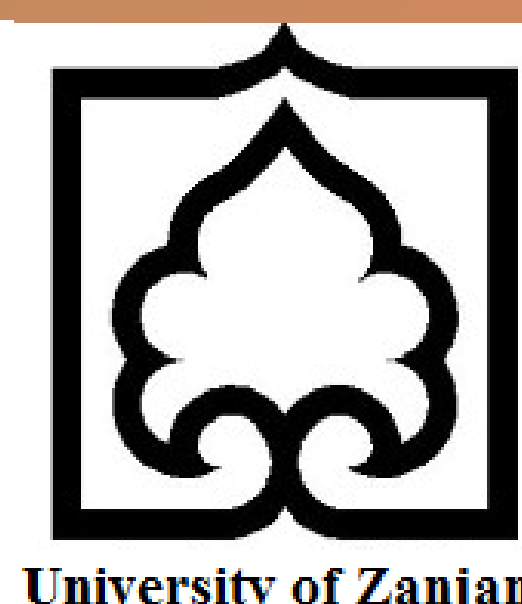




Leibniz Centre for
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The Impacts of Social Cohesion on Farmers' Soil Conservation Behavior: Analyzing the Case of Bushehr, Iran

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Introduction

Land degradation in the form of soil erosion is a serious threat to food security, sustainable agricultural production, and environmental sustainability. Soil conservation is considered as a precondition for achieving food security and adopting environmental policies. Iran is a vulnerable country in terms of land degradation and soil erosion. In Iran, many activities have been conducted for soil conservation but did not meet the intended effects. Social cohesion, in terms of levels of trust, cooperation and socio-economic inclusion, is considered a key factor and catalysts of adoption practices such as soil conservation. However, limited knowledge exists on how social cohesion impacts on the acceptance of soil conservation practices at the community level.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of social cohesion on the soil conservation behavior of farmers in Iran.

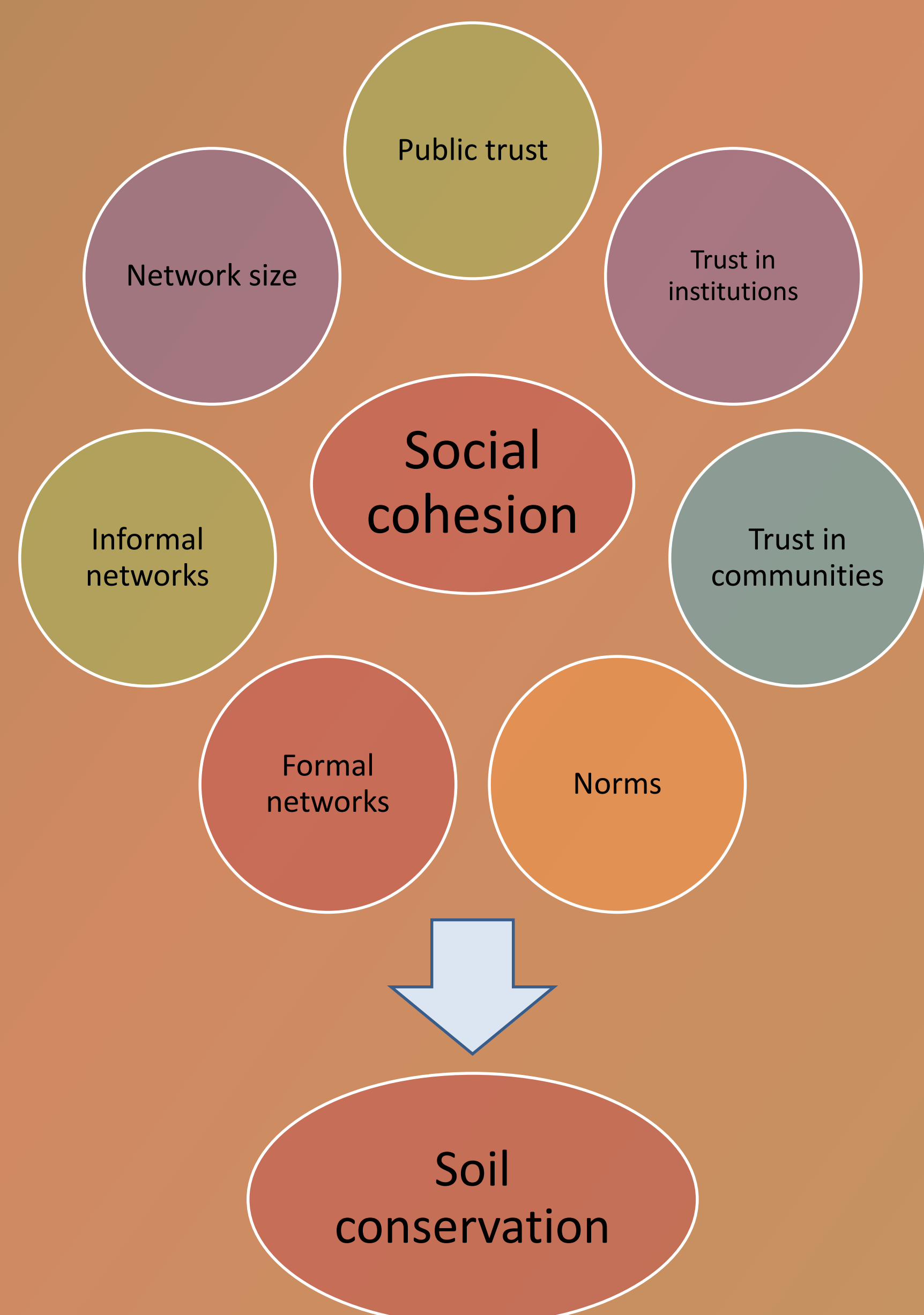


Figure 1. Impacts of the components of social cohesion on soil conservation

Methodology

The study sample was selected from farmers of Bushehr in the south of Iran.

Based on random sampling, a face-to-face survey with a total of 180 farmers was conducted.

In this study, we examine seven different components of social cohesion (1) public trust, (2) trust in institutions, (3) trust in communities, (4) norms, (5) formal networks, (6) informal networks, and (7) network size.

The questions were scored on a 1-5 point scale (very low, low, moderate, high, very high) to reduce the statistical problem of extreme skewness.

The questionnaire internal reliability was investigated using coefficient (Cronbach's) alpha. All scales indicate good reliability.

It is important to note that we used a mix of positive and negative items in our questionnaire. Furthermore, the validity of the questionnaire was approved by a panel of experts.

To analyze the study model, structural equation modeling was performed using Amos software.

Results

Structural equation modeling show that public trust, trust in communities, as well as formal networks and informal networks are the key to adopting soil conservation.

These components explain 30% of changes in the acceptance of soil conservation behaviors.

Network size, norms, and trust in institutions were not significant in accepting soil conservation behavior.

Discussion

Trust seems to have higher importance for the adoption of new practices than the network communication dimension. Trust is the catalyst that converts information into usable knowledge. Networks provide the context of information exchange. A network with a high level of trust can do more because networks are built on trust and confidence, thereby reducing risk by providing a safety net for people. The results of this study help to understand farmers' complex decisions about accepting soil conservation and help design strategies and policies to further accept soil conservation.

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