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Analysis of the Role of Handicraft Production in Rural Sustainable Development: A Case of Sar Aqa Seyyed, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province

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Abstract

Prioritizing the Rural development is one of the fundamental concerns of the Islamic Republic of Iran that is not achieved only through the agriculture development in villages of Iran, since weakness of agricultural foundations affect the unstable ecological conditions including the shortage of agricultural fields and the lack of the increase in number of land plots under cultivation, and cannot provide the proper social and economic indices for rural development. Experiences of successful countries in the rural development show the importance of the village industrialization in creating the job opportunities and preventing the rural migration to the cities. Theory of development and industrialization of rural areas is a factor affecting the economic and social development process and may be considered as the last solution for solving the problem of poverty in the rural areas as we see its success in China through this paper. Therefore, this paper examines the role of the handicraft production in sustainable development in the Sar Aqa Seyyed village. A number of handicrafts including carpet weaving as the main handicrafts of Sar Aqa Seyyed village are still flourishing. Handicraft production and development in this village not only creates employment opportunities and income, but also can play a major role in sustainable development and the village independence.

Keywords: Handicrafts, Economy, Sustainable Rural Development, Sar Aqa Seyyed.

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Introduction

Rural industrialization may be considered as a kind of strategy that provides the proper tools for diversification of the rural economy and therefore it is regarded as an economic approach that creates job opportunities, increases and helps the balanced distribution of the incomes, improves the rural life and provides the sustainable rural development of (Hajizadeh Asl and Ghaderi, 2015, p. 2).

Theory of the rural development and industrialization and of the rural areas is a factor affecting the economic and social development process and simultaneously, is the last solution for solving the problem of poverty in rural areas. According to this view, increasing the prosperity and providing the essential goods and services for rural households can be achieved through industrialization and development of the non-agricultural activities in rural areas (ibid., 2015, p. 2).

Diversification of the rural economy, preventing the improper migration from the rural to the urban areas and reducing the spatial inequalities between rural and urban areas are of major government policies on rural development that are formulated in the framework of the overall objectives and systematically implemented in different parts of Iran notably in rural areas (Sahraeian, 2001, p. 22).

Peter Duran believes that economic development is defined as the development of human resources and training the human capabilities that are necessary to prevent poverty. Reduction of general poverty, unemployment and inequality are associated with the development of the economy (Azkia, 2000, p. 18). Moreover, in the recent twenty years, the role of the small rural handicraft in providing the job opportunities and new facilities has been focused as a main concern in development economy literature and has been seriously considered as a new subject by the policymakers and international institutes as the donors (Gol Mohammadi, 2010, p. 75).

Sar Aqa Seyyed village is an example of the rural community where weakness of agricultural foundations affect the unstable ecological conditions including the shortage of agricultural fields and the lack of the increase in number of land plots under cultivation, and cannot provide the proper social and economic indices for rural development.

Research questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the significance of the handicraft development in achieving the sustainable development of the Sar Aqa Seyyed village?
2. What are the useful experiences of other countries in achieving the sustainable rural development in the Sar Aqa Seyyed village?

Research Methodology

This study was conducted in the village of Sar Aqa Seyyed, a village in the central district of Kuhrang county, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, Iran. This is a descriptive, analytical, and applied study that uses both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Data were collected from books, papers, documents and so on.

This study used the library research methods, study of documents and field study and experiences of other successful countries in the field of sustainable development of the rural and agricultural sector, such as China and analyzed them using the Internet and digital libraries and finally suggested solutions and functional patterns in the research subject.

Rural industrial development

With the depletion of natural resources in rural areas and developments as the result of the modernization, employment capacities in the agricultural sector, especially in traditional agriculture is not only limited, but also training the human resources in modern times is so that educated people usually do not tend to work in the traditional agricultural sector. Consequently, the population of the villages has decreased and the rural to urban migration in recent decades has caused some problems in the development of villages and cities. In these circumstances, diversification in employment capacities in rural areas and the development of the jobs according to the social, economic and environmental changes has been remarkably considered. Development of industrial activities is one of the major fields that provides the job opportunities and can complement agricultural activities. Therefore, new industries and their development in recent decades has been discussed as an executive policy. The proponents of this policy believe that if the emergence and development of this industry is seriously considered and precisely and patiently pursued, undoubtedly can help villages to develop their capacities. Thus, industrializing the villages, can lead to their development

instead of geographical isolation. The lack or shortage of the industrial activities and stagnant service activities in villages and relying on agriculture for income are of the main features of the rural economy of Iran. Industrialization in rural areas can improve the service sector and increase the rural economy capacities (Hajizadeh Asl and Ghaderi, 2015, p. 3)

