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Necessity of Rural - Urban Balance as a Hub of Environmental Development: A Sociological Appraisal of Iran

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Abstract

The article evaluates how rural-urban balance is necessary to access environmental development in developing countries including Iran. The continuing process of modernization is widely responsible for the change and the appearance of imbalance with special reference to Iran. The scenario is also observed in China, India and many other emerging countries. In the balance is maintained, agricultural and raw materials could be produced to feed industrial continuity in urban areas. Moreover, when imbalance emerges, the environmental destruction appears in cities, and the rural productivity disrupts on the other hand. The paper concludes that rural-urban balance optimistically reads to socio-economic development, sustainable growth and integration. In case of imbalance, surging urbanization would lead to declining of farmland areas. Similarly, the paper explores challenges, merits, demerits and the escalation of the current transformation. However, it is worth notifying that the unbridled change needs to be under scrutiny.

Keywords: Rural-urban balance. Modernization. Migration. Urbanization. Economic development

Introduction

The paper represents a gradual shift of rural inhabitants to the urban areas with a focus on the northern region of Iran. In the course of this change, a great physical, social, economic and cultural transformation takes place. The given shift, or the appearing phenomenon is much linked to modernization, and industrialization. The paper proposes a state of balance between the rural and urban scales, and in the absence of which both rural and urban sectors would be vulnerable. Urbanization as a modern phenomenon is absorbing a large number of people from rural to urban areas not only in Iran, but in China, India and many other Asian, African and other countries as whole. The paper will pursue the merits and demerits of the continuing transformation.

Interdependence and mutuality of the rural and urban sectors, and in particular, the role that small towns have as agents for rural improvement is of prime importance. The analysis may further go on to discuss "the circular causation" whereby rural change can also influence levels of urban prosperity. That is to say, urban development highly depends on rural change. Technologically speaking, all ancient societies were organic economics; relying on plants, trees, and animals for materials and power (Wrigley, 1988). In a famous essay, Finely(1965) argued that the only important technological advances took place early on, or in the Middle Ages. Through most of antiquity, he concluded, technology stagnated, because slave labour was so cheap that it did not pay to invent or buy machines.

Change in economic and agricultural technology is widely accepted and fundamental to any strategy for meaningful economic development, and thereby poverty alleviation. But, the problem of effectively harnessing new technological possibilities to meet the needs of rural development, and bringing about prosperity is a highly complex one; involving far more than the provision and financing of an *appropriate* technology package. However, new technology disturbs the equilibrium of the receiving environment, and the chain of a complex technical, economic, social, cultural, and institutional effects that are neither easily predictable nor necessarily consistent with the aims of rural development. Therefore technology change, has to be viewed more widely as the dynamic interaction between new inputs, methods, and systems (the *technology*), and the receiving environment.

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This suggests the need for handling technological change in developing agricultures within the context of a broadly-defined "technology policy", with the physical technology as one instrument in a set of policy choices and intervention designed to meet well-defined objectives.

However, producers have shown a growing interest in organic food and farming which has become a widespread issue at all levels of society. Similarly, much debate still arises about the value of organic food and farming as a model for sustainable agriculture (Bellon, 2014).

Rural Change

Globally speaking, since 1950, the world's labor force has more than doubled — from i.e., it has doubly increased to above 2.6 billion; outstripping the growth in job creation (Narasaiah, 2001). As a result, the ILO estimates that nearly 1 billion people, or approximately 30% of the global work force are unemployed or underemployed (working, but not earning enough to meet basic needs). In the present century, the world needs to create more than 1.9 billion jobs, i.e. all of which in the developing world — just to maintain current levels of employment. So far as rural-urban balance in Iran is concerned, due to the baby-boom of 1980s in the country, an increasing number of youth of both genders are looking for employment, but not easy to get it.

As a result of the mounting pressure for people to migrate to cities, the growth in urban populations in Iran is far outstripping the availability of basic services such as water, sewerage, transportation, housing, energy and electricity. As a result and due to rural-urban imbalance, life in urban spaces is plagued by poverty, pollution, congestion, homelessness and unemployment.

