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# **A Critique of Rural Entrepreneurship as a Neoliberal Project:**

Iran as a Case Study

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The Iranian Studies Unit

# A Critique of Rural Entrepreneurship as a Neoliberal Project: Iran as a Case Study

Series: **Case Analysis**

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Entrepreneurship in Iran has become the smart guard of uneven development in the city and an unsuitable alternative to rural development. Structural weaknesses in the country's economic system, as well as the dominance of perception, attitude, and a particular approach to neoliberalism, have caused the development process to move from rural to urban areas after nearly two decades of entrepreneurial development. The more unbalanced and concentrated the development process becomes, the more naturalized and individualized it becomes, eventually coming to a halt in villages. Taking a critical look at entrepreneurship and rural development, this paper analyzes the relationship between entrepreneurship and development and provides examples with theoretical concepts in Iran. It proposes the concept of rural prosperity rather than neoliberal rural entrepreneurship.

## Development, Post-development, and Neoliberalism

Various perspectives about the concept of development and its dimensions make it difficult to reach a theoretical consensus.<sup>1</sup> Development is a crucial complex and multidimensional process.<sup>2</sup> It differs from other concepts such as economic development or growth.<sup>3</sup> Indicators such as per capita income, industrialization, and GDP tied to economic growth or tolerance are considered to be related to economic development rather than just development. Ronaldo Munck provides three discourses of development from a Marxist perspective: Development I, Development II, and Development III. The first approach, Development I, emerged in Europe in the nineteenth century and emphasizes progress and order in the wake of industrialization and the development of capitalism. Development II focuses on the paradigm of modernization and dependency from the post-World War II period until the 1990s. Development III is a discourse that emerged in the 1990s in response to the rise of economic integration in the age of globalization and the emergence of the post-development era, which aims to eliminate inequalities between nations through universal marketization, and the creation of a flat world based on the end of history notion. During this period, development was accompanied by constraints owing to theoretical and methodological challenges arising from globalization, feminism, and postmodernism.<sup>4</sup> However, concepts and phenomena such as “Indigenous Development”, “Endogenous Development”, “Bottom-up Development” and “Local Development” have emerged. Munck argues that development is Eurocentric and still has a colonial character. Indeed, in the present age, which can be referred to as the post-development era, neoliberalism has taken over the development discourse.

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1 S. A. Razavi, “An introduction to the historical problems and contexts of Iran underdevelopment,” *The Monthly book of History and Geography*, vol. 138, (2009): p. 26 (in Persian).

2 M. Azkia and GH Ghafari, *The Sociology of Development* (Tehran: Keihan Publishing, 2005) (in Persian).

3 Azkia and Ghafari, 2005; E. Naraghi, *The Sociology and Development* (Tehran: Farzan Publishing, 2011) (in Persian).

4 M. Vosooghi and A. Eemani, “The Future of Rural Development and Sustainability Challenges,” *Rural Development Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2010): pp. 23 - 45 (in Persian).

As a result of the impact of postmodernism on development, development theory has been brought into question, subjecting it to anthropological critique, a space that many thinkers refer to as the “Age of Post-Development”.<sup>5</sup> Post-development theorists believe development theory to be founded on the historical conditions of the West and a reflection of the values woven into Western civilization.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, to disentangle Western ideals from the development process, a discourse approach to the development is necessary. In this sense, development is a dominant discourse and a discourse network that makes everyday observations comprehensible and meaningful to human beings. In short, post-development is a period in which we confront the “discourses” of development instead of the discourse of development, as well as “alternatives for development” instead of “alternative development” — a world in which the discourse of development is no longer monolithic, univocal, and hegemonic, but negotiable, co-opted and exploited. Development is achieved through the interplay or interaction between dynamic subjects.

The intellectual history of neoliberalism is also contradictory and controversial. Its most important components are the role of government in the economy, market competition, and corporate monopoly.<sup>7</sup> Despite its emphasis on the diminished role of government, neoliberalism is protected and consolidated by the regulating governments that employ it. The power gained by expropriation enables elites, who are present in the political and economic spheres through undemocratic means, to take advantage of government-owned resources and line their pockets. In a neoliberal economic system, many parts of the state apparatus “retreat,” but a new “emerging” governing body emerges. Therefore, the state has become a vital tool for abusing the impoverished. In this sense, neoliberalism can be considered a new orthodoxy due to flexibilization of labour, privatization of state-owned enterprises, empowerment of social networks, and global free trade. Neo-liberalization may thus be defined as a dynamic and progressive process in which society adopts new social, political, and economic structures. Market fundamentalism in the form of corporate monopoly, the spread of rent-seeking (under the guise of entrepreneurship), and a focus on contracts and contract laws rather than the role of markets in the organization of capitalism leads to a strong tendency towards hoarding, consumerism, materialism over belonging, and a decline in social cohesion.

