

# WRONG POLICIES AND NEGATIVE DEVELOPMENT: ANTI- SUSTAINABILITY

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**Abstract:** After the Islamic revolution in Iran 1978, the motto of justice for all became the rubric of governments in different aspects of life. As most of the population lived in rural areas having suffered from poverty, ignorance and lack of facilities, the attention was paid more and more to these areas to balance the distribution of wealth and resources. In the first attempts, there were built roads from the cities towards the village to facilitate the transportation and transmission of agricultural goods and products. Meanwhile, the focus on education necessitated the governments to establish rural schools and send teachers from cities to villages to teach. The establishment of health centers and local hospitals in the villages was among the initiatives performed nation-wide to spread health for villagers. Everything on the paper was straight and true. After a decade, there appeared great problems for all of the population and the government. In fact, the policies of government in the realm of sustainable development for rural areas became destructive and the trend of development became reversed. Most of the villagers found the village intolerable and tried to find a position in the cities in the hope of a higher status. On the other hand, allocation of university seats for remote area dwellers and villagers pushed a lot of students toward the cities. These persons never dreamt of returning to their village to continue their parents' occupation and practically the farms and villages became deserted. Supportive policies of governments in medicine and education could not solve the problem and the trend of migration from villages to the cities grew faster than ever, rural population became less and less and agricultural

system underwent a great harm. The only thing which could be in favor of development was a transition from rural architecture toward luxurious life and buildings which had no compatibility with traditions. This paper scrutinizes the trend of social development toward the sustainability in rural areas of Iran in three decades.

**Keywords:** agriculture, development, education, facilities, villagers

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable is defined in dictionaries in terms of continuity and maintenance of resources or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged. This and similar definitions present sustainability from an essentially anthropocentric and instrumental position, concerned with how to maintain and even improve the quality of human life within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems. The definition of sustainable development contains two crucial elements. First, it accepts the concept of 'needs', in particular those basic needs of the world's poor, such as food, clothing and shelter essential for human life, but also other 'needs' to allow a reasonably comfortable way of life. Second, it accepts the concept of 'making consistent' the resource demands of technology and social organizations with the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

This includes both local and global concerns and has a political dimension, embracing issues of resource

control and the inequities that exist between developed and developing nations. In this way, it endorses the notion of sustainable development as improving (and not merely maintaining) the quality of life within the limits of the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems. As a matter of attention, there are considered different objectives for implementing sustainable strategies and measures in a general consensus. These objectives are:

Providing adequate shelter especially for the poor, Improving management of urban settlements, Promoting sustainable land-use planning and management, Providing environmentally sound infrastructure facilities, Promoting energy-efficient technology, alternative and renewable energy sources and sustainable transport systems, Enabling disaster-prone countries to plan for and recover from natural disasters, Promoting sustainable construction industry activities, and finally Human resource development.

These objectives can be traced in each campaign of development all over the world but in some countries there emerge complex situation in which negative and positive outcomes should be viewed carefully and Iran is one example.

#### IRAN CHALLENGE

Iran is the most populous country with the second largest economy in the Middle East with a population of 68 million, a growth of 1.08 per cent per year and a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$115 billion which let the authorities to implement different programmes of development and welfare in the country. The issue of reforming style life and social changes practically started from 1961-2 when the country aimed at creating industrial revolution. The capitalism based ideology of the regime tried to keep the gap between the rural and urban areas and made the accessibility of villagers to urban areas restricted. The red lines were always kept to preserve the borders among different settlements.

The Islamic Revolution swept into power in 1979 espousing a strong pro-poor and egalitarian agenda, but, three decades later Iranian politics is still dominated by populism and issues related to poverty and the distribution of income and wealth. The revolution has been successful in bringing down the poverty rate to single digits based on the so-called international two-dollars-a-day. The Islamic Republic continues to identify the poor as its main social base and proclaims social justice as its key policy objective.

The focus of development and sustainability in Iran can date back to many years ago while two major periods of development have been distinguished: before and after 1979.

