

© The United Nations University, 1980
Printed in Japan

ISBN 92-808-0149-x
ISSN 0379-5764

HSDRGPID-35/UNUP-149

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE
VILLAGE IN IRAN: PROSPECTS FOR
AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH**

M. Hossein Haeri

Deputy Chairman, CENESTA
Box 33-109,
Teheran, Iran



This paper by M. Hossein Haeri is a contribution to the Alternative Strategies and Scenarios sub-project of the GPID Project.

Geneva, March 1980

Johan Galtung

It is being circulated in a pre-publication form to elicit comments from readers and generate dialogue on the subject at this stage of the research.

CONTENTS

Growth and Development in Iran	1
Growth and Underdevelopment	4
Development: Another Approach	10
A Dialogue	22
Notes	26

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN IRAN

Until the February Revolution of 1979, for more than two decades the development scene in Iran had been staged by grand ideals. All development thinking was centred on the megalomaniacal visions of the monarch and aimed at the fulfilment of those visions: to recapture the long-lost glory of the ancient Persian Empire;¹ and to lead the nation towards what was envisaged by the monarch as "the portals of the great civilization" before the end of the century. This grandiose scheme, which was entirely financed by oil revenues, received much moral, technical, and political support from the industrialized countries in the West in general, and the United States in particular, who considered Iran as both a perfect market for their products and an important, "reliable" ally.

In order to meet the demands of such high development ideals, the planners opted for the conventional growth model and adopted a technocratic strategy which emphasized accumulation through growth in GNP, technological modernization, and administrative efficiency. The most striking feature of the model, however, was that it did not discern that development is essentially an endogenous process which springs from within and, therefore, must be founded upon mobilization of internal human and material resources. The central assumption in this strategy was that of following in the footsteps of the developed countries in the West at a much faster pace by "borrowing" (often at exorbitant prices) the technological and administrative know-how of the developed industrial countries.

Foreign technology is of course useful, yet only so long as it is highly selective and can serve to build an infrastructure for the developing economy. The highly capital-intensive and import-substituting technology which was implanted in Iran during this period had indeed very little

relevance to the needs of the country's economy and the larger portion of the population. Administrative know-how, be it economic or social, can also be of great value as long as it is compatible with specific socio-cultural settings in the developing country. Many of the foreign administrative models which were implanted in Iran, such as the "rural co-operative societies" and "agricultural corporations," failed to result in any real progress because of their principally alienating character and their lack of conformity with the cultural patterns in rural Iran.²

The model failed in economic terms because it not only was unable to create a viable infrastructure for the economy, but also caused irreparable damages to the existing appropriate technology of the country. Even in terms of its own ideals, instead of leading the country towards political and economic self-determination and autonomy, the model rather plunged the country into the international market and subjected her to greater foreign economic and political intervention. True, the plan did achieve considerable material "progress." The GNP during the fourth and the fifth development plans (1967-1977) increased from US\$9,000 million³ to nearly US\$46,200 million. There was also a nearly ten-fold increase in per capita income in the same period.⁴ An analysis of the components of the GNP, however, reveals that this fabulous growth was primarily derived from rapid increases in the oil and natural gas outputs.⁵ During the fifth plan alone (1972-1977) oil production increased at the very high rate of approximately 51 per cent each year; while mining and industry together demonstrated a far lower rate of growth (18 per cent annually), and agriculture lagged far behind with a mere 5.9 per cent annual growth.

As the result of the sudden increase in per capita income, the country was led towards a stage of mass consumption long before the economy could reach mass production. The combination of the leap in per capita income and a 3 per cent population growth escalated the demand for food at a rate of 8 per cent a year. Consequently, in order to supplement the stagnating food production of the country, imports of supplies were increased from US\$270 million in 1972 to nearly US\$1,700 million in 1975.⁶

The development efforts of the past two decades in Iran also failed from the social point of view. The massive allocation of resources to urban/ industrial centres on the one hand, and an unequal allotment of development funds among various productive sectors of the economy, gave rise to an ever-widening gap between the urban and rural sectors of the population, and provided the grounds for further polarization of the population in terms of their access to the benefits of the national economic growth.⁷

An overview of the Iranian society during this period of rapid growth reveals an expanding class of affluent urban élite; a high development of repressive military apparatuses; heightened underdevelopment in rural and marginal urban areas; deeper foreign penetration into the economic and political structures than ever before; and apparent contradictions between the ideology of "development" and the experience of economic growth.

GROWTH AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

The development effort in Iran during the last two decades excluded from its benefits the bulk of the country's rural poor. Not only did they not enjoy the benefits of the vast economic growth of the country, they were, on the contrary, affected rather negatively by it. The result of the economic growth for the rural poor was in effect further pauperization and more underdevelopment, a process which has quite accurately been defined elsewhere as "anti-rural development."⁸

The development-planners assumed that the gradual flow of development benefits, in the form of technology, institutions, and capital, from the urban/industrial centres to rural areas would create sufficient stimulation for the rural economy to initiate its own development. What underlies this idea is the very principle of the diffusionist model which was applied to the development of the urban/industrial centres vis-à-vis the western industrial countries. The result of the approach was, therefore, very much the same as the experience of the urban/industrial centres themselves: greater dependence, heightened underdevelopment, and a minimized possibility of self-reliant development.

The transfer of technology to the rural areas, instead of stimulating the rural economy and helping the poor to stand on their own feet and get a stronger grasp on the levers of their economy, intensified inequality and polarization in the areas and drove rural communities towards disintegration. Another problem also arises in this approach, that of the transformation impulses (social and economic), emanating from the urban centre, and their impact on the rural community. These impulses, which reach the rural area through both private and government agents, generally act as strong incorporative drives and force the rural sector towards an ever-

increasing integration into the urban economic market.

