

Effects of Decentralization through Establishment of New Provinces on Rural Development: A case study: Qazvin Province, Iran

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Abstract: This research aimed to evaluate the effects of decentralization through the establishment of new provinces on rural development in Iran. In this study, quantitative and qualitative data associated with the new established Qazvin province, as a case study, was used. Regarding quantitative data, we used statistical documents published by Iranian Statistics Center, and for qualitative data a questionnaire was prepared that mainly focused on the economic, social and physical dimensions. The scale used was based on a 5-point Likert-type scale in the shape of Retrospective Panel Design (RPD) using measurements undertaken regarding the effects of the new province on rural areas before and after the its establishment. This survey questionnaire was distributed to 450 households in 45 villages in the study area, and the collected data was analyzed using the Wilcoxon test in the SPSS software. The results show that decentralization through the establishment of this new province significantly has affected a number of economic, social and physical indicators in both rural settlements and rural households. However, it seems that the model and aspect of decentralization that has been implemented in this case is, in reality, deconcentration.

[Mehdi Pourtaheri, AbdolrezaEftekhari, Hassan Ahmadi, Zahra Ahmadipour, Valiolah Nazari. **Effects of Decentralization through Establishment of New Provinces on Rural Development: A case study: Qazvin Province, Iran.** *Life Sci J* 2013;10(3s):86-97] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 12

Keywords: decentralization; rural development; Qazvin province; rural development

Introduction

Over the past two decades decentralization has become one of the broadest movements, and most debated policy issues throughout both developing and developed world (Faguet & Sa' nchez, 2008). However, there is still little research in the literature on the effects of decentralization particularly on rural areas. The recent literature has not reached consensus on the overall effect of decentralization in developing and transition countries. One strand of the theoretical literature argues that benefits of decentralization outweigh the associated costs; whereas the other strand argues for the opposite (Enikolopov & Zhuravskaya, 2007). It seems that the effects of decentralization are too complex to assess, and different to capture by a set of empirical measures. This may be related to four reasons. First, decentralization has several distinct aspects, e.g. decentralization can be classified into three aspects including political, fiscal and administrative (Iimi, 2005). Second, there are three main models for decentralization: deconcentration, delegation and devolution (Mayhew, 2003). Third, decentralization has two distinct dimensions: the vertical dispersion of power between the top level of government and the

lower levels, and the horizontal dispersion of power among individuals at the lower-level of government (Stansel, 2007). Fourth, the form of decentralization projects are various (Table 1) and each developing country has implemented a specific form of decentralization (Benjamin, 2008). Considering the above mentioned reasons, decentralization is naturally a complicated phenomenon, and is characterized by various aspects at different countries.

Case studies reported in different countries show that decentralization can improve the capacity of provincial administrators, improve the access of people in neglected rural areas to central government resources, increase pro-poor program benefits, enhance the responsiveness of government, improve the satisfaction with government and local services, improve capacity building in local government, decrease the level of regional inequality, increase political participation, empowerment and social development, and increase economic efficiency (Faguet, 2004; Neyapti, 2010; Poteete & Ribot, 2011; Iimi, 2005; Bossert & Mitchell, 2011; Stansel, 2007). On the contrary, some of the researchers believe that decentralization will likely depress growth and rural livelihoods, fail to poverty alleviation and improve

access of the poor to natural resources (Faguet & Sa' nchez, 2008; Tacconi, 2007). So, in this sense, decentralization becomes “part of the problem of rural poverty, not part of its solution”. Considering the above literature, it seems that there are two viewpoints about the effects of decentralization on rural development; the viewpoint that (i) advocates

and (ii) skeptics (Figure 1). In the first approach, decentralization is advocated as a remedy for rural sustainable development, while in the second approach, decentralization is a complex, problematic phenomenon that may ultimately have negative effects on rural areas.

Table 1. Various programs and projects of decentralization in different countries

Forms of decentralization	Researcher/ Author	country
The change in resource flows and political power	(Faguet, 2004)	Bolivia
The White Paper Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalizing the English Regions	(Pearce, Ayres & Tricker, 2005)	England
The new Movimien to Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) and the Law of Popular Participation	(Faguet & Sa' nchez, 2008)	Colombia
The Natural Resource Management program for wildlife management	(Poteete & Ribot, 2011)	Botswana
The forestry management	(Poteete & Ribot, 2011)	Senegal
The decentralization in the health care sector	(Mosca, 2006)	Italy, Spain
The natural resources management (NRM)	(Benjamin, 2008)	Mali
The natural resources management (NRM)	(Larson, 2002)	Nicaragua
The Health sector decentralization	(Bossert & Mitchell, 2011)	Pakistan
The fundamental economic and institutional reforms	(Francis & James, 2003)	Uganda
Effective delivery of health services	(Liu, Martineau, Chen,2006)	China
Parks and Peoples' Program (PPP)	(Agrawal& Gupta, 2005)	Nepal's Terai region

