

# **IRAN'S AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND THE FOOD SECURITY CONUNDRUM**

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## **Introduction**

The issue of food security has occupied considerable space on national and global agendas since the 1950s and 1960s. National and global policies were adopted to address widespread hunger and forms of food insecurity. However, several countries have failed to address this problem to varying degrees. This is due to several internal factors such as those related to the quality of agricultural lands, climatic impacts, adopted policies and sophistication of agricultural technologies. In addition, there are also external factors such as the nature of relations between countries, and the reality of the international grain market which has been and continues to be monopolized. Here arises the main conundrum of the countries that produce insufficient cereal grains; the chief source of nutrition for low and middle-income families. Therefore, grains are strategically important for the food security basket.

Iran is considered among the countries that is facing a food security problem. The problem is rooted in a set of overlapping internal and external factors meshing together to shape the nature and extent of the problem. However, Iran possesses massive potential and resources compared to several other developing countries. Over the decades, Iran has adopted a host of plans to achieve food security. It has also approved a package of measures to reduce food subordination to the global market. Iran has adopted agricultural development policies to develop the agricultural sector and achieve self-sufficiency in strategic crops, most important of which is wheat. It has also worked to expand the irrigated agricultural lands to ensure the stability of annual food supplies. All these policies, however, have proven insufficient to provide for the annually increasing food needs/demands of the Iranian people.

The study rests on one essential question: what are the factors that led to the creation of a food security problem in Iran? Why have the government's agricultural policies failed to address this problem despite the massive natural resources that Iran enjoys? The study presents three main assumptions clarifying the dimensions and causes of this problem. These are as follows:

First assumption — Inadequate investment in agriculture, the country's poor economic performance allied with the economic sanctions which are inversely proportional to the exacerbating food security crisis in Iran.

Second assumption — The poor rural economy is inversely proportional to the high levels of poverty and the increasing manifestations of food insecurity in Iran's rural regions.

Third assumption — The expansion of agricultural investment and the employment of agricultural technology are directly proportional to achieving food security in Iran.

The study is divided into four main sections: the reality of food security, Iran's agricultural policies, the factors contributing to the decline of Iranian approximations regarding achieving food security and Iranian social policy as an alternative to achieving food security in Iran.

## **The Reality of Food Security in Iran**

The reality of food security in Iran can be approached through two main concepts: agricultural capital and food security.

### **Inadequate Agricultural Capital**

As for agricultural capital, it consists of a host of natural and human resources, means and techniques that are used in agricultural production. The size of agricultural capital differs from one country to another. There

is agricultural capital that is related to natural factors such as geographical location and climate as well as the size of agricultural areas available in a particular country. The other factors pertain to modern agricultural technologies, which have become highly important in enhancing agricultural capital. However, several underdeveloped and poor countries lack modern technologies, with farmers still employing traditional agricultural methods.

With regard to geographical location, climate and topography, these all have a significant impact on agricultural capital. The countries with huge annual agricultural production achieve this result not only because of sophisticated agricultural technology, but also because they possess massive natural resources that they exploit in a highly efficient way. This applies to Russia, China, the European Union and North America. Though several countries are endowed with massive natural resources, they have failed to achieve self-sufficiency in strategic agricultural crops for the food security basket. This is attributed partly to the limited investment in agriculture and outdated agricultural technology, particularly when it comes to chemical and biological technologies.

As for Iran, it could be said that it is considered to be a mountainous country, with the Zagros Mountains among the most important mountain ranges, which surround several basins and plains. Among them is the central plateau located in central Iran. But this plateau is made up of two desert regions: Dasht-e Kavir and Dasht-e Lut.<sup>(1)</sup> Among the most important plains that Iran possesses is the Qazvin plain and Khuzestan plain, which is 160 kilometers long and runs deep into Iranian territory for 120 kilometers. The Qazvin plain extends for 640 kilometers along the coast of the Caspian Sea, running 50 kilometers deep into Iranian territory.