Generally speaking, currently above 47 percent of world population live in rural areas (WPDS, 2014), and Asia-wise, rural inhabitants in 2014 have been recorded 54 percent of the total population of the region. Such an amazing number of village inhabitants are in need of their own material and non-material capital, so as to be able to produce the food that they need, and thereby maintain their lives. In the following article, various theories regarding rural development in developing world will be discussed.

By rural change, it is meant to proceed through such schemes as to alleviate poverty in different sectors in rural areas. However, the rural areas must be targeted as centers of dynamism for job openings for the increasing number of families. Such opportunity schemes need to be initiated in the rural sectors. In achieving rural development schemes, glamorization and suitable family planning must be reached and achieved with special reference to the developing societies. Through such an operation, attaining agrarian industries need to be assured.

While talking about sustainable rural change, we may also briefly touch upon the concept of privatization (Taori, 1995). This new phenomenon may be carried out, when a multi-disciplinary team takes up a holistic exercise of inducting rationale changes. The process also needs sustainable linkage-building between agriculture, rural development, and rural industrialization.

Migration as a new phenomenon widely affects agriculture. Similarly, the lives of migrants and their communities that are lost in studies of migration statistics, the economic aspects of migration, or aspects of urban geography need to be appraised and be brought to our attention with special reference to Asia (Zhang and Duncan, 2014).

Agrarian improvement is a process with several dimensions including poverty eradication. It is operationalized via social and economic schemes. A victorious action plan will make it practicable. Rural development needs changing environments — enabling poor people to earn more, invest in themselves, and their communities in order to reach their key goals, and maintain the necessary infrastructures.

In a universal framework a large number of Third World countries are identifying that, in case agrarian societies are well enabled, they will possibly be able to administer their own community action plans. However, the appearance of rural deprivation creates considerable problems for the governing bodies in many developing countries. The failure of any rural change and development project even negatively affects the urban development and industrial projects (Harriss, 1982).

Rural regions everywhere in the world are more or less of comparable qualities, i.e. their people are scattered, and that contributes to their not having easy access to many facilities. In such communities, agriculture is usually the prime activity, followed by opportunities to be limited for use. Such features cause people in the rural regions to face challenges which contribute to underdevelopment. Such conditions bring about deprivations for the rural people — leading to their dissatisfaction. The emerging situation results in shortage of opportunities in rural regions rather than the non-rural ones. Therefore, rural areas are rarely able to mobilize sufficient resources to finance their own development programmes, leaving them dependent on transfers from external resources. Moreover, rural areas in the developing societies are often politically marginalized; leaving little opportunity for the rural poor to influence government policies (Redclift, 1984).

Less developed societies are often characterized by their increasing vulnerabilities with special reference to their rural locations (Chmbers, 1983). In some cases such as South Africa, approximately 70% of the country's poor people live in rural areas, and about 70% of the rural residents are poor. Such conditions result in constrained incomes by the ruralites stemming from insufficient job openings. However, rural areas in majority of developing countries are diverse with concentrations of poverty and relative prosperity. One of the characteristics of the rural areas is that the population of such areas is usually mobile between rural and urban areas; seeking better living conditions. That is to say, such people do not have satisfactory housing and quality of life in their locations of origine.

Issues of Rural Dwellers

High rates of population growth hinder the improvement of living standards in developing countries such as India, especially among the lower-income families. In many of the poorer countries, family-planning programmes have been adopted, but many of these have not yet succeeded in significantly reducing the rates of population increase. The appearing conditions require more practical research and practice on fertility, and the failure of which will lead to larger families. However, indirect policies are needed to implement family planning (i.e. for education, employment, and social security), whose impact on fertility might be considered an explicit benefit (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971).

The level of fertility in any society reflects ingrained and

interrelated socioeconomic factors which need to be analyzed in a variety of ways — by the study of fertility differentials at one point in time, by longitudinal assessment of the impact of development projects, and as in this research, by the detailed study of small communities (Porter et al., 1991).

