

Development Planning and Civil Society: The Pursuit of Social Cohesion in Iran

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Abstract

The predominant belief that development is facilitated through the management and reformist direction of variables and components of a social system has resulted in the formulation and implementation of long-term Development Plans by most countries of the world especially the developing countries including Iran. However, the centralization of political systems in developing countries, the top-down approach in drawing up and putting the Development Plans into action and the minor role of beneficiary groups in this process have contributed to the lack of a broad consensus over the Plans and deprived them of the participation of society in development. The present study, having adopted a qualitative approach, evaluates the Five-Year Development Plans of Iran in the last three decades, and tries to present a new pattern of planning with the distinctive feature of generating cohesion. The utilized method was descriptive-analytical and the data collected through direct observation and interviews with experts, academic elites and collecting questionnaires. SWOT method was applied to analyze the data.

Keywords: civil society, development plans, monitoring, participation, social cohesion.

1 Introduction

Nowadays, the societies and agencies involved in national development find their success indebted in many ways, to the National Visions and Development Plans. The development could be achieved through management and reform-oriented direction of variables and social system components in a context of imbalances, rather than balances or spontaneous order and discipline. In other words, the realization of development is via managing and directing variables in the context of the tensions and imbalances. Such a process of development requires a co-ordinating consciousness (Leftwich, 1996). On this basis, development is considered as a conscious process where getting awareness of the failure of the market economy and of the global political economy, identifying the priorities of the country, understanding the pillars of development and eventually gaining specialized knowledge of the details of the social system would be essential. Development programs are faced with

uncertainties, risks and unpredictable parameters which necessitate the adoption of required measures to manage unforeseen events.

Development is pursued within the society and its realization seeks for continuous efforts of the entire community. It is beyond the merely economic sphere; development needs mobilization of forces, creation and redefining of institutions to strengthen social cohesion, creation and re-definition of convergence mechanisms for regulating pressures as well as attracting participation and distribution of resources. Such an approach would make development a deep social and political process. Thus development is multi-faceted and achieving it, first and foremost, is subject to overcoming lots of limitations as well as short-term and long-term economic, social and sometimes political or security crises that are faced by an underdeveloped society. These issues necessitate consideration of the social sphere during the development process. During the development process, society would be in need of the creation of a coalition of various interests and diverse ideologies.

The pursuit of development with a focus on internal social dynamics is subject to a program inclusive of all components of the society. Here, above all, the need for social cohesion and increasing the scope of legitimacy is felt. Participation of social forces and private sector stakeholders calls for special procedures and mechanisms where the role of civil society, in general, and stakeholders in particular, is anticipated at the formulation, implementation and monitoring of development programs and plans. Having considered this important aspect, development plans will enjoy a democratic character and the capacity for structural integrity. With this introduction, we are going to examine the development programs of Iran, formulated and implemented by the Iranian governments as the Five-year Development Plans of Iran (FYDP).

2 Planning System in Iran

The planning system generally consists of three phases: the first phase is policy-making and visioning where the vision and the main future goals are being identified and the critical strategies for achieving these goals are determined. In the next phase, the list of objectives and practical strategies with identified administrative measures and certain responsibilities as well as the required resources and timing will be specified. In the last phase, legislation is done which involves the development and adoption of new laws and regulations or the modification of existing regulations, in order to facilitate the implementation of the measures anticipated in the Plan. In each of these levels and phases, the four processes of development, implementation, assessment and improvement must be carried out continuously and cyclically.

Iran's Development Plans are being prepared and implemented based on the Fourth Chapter of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially the Articles 43-44 and by virtue of the Budget plan ratified in 1972. The first Article of the Planning and Budget Law defines three types of long-term, five-year and annual Plans. Based on paragraph 2 of this Article, long-term plans must be devised for a ten-year period or more. Accordingly, general policies of the country's development scheme are established within the 1404 Vision, planned for a twenty-year time frame and the Five-year Development Plans are being placed under this Vision. According to Article 110 of Iran's Constitution, determining the general

policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, after consultation with the Expediency Council is within the duties of the Supreme Leader.

Based upon paragraph three of Article two of the Budget Plan, the FYDP is a comprehensive plan formulated for a five-year period; it is been ratified by the Parliament while the objectives of economic and social development in the same period are completely specified. The draft Plans must contain all the goals, policies, financial resources' assessment, expenses and other issues, in order to be submitted for ratification to the Parliament.