Iran has a history of environmental awareness, even prior to the 1979 revolution. For example, it was one of the 114 governments represented at the historic 1972 United Nations Stockholm Conference, which addressed problems of the human environment. As an outcome of this conference, Iran passed its first environmental legislation, the Environment Conservation and Restoration Act (ECRA), in 1974 (DoE, 2003). Although the Iranian government made significant efforts to protect the environment, the conditions on approvals by the DoE were often not carried out due to weaknesses in implementation and compliance mechanisms, and a lack of an appropriate management and monitoring system. The trend of development after the 1979 revolution sped up on behalf of the mottos of justice and equality for all taken from religious idealism. Tavassoli et al. (2000) argued that the Islamic constitutional form of government is held to guarantee the integrity of a strong nation-state while providing some formal guarantees to ethnic minorities, of whom there are several in Iran. One of the issues that Iran confronts in its attempt to construct a modern nation state is the implications of its complex ethnic and linguistic composition: nearly 66 per cent are of Persian origin and speak Farsi (Persian), while 25 per cent speak Turkish, some 5 per cent speak Kurdish and around 4 per cent speak Arabic (Aghajanian, 1983). The ethnic and linguistics minorities have traditionally lived in geographically distinct and marginalized areas near the border of the neighboring countries while 'Persians' occupy the central parts of the country.

Along with these residential separations, social and economic distance has long persisted and still continues among ethnic communities. Although there has been some internal and external migration of the people to and from various ethnic communities, the majority of people still live where their ancestors lived. The main means of subsistence in the marginalized areas is agriculture. Consequently, development was mainly for the Persian speaking areas in the central part of the country. It was estimated that among 12,000 doctors in Iran, about 8,000 were working in the capital during the Shah's regime.

Furthermore, most higher education institutions, whether governmental or private, were also located in Tehran. Access to these universities was difficult for the poor and marginalized people of the rural and nomadic communities. As a result not many participated in social, political and economic development of the society. According to Aghajanian (1983), in the 1960s and 1970s, the existing gap was further widened by centralized and urban biased economic growth. This was possible only because of the government's unique access to the increasing oil revenues which were generated with the help of

foreigners, while on-paper rule in post-1979 is completely different.

Article 19 of Iran's constitution stipulates that all people, whatever their ethnic group, enjoy equal rights. The rural-urban poor, the ethnic and linguistic minorities therefore are supposed to have the same right to education as equality was enshrined in Iranian education. Mohsenpour (in Tavassoli et al., 2000) stated that the protection of the weak from oppression and the search for justice (key elements in the curricula, and in textbooks) are defined in opposition to other political ideologies, notably capitalism, nationalism, and socialism—none of which are capable of fostering a revolution from within individuals. The fostering of capitalism is now seen to be associated with the earlier pre-Revolutionary era.

These developments were classified in three different groups of education, agriculture and housing, and health and communication system. Compared with Pahlavi's regime (1925-1979), Islamic regime achieved numerous successes with great leaps although with some negative outcomes which are discussed in details, comparatively.

## EDUCATION

### 3.1 Higher education in the last regime (1925– 1979)

During the Pahlavi era (1925–1979), the government implemented a number of policies aimed at modernizing the country and expanded the education system. Modern college and university education was developed under the Pahlavis. According to Abrahamian (1982), before 1925 there were fewer than 600 students in the country's six institutions of higher secular learning. These were all located in the capital city. This, however, changed after 1925.

The number of students expanded rapidly from 22,849 at the start of the Third Plan (1960–1965) to 38,096 in 1966 (Abrahamian, 1982). This expansion lagged behind the rapid increases of the secondary level, from whence an ever-larger flood of graduates with one primary goal, to gain admission to university, continued to burst. During the 1970s, these universities were further expanded and colleges and vocational institutes were set up in several cities. However, higher education in Iran was unable to admit the students based on their talents and aptitude. Expansion of universities did not result in, and had not been meant for, expanding job opportunities and the quality was also at low level.