## The Concept of the Village and Rural Entrepreneurship in the Post-development Era

Entrepreneurship today resembles a ghost that hovers over the economy and all social spheres of life. In other words, modernity has become entrenched in entrepreneurship.<sup>8</sup> The history of

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<sup>5</sup> K. Gardner and D. Lewis, *Anthropology, development, and the post-modern challenge* (London: Pluto Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> A. Escobar, “Anthropology and development,” *International Social Science Journal*, vol. 49, no. 154 (1997): pp. 497–515; A. Escobar, “Imagining a post-development era,” in M. Edelman and A. Haugerud (eds.), *The anthropology of development and globalization* (US: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> K. Birch, *A Research Agenda for Neoliberalism* (US, UK: Edward Elgar, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> A. da Costa and L. Saraiva, “Hegemonic discourses on entrepreneurship as an ideological mechanism for the reproduction of capital,” *Organization*, vol. 19, no. 5 (September 2012): pp. 587–614.

entrepreneurship can be divided into three periods: (a) the prehistoric period, (b) the economic period (sixteenth to mid-twentieth century, coinciding with the dominance of the discovery approach and psychology in the field of entrepreneurship), and (c) the multidisciplinary period (since the 1980s, coinciding with the beginning of globalization and the rise of social values, sociological studies of entrepreneurship, and the introduction of the concept of “entrepreneurial opportunities”). The definition based on the concept of “opportunity” is the most debated and critiqued of the numerous definitions of entrepreneurship.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, entrepreneurship is considered a process that includes discovering, evaluating, and exploiting opportunities.

Perhaps the controversy over entrepreneurship can be conceptualized around a theoretical dichotomy.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, entrepreneurship supporters — like all the national and local authorities in Iran — point to the significant relationship between entrepreneurship and economic growth and development. Entrepreneurial critics, on the other hand, have critically examined this phenomenon from sociological and anthropological perspectives.<sup>11</sup> With the prevalence of a critical view of development in the post-development era, entrepreneurship has also been critically explained as a development strategy. For example, Campbell Jones and Andre Spacer point to functionalist, interpretive, and critical approaches to entrepreneurship in *Critical Unmasking Theory*. In the functionalist approach — which is currently prevalent and propagated in Iran — the production of utility, profit, and added value is emphasized by the maximizer. The interpretive approach refers to the creation of meaning in the entrepreneurial process. Finally, the critical approach attempts to explain the actions, economics, and politics of entrepreneurship in order to place it at the center of political and social conflicts, test its political and economic repercussions, and reveal the power relations it shapes. This latter approach is an attempt to rethink entrepreneurship and is also underlined by this paper.

Following the change in the concept of development and entrepreneurship in the post-development or the neoliberal globalization era, the concept of the village has also evolved. It has been rethought in the form of holistic models. Using a hermeneutical realism philosophy, Rosenqvist has reviewed the concept of the village in the form of a holistic understanding. In this philosophy and with this understanding, space includes geographical, figurative, linguistic, and cultural dimensions. Looking at rural as a distinct space is exciting and necessary, especially in this postmodern era where images, language and symbols have gained prominence. Rosenqvist's

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9 S. Venkataraman, “The distinctive domain of entrepreneurship research,” *Advances in Entrepreneurship, Firm Emergence and Growth*, vol. 3, (1997): 119-138; S. Venkataraman, S. Shane, “The Promise of Entrepreneurship as a Field of Research,” *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2000): 217 - 226.

10 H. Shahraki and V. Sarani, (2019). “Development and its Evil Twin: The Situational Analysis of Rural Entrepreneurship in Sistan Region,” *Community Development (Rural and Urban Communities)*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2019): pp. 173 - 196.

