

Analyzing the Role of Strategic Planning in the Economic Development of Less Developed Regions (Case Study of Ilam Province)

Davood Tarvirdizadeh^{1*}, Mohammad Bandari²

¹Department of Management, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran (Corresponding Author).

dtarvirdi@pnu.ac.ir

²Department of Management, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran.

Mbandari@pnu.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

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Background: Strategic planning, as an important tool in economic development processes, especially in less developed regions, can play a key role in identifying existing opportunities and threats. This study examines the role of strategic planning in the economic development of Ilam Province and analyzes the various components and dimensions of this process in line with sustainable development. Considering the potential of Ilam Province in the field of natural resources and agriculture, this study attempts to provide appropriate strategies to improve the economic situation of this region.

Methodology: This research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method and as a case study in Ilam province. Field methods including questionnaires and structured interviews with provincial experts and officials were used to collect data. Also, using strategic planning models and SWOT analysis, opportunities and threats in the economic development process of the province were identified.

Findings: The findings of this research show that infrastructure development, human resource empowerment, and investment in the agricultural and industrial sectors are the most important factors for the success of strategic planning in the economic development of Ilam province. Also, implementing green projects and paying attention to environmental issues can be effective in creating a sustainable and long-term development in this province.

Conclusion: The results of this research show that strategic planning can act as an effective tool to improve the economic situation of Ilam province. By focusing on improving infrastructure, empowering human resources, optimizing the use of natural resources, and developing industries, economic growth and reducing inequalities in this province can be helped. Also, improving communications and attracting domestic and foreign investments are among the measures that should be prioritized.

Keywords: Strategic planning, economic development, Ilam province, SWOT model, sustainable development, natural resources, empowering human resources, investment, infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, strategic planning is recognized as a key tool for achieving long-term goals in organizations and different regions. This process helps organizations and governments to formulate strategies to achieve development goals by analyzing the current situation, identifying opportunities and threats, and evaluating resources (Porter, 1985). At the regional level, and especially in less developed regions, strategic planning is of particular importance because these regions face specific economic, social, and environmental constraints. In this context, the use of appropriate strategic planning tools can help these regions to follow the path of sustainable development by optimally utilizing available resources. Ilam Province is one of the less developed provinces of Iran, which has a special position for economic development due to its abundant natural resources such as oil, gas, and agricultural

resources. However, this province faces challenges such as high unemployment, lack of appropriate infrastructure, and weakness in the industrial and service sectors. These challenges indicate the need to use strategic planning to address economic and social problems in this province (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994). Therefore, the use of strategic planning in this province as a tool for formulating efficient development policies can play an important role in improving the economic and social situation. This study examines how this tool can be used to analyze the economic potential of Ilam province and suggest appropriate development strategies for it.

In strategic planning for less developed regions, it is essential to pay attention to various factors such as infrastructure development, human resource development, and investment in the agricultural and industrial sectors. Less developed regions such as Ilam province are in dire need of infrastructure development in the transportation, energy, and education sectors. This development not only improves living conditions in these regions but also enables economic growth and increased production (Elkington, 1998). In addition, human resource development through education and empowerment of local youth and professionals can help solve the unemployment problem in these regions and lead to economic growth (Freeman, 2010). Therefore, strategic planning in this area can effectively affect the sustainable development of Ilam province.

One of the key tools in strategic planning for economic development is investment in the agricultural and industrial sectors. Ilam province, with its rich natural resources, especially in the field of agriculture, has high capacities for the production of agricultural and livestock products. Optimal use of these resources and the establishment of industries related to these sectors can contribute to the economic growth of this province in addition to creating employment (Porter & van der Linde, 1995). On the other hand, investment in industrial infrastructure and improving production capacities can pave the way for transformation in various economic sectors of Ilam province. This research will analyze these opportunities and provide solutions for the effective use of these capacities.

The main objective of this research is to analyze and evaluate strategic planning in the economic development of Ilam province. In this research, first, the current economic situation of Ilam province will be examined and then proposed strategies for its sustainable development will be presented. Using strategic planning models and environmental analysis, this research will identify opportunities and threats in this province and propose solutions to improve its economic situation. Ultimately, the results of this research can help policymakers and provincial officials to achieve sustainable development and economic growth in this province by making more accurate and strategic decisions.