### 3.2-Post -1979 Education

#### 3.2.1 Public education in the Islamic context

The literacy rate is more than 79 per cent and education is compulsory through high school (up to

the age of 16). Currently, there are approximately 18 million students in education and about 2.3 million staff working in government organizations dedicated to teaching (Kousha and Abdoli, 2004). According to a United Nations Report, Iran has placed great emphasis on human development and social protection with good progress to date (UNDP, 1999). For example, life expectancy rose from 61.6 in 1988 to 69.5 years in 1997. Adult literacy rose from 41.8 per cent on the eve of the revolution (1979) to 51.5 per cent in 1988 and jumped to 74.5 per cent in 1997, although still 10.7 million people aged 6 or over are illiterate (Tavassoli et al., 2000).

#### 3.2.2-Higher education in the Islamic context

A large portion of the national budget has been appropriated to each province for physical and human development of higher education (MSRT, 2005). There has been an increased recognition of the education system based on equity; students from impoverished and marginalized areas have been given more opportunities for higher education. The universities were also open to older students. There is now a body of learners of varied social, economic and cultural levels in higher education. A large number of new institutions such as technical schools, vocational colleges, junior colleges and similar institutions have been opened.

Admission to these institutions has not debarred entry of students to universities.

Iran has a large network of private, public and state affiliated universities offering degrees (Bazargan, 2005). State-run universities are under the direct supervision of the MSRT for non-medical courses and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MHME) for medical schools. According to recent statistics by the MSRT, Iran currently has 54 state universities and 42 state medical schools. There are 289 major private universities operating as well (MSRT, 2005).

The increasing accessibility of low income and rural areas inhabitants to higher education institutes has brought a great problem. About 70% of graduates avoid returning to their villages and do not tend to continue their father's profession. The rate of men is higher than that of women as they are considered the head of the family. This has driven the population age of villages to over 45 and widened the economical gap of the families with those in cities.

## AGRICULTURE AND HOUSING

Over the past few decades, many agricultural development projects (ADPs) have been initiated in Iran to alleviate poverty, unemployment, and an insufficient food supply. Although these projects were assumed to be beneficial for rural people, they

often had unintended negative impacts on the environment and local communities. The projects were largely unregulated and the impacts often unmitigated. As a result, Iran has suffered from social and environmental degradation in many agricultural areas. Recently, however, ADPs in Iran and elsewhere have been criticized for their detrimental social and environmental impacts at the local level and to the world ecology at large.

Intensive use of chemical fertilizers, agricultural machinery, and irrigation devices combined in many places with intensive cultivation, two to three crops per year, led to higher yields, but also caused environmental degradation. High production costs brought about considerable financial problems. The rural poor—and often middle-income groups—had to step outside the formal system of life and livelihood to gain access to land and housing. Migration is the simplest way to solve the problem. As a result, the informal settlement has been growing and becoming both more diverse and increasingly demanding. About three-fourths of these informal settlements are located on the fringes of the 10 largest cities of the country. It is generally perceived that these settlements are home to rural-to-urban migrants who have moved into urban fringe areas “as one step in a progressive rural-to-urban migration process, creating a transitional social space or a temporary holding location for newcomers to the metropolitan center. These settlements reflect a process of sub-urbanization in which longtime rural dwellers move out (or are forced to move out of villages) in order to capitalize on new opportunities for land and housing acquisition, or on low housing rents and informal enterprises.

These settlements have caused many socio-economic and environmental problems. Since the public and private modern sectors are no longer creating jobs for an increasing urban labour force, unemployed people are trying to make their own living by working or creating new economic activity in the ‘non-official urban sector’, also called the ‘fringe’, ‘murky’ or ‘informal’ sector. These activities generally involve services and deal with car repair, hair cutting, shoe shining, street peddling, etc. This is enough to attract young workers from rural areas, driving down agricultural output while doing little to increase urban productivity or reduce urban poverty. Unfortunately, these settlements have become the shelters of wrong doers who are mostly uneducated with some criminal background. The rate of crime in these places is so high that there have been established a lot of police stations to control the situation and most young people suffering from unemployment and low wages represent a static profile of the environment, yet the physical structure of informal settlements in Iran is much more acceptable than those in other third world

countries. The appearance of a new linguistic identity which has no emblem of culture, history or tradition is a barrier to the integrity of these communities. While the official education of the country is leveling off different dialects and accents in to Persian, the economical problems leave vulnerable and make them the second hand citizens.