The rapid growth of the urban-dominated productive sectors such as industry and services - particularly construction - on the one hand, and the tipping of the exchange opportunity against agriculture, has widened the gap between rural and urban incomes, causing the flight of the work force from rural areas, and hence has weakened the potentials for growth in the agricultural sector. In an industrially growing society with a rapidly increasing rural population such transfer of surplus labour to the industrial sector is inevitable. In fact, historically, industrial growth has everywhere relied predominantly on the rural labour surplus. But the history of the now-industrialized societies also shows that the process has been of an extremely exploitative character. The rural poor and the landless, unable to sustain their livelihood in the villages, make for the urban centres in search of jobs; however, unskilled and illiterate as they often are, they remain marginal to the urban economy and join the "reserve army of the unemployed."⁹

The critical aspect of the "incorporative drive,"¹⁰ as we might call it, does not lie so much in the proletarianization of peasants. The problem is rather the adverse effects of the incorporation process on the life of villagers, i.e., the sucking of the labour force from rural areas without allowing them full participation in the urban economy. What we are concerned with here is not so much the rationality of the process itself, but rather the biographical predicament of individual peasants who are uprooted from their base without being able to acquire a consistent status in the urban society. They thus remain marginal to the society with minimal participation. Their participation in social institutions such as education, health, and welfare is very limited or takes place under highly discriminatory conditions. In economic terms also their participation is qualitatively low and irregular.

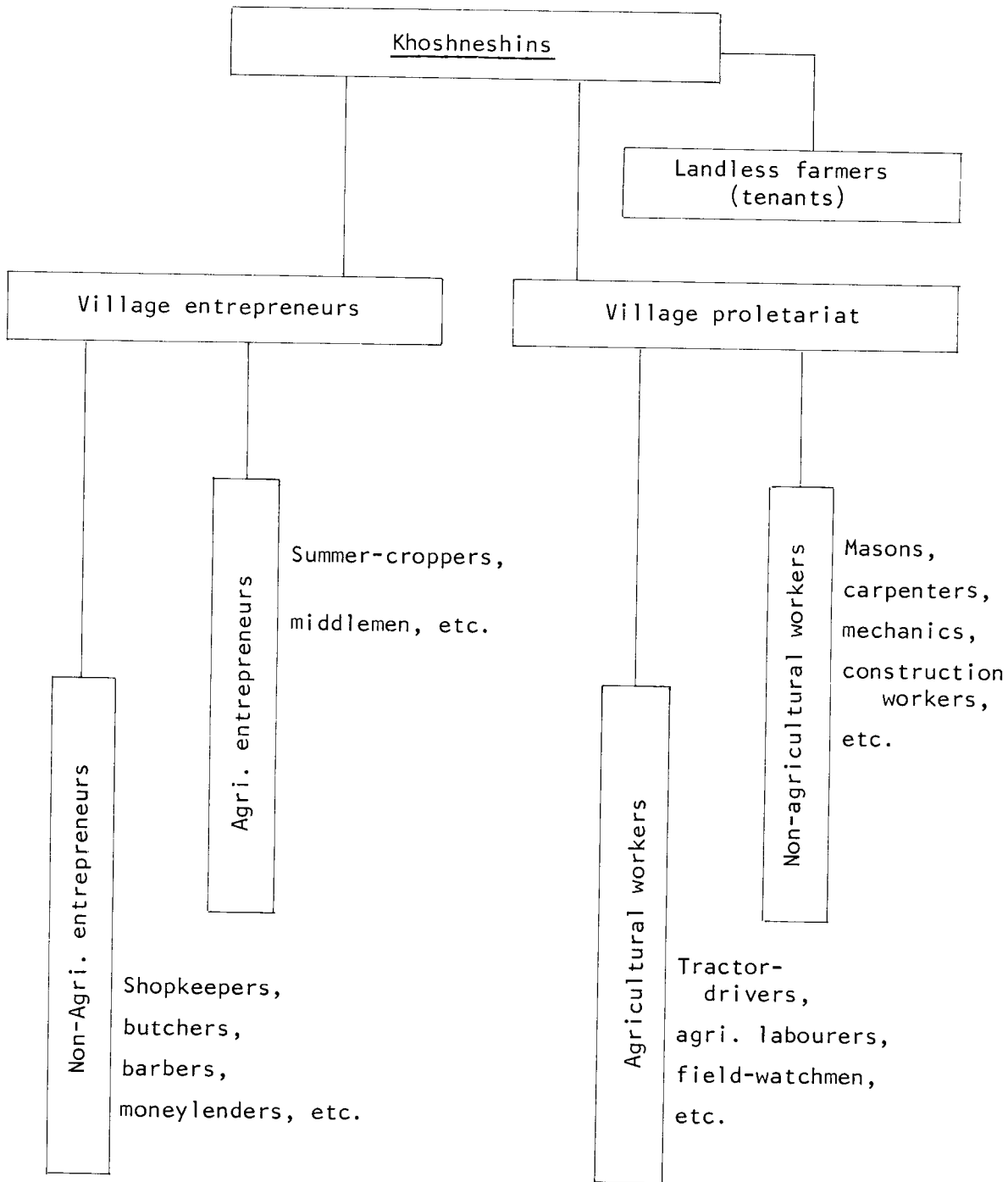
The incorporative drive is not limited to the absorption of inexpensive labour from rural areas; it also works as the most important factor in the alteration of rural life and social structure. The most important driving force in the transformation of the rural community is the market

complex, which not only seeks penetration into the rural economy as a market for its products but also strives to effect modifications and alterations in values and cultural goals which are in harmony with specific consumption patterns suitable for what they supply. The result is that the conditions in which the village community defines its needs and sets its cultural goals are no longer controlled by the villagers but are instead dictated by the market complex.