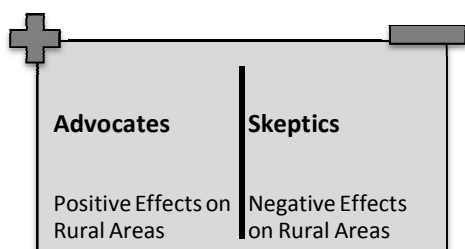


Figure 1. Different viewpoints to effects of decentralization on rural development

Much research has treated decentralization—in any of its forms—as a “best practice,” uniformly expected to result in positive effects (Richardson et al, 2002). If we accept the judgment that “while decentralization is no panacea, it has many virtues and is worth pursuing,”(Faguet& Sa' nchez, 2008), then there seems to be significant expectations that decentralization leads to increase government responsiveness to local needs particularly in rural areas, a point noted by Rondinelli et al (1983) and Faguet (2004).During the last two decades in Iran, the establishment of new provinces has been a striking factor for conducting the decentralization policy. The implementation of this policy through the formation of new provinces provides a research context in which the effect of this policy on rural development is investigated. In this study, the effect of this policy on

rural development is pursued through a case study of the Qazvin province newly formed. The Government has maintained a relatively uniform approach to development policy in urban and rural settlements across Iran through establishment of the new provinces. Thus, while acknowledging diversity, an investigation in any province is able to offer insights that are relevant elsewhere. To assess the effects of decentralization on rural areas in Iran this study aims to address the following questions:

What are the most important aspect and model of decentralization in Iran?

What are the economic, social and physical effects of decentralization on rural areas through establishment of new provinces?

In this regard, we examine clearly and convincingly that how decentralization policy changes different dimensions of rural settlements and the extent to which these changes are related to objective measures of local needs. Thus, the major objective of the current study is to find an answer to the question of whether decentralization through the establishment of Qazvin province has a significant role in economic, social and physical development of its rural areas. Although the establishment of new districts and new provinces apparently made almost no provision to ensure that new government policies are adjusted to local circumstances and meet the aspirations of the

people..(Australian National University, 2005). In this research, in order to study the relationship between decentralization and rural development, an analysis framework is developed, as presented in Fig. 2.

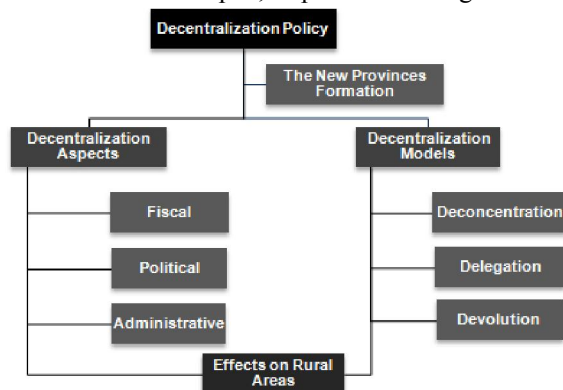


Fig 2: Framework to analyze the relationship among decentralization and rural development

Decentralization, bottom-up approaches and rural development

Throughout the world and in much of the models of rural development, governments have played – and continue to play – significant role for sustainable rural development in various ways and in different rural spaces (Cheshire et al, 2007; Clout, 2007). But, rural development programs over the last few decades have not been able to achieve much due to the centralized decision making of government, the lack of focus on local capacity and also the distance of such places from the centers of economic and political power (Jentsch, 2009). Therefore, during the second half of the nineteenth century local government was progressively reformed and collectivism gradually superseded individualism (Cherry & Rogers, 2005). Following that, a shift has been suggested in policy direction for the future well-being of rural areas (Cheshire, 2006). The key element of this shift has been the decentralization of policy administration and the implementation of local and regional policies. So, there has been a trend towards shifting increasing responsibility for rural planning and management from central government to local and regional government (Clayton et al, 2003). Local government is a key player in rural policy delivery and recent policy debate, and since 1997 it has focused on how to enhance its effectiveness, by bringing local government ‘closer to people’ (Gallent et al, 2008). The provision of local and regional programs through decentralization schemes has certainly allowed more flexible solutions regarding rural poverty to be developed; the solutions that are able to meet specific needs of different groups of poor people in particular rural places (Milbourne, 2004). In this regard, throughout both developing and developed