#### HEALTH AND COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

After 1979, the Ministry of Health developed a new health system for a more equitable allocation of health resources based on primary health care, which was mostly oriented at rural areas. The main aim of these projects was to remove deprivation from the face of villages. Currently, over 75 percent of the rural population and 60 percent of the urban population of Iran are served by the established health network of the Ministry of Health and Medical Treatment and Education. According to the targets set in Iran’s fourth five-year Development Plan, by 2012, the entire rural population will be served by the national health network. The country’s basic policies in health include the following priorities and principles:

- (1) Preventative measures are regarded as long-term investments
- (2) Rural areas and remote corners have priority in the allocation of medical resources.
- (3) Outpatient treatment is preferred to hospitalization.
- (4) General health care services have priority over specialized service

In 1992, there were 22,000 general practitioners and medical specialists, 3,600 pharmacists and 4,500 dentists in Iran. Currently, there are 16,220 health houses and 6,000 health care centers in urban and rural areas. About 16,000 *Behvarzes*, stationed at the health houses, offer primary The family planning program in existence before the 1979 Revolution was revived in 1989. The program has been extremely successful. By 1996, more than 74 percent of eligible couples were using a contraceptive, and the total fertility rate had dropped from 6.5 to 2.6. The traditional gap between urban and rural areas has also been substantially narrowed. Iran is making good progress toward the Millennium Development Goals, which aims to reduce child mortality and to improve maternal health. RURAL households have traditionally been the most disadvantaged section of Iranian society, not only in terms of income and political power but also in accessing basic public services, including health. In light of this, a major achievement of public policy in Iran over the past twenty years has been the improvement of rural health status and the near elimination of health disparities between higher income urban populations and the rural poor. Trends in the infant mortality rate (IMR) provide an illustration. In 1974, the IMR was 120 per thousand live births for rural areas and 62 for

<i>Indicator</i>	
Total health budget	(billion Rials) 4,409
Total rural share	( percent) 30.8
Total urban share	( percent) 58.1
Running expenses (non-allocable) share	( percent) 11.1
Rural public health services	( percent of rural budget) 60.9
Urban public health services	( percent of urban budget) 33.4
Total Public Health Services Share	( percent of total budget) 38.1

Source: Iran Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MOHME).

**Table:** Distribution of Health Budget, 2001-20021

urban areas. By 2000, the IMR had declined precipitously and the urban-rural differential was nearly eliminated with the IMR at 28 for urban areas and 30 for rural ones. Key to this achievement has been the Primary Health Care (PHC) system.

The government spends about \$5 billion on subsidies for food and medicine, and several semi-public foundations and charities assist the poor with income and credit (Esfahani, 2005) and helps them to cover most of their medical costs. These number about 8% of the population or somewhere between one-half to two-thirds of all poor individuals. Due to the rise of

health standards in the rural areas along with reduction of illiteracy rate, the families are downsizing and getting distance from their traditional lifestyle, whether good or bad. As an example, most rural families provided their own bread, eggs, dairy and even meat at home and formed the independent unit while now the queue of people waiting to buy bread from machine bakery is the common feature of villages.

While most villages were deprived from having land telephones before the revolution, it is now estimated that 70 per cent of villagers can use mobile phones on

the fields or at home. The accessibility to internet and satellite services ,previously unimagined, has been rapidly increasing in the authorized zones so that the people in the villages use advanced services in banking, marketing and travel through internet counters whether privately- or publicly funded.

#### CONCLUSION

Implementing justice-oriented programs by Iran government has removed poverty and ignorance from the rural areas .Unfortunately, the migration borne out of these developments has been so devastating for social and cultural identity of the rural people. Abandoning villages to find industrial jobs along with the increase of accessibility to higher education created new settlements with heterogeneous social and linguistic identity which can prevent people from interacting uniformly in policy making. To accommodate in new environment, most migrants lost their linguistic identity not to be stigmatized which could signal the decay of historical background and tradition. Despite the successes in removing poverty ,there is much to do to create a uniform system of life in different parts of the country.

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