In an increasing number of the Third World countries, due to the current poverty and vulnerability, the ruralite families generally resort to a set of paradigms to make sure of their survival. Thus, it is more advisable to illustrate their economic endeavors as survival strategies rather than occupations or employment. The deepest poverty in rural areas belong to women, and in many cases, children in such areas live in families/households with income below the minimum subsistence level. These families/households are often under-educated, and do not easily have access to water, fuel and other necessary services. This results in high levels of under nutrition or malnutrition, morbidity and mortality of the children etc. Under- such circumstances, there is always a one-way migration of people from rural to urban areas. Demographically speaking, such a process of migration negatively affects rural poverty. Such migrations transfer rural poverty to urban destinations as well (Goldstein, 1983).

While increasing number of rural households are quite marginalized within the Third World, with subsistence level of income, and no functional pension systems, yet they have to be seasonal workers with earnings almost less than the permanent workers.

As far as the states in the developing countries are concerned, they are required to play more active roles as follows:

- * Economic development: It refers to the process of improving the standard of living and well-being of the population of a country/society by raising per capita income. This is usually realized by an increase in industrialization relative to reliance on the agricultural sector.
- * Social sector (i.e. social infrastructure): It refers to investing in people of a country/ society. It includes policies designed to develop people's skills and capacities, and supports them to have full employment, and participate in social life, and the goal of which is education, improving quality of life, healthcare etc.
- * Human resource development: The concept refers to training and creating opportunities for the individual in a society/country to improve skills and distribute resources.
- * Natural resource-based programmes: It refers to the development and use of natural resources such as land, water, soil, animals etc. to access further productivity.

Such programmes lead to poverty alleviation through investment in infrastructure and provision of social services. However, elements in association with rural development are required to be on the agenda. Generally speaking, it is supposed to be a multi-dimensional process including rectified supply of services and opportunities for generating more income, rectified physical infrastructure, social integration and over-all security within rural areas. The main objective of rural development is to facilitate change within the rural locations — enabling the underclass people to have access to more income and maintain their livelihoods in a more satisfactory way; In a nutshell, to

discover opportunities, and to activate them. Nonetheless, a dynamic strategy will move people to less poverty. As a result, such paradigms will help the vulnerable people, and thereby their poverty will be relieved.

Sustainability in social context is an important step towards rural progress. However, rural communities hold a wealth of social capital in the form of extended networks of mutual solidarity, shared beliefs and traditions.

Extent of Growth

Dynamics of growth may denote to Asia where it is surprisingly becoming the most dynamically growing region in the world in recent decades with extraordinary speed and scale in both industrial and agricultural sectors (Vu,2013)

As far as the developing countries are concerned, to revive their rural development, and as a result, to advance the engines of their economic progress, functional and effective strategies need to be put into practice. Though the relevant processes change in the course of time and place, the resultant dynamics will emerge in terms of sources of progress, and the interconnections that extend the initial instinct. Progress in sources such as agriculture, forestry, and other related activities will lead to increasing earnings, employment etc.

It is so projected that as a result of growing agriculture, forestry, leisure and tourism in rural communities, the whole process would contribute to increasing incomes, development of transport and communications, and thereby the underdevelopment of rural communities will decline. This perception would be practical for the rural communities only if resource-based supports are allotted to the afford-mentioned activities.

Dynamic growth will benefit many of the rural poor in the developing countries, i.e. including those earning the least. Moreover, as more active rural economies become less cut off, they are less prone to sickness and mortality. That is, with better roads and means of communications, the chance that a sick or injured person will get to the hospital in time increases for the prosperous and the poor, even though the chances may still not remain equal for both.

Though development socio-economically uplifts many of the poor, it does not include all. Safety nets are still needed, and the rural poor are greatly disadvantaged relative to their urban counterparts when it comes to social assistance. Nonetheless, a few number of the rural people of the developing countries are included in social security systems, and hence those self-employed are not benefited from unemployment compensations.

