

The Role of Economic Empowerment of Rural Women and Enhancing the Active Participation in the Transition to Sustainable Farming System in Iraq

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Abstract

The empowerment of rural women is one of the essential issues in the path of achieving development and a launching pad towards the switch to sustainable agricultural systems. The inclusion of rural women in the social, economic, and environmental plays a pivotal role in achieving food security. The research study aims at reconsidering the role of economically empowering rural women in order to consolidate her active contribution in the transformation process to sustainable agriculture in Iraq. The research population is from all over Iraq, apart from Kurdistan Region, added to all academics, government institutions, experts, and research tanks concerned with empowering women. Other NGOs interested in women empowerment in general, rural women in particular, were also included in the research population. The total number of the research subjects mounted up to 150 ones, whose data were collected through many methods such as questionnaire and in person interviews. They were later subject to analysis using (SPSS). The results showed that providing rural women with government or development organizations facilitated subsidized loans came first as of economic empowerment indexes showing the top score on the weighted mean of 4.56 with a percentage of 91.33. This conclusion is associated with ages of marginalizing rural women, their reduced access to financing, and insufficient collateral and weak bargaining power within the local market. From this perspective, the role of government directorates and agencies of development is essential, as far as the subsidized loans are concerned. It can partially enable country women to accomplish agricultural enterprises to enlarge their income levels and boost their independence. For that reason, Subsidized loans are not a financial tools only, but rather a comprehensive institutional one to upscale her economic empowerment, and bridge the gaps between the city and the countryside, lift up living standards, and enhance women's economic contribution in achieving sustainable development. The paper came out eventually with a conclusion that easier access to affordable subsidized credits forms a direct strategy of supporting successful agricultural and economic initiatives, hence consolidating their decision-making potentials and resource management independence. The research study also came with the recommendation of boosting public-private partnerships for the immediate adopting of easier financing policies-aimed specifically at supporting rural women and widening funding opportunities. Accordingly, these steps, are essentially important for the accomplishment of agricultural sustainable development. Additionally, the collaboration with incubators specialized in business promotion with well-planned sustainable agricultural development is highly recommended. The reason behind that is they are not effective tools for harnessing the success and continuity of rural women projects only, but also good to boost income, increase of agricultural productivity, and full transition to eco-friendly farming systems.

Keywords: role, economic empowerment, rural women, participation, sustainable agricultural systems, hypothetical means, weighted means.

Introduction

The concept of empowerment and its embodiment refers to the developed countries who come with historically evolved economies based on agriculture. It is also one of the key components of modern development literature, as empowerment has turned nowadays into an urgent requirement within the fields of economy, agriculture, and social issues (Willem, 2022). Developing women's social and economic skills comes to the fore of interest (Al-Khafaji, 2022), thereby improving their skills to make vital decision making, improve their access to resources, and combine these resources in the farming systems (Ridha, 2020). Therefore, this can be fulfilled via initiating capacity-developing initiatives and skill-refining programs with support from agricultural expansion organizations whose goal is to promote social justice and consolidate both individual and collective independence among rural women (Cook et al, 2021)

Country women could be regarded as the backbone of rural development, forming the essential part of the social system and are the power of influence in the local communities (Manmeet &Surya, 2023). Investing in empowered rural women yields in fruitful vital benefits for the society as a whole (Medina, 2020). Better education and vocational training for them means they will eventually show existing skills and acquire new ones, paving the road to the increase of production, developed rural conditions, and more efficient participation in the transition towards sustainable agricultural systems (Umayrsh, 2023).

The roles, practices, and sustainable patterns used in the field of agriculture employed by rural women vary regionally based on each nation's specific peculiarities and policies (Chwialkowska e al, 2024). Rural women in Iraq, for example, play a vital role within agricultural labor (Rakhit, 2025), as they constitute close to 49.68% of the country's population, and more than 50% of country households in Iraq are headed by women (Ministry of Planning, 2025)

On the contrary, participation is the general standard through which the roles of rural women can be effectively assessed (Al-Hafidh, 2024). The inclusion of rural women in agricultural activities create the backbone of agricultural economies. They are indispensable factors in agriculture, not only as laborers, but also as active players in every phase of the process. This engagement ranges between soil management, sowing, planting seedlings, and weeding (Challob,2020), then shifting to draining, harvesting, saving, and exceeds on to managing livestock and further to operating farm crops. This potential aspect deals with in-farm labor force to be associated with an actual existence for economic empowerment. The domain of Agriculture is associated with a fundamental revenue, providing them with the methods of covering local demands and wider economic growth (Ramadan, 2023). Additionally, this role would pave the way to assure gaining marketing tools, and trading and e-services. This also enters the market as playing competitors in the workforce field (Al-Kubaisy, 2021). As it were mentioned above, there is an increasing need to include the rural women in the shifting towards a systematic sustainable agriculture (Keshava et al, 2025:2). Female farmers are highly essential in processing food crops (Patel, 2025:101). This may support the economic growth of agricultural community.