Given that industrial strategies and local investments tend to the cities, the main part of the investments belonged to one or more large cities and rural areas were less considered. Studies and development planning in 1990s mainly focused on the rural areas and making the bridge between agriculture and spatial context, so that rural areas were never studied from the perspective of industrial structure and agriculture was frequently regarded as the main focus of the rural sociologists and geographers in this decade. In the late 1990s, industrial production and the way rural areas were affected was taken into consideration. Thus, 2000s, was the beginning of a new stage of development strategy through industrialization and deployment of the industry for the development of rural areas. Industry development in rural areas as a way to achieve the overall aims of development were focused by the planners in Iran and it is believed that industrialization of the rural areas can lead to the diversification of the rural economy, increase in the value-added of agricultural production, creation of the job opportunities, increase in rural incomes, reduction of rural migration and ultimately reduction the inequality between urban and rural areas. In Iran, in recent decades, the dominant strategy in rural development programs was the industrialization of rural areas in the form of industrial areas as a widespread productive field that complement and support the agriculture sector and increase the people who are involved in. Capacities of rural industries are important for efficiency of the rural environment because rural development is not simply agricultural development. Several investigations were carried out to prove the importance and role of industrial development and the establishment of industries in the villages, however, case studies and field studies are of great significance after implementing the plan. The main issue that should be discussed in this kind of studies is the effects of the deployment of the industries and industrial areas on the social, economic and anatomical structures; in other words, the role of the industrialization strategy in rural development should be studies. These questions should be answered in case studies and field studies, too (ibid, 2015, p.4).

Local economy and rehabilitation of the local community

If localization can be defined as the conscious use of the patterns, methods, and techniques for developing and adapting them to local conditions as well as updating and strengthening the local techniques and methods or can be considered as the bridge between the formal knowledge and local knowledge and conditions, such a strategy can lead to the people's empowerment and their participation in the development and formation of endogenous and self-standing flow. Concerning the Chinese's experience on the relationship between the development and proper strategy, Weisskopf writes that after 1960s, china followed a deliberate policy as a self-standing development strategy to prevent the long term debts. They use more resources and efforts to develop the indigenous technological capabilities in order to prevent using the imported technology of other foreign private companies (Jomepour, 2014, p. 56).

Concerning the China's development strategy, Lin wrote that this strategy does not deny the normal commercial relationships and international cooperation as a secondary drive of the development. China is seeking to develop its economy quickly, trying to ensure that it strengthens its own self-standing development pattern not distort it. This kind of self-standing strategy is closely related to the development strategy of "growth with distribution" but it follows a different organizational and motivational model. This strategy was deliberately followed since 1960s and founded an endogenous development pattern and economic industrial boom in the next decades (ibid., 2014, p. 56).

The rural development and improvement of the user technology, decentralized patterns of the national control, and the role of ordinary citizens are emphasized on serious decision-making processes. In fact, Chinese converted its requirements to a successful pattern through localization of the development pattern and were not affected by its negative implications like other developing countries who sought for the development (ibid., 2014, p. 56). In other words, rural and agricultural sector, notably in developing countries that experience the early stages of the industrial development may be regarded as the driving factor for other sectors and foundation of the endogenous, self-standing and local development (Jomepour, 2005, p. 42), so that China has been able to achieve the development pattern using the localization based on the decentralization, user technology, rural development, and using the local knowledge and capacities. These factors have been ignored by other developing countries that only imitate and follow the traditional models of the development (Jomepour, 2014, p. 57).

James D. Wolfensohn, the then-president of the World Bank (1995-2005), states that local knowledge is a part of the culture and history of the local communities and we need to learn from local communities to strengthen our development processes. Concerning the development and localization, it should be said that localization—and local knowledge—based development helps societies to strengthen and rehabilitation themselves.

In this regard, the next step is to understand the different types of indigenous knowledge, how to preserve and transfer it to the next generations and its use in the evolution and development of society. So, localization through self-standing development based on the indigenous knowledge improves the rehabilitation of the local society and increase its efficiency. Thrupp believes that for helping the poor, rural and indigenous communities of the developing countries, addressing the indigenous knowledge, recovery and growth of the appropriate and efficient indigenous knowledge is a big step in the rehabilitation of the disadvantaged people. By strengthening the local people, adoption and appropriate application of non-indigenous technologies may occur in future. This shows the localization trend that rehabilitates the developing countries by restoring and strengthening the methods and efficient local knowledge and then help them to select the new methods by increasing the decision making power (ibid, 2014, p. 58).