world there remains a vast array of policies aimed at regenerating rural areas through decentralization programs (Robinson, 2008). In fact, decentralization appears to offer a locus for integrated rural development and the potential for downsizing a central government and promoting good governance (Clayton et al, 2003). Therefore, the establishment and maintenance of good governance or “appropriate decision-making arrangements” is the only feasible way to prevent the failure (or to ensure the success) of rural sustainable development. Especially with decentralization, local communities are expected to assume greater responsibility for community development (Rashidpour et al, 2011). The decentralization policy is defined as the devolution of specific functions by central government, with all the administrative, political, and economic attributes that these entail, to local governments which are independent of the center within a legally delimited geographic and functional domain (Faguet & Sa’nchez, 2008). Since the 1980s, decentralization has been promoted as a solution to many of the problems of administration and governance constraining local and national development, as well as a means of improving performance in poverty reduction (Francis & James, 2003). Decentralization towards regions and localities with the transfer of power from central government to lower levels sometimes involves community “empowerment” efforts in order to better meet the local needs and conditions found in rural areas and tap local knowledge and other resources (OECD, 2003; Benjamin, 2008). This policy is thus considered to be a cornerstone of good governance both in promoting local accountability and transparency, and enfranchising local populations (Cheshire et al, 2007). Decentralization is a prerequisite if local and regional planning is to be really effective. At the same time, it aims to decentralize decision-making powers to the poor in order to shift poverty reduction planning from ‘traditional top-down to participatory bottom-up’ (Long et al, 2010). Bottom-up approaches are considered to be more democratic, closer to the people and, therefore, to be more legitimate than either traditional top-down (Cheshire et al, 2007). Decentralization can be classified into deconcentration, delegation and devolution models. Deconcentration involves a shift of power from central offices to peripheral offices of the same administrative structure or a transfer of activities within the structure of governance to local outposts without ceding power. Administrative decentralization has often been tried in response to the failure of centrally controlled rural development and service provision (Clayton et al, 2003). Delegation involves a shift of authority and responsibility from center to

semi-autonomous agencies. Finally, devolution shifts responsibility and authority from central offices to separate administrative structures within the public administration (Mayhew, 2003).

Decentralization, new provinces and rural development in Iran

Iran with the eighteenth largest land mass and seventeenth largest population in the world is a country of great history and diversity. During the past five decades of planning in Iran, rural development has led to better living condition for villagers. But the important point is that the change is not very significant and there is a long way to go for achieving the best results of cooperation, participation and local community development (Asian Productivity Organization, 2004). Projects of rural development have been designed and prepared through government agencies with the least or lack of participation of rural people. Now, with the limited oil revenue in the future, with the necessity for more decentralization and privatization; people's participation is very critical to the whole process of rural development.

To effectively manage this wide country, Iran is currently subdivided into provincial divisions, which are called "ostān" in Persian. It has currently thirty-one provinces and each is governed from their capital, which is usually the largest local city. Each capital is called the "markaz" of that province. Every province is led by a Governor-General or "ostāndār", who is appointed by the Minister of the Interior subject to the cabinet approval. Each province is further subdivided into sub-province or "shahrestān", and each sub-province is then subdivided into districts or "bakhsh". Each district is further subdivided into sub-district or "dehestān" Fig 3. Each province consists of few cities or "shahr" and some villages or "Abadi" / "Rusta". According to the Statistical Center of Iran, as of the end of Iranian Calendar year 2009, Iran has 31 provinces, 324 sub-provinces, 865 districts, and 2378 sub-districts (Farmanesh, 2009).

Table 2. Local Governance System in Iran

Level	Local Name
National	Iran
Province	Ostān
Sub-province / Township	Shahrestān
District	Bakhsh
Sub-district	Dehestān
Village	Abadi / Rusta

Until 1950, Iran was divided into twelve provinces. In 1950, Iran was reorganized into ten provinces with subordinate governors. From 1960 to 1981 the governors were raised to provincial status one by one. Since then several new provinces have

been created. At present, Iran's territory consists of 31 provinces at the national level with an almost centralized system. During the last three decades, four rounds of five-year plans have been passed through the Iran parliament and implemented by the central government. One of the main justifications for the introduction of the five-year plans has been to ensure a process of regionally balanced and socially equitable development in Iran (Sepehrdoust, 2009; Alipour & Allahyari, 2010). In Iran 22.23 million people living in villages are directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture to survive. Most of these people are living under the poverty line. The Iranian rural economy is still dominated by agricultural activities, which accounts for 27% of GDP, 22.9% of employment opportunities, 82% of food supply and 35% of non-oil exports, plus considerable raw materials for industrial use. These figures show that rural economy has an important role in national economy (Kalantari et al, 2008). It seems that the rate of change in rural communities in Iran has been significant in recent decades. According to the 2006 census, 38 percent of the population in Iran was living in rural areas. Over the previous 44 years, the urban population has increased 6.1 times while the rural population has grown only 1.8 times. In 2006, the number of rural settlements was 68,000, of which 31,765 had a population of less than 100, with limited economic power and low access to welfare services. The number of villages with a large population is growing and low populated villages are decreasing. Rural development problems include shortage or lack of job opportunities, economic insecurity, low quality of housing, poor welfare conditions and lack of suitable conditions for financial investment in various sectors. The main goals of rural development are the extension of social justice and distribution of the benefits of economic growth among the rural people in order to provide a high standard of living. Objectives set to achieve these goals in the third five-year plan include equipping all villages with electric power, increasing the number of villages with potable water to 70 percent (from 47 percent), and increasing the number of villages with sewerage. (Asian Productivity Organization, 2004). However, as outlined earlier, changes from the 1990s largely as a result of economic adjustment and privatization in development plans have been characterized as a transition from government to governance with a range of local actors involved in making and implementing decisions at a more local and regional level. A planned strategy towards decentralization in five-year plans has been the establishment of new provinces. The implementation of this policy in recent years has led to aspirations for further transformation from the centralized system to decentralization. As a

