# Research Paper: Prospects of critical impacts of sustainable employment on rural sustainability (Case study: Dibaj Rural District - Dargaz county)

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** In recent years, economic hardships and the migration of rural youth have focused on sustainable employment. In this regard, sustainable employment can play an important role in stabilizing and sustaining the rural population because entrepreneurship and job creation of young people strengthen the sense of spatial belonging and rural sustainability. The present study investigates the role of sustainable employment in rural sustainability in the villages of Dibaj rural district of Dargaz city.

**Methods:** According to the studies and research literature and considerin environmental conditions of the study area, the indicators of the effects of sustainable employment in social, economic and spatial dimensions have been studied, and Entropy and MABAK methods have been used to analyze the research data.

**Results:** The study of analytical models shows that entrepreneurship and economic diversification are the most prominent effects of creating sustainable employment in this rural area.

**Conclusion:** Sustainable employment is considered a tool to reinforce rural sustainability. So, encouragement of rural investments inevitably affects the rural economy and population stability.

## 1. Introduction

Efficient use of rural space is one of the goals of sustainable rural development. In a way, the multi-functionality of the rural economy and the creation of new job opportunities in rural settlements can create a new spatial identity for rural areas and lead to the evolution of rural space (Duan et al.,2021).On the other hand, creating new markets and businesses and new economic structures leads to the reconstruction and production of rural space, which is one of the requirements of rural sustainability (Rosenqvist,2021). Thus, the production of space is affected by the dynamics of

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power and economic structures(Panzer-Krause,2021).A village is always a place of production, and the economy based on the production is a prominent feature of the village. Various occupations, including animal husbandry, cause people to stay in the village (Pourghayumi, Eftekhari & Taheri, 2021). In this regard, the production space effectively explains the reciprocal relations in rural areas and can determine the totality and sustainability of the village (Hu et al., 2021). On the other hand, Helfkari (2006) in the reconstruction of rural space emphasizes on strengthening the location of the village, the physical-spatial manifestation of the village and rural livelihood, which rural livelihood is closely related to creating sustainable employment. In the late 1980s, a booming market economy boosted rural economic productivity and increased farmers' incomes (Tao,2021). Thus, the boom in the employment market plays a role in positive change in rural settlements. On the other hand, rural areas due to having various functions such as providing food and raw materials, protecting resources and natural landscapes,

Creating productive job opportunities and realizing an oil-independent economy play an important role in the prosperity of the economy (Keshavarz, 2017). In this regard, rural entrepreneurial currents, the formation of micro-enterprises, and entrepreneurs' roles can cause spatial-spatial changes (Moradi et al., 2019).

On the other hand, employment expansion has an influential role in stabilizing rural areas. Sustainable employment is one of the principles of a resistance economy. One of the very helpful issues in the direction of a resistance economy is a stable job in the community. The endurance of households is directly related to their income from their work and occupation (Jamali and Jaberi,2015). Also, sustainable employment in many villages is vital to increasing the viability of rural settlements (Khorasani and Rezvani, 2013). Because job creation effectively reduces rural poverty (Alafar,1996), creating sustainable employment can reduce various social and economic inequalities. In this regard, border areas are among the regions where unemployment rises at some local levels, leading to migration to large cities. Therefore, the rural population of this region has decreased about 3.3%; from 21.700.000 in 2010 to 20466000 in 2016. In addition, a study of migration flows during the years 1390-1396 shows that 78% of migration was from villages and small towns to large cities. One of the main reasons for this migration pattern is the lack of employment opportunities in rural areas and the rising youth unemployment rate in rural areas; the lack of attention to local levels in planning and ignoring the capabilities of the regions has caused the gap and imbalance to increase (Taqvaei & Salehi, 2013).