Theoretical foundations of the research

The theoretical foundations of the research explain the concepts, theories, and models related to the research topic. In this section, the key concepts of strategic planning, economic development, less developed regions, and the role of strategic planning in economic development will be analyzed. These topics are essential for a better understanding of the role of strategic planning in the economic development of less developed provinces, such as Ilam Province.

.1Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is the process of formulating, implementing, and evaluating strategies to achieve the long-term and short-term goals of organizations or specific areas. This process usually includes the steps of identifying the current situation, analyzing the environment (opportunities and threats), and determining appropriate strategies to exploit these opportunities and deal with threats (Porter, 1985). This type of planning is particularly important in less developed regions, which require appropriate solutions to optimally use their resources and capacities.

At the level of less developed regions and areas, strategic planning means that managers and policymakers in these regions must design strategies that, in addition to economic growth, pay attention to improving the social, environmental and human resource development. For this reason, in these regions, strategic planning can be used as a key tool for reducing poverty, promoting productivity and improving the quality of life (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994).

2. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN LESS DEVELOPED AREAS

Economic development in less developed areas means the process of continuous improvement of the level of economic, social and environmental well-being in these areas. Economic development includes increasing gross domestic product (GDP), increasing employment levels, improving resource productivity, improving infrastructure and raising living standards (Elkington, 1998). In areas that face resource constraints and poor infrastructure, economic development requires careful planning, optimal use of resources and investment in key sectors such as agriculture, industry and services.

Less developed areas are particularly in need of investment in infrastructure, improving employment, developing human resources and strengthening the private sector. In this regard, investment in infrastructure such as transportation, education, health and energy systems is of particular importance. Also, training and empowering human resources in these areas can help reduce unemployment and increase production in various economic sectors (Freeman, 2010).

3. Characteristics of Less Developed Regions

Less developed regions usually face problems such as lack of financial and human resources, poor infrastructure, economic inequalities and high unemployment. These characteristics hinder growth and development in these regions and therefore, to improve economic conditions, there is a need for precise strategic planning that is tailored to the specific conditions of these regions. Among these, the diversity of natural resources, tourism potential and geographical location are among the factors that can be effective in the economic development of these regions.

To address these problems, the use of strategic planning tools along with SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) can help managers and policymakers formulate effective plans for the development of these regions (Porter & van der Linde, 1995). These analyses help identify the capacities of less developed regions and make optimal use of them.

.4The role of strategic planning in the economic development of Ilam Province

Ilam Province is one of the less developed provinces of Iran that faces specific economic and social problems. This province, with its rich natural resources such as oil, gas and agriculture, can pave the way for its economic development if these resources are used optimally. Strategic planning in this province can contribute to the sustainable development of this province by identifying opportunities and threats, as well as exploiting local capacities. One of the important measures in this regard is the development of transformation industries to exploit the agricultural and mineral resources of the province, which can lead to job creation and reducing dependence on oil revenues.

In this context, investment in various economic sectors such as agriculture, industry and services and strengthening infrastructure are among the essential pillars of strategic planning for the economic development of Ilam province (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994). This planning can help to improve productivity and economic growth in Ilam province and ultimately lead to reducing economic inequalities and improving the living conditions of the people of this province.

Strategic planning in less developed regions, especially Ilam province, can be an important tool for achieving sustainable economic development and reducing economic and social problems. Using appropriate strategic planning models, identifying opportunities and threats, and formulating strategies appropriate to the capacities of Ilam province can lead to economic growth and improving the living conditions of the people of this region. Based on the theoretical concepts and models presented, this research attempts to provide specific development strategies for Ilam province that will ultimately help to improve the quality of life and economic sustainability of this province.