Iran's climate in general is dry or semi-dry. About 90% of Iran's area is dry or semi-dry.<sup>(2)</sup> However, the Caspian Sea climate is considered to be moderate in summer and sees heavy rainfall in winter. The rainfall rate throughout the country reaches 250 millimeters per year, declining in some parts of the plateaus to 100 millimeters per year. But the Caspian Sea climate still sees heavy rainfall that reaches 13,00 millimeters per year.<sup>(3)</sup>

In light of the abovementioned realities (see Table 1), Iran suffers from a chronic climate problem. This, of course, has a direct impact on the agricultural sector. Thus, it could be said that Iran is a geographically unfortunate state. Iran is spread over an area of 17.5 million hectares, but the yield is limited, given the desert and mountainous nature of the country's terrain. The scant rainfall directly impacts the agricultural production process. Though Iran reiterates that it possesses 9.5 million

hectares of irrigated lands, it suffers from a water deficit reaching 81.3%.<sup>(4)</sup> This further complicates the issue of food security which needs huge and sustainable amounts of water.

**Table 1: The Nature of Agricultural Lands, Agricultural Production and Agricultural Manpower**

Total area	Area of Agricultural Lands/Million Hectares	Area of Irrigated Lands/ Million Hectares	Production of Agricultural Crops/Million Tons	Agricultural Manpower/ Million People
1,648,000 million square kilometers	536 ,17	09,6	74,403	3,8

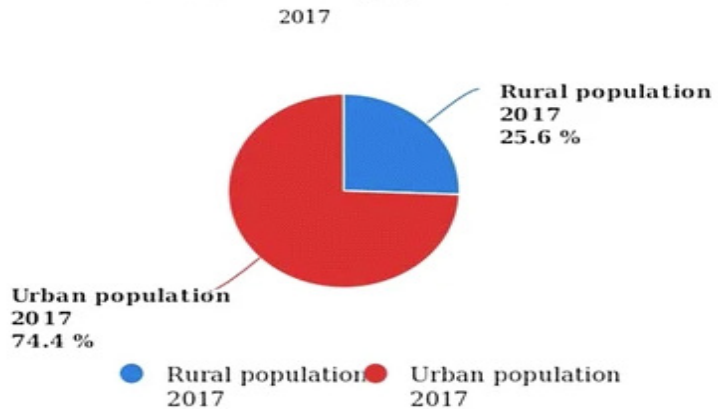
Source: Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, Statistical Yearbook: World Food and Agriculture 2022, Rome.

### Lack of Food Security

According to the World Food Summit of 1966, the four main dimensions of food security are: *availability* (quantity, quality and diversity of food), *accessibility* (physical access and infrastructure and economic access), *stability* (exposure to food risks and incidence of shocks such as domestic food price volatility) and *utilization* (the ability to utilize food; access to water and sanitation and the outcomes of poor food utilization).<sup>(5)</sup> There are two approaches to achieving food security: the liberal approach that focuses on market priorities and competitive advantage granted by the international market in terms of prices rather than focusing only on domestic production. The national approach focuses on self-sufficiency in strategic agricultural crops to achieve food security. There are several concepts related to food security, the most important of which is *food insecurity*, which the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) defines as the state in which people lack access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and to pursue an active and healthy life. This phenomenon (food insecurity) could arise as a result of food unavailability, poor purchasing power, inappropriate distribution and the inadequate consumption of food at the household level. Food insecurity is on the same footing with deteriorating health conditions and inappropriate care and feeding practices. It could be chronic, seasonal or transitional.<sup>(6)</sup>

The poverty index is considered among the major indices reflecting living conditions in any country. This is because it reflects the proportion of income allocated for spending on food and the financial stability of individuals for purchasing food items. Based on this, figures indicate that the food security landscape in Iran faces many problems, particularly in the rural areas (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Rural and Urban Population (2017)**



Source: Mohammad Emami et al., "Agricultural Mechanization, a Key to Food Security in Developing Countries: Strategy Formulating For Iran, *Agriculture & Food Security* 7, no. 24 (2018), September 26, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40066-018-0176-2>