Development of Human Power

By definition, human resource development (HDR) is the framework for helping employers develop their personal and organizational skills, knowledge and abilities. It includes such opportunities as employee training, employee career development and the like.

Rural communities in a large number of developing countries are generally exposed to many sufferings stemming from low skills. What they need is a separate strategy of human resources, so that their basis of skills in rural areas could increase. However, rural development could be pursued through such a master plan. To materialize such objectives, transfer of human resource to rural location is a priority. In some cases, experienced

volunteers need to contribute, and should be utilized. Similarly, transfer of education and training should be achieved as well. Interventions often through governments in all spheres are necessary too.

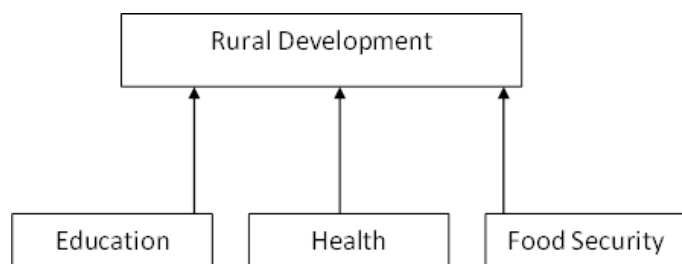


Fig 1: Model of Rural Development

Based on cause and effect logic, provision of education, health and food security would contribute to rural development. So, creation of such an atmosphere would provide the rural inhabitants with more security which ultimately leads to rural-urban balance. Therefore, creation of healthy life in which hunger and starvation are not there, helps in maintaining rural development, and consequently rural-urban balance.

Issues of Rural Development

Larger part of global poverty is rural, and hence reaching the Global Development Targets suggests giving higher priority to rural development. Similarly, the nature of the problems is changing, and will further change. Yet, the extent of rural poverty and its weight in global poverty is quite considerable with special reference to a large part of the developing world (ODI, 2001).

The duality of urban-rural interests has caused tensions/conflicts between the two areas in the Third World development. The question is that: either the urban areas must be developed for its long-lasting economic outcomes, or the rural locations must be paid more attention to, since poverty is more observable there. Though poverty is severe in rural areas, it is highly touchable in urban areas as well. Poverty being indigenous in the rural areas of the Third World, it reflected in different ways such as malnutrition, hunger and disease. Those who are usually affected are the landless, the female-headed households and young children. Harrison (1993) represents a qualitative and quantitative account of problem. Though Harrison identifies some of the causes of the problem, and proposes possible solutions, yet poverty would not soon be eliminated. The factors responsible for the issue will further complicate the situation.

Acknowledging the complexity of causes of poverty, one can accept that rural poverty is created by a number of closely-linked processes that are mainly policy-induced. In a number of developing countries, many policies, rules and institutions have contributed to the demarcation. The most important of these is urban bias which pre-empt resources from rural households (Lele and Adu-Nayko, 1992).

The created biases cause shortage of access to productive capital such as land, water etc. Others are families in arrangements such as lack of access to credit and inputs, and lack of grassroots institutions to encourage people's participation.

Land and Development

Human change and development affect all the dimensions

of the environment. As a result, all the new faces of development must be monitored with regard to its resultant impact on environment. However, any physical development is going to have some environmental impact. The degree or extent of that impact is dependent upon such factors as the intensity of the development, and the physical characteristics of the site.

The catastrophe of food production and the resultant poverty has focused attention to the problem of landlessness in many Third World countries. Land being the most important source of livelihood for most people in developing countries in which most people live in the rural areas, yet such issues have remained unsolved in most of the regions (Okoth-Ogendo, 1993). In a study on world rural poverty, Jaizairy et al. (1992) found that access to land, particularly arable land for the poor, had declined. The right way to sustainable development for the poor is to find access to productive assets, and the most important of which is land. A crucial determinant of income distribution and wealth is the distribution of land rights for the poorest of the poor in the Third World.