Article five of the Planning and Budget Law assigns the responsibility of preparing the long-term and five-year Plans to the former Planning and Budget and current Planning and Management Organization. This organization is required to offer its proposals on strategies and budget policies to the Economy Council.¹ The Budget Organization has to develop the five-year plans on the basis of the proposals of the administrative organizations and the conducted studies and submit them to the Economy Council. Article 2 of the Second Chapter of the Planning and Budget Law asserts that the Economy Council should send the Plans to the Cabinet following their study, approval and evaluation.

Upon examination and approval in the cabinet, the development plans are sent to the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Iran's Parliament or Majlis) for ratification.² It is worth mentioning that the final ratification and monitoring will be done by the Parliament and the Administration has to be responsive to Parliament during the implementation process of the FYDPs. Paragraph four of the first Article of the Budget Plan states that the annual plan, as the government's action plan, has to be set along with the country's annual budget scheme and presented to the Parliament. Meanwhile, the annual specific administrative targets of each administrative body and their related budgets are formulated in the form of the objectives and policies set forth in the five-year Plan.

2.1 Development planning before Islamic Revolution

With a proposal by the Department of Commerce, planning began in Iran in 1937 with the aim of developing a general economic plan for the country. After conducting various researches and academic studies finally, a seven-year Agricultural Plan was formulated by the Economy Council. Then, in 1944, the Council was mandated to prepare the scheme of a comprehensive economic plan and in May 1948, the bill of the First Development Plan submitted to the Iranian National Consultative Assembly. This was the beginning of planning in Iran resulting in two 7-year and four five-year plans (third, fourth, fifth, sixth) before the Revolution and five 5-year Development Plans after the Revolution (Jahangard et al., 2012).

¹ Management and Planning Organization of Iran established in accordance with the decision of the Supreme Administrative Council on 6th March 2000, by merging the Administrative and State Recruitment Organization and Planning and Budget Organization.

² Economic Council is a strategic decision-making body aimed at protecting the interests of different generations through overseeing the implementation of economic policies and the government's financial activities. The Council should offer its views to the President of the Council. President of the Council must be a permanent member of the state and is required to communicate the adopted strategies to the administration so that the administration considers those strategies in implementing its policies.

Increase of production and exports, domestic supply of the public demands, promotion of agriculture and industry, exploration of mines and underground resources, promotion of public health, raising knowledge and life qualities, settling public livelihood and reducing the costs of living were among the objectives of the First (1948-55) Development Plan (Hadi-Zonouz, 2010).

Second Development Plan (1955-62) aimed at continuing the action plan of the 1st Plan and implementing new programs; it was mainly focused on the development of communication networks and economic growth. The source of funding for the second Plan was oil revenues (Tofigh, 2007).

The goals of the Third Development Plan (1962-67) were to create new jobs, strengthen the agricultural sector, finalize the operations of the 2nd Plan and implement measures for the development of higher education and health. Lack of organized links between different sectors (industry, services and agriculture), lack of specialized personnel, inaccurate and non-precise information, as well as the economic recession of 1960 and 1963, led to the failure of the Plan in achieving its pre-determined objectives (Hadi-Zonouz, 2010).

The Fourth Development Plan (1968-72) was implemented during the period that Iran was caught with low per capita income, domestic disparity issues especially the existent inequality between urban and rural areas, and massive migration of villagers to cities. Over-reliance on oil, lack of trained skilled manpower, increased regional disparities and ultimately, the irregular migration of villagers to cities were among the fundamental problems created and spread during this period, challenging the development Plan (Tofigh, 2007).

The Implementation of 5th Development Plan (1973-7) coincided with the rise in oil prices in 1974, helping the improvement of the quality of life of different social strata, especially the middle class. The prosperity of the fifth development plan did not emerge during a long process, or based on a structural change in the society; therefore, it couldn't lead to strengthening and sustaining a constant balance within the system (Planning and Budget Organization, 1998).

2.2 Development Plans in the Islamic Republic of Iran

After the Islamic Revolution development programs faced a delay of several years; due to the war, the required ground for development planning practically did not exist, in other words, the 8-year Iran-Iraq war totally eliminated the possibility of implementing the development plans. By the end of the imposed war and the beginning of the second decade of the Islamic Revolution, the necessity of rebuilding the country's shattered economy and improving the lives of the people became more visible. Facing the new situation, Iran began dealing with development needs on a phase-by-phase approach through developing medium-term planning and in 1989 practically began devising development plans in the form of 5-year Plans.

The first 5-year plan for the period of 1989-93, began with launching a campaign of economic liberalization. The main objective of this program was that with the government's investment in the reconstruction of war damages and maximum utilization of existing capacity, the negative economic trends would change in favor of constant economic growth.