One of the major structural changes in rural Iran during the period following the land reform¹¹ was the emergence of a large class of khoshneshins. The term was originally used by peasants to refer to the landless agricultural workers in rural areas. Today, however, the term khoshneshin encompasses a large and highly differentiated group of the village population who are not tied to the land and derive their income largely through non-agricultural activities. The khoshneshins constitute the second largest socio-economic group in the rural population (approximately 20 per cent) next to the small-holding farmers. The khoshneshins are roughly divided into three general categories: (1) the landless peasants, (2) the rural proletariat, and (3) the village entrepreneurs (see Figure 1). The agricultural labourers who form the borderline between the small-holding farmers and the khoshneshins are usually landless peasants who still derive the main portion of their income from agriculture under either tenancy agreements or crop-sharing terms. They usually supplement their income by seasonal off-farm employment. The rural proletariat consists of two distinct groups: (a) the agricultural workers, and (b) the non-agricultural workers who derive their income totally from non-agricultural activities.

The growth of the khoshneshin population has also introduced a new element into the matrix of the social structure of the village: an indigenous class of entrepreneurs with strong ties to both the community and the city. The entrepreneurs, who do not have to depend on their own manual labour, and the rural non-agricultural workers, who have experience of the urban world, act as important carriers of the urban culture to the villages.

FIG. 1 The Structure of the Khoshneshin Population



As has been pointed out by Franklin, the partial derivation or supplementation of income from off-farm sources is a common feature of the peasant economy.¹² However, when the income is derived in toto from non-agricultural employment in general, and specifically the kind that is obtained from sources located outside the community, it has a great influence on the economic - as well as social - character of the community. It influences the social stratification of the village and forms the basis for a new division of labour in a social setting characterized by homogeneity and very little division of labour. As the new patterns of social and economic relations develop, they ultimately create a condition in which the functional rationale of the peasant socio-economic structure is no longer viable.

We can now turn to another source of transformation which has for many years, and in many ways, affected the rural life in Iran: namely, the government bureaucracies.

One of the most pronounced features of the late development pattern in Iran is the cancerous expansion of a highly centralized bureaucracy. Until the Land Reform Act of 1962 (which also constitutes the major turning point in the economic development of Iran) the domain of the government bureaucracies was usually confined within the urban frontiers. Their penetration into the rural areas was minimal and often limited to a few gendarmerie stations, and irregular invasions by the military recruiters. Following the Land Reform Act, however, a massive wave of government departments (ministries) and agencies began going forth into all rural areas.

The avant-garde of the movement were the representatives of the Land Reform Organization, who were immediately followed by other reform agencies such as the Education Corps, Health Corps, and Agricultural Extension Service. The initial contact, due to the nature of the missions, was quite successful. The government representatives were usually well-received almost everywhere by the villagers. As more, less experienced, inadequately trained, and uninterested recruits from urban areas and small towns with no (or very little) experience of rural life were drafted by

such reform agencies, the quality of the services began to deteriorate. Meanwhile, other branches of the government bureaucracy seeped into rural areas.

The villagers, already growing discontented with the low quality of services, soon found themselves entangled in the red-tape procedures of the highly inefficient bureaucracies on the one hand, and confronted by the insatiable avarice of incompetent agents of these bureaucracies on the other hand. Thus the initial welcome by the villagers began wearing out and even in some areas what appeared to be a happy encounter turned into bitter confrontations, which in turn resulted in more repressive measures and greater bureaucratic authoritarianism. The relation of the villagers to the government in general (be it the military, social service agencies, or development organizations), therefore, was transformed into one of the oppressed to the oppressor, characterized in most cases by distrust, isolation, resignation, and sometimes sycophancy.

Like the urban market complex, government bureaucracy is charged by incorporative drives of its own. The bureaucratic hierarchy, with its apex located in the capital, constantly seeks expansion by penetration into, and integration of, the rural periphery. It therefore does not tolerate competition from local indigenous organizations which stand outside its domain of influence and are centred upon paternalistic and "natural" leadership.

Quite often the government bureaucracies also become carriers or boosters of the incorporative impulses of the urban market complex. As an instance of this, we can mention the vending of manufactured consumer goods by government agencies in rural areas, such as the Consumer Co-operatives in rural areas of the country.

DEVELOPMENT: ANOTHER APPROACH

The overall result of the development efforts in Iran during the last two decades of rapid economic growth was greater underdevelopment (both social and economic) in the rural areas. The main reform strategies served primarily as political instruments to secure control of the countryside. The strategies provided some welfare measures in the form of rudimentary social services, yet these services were unequally distributed, and even then of low quality, inadequate, and irregular.

The failure of the old techno-economic development strategies to bring about any basic change towards an overall and sustained development in the countryside on the one hand, and the persistence of conditions of underdevelopment, poverty, and inequality in the rural areas, calls for alternative approaches to rural development and for a major reconsideration of development thinking in general.

Any new approach to development must include as its major components basic humanistic values such as equality, freedom, and identity. In this view, development must mean above all the all-round development of human personality and the overall qualitative enhancement of the human condition and life. Development also means the development of human beings out of conditions of exploitation, poverty, and oppression. The humanist approach requires strategies with revolutionary implications. The approach ought to consider, as its point of departure, the causes of underdevelopment; i.e., it must begin by a historical analysis of particular social and economic structures of the larger society which incorporates both development and underdevelopment.

The question, and indeed a very proper one, arises here as to where one would begin to look for these causes - at the bottom, or at the top? The answer, once found, will determine where the changes should really take place. Conventional development thinking has placed too much emphasis on the "specific factor" analysis in studying underdevelopment and has focused attention at the bottom rather than the top of the social structure. The result is that today the bulk of such studies provides very little that is relevant to a systematic understanding of underdevelopment.