The agricultural models have been explained by FAO as one of the overwhelming models of agriculture by which the community should have the capability of substituting it with dynamics that are suitable for the local limits of the environment so as to tackle the inevitable consequences of climate change and pass through production problems (FAO. 2024:3). Therefore, bringing policies that assure quality

education and boost related skills is decisive in empowering country women effectively in engaging within the agricultural systems (Adnan,2022). In addition to that, the women's access to training programs goes hand in hand with market conditions, which is a vitally significant for facilitating in the obtainment of resources, services, and agricultural information in a positive and productive manner (FAO: 2025:24).

The research paper aims at the development of a conceptual framework through which we can have a thorough understanding of economic empowerment role on how to enhance the effective participation of rural women in the transition towards sustainable agricultural systems in Iraq.

Material and Methods

The study falls within the limits of survey research and adopts the descriptive methodology. This approach suits well conducting an evaluative study and expressing respondent's perspectives regarding specific phenomena (Al-Hafidh. 2024: 78). Add to that, the method is considered as an appropriate one to achieve research objectives as it enables collecting fundamental details, information, and factual evidence related to the problem under investigation.

Collecting data was implemented through a structured questionnaire, in person interview, and were eventually analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)

The population used in this study are from 15 Iraqi governorates, apart from the cities of Kurdistan Region. It also included academics and other men of expertise who are part of governmental institutions and research centers concerned with female empowerment, as well as organizations dedicated to tackle empowering women generally, with specific attention to rural women.

Results and Discussion

The study reveals that the items associated with the field of economic empowerment, totaling 44 items, scored weighted means ranging between 4.56 and 3.46, with percentage weights between 91.33% and 72.93%. The total weighted mean for the field reached up to 4.23. matching to a percentage weight of 84.70%. The items were arranged in descending manner based on the results of their weighted means, as presented in table (2)

The above table reveals that the item "providing subsidized loans for viable rural women's projects through government or development agencies" came first as far as economic empowerment within the field of facilitated loans is concerned. This item achieved the highest weighted mean of 4.56 with a percentage weight of 91.33%. It can be attributed to the long history of marginalization of rural women, poor access to funds, lack of collaterals, and weak bargaining in the markets. In this regard, the government's role and development institutions in providing accessible loans is essential, since it can empower rural women to initiate productive agricultural projects, better income level, and achieve greater economic independence. Thus, subsidized loans represent not merely financing tools, but an integrated institutional means of promoting women's economic empowerment, reduces urban-rural gaps, improves life standards, and enhances women's economic inclusion in sustainable development (Al-Hafidh, 2024)

On a similar basis, 75% of respondents showed agreement with the item "providing dedicated funds for rural women in collaboration with local and international organizations in addition to the private sector to support women-presided agricultural initiatives" which is classified under the field of resource facilitation for sustainable agricultural transition. This item, in turn, scored a weighted mean of 4.25 with a percentage weight of 85.06%. Allocated funds boost rural women's ability to be actively included in rural agricultural development. Collaboration with local & international organizations, added to the private sector, contributes to the economic sustainability of women-initiated agricultural projects, improves productivity, diversifies income resources, and allows women to switch from low-value activities to innovative, technology-driven agricultural initiatives integrated into value chains through marketing contracts. This matches with improved routines and regulations for moving to the route of sustainable agricultural systems. Supporting the roles of the participation of international organizations and the private sector ensure better spread-out, training courses, and agricultural supervision. Following these steps can result in enhancing economic autonomy and food security, eventually empowering women to better deal with their resources and improve socio-economic conditions (Jasim, 2016).

The item "Allocating a section of the government's monetary policy to stand with rural women's inclusion in the transition towards sustainable agricultural systems" placed second since economic empowerment within the same area scored a weighted mean of 4.51 with a percentage weight of 90.26%. Public resources allocations related to the budget constitutes a strategically important step towards that, not only with potential government strategy, but also economically empowering country women and enhance their roles in the transition towards sustainable agricultural systems. The shifts may cause a betterment method via financial dynamic systems, enable the urgent inputs to support the economic hardships. This results in supporting the leading sustainable agricultural growth and food provisions.

