

Research Paper: The Model of Successful Developmental Intervention in the Local Governance System (Case Study: The Selseleh Regional Development Plan)

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to enhance our understanding of the experiences and mechanisms of the Selseleh Regional Development Plan Intervention Model in Iran.

Methods: Adopting a phenomenological strategy to understand the existing experiences of the local people from an ethno-development perspective, as well as the factors contributing to a successful intervention, a series of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with managers and local communities, key actors involved in the development plan. The analysis of this qualitative data led to the extraction of several categorized themes.

Results: Obtained results show that local actors conceived the Selseleh Regional Development Plan (SRDP) as a successful Developmental Intervention Model in the local governance system. The key success elements of intervention principles in this study are identified as: a) participatory approach; b) development based on local capacities; c) the role of interface intervention institutions; d) the role of justice; e) incorporating cultural values; and f) taking the needs and demands of vulnerable people into account.

Conclusion: The study concludes that the success of Selseleh Regional Development Plan Intervention Model highlights the significance of the intervention approach in determining the success of the intervention outcomes. It emphasizes that the development observed in the study area is not solely the result of the intervention itself but rather the approach taken during the intervention process. These elements play a crucial role in shaping the success of developmental interventions within the local governance system.

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1. Introduction

Over the last three decades, studies about development intervention have indicated the crucial role of people-centric approaches in the success of such policy and practices (Stavenhagen 1986). Advocates of the humanistic approach have criticized the developmental interventions that overlook the cultural and ethnic considerations (Hettne 1995, 1996). This literature emphasized that ethical considerations are the priority of efficient interventions (Pattison 2008) and that developments that are based on grassroots activities are more sustainable (Willis 2011). These considerations are particularly important in regions with a diverse ethnic composition, which are prone to severe conflicts (Hettne 1996). However, to date, few studies are available for such areas, and humanistic theories are less examined in literature.

The present study aims to understand developmental intervention patterns within the local governance system in ethnically diverse contexts. This study argues that the main difference between the theoretical and experimental analysis of development and instability of development in local communities is the insufficient attention to cultural sensitivities of ethnicities and misconceptions about how to intervene in diverse local contexts.

Over the years, the local community in Selseleh County, located in Lorestan Province, West of Iran, hosted many developmental interventions. These developments can be classified into two timeframes of before and after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, some of which include, the Selseleh Regional Development Plan (1970s) before the Islamic Revolution, the Kahman Selseleh Tourism Development Plan (1980-90), dam construction, water channeling, fish farms, sandstone, and mining companies after the Islamic Revolution (2000s). A commonality across these interventions, regardless of their period, is that funding and management were centrally controlled by the government. Consequently, the strategy of intervention in local communities has largely been defined as a subset of government-led top-down development models.

However, it is noteworthy that the local people's viewpoint towards the developmental plans and their expertise play a significant role in intervention outcomes. Because the common understanding of local people stands for their various experiences of intervention models before and after the revolution, these people, depending

on intervention mechanisms and manner, had various ideological reactions toward developmental projects. However, the above-mentioned reactions, to some extent, led to delayed access to resources and prevented the enhancement of the local community's quality of life.

Developmental intervention patterns in local communities such as Selseleh Town are facing issues such as the integration of tribal social norms and values. Development projects in tribally aligned communities are far more complicated than the process of rural developmental intervention in non-tribal communities.

Selseleh Town has witnessed tribal and clan alignments throughout history, which often has resulted in developmental interventions halt, including the interventions before and after the Islamic Revolution. However, it is important to bear in mind that the Selseleh Regional Development Plan (SRDP) intervention was welcomed by the local community. Better understanding the SRDP intervention working mechanism and studying the interventional impact of this plan can provide decision makers with valuable insight. The findings show not only that people did not object to the implementation of this plan but were receptive to the managers' measures and felt responsible for preserving and protecting the achievements of this model. Four decades later, the local community has a positive outlook towards the SRDP plan, as opposed to other development plans in Selseleh Town. Therefore, this research has adopted a phenomenological approach and discourse analysis methods in order to address the issue of "development and intervention approach" in local communities of Selseleh Town. In line with the forgoing issue, the present study aims to understand the experience of local actors involved in the SRDP and present a desirable intervention model satisfactory to local actors.