11 J. O. Ogbor, “Mythicizing and Reification in Entrepreneurial Discourse: Ideology-Critique of Entrepreneurial Studies,” *Journal of Management Studies*, vol. 37, no. 5 (2000): pp. 605–635; J. Cope, *Researching Entrepreneurship Through Phenomenological Inquiry: Philosophical and Methodological Issues* (Lancaster, UK: Institute for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development, 2003); D. Goss, (2005) “Schumpeter's Legacy? Interaction and emotions in the sociology of entrepreneurship,” *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2005): pp. 205-218; H. Shahraki, and R. Movahedi, “Reconceptualizing rural entrepreneurship discourse from a social constructionist perspective: A case study from Iran,” *Middle East Critique*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2017): pp. 79–100.

analysis can be evaluated through revisiting the works of Clock and Dobson in which the physical concept of the village has evolved into social, cultural, and linguistic concepts, and rural territory and society, rurality and rural identity, as well as (rural) entrepreneurship, are defined phenomena.<sup>12</sup> Dabson analyzes three components of rural American society in his definition, shifting from a physical to an integrated perspective of the village concept: economy, values and environment, and atmosphere or climate.<sup>13</sup> According to Dabson, and in explaining the component of the economy, agriculture is the essential pillar of the rural economy. He defines values in terms of religion, tradition, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency, and believes that the environment consists of refreshing spaces with livestock, animals, trees, and fields. He refers to climate, a more comfortable and safe lifestyle, and a suitable place for recreation, extreme sports, and eco-tourism. Taking into account the changes in the concepts of development, entrepreneurship, and rural areas, rural entrepreneurship can be defined as:

The process of continuous interaction between an individual or individuals with context, on the one hand, and opportunities on the other. Such a process typically consists of steps such as recognizing, evaluating, and exploiting opportunities that can increase the income of villagers by creating employment or job diversity in the short term. It can (and must) lead to an increase in the presence of women in the development of the village, an increase in social capital in the village and its new relations with the surrounding villages or towns, and an increase in the role and emergence of rural movements in the long run.<sup>14</sup>

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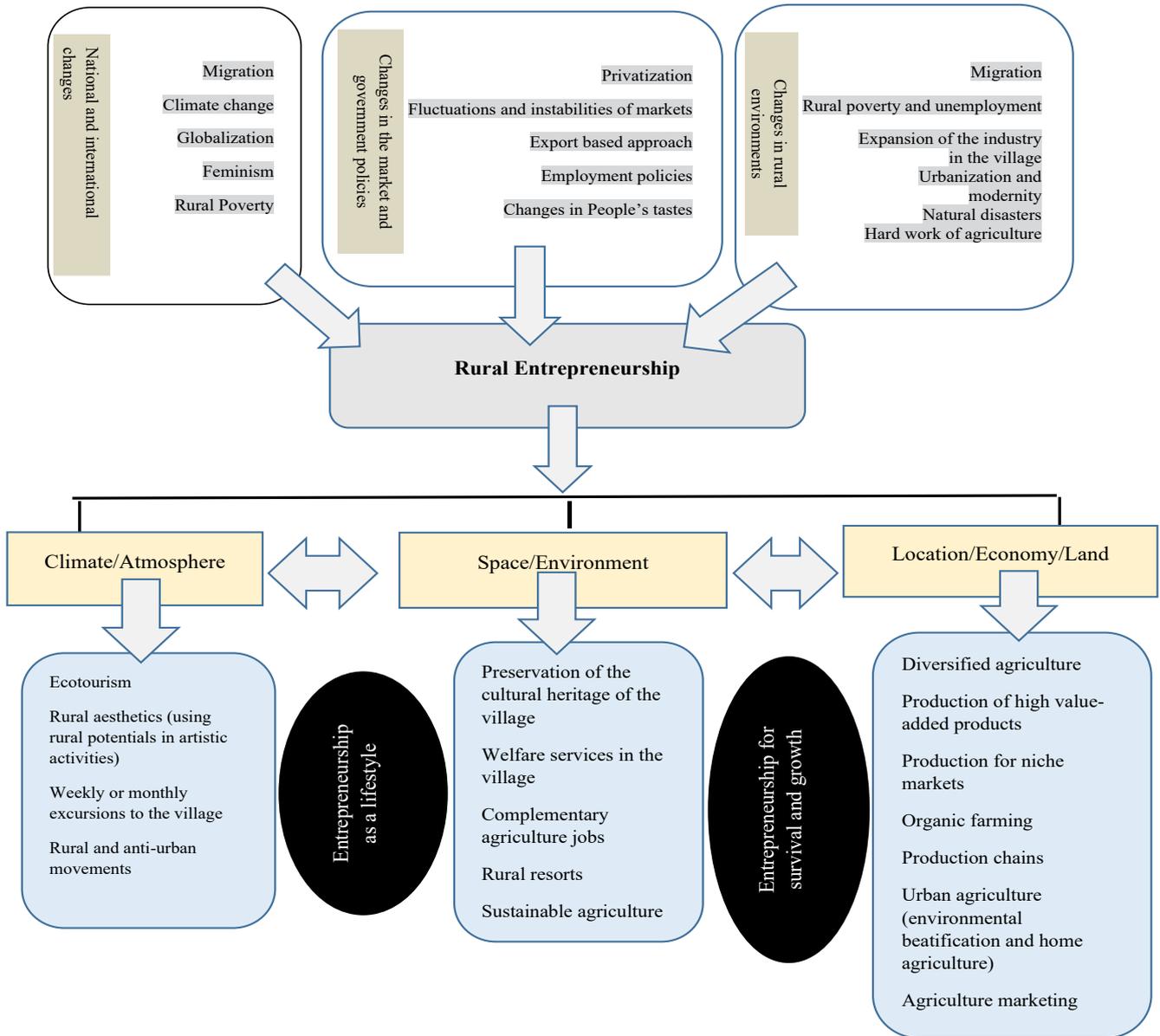
<sup>12</sup> B. Dabson, *Entrepreneurship as a real community and economic development strategy*, Rural policy research institute & truman school of public affairs (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2005); P. Cloke, "Conceptualizing rurality," in P. Cloke, T. Mardsen, and P. H. Mooney (eds.), *Handbook of rural studies* (London: Sage, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Hassan Shahraki, "Explanation of cultural and social components of rural entrepreneurship: A qualitative research," *Journal of Entrepreneurship Development*, vol. 9, no. 4 (2017): pp. 749 - 768.