In this sense, economic growth was considered as the fundamental national development need and thus, the economic policies influential in the production increase were put on the agenda. The devastations left from the Iran-Iraq war, sanctions imposed against Iran, rapid population growth and freeze of Iran assets in The United States of America were among the challenges of post-war development (Deputy for Planning and Strategic Monitoring, 2008).

The second Development Plan for the 5-year period of 1995-9 was prepared based on economic liberalization and privatization. Economic growth and development were considered as the main goals of the country in this Plan. Structural problems gripping both the first and second FYDPs, the domestic social attitudes towards economic issues, the policy of détente in international relations, improved relations within OPEC and the presentation of the Economy Plan of 1998, all led to the formulation of a pattern of economic reform with a domestic approach, in the 3rd Development Plan (1999-2004). Adopting an economic reform strategy, this program was devised and drafted with a focus on the development of a competitive economy through liberalization of the economic system, along with the establishment of a comprehensive system of social security as well as legal and institutional reforms, the abolition of the monopoly for the provision of outsourcing areas of the private sector and also reducing the commanding role of the government (Deputy for Planning and Strategic Monitoring, 2008).

Setting a pattern of global knowledge-based sustainable economic growth in the form of a long-term economic vision, as the distinctive feature of this program, the 4th Five-year development plan was formulated. The fourth FYDP was developed with consideration of the urgencies and necessities derived from the aspirations of the Constitution, international developments, the new international economic climate, scientific developments and new technologies. In this Plan, the major cause of the inefficiency of the country is suggested to be the high proportion of public investment to the private sector.

The annual GDP growth of 8%, improvement of the business climate of the country, mitigating huge economic risks, modifying the country's budgeting system to operational budgeting model, providing society with regular and transparent data, reforming the banking system and enforcing the Law for Usury (Interest) Free Banking, the realization of the General Policies of Article 44 of the Constitution, compensation for unjustified inequalities of income through tax policies, enforcing subsidy reform plan on fiscal (explicit) subsidies and gradual implementation of quasi-fiscal (implicit) subsidies, informing the public of economic data, performing necessary actions to bring down the national unemployment rate to 7% providing a comprehensive and efficient insurance system and qualitative and quantitative expansion of the social security system and health insurance services are some of the economic missions of the 5th FYDP.

The implementation of the 5th Development Plan supposed to be launched by the beginning of 2010 which was postponed to 2011 due to government delays in submitting the bill of the program to the Parliament. Accordingly, the 4th Plan was extended for one more year and was actually implemented for six years.

3 The failure of Five-year Development Plans in Iran

Planning began in Iran in 1937 with the proposal of the Department of Commerce, aiming at the development of a general economic plan. After conducting various activities and academic studies, a Seven-year Agricultural Plan was formulated by the Economy Council. In 1944, this Council was mandated to prepare the scheme of the economy plan and ultimately by May 1948, the bill of the First National Development Plan submitted to the Iranian National Consultative Assembly. It was the outset of planning in Iran resulting in two seven-year and four five-Year plans (third, fourth, fifth, sixth) before the Revolution and five 5-year Development Plans after the Revolution (Jahangard et al., 2012).

The development planning dates back to 65 years ago and during this period 11 development plans have been drawn up. The non-realization of the anticipated missions and objectives and the non-implementation of development plans raise the question that why macro plans of the country encounter problems in the implementation phase while being constantly monitored, criticized and examined during the whole process from drafting to implementation phases.

According to the Fourth FYDP, the average annual inflation rate should be below 10%; however, the average inflation rate during the Fourth and Fifth FYDPs was about 14.4%. The price index reached from 100 in 2004 to 203 in 2009. Similarly, according to the Fourth development plan, public companies' investment through bank loans was supposed to reach zero as state-owned companies; that is, if they are not privatized, at least they shouldn't take out loans from banks. But, not only the figure never reached zero, 26 billion dollars was borrowed from banks. It was predicted that in the Fourth FYDP, on average, annually 300 projects will be completed, however, during the defined period, less than 30% were finalized. Likewise, among 1500 projects, planned to be concluded by the end of the implementation of the Fourth development plan, only 450 projects were successfully accomplished. Based on the same Plan, the completion of at least 50% of the freeway and highway network constructions, linking the provinces, should have been done, but the real achievement was 7.5% for freeways and 36% for highways.