The rural communities of today are rich and complex realities with multi-dimensional ties to the larger society. The plight of the rural population, therefore, is fundamentally a dialectical phenomenon shaped by the historical development of the economic system and the functioning of institutions and dynamics of the social system of the country at large. Thus an investigation of the situation of rural communities irrespective of their interrelationships in the larger social system is of little analytical value. In other words, the micro-socio-economic analysis of the phenomenon of rural underdevelopment must have as its background a macro-socio-economic understanding of its historical and structural aspects.

Development strategies, therefore, must deal first of all with aspects of the structural constitution of the society at large. For no strategy, no matter how soundly it may be planned, can produce any significant results within an inappropriate structure. The planner thus should begin his/her task by first asking himself/herself "What is the most feasible strategy for development within this specific structure?" This, however, would be at best a reformist approach which is unlikely to produce any effects beyond alleviative ones, and at worst a misleading one. The radical approach, and in our view a more pertinent formulation of the question, would be: "How feasible is this given development goal within this particular structure?" This in turn leads to the fundamental, and policy-wise more effective, question: "What changes in the social and economic structure should take place for this particular development goal to be feasible?"

Such an approach to rural development is particularly relevant to the social framework of post-revolutionary Iran in the light of the major transformations which have taken place in the political, social, and economic structures of the country. An important aspect of this transformation is a marked shift in development thinking towards values such as self-reliance and endogeneity and, at the same time, an emphasis on rural development. A major step in this direction has already been taken, as the "Showra" article has been passed by the Constitutional Assembly. According to this (Article of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran), locally elected showras (councils) constitute the main body of decision-making in local affairs at various village, town, and provincial levels.

A Field Study

With this view in mind, we conducted a field study in 1979 in the three villages of Akkanlo, Chahavand, and Karafs in the Hamadan province in Western Iran.¹³ All three villages are located in remote parts of the province between approximately 85 and 135 kilometres from the provincial centre of Hamadan. The main economic activities in these villages are farming, which is the predominant activity, some handicrafts such as rug-weaving, and animal husbandry. Although some incipient forms of capitalism and commercial farming can be observed in these villages, the populations consist by and large of semi-subsistent small producers and no large-scale commercial farming enterprises exist in these areas.

The objective of this study was to discover how the creative initiatives of the rural population can be mobilized for a self-reliant development, and to explore, together with the villagers, the practical implications of "self-reliance" within the specific socio-economic context of this area in terms of:

1. endogenous institutional facilities and other socio-economic mechanisms;
2. endogenous obstacles and exogenous constraints;

and

3. the role of exogenous support (especially from government sources) as perceived by the villagers.

The specific group selected for this study consists primarily of the small-holder population and the landless poor who form together the most deprived and the most powerless of the rural population. The small-holders constitute about 85 per cent of the landed population with access to no more than 38 per cent of the land, and produce 42 per cent of the area's marketed agricultural production.¹⁴ This group, with average holdings of five hectares per household (minimum size of holdings one hectare and maximum ten hectares), is by far the largest socio-economic group in the villages with relatively uniform interests and value orientations.

The Methodology

The research method we employed for this study was the "participatory approach,"¹⁵ which included the dialogical method in which the outcome of the research is essentially a synthesis produced by the interaction between the "researched" and the "researcher." The reasons for the choice of this particular approach are based on both practical considerations and ideological concerns.

The major practical obstacle to adopting conventional research methods in rural Iran is the unwillingness of the rural population to give information to outsiders.¹⁶ The reason is, of course, intense suspicion and mistrust of outsiders which is itself a very natural consequence of long periods of oppression exerted on the rural areas from the outside. The establishment of interpersonal relationships based on mutual trust and good rapport with the villagers is therefore a necessary step and a precondition for any kind of research in today's rural Iran. In this endeavour what is first of all required of the researcher is his/her ability to convince the villagers of his/her sincerity and concern, and also of the fact that it is they (the villagers) above all who are the

beneficiaries of the research results.

Unlike conventional methods in which the "researched" serve as mere "objects," the participatory approach aims at a more symmetrical distribution of benefits such as "consciousness formation."¹⁷ The approach also calls for an active participation of the population concerned as equal partners in the research. In this process the researcher does not act upon the "researched" to extract information; he/she rather interacts with them and also gives information.

The choice of this approach is also underlain by the general ideological framework of our approach to "development," which we have already defined as the overall development of human personality. This conception stresses the development of a person's consciousness and his/her ability to understand and systematically analyse the forces of the broader reality which shape and determine his/her immediate and more personal predicament. The main concern of the researcher here is not a mere analysis of the situation but, rather, to discover means by which it can be transformed.

With the specific objectives of this study in mind as a general framework, we entered into over 15 dialogues with individual villagers (excerpts from one are reported in the closing part of this presentation), and several group dialogues in the three above-mentioned villages. Most of these dialogues took place rather spontaneously and without being pre-designed. The attempt was to avoid the question/answer format as far as possible and let the interactions evolve naturally. Here we shall present a summary of the findings as we sought, jointly with the villagers in our target group, some of the practical implications of self-reliance in the three villages.

The most chronic of all constraints on self-reliant action for development in the area has been the absence of potentials for organization and collective action. The need for organization, both as a means of representation in the larger society and as a defence mechanism against the outside forces, is felt everywhere. The only form of local organization

which exists in these villages is the boluk - a traditional institution which groups several farms into irrigational units called boluks. In many rural areas in Iran similar institutions function as effective collective-farming units and powerful forms of social organization. The boneh in the central areas of Iran is a prime example of such institutions. The functions of the boluks in the three villages under study, however, are very limited and usually do not extend beyond the regulation of irrigation and minor social action. Although boluk chairmen are often popularly chosen and are not necessarily of a different social stratum from the majority of the population in the village, in these villages the management of the boluks is usually in the hands of village "notables" who are often middle-size farmers, sometimes with holdings that remained intact during the Land Reform in 1962.