An overview of the strategy of rural industrialization in the development process

Nowadays, the term *rural industries* and *rural industrialization* is of great importance in development planning literature in different countries, including China, India, Malaysia, Egypt and so on and plays a major role in creating jobs, increasing income and improving rural livelihoods and so on (Gol Mohammadi, 2010, p. 80).

Before 1950s, little attention was paid to the rural and small industries. However, in 1950s, many countries made remarkable efforts to develop this kind of industries in order to eradicate unemployment and poverty. In this regard, some countries such as China, India and Indonesia prioritized the rural and small industries; in spite of this, some countries still face challenges regarding the rural industrialization and rural handicrafts during the last decades. Iran, after Islamic Revolution and during the past two decades, has considered the rural industries through Jihad of Construction and has made following efforts (ibid., 2010, p. 80):

A) Contributing to the prosperity and sustainable development of rural areas to improve the economic and social conditions of the villagers through:

1. Encouraging people's participation in investment for the creation and development of rural industries (conversion, small and handy).
2. Providing the employment opportunities and income increase for the rural residents and social justice.
3. Providing the opportunities for optimal exploitation of the resources and capabilities of the rural areas in order to verify the economic activities in these regions.
4. Enhancing the technical knowledge and skills of rural villagers and increasing the productivity of the workforce.
5. Supporting the activities of the agricultural sector.

B) Producing and providing the required goods of Iran.

C) Helping in increasing exports (ibid., 2010, p. 80).

An overview of the China's successful experiences in industrialization of the rural areas

In order to achieve the optimum model for rural industrialization in the period after China's reform, following factors should be considered:

1. High flexibility: Many rural investments in China show high flexibility; so that ease in the transition of the production line according to the market requirements is of the typical characteristics of these industries.
2. Low cost investments: governmental investments in rural areas with were conducted by low costs so that providing job opportunities for everyone in urban areas is possible by the capital of 15,000 Yuan and in rural areas, only by 10 percent of this cost.
3. Dynamic Management: According to statistics, 30% of rural investments benefited from strong, 40% moderate, 20% poor and 10 percent extremely poor management.
4. Orientation towards target groups: Since rural industries create more income for rural low income groups than the agriculture sector, therefore, governments focus significantly on increasing the income for groups with low income in rural areas.
5. Supporting and expanding the rural industrial units with private property and reducing the governmental positions that directly increases the motivation and creates a reasonable connection between the wages and productivity.
6. User technology users to create employment in non-agricultural sector.

7. Creating the logical relations between rural industries, modern industries and agriculture sector.
8. Large and small scale investments especially in five main industries or so-called five major industries including iron, steel, chemical fertilizer, agricultural equipment, and cement industry in rural areas. These industries are exclusive, because China is the only country that the product produces these products in small-scale dimensions and by relative use of user-generated technologies.
9. Deployment of industry in rural areas in line with comprehensive rural development programs.
10. Ideal thinking of the industrial development in rural areas: This kind of thinking focuses on cooperation and coordination between the production and growth of rural consumption.
11. Reasonable transformation of the agricultural sector to the industrial sector in the village, with the slogan “leave the land but not the village, enter the plant but not the city”.
12. Adopting the appropriate measures for locating industries in selected rural centers (Taherkhani, 2000, p. 187)

Technology characteristics in the neighboring countries

The countries that nowadays are known as the neighbors, before being neighbors, rely on their own national technology and industry and produce their own industrial goods. In many cases, these products have been unique in the world in terms of quality (Gol Mohammadi, 2010, p. 80).

Rural Industries of the neighboring countries include three main areas including conversion industries, handicrafts and small industries (ibid., 2010, p. 84).

Conversion industries refer to those industries that create a direct connection between the agricultural products and livestock. There are not many conversion industries in the rural areas of the neighboring countries (ibid., 2010, p. 84).

Handicrafts as the second class has a long history in neighboring countries notably in rural areas and a large group of villagers still make a living through it. These industries are located in the opposite situation. On one hand, some industries such as shawl-weaving, Give-doozi and pottery are vanished as the consequence of the of urban machine mass production, on the

other hand, other industries such as carpet weaving are flourishing due to the urban or western tendencies towards the carpet trade (ibid., 2010, p. 84).

