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Strategies of decrease in urban poverty in Iran – case: Mashhad city

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Abstract

Before establishing the Islamic City Councils in Iran in 1999 and assigning the city affairs to the city councils, municipalities were the most significant urban organization and the executor of government policies in management of the cities. It was a bureaucratic, duty oriented and traditional. Municipalities did not pay much attention to the people's demands, especially, the poor and deprived regions of the city. Individualism and individual taste governed on decision making process of city affairs. The decisions made by the city managers were unconsciously in the interest of the people with a high income. The citizens who paid taxes had no role in the process of decision making about the city affairs.

The establishment of city councils in 1999 including the City Council of Mashhad was an important stage in assigning the management of the city to the representatives of the city and caused an essential change in the attitude of the municipalities authorities about the planning in compliance with the citizen's demands. The objective of the present article is expressing the function of Mashhad City Council in removing poverty in tandem with the theory of good urban governing: the importance and necessity of which are emphasized by the international organizations including the Human Settlement Committee of the U.N.

For such a purpose, the theoretical fundamentals of urban poverty were explained; then, the present situation of Mashhad with a population of 2.5 million and about 650,000 people who are residing in margins of the city and is the second metropolitan and the most religious city of Iran was analyzed with the help of Spss. Arcview software from the socio-economical dimensions including per capita income of the municipality in 2000 and 2001, the share of unstable urban incomes in providing the of the city, the per capita of green area, the density of population. The article indicates the deep differences in 12 regions of the municipality in such a way that the difference of per capita income among the undeveloped and developed regions is 16 folds. The per capita is varied between 2 to 30 meters. The results obtained from the analysis of the public poverty indices express the fact that in spite of the efforts made by the City Council, there is a deep difference among the districts of the city. Finally, some solutions were presented for decrease in urban poverty especially general poverty and deprivation of the city from appropriate facilities and making balanced the proportion of the area of districts to the city area on the basis of the function and responsibility of the City Council.

Theoretical analysis of urban poverty

The word "poverty", simple and clear, the concept of which is complicated, is the origin of most thoughts and theories. This is the reason for giving numerous definitions from poverty. The primary concept of poverty is not earning any money (Edwin Mills, 1997, 220). The World Bank divided the poverty into Absolute Poverty and Relative Poverty (Darkoosh, 1362, 43). The Human Settlement Committee of the U.N divided the poverty into Income Poverty and Human Poverty (Mersedeh Amini, 1380(2001), 15). The scientific survey of poverty phenomena was started in 1900 in the U.S.A. but the efforts made for decreasing poverty refer back to 1930. But, as if, poverty were discovered or innovated since 1960. The rapid progress of information access is one of the reasons of such inclination and paying attention to poverty was increased among the economists and government authorities.

At the beginning of 1970s, the subject of poverty was gradually forgotten but serious studies continued (Edwin Mills, 230, 1997). Some policies in the local and national domains were suggested. Among macro plans for decreasing poverty is the general development in the U.S.A. since 1960s.

which continued with a less growth in 1970s. (Rafiei, Mioo, 1367(1988), 130). The strategy of decreasing the population in a rate of 20% with the highest amount of income and increasing of population in a rate of 29% with the lowest income is one the measures taken in this period in the U.S.A. (Edwin Mills, 241, 1997).

In the local domain, the essential challenge of the local governments is the improvement of living facilities, providing a safe environment for living and better situation for the poor in the urban regions (Mercede Amini, 1380 also declared the good local government as the missing ring between the efforts made against poverty and decrease in it (Mercede Amini, 16, 2001). The method of improving the local government for decreasing poverty refers to the fact that the governments are respondents and responsible for the poor's problems and emphasized on a joint approach in which the poor also have competent representatives and offered leading programs for decreasing poverty in the local domain.

- A. Employment Opportunities
- B. Financial Markets
- C. Public financial resources
- D. Urban government and

Non-centralized procedure for decreasing urban poverty is started in most of the developing countries. In the first steps, such a procedure is forming through power balance and distribution of factors among the local and national governments. Historically, decreasing poverty is one of the responsibilities of national government; but assignment of such a responsibility to the local governments is increasing. The local governments in urban regions are bound to render minimum services for all the citizens especially, the poor. They should develop the life standards of the poor so that they are resistant against events.

