

## Gender and Reduction of Poverty in Iran

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**Abstract:** Women and girls constitute the majority of the world's poor. In the developing world, economic and social conditions of women had worsened (Falkingham & Baschiere 2004). Iran is an Asian country and about 10 percent of the population nationally lives below the poverty line according to statistics but in rural areas this ratio leaps to over 15 percent (World Health Organization 2008). Studies from various parts of the country suggest that, there are widespread and systematic inequalities within households. In this paper the main questions were: what are policy-practice impasses of the reduction of gender inequality and poverty of women, particularly household-headed women? How much have policies been succeeded? The aim of this paper was to examine the situation of poverty in Iran and the social policies for declining of women poverty in this country. For answering to these questions, research was based on analyses of documents, include: data of Statistical Center of Iran, yearly reports on developmental activities specifically oriented toward poverty reduction. According to the report of UNDP (2004) Iran's rank in the reduction of gender inequality among 124 countries was 82 in 2004 while this rank was 118 among 124 country in 2007. The gender inequality in health and education is less than that of economy and the income. Women's employment rate has been 15.4 percent in 2005 while this rate is 18.5 percent in 2008. The rate of unemployment women with academic education in comparison to men was 23.6 percent in 2005 and declined to 9.3 percent in 2008.

**Keywords:** poverty, gender, female-headed households, inequality, poverty line.

### Introduction

One of the most important axes of power relations in social life is gender. In all societies, gender relations play a role in the division of labour, distribution of work, income, wealth, education, public goods and services and so on. In most societies women are likely to work longer hours than men, have lower earnings, education, wealth and less access to credit, information and knowledge. Resource allocation is often gender-biased within households as well as within local and national budgets (Aragatay et al. 2000). Gender biases in social life get transmitted through a variety of institutions, including not only the family but less obviously, markets, local, national and international and the state, which often perpetuates gender bias through a host of economic policies, including macroeconomic policies, trade policies, labor-market policies, and so on (e.g., Aragatay, Elson and Grown 1995; Grown, Elson and Aragatay 2000). In fact, gender relations permeate all aspects of economic life, making economies gendered structures.

For the last three decades, many women's advocates have been arguing that women are poorer than men. The situation of women and girls around the world is grave. They constitute the majority of the world's poor. A significant portion of them are living with HIV/AIDS, and, in some parts of the world, have little or no access to education, health and sanitation services. In the developing world, economic and social conditions had worsened, although poverty is also to be found in developed countries (Falkingham & Baschiere 2004). Under such conditions, women are particularly affected, due to subordination and discrimination. In working life, women all over the world are confronted with higher rates of unemployment, fewer possibilities for a career, and lower wages. The most precarious positions of employment are often held by women in the informal sector, with no social security or membership in trade unions (Zuckerman & Elain 1998). Women work more hours than men, yet women's incomes are lower. In most societies they have more limited opportunities to improve economic conditions and access services than do men. Even where women have equal education and experience to men, their heavier domestic work burden reduce. Among other social, cultural, political and juridical factors affecting poverty and discrimination against women, the impact of economic factor is much more important. The result of

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the suffering of women in poverty and the discrimination against them is the increase of social pathologies, such as: suicide, addiction, prostitution, killing of spouse, violence against women and child abuse, etc (World Bank 2001).

In addressing women's poverty, many studies measure the incidence of income or consumption poverty among female-headed households (FHHs) and compare it to that of male-headed counterparts. The unit of analysis is the household and the incidence of women's poverty is conflated with the poverty of FHHs. The evidence on the comparative poverty of FHHs vis-à-vis male-headed counterparts is not universal, (Moghadam cited in United Nation Development Programme 1997; Chant 1998; Gammage 1997). However, there is an association between female-headed and poverty. Buvnic and Gupta (1997) report that out of 61 studies on the relationship between female-headship and poverty found that FHHs are over-represented among the poor and 15 other studies found that poverty is associated with certain types of female heads or that the association emerged for certain poverty indicators. It has also been argued that it may be more meaningful to study female-maintained households as opposed to those headed by women (Gammage 1997). Female-maintained households are those in which women are the primary providers of the family .

