

Analyzing Factors behind Livelihood Unsustainability in Rural Regions (Case Study: Saravan Town)

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Rural households living in the villages surrounding Saravan town are faced with numerous problems as a result of unemployment, lack of agricultural innovation and technologies, low income, and absence of motivation for living. These circumstances have led to a number of issues such as immigration, insecurity and most importantly, livelihood instability and unsustainability. Given these problems, many families have changed how they make a living, resorting to dangerous activities such as smuggling fuels and goods mainly due to livelihood unsustainability and lack of options to provide for themselves. Accordingly, a set of factors together with local and familial capitals can affect livelihood opportunities and/or the insecurity of rural households' livelihoods, particularly in isolated communities. Identifying the type of livelihood capitals is a useful solution for planners and policymakers to improve level of livelihood and pay attention to rural inconsistencies and changes. In this study, the sustainable livelihood approach was adopted to examine local and familial factors and capitals behind insecurity and unsustainability of livelihood across Saravan town villages located along the border. The following research questions were then formulated: What are the most important causes behind livelihood unsustainability in Saravan rural areas? What are the most important familial causes behind livelihood unsustainability in Saravan rural areas? What are the ways adopted by rural families to make a living as a response to livelihood unsustainability?

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The approach adopted for the present study falls under the framework of households' sustainable livelihood approach. As one of rural sustainable development approaches, this strategy was created in the late 1980s with the purpose of rural improvement and poverty eradication. Sustainable livelihood and subsistence represents a mixture of household activities and choices. The basis behind the sustainable livelihood approach

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involves the fact that people require an extensive spectrum of assets to achieve positive results in their livelihood. According to this approach, assets include (i) private assets and capitals (familial capitals), and (ii) public capitals (of the society). Both types of capitals specifically affect household livelihood. Livelihood opportunities for households also depend on their access to capitals at levels of family and the society that help them against social, economic, and environmental pressures. In other words, households' access to livelihood opportunities depends on the extent of the family and society capitals. When a household does not face livelihood shocks, then a combination of local and familial capitals leads to livelihood sustainability as opposed to unsustainability.

3. Method

The present study was conducted using the mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) with applied purposes. The mixed method was used due to the following reasons; first, qualitative research instruments such as interviews, observations, and the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) method were employed to obtain deep data on the experiences of rural communities with respect to both local and collective capitals that affect their livelihoods. Second, to identify familial factors and capitals as well as the strategies against livelihood shocks, the quantitative method and questionnaire (with the Likert scale) were used. Accordingly, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used for data collection. Theoretical studies were collected using documents and field data obtained from questionnaires, observations, and interviews with rural households. The total population of the study included rural households of Saravan town (N=25986). Sample population was indicated as 370, using Cochran's formula. The number of samples for each region and village (based on the number of households) were specified using the sample population formula and the quota sampling method (based on the number of households).

4. Results and Discussion

Findings related to the local factors affecting rural livelihood showed that the most important natural capital identified by the respondents was the water supplies, esp. for agricultural applications. Public services and facilities such as educational and health centers are at a low level across Saravan town rural areas; moreover, lack of access to credit and banking along with aforesaid factors have directly and indirectly resulted in livelihood unsustainability throughout the villages of the region. Generally, among the local factors, the highest levels of association with livelihood instability of rural residents belong to natural factors, production infrastructure, services, and public facilities, respectively. According to the logistical findings with respect to familial factors and capitals related to livelihood unsustainability of rural residents in Saravan town show that out of the five factors considered, the economic factor (0.632) and natural factor (0.540) respectively had the highest effects on livelihood unsustainability (the dependent variable). Albeit, the human capital (0.449) and physical capital (0.463) were also effective in rural livelihood unsustainability at 0.005 level. The lowest extent of effectiveness belonged to the social capital (0.178). The following results were obtained with

respect to the livelihood means as a response to livelihood shocks, insecurities and unsustainability: Out of 370 respondents, 30.5% believed that they had resorted to mendacious jobs such as smuggling fuels and goods; 18.4% expressed that they had not adopted any specific strategy as they are incapable of using means for livelihood and are forced to cope with these circumstances and keep on living in poverty as unemployed people. Finally, 15.4% believed that had been forced into service labor in cities.

5. Conclusion

Findings related to the familial factors affecting the livelihood of rural residents in the studied regions showed that the following factor have the highest association with their livelihood unsustainability: lack of fixed income for families, unsustainability of family wage and employment, lack of ownership, absence of assets such as gold and jewelry, absence of proper saving for families, households' lack of proper access to assets and production institutes such as seeds and fertilizers, lack of vehicle and machinery ownership, low number of work force in families, low literacy and education levels within families, absence of technical and skilled individuals in families, presence of small and dispersed agricultural lands, lack of private lands for agriculture, and absence of water supply shares, water well ownership, and fertile agricultural lands. Results with respect to familial factors and capitals behind livelihood unsustainability of Saravan town rural residents demonstrated the economic and social factors as the most and least effective factors on livelihood unsustainability, respectively. In response to livelihood shocks and unsustainability, rural households have resorted to mendacious jobs such as smuggling fuels and goods, choosing to remain in poverty, doing service labor in cities, and selling their assets as the most important strategies to confront said issues.

Keywords: Local Capital, Familial Capital, Rural Livelihood, Border Regions, Saravan Town

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