Poverty is staggeringly rampant in Iran's rural areas, as is the case in many countries. And it is inextricably linked to sustenance farming. It is also prevalent in suburbs though it is hard to precisely measure the poverty level in any country since it is a complicated sociological phenomenon. However, the World Bank issues regular reports on this phenomenon covering various countries worldwide, including Iran, in which the poverty index is soaring, particularly in the countryside and the urban peripheral regions (see Table 2). This has a direct impact on food insecurity. There are high percentages of pregnant women suffering from anemia and children suffering from malnutrition and dwarfism.<sup>(7)</sup> Poverty rates are high and differ from one region to another as do food insecurity indicators. Yet the Iranian food system lacks the ability to enable families to sustainably obtain basic food items, particularly during periods of international economic crises and droughts.

**Table 2: The Poverty Rate and Number of Those Suffering From Malnutrition in Iran**

Population Number/in Million	(Poverty Line (2019 Annual Income Below \$2.15		Malnutrition population in Million /(2020)
87.29	Urban areas	Rural areas	3.4
	27.6%	53%	

*Source:* FAO, *Statistical Yearbook* (Rome, 2022). "Poverty & Equity Brief: Middle East & North Africa, Islamic Republic of Iran," *The World Bank*, October 2022.

Table 2 shows that the poverty rate in Iran in general is high. But it is staggeringly higher in the countryside in particular, which reflects the level of unemployment and social fragility. The table reveals that the number of people suffering from malnutrition exceeds 3 million. The number of individuals unable to secure healthy food surpasses 17 million. This is a huge number that reflects the deteriorating health conditions of the Iranian populace, particularly women who are pregnant and breastfeed. The increase in malnutrition exposes the level of the food crisis in Iran, which is directly reflected in the poverty index (rate) which exceeds 50%, particularly in the rural areas (see Table 3).

**Table 3: The Manifestations of Food Insecurity in Iran in 2020**

The Spread of Anemia Among Women aged 15-49	The Number of Individuals Unable to Secure Healthy Food/in Millions	The Proportion of Individuals Unable to Secure Healthy Food	The Rate of Moderate Malnutrition Among the Population	The Rate of Severe Malnutrition Among the Population	The Spread of Dwarfism Among Children Under 5
24.1%	17.1	20.3%	42.4%	7.7%	6.3%

*Source:* FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, *The State of Food Sec--urity and Nutrition in the World* (Rome, 2022).

Table 3 relies on a number of indicators to measure the phenomenon of food insecurity in Iran. Figures show that the food security situation is still

critical. The spread of anemia among women reflects the (deteriorating) nutrition reality. Iranian studies, for example, confirm that 56% of women suffer from anemia and a deficiency of zinc and Vitamin A, as well as a deficiency of vitamin D,<sup>(8)</sup> which negatively impacts the health security of children.

With regard to the correlation between agriculture and food security, and despite the significant improvement in the agricultural economy in Iran as well as the levels of food production, Iran is faced with a host of factors that impact its food security. The food deficit reached its peak in 2014/2015 and 2018 due to the drought, economic sanctions, poor economic growth as a result of COVID-19 and the decline in oil prices.<sup>(9)</sup> Yet a cursory look at Iranian agricultural production (74 million tons in 2020) shows that its agricultural economy is considered to be productive. However, the majority of the rural population live within the poor stratum. This is because the government does not give sufficient attention to rural development or the rural economy. It also reflects the absence of government technological and financial support as well as a lack of rural infrastructure. This all has negatively impacted the residents of the Iranian countryside as well as the rural economy. The weakness of the rural economy has impacted the food security of the population in general and the rural population, as a socioeconomic segment, in particular. This requires government intervention, but with different policies, primarily social policies as well as rural development policies to push forward the rural economy, obliterate poverty, wipe out population fragility, resolve food security problems and achieve social justice. This requires the pursuance of a comprehensive social policy that considers the Iranian economic system on the one hand and the imbalance in provincial development on the other. It should also seek to develop the rural and urban peripheral regions and work to ensure the provision of basic foodstuffs at prices affordable for poor families and vulnerable segments in general.