Having a variety of ethnicities across the country (more than 9 ethnicities including Fars, Lak, Lor, Kurd, Turk, Balooch, Mazan, Gilak, and Arab), the Iranian society mostly needs to apply such an approach in order to ensure the success of development plans. SRDP is among the intervention models that try to attend to cultural and ethnic sensitivities and is considered a successful intervention model by local actors. Accordingly, this study seeks to understand the SRDP's approach through the lens of local actors' lived experiences, their perceptions and interpretations of the intervention, and the key characteristics that make the SRDP a development model approved by its target population.

This paper is structured as follows: first gives a brief overview of the studies on intervention and different theoretical and practical approaches. Then, the paper gives an account of the study area, followed by the research method conducted in this study. After explaining the methods of data collection and qualitative analysis approach, the fourth section presents the findings of this research and lists the codes and themes extracted from the field study. The key success elements for intervention in SRDP are introduced in the same section, which are explained and justified using the literature in the discussion section. This paper ends with a conclusion section, which looks back to the objectives of the study and explains the significance of findings in the case of SRDP. This section also recommends further research and investigation on how these findings can be considered in broader development approaches in Iran and other similar contexts globally.

2. Literature Review

Over the last two decades, the concept of “intervention” has received a great deal of attention in the literature of development (Long, 2003, 2001; Kontinen, 2004; Koponan, 2004; Rothman, 2001; Dewi et al., 2016; Mcleroy et al., 2003; Rosato, 2014). A group of scholars believes that the intervention should not be underestimated when discussing the development. For instance, Koponan (2004) believes that the intervention concept has been misinterpreted in development discourse, which has undermined it to some negative aspects like conflict, violence, and military action. However, intervention as an analytical concept is essential to better understand development. True development is impossible without intervention. The author regards intervention as the most important intersection of theoretical and practical dimensions of development, leading to the confrontation of development actors. As such, intervention is a component of development, and development is totally an interventionist action (Koponan, 2004).

Accordingly, Long (2003) and Kantinen (2004: 27) hold this view that intervention represents meeting or mutual influence of the real world and various social-political experiences. According to Long and Roberts (1984) and Long (2001, 2003, 2004), there is an urgent need to study and understand developmental interventions in practice. He believes that the continuous existence of developmental intervention should always be acknowledged as development is composed of targeted interventions leading to making the way towards desired objectives.

The literature suggests that key development actors such as governments, local and civil institutions, and the similar necessarily need to be considered to analyze and interpret the intervention concept. For example, Fox (1995) investigated governmental intervention in rural communities and public accountability. Funder et al. (2017) analyzed central government interventions and the conflicts of state, local governments, and institutions in climate change adaptation measures in the development of rural Zambia. Further, Lewis (2016) emphasized the role of the cooperation of interventionist central government with local governments and the benefits and drawbacks of the decentralization of fiscal spending in Indonesia's context.

The classic approach to development emphasizes the magisterial, imperative, and top-down nature of intervention and undermines the role of local agencies in development. In addition, the main idea of the classic approach was the planned and rational intervention in macro scale fundamental economic and social processes, which incorporated knowledge as an essential element. However, Koponen (2004) considers this approach as ‘ideological’ developmentalism and advocates the shift towards a more ‘methodological’ one. The new approach incorporates a commitment to critical reflection and an analysis of development discourse and practice.

Some post-development theorists such as Sachs (1992); Escobar (1991,1992, 1995); Rahnema (1992, 1997); Ferguson (1990); and Rist (1997) have also heavily criticized the body of development discourse. They reflected the social consequences and damage resulting from developmental interventions in the local contexts. As a result, this group is somehow opposed to development approaches that have been carried out in the past.