This definition of rural entrepreneurship emphasizes the relationship between entrepreneurship and development, the role of women, and agency. Figure 1 depicts the evolution of the concepts of village and rural entrepreneurship.

**Figure 1. New Concepts and Components of the Village and Rural Entrepreneurship**





## History of Development in Iran and the Beginning of Entrepreneurial Rotation in the Economic System

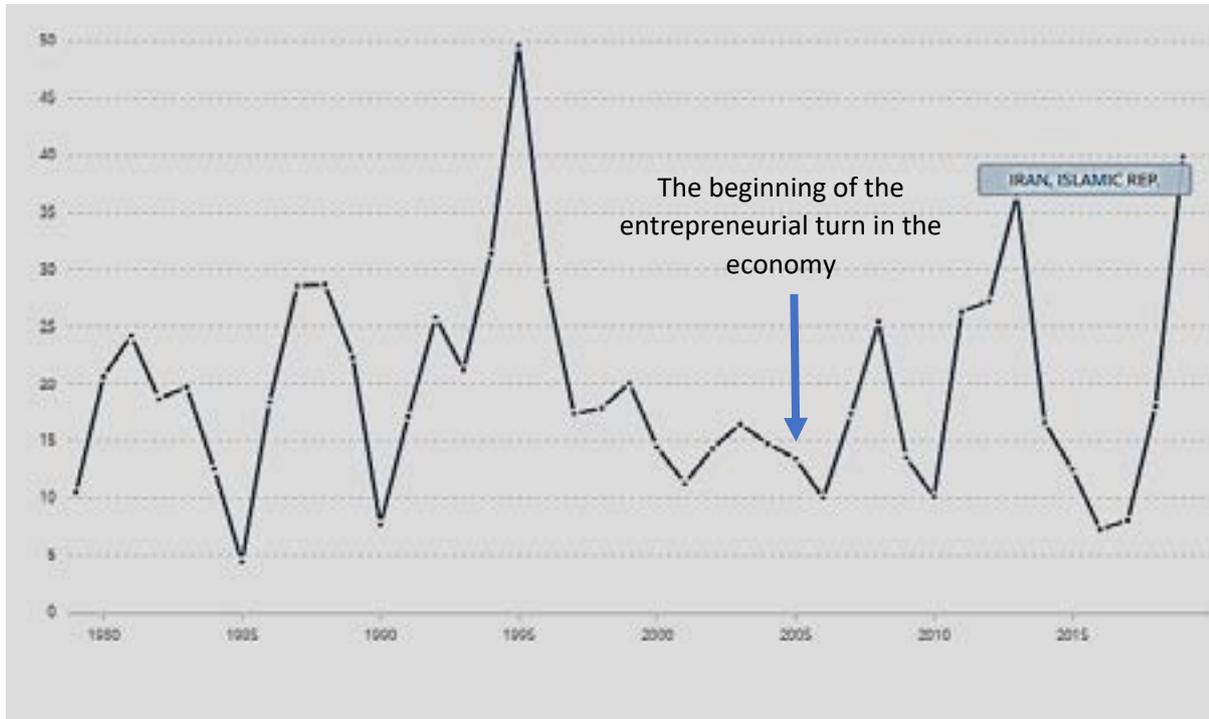
Iran's development planning system has historically had a centralized government structure. Shortly after the approval of the law on the implementation of the first seven-year development plan of the country, "History of preparation of the seven-year development plan of Iran" was published in the appendix of Bank Melli Iran Magazine No. 98. This report, which also includes the text of the bill of the first seven-year plan, is considered as the first official document in Iran's development literature. Iran's economic history has seen eleven development plans in the last seventy-three years. Before the 1979 revolution and under the Pahlavi monarchy, five development plans have been implemented: the First Plan (1949-1956), the Second Plan (1955-1962), the Third Plan (1962-1967), the Fourth Plan (1968-1972), and the Fifth Plan (1973-1978).<sup>1</sup> Six development plans have been adopted by the Islamic Republic between 1989 to 2022. According to Khatam, the common denominator of all development plans in Iran, both before and after the 1979 revolution, has been the neglect of political development based on civil society. Apart from the development of the industrial plan in the 1940s, the land reform project from 1962 to 1972, the Jihad-building actions in the early years of the revolution that were influenced by revolutionary motives and reflected in the first post-revolutionary development plan, and the measures taken by Seyyed Mohammad Khatami's government to strengthen civil society in the 1970s, development in Iran since the Pahlavi monarchy has strengthened an economic system based on trade and extremist market-orientation — in the absence of political development.