### **Iran's Agricultural Policies**

Iran has adopted five-year plans as mechanisms for agricultural development. Since 1989, the Iranian government has been adopting agricultural policies to boost grain production and end subordination to international grain markets, which are monopolized by a few. This is against the backdrop of tensions between Iran and major world powers. Thus, Iran has intervened through two methods. The first is through a pricing policy, setting a specific price for purchasing strategic crops from farmers, primarily wheat. The second is through providing direct financial and technological support for farmers. Iran has sought to boost wheat

production, for which it has allocated a considerable budget of \$1.5 billion. Iran has a cultivable area of 5 million hectares. The agricultural area allocated for producing wheat in general reaches 10.23 million hectares.<sup>(10)</sup> This figure reflects the extent to which the Iranian government is giving attention to strategic agricultural crops within the food security basket and its genuine desire to get rid of subordination to international grain markets. The wheat production rate rose from 5.7 million tons in 1989 to 11 million tons in 2004<sup>(11)</sup> and 15 million tons in 2020 (see Tables 4 and 5).<sup>(12)</sup>

**Table 4: The Grain Production Rate in Iran (2020/ Million Tons )**

Wheat	Barley	Corn	Rice
15	0.3	1.4	0.2

*Source:* FAO, *Statistical Yearbook* (Rome, 2022).

**Table 5: Production Rates and Grain Imports in Iran (2020)/ Million Tons**

Production Rate	Import Rate	Food Trade Balance/In Billion Dollars	The Percentage of Subordination to the International Market in the Grain Division/2017-2019
22,013	9,328	-4,087	%37,5

*Source:* FAO, *Statistical Yearbook* (Rome, 2022).

Tables 4 and 5 reflect the strength of the Iranian agricultural sector in terms of producing grain, which reached 22 million tons in 2020 despite the drought. Conversely, a cursory look at the food trade balance shows that it records a deficit every year. The increasing rate of subordination to international grain markets shows the true reality of the agricultural sector which is no longer capable of meeting the food needs of the Iranian people. The tallies by the FAO confirm that the losses of the agricultural trade deficit have more than tripled over the past two decades. In 2000, the country's trade balance posted a loss of \$1.619 billion while in 2010 the losses reached \$2.423 billion. The figures continued to be in the negative, with the deficit reaching \$4.087 billion in 2020.<sup>(13)</sup> This shows the amount of food imported by the Iranian government from the international market. The Iranian government has also announced modernizing the agricultural sector and supplying it with various technologies, whether mechanized equipment or chemical technology to increase production rates (see Table 6).



**Table 6: The Use of Tractors and Harvesting Machines in Iran Between 1992 and 2005**

Year	Number of tractors		Number of Harvesting Machines	
	Distributed	Available for Usage	Distributed	Available for Usage
1992	12.469	220.947	578 <sup>b</sup>	5.554
1993	8.296	214.653	534	6.024
1994	7.321	207.294	480	5.918
1995	4.217	196.084	113	5.806
1996	5.250	167.423	179	5.558
1997	4.715	136.337	220	5.253
1998	2.039	114.095	191	4.809
1999	3.917	91.991	280	4.532
2000	4.378	82.130	298	4.509
2001	7.474	84.578	363	4.763
2002	12.613	91.649	368	4.890
2003	14.111	97.808	452	4.780
2004	16.212	104.016	639	4.695
2005	16.890	108.527	701	4.818

*Source:* Afshin Amjadi, Amir-Hossein Jaizari, "The Mechanization of the Agricultural Sector in Iran," *Journal on Agricultural Economy and Development* 55, (Fall of 2015): 163. [Persian].

