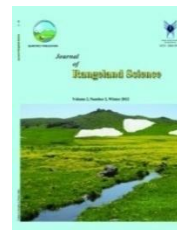


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**Full Length Article:**

**Comparative Study of Member Viewpoints about Effective Socio-Economic Factors on the Range Management Cooperatives Success (Golestan Province)**

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**Abstract.** Renewable natural resources are the wealth that not only belongs to the current generation but also to future generations. Diversity in rangeland user viewpoints and policy makers has caused these lands to face some damages. This study was conducted to compare viewpoints of ordinary members as rangeland users, and board of directors as executives of management plans. Statistical population of the study involved ordinary members and board of directors of 28 range management cooperatives in Golestan province. According to the Krejsi- Morgan Table, 308 and 78 individuals were randomly selected for ordinary members and board of directors as sample size, respectively. Main material of this study is based on utilizing questionnaires that their validity and reliability were checked based on a guide study. To analyze data, qualitative methods, descriptive statistics and T-test were used. The results showed that there was a significant disagreement between ordinary members and board of directors about effective social-economic factors on range management cooperatives success. Based on the results, providing loans to the cooperative members with low interest and long term payback and better chemistry for more attraction of members participation in decision-making and cooperatives plans are recommended.

**Key words:** Range management cooperatives, Success, Socio-economic factors, Golestan province.

## Introduction

Undoubtedly by getting a glimpse on decision making process about renewable natural resources, vicissitudinous and sometimes contradictory procedures can be found in planning and decision making in order to manage these precious resources in recent decades. There is a rapid degradation rate in renewable natural resources especially rangelands so that the country is faced to a deep crisis (Najafi *et al.*, 2008). Rangelands as natural ecosystems have enormous importance, making up nearly 43 percent of the terrestrial global landscapes (Mesdaghi, 2003). By increasing human population, human needs have also risen. It had positive and negative effects, and wherever the utilization of rangelands is irrational, the equilibrium of resource is destroyed. Natural resources play undeniable role in national economy and rangelands occupy approximately the broadest part of country natural resources total area and have important roles such as soil and water conservation and with recreation values, air regulations, animals feed and so on. They should be then treated as a national asset and with a holistic management. Cooperative systems are considered as one of the patterns that people participate in conservation and restoration of natural resources especially rangelands through executive organizations. Rangeland cooperatives are also provided extensive participation of users in rangelands development processes and can solve their social, economical and cultural problems by such participatory approaches. Cooperative, in general meaning, is defined as “together work”, “help”, “participation” and “sharing in providing public needs”. As a specific meaning, cooperative is individuals participation and co-working for founding an economical organization through accepting the rules that reject trade and exploitation of a person and its main

objective is to collect ethical and anthropological values with economical goals (Namegh, 2009). The cooperative goal is to service the society and especially its members that encompass “members possesses”, “members benefits” and “controlling by members” (Davies and Burt, 2007). Developing countries personnel also had seriously studied extending and institutionalizing of cooperative literacy between different layers of society. Rangeland managers and users are not excluded. In such conditions, cooperative management should be changed its management patterns to modern management according to sustainable development, new innovation in different developmental actions, increasing incomes and making suitable and on time decisions. Therefore, partnership of cooperative section, as one of the economy sections, is people base, and it is very important and also has a wide range of responsibility. So, understanding the concepts of cooperative prospect and its effective factors is one of the critical criteria for Natural Resources Cooperative Corporation which grows and develop especially the range management cooperative and reach to its different aims. There is a general paucity of information on controlling factors of Natural Resources Cooperative Corporation and especially range management cooperative success. Alipour (2001), Samari and Rasolzade (2008), Karami and Agahi (2010), and Zare Yekta (2007) found credit facilitations as the effective factors on cooperatives. Latifian (2005) and Ebrahimi *et al.*, (2010) stated that the cooperatives which had attracted more members and their participation, were more successful in comparison to other cooperatives. In other words, having more members and their participation in cooperative activities are of corporate corporation goals.