This management group consists of medium-holders who have emerged as a distinct stratum in the rural areas of Iran following the Land Reform: a middle stratum of rural population who may have some education, know the "city ways" and, like the khoshneshin entrepreneurs, are urban-oriented and sustained by urban reference groups.¹⁸ In fact, it is this very privilege which the small-holders lack and for which they have to depend on this middle stratum. The rural poor, drawn by the incorporation drive into the money economy, lacking education and commercial knowledge, are forced into an ever-increasing reliance on the middle stratum as their main channel for contact with the outside.

One of the major obstacles to the development of these institutions in this area has been their inability to gain official recognition and support. Although the benefits of co-operative arrangements in rural areas had been realized in the old development trend of the country, the specific forms of co-operatives adopted were highly unsuitable. This is clearly evidenced today by the failure of such attempts in the rural areas. The boluk system, in spite of the above-mentioned administrative shortcomings, has remained up-to-date as an effective popular institution for co-operation and organization of agricultural production in the villages we studied, and in many other areas of the country. With some modifications, and support from government sources, the boluk can evolve

into an effective co-operative organization in the villages. The main advantage of the boluk, in contrast with government institutions, is that it is founded upon popular local bases and is not - and cannot be - treated simply as another branch of bureaucracy.

The value and function of the boluk lie in their potential for development in the form of locally based organizations for collective farming and co-operative development action. There is great scope for such organizational arrangement on the economic side to increase production and income, and in the sharing of expensive implements (e.g., tractors or tubewells, and facilities for marketing, storage, transportation, etc.). On the social and political side, the boluk can function as a powerful social organization for co-ordination of collective social action, political delegation and representation, and uniting the poor against possible exploitation. In psychological terms also the boluk can play an important role in strengthening the collective consciousness and promoting a sense of community and the value of self-reliance among the villagers.

Unquestionably the most important aspects of rural underdevelopment are the economic factors of low productivity and income. Technical deficiency is a major reason for this, but organizational factors are far more important. The size of individual family holdings are usually too small for mechanization on a individual farm basis and agricultural labour is scarce and costly. The alternative would be collective farming and co-operative use of appropriate mechanization techniques and the organization of the agricultural sector so as to retain more labour. Yet all these require organization and effective management. This is precisely where the boluk system can be of immense value to rural development as a deeply-seated endogenous organizational pattern through which the rural population can draw from the benefits of large-scale agriculture, at the same time as developing a sense of self-reliance and identity.

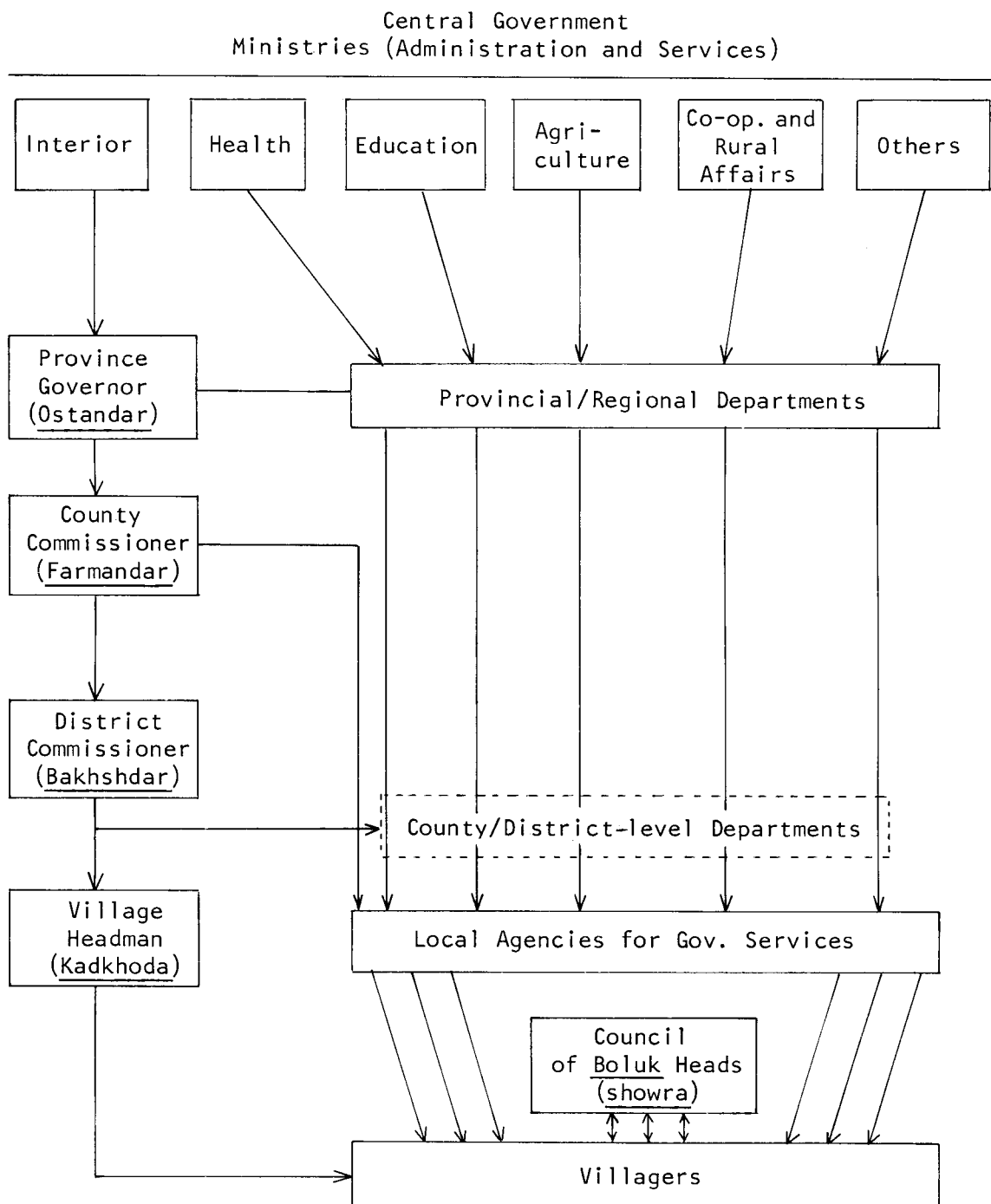
This aim, however, can by no means be realized under the present centralized administrative patterns in rural areas. The pressure from government bureaucracies has so far been too great to allow for such locally based and endogenous organizations to expand and develop their functional poten-