Another group of scholars known as “development regulators” (Nederveen Pieterse, 2000; Nustad, 2001; Matthews, 2007; Latouche, 1993; Chambers, 1983; Sen, 1999), recognize the achievements of development while criticizing the development and post-development discourses. This group believed that development and its interventions should be monitored and limited to the benefit of local communities. Moreover, they considered both external and local scientific knowledge as essential elements for successful development. For instance, Stavenhagen (1986) employed “Ethno-development” and Willis (2011) suggested “grassroots development” to describe the development patterns that focus on different needs of ethnicities. In addition, considering the concept of ethno-development, Hettne (1995, 1996)

also criticized the developmental interventions that did not take cultural and ethnic considerations into account. He suggested an emphasis on dimensions such as Territorialism, Internal Self-determination, Cultural Pluralism, and Ecological Sustainability as the characteristics of an appropriate developmental intervention. As such, the cultural mechanisms of intervention in various communities were emphasized in the literature.

Noteworthy, the community-driven development and sustainable livelihood approach were adopted in several upgrading and empowerment programs in rural and marginalized areas across developing countries including South America, South East Asia, and the Middle East. For instance, Sheikh (2004) elucidates the role of adopting the bottom-up approach in empowering the marginalized communities and reducing poverty in dilapidated areas of Ardekan city, Iran. He emphasizes the crucial role that the local community played in partnership for successful programs in poverty reduction measures. In one of the other de-marginalization plans, Sheikh (2004) highlights the significant contribution of local charity organizations and taking into account the local communities' culture and customs in implementing the empowerment and upgrading plans.

In a similar vein, Sabri et al. (2006) and Hatami Nezhad et al. (2008) emphasized the importance of multi-stakeholder coordination, including public-private partnerships, in the empowerment initiatives in Abkooh, a marginalized neighborhood in Mashhad, Iran. They observed that top-down, uncoordinated interventions had previously led to greater deterioration and social exclusion in Abkooh between 1974 and 2006.

Besides the coordinated development measures, ethnic diversity is one of the main challenges in the Middle East, particularly in Iran. As a response to this issue, the ethno-development approach is one of the developmental approaches that are mostly applicable to analyze the condition of communities with tribal and clan integration (Stavenhagen, 1986; Hettne, 1995, 1996).

This approach is appealing the ethnic characteristics of western parts of Iran, where Anbari and Ahmadi (2016) and Yousefvand & Taleb (2018) indicated the tribal and clan integrations of kurd and Lor ethnicities.

Hosseini (2011) compared two regional development projects—Selseleh and Rimleh—in Lorestan Province and identified cultural sensitivity, public participation, and local training and education as key success factors. He also highlighted several challenges, including cultur-

al mismatches between implementing agents and local communities and neglect of local norms, such as gender segregation in workplace settings.

Given these insights, this study examines the Selseleh Regional Development Plan (SRDP) through an ethno-developmental lens, which is elaborated in the following sections.

The Selseleh Regional Development Plan (SRDP)

SRDP (1973 – 1977) is the most important rural regional developmental project implemented in Selseleh County, located in Lorestan Province in Western Iran. It was suited to the specific conditions of Iran and can be implemented in various regions of the country with little modifications. Generally, SRDP aimed to create a self-determined society. The project introduced a new approach for a coordinated and self-reliant rural growth and development through community participation. As a result, the development relies on local people's skills and capacities. The SRDP began implementation activities under Majid Rahnama's supervision in 1973 but remained incomplete in 1979 due to the Islamic Revolution. However, the local community continued some of the implementation activities utilizing the new skill sets gained through the training and education provided during SRDP plan.

The SRDP covered 30 villages in Selseleh county, distributed across 7 districts of Lorestan Province. Based on the study conducted in the region in collaboration with residents, project managers identified the essential needs of the local community and carried out their activities within a framework consisting eight dimensions illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Domains of activities related to empowerment measures taken for SRDP



3. Methodology

In the present study, a qualitative research design was employed using a single instrumental case study approach related to SRDP. According to Creswell (2007: 73-74), case study research is a qualitative approach in which the researcher explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time. This approach involves detailed, in-depth data collection from multiple sources of information, resulting in a case description and case-based themes. In the single instrumental case, the researcher focuses on an issue and then selects one bound case to illustrate this issue.

The present study aimed to understand the interventional mechanisms of local development in Selseleh County. A phenomenological approach was integrated to explore the experiences of individuals involved in SRDP before the Islamic Revolution and to extract the optimum pattern of development.

Data were collected through semi-structured (both one-by-one and group) interviews, participant observations, as well as informal individual interviews and focus group discussions. Other methods include the study of development plan documentation as well as audiovisual materials (videotapes) from interactive platform sessions between development plan managers and community representatives.