Zeranejad and Sharifi Mood (2007) have examined the Ilam province cooperative members and executive look to affective factors of efficiency improvement on these cooperatives and showed that fortifying financial afford and efficient labor force are affecting on efficiency improvement of consumption cooperatives. Molla Hosseini and Mohammadi (2010), Shaver and Scott (1991), and Reynolds (2006) found that executives experience have direct and significant relationship with cooperative efficiency. Beverly (1996) stated that there is more awareness about obtaining credits and facilitations to improve marketing condition and attempting to organize cooperative. This will make possible its ultimate goal, i.e. cooperatives dependence. Robert (2002) has been considered the initial investment and financial management a effective factor on industrial cooperatives in United States. Member participation in cooperative activities was considered as one of the most important factors in their success (AAC, 1988; Abbasi, *et al.*, 2009; Amini and Ramezani, 2006; Shabanali Famy, *et al.*, 2006; Mohammadi, 2005). Amount of members investment in cooperatives is of effective variables in their success (Sadighi and Darvishinia, 2002; Heydarpour, *et al.*, 2008). Financial problems (Taghavi, 2003; Taleb, 2008), responsibility sense (Azkia and Ghafari, 2001) and members communication (Samari and Rasolzade, 2008) are reported as effective variables in cooperative success. In the rangeland cooperative field, two categories can be generally distinguished. First, there are ordinary members that are rangeland users. Second, there is board of directors that is responsible for rangeland maintenance and conservation as well as being users. It is obvious that each of these two groups, depending on their own interests and tasks, have different point and perception of

effective factors on these parties succession. By considering these introductory points, the objective of this study was to indicate the differences of socio-economical factors affecting cooperative success between two group viewpoints, i.e. ordinary members and board of directors in Golestan province range management cooperatives.

### Materials and Methods

The study was done by examining Golestan province cooperatives. Golestan province plants are amazingly different because of geographical location and climate condition. The province vegetation includes forests, woodlands, rangelands, grasslands, steppes and deserts. Total area of province rangelands is about 1,126,000 ha (Karami and Agahi, 2010). Warm season rangelands are mostly located in Gorgan plain that is between Gorgan River and Turkmenistan border. Livestock grazing has an important economic role in the Golestan province economy. The province rangelands are affected by Torkaman pastoral approaches in northern part of province, native Fars pastoralists in southern and central parts and mountains, and nomadic pastoralists from northern Khorasan in northern and north-eastern rangelands that caused to different types of culture, exploitation, livelihood and language variation and so on, that use rangelands commonly in the form of management units and active societies. The modern management procedures of rangelands had set them as organized bodies of cooperatives, exploitation corporation and so on, that seriously participate in rangelands restoration and exploitation activities. To manage rangelands with goals including conservation, restoration, development and proper utilization, in order to stable and continuous production and basic resources (soil and water) conservation, range management plans are developed and will

beganted after approval in the form of cooperative corporations with participation of beneficiary pastoralists. There are 28 rangeland cooperatives with about 1315 members that are allowed to manage 56 range management plans with area more than 171,000 ha. Data were collected through census. Due to time and equipment limitations, it was impossible to sample total statistical population (including 1350 ordinary members and 140 members of board of directors). Therefore, sampling was randomly applied. The sample size of 308 and 78 numbers were respectively allocated to ordinary members and board of directors according to the Krejsi- Morgan Table. The needed sample size for each cooperative was determined by using proportionate allocation method (total number of member of each cooperative/total number of members of all cooperatives total sample size). Questionnaire and interview were main data collection tools. To determine research tools, oral questionnaires were corrected by using experts and specialists viewpoints, Cronbach  $\alpha$  was used to determine questionnaires validity and reliability. Analytical and descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. The descriptive statistics chosen include: mean, and standard deviation or coefficient of variance. To test the equality of means of the two member group viewpoints and to assess the differences in means, T test at the 95% confidence levels was used as analytical statistic. The SPSS ver. 18 statistical software package was mainly used. In this study, extent of realization of cooperatives goals was treated as extent of cooperatives success. So, cooperatives success was assessed by asking 25 questions that were defined in nine of cooperative goals. There were five options for answering to each question from never to very good. Zero score was allocated to never and 4 score was allocated to very good. After

calculating final scores, the extent of realization of cooperatives goals was estimated. The scores were then converted to four level of extent of cooperatives success as follow:

- a) the cooperatives success was estimated low, if  $S < \text{Mean} - Sd$
- b) the cooperatives success was estimated medium, if  $\text{Mean} - Sd < S \leq \text{Mean}$
- c) the cooperatives success was estimated high, if  $\text{Mean} < S \leq \text{Mean} + Sd$
- d) the cooperatives success was estimated very high, if  $\text{Mean} + Sd < S$

where:

mean is the average of extent of cooperatives success in realization of cooperatives goals and  $Sd$  is standard deviation. Providing credit facilitations, financial problems in cooperatives, responsibility sense, ethnical and racial types differences, local customs and traditions, relations between members and their participation in cooperatives were evaluated by 9, 2, 3, 5, and 5 questions respectively. There were five options for answering to each question from none to very high. Zero score was allocated to none and 4 score was allocated to very high. All presented questions for scaling extent of cooperatives success and socio-economical factors were designed based on meeting and exploration interviews with rangeland users and personnel of natural resources and corporation bureaus. First, corresponding indices were determined for each factor and several questions were then designed for them.