In the microeconomic level, there is a need to understand the gender and age-based power relations within households, the mechanisms of cooperation and conflict as well as the dynamics of bargaining that shape the distribution of work, income and assets. Such processes of bargaining do not take place in a social vacuum, however. They are affected by social norms as well as the differential access to opportunities and resources men and women have outside the household (Sen 1990; Agarwal 1997). In a similar vein, engendering the macroeconomic level of analysis is equally important since the economic, social, political and ecological environments in which households maintain themselves or fall into destitution are shaped by macroeconomic policies (Cagaty, Elson and Grown 1995). Poverty has been traditionally understood to mean a lack of access to resources, productive assets and income resulting in a state of material deprivation (Baulch 1996). Emphasizing deficiency in private consumption, poverty has been defined as private consumption per person falling below a particular level (Lipton 1997). In this approach, absolute rather than relative poverty has been the focus of attention. Recently, the concept of poverty and the discussion of its causal explanations have been broadened (Baulch 1996; Lipton 1997). As the consumption/income approach to defining poverty has come under increased criticism, it has been suggested that in the analysis of poverty common property resources and state-provision of commodities should be taken into account and the concept of poverty should be broadened to include lack of dignity and autonomy (Jodha 1986). The inclusion of the latter in the meaning of poverty draws from the insight that being non-poor implies a "freedom from the necessity to perform activities that are regarded as subservient and (their) ability to choose self-fulfilling and rewarding life styles" (Baulch 1996:3). Along these approaches, in the literature that focuses on the coping mechanisms of the poor, the concept of assets has been extended to include social capital and household relations (Moser 1996, 1998).

Furthermore, new qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, approaches to poverty assessment have emphasized the poor's own criteria of poverty as well as their own solutions (Chambers 1996). The policy implications of this new approach have emphasized programmes that enable the poor to exercise their agency, their own solutions and creativity by creating an enabling environment as well as making available critical external resources such as credit. Another recent approach, the social exclusion approach, emphasizes the importance of institutions and norms that exclude certain groups from a variety of social networks and the importance of social solidarity in sustaining livelihoods (International Labour Organization & United Nation Development Programme 1996; United Nation 1997). Other approach is the sustainable human development. According to this perspective; poverty represents the absence of some basic capabilities to function. Functioning's, in turn, represent "the doing and being" of a person. Thus, "the capability approach reconciles the notions of absolute and relative poverty, since relative deprivation in incomes and commodities can lead to an absolute deprivation in minimum capabilities" (United Nation Development Programme 1997:16). UNDP bases the concept of human poverty, which was introduced in the 1997 human development report, on the capabilities approach. As distinct from income poverty, human poverty refers to the denial of opportunities and choices for living a most basic or "tolerable" human life. It, therefore, takes into account more than the minimum necessities for material well-being and views poverty as multidimensional.

Focusing on the concept of human poverty helps us see the causes of poverty, not merely its symptoms. The concept of human poverty has been helpful in shedding light on the relationship between gender inequalities and

poverty. Such an approach focuses the discussion on gender differences in deprivation in basic education (illiteracy) health services and life expectancy (short lives) and the socially constructed constraints on the choices of various groups such as women or lower castes. Poverty eradication is an aspect of human development, which is defined as "a process of enlarging people's choices" ( United Nation Development Programme 1990).

Iran is an Asian country with a total population 70,495,782 and population average annual growth rate %1.6 during 1996-2006. According to the statistics of the last census: the number of total of households was 17,352,686 that 15,711,642 were male-headed households and 1,641,044 female-headed households (Statistic Center of Iran 2007). Relative distribution of women of head of the household to total of head of households has been estimated 9.46 in 2006 .The growth of this index was 12.9% to 1996 and 31.22% to three decades age .Studies from various parts of the country suggest that, there are widespread and systematic inequalities within households. These may be related to age, life cycle status, birth order, relationship to household head and other factors. The most pervasive, however, are those related to gender. About 50% of people are poor and more than 60% economic income belongs to 20-30% of people. The rate of inflation is 26.7% in Iran. 40% of Iranian (28 million people) are living in absolute or relative poverty .After countries of Zimbabwe, Myanmar, Berme, Gineh and Eritre Iran ranks the fifth in terms of inflation rate in the world (Centre of the Parliament Research of Iran 2004). In this paper the main questions are: 1) are women poorer than men in Iran? In these discussions, the concept of feminization of poverty was used . It can mean either one or a combination of the following:

- a. Women compared to men have a higher incidence of poverty.
- b. Women's poverty is more severe than men's.
- c. Over time, the incidence of poverty among women is increasing compared to men.

2) what are the policy-practice impasses of the reduction of gender inequality and poverty of women? 3) how much have they been succeeded? We applied the human development perspective to answer the above questions.