Two major groups involved in the development plan were interviewed in the present study:

1) Managers, including practitioners, agricultural growers, and teachers; and,

2) Local actors who participated in and cooperated with SRDP and accepted the developmental intervention.

As a method of qualitative analysis, a step-by-step coding process was conducted to minimize conceptual error, enhance understanding of the phenomenon, and develop constructs (categories and themes) (Saldana, 2013). After the initial coding, the interview transcripts were sent back to the interviewees for validation, and their additional comments were included in the study. Given that more than 40 years have passed since the launch and partial implementation of the SRDP, the age and availability of relevant respondents (i.e., those actively involved in the project) were important considerations in the sampling process. Moreover, it was necessary to inform interviewees about the aims of the research project in advance. To ensure the inclusion of appropriate participants, theoretical, purposive, and snowball sampling methods were used.

The study was conducted over a two-year period, during which the corresponding author was present in the local communities of Selseleh Town. During this time, more than 50 semi-structured interviews and eight group discussions were carried out. As a native of the study area, the researcher was familiar with the region's culture, customs, and local language, which helped facilitate trust and accurate data collection.

The data were initially recorded in the Lak language, then translated into Farsi for analysis, and finally translated into English for publication.

Table 1. Characteristics of participants in group discussions

Participants	Number of participants	Gender	Time (hours)	Number of sessions
Farmers	Session 1: 7 and Session 2: 9	Male/female	2	2
Gardeners	6-8	Male	Session 1: 1 and Session 2: 2	2
Housewives	6	Female	1.5	1
Educated People	Session 1: 8 and Session 2: 9	Male	Session 1: 1.5 and Session 2: 2	2
Female households	5	Female	1.45	1
Ranchers	6	Male	1.5	1
Elites (elders and informants)	6	Male	1.5	1
Social political activists of the town	5	Male/female	2	1

4. Findings

Interventional mechanisms of SRDP as a successful model

Table 2 presents the shared experiences of local actors, as extracted from interviews with individuals who directly participated in or witnessed the interventional pattern of SRDP. As mentioned earlier, the present study explains the reasons for the success of this intervention model from the perspective of the local community.

After categorizing and coding the themes in Table 2, the dominant concepts derived from interview and described as follows:

1. Developing “interface institutions” between people and managers

The interface institution, called “joint body”, provided three groups- teachers, agricultural owners, and practitioners- with multiple instructions tailored to the needs of people. After completing the joint training courses, this group was qualified to assist with the plan. They played the role of mediators between managers and local people and created a context for a dialogue among people and authorities. Other responsibilities of this institution included organizing training courses in areas such as agriculture, literacy, healthcare, and basic skills of the local population.

Realizing the objectives of the plan, these individuals worked to inform the villagers about the development plan. Thus, they paved the way for accepting mediators, and a direct connection was established between people and managers. This direct interaction was marked by sincerity and kindness, with almost no top-down pressure imposed on the local population.

Table 2. Codes and themes extracted from the field studies¹

Theme	Codes extracted from interviews
Creating interface institutions between people and managers	Educating and training local actors (called “People Assistants”) as the crucial part of the plan Creating a connection between people and managers Playing the role of sharing information with local community and managers Internal the self-determination of local trained forces in managing plan
Attending to people’s needs and demands	Non-primary interface in prioritizing the needs of people An immediate attention to three basic needs of prosperity, health, and dignity and addressing these issues as a priority Creating a free and Safe Environment for expressing individual needs
Increasing bargaining power of local people	Rearrangement for equal decision rights among different social classes Increasing local people’s motivation for collective actions and peaceful requesting of rights Creating an opportunity for making a dialogue among pros and cons of the SRDP plan Listening to people who have not had a voice so far, to express their opinions Influencing managers’ decisions and defending poor people rights
executive managers are people-oriented	Managers and benevolent men are always available in the community Living among local people and settling in rural houses Supporting unprivileged people Accountability, diligence, honesty in expression and practicality managers
Culture-orientation intervention	Respecting local social and cultural values Respecting human dignity and religious and local beliefs Presence and cooperation of planning managers in holding religious rituals and local customs Recognizing property rights of local people Observing ethical principles in intervention Encouraging local actors to utilize their knowledge and skills of the region in the planning process
Justice orientation and eliminating prejudices	Reconstructing power relations Reducing traditional patriarchy Adjusting the power of biased owners and tribal leaders (thanes) Informing poor villagers of their rights Adjusting and balancing power relations in managing the local community Reduced local people’s fear of communicating with agents and owners Strengthening the sense of community for marginalized and excluded people
Persuasive and incentive intervention approach	Intervention in peaceful conditions Applying real dialogue and negotiation to local people Encouraging people to participate in decision making, implementation Top-down accountability Creating motivation and hope for change Participating in and a strong moral support of the plan.