The third class of the rural industries includes small industries that satisfy the agricultural and livestock requirements and result in the rural self-sufficiency. This section of rural industries due to the inability to compete with manufactured goods were vanished in many villages in the neighboring countries (ibid., 2010, p. 85).

Rural handicrafts

Handicrafts are made based on local and traditional techniques and can be produced both in rural and urban environments. Handicrafts are affected by the natural environment. Handicrafts are a part of rural economy and villagers, using their creative power, convert the raw materials into the goods that are called rural handicrafts (Afrakhteh, 2014, p. 124). Effective and creative human presence in manufacturing and supplying a major part of consumed raw materials from the domestic resources and cheap labor force are of the main characteristics of the traditional handicrafts (Motiei Langaroodi and Najafi Kani, 2011, p. 11).

The rural handicrafts industries compose a kind of simple industries with no complex techniques that can be considered as a source of income and complementary job and villagers do it during their free seasonal time. Rural households appeal to the handicrafts to produce both a commodity and save their time and satisfy their family needs.

In fact, rural handicrafts complement the agricultural and livestock activities. This section of productive activity that is carried out by women and children, is a kind of family production and is not based on the craft production. Thus, many rural households use them and only the surplus are supplied in the markets. Rural handicrafts are affected by the geographical and natural because this environment provide people with raw materials of the industries. Rural income from handicrafts is not the same in different parts of Iran, so that in some parts of Iran, carpet weaving or cotton weaving is the main income of the rural people and in other parts, this kind of income is very low. Some of handicrafts in Iran due to the influence of money and market in rural areas and the conditions of the Iranian society has gradually lost their scope, significance and role. Some of them include carpets, Kilim, Jajim, Verni, Zillo, Giveh, pottery, baskets, socks, shawl, Golabatoon, fur coat, soap, candles, and skullcap (Taghavi, 2002 , p. 100).

In addition to tourism, which plays an important role in national development and diversification of the national and regional economy, handicraft can supplement the historical and tourist attractions (Afrakhteh, 2014, p. 124). Rural handicrafts, especially in Iran has a history of several thousand years. These industries have been produced in different geographical environments and are based on the different requirements; inspite of the limited facilities, this industry produces the high quality and proper products for the markets (Motiei Langaroodi and Najafi Kani, 2011, p. 12).

Characteristics of small industries and the reasons for considering them in the developing countries are as follow:

1. Capital expenditure savings
2. Abundant employment
3. Ensuring social and regional balance by preventing the migration from rural to urban areas
4. Increasing the export value
5. Little dependence on foreign products and saving in the use of foreign exchange
6. Development of the tourism industry
7. Making the technical knowledge endogenous
8. Filling the missing rings in the production process
9. Facilitating the competition
10. Encouraging the culture of investment
11. Training the managers, entrepreneurs and industrial workers
12. Taking the environment into consideration
13. Helping to the distribution of balanced income
14. Privatization
15. Accelerating the exploitation time and paying attention to the costs of capital opportunities
16. Introducing the countries' rich culture (Gol Mohammadi, 2010, p. 88).

In general, using the the capital and limited budget of the country for creating the job opportunities should be considered and unemployed people should be employed more than before so that they can promote their capabilities and capacities and the income of the country is increased too; moreover, some problems resulting from unemployment such as increasing divorce and crime are reduced, like India after independence. India provided job opportunities for the people by creating the small, cheap, and simple industries and handicrafts and follow it

seriously. This could be an optimal model for Iran notably in rural and urban areas (ibid., 2010, p. 89).

The geographical location of the village of Sar Aqa Seyyed

Sar Aqa Seyyed village is located at 45 km northwest of Chelgerd and 130 km of Shahr-e Kord. The village is 2500 meters above sea level, the climate is moderate and mountainous. This village as one of the parts of the Kuhrang county of Miankuh-e Moguyi Rural District (Malekpoor Naghaneh, Kazemian and Zandian, 2013, p. 96). This village is located in $49^{\circ} 46'$ eastern longitude and $32^{\circ} 40'$ northern latitude. Sar Aqa Seyyed village is located on the Narmeh Mountain in the midst of a valley, toward the sun, in form of the staircase in southern part of the mountain. It begins from the body of the mountain and leads to the river in the