These factors should be considered by a country like Saudi Arabia, which is becoming a model for the development of the neighbouring Arab countries as a result of Muhammad bin Salman's reforms. Except for the early years after the revolution, especially during Hashemi Rafsanjani's presidency (1989-1997), which had a justice-seeking nature due to the Islamic Revolution and the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq, development plans in Iran with a quasi-liberal nature of production and distribution have always been to consolidate a comprador, consumerist, and non-productive capitalism. From a historical point of view, Iran's government has initiated many entrepreneurial plans and programs. However, apart from a two- or three-year period following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, when the newly established revolutionary state organization, Construction Jihad (*Jihad-e Sazandegi* in Persian), engaged in significant rural activities (albeit limited to the creation of rural infrastructure), there have been no apparent academic or practical acts, projects, and plans that consider the internal dynamics of rural and peasant communities.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>15</sup> For more information on Iran's earlier development plans see: Farhad Daftary, "Development Planning in Iran: A Historical Survey," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1973): pp. 176–228.

<sup>16</sup> Gholamreza Ghaffary, "The state and rural development," *Middle East Critique*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2006): pp. 283–293.

Figure 2. Iran's Inflation Rate from 1979 to 2019



Source: World Bank, International Monetary Fund, International Financial Statistics and data files, <https://bit.ly/3sXgflA>.

Numerous studies on entrepreneurship, and particularly rural entrepreneurship, have taken a testimonial perspective toward entrepreneurship, assuming a definite relationship between entrepreneurship, economic growth, and development.<sup>1</sup> The latest Global Entrepreneurship Monitoring (GEM) report also assumes a direct relationship between the entrepreneurship and economic growth.<sup>2</sup> This entrepreneurship-centred literature presumes that starting and running new businesses creates new jobs, higher incomes, and added value, often by introducing new ideas, technologies and products to society. Increasing value-added and boosting economic growth will inevitably result in lower inflation and unemployment rates. However, at least regarding Iran, this is not the case, and the GEM, in its most recent report, emphasizes that inflation took hold of the economy in most months of 2021, running well above 40 percent.<sup>3</sup> The unequal race between entrepreneurship and economic indices such as inflation, among other reasons — for example, in an event like the Covid-19 pandemic — is the outcome of severe and chronic structural predicaments embedded in Iran's economic system.

<sup>17</sup> K. Daugstaad, K. Ronningen, and B. Skar, "Agriculture as an upholder of cultural heritage? Conceptualizations and value judgments: A Norwegian perspective in international context," *J. Rural Stud*, vol. 22, no.1 (2006): pp. 67–81; G. McElwee, *Developing Entrepreneurial Skills of Farmers* (Lincoln, CA, USA: University of Lincoln, 2005); D. Audretsch, *Entrepreneurship: A Survey of the Literature* (Bloomington, IN, USA: Institute for Development Strategies, Indiana University and Centre for Economic Policy Research, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2021 / 2022 report is available online at: <https://www.gemconsortium.org>

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 125.