On the other hand, the youth unemployment rate has increased from 18.8% in 2011 to 22% in 2016 (Statistics Center of Iran, 2016). Therefore, sustainable rural employment to solve rural problems has been the focus of decision-makers. Accordingly, the Cabinet of Ministers, in the meeting of 2017 at the proposal of the Program and Budget Organization and cooperation with the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare and the Deputy Minister of Rural Development and Deprived Areas of the country, approved a law. Thereby supporting the development and creation of sustainable employment in rural and nomadic areas using the resources of the National Development Fund was intended (www.daraian.com). Because paying attention to local capabilities and sustainable employment is an undeniable necessity (Ghadermazi, 2015).

This study aimed to investigate the situation of sustainable employment in the Lotfabad sector of Dargaz county in three social, economic and spatial fields.

## 2. Literature Review

Many studies on creating sustainable employment in rural areas indicate the impact of sustainable employment on population stabilization and retention of the active rural population. According to the studies of Meng & Zhao (2019), in the rural area of Zhejiang city, the lack of job opportunities in rural areas has been the cause of the formation of a permanent population flow to the city. Accordingly, in his study, Chen (2018) concluded that the expansion of job opportunities in rural areas had reduced the gap between towns and villages in large Chinese cities. Because according to comprehensive studies (2017), employment has a key role in attracting immigrants and expanding the rural population. Based on Islam (2011), countries can develop sustainable employment if they generate more sustainable investment sources. The research of Heydari Mokarrar, Nadrianfar, Nadrianfar & Shahraki (2012) is in line with these results. They have considered self-sufficiency and job creation projects to improve rural life. They can generate more sustainable sources of investment. In confirmation of these studies, Ghanbari, Nouri & Ghafourzadeh (2016) have also pointed to the effective role of the Committee of Emdad in developing sustainable employment in rural areas.

On the other hand, according to the study by Ebrahimi et al. (2014), creating rural employment can cause urban and rural population balance; because employment

is one of the main factors in the stability and order of the villages. Further, it creates new opportunities for the villagers to increase their income and capital. Also, it improves the living standards of rural communities by creating new institutions and small and medium-sized businesses. In this regard, sustainable employment means that a person has job security and works continuously. According to Ghadermazi studies(2015), sustainable employment provides opportunities for further development and income in rural areas and stabilizes the population.

Capacity building for sustainable employment is one of the policies of sustainable development. Because employment and unemployment are among the most critical issues, they should be considered the first condition for achieving economic growth and development (Sepehrdoost & Barouti, 2017). Unemployment is one of the biggest problems that upset the financial balance of society and causes various crises in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres of society (Jamshidi et al.,2017).In the book entitled:" Wealth of Nations", Adam Smith states that every nation wants to specialize in a type of production that is naturally more talented by implementing the basic principle of division of labour (Jafari, Samimi &Taghavi,2008). Therefore, if the factors affecting the economic growth of the regions are identified, it is possible to improve the level of policies related to the areas and make the right and informed decision-making for national and local policymakers (Sadeghi Shahdani & Ghaffari-Fard, 2009). Economic development requires paying attention to local needs, recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of regions, invigorating rural economic potential, and eliminating investment challenges and constraints at the regional level (Todaro,1999). Also, the solution to the problem of urban unemployment is to improve employment in rural areas (Alizadeh,1999). Then, Promoting resilience and adaptation to changes and environmental crises and reducing the risk level among local communities enable community development to continue in the face of environmental threats constantly and sustainably(Azimi et al.,2020). One of the most important policy tools is employment-oriented industrial development, which provides the need for people's participation in production and the economy (Rabiee & Mansouri, 2016). So, sustainable employment emphasizes equitable growth, employment, and poverty reduction, which are approved as a critical component of policy-making and even the goal of socio-economic programs. In this regard, models such as micro-finance, local economic development, and business cluster development are mentioned due to locally designed and implemented methods. One of the common problems of these models is their focus on the geographical, local and social characteristics of the target socio-economic systems, independent of macroeconomic and political currents. The Millennium Development Goals were based on developing employment and employment programs based on their indigenous capacities and led to a more flexible approach to economic policy-making (Rabiee& Mansouri, 2017). According to De Rosa et al.(2019), economic diversification in various agricultural activities increases job opportunities and sustainable employment in rural areas and prevents rural migration.