Table 6 shows the fluctuation in the Iranian government's support for the agricultural sector in terms of agricultural machinery. The Iranian government delivered 12,469 tractors in 1992, but this support declined to 2,039 tractors in 1998. In 2005, the number rose to 16,890 tractors. However, despite all this support, the agricultural sector experienced a decline in the number of tractors. The sector used to provide 220.947 tractors in 1992, which declined in 2005 to 108.527. The same applies to harvesting machines. The agricultural sector provided 5.554 harvesting machines in 1992, which plummeted in 2005 to 4.818. This is attributed to the rugged Iranian terrain and the lack of spare parts required for repairing broken-down machines. Despite all the government's efforts, several Iranian farmers continue to use traditional means of production, particularly the small farmers in the countryside who still depend on outdated agricultural methods.<sup>(14)</sup>

This reality shows the imbalance in the agricultural sector. Agricultural reform has not included all Iranian agricultural regions. It has been a rath-

er selective reform process that focuses on regions that produce massive amounts of crops, including the basins and plains characterized by huge amounts of water and fertile lands. Foremost among these is the Caspian Sea coast basin and the Khuzestan basin. The Iranian agricultural development policy has led to substantial changes in the agricultural sector, with Iran achieving significant progress in agricultural modernization and development. It also managed to increase the rate of grain production, particularly wheat, considered to be among the strategic crops. However, production remains limited, falling short of meeting public needs, particularly when considering climate shocks and drought. This is in addition to agricultural regionalism. There are several regions that continue to depend on outmoded means of agricultural production.<sup>(15)</sup> Yet there are limitations in biotechnology which if overcome could raise the productivity of each hectare, particularly in light of the extreme weather prevalent in some regions. Thus, Iran has failed to eliminate the food subordination to the international market, which accounted for 37.5% in 2020, a huge rate if compared to Iranian citizens' purchasing power, especially when considering the turbulent international context and rising grain prices. In addition, overlooking the rural regions has impacted the agrarian economy in general, and poverty in the countryside in particular. This has in turn profoundly impacted the food security index of the populace in rural areas.

According to the foregoing, it could be said that the Iranian food security index remains weak. Despite the production capacity of the agricultural sector and the growth it has posted, it remains unable to provide various kinds of agricultural crops at prices affordable for low-income segments. Furthermore, it appears that the agricultural sector today is subject to the law of "decreasing grain," particularly in light of the drought and scant government investments in the agricultural sector. This will lead to further subordination to the international market in terms of food, thus further risking the food security of poor families in the countryside and urban peripheral regions as a result of the unprecedented rise in the prices of food items, both locally and internationally.

### **Factors Contributing to the Failure of Iran's Food Security Policy**

Food security in any country is subject to a host of economic, natural, political and social factors. Each country has its own food security policy for which the government intervenes with various options. Iran is a country that falls within the middle-income category and adopts the policy of self-sufficiency in strategic crops to achieve food security.<sup>(16)</sup> However, this option has become elusive, with food subordination levels increasing every year amid a decline in the performance of the agricultural sector and

an increase in demographic growth. The reasons behind the failure of Iranian methods to achieve food security could be summed as follows:

### **Natural Factors**

As previously stated, natural factors include limited natural resources, particularly in Iran's northern and southern parts, where fertile lands rarely exist. In these regions, there is scant government-sponsored agricultural investment and sustained agriculture due to limited natural resources and poor infrastructure. Therefore, poverty has spread in these regions, which directly affects food security. Extreme droughts on an annual basis have significantly impacted the Iranian agricultural sector, particularly climatic changes and soaring temperatures, which have caused a decline in agricultural irrigation capabilities. Additionally, Iran's water share from the Helmand River, which emanates from Afghanistan, has also declined.<sup>(17)</sup>

### **Economic Factors**

This is due to the poor performance of the Iranian economy in general, particularly with the escalation of the economic sanctions and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors have negatively impacted public investments, exacerbated inflation, increased unemployment and undermined food security. The economic factors particularly include the following:

**Weak rural economy:** This negatively impacts the livelihoods of villagers in general as a result of rampant unemployment and manifestations of food insecurity. This requires a specific focus on rural development policies and the agrarian economy. Therefore, a robust food system in rural regions can maintain food stability during times of food crisis.<sup>(18)</sup>

**High costs of agricultural production:** This is because of the increase in the prices of agricultural inputs, which has in turn raised crop prices. This has also negatively impacted the Iranian people's food security.<sup>(19)</sup>

**Crumbling infrastructure:** This particularly includes the dilapidated roads, agricultural extension systems, agricultural irrigation systems, systems of transport, storing and packaging, which results in the devastation of more than 30% of agricultural crops per year. Moreover, the excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides as well as the lack of cleaning and treatment operations have led to a considerable decline in cultivated lands.<sup>(20)</sup> This has negatively affected the whole process of cultivation, completely eroding farmers' incomes.