## **Results**

After extracting and analyzing presented viewpoints of both ordinary and board of director members about extent of rangeland cooperatives success and effective socio-economical factors on them, answers were presented as coefficients of variation and then ranked according to means and standard deviations (Table 1). In (Fig. 1)

the comparisons results of the two group viewpoints are presented. As it can be clearly seen in (Table 1), the factors with same order in each group are connected to each other by arrows to show the difference between each of them based on their order. The result shows that the first three orders of ordinary members viewpoints that are correspondence to responsibility sense, relations between members and their participation in cooperatives activities, are the same as the first three orders of board of directors viewpoints. In other word, responsibility sense, relations between members, and their participation in cooperatives activities are the three first reasons for rangeland cooperatives success from both ordinary and board of director viewpoints. Local customs and traditions were in the fourth

order based on ordinary member viewpoints but it was in fifth order according to board of directors. The last order was assigned to provide credit facilitation by ordinary member viewpoints, but based on board of director viewpoints, ethnical and racial type differences was the last order. The results show that 39.4 percent of both groups are set the studied rangeland cooperatives in medium functionality. In other word, most of members believe that rangeland cooperatives were relatively successful in realization of their goals. This is because of the reason that 30.8% and 16.1% of members have set the cooperatives in high and very high functionality respectively. The frequency distribution of the variables is presented in 9 Table 2).

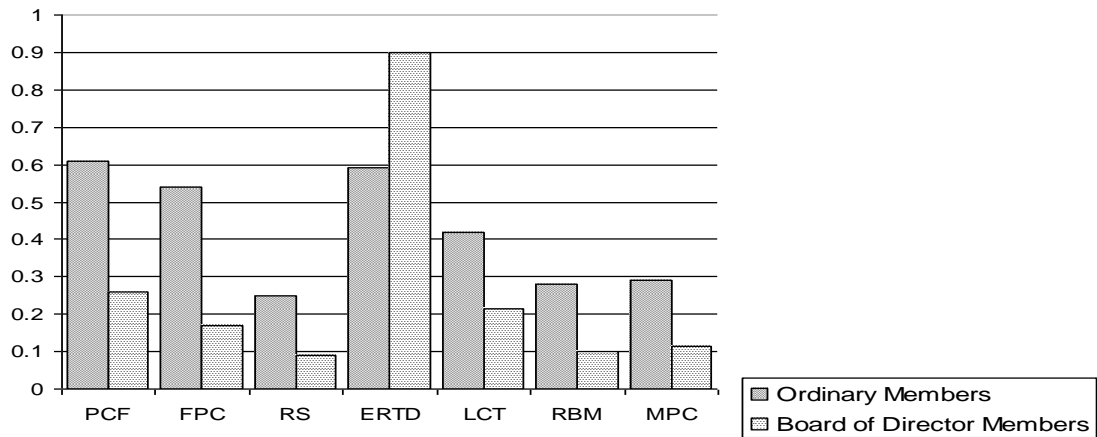


Fig. 1. Ordinary and board of director viewpoints about socio-economical factors, PCF= Providing Credit Facilitations, FPC= Financial Problems of Cooperatives, RS= Responsibility Sense, ERTD= Ethnical and Racial Types Differences, LCT= Local Customs and Traditions, RBM= Relations Between Members, MPC= Members Participation in Cooperatives.