proof, the Iranian government has established eight new provinces during 1990-2010 (Fig 4).

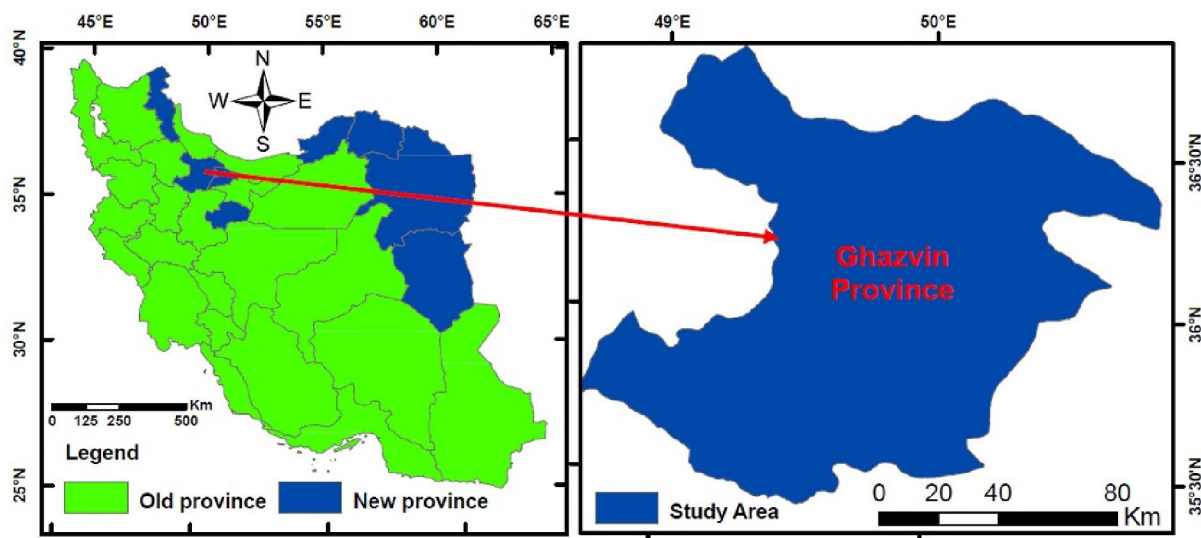


Fig 4: Spatial distribution of new provinces from 1990 to 2010 in Iran

The decentralization policy through administrative and political changes in a provincial level leads to the relocation of central government functions to local communities so that greater responsibility is given to individuals, firms, community groups and local authorities. Implementing such a policy through the establishment of new provinces has direct impacts on rural areas and improves economic, social and physical aspects of rural people's life in different ways. Policy-makers points out that the establishment of new provinces can play a pivotal role in assisting local authorities to speed up rural development. The Qazvin province is a good example for assessing the impacts of a new established province on rural development in Iran. The Qazvin province has been formed more than one decade ago and as a result many changes have been seen in the structure and processes of administrative and political divisions. Following long-term confusion and conflict Gazvine was affiliated to the Zanjan province in 1996 (Susuki,

2011). In this year, the Qazvin region became independent from the Zanjan province, and on the Gazvin province was established following the Islamic Council Majlis (i.e.Parliament) approval. The Gazvin province with an area of 15568 Km² is located in the north of Iran. It consists of mainly the plain in the south and the mountainous terrain in the north, with an altitude ranging from 500m to 4000m. The province has a diverse climate from desert, semi-desert, moderate to cold mountainous with the average temperature of 24 C and the average annual rainfall of 240 mm. Based on the last census undertaken in this region, 70 percent of villages are in the plain and 30 percent are in mountains. According to the new divisional structure, the Qazvin province has 5 sub-provinces, 19 districts, 46 sub-districts, 25 cities and 898 villages. Based on the census undertaken in 2006 the population in this province was 977,710 of which 35 percent were rural population. Table 2