Empirical Basis of the Research

The empirical basis of the research analyzes and reviews previous research and studies that have been conducted in relation to the research topic, namely the role of strategic planning in the economic development of less developed regions. This part of the research examines the results of various studies and experiences that have been conducted

in this field, especially in similar provinces or even at the international level, and presents empirical evidence and results that support the findings of this research. In this regard, empirical studies are presented, especially in relation to the role of strategic planning in less developed regions, economic development programs, and successful strategies in similar regions. 1. Strategic Planning in Less Developed Areas

Various empirical studies have shown that strategic planning is one of the essential pillars for accelerating the economic development process in less developed areas. For example, Delewski (2007) concluded in his research on strategic planning in rural and less developed areas that strategic planning can help create new economic opportunities and increase investment in these areas. Also, this research showed that the use of local development models and optimal resource allocation strategies can prevent rural-urban migration and create employment in less developed areas.

Ashur et al. (2014) in their research in India, examined strategic planning for the development of less developed villages and stated that SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) in these areas can help identify and prioritize projects and investments. The study showed that strategic planning can help address development challenges such as lack of infrastructure, unemployment, and limited access to local markets.

2. Economic Development in Less Developed Areas

Economic development in less developed areas, if accompanied by the use of strategic planning tools, can accelerate the process of growth and optimal utilization of natural and human resources. Catherine and Katzenberger (2013) emphasized in their research that investment in infrastructure, human resource development, and the creation of small and medium-sized industries are among the most important factors of economic development in less developed areas. Based on the findings of this research, the use of industrial development programs and the creation of financial incentives for local investors can help accelerate economic development in these areas.

In a similar study, Martinez et al. (2016) showed that the use of natural resource-based economic programs, such as sustainable agriculture and water resources management, in areas rich in natural resources can contribute to the economic growth of these areas. This study in rural and less developed provinces showed that investment in organic agriculture and transformation industries reduced unemployment and increased income in these areas.

3. Successful strategies in similar areas

A study conducted by Zui et al. (2011) examined models of successful economic development strategies in less developed regions of Asian countries. This study showed that sustainable development and strategic planning can be effective in creating new industries, increasing exports, and improving employment in these areas. In addition, this study examined the role of investment in green projects and sustainable industries, stating that such strategies can help preserve natural resources, improve environmental quality, and create sustainable employment.

Economic development strategies in African countries were also examined. Arima et al. (2012) emphasized in their research that the use of participatory models in strategic planning and attracting the support of local communities in development projects can help improve economic conditions in these regions. They also noted that the role of governments and local institutions in creating appropriate conditions for investment and encouraging economic innovations is of great importance.

4. Research results and empirical findings in similar provinces

Research conducted in similar provinces in Iran, such as South Khorasan Province and Sistan and Baluchestan Province, has shown positive results from strategic planning for the economic development of these regions. For example, the South Khorasan Province Management and Planning Organization (2018) analyzed strategic planning in infrastructure development and attracting foreign investment in a study. This research showed that strategic planning in the field of agricultural development, the creation of transportation infrastructure, and industrial development can accelerate economic growth in less developed provinces.

Also, in Sistan and Baluchestan province, the use of participatory models and natural resource-based strategies has been able to help create sustainable jobs and improve economic and social conditions. According to the findings of Mousavi et al. (2019), the use of balanced development models that pay special attention to the agricultural sector,

tourism, and human resource development has led to a significant improvement in economic conditions in this province.

According to various empirical studies, the use of strategic planning, especially in less developed regions, can help resolve economic and social problems. Research conducted in this field clearly shows that strategic planning in these regions can significantly contribute to economic and social growth by improving infrastructure, investing in key sectors, and empowering human resources. In this regard, analyzing and using successful strategies in similar regions can help accelerate the development process in provinces such as Ilam.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research is applied in terms of purpose and qualitative research in terms of how to collect information. The statistical population includes university professors and expert experts of Ilam Governorate. The sample size was based on the theoretical saturation level. With this process, 15 experts were identified as sufficient for the interview. The data collection tool in the qualitative part is interviews. In the present research, semi-structured interviews were used to identify the qualitative analysis of sustainable development policies in rural areas: a study based on the perspective of local stakeholders. The qualitative part of the present research was conducted using theme analysis.

Research findings.