In many developing countries, landlessness has given rise to overcrowding and land degradation as people tried to make a living out of the meager pieces of land on which they live, and this is one of the reasons land reform is about, how land is owned, and how patterns of ownership change. Land reform is said to be the only means of altering inequitable owner structures for effective development of participatory institutions, local and national (Doener, 1972; Prosteman et al., 1990).

Alliance of Rural Development

The objective of integrated rural development is to enable identified rural poor families to cross the poverty line by providing productive assets and inputs to the target groups. The assets are provided through financial assistance in the form of subsidy by the governments and term credit advanced by financial institutions.

Rural issues are different in type and number, and need more attention. Similarly, it is also important to recognize the actors suitable for the rural development. As far as the developing countries are concerned, their elite actors pay more attention to urban areas; their projects and development targets which are more rewarding. However, multi-dimensional integrated rural development is of prime importance for these countries.

We can therefore state that rural development is not only to provide relief to the poor, but to eradicate poverty by inter alia, primarily addressing the following issues:

- * Equal treatment: This covers the problem of distribution, enrichment of the elite, corruption, and empowerment of the poor.
- * Land ownership: Land possession, development etc.
- * Population movement and population pressure: That includes rural-urban migration and is associated with both rural and urban development. There is also an alliance between migration and rural production yields.

Change/shift in thinking of development model from large-scale economic development to small-scale and self-sufficient development also needs adjustments and flexibility in the implementation of rural development. Simultaneously, industrialization and economic development are required to continue. The difference lies in

the fact of a shift in emphasis in which the knowledge, abilities, needs and interests of the poor are put first by means of a process of empowerment. This means that the people's basic needs as defined by themselves, are satisfied, and that social security is provided. Nonetheless, to make sure of sustainable development with special reference to rural development, each person or community needs to handle its own resources and environment with sufficient care.

Vulnerability of the Southern Caspian Sea

The Southern Caspian Sea region including two Provinces of Guilan and Mazandaran with a population density of more than 120 people per k², is one of the densest regions of Iran. The given region, while currently facing increasing challenges in terms of environment, space, population density, migration, socio-ecological instability etc., it is potentially subject to further social, environmental, rural and urban vulnerabilities. The increasing literacy rate of the rural youth and the migration of such young cohorts to urban areas in search of non-agricultural occupations, and the pulling migration factor of the region in general, have contributed to the emergence of new challenges in the region. Different citizenship controversies constantly persuade younger age groups (mainly 20-30 years of age) to migrate (Sheykhi, 2008:69).

Similarly, the expanding and unbalanced tourism in the region, flow of non-indigenous material capital into the region, growth and prosperity of housing construction, unreasonable rise of the price of land in the region, and change of land use from agriculture to housing and industry in the region all reflect an image of the region. In migration of unlocal people with different socio-cultural conditions, speedy and constant change of culture and indigenous values, merging of non-indigenous subcultures with other indigenous cultures are some of the changes and challenges observed in the two southern provinces of the Caspian Sea. Such changes contribute to the emergence of some sort of normlessness, the loss of local and regional norms which reflect a negative perspective of the region.

The above-mentioned conditions while apparently bring about richness and economic prosperity to the region, yet it contributes to increasing social and economic abnormalities in long term in the region. On the other hand, because of mechanization of agriculture, great numbers of the rural youth have migrated to cities which has caused the rural-urban imbalance (Sheykhi, 2006:40).

On the contrary, socio-environmental stability, stability of population density, and appropriate exploitation of resources are known as social indicators that eventually lead to guarantees, an equilibrium, and sustainable pacificity for the Southern Caspian Sea region. Immediate change of habits and patterns within different groups, especially the youth, will potentially increase the vulnerability of the given population in different dimensions. Giving up indigenous culture such as social norms, traditions etc. for the sake of material and economic interests in process, will jeopardize the rural and agricultural safety, the relevant activities, and the present potential capacities.