Table2:Spatial distribution of new provinces from 1990 to 2010 in Iran

Sub-province	Date of establishment	Area (km ²)	District	Sub-district	Village	Total population	Rural population
Abyek	2001	1318	2	5	89	87905	40767
Alborz	2004	416	2	4	28	131027	50856
Buin Zahra	1996	5673	6	14	248	148670	96232
Takestan	1980	2591	4	9	131	156554	67125
Qazvin	1937	5570	5	14	402	453554	110223
Total Province	1996	15568	19	46	898	977710	365203

Study Methodology

This investigation was designed to further understand the effects of decentralization through the establishment of new provinces on rural development. In this research, the Qazvin province was selected as the case study. To do this, quantitative and qualitative data were used. Quantitative data consisted of statistical documents published by Iranian Statistics Center. These data were obtained from population and housing censuses collected in three time periods (i.e. 1986, 1996 and 2006) and agriculture censuses collected in three periods (i.e. 1983, 1993 and 2003). Regarding qualitative data, a questionnaire was designed and distributed to 450 households in 45 villages in the study area. Considering information sources in this research, objective indicators and subjective indicators (i.e. subjective judgments) in the rural areas were analyzed. In the objective approach, the focus is on measuring 'hard' facts that are constructed through information collected by observing reality, such as rural settlements percentage with access to asphalt road. In contrast, the subjective approach considers 'soft' matters that are formed through

information collected from individuals. The information is concerned with individual opinions, feelings, perceptions and attitudes; such as sense of belonging to rural settlements (Veenhoven, 2002; Maggino & Ruviglioni, 2008).

A field survey was undertaken over 4 weekson March 2011 and the data were collected from 450 rural households distributed in45 villages. At the end,450 valid responses were obtained by applying a systematic random sampling technique. In the collected data, the sex of respondents was dominated by 60% in favor of men; and the mean age was around 40 years old. The respondents have been approached before and after establishing the Qazvin province. The designed questions were mainly focused on the economic, social and physical dimensions of rural development, according to the research objectives. The scale used in this research was developed with 7 economic items, 7 social items and 7 physical items on a 5-point Likert-type scale in the shape of Retrospective Panel Design (RPD).As illustrated in Figure 5, the RPD approach is to measure outcomes before the intervention and compare them with outcomes measured afterward.

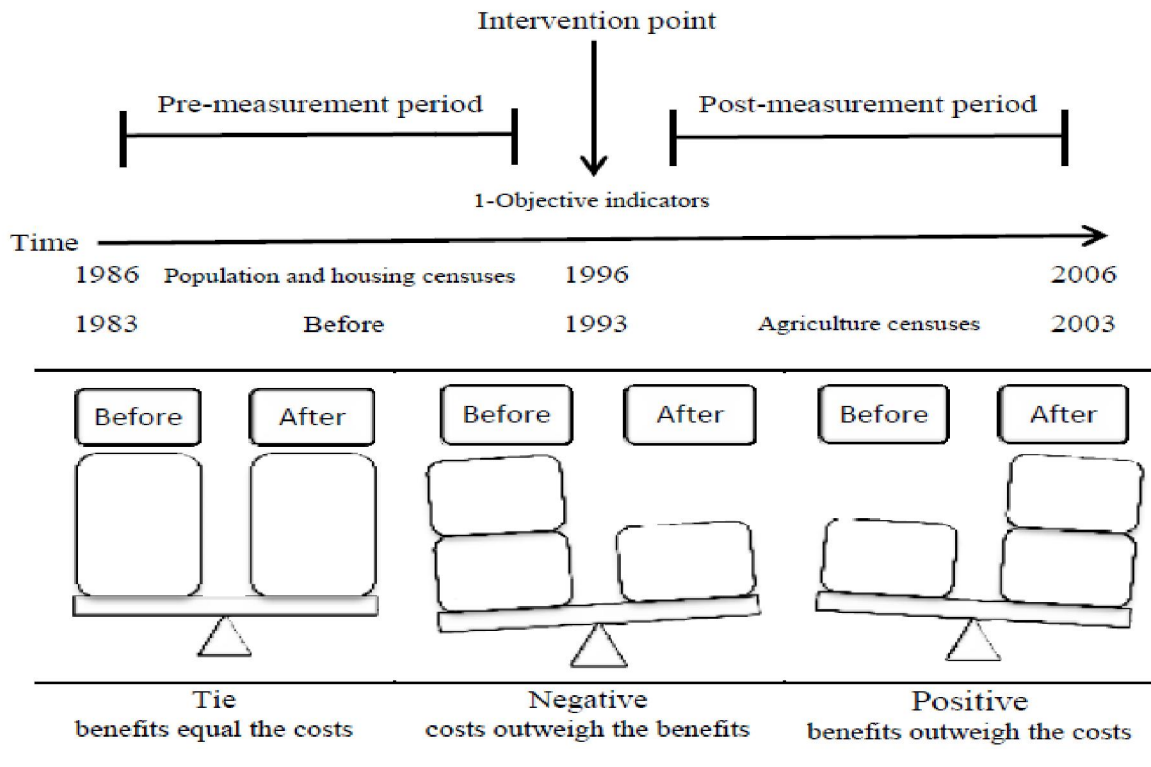


Figure 5. Statistical documents (1) and attitudes (2) about effects of the establishment of new provinces on rural development