**Average value of food production and food energy supplies:** These considerations have a significant impact on any nation's food security. The cost of producing food and the average per capita income are just two of the many reasons for the failure of Iran's food security policies.

This consequently impacts the overall number of calories a person consumes, making it harder for him/her to obtain the energy needed to lead an active, healthy life. This has an immediate impact on food security, leading to widespread malnutrition.<sup>(21)</sup>

### **External Factors**

International factors have contributed to complicating the food security problem in Iran, given the ideology adopted by the ruling elite, regional ambitions, relations with major world powers and the volatile global context. The impacts of the external factors could be summed up as follows:

**Massive Iranian spending on the military sector and regional disputes:** This has negatively affected government investments in the social and economic fields. The more intense the regional disputes, the higher the defense budget and the lower the expenditure on social welfare. Therefore, families get impacted, particularly those not earning incomes that enable them to meet the basic food requirements.<sup>(22)</sup>

**Economic sanctions:** Just as Iranian food security hinges on economic performance and the international market, the sanctions imposed since 2018 have significantly impacted food security. After the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal in 2018, the Iranian currency lost more than two thirds of its value, thus causing inflation to soar. This has triggered unprecedented surges in the prices of foodstuffs, which have negatively impacted the country's food security.<sup>(23)</sup>

**International crises:** Despite Iran benefiting from the Russia-Ukraine war as a result of the rise in oil and gas prices, this surge has brought with it unprecedented spikes in food prices on the global market. This is because Russia and Ukraine are considered two major contributors to global grain markets. Russia alone contributes more than 42 million tons to global grain markets (wheat, barley and corn) while Ukraine's exports exceed 50 million tons — for the same crops — according to 2020/2021 statistics.<sup>(24)</sup> Regarding oilseeds and sunflowers, the two nations hold a combined 50% global market share. The war and port closures made it difficult to harvest and export all of Ukraine's crops, which resulted in a decrease in the supply of grains on the world market.

The FAO<sup>(25)</sup> reports that food costs have increased by 8% to 22% as a result of this accelerated dynamic. The price of a wheat ton shot up to €440 right after the Ukraine war started, almost double what was recorded in 2021. However, costs started to go down and eventually declined to €330 per ton.<sup>(26)</sup> Naturally, this has an effect on the countries that import food, such as Iran. The nation is currently importing inflation, which compounds

the inflation that is already present in its economy. As a result, Iranians' purchasing power has been impacted, chiefly affecting their food security to varying degrees. Those who lack a stable income always suffer the consequences of these shocks to the food system. Though the Iranian food system is able to withstand the storm, given that the government benefits from the rise in fuel prices, it remains unable to assist poor families in meeting their food needs.

Overall, it could be said that the tallies show that Iranian food security profoundly depends on imports. For example, the rate of Iran's reliance on grain imports reached 28.7% in 2014 and the country's food imports remain high. Iran's exploitation of water resources, which are 70% above the global average, remains ineffective. At the same time, 74% of Iran's territories, nearly 120 million hectares, are uncultivable. Over the coming years, it is expected that the amounts of water will not even suffice this small area of cultivable land. These circumstances, coupled with the international political issues and foreign policy, make the future of agriculture and food security in Iran more difficult and challenging. Given these circumstances, Iran should determine the current challenges, putting more focus on the future of food and agriculture.<sup>(27)</sup>