1. Themes were extracted from the interview with locals and plan managers.

he measures taken by the interface institution—as messengers of development in the community—also led to informed and responsible participation by local people.

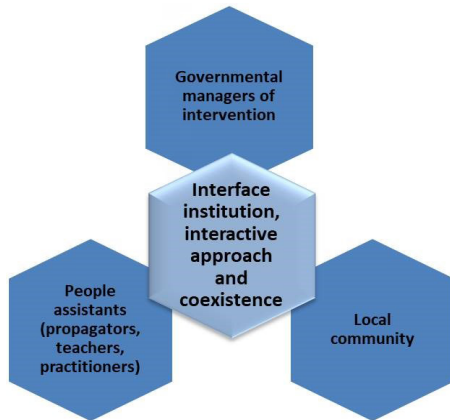


Figure 2. The mechanism of interface institution of SRDP



Therefore, it is argued that one of the factors to make a successful interventional pattern of SRDP before the Islamic Revolution is the creation of “the interface institution between people and managers”, because in its early days, it played the role of mediator and information sharing, then continued to work as the empowered local force to internal self-sufficiency of the region.

2. Attending to people’s needs and demands

The experiences of local people show that the plan developers’ agenda was dictated by community needs and that plan managers had limited influence over prioritization. Stakeholders focused on creating safe and open environment for communication and encouraging locals to express their urgent concerns. Most of the interviewees believed that “the managers of the development plan understood our most important needs well.”¹

The majority of interviewees also believed that all residents of the region were aware of their basic needs such as having roads, bridges and drinking water (construction of water supply and water piping), education and building rural schools (the presence of teachers), increasing agricultural products (propagators’ consultations), improving health (the presence of practitioners). With an understanding of these problems, the executors of the plan also performed collective actions proportionate to “subsistence, dignity and health needs”, through the help of people assistants and resources available and using indigenous knowledge and local people capabilities.

3. Increasing the bargaining power of local people

1. Group discussion with local people of plan workforce

Before SRDP, people were oppressed by local authorities through heavy taxation and arbitrary penalties. Such “oppressive relationships” were a common theme in residents’ accounts. Implementing a development plan in the region, the situation changed as local people and even rural women were encouraged to attend the society and collaborate with men outside the home, and fair social opportunities were provided for different groups. On the other hand, the logic of “negotiating for demand” was introduced to them as an important principle of life. The situation was changed so that, when necessary, the weakest groups and classes easily discussed their needs and demands with officials and defended their rights.

Enhancing a collective spirit of demand against the region’s owners and tribal chief is regarded as one of the achievements of the plan from the local people’s viewpoint. These people concluded that their needs could only be met through “collective actions”.²

As a result, despite opposition from powerful landowners, the people—through collective influence and unity—forced these elites to acknowledge the rights of the poor.

4. People-oriented executive managers

Local people believed that plan implementers should consult with elders and intellectuals before taking any action and incorporate their suggestions when setting priorities. Interviewees acknowledged that plan managers believed in “genuine dialogue”. Regarding the principle of bilateral dialogue between people and managers, the rural people assistant noted that this belief was widespread among plan executors Majid Rahnama – the plan director:

“As long as we have no ears listening to people it is not possible to see the world through their eyes, no real conversation will take place.”³

Hence, any sort of cooperation and acceptance of new ideas require “sympathetic dialogue”. Therefore, authoritarian and patrimonial viewpoints, as well as one-way dialogue, not only cannot pave the way for cooperation and consensus in the long run, but also, it can result in resistance and opposition to cooperation. Hence, this principle was also emphasized by managers:

2. So that today, the effect of this issue is observed in the concept of “the consensus of the candidates of rural and urban local council’s elections
3. A rural people assistant who remembered this sentence form Majid Rahnama.