The objective of the present article is analysis of the urban poverty and deprivation and its spatial distribution among the districts of municipality of Mashhad as well as describing the solutions which are presented by the City Council for removing urban poverty which is in fact, a step for materialization of a good urban government.

Growth rate of Mashhad population

Mashhad means the place of martyrdom of the eighth Imam of the Shiite (a branch of Islam) with a history of 1200 years (495 A.D.). This city enjoys from a special position in the national and international domains due to its communicative situation (locating in the course of Silk Road). It was the capital of Iran in the era of Nadershah Afshar (Rahnama, 1369 (1990), 15). Therefore, it has had peak and fall ears throughout the history. But the city transformations should be pursued in the general changes occurred in the recent century because Mashhad is a part of the country. The procedure of the urban population of the country was 3.5% in a year during 1920 - 1996 for a period of 75 years. The ratio of urbanization was increased from 28% to 61.3% in this period which demonstrates the rapid growth of urbanization in our country.

Providing facilities and services for meeting the needs of such a population (especially migrations from villages to the cities) is impossible (Rahnama, 1379 (2000), 20).

Mashhad has had a more rapid growth than the country because of its pilgrimage and communicative situation and being the political center of the region; such a situation is specified in table No.1. Mashhad has been the second metropolitan city of the country and Khorassan province with a population of 2145000 in the year 2001 from which 54.7% of the province urban population and 31.2% of the total population of the province reside in Mashhad (Statistical Information Organization of Municipality, 1380 (2001)). The religious attraction of Mashhad causes the arrival of 12,000,000 pilgrims and travelers from Iran and about 200,000 tourists from other countries in this city. The annual growth of Mashhad population during the recent eighty years (1920-2001) is 41.10% in average. But, within the period of 1966-76, it even reached 08% which shows the rapid growth of migration from villages to cities. Within the same period, the area of the city increased from 7 Sqkm to 255 Sqkm. In addition to the city population growth, the marginal districts of the city has had a high growth in such a way that on the basis of the statistics presented in 2001, the population settled in the villages and the residential estates located in the margins of the city is about 650,000.

As it is evident in the above diagram and table No.1, in the recent 25 years (1976-2001) especially after the Islamic Revolution, due to lack of any specific policy, the growth rate of Mashhad was three folds within the recent years. Such a procedure destroyed the opportunity of coordination of the social and economical changes in the infrastructures with the increasing needs of the urban society. The urban organizations could not provide the appropriate structure for responding to unmet needs of the citizens. The most important factor is the self-sufficiency of the municipalities due to continuation of the war between Iran and Iraq in 1980s and cancellation of government aids to the municipalities of the metropolitan cities of the country and depending the income of

1) Horizontal development of the city instead of its vertical one; indeed, no materialization of a horizontal one, increase of the length of daily travellings ,consumption of fuel energy, destruction of forest and natural lands (about 50 Sqkm. in the recent twenty five years),increase in the cost of construction installations, passages, urban environment pollution, and weakening the economical basis of urban areas, increase in urban poverty are some of the results of such measures. The average of the number of storeys in Mashhad is 2.5.If the average of the number of storeys increases to 5,the area of the city will decrease from 255 Sqkm. in the year 2001 to 127.5 and billions dollars will be economized in different conditions.

2) Unstability of the sources of municipality income and its dependence to construction works are other harmful results of such policy. The measures should be taken for stabilizing the sources of municipality income and stopping its dependence to construction works.

Relationship between the income of different disticts of municipalities with the amount of built-on area permitted in construction licences

As it was said before, there is a direct relation between the volume of the construction licenses issued and the income of municipalities. If once construction works decrease as a result of low urban population and high life average of buildings in Iran (it is 30 years),it is not evident from what source the municipality income should be provided. The growth procedure of volume of built-on area during 2000-01 is 51.9% .Such a situation is demonstrated in the Table No.4.