tials. In fact the most salient feature of the Iranian bureaucratic system is its vertical, authoritarian structure which prevents the expression of needs and suggestions by the administered. This, combined with incompetence and inefficiency at lower levels, produced alienating conditions wherein the rural population were left with no means of access to the decision-making levels and were forced into isolation. The villagers, everywhere confronted with unconcerned, incompetent, and irresponsible local officials, were often forced to opt for direct appeal to higher levels for the expression of their needs - not to mention that more often than not the attempt was of no avail. Figure 2 gives a rough visual picture of the pre-revolutionary administrative hierarchy and its extension to rural areas.

As we can see from figure 2, the boluks were entirely excluded from the formal administrative system and the process of decision-making. The little representation on the villagers' side that took place was usually indirect and based on individual initiatives. Sometimes the representation was mediated by influential people who may sometimes have included boluk heads; yet this was usually so in cases when the person involved was urged by private interest to mediate between the villagers and higher levels of the administration in his informal and personal capacity.

"The purpose of society is to serve man." The aim and the very *raison d'être* of "administration" in a society is to organize this responsibility; however, the administrative system in pre-revolutionary Iran was indeed a mechanism of exploitation, repression, and control. These characteristics, coupled with inefficiency and corruption at various levels, created such conditions of overwhelming public dissatisfaction that we can say today with certainty that one of the major forces which gave rise to the massive upheaval of the Iranian masses was this very dissatisfaction with the bureaucratic system of the country. An upheaval which finally in February 1979 caused the precipice of the bureaucratic administration to fall, and with it the entire political system of the country.

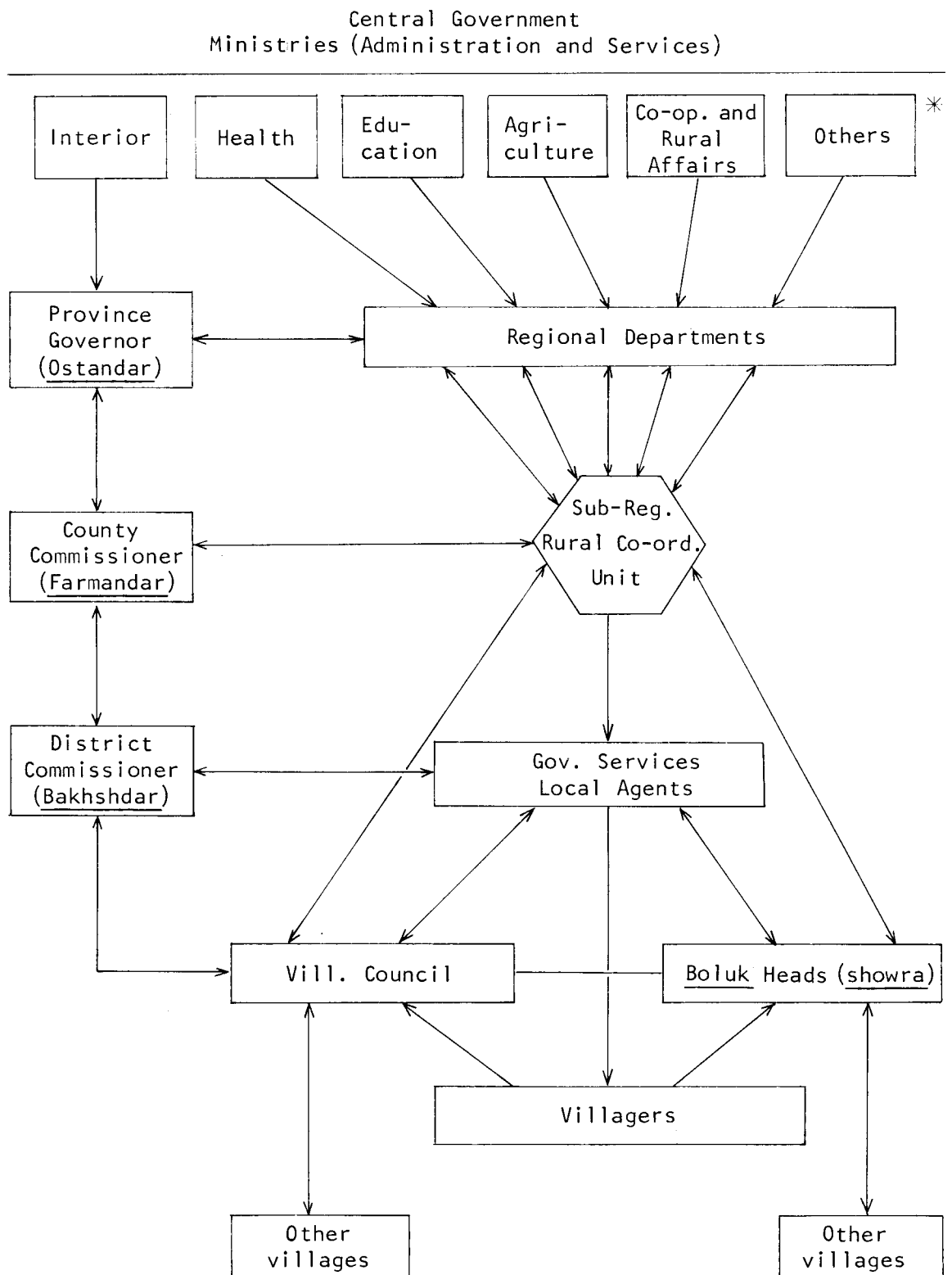
FIG. 2 The Pre-revolutionary Administrative System in Iran