It is worth noting that employment is the last link in production. If investment and output are not made, employment will not be created. It is necessary to develop employment and remove barriers and challenges facing production and investment, including lack of financial resources, infrastructure facilities, and socio-cultural barriers (Ziaee & Bigdeli, 2003; Karimi, 2014). Therefore, in employment development, it is necessary to develop jobs while increasing the level of employment in communities, are compatible with geographical features and strengthen the sense of spatial belonging.

## 3. Methodology

The research method used in this research is descriptive-analytical research. The data collection tool is a questionnaire, and the scale for measuring the indicators used is sequential. Cronbach Alpha has been adopted to measure reliability, estimated at 0.77, which is appropriate. Entropy and MABAC methods have been used to analyze the data. The entropy method has been used to weight items and indicators. Entropy expresses the amount of uncertainty in a continuous probability distribution. The basic idea of this method is that the higher the scatter in the values of an index, the more important that index is. In a matrix, decisions are made with m options and n criteria for weighting the variables. The MABAC method has also been used to rank items and villages. It is one of the multi-criteria decision-making methods presented by Pakumar and Sirovik.

This method aims to rank the options in a multi-criteria decision model. The steps of this method are given below. Step 1: Form the initial decision matrix (X) Step 2: Normalize the initial decision matrix elements (N). Because the type of each of the criteria may be different, in the second step, the decision matrix is normalized to neutralize the effect of the different scales of the criteria. In order to do this and according to the gender of each criterion, Equation 4 is used to normalize the positive

criteria, and Equation 5 is used to normalize the negative criteria. The normal decision matrix is denoted by N.

$$N = \begin{bmatrix} n_{11} & \cdots & n_{1n} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ n_{m1} & \cdots & n_{mn} \end{bmatrix}$$

The values of the normalized matrix N are calculated using the following equations:

$$n_{ij} = \frac{x_{ij} - x_i^-}{x_i^+ - x_i^-}$$

$$w_j = \frac{x_{ij} - x_i^+}{x_i^- - x_i^+}$$

Step 3: Formation of a normal rhythmic matrix (V); Step 4: Specify the area estimate boundary matrix (G) ; Step 5: Calculate the distance of the options from the area estimation boundary (Q). The distance of the options from the area estimation boundary is determined according to the relationship equal to 8 times the difference between the weighted matrix elements (V) and the value of the area estimation boundary

$$Q = V - G = \begin{bmatrix} v_{11} & \cdots & v_{1n} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ v_{m1} & \cdots & v_{mn} \end{bmatrix} - \begin{bmatrix} g_{11} & \cdots & g_{1n} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ g_{m1} & \cdots & g_{mn} \end{bmatrix} \quad \text{(G)}.$$

$$g_j \in \begin{cases} G^+ & q_{ij} > 0 \\ G & q_{ij} = 0 \\ G^- & q_{ij} < 0 \end{cases}$$

Based on the logic of the Mabak method, for Ai to be the best option in the set of options, It needs to be closer to the upper limit of the (G +) region than other options. Step 6: Rank the options, which are calculated by the following formula (Pamučar & Ćirović,2015):

$$S_i = \sum_{j=1}^{n} q_{ij}$$

According to the previous studies, reviewing the research literature, and considering the environmental conditions of the study area, indicators of employment stability have been studied in terms of three of social, economic-spatial dimensions. The indicators and variables used in this research are listed in Table (1).

**Table 1.** The indicators of the research

| Index | indicators | Variations |
|---|---|---|
| Social index | Population stabilization | The residence of children |
| | | The residence population |
| | | Immigrants return to the village |
| | Social justice | Increase revenue |
| | | Loan & credit access |
| | | The invigoration of rural cohesion |
| Economic index | Economic diversification | the number of jobs Increase |
| | | Diversification of occupations |
| | | Increase in employees |
| | Economic efficiency | Diversity of rural income sources |
| | | Revenue increase |
| | | Family purchasing power Increase |
| | | Saving Increase |
| Spatial index | Reinforcement of the sense of spatial identity | Continuity of rural livelihood |
| | | Strengthen the sense of spatial belonging |
| | | Participation in rural development |
| | Rural sustainability | Entrepreneurship |
| | | Creation of sustainable jobs |
| | | Increase in rural participation |

Source: HeyuanYou & Zhang, 2017; Afshari Azad et al., 2016; Ghanbari et al., 2016; Plummer et al., 2018; Mani et al., 2018; Sari & Akkaya, 2016.