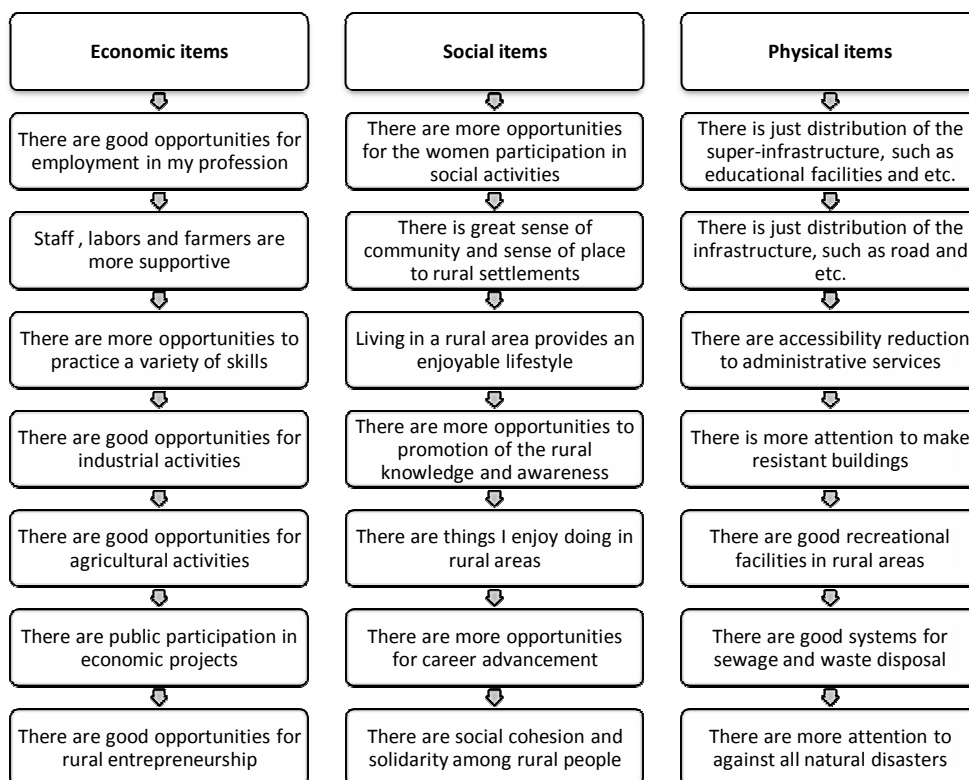


Fig 6. Research questions based on Likert-type scale

The questions designed in the questionnaire are presented in Figure 6. The selection of these items was based on previous researches and the literature review. Reliability based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the final scale resulted in a robust value (i.e. 0.765, 0.865 and 0.839 for each item). Reliability, as computed through Cronbach's alpha, was high. The Data obtained from questionnaires were analyzed using the Wilcoxon test in the SPSS software. This test takes into account the magnitude of differences between two paired variables. The output includes a ranking table, showing, for each pair, the number of valid cases, positive and negative differences, their respective mean and the sum of ranks, and the number of ties.

Findings and results:

These findings can be used as objective and subjective indicators in economic, social and physical fields.

Analysis of objective indicators

Based on the results obtained a number of objective indicators show positive growth and poverty reduction in rural settlements following the establishment of the Qazvin province (Table 3). For example, access to asphalt road has increased from 26.3 % in 1986 to 28.4% in 1996 and to 63% in 2006. Adequate access to asphalt road has helped decrease the costs in a number of ways, from obtaining inputs

to transporting goods to market, to finding buyers. Also, after the establishment of Qazvin province, safeguarding and improving the health status of individuals and families received higher priorities. In this regard, efforts were made to enhance the delivery system and to improve the scope and quality of health care. Since the establishment of the Qazvin province, medical and health care services were expanded and improved in order to enhance the health and quality of life of rural population. For instance, a significant increase has been experienced in the rural settlements in terms of access to rural clinics; an increase from 45.3% in 1983 to 55.5% in 1996 and to 75.7% in 2006. Similar achievements have been seen in the rural settlements regarding access to electricity, safe water, telephone, ICT, physical design, high school, concrete and metal housing and etc. The establishment of the Qazvin province has had an important influence in providing fund for agricultural productions. In addition, considerable shifts have been noted with regards to total arable lands, agricultural production, the number of rural households with agricultural activities, the area of irrigated agriculture, the area of gardens and the number of agricultural machineries (i.e. tractor and combine) following the establishment of the

Qazvin province. For example, the mean area of arable lands has increased from 169188

hectares in 1986 to 133208 in 1996 and reached 155265 hectares in 2006. The agricultural production

has risen from 1,854,196 tons in 1983 to 2,652,456 tons in 1993 and reached 3,803,685 tons in 2003.