Today, many changes have taken place in government bureaucracies. The need is also felt for an overall reconsideration of the entire system, not only organization-wise but also in terms of its ethos. Such re-organization, we suggest, must follow the guidelines of a democracy and freedom, aiming at the true mission of any such system: that of serving the most needy and the most deprived, that is, the bulk of the rural poor. It must also consider the values of self-reliance and allow for direct and active participation of the rural poor in decisions that affect their lives. The boluk, as a popular and endogenous organizational system, we have reason to believe, has every potential for co-ordinating this process. In terms of local administration, the council of boluk heads (elected from among farmers themselves) can act as the main decision-making body in the villages and a channel for outside relationships. It is also essential that this council (showra) be in direct contact with various government agencies and maintain a "dialogue" with both these agencies and showras of other villages. There still remains another difficulty which is yet to be overcome; that is the problem of maintaining a "dialogue" with several government agencies whose functions are different from one another and which have little or no co-ordination among them. There is, therefore, a need for what the villagers in our study called "a co-ordinating unit" which can relay the decisions of village showras to various government departments, and also co-ordinate the services of government departments in villages (see figure 3). Establishment of such "units" at regional or sub-regional levels, staffed with well-trained and committed personnel, would greatly facilitate a direct communication between the villagers and the government.¹⁹

The role of the government in this new arrangement is simply an executive one. The representation from the rural areas must also take place at the legislative level. This, however, requires the active participation of the rural population in the political processes of the country which can only be promoted by educative and consciousness-raising efforts. What we have suggested here is simply an alternative organizational model for rural administration and development, one which appears as most suitable in our view and in the eyes of the villagers in our study area. The model is by no means a complete one in structural terms. It is simply a practical

FIG. 3 The Recommended Model for Post-revolutionary Rural Administration and Development Planning



* Here only some of the ministries with extensions in rural areas have been mentioned.

step. Since the February 1979 revolution in Iran, in which the structural obstacles to development of rural areas were removed by the masses themselves, the rural poor have already taken a long leap forward into great self-realization and have come to a clear consciousness of their own potentials and powers. Our role as researchers here has been one of a catalyst to help the villagers develop an awareness of their constructive potentialities and possibilities for a free and self-reliant life.

In the concluding section of this report we shall present excerpts from a dialogue with one of the farmers in the village of Ghahavand. We hope that the account illustrates the process of unfolding and expanding of consciousness as a synthesis of the coming together of two personalities.

A DIALOGUE

- There is something that I've been meaning to ask you, and that's your age. How old are you anyway?
- Oh, about 60... 65? In the beginning of the Pahlavi²⁰ period I was a young boy. I remember when I was still a child, one day my grandfather ... God bless him ... such a good man he was...told me that my generation was an unfortunate one: we had been born in bad times, a time with a dark future.
- I suppose your grandfather wasn't wrong after all, I mean, considering the unbearable conditions which dominated the village life in those days.
- Well, it wasn't just "those days"; it was always the same way. Villagers have always lived under harsh conditions - from the early days of tribute-paying right through this very day, it has always been a misfortune to be born in a village. For example for myself, be it in the landlord days or today, there has not been one single happy day. Hard work, harsh life and no gains. I've been flogged too - by the landlord, when I was a young boy.
- And it wasn't just the landlord either, was it? The government officials, especially the gendarmes, had a lot to do with it too.
- Let me tell you just one thing about the gendarmes: there used to be an old man in our village who immediately fainted upon the sight of one [gendarme].
- Did you ever try to do anything about it? In the way of protest or group action?
- Nothing, not one single thing. We were so afraid that even the thought of such a thing would frighten us to death. To be honest, even today the thought makes me shiver. This is perhaps one of the reasons for my being baffled when you talk of - what do you call it - self-reliance?

Or internal organization.²¹ You see, for ages we have been told that we cannot stand on our own feet. We've always had to rely on others for help.

- I realize that, and I believe this is the main source of your fear of the outsiders and government agents. I myself have had many experiences of instances when I couldn't have a heart-to-heart talk with villagers because they had taken me for a government agent.
- Sure, and you shouldn't expect them to act otherwise. The kind of things we are talking about could have meant deep trouble just a few months ago [before the revolution]. Even today many dare not talk about these things with strangers. Like the old saying has it, "once bitten by a snake, you are scared of a black-and-white rope." Memories of bad experiences stay with you for a long time. Considering that we haven't benefited much from "outsiders," it's natural for us not to be very friendly.
- You mean all of them?
- Well, yes ... more or less all of them. You see, you have to consider the fact that the kinds of outsiders we get here are very few, like government agents, buyers from local towns, and some people from the Health and Education Corps [sepahi]. Some of the sepahis are good people; but as soon as they get here, they try to get transferred to some other place.
- How about researchers? Do you ever get people coming here to do research?
- I've seen a few. I suppose [they were] from some university or some government office.
- I don't suppose you knew what they were doing research on? Do you?
- I remember they asked lots of questions about the village and ourselves. What is meant by this "research" anyway?
- Well, I can't say for sure. It depends. The purpose of research is usually to learn more about you and the way you live, and to understand your problems. Someone may also be trying to find ways to help you with your problems. As I said, it just depends. There is one thing I know: that villagers usually don't like them [researchers].
- Tell me, would you like someone to come to you and ask you all about your life and how much you make or how many hectares of land you have

when you don't know the person?