On the contrary, the item "training rural women on how to apply for grants and manage them effectively" came in the bottom of ranking with reference to economic empowerment within the field of provision of loans and grants. It showed the lowest weighted mean of 3.64 with a percentage weight of 72.93%. This refers to the hierarchal nature of economic empowerment. It begins with access to productive agricultural resources and financial support, then goes through skill-building and then supported by an empowering environment that allows women to be actively included in economic activities. Loan management courses are looked at as a sophisticated activity that requires substantial prior empowerment and project management skills, and, hence, respondents perceived it as less feasible for on the spot execution (Rana, 2025).

Additionally, "initiative of providing free seminars and workshops on managing loans and repayment for rural women" reaped a weighted mean of 4.45 with a percentage weight of 89% surpassing the neutral benchmark. Loan management workshops are fundamental constituents of rural women's economic empowerment projects. They offer help to women choose the projects effectively, manage repayment schedules effectively, and make their initiatives of sustainable nature. Effective loan management can consolidate promoting eco-friendly agricultural initiatives, downsize financial losses, improves food security, and is considered a strategic development approach to support the transition to sustainable agricultural systems.

Table 1. Mapping of Respondents

No.	Institution / Organization	Number of Respondents
1	Ministry of Agriculture	31
2	Ministry of Planning	5
3	General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers	13
4	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	8
5	Ministry of Water Resources	20
6	Ministry of Environment	20
7	Research Institutions	33
8	International and Local Organizations	20
<i>Total = 150 Respondents</i>		

Ranking according to Empowerment Questionnaire	Ranking to according	Items to	Frequencies					Weighted Mean	Percentage Weight (%)
			Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree		
1	17	Providing subsidized loans for viable rural women's projects through government or development institutions.	90	55	5	0	0	4.56	91.33
2	29	Allocating a portion of public budgets to support rural women's participation in the transition toward sustainable agricultural systems.	84	60	5	1	0	4.51	90.26
3	7	Strengthening training programs for women to promote entrepreneurship and provide business incubators for developing women-led projects.	79	65	6	0	0	4.48	89.73
4	1	Establishing specialized agricultural support funds for rural women to facilitate the adoption of sustainable agricultural systems.	77	65	8	0	0	4.46	89.20
5	14	Providing free seminars and workshops on loan management and repayment for rural women	80	61	7	1	1	4.45	89
6	26	Facilitating the establishment of agricultural cooperatives that enable rural women to engage in collective work, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the labor market	76	65	9	0	0	4.44	88.93
7	36	Training rural women in sustainable agricultural techniques that contribute to improving productivity.	78	59	13	0	0	4.43	88.66
8	4	Providing non-financial (moral) incentives to rural women when adopting sustainable organic farming systems.	71	72	7	0	0	4.42	88.53
9	16	Encouraging the private sector to provide loans to rural women in order to enhance their sustainable income and increase their economic independence.	75	64	9	2	0	4.41	88.26
10	15	Providing flexible repayment mechanisms for rural women during their transition to sustainable agricultural systems.	71	69	9	1	0	4.40	88.00
11	28	Mobilizing all available resources for rural women to support their transition to sustainable agricultural systems.	72	68	8	1	1	4.39	87.86
12	5	Establishing platforms to support rural women in forming networks that enhance their opportunities for marketing and accessing collective financing.	73	68	9	2	0	4.38	87.73
13	2	Providing financial support to rural women for their projects that focus on the transition to sustainable agricultural systems.	66	74	10	0	0	4.37	87.46
14	43	Supporting rural women in agricultural entrepreneurship, establishing green projects, and accessing sustainable financing.	70	67	10	3	0	4.46	87.20
15	10	Enacting laws that protect the rights of rural women and enhance their opportunities in ownership and employment.	65	73	12	0	0	4.35	87.06
16	18	Establishing fair competition to facilitate the transition to sustainable agricultural systems.	66	72	10	2	0	4.34	86.93

