



Rural Women Empowerment, Social Development and Extension Role

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Employment is one of the main issues that has an important contribution in a country's economic policy and planning program. Since rural women contribute half of the population in rural areas, their employment and empowerment has a crucial importance in this respect. Although rural women play an important role in production, they have been always underestimated in valuing production and their ability has not been appreciated. One reason for the need to their empowerment, their direct and indirect contribution in development indicators. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the methods of empowering rural women through the formation of rural production cooperatives, granting micro-finance and increasing training and literacy of rural women as well as their impact on social development. To achieve the above objective, this paper has utilized reviewing relevant documents. Rural production cooperatives can be one mechanism for increasing rural women income and employment. Cooperatives can attract women's capital and create job opportunities, so they can reduce unemployment, increase productivity and income and finally improve the welfare of rural women. Thus, presence of women in group production activities provides an appropriate context for their participation in social development. Another empowerment mechanism is granting micro-finance support to rural women. Results showed that the women who have received loans, because of improving their economic situation, their confidence has also increased and finally led to their participation in community development. Increasing women's knowledge and skills in relation to production and business activities can cause traditional agricultural activities of women change to business-oriented activities, which lead to the enhanced contribution of rural women to social development. Moreover, empowering rural women can happen through developing tourism, handicraft making and social support. This may need the application of extension approaches for their empowerment.

Key Words: Empowerment, rural women, employment, social Development, extension