“Listening to people will make a success out of any interventional action in case it was real.”⁴

The intervention managers’ independent mindset, devoid of political motivations, and their commitment to empowering rural communities contributed significantly to the project’s success.

Local people think that high efficiency, the ability to perform joint projects, brainstorming with the local community in decision-making, planning, and implementation phases, diligence, honesty in making promises and taking actions, as well as close cooperation with villagers in a humble manner are features stand for successful plan managers.

A key practice was employing local laborers and improving their skills through workshops, ensuring that development was achieved “with the people and for the people. Hence, Selseleh plan was based on the principle of “development with the people and for the people.”

5. Culture-orientation intervention

Local people supported intervention that respected their “socio-cultural values” emphasized community involvement over authority, recognized local needs and rights, and encouraged the use of local knowledge. They described SRDP as a “culture-oriented intervention model.”

As one interviewee noted:

“Although the plan managers were coming from the city, they knew well how to live in village with us, and attended our religious ceremonies, and local festivals and customs. They were not strangers to us.”⁵

Due to the great influence of managers and their acceptance by the local community, a sense of belonging was formed between the two groups to the extent that rural actors considered the diligent participation and collaboration in Selseleh plan as a “source of pride” and believed it increased social solidarity and engagement.

6. Justice-oriented and eliminating prejudices

The SRDP, designed to restructure power hierarchies, fostered a new public belief in law enforcement and justice for all. People viewed justice as one of the primary

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4. Interviews with managers and people assistants of the plan
 5. Interviews and group discussions with villagers

outcomes of the plan, having experienced fair treatment and a reduction in traditional patriarchy.

Local dwellers believe that SRDP gave a voice to marginalized groups, informed the poor of their rights, and empowered them to participate in public affairs. This shift was resisted by landowners, who lost access to cheap labor and exclusive power.

Crucially, local people’s experience showed that interactions with authorities became cooperative, and power dynamics were rebalanced. It was the first time the government respected the dignity of the rural population, recognized their property rights, and helped create a peaceful coexistence with local elites.

7. Persuasion and encouragement approach

Rather than using force and policing to advance their intervention measures, the managers of SRDP always had a dialogue with local people and motivating stakeholders. This approach guaranteed the majority acceptance and active participation in pursuing the intervention plans.

Local actors interpreted the dominant interventional approach as the “Persuasion and encouragement approach,” describing it as rooted in mutual understanding, compassion, and acknowledgment of the local community’s needs.

This approach is based on convincing and encouraging opponents and the negotiation skills relying on empowering social capital. Local people not only did not oppose the intervention, but they were also happy and satisfied to support and cooperate with it.⁶ Rather than being dominated by the top-down approach, this intervention had a bottom-up incentive approach, with local people’s active participation and took measures to provide marginalized and vulnerable groups with services and facilities based on their local capabilities, with a minimum of conflict among them, which was welcomed, accepted and acknowledged by local actors.

Local actors believe that hope for a change, common goals (meeting basic needs and empowering people), and mutual trust between people and managers are the main factors of making solidarity with SRDP.

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6. While local people were fiercely opposed with the intervention taken place after the Islamic Revolution, a top-down authoritarian intervention model was imposed on them, leading to their dissatisfaction, resistance and opposition to development interventions taken place after the Islamic revolution.



Figure 3. Features related to developmental intervention pattern of consent by local actors



5. Discussion

The present study investigated the experiences and interventional mechanisms of SRDP as a successful intervention model in the local governance system. It especially emphasized the experiences of villagers and local managers involved in the plan so that local actors can realize the mechanisms and the main interventional elements of SRDP.