17	30	Facilitating rural women's access to technology to68 ensure their participation in sustainable agricultural systems.	64	18	0	0	4.33	86.66
18	39	Developing agricultural activities for women in the66 fields of sustainable agricultural technologies and entrepreneurship.	68	14	2	0	4.32	86.40
19	12	Providing loans tailored to the needs of rural67 women to support their transition to sustainable agricultural systems.	67	12	4	0	4.31	86.26
20	42	Assisting rural women in accessing green markets68 and promoting sustainable agricultural products.	64	15	2	1	4.30	86.13
21	3	Providing financial incentives to rural women61 when utilizing renewable energy sources in agriculture.	73	15	1	0	4.29	85.86
22	9	Training rural women in budget management,61 investment, and financial planning for their projects.	74	12	3	0	4.28	85.73
23	40	Supporting the development of sustainable value66 chains that enable rural women to market their agricultural products at fair prices.	62	19	3	0	4.27	85.46
24	37	Encouraging rural women to adopt small-scale65 projects to facilitate the transition to sustainable agriculture.	65	15	5	0	4.26	85.33
25	33	Providing dedicated funding funds for rural women53 in collaboration with local and international organizations and the private sector to support women-led agricultural initiatives.	82	15	0	0	4.25	85.06
26	44	Providing training courses and workshops for rural66 women on managing sustainable agricultural activities and projects.	65	12	3	4	4.24	84.80
27	21	Encouraging rural women to participate in labor60 market activities.	72	11	7	0	4.23	84.66
28	19	Providing electronic platforms to connect rural61 women with donors and funders interested in the transition to sustainable agricultural systems.	63	25	1	0	4.22	84.53
29	23	Encouraging rural women to use social media to57 promote their products and increase demand.	71	19	3	0	4.21	84.26
30	6	Providing technical consultations to rural women61 on how to convert financial support into successful projects.	66	16	5	2	4.19	83.86
31	22	Training rural women on marketing through the55 electronic labor market.	77	11	5	2	4.18	83.73
32	20	Empowering rural women in e-marketing to sell55 their products as a result of the transition to sustainable agricultural systems.	75	13	5	2	4.17	83.46
33	25	Developing agricultural value chains that consider65 the needs of rural women and ensure equitable distribution.	60	14	7	4	4.16	83.33
34	27	Offering training courses on e-commerce to teach55 rural women how to use technology to sell their products online.	69	19	7	0	4.14	82.93
35	13	Formulating regulations and guidelines for54 financial institutions to enable them to provide loans to women.	75	10	6	5	4.11	82.26
36	38	Encouraging rural women to conserve water and46 soil and to adopt modern irrigation techniques through the transition to sustainable agriculture.	79	20	5	0	4.10	82.13
37	31	Encouraging rural women's agricultural and45 sustainable innovations by financing their innovative projects.	78	23	3	1	4.08	81.73
38	11	Facilitating rural women's access to loans by60 relaxing collateral and guarantee requirements.	50	30	5	5	4.03	80.66
39	41	Strengthening the green economy to empower rural42 women in transitioning to sustainable agriculture.	64	40	3	1	3.95	79.06
40	32	Financing scientific research and development in49 agricultural technologies suitable for rural women.	48	46	5	2	3.91	78.26

41	34	Empowering rural women with resources that36	59	52	1	2	3.84	76.80
42	35	enable them to purchase land.						
42	35	Providing specialized training centers for rural29	80	25	9	7	3.76	75.33
		women in sustainable agriculture.						
43	24	Organizing training courses for rural women on47	44	39	13	7	3.74	74.00
		marketing planning.						
44	7	Training rural women on how to apply for grants18	70	55	5	2	3.64	72.93
		and manage them effectively.						
Average							4.23	84.70

Conclusion

1. Offering the support to rural women with reference to facilitated loans and subsidized interests from institutions concerned with this field, represents a significant approach to boost the productive agricultural and economic projects. Monetary growth is a supporting factor of decision-making competencies. It is also a self demonstrative to the resources in general.
2. Focusing on the monetary provisions of female villagers shows that the governmental requirements stand behind the societal and financial welfare within agricultural development schemes.
3. Organizing training seminars and bringing in business incubators to rural women diminishes the failure potentials of projects managed by women through making available the required skills and knowledge which stood as setbacks in their economic inclusion history. Investing in entrepreneurship training and women's business incubators is therefore a key aspect in the support of sustainable agricultural development.
4. Creating e-platforms that target rural women is a useful method to increase market reachability that enhances their potentials to promote their products fairly. It eventually increases their income and economic autonomy.
5. The Initiation of allocated financing funds for rural women to upscale their participating roles in the markets that witness some competition, overrun hurdles, and improve their agricultural projects effectively.

Recommendations:

1. Boosting partnership between public and private sectors to adopt easy financing policies to go directly to rural women and enhance their access to funds, which is an essential way towards reaching sustainable agricultural development.
2. Supporting female villagers' participation in the aspects of local economy to come up with a shift towards systematic sustainable agriculture.
3. Controlling and evaluating the projects to warrant the effectiveness of required provisions for female villagers. Additionally, enhancing the headquarters of systematic sustainable agriculture.
4. Mixing the economic frameworks of agricultural development roadmaps. This is consequently instrumental method to build surpassing female-leading agricultural schemes. This is not necessarily ascribed with sustainable projects, but also reestablish revenue of agricultural productions, which is an elemental contribution to move towards the systematic sustainable agriculture.
5. The work of refresher programs for female villagers means to perform state monetary programs. Linking them is required to be a basic real needs to approach the exceeding of projects and support the role of enhancing sustainable economy.
6. Innovating resources for female villagers with dynamic loans that are flexible to have interest rates, and suitable for the projects of agricultural.

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