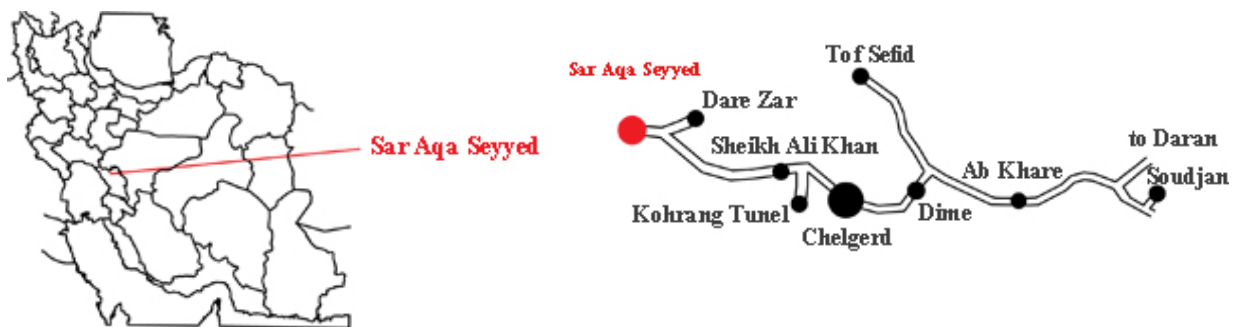


Figure 1. The geographical location of the village of Sar Aqa Seyyed (aghaseyed.blogfa.com, 2015)

south of the village (Ansari et al., 2015, p. 84). The village is one of the regions with average rainfall of 1303 mm in cold and mountainous climate. Sar Aqa Seyyed Village is located at the 81-meter height difference and its slope is more than 23 percent, and is stretched from north to south.

Three watercourse from the east, middle and west of the village are stretched from north to south. These streams direct the surface rain waters and runoffs to the south of the village. Sar Aqa Seyyed village is protected by the water resources that shows the water reservoirs in this village. This village due to the location on the slope and height variety, and its location at the foot of the mountain and at the Orchaneh downstream, middle watercourse and so on in different seasons notably winter has created proper landscapes. In the village, twisting watercourses and organic spatial opening in combination with local materials provide the good landscapes and the mountainous points in terms of color vision. Sar Aqa Seyyed village creates the diversity of plants and animals, cold and mountainous climate, favorable soil,

beautiful landscapes and fields, a combination of beautiful and natural environment (Ibid., 2015, p. 85).

Population and employment in the village of Sar Aqa Seyyed

Overview of the village of Sar Aqa Seyyed (Photo by the author, 2015)



Demographic trends in the village includes a series of social and economic characteristics, and the most important ones are mortality, migration and the age and sex structure of the village population. The population of the village was 1360 people in 208 families with the size of 6.5 people in 2006 (Malekpoor Naghaneh et al., 2013, p. 97).

Usually in the immigration *countries* the ratio of the men compared to the women is more than 105 and on the contrary, emigration countries the ratio of the men compared to the women is less than 105. Age ratio of the village is 82 with respect to the equal number of men as 610 and women as 750. Ratio of men to women in more than 105 areas of immigration and in this regard, Sar Aqa Seyyed village has the capacity of emigration (ibid., 2013, p. 97).

According to the census in 2006, 525 people were literate, 610 people were illiterate and 225 people were under training of the total population of village (ibid., 2013, p. 97). One of the most important variables that has a direct effect in social and cultural areas is the economic situation that in many Iranian villages, including in the village of Sar Aqa Seyyed that is the

main income for people is agriculture and livestock (ibid., 2013, p. 98). However, due to the shortage of agricultural lands and the lack of facilities in the village, such as the lack of high school, many families migrate from the villages to cities such as Isfahan to enroll their children in the schools and work as a laborer (Dadvar, 2015).

Production of handicrafts in the Sar Aqa Seyyed village

Economy of the Sar Aqa Seyyed village is based on the three elements of agriculture, livestock and handicraft, of which, livestock and producing the traditional textures is of great importance. All of these families are interested in various handicrafts and use it as a way for complementary income. A variety of the textures that are the main handicrafts in Sar Aqa Seyyed village include Siah Chador, Chogha, Gelim, Jajim, and Varis. Natural and architectural landscapes of the Sar Aqa Seyyed village with the different appearance show a simple pattern of the nature and regional geography and satisfy the needs of the people whose economic and cultural activities is different from other parts of Iran. The Architectural plan of this village is staircase using the local materials (Rahmani and Motarjem, 2015, p. 6).

