such responsibilities to male employees
Offering routine and simple tasks to women	18	often simple official works but long lasting duties such as entering statistics are committed to women in the organizations

Continued Table2

Continue of Table 2.

Challenges	No. of believers	Justification
Providing key posts to men	16	When a managerial post is empty, administrators do not think much about charging women in that post
Physical weakness	5	Women due to physical weakness cannot as men involve in official jobs. Six hours work a day make them more tired than men
Information and knowledge weakness	2	Women's knowledge is less than men due to little experiences of agricultural work and limited interaction with male farmers and experts.
Little experiences in agricultural work	6	Women have less experience in connection with agricultural works and this inflicts negative impact on the women professional and technical capabilities
Little effort to access managerial posts	6	little efforts and tendency to career advancement by women is as a barrier to her career advancement
Little conformity between the facilities of boarding centers and women conditions	7	There are limited facilities for women in the boarding school centers; therefore they often cannot participate in the boarding school courses that have great effect on their career advancement

Table 3. Priority setting of challenges of women's career advancement in AEO.

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Rank
Providing key posts to men	4.82	.35	1
Little tendency of male colleagues to women career advancement	4.79	.52	2
Offering routine and simple tasks to women	4.67	.49	3
Administrators' weak belief about women experts' competencies	4.56	.63	4
Limitation to visit villages	4.43	.71	5
Little conformity between working hours and family responsibilities	4.29	.88	6
Involvement between maternal and job tasks	4.28	.68	7
Little conformity between the facilities of boarding centers and women conditions	4.28	.77	8
Intensive concentration of ethical and discipline control	4.17	.92	9
Little motivation of women employees to more activity	4.11	1.23	10
Farmers' weak belief about women's professional competencies	4.02	1.25	11
Limitation to participate in the full-time courses	3.96	1.56	12
Women's little effort to access managerial posts	3.94	.98	13
Clients' referral to male colleagues	3.89	1.32	14
Limitation in interacting with male clients	3.88	1.98	15
Paucity of women experts working in the AEO	3.84	1.78	16
Limitation in interacting with male colleagues	3.76	1.86	17
Limitation of continuing education	3.76	2.03	18
Little participation in the party and political activities	3.74	2.11	19
Time limitation to participate in extracurricular activities	3.29	2.25	20
Information and knowledge weakness	3.21	2.28	21
Limitation for overtime work after working-hours	3.11	2.37	22

1= very low, 2= low, 3= medium, 4= much and 5= very much

male colleagues and clients, and the need to "prove yourself" as a woman for becoming an administrator. Kemirembe et al. (2007) findings showed that limitation in transportation had been a main barrier for

women participation in agricultural extension services. Barbercheck et al. (2009) found that isolation from others (male and female farmers) had been a main barrier for women farmer.



Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was utilized to summarize the variables of the research to a smaller quantity and to determine the main challenges faced by women in achieving career advancement. The implemented computations revealed that the internal coherence of the data was appropriate (KMO=0.796). Bartlett's test was significant at 0.01 level. According to Kaiser Criteria, there were 4 factors whose Eigen values were extracted more than 1 (Table 4). Finally, research variables were categorized into four factors by Varimax Rotation Method.

According to factor analysis, four challenges to women's career advancement were identified and variables of each factor

were extracted based on Table 5 and were grouped as follows:

Attitudinal Factor

This factor had the highest Eigen value (8.64) among the other factors. Also, this factor explained 20.48% of the total variances of the variables and consisted of seven items including: "Administrators' weak belief in women experts' competencies", "limitation in interacting with male clients", "limitation of continuing education", "limitation for overtime work after working-hours", "clients' referral to male colleagues", "farmers' weak belief in

Table 4. The extracted determinants with the corresponding Eigen values, variance percentage, and the cumulative variance percentage.

The Factor No.	Eigen values	Variance percentage of the Eigen values	Cumulative variance percentage
1	8.64	20.48	20.48
2	4.91	16.74	37.22
3	3.83	15.98	53.20
4	2.88	10.16	63.36

Table 5. Restrictive factors for women's career advancement in AEO.

Factors	Variables	Factor loads
<i>Attitudinal</i>	Administrators' weak belief in women experts' competencies	.831
	Limitation in interacting with male clients	.811
	Limitation of continuing education	.762
	Limitation for overtime work after working-hours	.791
	Clients' referral to male colleagues	.610
	Farmers' weak belief in women's professional competencies	.586
	Limitation to visit villages	.530
<i>Male dominance organization structure</i>	Little willingness of male colleagues toward women career advancement	.823
	Paucity of women experts working in the AEO	.753
	Little motivation of women employees for more activity	.769
	Giving key positions to men	.682
<i>Time limitation</i>	Time limitation to participate in extracurricular activities	.733
	Little participation in political parties/ activities	.548
	Limitation to participate in the full-time courses	.510
<i>Adaptive</i>	Little conformity between working hours and family responsibilities	.627
	Little conformity between the facilities of boarding centers and women conditions	.561
	Offering routine and simple tasks to women	.504

women's professional competencies" and "limitation to visit villages". According to Bhalalusesa (1998), the challenges that women experience in trying to achieve their career aspirations are mainly socio-cultural, and psychologically deep-rooted in their traditional values and practices. Akeredolu *et al.* (2007) have shown that socio-cultural restrictions make women almost invisible.