The inflation and unemployment rates during the eight-year Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988 were relatively low, at approximately 6.9 and 11.9 percent, respectively. Figure 2 depicts the inflation rate in Iran from 1979 to 2019. The government has controlled the mean rate of inflation from 1981 to 1989 up to 20 percent. The inflation rate, however, has fluctuated over time and peaked at 39.9 percent in 2019; this means that the entrepreneurial turn in economy — from 2005 onward — has been unable to achieve the logical and economically acceptable and affordable inflation rate. The entrepreneurial turnaround in Iran’s economy can be traced back to the beginning of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s presidency in 2005, and his government’s support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).<sup>4</sup> Since then, entrepreneurship and rural entrepreneurship have been on the agenda of the government as a project. State-owned entrepreneurship is often accepted without criticism and is assumed to solve many problems, particularly unemployment.<sup>5</sup> Expectations from the government are so high that for more than two decades, all governments have sought to consolidate this image of a “clean and pure government” and “entrepreneurship as something sacred and obvious.” Thus, the project of state-owned entrepreneurship in Iran was limited to the most basic and cost-effective method: the payment of bank facilities and credits. For example, in 2018, about \$1.5 billion of credit was allocated by the National Development Fund for rural development and job creation in rural areas.<sup>6</sup> However, credit payment could never increase the welfare of the villagers. One indicator of welfare is the final per capita consumption of the household.

Figure 3 presents the household final consumption per capita from 1979 to 2019. The consumption rate has had a steady smooth trend from 1979 to 1990 even during war time. In this period, distribution and production policies are in a balanced interaction. If the cost of the war is estimated to be approximately 440 billion dollars,<sup>7</sup> then this amount of consumption is reasonable. Despite the end of the war, the rate of consumption did not increase from 1990 to 2000. From 2004 to 2007, the level of consumption (i.e., welfare) grew, but it fell after this period. Thus, rural entrepreneurship did not establish a significant relationship with welfare and proved indifferent to environmental protection and the villagers’ agency. Neoliberal entrepreneurial citizenship is devoid of collective spirit and solidarity, focusing only on accumulation for greater consumption.

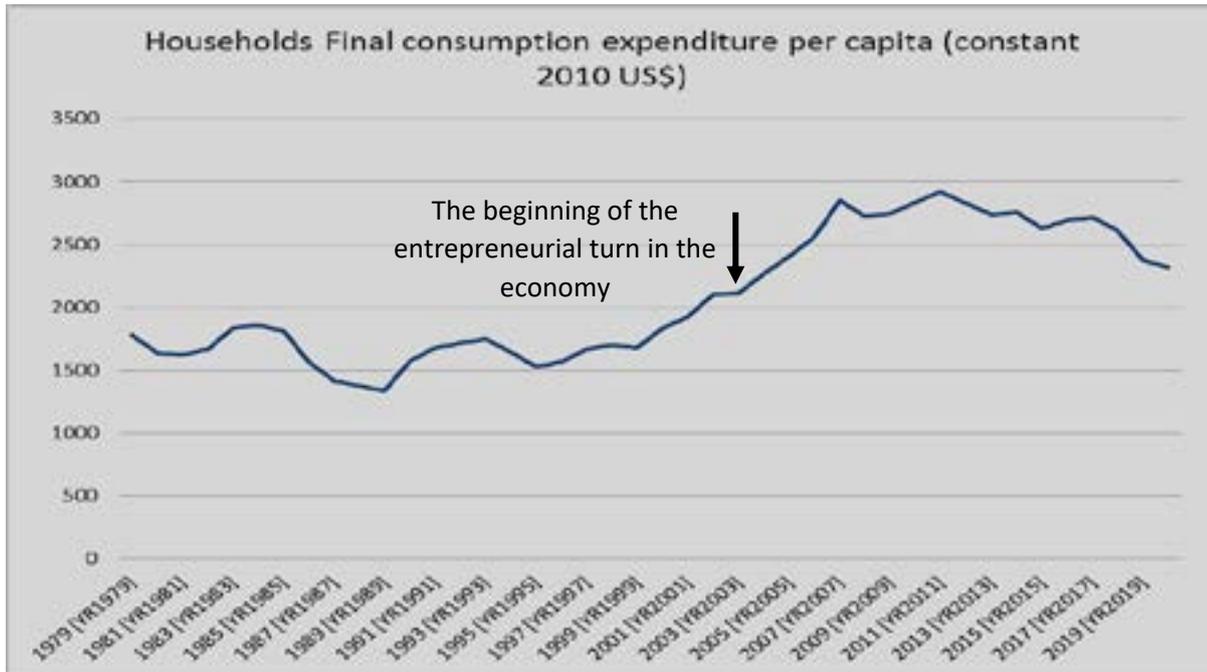
<sup>20</sup> On economic policies of Ahmadinejad and the macroeconomic performance of Iran under his presidency check: Nader Habibi, “Economic Legacy of Mahmud Ahmadinejad,” *Working Paper Series*, Brandies University Crown Center for Middle East Studies, no. 5 (2014), <https://bit.ly/3MkgzTm>.

