



Woman in Development and Politics

The Effect of Multidimensional Poverty on Informal Strategies of Women's Political Activism (Case study: Women Protesting the Lack of Water in the Village of Naqdi-ye Olya in 2021)

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article type: Research Article</p> <p>Article history: Received: 7 February 2024 Received in revised form: 08 August 2024 Accepted: 15 September 2024 Published online: 31 December 2024</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Multidimensional Poverty, Informal Political Activism, Women's Activism, Female Villagers, Institutional Ethnography.</i></p>	<p>Introduction</p> <p>The inadequacy of income as a sole indicator for poverty assessment often conceals the multifaceted nature of poverty, especially for marginalized groups with limited access to opportunities for growth. Access to welfare, education, healthcare, and the lack of opportunities for formal political participation are crucial dimensions of multidimensional poverty. Gender-biased beliefs and multidimensional poverty are among the factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in formal political participation, particularly in rural areas. The experience of multidimensional poverty in marginalized regions, coupled with the deficiencies in institutional and structural mechanisms for political participation, particularly for women in rural and marginalized communities, necessitates the expansion of informal political activism. The daily lives of marginalized groups are significantly impacted by discriminatory structures, which are deeply ingrained in institutional layers and relationships, such as social behaviors, stereotypes, culture, and formal structures. Informal political activism in marginalized communities, undertaken by these groups, emerges from the realities and necessities of their lives and, depending on the context and available opportunities, can sometimes be innovatively employed by marginalized groups for advocacy, influence, and policy change. Another consequence of multidimensional poverty is the migration from rural to urban areas, which has, in certain instances, exacerbated poverty in rural areas. The feminization and aging of the labor force, as well as the seasonal nature of rural habitation, have been the consequence of this migration, which has altered the demographic structure of villages. The increased workload for women, the necessity for independent living, the widening class divide in rural areas, the population surge in villages during the spring and summer, water-related tensions, and unequal access to water resources are all consequences of rural-to-urban migration. The extensive migration to large cities, notably Tehran, has also been prompted by the deprivation of villages surrounding Meshginshahr. Depopulation has occurred in certain villages, while others have lost their youthful labor force and have become seasonal settlements. In May 2021, the women of Naqdi-ye Olya village protested against water issues and were positioned in this social context as water couriers. The water issues were further exacerbated by the insufficient distribution of water to the villagers and the storage of water in the Sabalan Dam. Additionally, the inability to effectively communicate the water issue through village institutions like the village council and local governance led to the exhaustion of women from carrying water and prompted them to block roads and stage protests. The protest was transformed into a political protest on the eve of the elections by the filming and broadcasting of it by media and opposition networks, which elicited a prompt response from officials. The objective of this investigation is to investigate the influence of institutional barriers and multidimensional poverty, as encountered in lived realities, on the constraints of formal political participation for women. To better understand these limitations, the protest by the women of Naqdi-ye Olya village against the drinking water issue in 2021 is analyzed as a case study, illustrating the shift towards informal political activism among marginalized women in peripheral areas.</p>

Methodology

Rural site observation, semi-structured individual interviews with 20 women who protested against the water issue, and focus group interviews with 15 women who continued to express dissatisfaction with the situation were the data collection methods employed in this study. The study also examined institutional texts, including executive directives, government announcements, protest recordings, news reports, and digital media materials, in accordance with the institutional ethnography methodology. Thematic analysis with an emic approach was employed to analyze the interview data. Thematic analysis is a process for analyzing textual data, transforming scattered and diverse data into rich and detailed information. According to Abedi Jafari et al. (2012: 153), "Thematic analysis is not merely a specific qualitative method but rather a process that can be applied across most qualitative methods." In other words, thematic analysis is not associated with any particular theoretical framework; rather, it is predicated on the comprehension and interpretation of the text. This method systematically organizes themes at three levels: basic themes (codes and key points within the text), organizing themes (themes derived from combining and summarizing basic themes), and overarching themes (higher-order themes that encapsulate the governing principles of the text as a whole), providing a comprehensive thematic map of the entire content (Kamali, 2018: 192). According to Mohammadpour (2011: 228), the emic approach is "a model that evaluates the ideas or behaviors of members of a culture in accordance with native definitions or perspectives."

Results

Multidimensional poverty is experienced by the residents of Naqdi-ye Olya village in Meshginshahr, which is home to approximately 700 households and a population of approximately 2,500 individuals, with 300 households being seasonal residents (Golshan, 2021). This poverty is characterized by a variety of factors, including the migration of young people and men to larger cities in search of employment, insufficient income from agricultural products, inadequate educational facilities, and a lack of access to safe drinking water. The indicators of multidimensional poverty exacerbate each other, resulting in a variety of issues, such as the burden of water transportation, class divisions within the village as a result of migration, and the inefficiency or dysfunction of village institutions.

Conclusion

Social groups engage in political activism by employing a variety of strategies and methods to express their demands and secure their requirements from the centers of power. They formalize their activism by utilizing official and legal channels for political participation when they are available. However, in the absence of opportunities to establish and benefit from official institutions for participation, they resort to informal activism. This informal approach is often protest-oriented and typically involves innovative and creative aspects. These two characteristics pose challenges to those in power when dealing with such activism. The protest nature of these actions can result in violence, and their innovative nature means that each action is influenced by the environment and circumstances in which it occurs, which restricts the capacity of official institutions to rely on previous experiences when addressing them. This situation may result in the use of inappropriate methods to deal with informal activism, potentially escalating it towards violence. Therefore, it is imperative to fortify official institutions in order to effectively address the demands and requirements of social groups, including women who are ensnared in multidimensional poverty, and to establish the requisite mechanisms for formal political participation. By doing so, social organizations can be directed toward official channels, thereby reducing their propensity to engage in informal and protest-oriented actions as a means of addressing their demands. This approach can prevent informal activism from becoming a routine method of engagement and reduce the likelihood of such challenging activism for governments.

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