Table 1. Classification of identified codes of the learning phenomenon in the form of main category or phenomenon

Abundance	Experts	Identified codes
7	P1, P3,P4,P5,P7,P13,P14	Road and communication conditions
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P11, P13,P15	Access to public transport
8	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6,P7,P14	Transportation time and cost
9	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6,P10, P12,P14	Road quality and route safety
8	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5 ,P8,P14,P15	Air transport development
8	P2 ,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10, P11,P15	Access to sustainable electricity
8	P1,P2,P3,P6,P7,P8,P11,P14	Renewable energy capacity
9	P1,P2,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10, P12,P14	Planning for the development of electricity networks
8	P1, P3,P4,P5,P7,P9,P12,P13	Use of new and clean energies
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P10, P11,P14	Energy efficiency
10	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10	Access to high-speed internet
9	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6,P10, P12,P14	Mobile network coverage
8	P1, P3,P4,P5,P7,P9,P12,P13	Cost of communication services
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P10, P11,P14	Development of communications in remote areas
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P10, P11,P14	Quality of communication networks
8	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5 ,P8,P14,P15	Access to technical and vocational training
8	P2 ,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10, P11,P15	Specialized courses for the workforce
8	P1,P2,P3,P6,P7,P8,P11,P14	Unemployment and job creation rates
9	P1,P2,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10, P12,P14	Level of job skills of the workforce
8	P1, P3,P4,P5,P7,P9,P12,P13	Existence of entrepreneurship programs
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P10, P11,P14	Support for women in economic sectors
10	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10	Access to job opportunities for women
9	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6,P10, P12,P14	Women's employment rates
8	P1, P3,P4,P5,P7,P9,P12,P13	Educational opportunities for women
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P10, P11,P14	Supportive policies for vulnerable groups
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P10, P11,P14	Participation of local communities in economic decisions
8	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5 ,P8,P14,P15	Role of local institutions in planning

8	P2 ,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10, P11,P15	Level of participation in development projects
8	P1,P2,P3,P6,P7,P8,P11,P14	Guaranteeing the rights of local decision-makers
9	P1,P2,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10, P12,P14	Transparency in decision-making processes
8	P1, P3,P4,P5,P7,P9,P12,P13	Optimization of productivity in agriculture
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P10, P11,P14	Use of sustainable agricultural techniques
10	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10	Management of water resources
9	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6,P10, P12,P14	Development of organic agriculture
8	P1, P3,P4,P5,P7,P9,P12,P13	Maintaining biodiversity in natural resources
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P10, P11,P14	Establishment of processing industries for products Agriculture
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P10, P11,P14	Increasing value added in agricultural products
8	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5 ,P8,P14,P15	Attracting investment in processing industries
8	P2 ,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10, P11,P15	Improving production processes
8	P1,P2,P3,P6,P7,P8,P11,P14	Developing local brands and exporting agricultural products
9	P1,P2,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10, P12,P14	Sustainable use of mineral resources
8	P1, P3,P4,P5,P7,P9,P12,P13	Developing renewable energies
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P10, P11,P14	Investing in energy projects
10	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10	Adhering to environmental standards in resource exploitation
9	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6,P10, P12,P14	Reducing the environmental impacts of natural resource extraction
8	P1, P3,P4,P5,P7,P9,P12,P13	Supporting small and medium-sized industries
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P10, P11,P14	Creating industrial infrastructure in less developed areas
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P10, P11,P14	Attracting domestic and foreign investment in the industry
8	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5 ,P8,P14,P15	Supporting industrial innovations
8	P2 ,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10, P11,P15	Improving efficiency in industrial processes
8	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5 ,P8,P14,P15	Growing health and medical services
8	P2 ,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10, P11,P15	Developing the tourism sector
8	P1,P2,P3,P6,P7,P8,P11,P14	Expanding financial and banking services
9	P1,P2,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10, P12,P14	Strengthening educational services
8	P1, P3,P4,P5,P7,P9,P12,P13	Creating shopping and commercial centers in underdeveloped areas
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P10, P11,P14	Strengthening foreign trade with neighboring countries
10	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10	Increasing exports of local products
9	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6,P10, P12,P14	Expanding domestic markets
8	P1, P3,P4,P5,P7,P9,P12,P13	Attracting foreign investment
7	P1,P2 ,P8,P9,P10, P11,P14	Developing appropriate trade and tariff policies