<sup>21</sup> G. Jamshidiha and H. Nozari, “Changes in the Meaning of Development after the Islamic Revolution in Iran: From Rejecting to Redefining,” *Community Development (Rural and Urban Communities)*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2014): pp. 25 - 48.

<sup>22</sup> “1.5 billion dollars have been allocated to job creation in rural areas of the country,” *IRNA*, February 21, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3wRXP7e>.

<sup>23</sup> The estimated currency exchange rate during the war was 1 US Dollar to 70 Iranian Rials.

Figure 3. Final Consumption Expenditure Per Capita from 1979 to 2019



Source: World Bank, World Bank national accounts data and OECD National accounts data files, <https://bit.ly/3NDL2fu>.

## Entrepreneurship and the Premature Offspring of Uneven Development

According to Shahraki and Sarani's findings, interviewees pointed out factors affecting rural entrepreneurship in Iran, such as entrepreneurial monopoly on lending, structural corruption in the lending process, lack of government oversight, instability of governments, the monopoly in the economic system, and the lack of proper economic evaluation of business plans. These challenges are also linked to the macro-characteristics of the country's economic system, which has recognized rural entrepreneurship, despite its historical roots in schools and the competitive capitalist system, as a paradoxical government project in rural development. Jamshidiha and Nozari have analyzed the changes in the concept of development after the Islamic Revolution using Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory.<sup>8</sup> They argue that the two dominant discourses of neoliberal growth (Hashemi-Rafsanjani, Khatami, and Rouhani) and neoliberal distribution (Ahmadinejad government) have influenced the development climate in Iran. These discourses have emphasized the reform/increase of prices, market society<sup>9</sup>, and have replaced development with economics.

Iran's economic system has absorbed entrepreneurial discourse through the lens of political economy and the world of opinion. It has formulated it using neoliberal economic concepts such as

<sup>24</sup> M. Jørgensen and L. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (USA: Sage Publication, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> M. Granovetter, "Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 91, no. 3 (1985): pp. 481–510.



privatization, profit, productivity, government agility and downsizing, commercialization of science, innovation and technology, the application of science, and the existence of non-governmental organizations that complement and support entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, according to theories that seek to explain capitalist relations in the Iranian economy — such as the theory of capital accumulation chain in Iran — entrepreneurship, even in its capitalist form, arising from innovation in the entire economic process, to make a profit<sup>10</sup>, has no room for development in the heart of the current economic system of Iran. Incompletely and paradoxically, at least in the rural sector, this problem was referred to the government, and the government has deviated from pursuing the path of rural development, which is its inherent duty. Thus, the group or collective producer, who has no protection under cumbersome rules, is replaced by an individual entrepreneur, who rent-seeks and obtains bank facilities. The consequence of this process of devoting the entire economy — and not the economics — as a system to the entrepreneurship discourse and practice, according to the recent Planning and Budgeting Organization report<sup>11</sup>, has been an increase in economic indices, such as the Gini coefficient, Thiele modulus, Atkinson index, and Palma ratio, all of which reflect (in)equality in distribution. This was the case from 2013 to 2019 when the country suffered from neo-liberal capitalist entrepreneurial plans as well as social turmoil. The corresponding indices for this period increased sharply: 0.37 to 0.4 (Gini coefficient), 0.2240 to 0.2871 (Thiele modulus), 0.1982 to 0.2461 (Atkinson index), and 1.62 to 2.05 (Palma ratio). Entrepreneurship and neo-liberal structural adjustment have undermined Iran's economic system as a whole.

