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Gender Equality and Empowerment in Iran: A Comparison between Ahmadinejad's and Rouhani's Governments

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Introduction

In the past century, gender inequality has been one of the most important debates in all societies.⁴ Though roles of women and men are different in various cultures, there is no society in which women are more powerful than men. In most countries child rearing and household chores are considered women's responsibility while men are engaged in activities that have more power and prestige.⁵ Women in societies in which power and decision making in social, economic, political and cultural aspects have been assigned to men, are exploited in such a way that they do not receive equal wages for their work; in addition, they do not have access to equal job opportunities.⁶ Statistics show that in Muslim countries, where Sharia Law is dominant, there is more gender discrimination.⁷

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⁴Hemmati, Reza and Maktoubian, Maryam (2013), "Gender Inequality in Selected Middle Eastern Countries with the Emphasis on Iran", *Pajouhesh Nameh Zanan*, 4 (2), pp. 115-124.

⁵Giddens, Anthony (1995), *Sociology*, translated by Manouchehr Sabouri, Tehran: Nashre-Ney. P. 187.

⁶Saifullahi, Saifullah, *The Foundations of Sociology*, (Tittle translated), Gonabad, 1995, Marandiz Publication.

⁷Gouda, Moamen & NiklasPotrafke (2016), "Gender equality in Muslim-majority countries", *Economic Systems*, 40(4), pp. 683-98.

According to 2017 World Economic Forum Report, Iran's gender gap is ranked 140th with a score of 0.583, among 144 countries. In addition to Iran, Chad, Syria, Pakistan and Yemen have been placed at the bottom of the list with the largest gender gap. The report demonstrates that it will take a significant time to make progress and reach some levels of gender equality in Iran. Furthermore, this report puts demands on policy makers and other stakeholders to accelerate gender parity development, which, clearly, would be impossible without government's engagement.

Iran's constitution contains language outlining rights and political freedom for everyone, regardless of gender, age and race. Moreover, almost all countries in the world including Iran have signed human rights agreements pledging not to discriminate. However, these promises, and agreements are not adequately implemented where law enforcement is weak. In parts of the world where there is no enforcement of these laws and agreements, there is also no movement towards achieving gender equality.

Gender equality gives more stability and cohesion to society and it improves both social and economic conditions. These are significant reasons for considering governmental intervention to boost gender equality.⁸

Research question

This research uses the United Nations women's empowerment principles as guideline as well as domestic and international statistics to investigate the performance of Ahmadinejad's government (2005-2013) and Rouhani's government (2013-today) with respect to gender equality issues. The focus is to correlate this performance to governments' ideology (conservative vs. moderate).

Iran's controversial presidential election was held in 2009 and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was reelected as Iran's president (the 10th government). This resulted in the takeover of the hardliners in Iran with their clear agenda to domesticate women. Their political agenda was to contain women's role within their families only, and assumed women's social participation could be acceptable if it was connected to their main responsibility as primary caregivers in the family.⁹ In a symbolic action at the beginning of his presidency, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, changed the name of the "Center of Women's Participation" to the "Center of Women and Family".¹⁰ It was not only a term substitution but also an essential shift in governmental policy making in the realm of women's issues.

⁸World Bank. (2001). *Engendering Development*. Publication: Oxford University.

⁹Karami, Mohamad Taghi (2012), "Gender Analysis of Three Development Programs", *Barnameh Riziy-e Refah va Tose'e ye Ejtemayi*, 4 (13), pp. 41-75.

¹⁰<https://www.isna.ir/news/96051609577/>

Governments have stubbornly attempted to contain women inside family. As Ahmadinejad said in a nationally televised program on June 15, 2010: “We are better than others since Iranian women are better women respecting their role as mother, primary care givers and family managers”.¹¹ Particularly the second round of Ahmadinejad’s government is characterized as promoting a gender discriminatory agenda attempted to marginalize women in various political and social spheres.

Following eight years of hardline government of Ahmadinejad, Rouhani with a more modest approach earned the national vote in the 2013 presidential election and formed the 11th government of the Islamic Republic. Before gaining power he made several campaign promises to improve women’s condition in the society. Also, in his swearing-in ceremony he emphasized women’s role in the national development: “The government of wisdom and hope, regards women’s rights observation and creating equal opportunities in social areas among its main tasks, and considers providing social and legal contexts necessary for women’s participation in different areas as its main agenda”.¹²

In his first term of presidency, Rouhani, pledged to “give equal opportunity” and “promote women’s rights.” He promised to expand women’s role in government, heralded that “women, too, must have the same opportunity as men. Educated and experienced women must gain higher social opportunities step-by-step.” But, when he announced his proposed cabinet list (August 4 2013), there was not even one woman in his cabinet. Obviously he encountered rejection and resistance from the conservative clerics and could not deliver his campaign promises.¹³

Looking into political propensities of Ahmadinejad’s and Rouhani’s governments, and their policies about women issues is a necessity as it will demonstrate that studying women’s situation and their legal status without paying enough attention to the official ideology of the establishment would be inadequate in countries like Iran¹⁴ Furthermore, governments are responsible for creating equal opportunities for men and women. They

¹¹Nazarzadeh, Shaqayeq and Afkhami, Ali (2014), “Women in the Two Governments: Discourse Analysis of Women’s Situation in Recent States of Iran”, *Zaban Pajouhi*, 6 (13), pp. 165-92.

