

## ***Analysis of Regional Development Inequalities in Iran***

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Received: 30/09/2010    Accepted: 06/06/2011

### **Extended Abstract**

#### **Introduction**

Inequality and its different dimensions are the significant signs of underdevelopment. Regional inequalities represent a continuing development challenge in most countries, especially those with large geographic areas under their jurisdictions. Large regional disparities represent serious threats to countries as they create potential for disunity and, in extreme cases, for disintegration. Marginalized populations often are left excluded when important development and investment decisions are made. Regional disparities in Iran have been growing at an alarming rate leading to serious problems including migration with its associated problems from backward provinces to the more affluent ones. So that, the Human Development Report for Iran in 1999 reflected such disparities and reiterated that one of the major human development policies in the country's Third Plan is to "pay attention to the spatial planning as a long-term framework for social justice and regional balance". In order to provide a scientific basis to decrease regional inequalities, it is very necessary to comprehensively assess the status of regional development with regard to different indicators. Once this assessment is done and we get a clear idea of the backwardness of some regions, we can proceed to tackle the problems of backward regions. The aim of this study is to assessment the regional development inequalities in Iran at sub-province scale. In this way, multi criteria decision making methods were applied for evaluating regional development level of sub-provinces.

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**Methodology**

For determining the development level of sub-provinces of Iran, a national survey involving all sub-provinces of Iran (336 sub-provinces in 2006) was conducted to obtain data. The required data was mainly collected from detailed results of the last Population and Housing Census (2006) published by Statistical Centre of Iran, and statistical yearbooks of provinces of Iran in the same year. It was developed a system of 54 indicators of regional development that address economic development, agriculture, education, health, housing, infrastructure, and social-cultural attributes. The weight of indicators was calculated using AHP (Analytic Hierarchy Process). Then, these weights were submitted to TOPSIS (Technique for Order Preference by Similarity to Ideal Solution). The development level of sub-provinces of Iran was determined based on the scores of sub-provinces as relative closeness to the ideal solution in TOPSIS method. Analysis of Coefficient of Variation was also applied to reveal regional inequalities about different dimensions of development.

**Results and Discussion**

At final step of the process of evaluating regional development of sub-provinces of Iran, relative closeness of sub-provinces to the ideal solution in TOPSIS method was calculated. Based on these scores, all sub-provinces were classified into 6 groups of development including highly developed, developed, relatively developed, medium level, backward and highly backward; so that 3, 12, 49, 123, 142 and 7 sub-provinces stilt in these categories, respectively. Results show a clear unevenness among sub-provinces and there is a salient system of core and periphery in respect of regional development. Shemiranat, Teharan and Damavnd stand out as the most developed sub-provinces being in the center of Iran; Nikshahr, Saravan and Sarbaz are highly backward regions located in the southeast of the country. Coefficient of Variation calculated for each group of indicators is as follows. Infrastructures: 0.622, agriculture: 0.605, housing: 0.485, education: 0.422, health: 0.398, economic: 0.320 and social- cultural attributes: 0.215. Therefore, inequalities in the indicators of infrastructures, agriculture and housing are more critical in comparison to other dimensions of development.

**Conclusion**

The results of this research showed that there are obvious differentiations among sub-provinces in development level. So, the problem of regional disparities in Iran is indeed a cause for great concern. Spatial distribution of sub-provinces with regards development level shows that an intensive system of core and periphery exist in the country. So, it is necessary to reduce regional disparities in Iran to pave way for greater national integration, increase in economic growth and political stability. It should be stressed that six highly backward sub-provinces are located in the southeastern region of Iran; so, extraordinary focus ought to be on this region to improve development level in both qualitative and quantitative aspects. However, it is urgent to improve development indicators- especially in which inequity is critical- in backward regions.

**Keywords:** *Regional Development Inequalities, Development Level, TOPSIS, Coefficient of Variation, Sub-provinces of Iran.*