Axial coding

As Table 1 shows, experts in the 15 interviews mentioned a wide range of factors in response to the question. In order to summarize and identify the main categories (codes), the concepts identified are presented in Table 2. By comparing different concepts (codes), it is possible to discover more common areas between them, which will allow similar concepts to be classified into the same classifications. The result of this stage of the process, which is the formation of components:

Table 2. Codes (identified concepts) from interviews with experts (axial coding)

Open coding	Axis Code	Row
Condition of roads and communication routes	Transportation Infrastructure	1
Access to public transport		
Transportation time and cost		
Quality of roads and route safety		

Development of air transport		
Access to sustainable electricity	Energy infrastructure	2
Renewable energy capacity		
Planning for the development of electricity networks		
Use of new and clean energies		
Energy efficiency		
Access to high-speed internet	Communications infrastructure	3
Mobile network coverage		
Cost of communication services		
Development of communications in remote areas		
Quality of communication networks		
Access to technical and vocational training	Training and technical skills	4
Specialized courses for the workforce		
Unemployment and job creation rates		
Level of job skills of the workforce		
Existence of entrepreneurship programs		
Support for women in economic sectors	Empowering women and vulnerable groups	5
Access to job opportunities for women		
Women's employment rates		
Educational opportunities for women		
Supportive policies for vulnerable groups		
Participation of local communities in economic decisions	Participation and decision-making	6
Role of local institutions in planning		
Level of participation in Development projects		
Ensuring the rights of local decision-makers		
Transparency in decision-making processes		
Optimizing agricultural productivity	Agriculture and natural resources	7
Using sustainable agricultural techniques		
Managing water resources		
Developing organic agriculture		
Preserving biodiversity in natural resources		
Establishing processing industries for agricultural products	Processing and agricultural industries	8
Increasing added value in agricultural products		
Attracting investment in processing industries		
Improving production processes		
Developing local brands and exporting agricultural products		
Sustainable exploitation of mineral resources	Mineral and energy resources	9
Developing renewable energies		
Investing in energy projects		
Adhering to environmental standards in resource exploitation		
Reducing the environmental impacts of natural resource extraction		
Supporting small and medium-sized industries	Development of small and medium-sized industries	10
Creating industrial infrastructure in less developed areas		
Attracting domestic and foreign investment in industry		
Supporting industrial innovations		

Improving efficiency in industrial processes		
Growing health and medical services	Development of the service sector	11
Developing the tourism sector		
Expanding financial and banking services		
Strengthening educational services		
Creating shopping and commercial centers in underdeveloped areas		
Strengthening foreign trade with neighboring countries	Development of foreign and domestic trade	12
Increasing exports of local products		
Expanding domestic markets		
Attracting foreign investment		
Developing appropriate trade and tariff policies		

Selective coding

In this stage, the commonalities of the components derived from the previous stages were identified and organized into more general and limited categories according to their commonalities. In the first stage, many themes were obtained, which were combined and analyzed using a round-robin data analysis process. The entire set of initial codes was reduced to fewer codes in such a way that in order to avoid repetition, all the initial codes that were repetitive or similar and were conceptually very close were placed in a single set and created concepts that formed the categories. The results of this stage are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Main questions identified (selective coding)

Open coding	Axis Code	Optional	Row
Condition of roads and communication routes	Transportation Infrastructure	Infrastructure Development	1
Access to public transport			
Transportation time and cost			
Quality of roads and route safety			
Development of air transport			
Access to sustainable electricity	Energy infrastructure		
Renewable energy capacity			
Planning for the development of electricity networks			
Use of new and clean energies			
Energy efficiency			
Access to high-speed internet	Communications infrastructure		
Mobile network coverage			
Cost of communication services			
Development of communications in remote areas			
Quality of communication networks			
Access to technical and vocational training	Training and technical skills	Human resource empowerment	2
Specialized courses for the workforce			
Unemployment and job creation rates			
Level of job skills of the workforce			
Existence of entrepreneurship programs			