Table 3: Change trend of objective indicators in before and after the establishment of Qazvin province

Indicators	1986 (Before)	1996	2006 (After)
% Rural residential units with access to concrete and steel housing	1.4	4.0	12.5
% Rural settlements with access to physical design	6.41	24.6	77.0
% Rural settlements with access to asphalt road	26.3	28.4	63.0
% Rural settlements with access to electricity	25.4	84.2	90.0
% Rural settlements with access to drinking water	11	28	71
% Rural settlements with access to ICT	0	4.5	22.2
% Rural settlements with access to telephone	8.0	22.1	66.8
% Rural settlements with access to high school	3	12	15
% Rural settlements with access to rural medical practice	45.3	55.5	75.7
% Literacy	55	73	78
% Unemployed	13	12	9
	1983 (Before)	1993	2003 (After)
Area of arable lands (hectares)	169188	133208	155265
Irrigated agriculture (hectares)	87815	84276	99926
Agriculture production (tonnage)	18548196	2652456	3803685
Households with agricultural activities	65172	66259	80415
Area of gardens	24393	20625	31768
Number of tractors	3348	3714	4530
Number of combines	73	53	72
Number of companies with agriculture activities	89	139	219

Analysis of subjective indicators

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for the whole items. As seen, the difference between the figures obtained before and the after the intervention shows a significance change in subjective indicators. Respondents gave the series a low rating of 2.2 out of 5 before the establishment of the new province and a high rating of 3.4 after the establishment of province. The lowest ratings were for the more attention to against all natural disasters and just distribution of the super-infrastructure in before period and the

highest change in the respondents' attitudes before and after the establishment of Qazvin province was observed in their responses to the item which addressed the issue of 'taking appropriate actions against natural disasters (from 1.98 to 3.95).

The results show that all of respondents admit that their economic, social and physical conditions have significantly improved after the establishment of the Qazvin province. However, it seems that the intervention has had more impacts on physical conditions than economic and social ones.

Table 4. Frequencies, average values and median of the indicators

In your viewpoint how much the establishment of the Qazvin province has influenced the following items? from 1 = very low to 5= very much														
Items	Before the establishment of Qazvin province							After the establishment of Qazvin province						
	1	2	3	4	5	Ave.	Med	1	2	3	4	5	Ave.	Med
Economic														
There are good opportunities for employment in my profession	67	141	152	22	18	2.45	2	6	26	110	142	116	3.84	4
Staff, labors and farmers are more supportive	94	155	125	26	0	2.20	2	3	17	107	129	144	3.98	4
There are more opportunities to practice a variety of skills	85	146	93	49	27	2.46	2	3	39	131	111	116	3.74	4
There are good opportunities for industrial activities	54	133	169	35	9	2.53	3	4	32	161	132	71	3.58	4
There are good opportunities for agricultural activities	120	134	111	22	13	2.18	2	4	107	181	63	45	3.1	3
There are public participation in economic projects	134	133	106	18	9	2.08	2	2	9	141	230	18	3.63	4
There are good opportunities for	112	151	107	26	4	2.14	2	6	48	192	78	76	3.42	3

rural entrepreneurship						2.29	2						3.61	4
Social														
There are more opportunities for the women participation in social activities	125	119	107	40	9	2.22	2	3	59	280	22	36	3.07	3
There is great sense of community and sense of place to rural settlements	117	124	105	36	18	2.28	2	2	25	228	127	18	3.33	3
Living in a rural area provides an enjoyable lifestyle	115	147	107	22	9	2.15	2	2	18	345	35	0	3.03	3
There are more opportunities to promotion of the rural knowledge and awareness	148	137	88	18	9	2.00	2	6	13	354	27	0	3.00	3
There are things I enjoy doing in rural areas	116	142	106	27	9	2.17	2	4	66	248	34	48	3.14	3
There are more opportunities for career advancement	89	142	142	18	9	2.29	2	2	4	223	163	8	3.43	3
There are social cohesion and solidarity among rural people	49	159	174	9	9	2.42	2	2	27	222	74	75	3.48	3
						2.22	2						3.21	3
Physical														
There is just distribution of the super-infrastructure, such as educational facilities and etc.	120	164	116	0	0	1.99	2	4	20	286	81	9	3.18	3
There is just distribution of the infrastructure, such as road and etc.	52	233	97	18	0	2.20	2	2	18	306	66	8	3.15	3
There are accessibility reduction to administrative services	129	146	107	18	0	2.03	2	3	9	261	64	63	3.43	3
There is more attention to make resistant buildings	105	143	127	18	9	2.22	2	1	9	192	154	44	3.58	3
There are good recreational facilities in rural areas	107	147	124	13	9	2.17	2	2	25	299	43	31	3.19	3
There are good systems for sewage and waste disposal	85	217	58	31	9	2.15	2	1	7	120	245	27	3.72	4
There are more attention to against all natural disasters	139	141	107	13	0	1.98	2	3	11	77	219	90	3.95	4
N=450						2.10	2						3.45	3
Overall						2.20	2	Overall					3.40	3