## Study area

Dibaj village is located in the Lotfabad section of Dargaz city in Khorasan Razavi province of Iran. This village is located near the border of Turkmenistan with Iran (Fig 1.). Shilgan village has the highest population. The total population of the studied rural settlements in 1976 was equal to 2165 people, which in 2016 has decreased to 1406 people. Also, in these villages, of the population over ten years old, 650 are employed, and 42 are unemployed, which indicates the high employment capacity of these villages (Statistics Center of Iran, 2016). According to the Cochran formula,216 people were adopted as the sample size (Table 2).

The most important effect of sustainable employment on sustainable rural development is that the population has been stable. In Shilgan village, due to its abundant water resources and Imamzadeh, the lands under cotton, grape and plum cultivation, and its extensive livestock, it has significantly impacted job opportunities. In Shilgan village, a ranch with 500 head of cattle was established and created many jobs. Also, tourist attractions have left a positive impact on Shilgan village. Hesar village is one of the border villages of Turkmenistan, which is important in terms of population. The village cultivates wheat, and barley and produces many livestock products. Also, beekeeping activities have recently been launched in Safar Qaleh rural settlement.

## 4. Findings

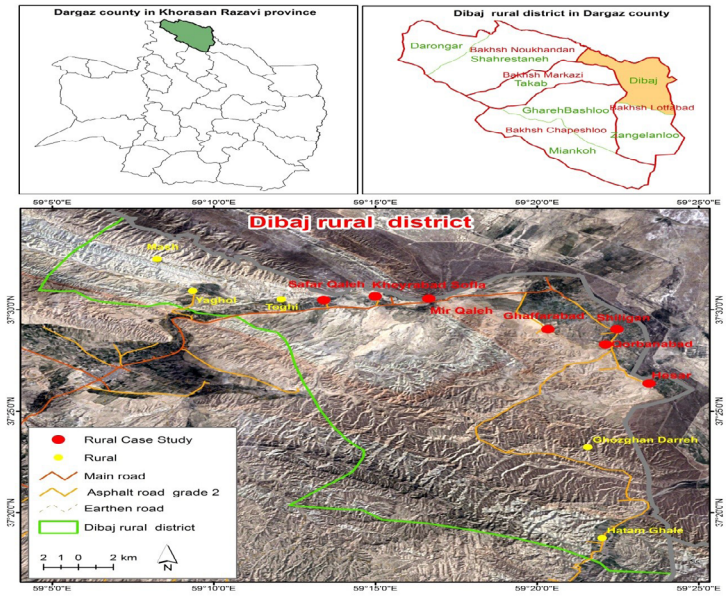


**Figure 1.** Geographical map of Dibaj rural district

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**Table 2.** Rural case studies & sample size

| Rural settlement | population | household | sample |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hesar | 224 | 78 | 34 |
| Shilgan | 639 | 230 | 100 |
| Kheirabad | 87 | 33 | 14 |
| Safar Qaleh | 64 | 21 | 9 |
| Ghaffarabad | 116 | 44 | 19 |
| Ghorbanabad | 92 | 30 | 13 |
| Mir Qaleh | 184 | 59 | 26 |
| Total | 1406 | 495 | 216 |

Statistics Center of Iran, 2016

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Ghorbanabad village is a single-sector village that is engaged in animal husbandry. Most of their residents are involved in semi-nomadic and nomadic livestock farming, whose livestock is sold as fattening in Dargaz and Mashhad markets. In this way, they earn a good profit and added value to many young people in this activity. They are also employed. Also, one of the main products of this village, which is sold in the surrounding villages and the Dargaz city, is the production of various livestock products, which are famous for this product. In the village of Safar Qala, Limited livestock facilities, agriculture and distance from the main road have been effective factors in job diversity in 1400 residents due to adaptation to climate change and entrepreneurship to raise bees.