According to the MPs- as the main monitors of implementation of the development plans- 60% of the goals of the Fourth FYDP in the transport sector did not materialize. In addition, it had been expected that within the fourth Socio-Economic Development Plan, the government would give 50% of loans to the private sector via the Foreign Currency Reserve Account; however, this pledge was fulfilled only by 10%. In the same manner, the real figure for the anticipated dedication of 10% of loans to the agricultural sector was only 1%. Although withdrawal from the Foreign Currency Reserve Account for non-oil revenue deficit had been prohibited in the Fourth FYDP, the government used to withdraw from this account due to budget deficit. As another example, one of the main goals of the Fifth Development Plan was reducing the dependence of the government spending on oil and gas revenues, based on which annually 20% of the profits from oil, gas and petroleum products should be deposited in the National Development Funds and gradually its role in budget and the current cost of government would reach zero. But the records show that during the past years, the dependence on oil revenues has increased and practically this objective of the Fifth development plan turned to a mere showcase for the wishes of the people and the system.

Eventually, according to MP, Mohammadali Abdullahzadeh, more than 50% of the objectives of the previous FYDPs and specifically the 5th one have never been achieved³.

To summarize, it becomes clear that the main goals of development planners have not been mainly realized and the promised objectives of the development plans are not materialized. Hence, examining the roots of these problems and analyzing the faults and drawbacks of development planning process and system at the national level has become an essential issue. The main question is finding the reasons and causes of such failures. Although, the history of development planning in Iran is too much longer than many developing countries which are now at the edge of development, planning for development didn't have any significant achievement for Iranian society. What are the main obstacles before the realization of development programs? In response to such questions and exploring the factors, a series of faults and setbacks are proposed by experts in the form of concepts such as opportunities and threats of the external environment and strengths and weaknesses of the internal environment. Therefore the use of SWOT analysis could be served as the perfect tool for analysis and evaluation of the five-year Development Plans of Iran.

4 Methodology

Through analyzing the internal and external environments of the development plans and specifying the resources, certain indicators could be recognized for identifying sound strategies; via implementing such strategies along with integrating each unit and subcategories of the intended development plans, the restructuring of the plans, management and participation of the beneficiary groups could be materialized. Finally, an index could be offered for evaluating the progress of the plan in society. Taking into account a long-term approach, strategic planning examines the internal and external environmental factors.

SWOT is one of the main methods in strategic approach for analyzing and directing the environment (Amin et al, 2011).

SWOT analysis has been applied as a conceptual framework, for systemic analyses in creating order and special relationships between strategic issues of the present study. SWOT is applied for analyzing the current status of strategic planning in two ways: it is either applied as a tool for improving the existing strategies or used for inspiring ideas about new strategies.

In the first case, it is suggested that the first step in the process of strategic management should be the evaluation of the current situation in relation to the current mission, goals and strategies. The next step will be identifying the internal and external environment of the organization and specifying the strategies required to be changed. Perhaps influenced by this knowledge, the mission and goals undergo some changes as well.

For the second case, after a situation analysis, the SWOT matrix can be used as a framework of ideas to propose new strategies. The juxtaposition of external opportunities with internal strengths and weaknesses in this matrix stimulates the thoughts of the planners

³ <http://icana.ir/Fa/News/258649>

and managers in finding solutions for optimum utilization of opportunities using the strengths and removing the internal weaknesses by means of such opportunities. In addition, the juxtaposition of external threats along with their strengths and weaknesses lead the mind to find solutions that eliminate external threats using the strengths and to adopt strategies that prevent the increase of threats and weaknesses.

A combination of both modes is used in this study, and by some caution, it could be said that the extracted strategies are wise and advisable ones.

Since the present study is focused on examining the problems and evaluation of the development programs in Iran, data collection was carried out through library research, library-based documents, interviews with academic elites and experts and questionnaire distribution, entailed in the Delphi method. Delphi is a mechanism of group decision-making that requires the participation of qualified experts who have a deep understanding of the subject. Therefore, one of the most important requirements in adopting this method is selecting competent experts. In the process of collecting Delphi questionnaires, the sample population was divided into two groups: a) 15 questionnaires filled out by managers and experts engaged in the preparation and implementation of development plans, and b) nine questionnaires completed by professionals and academic scholars. The Snowball Sampling was used to determine the sample size. Based on this technique, identified participants, familiar with the subject matter of research in universities and various specialized institutions were requested to introduce qualified and experienced experts in various research institutions.

5 SWOT analysis of Development Plans

In order to develop the final strategy in strategic planning, it is necessary to consider all factors as part of the strategic planning process within the framework of the SWOT analysis method. SWOT also serves as a management tool for decision-making which is applied in the present research for systemic analysis of the impact of the internal environment and the external environment on the country's development programs; the internal situation in relevance to the status and nature of the development plans are examined in two aspects of the strengths (S) and Weaknesses (W). External conditions derived from external systems outside the plans are the forces that could influence the development Plans and are analyzed from both aspects of opportunities (O) and threats (T). The SWOT analysis also enables us to provide realistic and applicable strategies for solving problems of the FYDPs (Nikolaou et al., 2010; Zhao et al., 2009).