Male-dominated Organizational Structure Factor

This factor, with Eigen value of 4.91, explained 16.74% of the total variances of the variables and consisted of four items including: "little willingness of male colleagues toward women career advancement", "paucity of women experts working in the AEO", "little motivation of women employees to more activity" and "giving key positions to men". Seevers and Foster (2004) have pointed to male-dominated organizational structure, also called the "good 'ole boy system", as a preventative factor for participation of female extension agents.

Time Limitation Factor

This factor, with Eigen value of 3.83, explained 15.98% of the total variances of the variables and consisted of three items including: "time limitation to participate in extracurricular activities", "little participation in the political parties and activities", and "limitation to participate in the full-time courses".

Adaptive Factor

This factor, with Eigen value of 2.88, explained 10.16% of the total variances of the variables and consisted of three items including "little conformity between working hours and family responsibilities", "little conformity between the facilities of boarding

centers and women conditions", and "offering routine and simple tasks to women". Alibayg *et al.* (2013) and Al-Rimawi (2002) showed that family demands have great influence on women's business. As shown in Table 4, the above four factors explained 63.36% of the total variance of the research variables. In other words, 36.64% of total variance that pertains to other variables was not explained, and these predictions did not come true in this analysis.

DISCUSSION

Whereas the aim of this study was the recognition of the challenges of women's career advancement from female employees' perspective, we certainly cannot explain the findings of this research as representing all of the barriers of women's career advancement. Possibly, there are other reasons which should be investigated from the men's perspective.

Based on the items/statements that show women's responsibilities in the family as well as the time factor, it seems that women employees prefer (or require) to spend less time for their job in comparison with men. The results of Sabarwal and Terrell (2009) showed that female entrepreneurs had preferred to keep their business on a small scale to be able to perform their family responsibilities. The limitations related to the time factor is another challenge. Blackden and Wodon (2006) show that gender difference causes difference in time use pattern, in such a way that men concentrate only on their production role as their first priority while women concurrently focus on their production as well as family roles. Therefore, they should create a competitive balance for how to use their time.

"Limitation to visit villages" refers to the fact that the respondents could not even take short trips for few hours to nearby villages. Also, Kemirembe *et al.* (2007) study proved this issue. They introduced women's traffic



as one of the preventive factors for women's participation in agricultural extension services.

Attitudinal factor was introduced as another part of women's career advancement barriers in the AEO that has root in the people's attitude toward a woman's capability. As an inclusive experiment, it has been accepted that social norms and traditions affect women's contribution in economic, social, and political affairs. Anker (1998) stated that women and men use norms and traditions to justify their role at home and in the society. Therefore, the culture of society about proper role for men and women result in cliché understanding of suitable job for a woman and this understanding should have impact on the skills advancement. In other words, the society determines what role is proper for what gender and people based on these traditions accept their role and develop their capabilities. Honig (2000) and Chen (2005) study showed that in China, despite strong governmental support for gender equality on multiple levels in the workplace, cultural norms have still emphasized the role of women as *xian qiliangmu* (a good wife and a good mother) and as the bearer of responsibility for household work. General norms recognize maternal and home keeping as the best role for women.

Women introduced interaction issue with the opposite gender (clients and co-workers) as one of the career advancement challenges. World Bank (2012) reports that women have little access to information related to job networks. The results of Timberlake's (2005) study showed that while personal interactions facilitate job recognition, but family responsibilities prevent making useful social interactions for women. Also, Hiroko *et al.* (2011) insisted that women who had fewer social contacts were also more vulnerable to redundancy and experienced more hardships in finding a new job after having been displaced from their old job. Anyway, we cannot ignore managerial discrimination impact on women's career advancement in the AEO.

The big proof for this evidence is *the second factor (male-dominated organizational structure factor)*. Male colleagues' jealousy is a worldwide challenge. Akeredolu *et al.* (2007) have pointed to this issue.

Adaptive factor mentions the need for gender sensitive program in terms of creating specific working conditions for female employees. A female employee has more responsibilities than a male employee. So, she should have more time to conduct them.