- No, of course not.
- I know, when you ask villagers this kind of question they immediately take you for a tax collector, or they think you might take something away from them. This is of course when they are poor. But I don't think rich people would like it either.
- The problem usually is that you don't know what they [the researchers] are doing.
- That's true, they just write things down and leave; and we never hear from them again.
- Speaking of financial matters, I think the crop was much better this year; better yields?
- Well, better or worse, it doesn't make that much difference. You don't make much on this kind of crop [wheat].
- I wonder if the little he's kept for himself is going to last him through the year?
- Lots of villagers do that. When the government buys the wheat, they usually keep a lot for themselves; but later on they sell it to the free market - that is if it is not already pre-sold.
- I understand that the free market price is a few rials higher.²² But what are they going to do for the rest of the year?
- Sometimes they can buy flour from the government if they [villagers] can get a hold of it [flour at subsidy price]. Very often they have to buy it from the market.
- At double the prices they sell themselves, of course.
- That's how they make money in the town.
- Well, isn't this a problem? For the villagers I mean. Why don't they think in advance and keep enough for themselves?
- There are various reasons for this. Sometimes they are so loaded with debts that they have no other choice.
- And sometimes storage is a problem too. Am I right?
- Definitely! But despite all these, some people would sell out regardless.
- That's interesting. How do you mean?
- How can I put it? When you finish harvesting... you get something in your head which tells you to sell. Like there is something in the air. And when you get the offer, you just can't resist. It's a funny thing.

All farmers are the same way.

- The urge is of course quite costly at the same time! Why shouldn't you be able to sell at a better time when the price is higher? I suppose then you run into the problem of storage. Can't you do anything about it? At least to be able to keep enough for yourselves?
- Well, we have to have someone to get us together and show us how to do these things.
- You already know the problem and you know the solution too. Why can't you do something yourselves? Especially now that I think you can even get some help from the government for this kind of thing. Once you put your efforts together, you can also take care of your other problems.
- I don't think we really can do this. Of course we would still need some help.
- I am sure once you make up your minds and come up with a definite plan, there will be lots of people who are willing to help. I'll be one myself.
- Yes, I think with some government support we can get lots of things done. Especially with the new government it will be a lot easier.
- I think so too. I believe now the government is willing to help. But you must begin first.
- Yes, we have to see. Of course, we have so many problems. We have a thousand and one miseries. We have to see ...

NOTES

1. For a complete account of such "visions" see M.R. Pahlavi, The Great Civilization, and Mission For My Country. Both books, written by the now dethroned monarch, are available in English, French, and Italian. The old Persian Empire began with Cyrus the Great just over 2,500 years ago.
2. For a more general historical study of these institutional patterns see M.H. Haeri et al., "Traditional Rural Institutions and Their Implications for Development Planning" (UN University GPID research paper, 1980).
3. Based on 1972 constant prices.
4. From \$160 in 1967 to \$1,600 in 1977.
5. In 1967 oil production constituted only 13.8 per cent of the GNP. In 1977, however, over 50 per cent of the GNP was derived from oil.
6. E. Adjami et al, "The Third Strategy: Reconstruction of the peasant agriculture and renovation of commercial units in Iran 1978" (unpublished article presented to the symposium on the Iranian Agricultural Policy, Shiraz University, May 1978).
7. Such misallocation of resources, which in effect represents a very distorted view of national priorities, is clearly evidenced by the appropriation of the government funds as scheduled in the Fifth Development Plan (1972-1977): from the US\$82,109 million total government funds, over 31 per cent was allocated for defence, 6 per cent for agriculture, 8.8 for education, 3.7 per cent for health. The share of rural development programmes was slightly over 1 per cent while 3.6 per cent was allocated for "internal security"! See Fifth Development Plan (rev. ed.), The Plan and Budget Organization, Teheran, July 1974.
8. W. Haque, N. Mehta, A. Rahman, and P. Wignaraja: "Towards a Theory of Rural Development," Development Dialogue, (1977), p. 11.
9. For an elaboration of the concept see D.L. Johnson, "On Oppressed Classes," in Dependence and Underdevelopment in Latin America (Anchor Books, N.Y., 1972), pp. 274 - 301.

10. See also A. Pearse, "Metropolis and Peasant: The Expansion of the Urban Industrial Complex and the Changing Rural Structure" (1968), in T. Shanin, Peasants and Peasant Societies (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, UK, 1971), pp. 69 - 80.
11. For an amply documented account of the Iranian Land Reform see A.K.S. Lambton, The Persian Land Reform (Oxford University Press, London, 1969).
12. S.H. Franklin, European Peasantry: The Final Phase (Methuen, London, 1969), p. 49.
13. We chose these specific villages because the author had already had previous contact with them, which greatly facilitated the establishment of good rapport with the villagers.
14. Figures are based on estimates given by villagers themselves.
15. For an elaboration of the concept see Anisur Rahman, "Research on Participation of the Poor in Development," Working Paper No. 10, World Employment Research Programme, ILO Geneva, December 1978.
16. For a discussion of this see M.H. Haeri, "Dialectical Transformation: A Study of 'Dialogue' as a Method for Research and Development in a Rural Milieu" (UN University GPID research paper, 1980).
17. The idea of "research" as a "process of consciousness formation" is developed in Johan Galtung, Methodology and Ideology, vol 1 (Copenhagen, 1977), p. 241.
18. This situation may be exceptional since our earlier research had shown most boluk chairmen to be illiterate, although in some cases they are among the new rural élite who take up rather powerful additional roles such as managers of rural consumer co-operatives, etc.
19. In future studies we shall present the model to other villages for further evaluation.
20. The Pahlavi dynasty, which came to power after the 1921 coup d'état.
21. Reference here is to other parts of the dialogue which are not reported here.
22. US\$1.00 = 70.0 Rials at the official exchange rate.