In the first step the internal factors consisted of the strengths and weaknesses as well as the external factors, including the opportunities and threats are identified; then by analyzing the findings, development strategies are being presented and expanded.

5.1 Identifying the strengths of the Five-Year Development Plans of Iran:

Strengths of the development schemes, more than anything else, are related to the common features that imply the importance and necessity of the program; another part of these merits pertains to particular approaches emphasized within development plans and are considered as the basis for development. Below the details of these features, from the point of view of experts are discussed;

5.1.1 Comprehensiveness of development plans

Five-year Development Plans have considered the development of all areas of social, cultural and economic spheres. For example, the main objectives of the 4th FYDP include the following fields: 1. the development of the national economy, 2. protection of the environment, land use and regional balance, 3. health development, human security and social justice, 4. preservation of identity and culture, 5. ensuring national security, 6. renovation of the government and improving government influence. This multi-faceted approach to development will advance society in a balanced manner.

5.1.2 Existence of the 20-year Development Vision

The 20-year Development Vision, as a long-term program can serve as an integrative and regulative guide for the five-year medium-term development plans.

5.1.3 The ability to create expectations in the environment and engaging the society

The realization of development programs depends on the community engagement; meanwhile, the expectations created from development plans, can stimulate and motivate social forces in keeping up with the development agenda.

5.1.4 The mere existence of Development Plans

Development plans have always had an important role in the development of societies, especially where the political ups and downs impair the process of development; therefore one of the requirements of development is integrated, goal-oriented and stable planning which regardless of political and marginal problems or the change of governments can manage the social structure of the country.

5.1.5 Knowledge-based development

The role played by knowledge, technology and skills are recognized in Development Plans as the main factor in the creation of value-added in the modern economy. Knowledge-based Development Model that the educational programs of the Fourth and Fifth FYDPs of Iran were developed and named under the same title, hold a special position for creativity, public education, higher education and public access to resources and knowledge for meeting the basic and fundamental human needs.

5.1.6 Emphasis of the FYDPs on the role of society in advancing development agenda

Public participation has been one of the important issues in development programs.

5.2 Identifying weaknesses of the FYDPs

5.2.1 The absence of a precise definition of the concepts of development programs

Many of the basic and fundamental concepts of the five-year development programs of Iran, lack a single clear and legal definition; there is no reference to answer the related questions as well.

5.2.2 Holistic view of Development Plans for the multi-layer society of Iran and its various classes

Development programs are being developed within a general format, not suited for the Iranian community, which is composed of various social classes with diverse needs; as a result, the majority of the demands and concerns of social groups are almost totally ignored.

5.2.3 Lack of prioritizing

For a country that faces a lot of constraints, devising and developing a targeted plan and defining priorities is the utmost priority. Despite this important fact, prioritization has not been observed in development programs and a wide range of demands have not been met, while general and specific issues are presented in vague and unclear expressions.

5.2.4 Static approach

Development, in a sense, is the successful passage from a series of crises, while interacting with a constantly evolving environment. Demands' follow-up within the five-year development plans is less concerned with the changing environment.

5.2.5 Non-systemic approach

Iran's development programs lack a systemic mechanism for coordination of program components and levels- area, province and region. Furthermore, they lack the required compatibility between the phases. This has led to some kind of disorder within the legal boundaries between executive and legislative bodies; most importantly, it has caused a lack of interaction and logical allocation of responsibilities among political and specialized components of the planning system.

5.2.6 Lack of consensus on a theoretical model for programs

Planning in Iran, mainly suffers from lacking a clear theoretical framework. If a general consensus on the paradigms of development is not reached among planners and executives on the one hand and the authorities and the private sector on the other hands, there shouldn't be any optimism on the approval and implementation of programs.

5.2.7 Weak feasibility studies in defining specific objectives of the programs

Defining some goals beyond the domestic capabilities of Iran in the international system has resulted in the erosion of the resources and frustration of efforts. Taking a look at the principles incorporated within the 2nd and 3rd Development Plans in the area of foreign policy shows that some of the defined objectives are in the far distance with the domestic capabilities and possibilities and are designed too ambitiously.

5.2.8 Neglecting the indicators

One of the main weaknesses of Iran's development programs and their inefficiency is lacking consistent performance indicators, which results in reducing the possibility of evaluating and assessing the programs.

5.2.9 The generality and interpretability of some sections of the programs and the extreme offer of details for some others

In most cases, the FYDPs only provide general solutions that cannot be dealt with as a general guide to determine the plan of action and formulate bylaws and executive regulations. In some cases, programs give extreme details and explanations that go beyond being practical instructions for program implementation.