## The Path to Salvation: Transition to Rural Prosperity

“Rural prosperity” is the key to escaping rural entrepreneurship as a neoliberal project.<sup>12</sup> The term refers to the evolution of the concept of human development and its accumulation with material resources, which have received little attention in indicators such as per capita income, education, and life expectancy. Rural prosperity is a radical discursive and practical transformation in the state-of-the-art of rural development. From the discursive point of view, rural prosperity is very similar to *Buen Vivir*, which means living well or a collective wellbeing and refers to a Latin American alternative development paradigm.<sup>13</sup> The main feature of the *Buen Vivir* is an evolutionary transition from individual level (quality of life and its components such as liberty and autonomy) to the institutional level (state democratization), and finally, to the universal biocentric concerns (like a harmonious living or cohabitation with nature and all non-human species). *Buen Vivir* emphasizes

26 T. Knudsen and R. Swedberg, “Capitalist Entrepreneurship: Making Profit through the Unmaking of Economic Orders,” *Capitalism and Society*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2009).

27 This Organization has been considered a mastermind of the development project both before and after the 1979 revolution.

28 H. Shahraki, “Three-Dimensional Paradigm of Rural Prosperity: A Feast of Rural Embodiment, Post-Neoliberalism, and Sustainability,” *World*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2022): pp. 146 - 161.

29 K. Artaraz, and M. Calestani, “Suma qamaña in Bolivia: Indigenous Understandings of Well-being and Their Contribution to a Post-Neoliberal Paradigm,” *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 42, no. 5 (2015): pp. 216–233; C. Walsh, “Development as *Buen Vivir*: Institutional arrangements and (de)colonial entanglements,” *Development*, vol. 53, no. 1 (2010): pp. 15–21; E. Gudynas, “*Buen Vivir*: Today's tomorrow,” *Development*, vol. 54, no. 4 (2011): pp. 441–447.

axiological rationality, the emotional base of social interactions, and degrowth movements. In a similar vein, rural prosperity aims to consider the embodied elements of development (for example, climate change resilience), to transform and reverse the catastrophic consequences of neoliberal economic system, and to pay special attention to the nature.

Bringing nature to the forefront is a milestone of rural prosperity. Several news organizations have recently reported the death of approximately 8,000 migratory birds in the Miankaleh wetland in northern Iran due to poisoning. This poisonous development can be ended through the examination of rural prosperity. In this sense, rural prosperity in tackling phenomena such as rural feminism and climate change is a progressive approach to rural entrepreneurship. It incorporates concepts such as emotions and ethics into economic practices. Rural prosperity is a development paradigm that situates and contextualises development. Thus, rural prosperity considers both the meaning of development in terms of historical conditions and society's cultural and social contexts as dynamic, fluid, and constructed. Finally, it entails a revision of the physical and geographical meaning of space, the inclusion of cultural concepts and other terms such as *ruralization of urban* and *urbanization of rural*, the extension of citizenship rights to plant and animal species, the replacement of ideology by nature. Rural prosperity contributes significantly to the realization of the concept of sustainability. In addition, based on the case study of Iran, the following recommendations can be suggested in the field of entrepreneurial political economy:

- The positivistic, monolithic, and univocal discourse of rural entrepreneurship and development can be deconstructed and transformed into a dialectical, constructivist, polysemic, and multivocal discourse of societal and governmental rural prosperity.
- The developmental buzzwords constructing its lexicon need to be deconstructed.<sup>14</sup> For example, a detailed answer should be posited in response to the question of how and why the discourse of deprived regions (*Manategh-e Mahroom* in Persian) should be produced and reproduced, and what the power relations in this process are.
- Rural entrepreneurship needs to be looked at as a discourse that must be broken down. For example, instead of focusing on the concept and strategy of “job creation,” analyzing the basic concept of “opportunity” is important.
- Rural entrepreneurship as a government development project, its abandonment (or improvement), and return to the classical rural development discourse and practice with goals such as eradicating poverty, unemployment, and inequality should be critically examined.
- A consistent, widespread, and comprehensive fight against corruption is needed to replace the government's contradictory project of rural entrepreneurship development with the discourse and government project of multifunctional agriculture.

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<sup>30</sup> A. Cornwall, “Introductory overview – buzzwords and fuzzwords: deconstructing development discourse,” in A. Cornwall and D. Eade (eds.), *Deconstructing development discourse: buzzwords and fuzzwords* (UK: Practical Action Publishing, 2010).



- Institutional measures regarding the creation and reproduction of rural identity based on spontaneous and autonomous rural movements should be considered.
- Rural life should be seen as a process of living in harmony with nature.
- The concept of entrepreneurial opportunity must be revisited in a manner that encompasses the rights and interests of natural resources and non-human species (resource nationalism).