Anyway, according to the findings of this study, we can offer the following conclusions:

1- Time use pattern is a process that can hurt women's career advancement in different forms e.g., men's negative attitudes toward women prevents the administrators from giving to women high managerial positions, which demand much time and numerous travels.

2- It seems that, under a religious attitude prevailing in Iranian society that puts great emphasis on controlling women and men relations (talking, interacting etc.)- most of the employed women with such attitudes, and under male-dominated organizational structure that mostly includes men employees, prefer to work in a womanly environment. Therefore, women are sent less on official outdoor missions, interact less with men, and administrators, farmers, and co-workers have less belief in their capabilities. In order to eliminate the negative attitudes toward women's role and capabilities, it is necessary to support cultural and training plans at society scale by mass medias. Informing and taking effort for gender equality in the framework of organization and defending women's right should continue until the idea that "the first role of a woman is accountability to family needs" disappears.

3- Also, it seems that, in AEO, the women cannot use informal interactions and communications to create informal networks due to disciplinary controls which determine their positions in the organization. It seems that respondent's attitude towards "little

participation in the political parties and activities" also show women's limited interaction in the AEO. Thus, interaction issue with the opposite gender can be considered as one of the most important barriers of women's career advancement.

4- While most of the respondents believed (with mean of 4.11) that the system of salary payment was unjustified or that salary of female experts was low, there is no doubt about gender discrimination effect on women career advancement in the AEO. The issue is that all key positions/posts belong to men in this organization and women mostly do routine and simple works, however, this may be due to men's incorrect attitude and/or due to the women's own will. But we should not forget that all women employees are not unwilling to reach managerial positions. Gender discrimination and women's career advancement are mutually reinforcing. While gender discrimination decreases women's career success, women's little success in their jobs also intensify discrimination against them. Women's career advancement in the AEO needs gender equality and male and female employees must have equal access to the same positions and opportunities for career advancement.

5- Presence of women in low positions of organization can be due to the above reasons; moreover, women prefer to choose positions in AEO that are most adaptive with their responsibilities at home. In this study, the women respondents spoke directly about their unwillingness to occupy managerial positions and their stress about "women's little effort to reach managerial positions" as the tenth priority can give a sign of this issue. To solve this problem, it is suggested that plans of human resources development (in-service training courses etc.) should be more sensitive towards gender issue. In other words, although, the managers execute plans to develop employees' capabilities every year, but they cannot usefully be applied because of the lack of gender sensitivities to those plans. At the end, we refer to the quotation of a young female in

the interview that explains the barriers of women's career advancement in the AEO in an elegant statement, concisely: the belief in that she can do her tasks as well as a man. Sometimes, taking a risk can create great consequences. Creating human being sense is a motivation to ignore differences

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چالش های پیشرفت شغلی زنان در سازمان ترویج کشاورزی ایران

م. مرادی کفراج، و س. ح. موحد محمدی

چکیده

از آنجایی که زنان بخش کوچکی از مدیران ترویج کشاورزی کشور را تشکیل می دهند، به منظور تسهیل مشارکت زنان در برنامه های توسعه لازم است که سیاست برابری فرصت های شغلی و آموزشی به طور جدی مورد توجه قرار گیرد. هدف این مطالعه شناسایی مشکلات پیشرفت شغلی زنان در سازمان ترویج کشاورزی بود. مطالعه به روش پیمایشی انجام شد. نمونه آماری شامل ۱۳۵ متخصص زن در سازمان ترویج کشاورزی بود که به روش نمونه گیری طبقه ای تصادفی انتخاب شدند. پرسشنامه ابزار پژوهش بود. اعتبار روایی با نظر متخصصان تایید شد و پایایی آن با محاسبه آلفای کرونباخ تایید شد (۰/۹۲). به نظر پاسخگویان، ارائه پست های کلیدی به مردان، ارائه وظایف روتین و ساده به زنان، تمایل کم همکاران مرد به پیشرفت شغلی زنان، اعتقاد کم مدیران به توانمندی های زنان و محدودیت جهت سرکشی به روستاها، به عنوان پنج متغیر بازدارنده نخست انتخاب شد. همچنین، تحلیل عاملی انجام شده، عوامل نگرشی، ساختار سازمانی مرد محور، محدودیت زمانی و سازوارپذیر را مشخص ساخت. تحت مجموعه ای از چالش های محدود کننده از قبیل تبعیض مدیریتی، هنجارها و نگرش های منفی در مورد نقش و توانایی های زنان، درگیری شدید بین وظایف اداری و خانوادگی و میل فردی، زنان سهم کمی در کسب مشاغل مدیریتی سازمان ترویج کشاورزی دارند. بنابراین، برنامه های توانمندسازی باید در این حوزه ها متمرکز شوند.