The estimations made concerning the average life of buildings in the country is about 30 years. If the urban population growth is controlled and the average life of buildings increases to 50 years, from which source, the income of municipalities should be supplied. In the undeveloped regions of the cities where there is no brisk in construction works, how should such districts be administered ? The relationship between the percentage of the income of municipality districts and the volume of the issued construction licenses are indicated in the Table No.2 and the Map No.3

As it is clear in the above map, there is not a direct relation between the percentage of the built-on area specified in construction licenses and the percentage of income. The districts 3 and 4 which are among the undeveloped regions of the city, issued 3.59% of construction licenses but they have provided 6.11% of the municipality income which demonstrates the more share of the deprived districts in supplying the municipality income. The districts 9,10,and 11 which are among the high class regions of the city, issued 46.9% of construction licenses while they Collected 29.4% of the municipality income. The unreal and inflexible standards of city mater plans for undeveloped regions is one of the reasons of such a situation.

It seems that the share of the deprived regions in providing the municipality income is more than the developed ones while it should be vice versa. Benefiting from advantages resulted from standards and regulations of master plans(offering high height density in the regional price) is among the main factors in decreasing the income compared with the volume of issued construction licenses.

The results obtained from analysis of the existing situation of Mashad city

The analysis of the status of social and economical indices of Mashhad City indicates the deep differences between various regions of the city.Lacking true information by the authorities also caused taking decisions which are harmful for undeveloped regions. The situation of indices are specified in the Table No.2. As it is evident in the table, the average of people residing in residential units ranged from minimum 4.3 in the district one(district with the highest rate of income) to 6.2 (in district 5 which is among the regions with lowest per capita income).The per capita green area ranges from 1.5 to 30 Sqm. among different districts. The difference of per capita income of the municipality between the undeveloped and developed regions is 16 folds.

The dependence of municipality income to construction works is one of the other problems of the city especially the deprived regions in which there is no brisk in construction works; but due to lack of any coordination between the standards and regulations of master plans and the local situation ,e.a. residential units of the residents ranges from 50 to 200 Sqm.With regard to the fact that the minimum area of plot of land is predicted to be 200 Sqm., therefore, unwantedly, the owners are considered to be violators and applied fine to them.

Approaches for removing urban poverty

The analysis of the existing situation of Mashhad indicates a deep difference among urban districts and the inverse relation between the population density and per capita income in undeveloped regions of the city. General shortage of urban per capita indices and its unbalanced distribution in different regions of the city, the rapid population growth in the recent 25 years (1977-2002), presence of about 500,000 Afghan refugees in the city up to the recent days assists the deepening of the difference among various city regions.

Therefore, in Mashhad, we are faced with two separate but correlated phenomena of urban poverty which are family poverty, public poverty and deprivation, and its unbalanced distribution in different urban regions.

With regard to this topic, two strategies are there for removing it.

1. Development-oriented strategy: Direct aid to the classes with low income and deprived regions.

2. Growth-oriented strategy: Indirect aid through reinforcement of general urban infrastructures (rail transportation, road building, public spaces development)

The efficiency of the above strategies needs the counter-action between national government and urban administration in the local domain. The emergence of Islamic Councils of the city in 1999 is an important step in paying attention to urban problems especially public poverty in the urban regions. The efforts which have been made up to now are as follows:

1. The partnership made by the citizens in formation of city councils is being institutionalized. The city council through forming supervising committees in different districts of the municipality or holding permanent meetings has established a direct relationship with the people. Most of the local problems are solved by committees. What is unsolvable will be referred to the city council for making final decision. The urban development plan is drawn up by supervising committees which is aware of local demands and capacities.

2. The allocation of credits to deprived regions in accordance with the needs. Before establishing the Islamic City Councils in Iran in 1999 and assigning the city affairs to the city councils, municipalities were the most significant urban organization and the executor of government policies in management of the cities. It was a bureaucratic, duty oriented and traditional. Municipalities did not pay much attention to the people's demands, especially, the poor and deprived regions of the city. Individualism and individual taste governed the decision making process of city affairs. The decisions made by the city managers were unconsciously in the interest of the people with a high income. The citizens who paid taxes had no role in the process of decision making about the city affairs.

The establishment of city councils in 1999 including the City Council of Mashhad was an impoganzation of Mashhad Municipality, Statistical report of Mashhad, 2001.

11. Hanri Rene, German author, Travelogue from Khorassan to Bakhtiari, translated by Farahvashi, Tehran, 1335 (1956).