Therefore, the given region needs to adopt effective, advisable and sustainable strategies. Likewise, and from sociological and geo-ecological point of view, the region needs increasing micro and macro studies. Setting

appropriate paradigm, and preventing further pressures, and also forming effective alternatives can create further social and environmental safety.

Similarly, balancing the urban and rural population of the region, and appropriate settlement of urban and rural population, will itself act as an infrastructure to bring about development and sustain the agriculture in the region of the Caspian Sea in general. On the contrary, and in case of the cultivation of pseudo, unadvisable and short-term business, social and environmental conditions are endangered. That will act as a large and multi-dimensional threat to the future generations. The debate that the two subject -matters of poverty and social organization have mutual and close relationship with each other, is of prime importance. That is to say, where social organization weakens, poverty will inevitably emerge which is highly discussable (Sheykhi, 2011:235).

A perspective of India

India with a total population of than 1.3 billion (WPDS, 2015), about two-thirds of whom is estimated to live in rural areas. India's poverty is affecting almost 170 million of the total population, and due to that everyday 1200 families migrate to Mumbai (BBCW, June 23, 2015). Though many of these poverty-stricken people attempt to migrate to cities, yet three out of every four continue to live in the rural areas of the country, and that helps poverty to sustain as more a rural phenomenon. Many of these poverty-stricken people are observed in areas such as West Bengal, Rajasthan, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Such regions usually face droughts and extreme water shortages too.

India's elevated amount of poverty is mainly caused and appeared due to the inabilities of the residents and communities to maintain essential and constant assets, and also due to shortage of financial capital. Another indicator of India's poverty reflects in illiteracy levels, insufficient healthcare system, and basically no capability of receiving social services (Retrieved, 2009).

Upto 2005, some 85.7 percent of India's population lived on less than US \$2.50 (PPP)¹ a day down from 92.5% in 1981. This compares with both China and Vietnam making enormous progress against poverty, and the evidence suggests that rural economic growth has played a large role in this success. Based on different country-wise definitions of poverty, in terms of poverty line over time, rate of poverty in China fell from above 50 percent in 1981 to about 20 percent in 1991, and 5 percent in 2005. In Vietnam also, poverty fell from almost 60 percent to 20 percent during 1993-2004 (Ravallion, 2008).

However, land is the most important non-labour asset in any developing rural economy. On the basis of land determining role in the rural economy, efforts are being made to control poverty. Therefore, India should also follow suit with China and Vietnam in order to lower or eradicate her poverty.

Recommendations:

- To reach an atmosphere of rural-urban balance, more priorities need to be given to rural inhabitants.
- To reach the goals of rural-urban balance, more subsidies and credits/loans need to be provided to rural

¹ - Purchasing Power Parity.

inhabitants.

- To sustain rural-urban balance, more healthcare services and educational facilities need to be provided in rural areas.
- To reduce rural-urban mobility, income inequities need to be minimized in rural areas.

Conclusion

Not only Iran, but many other developing countries must set up a new plan in which rural-urban relations, and consequently agriculture- industry relations are improved, and in the course of which an integrated development is reached. The infrastructure of industry being agriculture, integration between the two must be highlighted. In the meantime, the country needs to control the scale of megacities in urbanization drive. Similarly, agri-urbanism must provide a new path to sustainable development.

Contrary to the all efforts made, agriculture is still not satisfactory enough from different viewpoints. Though remarkable progress has been recorded in this sector, yet, there are still weaknesses that persist. However, despite the actual improvements in the various spheres of agriculture, there are still shortcomings that mar the agricultural scene.

As acknowledged, lifting poverty in both rural and urban sectors is quite important. It must also be realized that preference must not be given to one area, to the detriment of the other. This approach has led to cityward migration, which has merely transferred rural poverty to even urban areas. In addition to the necessity to access land by the rural dwellers, a balanced approach is advised to be adopted as a determining strategy. It is only in this way that the problem of rural development can be implemented in a successful way. Luckily, as our study has shown, the poor have shown their perseverance and enterprise. That is, they merely need the means (strategy) to reach the end (rural development).

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