### **Methodology and Data**

The relationship between gender and poverty is a complex and controversial topic that is now being debated more than ever before. The difficulty originates from the different shapes and forms gender inequalities and poverty take depending on the economic, social and ideological context. Yet another difficulty involves the scarcity of gender disaggregated data for a number of countries. In this paper for to answer the questions of research we applied the human development perspective. Method of research was documentary and was based on analyses of documents. The most important of resurces are statistical informations which gather every year by statistical centre of Iran. The main reference of these information are statistical publications, of statistical centre of Iran and specially statistical year book of the country. Furthermore, annual reports on developmental activities, specifically oriented toward poverty reduction have been used. In the field of economic, important indexes are the labor force participation, wages paid to similar work, income, the presence of women in managerial and competency lawmaking, the amount of men and women in the technical and professional part. In the field of health, important indexes are life expectancy ,life expectancy at birth ,rate of fertility and expenditure on health. Index of education is the rate of access to education.

One of major equalizing achievement of the country in the last 30 years is reduced fertility, especially in rural areas., thanks mainly to increased education and improved access to health and other basic services (electricity and piped water). In rural areas the average number of births per woman fell from about eight in the mid-1980s to about two in 2006. The poor's access to basic services has substantially increased: during 1984-2004 access to electricity by the poorest quintile (bottom 25%) in rural areas increased from 37% to 94% .Remarkably, as a result of the extension of these services, by 2004, 80% of these households owned a refrigerator, 77% a television, and 76% a gas stove (Iran's Statistical Yearbook 2006 and before). According to published statistics of the Statistic Center of Iran, during the 1981 to 2004 the consumption of meat and the consumption of fruits and vegetables have decreased 50% and 55% respectively. With drastic price increase of alimentary materials, particularly from 2005 to 2008, the average consumption of alimentary materials has decreased more (Association of General Medicines of Iran 2006). The maximum price increase on settlement has been 184% and the minimum of that has been 46% (Central Bank of Iran 2008). Population with sustainable access to improved drinking water sources in rural regions of Iran is 78% in rural regions and 86% in the urban regions in 2000 and this ratio is 84% (rural regions) and 99% (urban regions) in 2006 (World Health Organization 2008). Life expectancy at birth male/female was 69.73 years, Healthy life expectancy at birth male/female: 56.59 years Probability of dying under five (per 1 000 live births): 35 and probability of dying between 15 and 60 years male/female (per 1 000

population): 170/106. Total expenditure on health per capita (Intl \$, 2006): 731, total expenditure on health as % of GDP (2006): 7.8 (World Health Organization 2008). The index of the price of hygiene and treatment has increased 22.3% compared with 2008 (Central Bank of Iran, 2008). The per-capita of hygiene in the advanced countries is 40 times of that in Iran. The per-capita of mental hygiene of each Iranian person is 13 Rials and per-capita of hygiene of each Iranian student is 5500 Rials.

According to the report of world health organization in Iran, about 10 percent of the population nationally lives below the poverty line and in rural areas this ratio leaps to over 15 percent (World Health Organization 2008). The gap between the rich and the poor is then main factor for unemployment and inflation. This is the result of the inhuman social relations and the unequal economic system. In such situation, the salary of a worker in its best could be one-third of the amount of the urban poverty line. Of course this situation includes not only the workers specifically, it includes those nurses and teachers as well. According to statistics of census of 2006 of Statistic Center of Iran: the rate of unemployment of active population was 22.3% ,this rate for males was 9.3% and for females was 15.8%. The total of unemployed of with academic educations were 373513 that 168786 are males and 204728 are females. The rate of the employment of the males in urban regions was 56.2%, in rural regions was 61.1% and that of the females was 10% in the urban regions and 20.4% in the rural regions . 65.7% of total of the employee in governmental section were males and 34.3% females. The number of total of households was 17353 that 15712 was male-headed households and 1641 female-headed households (Statistic Center of Iran 2007).

According to the report of the bureau of culture and youth affairs of presidency (2006): 88% of the income of the country from 1996 to 2006 has been belonged to men. From 1996 to 2006 the rate of unemployment of men has been decreased to 28% while this rate for women has shown 1.5% increase. The rate of unemployment of women is 50% more than that of men. 88.7% of the rate of unemployment in cities and 54.9% of the rate of unemployment in rural areas of Iran belong to women with academic or high school education. 12,500,000 housewives in Iran do hard and long term works without any payment. They don't use insurance and don't have any savings. Single women and household head women receive a pension of 150,000 rials while the poverty line of urban area is between 5,000,000 to 7,000,000 rials. 1,150,00 of household head women are under the coverage of Emdad Committee ( Farsnews 2009). The employed women don't receive the marital rights. The small workshops where women are the main workers are exclusive to the law of work. The women don't receive equal payment with men while their work is equal to men. There is the gender discrimination in recruitment (Iran's Statistical Yearbook 2006 and before).