### **Social Policy as an Alternative to Achieving Food Security in Iran**

Social policies differ from one country to another, which depends on the history of each country, the degree of its economic advancement and the implemented social welfare model. The majority of the developed countries work to ensure a minimum level of social services to the whole population, such as education, healthcare and nursing services. However, there are measures in Iran that protect the poor from social neediness.<sup>(28)</sup> Assistant Professor of Sociology and International Studies at Boston College Mohammad Ali Kadivar argues that the direction of Iran's social policies reflects an apparent overlap between oil prices, rising GDP and the reduction of poverty.<sup>(29)</sup> However, if this is the approach adopted with regard to the various social policies pursued by the Iranian government to curtail poverty, it means that its policy of redistribution remains insufficient and lacks comprehensiveness, particularly in the rural regions, the urban peripheral regions and those regions deemed ideologically opposed to the ruling elite, where the government's investments decline while poverty and political instability rise.

After the failure of the efforts for achieving self-sufficiency and the manifestations of food insecurity, the Iranian government established the Supreme Council for Health and Food Security in 2004.<sup>(30)</sup> The program

dubbed “The National Plan for Economic, Social and Cultural Development 2011/2016” was put into action. It aims to ensure the food security of all the Iranian provinces.<sup>(31)</sup> However, the lack of coordination among the various ministries, ignoring its recommendations and the lack of a response system have all impeded its activities.<sup>(32)</sup> Therefore, food security in Iran remains a source of crises. The Planning and Management Organization remains the most important government institution that works toward social development and curbing poverty. It cooperates and coordinates with the non-governmental charitable organizations.<sup>(33)</sup> Assistance is provided to the poor and those deprived in Iran. But the reach of these associations and their connections with the various social contexts determine the extent to which they can equitably distribute aid. This aid is considered a voluntary activity on the part of the association, meaning that refraining from providing it — out of negligence or selectiveness in distribution — will not result in accountability. At the same time, they mitigate the suffering of the poor and ease their anger at the Iranian leadership’s political performance.

In Iran, there are several charitable organizations that work to aid the disenfranchised classes, foremost among which is the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation (IKRF).<sup>(34)</sup> The foundation distributes various kinds of assistance to the disenfranchised segments, particularly those impacted by natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes and other catastrophic events. The IKRF plays an essential role in bolstering Wilayat al-Faqih’s legitimacy; however, it provides important aid to disenfranchised citizens, securing a decent life for them. The foundation is responsible for 92% of the aid distributed throughout the country and it receives financial transfers from the government as well as volunteers inside Iran. There are other organizations that emerged after the 1979 revolution such as the Martyrs’ Foundation (Bonyad Shahid) and Injured Veterans Foundation (Bonyad-e Mostazafin-va-Janbazan) — these organizations are based on the religious affinities of Iran.<sup>(35)</sup> It is true that these organizations play a role in addressing the shortfalls in the country’s social welfare policies, but rising poverty rates, which have significantly impacted the food security of Iranians, expose the extent of the crisis that they suffer. Therefore, signs of the crisis have begun to emerge in the form of successive protests in a number of Iranian provinces.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, the Iranian people are suffering from a food security problem at varying degrees, depending on the region where poverty prevails. This

crisis will continue to intensify as long as there is a global economic crisis, economic sanctions on Iran and regional and global tensions. However, food security is impacted by the decline in oil prices. It is true to say that there is an agrarian economy in Iran which has enabled the state to build a food system that largely depends on self-sufficiency. However, this system fails to enable poor families to secure their food needs at affordable prices; it has also failed to plug the food subordination gap which widens every year as a result of the natural factors related to drought as well as demographic factors. In addition, there are factors related to the Iranian economy, international economic relations and the nature of the Iranian budget, the majority of which is allocated to armaments rather than the economy and social welfare.

Ending the conundrum of food insecurity in Iran begins with outlining comprehensive policies for all sectors which work to address poverty and social deprivation, particularly in the rural regions and the urban peripheral regions. This will entail increasing investments in the agrarian economy and working to build the rural economy in its various fields. Iran also needs to lay out a policy for social justice that will enable all citizens to meet their food needs to lead a healthy and active life — in all regions and sustainably.

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