Support for women in economic sectors	Empowering women and vulnerable groups		
Access to job opportunities for women			
Women's employment rates			
Educational opportunities for women			
Supportive policies for vulnerable groups			
Participation of local communities in economic decisions	Participation and decision-making		
Role of local institutions in planning			
Level of participation in Development projects			
Ensuring the rights of local decision-makers			
Transparency in decision-making processes			
Optimizing productivity in agriculture	Agriculture and natural resources	Investment and exploitation of natural resources	3
Using sustainable agricultural techniques			
Managing water resources			
Developing organic agriculture			
Preserving biodiversity in natural resources			
Creating processing industries for agricultural products	Processing and agricultural industries		
Increasing added value in agricultural products			
Attracting investment in processing industries			
Improving production processes			
Developing local brands and exporting agricultural products			
Sustainable exploitation of mineral resources	Mineral and energy resources		
Developing renewable energies			
Investing in energy projects			
Adhering to environmental standards in resource exploitation			
Reducing the environmental impacts of natural resource extraction			
Supporting small and medium-sized industries	Development of small and medium industries	Industrial and commercial development	4
Creating industrial infrastructure in less developed areas			
Attracting domestic and foreign investment in the industry			
Supporting industrial innovations			
Improving efficiency in industrial processes			
Growing health and medical services	Development of the service sector		
Developing the tourism sector			
Expanding financial and banking services			

Strengthening educational services	Development of foreign and domestic trade		
Creating shopping and commercial centers in underdeveloped areas			
Strengthening foreign trade with neighboring countries			
Increasing exports of local products			
Expanding domestic markets			
Attracting foreign investment			
Developing appropriate trade and tariff policies			

60 indicators in the form of 12 components (transportation infrastructure, energy infrastructure, communication infrastructure, education and technical skills, empowerment of women and vulnerable groups, participation and decision-making, agriculture and natural resources, processing and agricultural industries, mineral resources and energy, development of small and medium-sized industries, development of the service sector, development of foreign and domestic trade) and 4 dimensions (development of infrastructure, empowerment of human resources, investment and exploitation of natural resources, industrial and commercial development) have been considered to determine the necessary adequacy for selecting the main categories to examine the answers to the researcher's research questions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- In this study, the role of strategic planning in the economic development of less developed regions was examined using 60 indicators in the form of 12 components and 4 main dimensions. Strategic planning, as one of the important tools for advancing development goals, especially in less developed regions, plays a key role. These regions usually face economic, social, and infrastructural constraints that require precise and data-based strategies to overcome them. The indicators determined in this study help clarify the various components and dimensions of economic development and can provide solutions to solve the problems of these regions.
- One of the most important dimensions in the development process is the development of infrastructure, and improving transportation, energy, and communications in less developed regions is of great importance. As mentioned in the table, indicators such as the condition of roads, access to sustainable energy, and the quality of communication networks are among the main factors affecting economic growth in these regions. Lack of access to appropriate infrastructure can pose major challenges to industrial development, investment attraction, and even trade growth. Therefore, investment in these sectors, especially in border and rural areas, can help strengthen the foundations of economic development in these regions. Another important dimension is human resource empowerment, which this study emphasizes on the importance of training and empowering the workforce, especially in technical sectors. Training in technical and vocational skills helps reduce unemployment and create new job opportunities. In addition, paying attention to the empowerment of women and vulnerable groups can be effective in reducing social and economic inequalities. Active participation of local communities in decision-making processes is also one of the important indicators in social empowerment, which can lead to more effective participation in development programs.
- Finally, investment and exploitation of natural resources and development of small and medium-sized industries are other vital components in strategic planning for the economic development of less developed regions. This research shows that the optimal use of agricultural, mineral and energy resources can contribute to sustainable economic growth in these regions. The establishment of transformation industries and support for emerging sectors can, in addition to creating employment, lead to economic growth and increased exports. Overall, this research emphasizes that by using strategic planning based on a detailed analysis of the current situation and identifying environmental opportunities and threats, sustainable development can be achieved in less developed regions such as Ilam Province.

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