In the villages of Safar Qaleh, Mir Qaleh and Kheirabad, the collection of medicinal plants is common, and these plants are sold in the Dargaz city. Based on the results of table 3., the creation of sustainable jobs, entrepreneurship and diversity of employment is the efficient factors in rural sustainability, which is evident in Shilgan village. Also, increasing employment and diversity of income sources are the economic effects of sustainable employment. On the other hand, rural residency and population stabilization are also important and prominent effects of sustainable employment in the social impact of sustainable employment.

Also, to rank the villages, the Mabak method has been used for ranking in Table 4. The matrix is normalized using steps 4 and 5. Then multiplied by Equation 6 by the weight of the criteria obtained from the Savara method to obtain the weighted matrix, then by step 7, the area estimation boundary (G) is calculated for each criterion. By step 8, the distance of the options from the estimated limit of the area (Q) determined at the end is calculated and ranked by the final score relation of the options.

According to the results of MABAK method in order to explain the effectiveness of sustainable employment, Shilgan village is ranked first in terms of the effects of sustainable employment among the villages. The Hesar village in terms of rainfed agriculture and livestock, Mir Qaleh village due to its proximity to Lotfabad city and benefiting from economic-occupational benefits of this city have the highest rank in creating sustainable employment that have the greatest impact on the stability of rural settlements (Table 5).

**Table 3.** The weighting of research items

| Variations | Ej | dj | weight | rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rural residency of children | 0.9816 | 0.0184 | 0.0296 | 11 |
| Rural residency of population | 0.9816 | 0.0184 | 0.0296 | 11 |
| Return of immigrants | 0.9839 | 0.0161 | 0.0260 | 12 |
| Increase revenue | 0.9724 | 0.0276 | 0.0445 | 10 |
| loans and credits access | 0.9718 | 0.0282 | 0.0455 | 9 |
| Strengthen of rural cohesion | 0.9867 | 0.0133 | 0.0214 | 14 |
| Increasing the number of jobs | 0.9883 | 0.0117 | 0.0189 | 15 |
| Diversification of occupation | 0.9508 | 0.0492 | 0.0794 | 3 |
| Employees increase | 0.9554 | 0.0446 | 0.0720 | 4 |
| Diversity of income sources | 0.9554 | 0.0446 | 0.0720 | 4 |
| Income increase | 0.9658 | 0.0342 | 0.0552 | 7 |
| Purchasing power increase | 0.9664 | 0.0336 | 0.0542 | 8 |
| Savings increase | 0.9664 | 0.0336 | 0.0542 | 8 |
| Sustainable livelihood | 0.9664 | 0.0336 | 0.0542 | 8 |
| Strengthen the sense of locational belonging | 0.9867 | 0.0133 | 0.0215 | 13 |
| Participation in rural growth | 0.9884 | 0.0116 | 0.0187 | 16 |
| Rural stabilization | 0.9611 | 0.0389 | 0.0628 | 5 |
| Entrepreneurship | 0.9437 | 0.0563 | 0.0908 | 2 |
| Creation of sustainable jobs | 0.9431 | 0.0569 | 0.0918 | 1 |
| Enhancement of social cohesion | 0.9644 | 0.0356 | 0.0574 | 6 |