In order to test the difference between answers obtained before and after the intervention, the Wilcoxon test was used. Given the objectives considered in this study, the following hypotheses have been developed:

Null (H0): effects are the same before and after the establishment of the Qazvin province, and Alternative (H1): effects are not the same before and after the establishment of the Qazvin province.

As seen in Table 5, the test statistic and the P-value in all cases are smaller than 0.05 (i.e. $P < 0.000$), hence the null hypothesis is rejected. The results provide statistically significant evidence that answers obtained after the establishment of the Qazvin province differs from those obtained before the intervention. So, it may be concluded that decentralization through the establishment of new provinces positively influences economic, social and physical conditions in rural settlements.

Table5. Significance value of the economic, social and physical effects using the Wilcoxon test

Items	Negative ranks	Positive ranks	Ties	z	Asymp. sig
Economic					
There are good opportunities for employment in my profession	31	306	63	14.3	0.000**
Staff, labors and farmers are more supportive	15	339	46	15.9	0.000**
There are more opportunities to practice a variety of skills	63	300	37	12.7	0.000**
There are good opportunities for industrial activities	20	273	107	14.0	0.000**
There are good opportunities for agricultural activities	26	268	106	13.2	0.000**
There are public participation in economic projects	9	336	55	16.0	0.000**

There are good opportunities for rural entrepreneurship	1	352	47	16.7	0.000**
Social					
There are more opportunities for the women participation in social activities	23	260	117	12.6	0.000**
There is great sense of community and sense of place to rural settlements	18	278	104	14.3	0.000**
Living in a rural area provides an enjoyable lifestyle	36	264	100	13.2	0.000**
There are more opportunities to promotion of the rural knowledge and awareness	22	279	99	14.3	0.000**
There are things I enjoy doing in rural areas	28	258	114	12.5	0.000**
There are more opportunities for career advancement	27	314	59	14.2	0.000**
There are social cohesion and solidarity among rural people	18	281	101	14.3	0.000**
Physical					
There is just distribution of the super-infrastructure, such as educational facilities	0	352	48	16.9	0.000**
There is just distribution of the infrastructure, such as road and etc.	0	210	190	15.5	0.000**
There are accessibility reduction to administrative services	10	348	42	16.6	0.000**
There is more attention to make resistant buildings	18	327	55	15.7	0.000**
There are good recreational facilities in rural areas	4	287	109	15.0	0.000**
There are good systems for sewage and waste disposal	2	339	59	16.5	0.000**
There are more attention to against all natural disasters	5	353	42	16.4	0.000**

Conclusions:

Due to the nature of the existing political system in Iran (i.e., central government), sovereignty is imposed by the center and, as a general rule, the political power is implemented by a ruler in the form of a centralized government.

The political order consists of three elements of unity in the institutional form including structure, nation and territory. In the form of structural unity, a political system includes legislative, executive and judicial branches, and authority is rarely delegated to regional governments. The relation between central government and provinces has been formed in a pyramid shape and has a hierarchical order to operate the system. Hence, the formation of new provinces does not alter the power relation and its distribution in the mentioned pyramid, but executive authority is divided amongst the organs and local administrations. In this procedure, central government delegates partially its authority to the administrative agencies in the local level, and any actions of governor and managers will be under auspices and public policy of central government. Executive managers act as agents who transfer power from capital to the lower levels and cannot make decisions independently. Regulations are issued from focal political point (in this case Tehran), and accomplished in all provinces including the greater Tehran province. So, it seems that decentralization as a contested and ongoing process through the establishment of new provinces relocates administrative power and resources from center to others at the periphery. It is expected that decentralization through the establishment of new provinces leads to efficient provision of local public services and results in rapid economic and social development in rural areas. The current study on the Qazvin province which was established in 1996 could contribute to expand the existing literature on rural development through the establishment of new

provinces. In this case, the model and aspect of decentralization that has been implemented seems to be, in reality, deconcentration and administrative. This is because provinces have no autonomous sources of revenue, and are generally acting as administrative and implementing bodies for policies made at the center. In general, it is evident that, despite policy commitments, the government is unwilling to redistribute its functions to local councils although it has not attempted to halt the decentralization process altogether.

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12/6/2012