The greatest achievement of the revolution during its 30-year history is the expansion of educational opportunities, especially for women and rural families. The average years of schooling increased from about 40% of their male counterparts for women born in the 1960s (who started school during the Shah's White Revolution) to about 90% for those born in the late 1980s (who started school after the war with Iraq) (Iran's Statistical Yearbook 2006 and before ). Urban women have now surpassed urban men in average years of schooling, a phenomenon that led Iran's Parliament to seriously consider and partially implement affirmative action for men in entering university! Increased access to free education from primary to university has equalized educational attainment between individuals. The Gini index of inequality of years of schooling for adults born in the 1950s was in excess of 0.60, compared to 0.35 for cohorts born 20 years later, which is a substantial decrease in education inequality in just one generation. However, there is evidence that educational attainment still depends greatly on family resources. Education inequality is likely to worsen as private education, both at the university and high school levels, continues to expand (Iran's Statistical Yearbook 2006 and before).

## **Discussion**

Gender inequalities in economic life also become a causal factor in the chronic poverty of all household members, not just of women in poor households and the intergenerational reproduction of poverty. Norms about child migration of girls, gender biases against girls' education women's limited mobility, women's lack of control over fertility decisions, gender gaps in wages all contribute to difficulties of escaping poverty intergenerationally through vicious cycles between poverty and gender inequalities. According to above data inequality reduction in health, education is more than economy and the income. Currently the ranking of women in health and education has been increased but their economic conditions and income growth rate is low. However, there is evidence that educational attainment still depends greatly on family resources. Education inequality is likely to worsen as private education, both at the university and high school levels, continues to expand. The government policies of Iran, economic boycotts of the Security Council of the United Nations, European Union and the United States of

America are the main factors of impact over the spread of poverty in Iran. The result of the poverty is the growth of the kinds of social pathologies (e.g.: increasing people on drug addiction, prostitution and kinds of crimes). Government programmes for reduction of poverty:

- Special schemes have launched to provide poor women access to micro-credit to help them start businesses.
- Giving the lone for to establish soon-output project. governing of relation instead law has deprived many of the poor women of obtain to this lone.
- distributing of justice stocks between women of head of household.
- Giving lone to women of self-employment.
- establishing Of the welfare ministry
- little helps of Emdad Committee to old poor women or nonheaded .
- Protecting and covering of the old poor and unable women that are lack of any relatives by the Behzisty Organization .

The poor can escape poverty to:

1. Eliminating of poverty can not be based on a narrow approach that relies solely on "rising incomes" or macroeconomic growth.
2. Poverty must be understood in multidimensional sense, i.e., it must be conceptualized not only through the lens of consumption/income poverty, but also that of human poverty, i.e., deprivation in basic capabilities.
3. However, eliminating women's drudgery is require other interventions such as increasing the productivity of their labour in both paid and unpaid activities through access to better technologies and knowledge.
4. Gender discrimination in labour and a variety of other markets are a cross-cultural phenomenon. Women's empowerment as labourers can be realized through collective action.
5. Asset distribution strategies, such as land reform, or privatization policies must be made gender aware and gender fair. Similarly, strategies that increase poor people's access to productive resources such as credit as well as employment schemes must be made gender aware.
6. Anti-poverty strategies must also include the goal of democratic governance as a poverty issue. If poverty is to be eradicated, it cannot be done without the empowerment of the poor. This is particularly important for women because of the worldwide gender inequalities in political and economic empowerment. Self-help groups and the creation political space for NGOs and CBOs are important not only for political but also economic empowerment of poor women, whose voices must be heard.
7. All policies, including macroeconomic policies must be examined from a gender and poverty perspective.
8. In the long run, elimination of poverty, as opposed to alleviation of poverty, requires transfor matory approaches that go beyond coping with poverty.
9. linking macroeconomic and microeconomic instruments and institutional reforms.
10. Accessing of women to media and information technologies, communication of women to ther countries women to exchange ideas, gain new knowledge and skills and pursue new economic and political opportunities.
11. Supportig programmes to improve the skills and abilities of the poor women by increasing opportunities for education of the vulnerable people.
12. Preparing of political situation of equal for women by applying the reforms and promotion of women's human rights.
13. Involvement of women in reconstruction and reconciliation efforts were essential to their success.
14. recognizing the continuing and vital role of women in agriculture, nutrition and food security.
15. Developing capacities both in-country and in-house to integrate gender concerns in all practice areas.
16. Supporting specific interventions that benefit women and innovative models such as those developed and tested by the UN Development Fund for Women

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