5.2.10 Centralization in planning

Despite efforts and emphasis on the need for decentralization, the political and legal structure of the plans, as well as the Plans' finance methods, still support and strengthen the same process of centralization.

5.2.11 Lack of attention to spatial and regional planning

In Development plans, spatial planning on the basis of land use and national division of tasks between the regions, or the regional division of tasks between the areas is not being considered. In other words, the mechanism of involvement of regions and provinces in the preparation, development and implementation of the FYDPs and also the role of regional planning in national planning are not specified. Eventually, the outcome has been ignoring the possibilities, opportunities, capacities, limitations, problems and the local-regional needs in all political, social, economic and cultural aspects.

5.2.12 Lack of alignment and integration of provincial programs with national development plans

Suggestions and demands of different sectors are considered as the primary content of the plans which need to be combined and integrated by the Deputy Director of Management and Planning. While a sector-oriented approach prevails the national and cross-sectoral approach in such suggestions, the national considerations are mostly ignored at the integration process.

5.2.13 Heavy shadow of economic aspect on the development programs

The economy is the dominant and governing aspect of FYDPs and the other aspects are being developed under its influence.

5.3 Identifying opportunities in realization of the Five-year Development Plans

The stated opportunities in the external environment would include:

5.3.1 A wide range of educated manpower as decent agents for development

Capable human resources are the greatest competitive advantage of Iran. The Priority given to the development programs in the training of human resources, on the one hand, and the young labor force, on the other hand, have created a great potential for the development of Iranian society.

5.3.2 The high possibility of benefiting from foreign investment

5.3.3 A comparative advantage in the field of oil and gas and some economic areas

5.3.4 High potential for organizing social capital and mobilizing social forces

5.4 Identifying the threat against Five-year Development Plans

This section discusses the unfavorable factors that challenge the realization of development programs in society:

5.4.1 Poor social context for realization of development

A strong and efficient civil society is the basis of the realization of development programs; this is while little attention has been paid to professional civil society, as the main agent of development, in the FYDPs and a limited framework has been defined for them.

5.4.2 The lack of an independent and comprehensive statistical system

The Statistical Center of Iran, as the only statistics center in the country, is a state organization. However, in order to reduce the likelihood of influence and manipulation of statistics, such institutions should be non-governmental and totally independent from the administrative bodies of the plan.

In addition, one of the basic prerequisites of optimum planning is sufficient knowledge of the status quo. Nonetheless, in Iran, we face lack of accurate and timely, sometimes even contradictory, information and statistics.

5.4.3 The lack of a link between the annual budget and FYDPs

There is not a coherent correlation between Five-year Plans and the annual country budgets.

5.4.4 Weak relationship between development plans and the community players

The private sector and trade unions always complain about not being involved and participated in the planning and decision-making processes. Lack of community participation in drafting and preparing the FYDPs, combined with the weakness of media in creating a sense of attachment, led to some difficulties in the implementation of Development Plans.

5.4.5 Mismatch between government and parliament tenures with FYDPs

Parliament and government compositions are being changed every four years, while the Development Plans are being prepared and approved every five years; therefore, every FYDP necessarily meets two governments and two Parliaments. Considering the possible difference

of opinion between these governments and Parliaments, usually widespread modifications in FYDPs and their implementation processes as well as the adoption of a selective approach is commonly observed.

5.4.6 Lack of government commitment as the main agent of FYDP implementation:

Political orientations and prescriptions often overshadow approaches, policies and rational tools and strongly affect them. Giving priority to the programs of the government-in-office and their intervention with development programs is one of the main reasons for the marginalization of FYDPs in Iran. For example, the economic plans of the post-revolution governments (Structural Adjustment Plan of Hashemi's Administration, The Economic Regulation Plan of Khatami and Ahmadinejad's Economic Reform Plan) were all presented apart from the Five-year FYDPs of the country.

5.4.7 Lack of organic connection between FYDPs and the context of social system

The challenges and problems faced by society and its "concerns" and "wishes" are not fully considered within FYDPs.

5.4.8 The correspondence between the upstream documents and medium-term plans

The existence of upstream documents (the Constitution, 20-year Vision, Iran's General Policies), and how they relate to the five-year medium-term plans have always been one of the vague points in Iranian planning system. Consequently, the expected regulatory role of long-term plans over the medium-term programs of the country, are never materialized.

5.4.9 Failure to comply with previous development plans

Contrary to expectations, Iran's FYDPs are not considered as the rings of a chain connected together; for example, the 4th FYDP, while claiming to adopt complementary measures and addressing the weaknesses, couldn't be regarded as a plan tracking the objectives and mission of the 3rd FYDP.