**Table 4.** MABAK weight matrix and boundary of the estimation area

| Index | Mir Qaleh | Qurbanabad | Ghafarabad | Safar Qaleh | Shilgan | Kheirabad | Hesar | G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rural residency | 0.041 | 0.047 | 0.047 | 0.030 | 0.059 | 0.041 | 0.053 | 0.045 |
| Population residency | 0.041 | 0.047 | 0.047 | 0.030 | 0.059 | 0.041 | 0.053 | 0.045 |
| Return of immigrants | 0.042 | 0.031 | 0.036 | 0.026 | 0.052 | 0.031 | 0.042 | 0.036 |
| Increase revenue | 0.045 | 0.074 | 0.059 | 0.052 | 0.089 | 0.067 | 0.059 | 0.062 |
| loans and credits access | 0.076 | 0.068 | 0.076 | 0.045 | 0.091 | 0.068 | 0.076 | 0.070 |
| Strengthen of rural cohesion | 0.034 | 0.026 | 0.034 | 0.021 | 0.043 | 0.026 | 0.039 | 0.031 |
| Increasing the number of jobs | 0.026 | 0.023 | 0.026 | 0.019 | 0.038 | 0.023 | 0.023 | 0.025 |
| Diversification of occupation | 0.119 | 0.109 | 0.099 | 0.079 | 0.159 | 0.099 | 0.129 | 0.111 |
| Employees increase | 0.103 | 0.093 | 0.072 | 0.072 | 0.144 | 0.082 | 0.113 | 0.094 |
| Diversity of income sources | 0.103 | 0.093 | 0.072 | 0.072 | 0.144 | 0.082 | 0.113 | 0.094 |
| Income increase | 0.074 | 0.092 | 0.074 | 0.055 | 0.110 | 0.083 | 0.092 | 0.081 |
| Purchasing power increase | 0.081 | 0.072 | 0.072 | 0.054 | 0.108 | 0.081 | 0.090 | 0.078 |
| Savings increase | 0.081 | 0.072 | 0.072 | 0.054 | 0.108 | 0.081 | 0.090 | 0.078 |
| Sustainable livelihood | 0.081 | 0.072 | 0.072 | 0.054 | 0.108 | 0.081 | 0.090 | 0.078 |
| Strengthen the sense of locational belonging | 0.034 | 0.026 | 0.030 | 0.022 | 0.043 | 0.026 | 0.039 | 0.031 |
| Participation in rural growth | 0.026 | 0.022 | 0.026 | 0.019 | 0.037 | 0.022 | 0.030 | 0.026 |
| Rural stabilization | 0.102 | 0.094 | 0.094 | 0.063 | 0.126 | 0.086 | 0.110 | 0.095 |
| Entrepreneurship | 0.151 | 0.161 | 0.141 | 0.091 | 0.182 | 0.131 | 0.151 | 0.141 |
| Creation of sustainable jobs | 0.153 | 0.163 | 0.143 | 0.092 | 0.184 | 0.133 | 0.163 | 0.144 |
| Enhancement of social cohesion | 0.093 | 0.086 | 0.093 | 0.057 | 0.115 | 0.086 | 0.101 | 0.089 |

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**Table 5.** Score and final rank of rural settlements

| Rural settlement | Q | Rank |
|---|---|---|
| Mir Qaleh | 0.053 | 3 |
| Qurbanabad | 0.018 | 4 |
| Ghafarabad | -0.067 | 5 |
| Safar Qaleh | -0.448 | 7 |
| Shilgan | 0.545 | 1 |
| Kheirabad | -0.083 | 6 |
| Hesar | 0.201 | 2 |

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## 5. Discussion

The present study aimed to evaluate the effects of sustainable employment. Based on this, three dimensions of economic, social -spatial effects of sustainable employment and its impact on rural sustainability in Dibaj rural area of Dargaz city have been studied. Analysis and evaluation of research items indicate that creating sustain-

able employment and job security have comprehensive effects on the growth and sustainability of rural settlements. Job diversity in the villages of the study area, access to credit and loans, entrepreneurship and investment strengthen the effects of sustainable employment in the study villages. In general, according to the analytical model results, it can be mentioned that creating sustainable jobs, entrepreneurship, and job diversity have the most role in sustainable rural employment.

A comparison of the obtained findings with other research results shows that the combination of employment opportunities with spatial-spatial capabilities has improved spatial-spatial belonging, stability of rural settlements (Ghadermazi, 2015), and improved the quality of rural life (Heidari et al., 2011).

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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