Based on local experiences, SRDP can be considered a successful intervention model in managing the development of local communities aligning with the theoretical perspective of [Stavenhagen \(1986\)](#) and [Hettne \(1995, 1996\)](#) on ethno-development, and [Anbari \(2016\)](#), who argued that “development is identity”. [Willis \(2011\)](#) also reviewed grassroots development. In the case of SRDP, managers demonstrated a deep sensitivity to cultural, ethnic, and identity matters, so they could make a society based on internal self-determination through the inclusion of the logic of local territorialism and culture-oriented approach. This intervention model could attract the local people to development through the intervention process such that participation, involvement, and sustainability of the development plan were perceived as a matter of dignity and identity. Similarly, [Anbari and Ahmadi \(2016\)](#) and [Yousefvand & Taleb \(2018\)](#) emphasized the dignity and identity aspect of local participation in their studies conducted in Kurdish and Lori-populated regions of Iran. consequently, it can be argued that SRDP was regarded as a successful intervention model in the field of “ethnicity and identity-based development” approaches within the local governance system.

The results show that SRDP’s success was tied to the broad participation of local people, particularly in setting goals and determining measures. This participation was voluntary, grounded in a spirit of self-help, and sup-

ported by managers who acted more as facilitators or consultants than as directive authorities. They assisted in identifying and enhancing local social capabilities while minimizing external imposition.

Furthermore, SRDP made deliberate efforts to restructure power relations by introducing a justice-oriented approach, eliminating entrenched prejudices, reducing traditional patriarchy, and redistributing resources, power, and opportunities. These efforts aimed to increase the bargaining power of local people while simultaneously recognizing and formalizing their property rights.

These strategies align with [Rothman’s \(2001\)](#) models of successful interventions, particularly Strategy (A) “Locality Development” and Strategy (C) “Social Action”, as the successful indicators of intervention models. Based on the findings of this study, a kind of “reverse thinking” approach, as [Chambers \(1983\)](#) puts it, occurred in SRDP. As such, attending to the needs and demands of rural vulnerable groups and balancing power among villagers, land owners, and thanes were the priorities of the intervention.

Notably, [Yousefvand \(2017\)](#) indicated that the tourism development plan was not successful in the same region due to a top-down autocratic intervention approach. However, the present study illustrated that the key to success in SRDP is related to the existence of an interface institution and the dominance of an empathetic interaction, non-authoritarian, bottom-up, culture-oriented approach. As the previous researchers emphasized the role of empathetic and peaceful interaction and cooperation of development actors ([Funder et al., 2017](#); [Lewis, 2016](#); [Dewi et al., 2016](#); [Narayan et al., 2000](#); [Fox, 1995](#)) and ethicality ([Pattison, 2008](#)) to guarantee the success of the intervention, these considerations must be observed in the intervention model of SRDP.

Based on the gained experiences, local people attribute some features to the successful developmental intervention model, which requires the intervening institution to take precautions motivating participation and sympathy of the local community. Such a model must:

- Address the needs and priorities of local people;
- Enhance community bargaining power;
- Promote justice and eliminate social prejudices;
- Create equal social opportunities for all groups;
- Ensure transparency and equitable access to information;
- Reconstruct unequal power relations;
- Respect cultural and religious values;
- Encourage the use of indigenous knowledge;
- Uphold ethical standards of engagement;
- Be embedded in the community rather than operating as a separate external entity;
- Adopt a sympathetic, persuasive, and empowering approach rather than a coercive one;
- Establish effective interface institutions between the people and decision-makers;
- Foster internal self-determination and recognize local property rights;
- Provide avenues for active participation in all stages of decision-making, implementation, and maintenance;
- Prioritize local capacities and support vulnerable groups.

Collectively, these principles form the foundation of a bottom-up, participatory intervention model that is community-approved, cost-effective, and impactful in driving the long-term development of local communities.

Ultimately, the study argues that “the mechanism and manner of intervention”—rather than the act of intervention itself—determines whether an intervention is accepted or rejected, and whether it succeeds or fails. True development cannot occur without intervention; however, it must be context-sensitive, inclusive, and participa-

tory. As such, development is inherently an interventionist process, situated at the intersection of theoretical and practical dimensions and shaped by the confrontation and cooperation of multiple development actors.

Thus, successful developmental outcomes require careful attention to the cultural, social, and institutional mechanisms that underpin intervention. Emphasizing bottom-up participation and institutional quality remains essential for achieving meaningful and sustainable development within local governance systems.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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