5.4.10 The unstable structure of organizations and management in the country

The dissolution of the provincial Planning Organizations, the dissolution of the country's main planning body after 50 years of activity and the dissolution of the supreme councils as one of the institutions of collective decision-making, as well as early and frequent changes of managers, practically nullify the possibility of primary vertical and horizontal co-ordination as well as monitoring and auditing the management.

5.4.11 Lack of motivation amongst the agents of development programs

Development programs have often been some resource-allocation plans for the public sector and in most cases, the need for policy-making and directing the activities of the private sector as an important economic factor is not considered. Meanwhile, the weak administrative capacity of the government agencies has also challenged the implementation of development programs.

5.4.12 Overlapping functions of regulatory and monitoring bodies

In most cases, not an organization or institution is officially assigned to evaluate programs or policies, while in other cases, there have been several institutions or bodies in charge of the evaluation task. In fact, a great deal of the country's economy is under no supervision or inspection mechanism.

5.4.13 Weak civil society participation in monitoring process

In most countries, public monitoring bodies, including the media, NGOs, political parties and civil society organizations (trade and political) and independent universities, take the central role in the assessment and continuous monitoring of Development Plans. The absence or weakness of such institutions in Iran has deprived the development plans of this potential.

5.4.14 Limited approach to monitoring

The dominance of a budget-oriented approach to FYDPs is clearly manifested in the evaluation of the plans as well. The only way to evaluate the performance is by assessing the efforts or the credits spent. This approach would provide less incentive for the quality performance of the managers.

6 Discussion

Development plans are efforts in manipulating the social systems; however, the society has its own relatively consistent and restrictive patterns and structures. The result is that the changes and developments of the society follow certain laws which introduce necessities on the development plans. This issue is being recognized as internal and external environmental elements by the experts. In this section, some of the previously identified items will be categorized and discussed with the purpose of providing a ground for suggesting new strategies for drafting development plans.

6.1 Adopting bottom-up approach

The first and foremost challenge of the development planning system in Iran is related to the top-down planning approach. This is while the continuation of non-participatory procedures is extremely costly and inefficient. Despite the emphasis on the participation of different areas and regions in drafting the development plans, the required legal mechanism for the participation of civil societies, private sector and economic enterprises in development plans has not been fully identified and specified.

Little attention to the issue of participation in the planning, monitoring and implementation of the five-year development plans shows the top-down approach of development plans. Specifically, the administrations, as the main employers of the development plans, enjoy too little social support for realizing the goals of the development plans. The issue of attracting the participation of civil society in development plans has been merely considered in charity affairs. Five-year development plans, specifically the 20-Year National Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran, presenting an ideal image and promise of future achievements can bring dynamism and movement to society, as a fundamental factor in creating required resources for realizing the development objectives. But the question is

how people are exposed to this idea in order to feel a sense of belonging and movement for participation; according to frequent reports, most people, and surprisingly the elites, have no idea of the development programs.

The unfamiliarity of different classes of the society with the development vision, lack of their effective participation in devising the plans and their implementation and institutionalized monitoring, are among the challenges faced by development plans. Any plan, according to its area of function, has several beneficiaries and stakeholders whose participation and engagement in planning, implementation and monitoring processes is inevitable. But in many cases, such interaction is not defined in the programming, and the development programs are being formulated in the absence of main stakeholders. It is, therefore, necessary to change the top-down programming approach of the five-year plans and use the power of social media to turn it into public demand. In particular, creating a sense of belonging in the community to co-operate in the development process requires more attention to the needs of each class of the society within the development plans.

Development programs should enjoy an integrative and cohesive character, in light of which, the maximum potential of social forces formulated on the basis of a variety of demands, could be used to achieve the development goals. The failure of development projects is mostly related to the lack of public participation in the planning and implementation of these projects. Therefore, the development of a mechanism for attracting public co-operation and adopting co-operative interaction methods, as one of the essential aspects of development, is being proposed. In order to fulfill this important goal, it is suggested that:

- The scope of national programs should encompass the whole range of social system: in addition to raising the possibility of the realization of development plans, the increased community participation in development strategy, offers more objective data for implementing necessary amendments on the laws and regulations.
- Use of integrated, powerful and proportional information system: the development plans have great ability to create expectations and attract the community in order to achieve the goals of development. Therefore the general objectives of the plans, as the public concerns, should be presented in many ways, especially the media; in this way, social forces could be stimulated to participate in the fulfilment of development programs.
- Stakeholders should be involved in the planning and realization of development goals: the development of a mechanism for the participation of institutions, associations, the private sector and stakeholders seem to be fundamental for this purpose.