Handicrafts in Sar Aqa Seyyed village

Texture machines and traditional textures

Texture techniques of Bakhtiari nomads are divided into two parts in terms of the used tools for weaving:

1. Weaving techniques with the leather panels (davāl)
2. Weaving techniques with the loom (ibid., 2015, p. 7)



Picture of Horizontal and flat looms (Rahmani and Motarjem, 2015, p. 8)



Card weaving or tablet weaving (Photo by the author, 2015)

Weaving using the davāl (leather squares)

Card weaving or tablet weaving or what Bakhtiari nomads call davāl weaving is a kind of knitting that produces the strips with high length and low width. These strips are very strong and durable with a wide range of applications. Card weaved handicrafts can be divided into two nomadic and decorative. The nomadic ones include Bellyband, headband, chest strap, and strips for carrying the burden (maal band) and setting up tents and carrying cradle, firewood in nomadic life or as the decorative strips on clothing and tents, and so on. These textures (in Bakhtiari Dialect known as Varis) are crouched texture and one woof and their designs are simple and simplifications of human, animal and geometric. Sometimes some verses and words are woven on these tapes. Sometimes these strips get plaited form and become decorated with tassels. It is usually made of animal fiber, goat hair and sheep's wool or linen fibers that are hand-woven and are usually used with white, black, red and blue colors.

Weaving by using loom (with theme)

Loom is a large knitting machine with a horizontal position and with slight variations exist among all nomads in the Middle East. This device is simple and can be easily opened and closed and its portability is compatible with traveling life. Horizontal and flat looms are placed horizontally on the ground. In Kilim, Jajim, Chogha weaving and so on the flat loom is used. This type of loom can be separated and picked up from the ground easily. It would be placed on the animal and after settling in a new place, it can be easily installed again. Of course, unpacking and reinstallation may cause some stretch in the hand-woven and some imperfections in headbands and tissue. The problem of making adequate elasticity in the horizontal machine has required that only thin stripes, often with several meters in length, be woven by flat machines. In larger Gelims, similar textures are woven from the middle or a number of thin strips are connected together from the binding. In this type of loom, a wooden tool is used for lifting warps (ibid, 2015, p.8).

String is pulled over two rolling pins while each of them is connected tightly to the ground with nails. String is usually in the form of a rolling belt which is pulled over a conveyer. In the process of weaving, warps are lifted up alternatively and woofs are passed through them by using bobbin. After a few woofing, woofs are compressed by comb (Cricket) and they become better and stronger (ibid, 2015, p.8).

Conclusion

Due to the limited capacity of the agricultural sector in Iran and in this particular case, the village of Sar Aqa Seyyed, other alternatives should be sought to create the job opportunities and income for the villagers. The experiences of successful countries show that creating and developing the small industries can play a major role –even more important than the current share of the agricultural sector in these countries– in creating job opportunities and income for the villagers. All countries should provide a reliable source of income for themselves by their value system of their particular society in order to be a guide for the experts and rural industrializers. However, rural industries could be generally defined as the small, decentralized, and economic, with a local and renewable source. Selling the handicrafts is a source of income, because no destructive effects. This industry creates a meaningful job opportunity and eventually, results in the rural stable development and maintaining the local values of the region and this leads to the self-standing society and creates a high quality of life in a quiet place.

In general, transferring and developing the industry in rural areas can lead to the entrepreneurship, poverty alleviation and rural development in Iran and emigration to the urban areas can be prevented by improving the life measures and the development of overt and covert employment in urban and rural areas can be reduced and eventually lead to the human development.

In this regard, developments, needs and desires of local, national and international communities should be considered and required arrangements should be planned. To achieve this goal, considering the experiences of prosperous countries such as India and China in transferring the small and large scale industries to the rural areas should be taken into consideration (which do not require a lot of infrastructure and skills) and should be properly used.

Fortunately, rural handicrafts of Sar Aqa Seyyed village are popular so that by initiating the production units and their proper management by the villagers, the economic conditions of the village can be improved.

Also in recent years new capacity in the tourism sector has emerged that can create more income and prosper the economy of the handicraft of this village. Here the role of the training is important and local planners should prioritize the extensive training classes notably for the women in this village, a kind of training that is based on the cultural and economic viewpoints

and provide the reasonable and correct solutions for providing the services and obtaining the income. It is suggested that the importance of the environment and cultural heritage of this village especially handicrafts, architecture and maintaining the current texture is inherently considered in training because it plays a major role in sustainable development of the village.

Recommended that the importance of preserving the environment and cultural heritage of the region, especially handicrafts, architecture and an integral part of maintaining the existing texture.

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