Table 1. The frequency distribution of answerers in terms of rangeland cooperatives success

Extend of Success	Answerers Number	Percentage	Cumulative Percent
low	53	13.7	13.7
Medium	152	39.4	53.1
High	119	30.8	83.9
Very high	62	16.1	100

Table 2. Comparison of ordinary members and board of director viewpoints about effective socio-economical factors on rangeland cooperatives success

Socio-Economical Factors	Ordinary Member Viewpoints					Board of Director Viewpoints				
	Mean	Sd	CV	Order	Relations	Mean	Sd	CV	Order	
Providing credit facilitations	2.21	1.35	0.61	7		3.14	0.83	0.26	6	
Financial problems of cooperatives	2.16	1.17	0.54	5		3.13	0.54	0.17	4	
Responsibility sense	17.75	4.50	0.25	1		25.81	2.43	0.09	1	
Ethnical and racial types differences	1.94	1.15	0.59	6		0.62	0.69	0.9	7	
Local customs and traditions	4.73	2.01	0.42	4		7.06	1.54	0.22	5	
Relations between members	9.91	2.83	0.28	2		16.58	1.72	0.1	2	
Participation in cooperatives	9.51	2.79	0.29	3		14.79	1.74	0.12	3	

**Extent of rangeland cooperatives success**

The T test was used to compare rangeland cooperatives success based on ordinary members and board of directors. The results show that board of directors valued the cooperatives more successful than what ordinary members did ( $p < 0.01$ ). In other word, rangeland cooperatives were more successful in their activities based on board of director viewpoints.

**Providing credit facilitation**

The finding of the study show that there are significant differences between ordinary members and board of director viewpoints regarding providing credit facilitation ( $p < 0.01$ ). It means that providing credit facilitation was assessed more by direction board than ordinary members and they believed that the cooperatives were functioned better in this field.

**Financial problems in cooperatives**

Based on the research results, there is a meaningful difference between ordinary members and board of directors viewpoints

about financial problems in cooperatives ( $p < 0.01$ ).

**Responsibility sense**

Mean comparison of viewpoints of ordinary members and board of directors of rangeland cooperatives indicated that responsibility sense was scored more by board of directors than ordinary members ( $p < 0.01$ ).

**Members' participation in cooperatives**

There are significant differences between ordinary members and board of directors viewpoints about participation in cooperatives activities ( $p < 0.01$ ). It means that board of directors participate in cooperatives activities more than ordinary members.

**Relations between members**

Mean comparison of ordinary members and board of directors viewpoints showed that there is a significant difference between ordinary members and board of

directors view points about relationships between members ( $p < 0.01$ ).

### Discussion and Conclusion

Natural resources as the bed of all social and economical activities are of enormous importance. The most critical problem about natural resources fields including rangelands is that; in one hand, there is the notion that rangelands are people fields for life and livelihood and this notion leads to huge damages of rangelands. On the other hand, cooperatives as contractors of range management plans are responsible for rangeland restoration, conservation and suitable utilization. Consequently, there are always conflicts between two group viewpoints and each of them might consider different factor (s) as effective factor (s) on rangeland cooperatives success. The research findings showed that ordinary members and board of directors have identical view points about responsibility sense, relationship between members, and member participation in cooperatives activities; it means that the three factors are evaluated from the same orders. This shows that the ordinary and board of directors members considered responsibility sense, relationship between members, and member participation in cooperatives activities in the first, second and third orders, respectively. In other words, the three factors are assessed as the most effective factors on cooperatives success. There was significant differences between ordinary members and board of directors viewpoints about rangeland cooperatives success in realization of goals ( $p < 0.01$ ). It means that board of directors members have more important role in rangeland cooperatives success factors. The important note is that both two group members were unanimous in this point that the rangeland corporations were successful in realization of cooperatives goals. But there was a significant difference between

their viewpoints about amount of succession. This difference can be explained by two group expectation from each other. On the one hand, the ordinary members have more expectation from corporations in the cases of providing credit facilitation and financial problems. It could be stemmed from lack of ordinary members' awareness of corporations responsibility and authorization. On the other hand, board of directors expects the ordinary members to participate more in corporation activities and interact more with each other. The important note is to match both group views in order to reach cooperative success in the future. In order to achieve this goal, the following suggestion can be offered:

- Beneficiary organizations attempt to attract members' participation in rangeland restoration and rehabilitation plans and fortify their weakness to attract their participation by identifying members' weakness and strength in different ways.
- Banks should be considered facilitations to provide loans to the cooperative members at a low interest and long term payment.
- Asset factor should be considered by credit institutes that provide cooperative corporations assets.
- Cooperative directors should take native elders and all racial viewpoints; because these individuals are respectful for local people and their participation in cooperatives activities will undoubtedly encourage other people to participate in cooperatives activities and to do their jobs responsibly.

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