6.2 Feasibility in planning

One of the main reasons for the failure of achieving development goals is related to the incorrect assessment of the possibilities and the structural and resource limitations. Development plans suffer fundamental weaknesses in identifying and estimating costs and resources, upon which all future problem-solving strategies are being founded.

Faced with this problem, the first step would be conducting Feasibility Study, whose accomplishment requires access to detailed statistics along with establishing and strengthening an independent, transparent and comprehensive statistical system. In line with the needs assessment of programs, observing some considerations in the process of formulating development plans is highly recommended:

- Precise targeting of development programs based on the National Budget: considering the resource limitations, the comparative advantage of areas with higher potential for development, shall be identified and supported.
- Synchronizing programs with upstream documents; as the realization of the Development Plans cannot be expected in the absence of legal prerequisites, the presentation of the Plan should be concurrent with the establishment and approval of the executive regulations and related laws.
- We should move toward case-by-case programs; several essential cases should be identified in the first phase and a comprehensive plan will be devised later.
- Planning should be carried out at local, regional, national and international levels and then adjusted and regulated in respect of them; the possibility of timely revision should be anticipated as well.

6.3 Reforming educational approach in development plans

This reform must take place through a change from quantitative approach to qualitative approach, structural integration of the educational system within all components of the social system and expansion of the inter-organizational relations.

6.4 Feasibility of monitoring

Faced with a narrow view on monitoring and the functional interference of monitoring and evaluation bodies as the main challenges before the realization of development goals, the following mechanisms are suggested:

- Indicators must be determined for assessing progress.
- Specific supervisory bodies need to be established.
- Monitoring and evaluation reports should be received in time, in order to allow prompt revision and modification on the Programs.

6.5 Adopting a systemic approach within the program:

Despite the existence of strategic planning processes for development, there is no mechanism or system to coordinate them effectively. Within the content of the Development Plans, there is not any logical connection and complementary interaction between the various parts of the programs (economic, social and political) and even between the internal components of each section (within economic subcategories such as industry, trade and agriculture). Lack of coherence and an organic relationship between the components of the five-year development

plans, poor prioritization of objectives, generalization and interpretability of the objectives of the Plans, are the variables indicating and necessitating the need to adopt a systemic approach.

Governmental organizations, as an important part of the development agencies, face lots of problems including lack of coordination and the disintegration of various structures and the intermediary institutions. Therefore, the establishment of intermediary institutions to strengthen inter-organizational communications between development agencies could be very efficient.

Adopting systemic approach in drawing development plans is also essential in order to maintain the proper relationship between different parts, line up the divisions, provide required tools for practical unity, use integrated and balanced approach for solving problems and accommodate policies and activities.

In addition, initial planning should be based on the strategic interests of various stakeholders (managers, customers, business partners, and etc.); therefore, while planning a program of national scope, the needs are required to be identified at the local level and policies and planning shall be developed locally. Ultimately, to meet the target, the interactions of components have to be linked to each other in the form of a system, classified under a whole.

7 Conclusion

The main criticism over Iran's development Plans is related to the lack of coherence and systemic relationship within the plans. In fact, just like the theories of development which are constantly exposed to the threat of falling away from the tangible realities resulted from their mission of explaining a wide range of phenomena, the development plans are also faced by the risk of drowning in details and dispersion, due to their objectives and operational aspects. Structural integration has a key role in achieving the goals of development; while in most cases, developing countries actually lack the required directive and coordinating structure. From this point of view, the flexibility to deal with a changing environment and adoption of a dynamic approach in planning must be considered more than anything else. The organic relationship between program components, above all, needs the adoption of a dynamic systemic approach, which gives the possibility of change, reform and high versatility to the program. The above-mentioned integration could be defined in the form of a systemic approach, based on which, convergence and strengthening of cohesion between components and maximum involvement and engagement of civil society are expected. In particular, the realization of development is possible in the context of a strong civil society. Thus, facilitating and supporting the engagement of independent and versatile social forces, as the parameters of environmental feasibility, would be essential as well.

Last but not least, although the process of promoting development exposes the society with a variety of imbalances, the development plans have made the least attention to the ways of resolving conflicts in order to restore the social balance. Furthermore, in spite of all increasing developments of the external environment, the option of reviewing and revising the plans has been less considered. In order to gain the ability to garner support in inputs and switching the demands to decisions in outputs, the Development Plans need to follow the

bottom-up approach at all stages of development. A Plan which involves the engagement of the stakeholders of each sector in its formulation, and achieves the transparency in functions through the participation of civil society and local communities, can mobilize all forces and equip the resources for reaching significantly higher realization chance.

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