¹²<http://www.president.ir/fa/70145>

¹³See Frud Bezhan, “Special Circumstances” behind Dearth of Women in Iran’s Cabinet, August 21, 2013, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-lack-of-women-in-cabinet-/25081794.html>

¹⁴Ahmadian, Qodrat and Nouri, Mokhtar (2015), “The Status of Women in Iran’s Political Structure: From Revolution to Moderate Development”, *Proceedings of the Second National Conference on Moderation*, Tehran: Sazman-e Asnad va Ketabkhaneh Melli-e Iran, 2015, pp. 124-89. (P.113)

are supposed to develop gender equality through legislation, political reformations and creating equal opportunities. The research also answers the questions as to what extent article 21 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran¹⁵, in which the government is responsible for developing favorable contexts for women's personality growth and protecting their material and spiritual rights, has been materialized.

Present research aims to study two governments of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani with regards to women's situation by way of comparison. It investigates whether the aforementioned governments boosted or impeded gender equality as provisioned by the UN Women's Empowerment Principles. As a yardstick the UN principles contribute to find a clear response to the question of whether the performance of these governments stems from their ideological base.

Theoretical framework

In spite of UN attempts to promote gender equality, gender discrimination encroached in different social, economic and political areas around the world. Gender equality and women's empowerment are among important factors of achieving political, social and economic progress. The process of women's empowerment enables women to proceed from individual level extending to social, economic and political levels and move from unequal to equal condition¹⁶.

One of the prominent models of women's empowerment is Sara Longwe framework that seeks a balance of power between women and men to avoid a position of dominance by either side.¹⁷ Longwe proposed five levels of equality among men and women. Briefly described below, these levels consist of: *welfare*, *access*, *awareness*, *participation*, and *control*.

Welfare implies that women and men's primary needs including food, income and healthcare, are equally met. *Access* means equal accessibility to land, job, finance, education, marketing and all kinds of public services which as governed by law. *Awareness* level includes awareness that gender roles are the result of culture and changeable. *Participation* refers to equal participation of women in decision making and policy making. Finally, *control* refers to equal control and access to resources.

These levels of equality are hierarchal in such a way that emphasizing on higher levels results in more women's empowerment than lower levels.

¹⁵Full text of Iranian constitution (in Persian) is available at this site: http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/content/iran_constitution

¹⁶Shakouri, Ali, Rafat Jah, Maryam, and Jafari, Masoumeh (2007), "The Components of Women's Empowerment and Their causes", Pajouhesh-e Zanan, no.1. P. 24.

¹⁷<http://genderlinks.org.za/who-we-are/board-of-directors/sara-longwe/>

Enhancing women's welfare makes their empowerment more possible; their participation in decision making about resources makes them more powerful than merely having access to resources¹⁸.

Methodology

Since the main goal of this research is to explore the impacts of the ideologies of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's governments, the target society is the very two governments. The comparison is made based on the seven principles of UN women's empowerment. Following are the indicators extracted from those principles:

Seven principles of women's empowerment¹⁹

In 2010, UN Women published seven principles of women's empowerment in work place, market and society. These principles aim to boost gender equality and women's empowerment. The indicators in this research are based on the seven principles of women's empowerment and as published by the United Nations:

- First principle: Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
- Second principle: Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.
- Third principle: Ensure health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.
- Fourth principle: Promote education, training and professional skill development for women.
- Fifth principle: Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
- Sixth principle: Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
- Seventh principle: Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

Data and statistics published by international organizations like the World Economic Forum and World Bank have been analyzed to see to what extent the seven principles of women's empowerment have been implemented between 2009 and 2012 (during Ahmadinejad's government), and between 2013 and 2016 (during Rouhani's government).

¹⁸March, Candida; Smyth, Ines; and Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay. (1999). A Guide to Gender-Analysis Frameworks. Oxfam Publication, 1999, P.93

¹⁹The information and data about UN's program is extracted from this website: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/partnerships/businesses-and-foundations/womens-empowerment-principles>

The findings regarding each principle are as follows:

First principle: Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality

Many researchers and international organizations are interested in women’s leadership in developed and developing countries. This is one of the significant indicators of gender-sensitive development and women’s empowerment. Despite planning and efforts in this field, there is no considerable progress either in developed or developing countries.²⁰

Table 1, compares the percentage of women in decision making positions according to international statistics. The statistics are based on the reports published by International Labor Organization (ILO), World Bank and World Economic Forum. There are no statistics for indicators of women in middle or senior management reported by International Labor Organization, and corporate leadership with women in high level leadership in Iran. The Indicators of women’s share of managerial posts including only statistics of 2009, 2010, 2015 and 2016, record 2.8% increase in the number of women with managerial posts in 2010 compared to 2009. Statistics with respect to women’s share indicator in 2016 compared to 2015 shows 1.8% reduction in number of women’s managerial posts. The percentage of women owned companies in 2011 is 25%.

Table 1 - Comparison of Women in Decision Making Positions

Government	year	International Labor Organization report ²¹		World Bank report ²²	World Economic Forum ²³		
		Women in middle management	Women’s share of high levels (%)	Companies with women in high levels (%)	Women in managerial board of public limited companies	Women owner of companies	Companies with high level women manager
Ahmadinejad’s government	2009	Not presented	11.8	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented
	2010	Not presented	14.6	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented
	2011	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	25	Not presented
	2012	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented
Rouhani’s government	2013	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented
	2014	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented
	2015	Not presented	18.2	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented
	2016	Not presented	16.4	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented

²⁰Jafarnejad, Ahmad, Esfidani, Mohamad Rahim (2005), “The Condition of Women in Employment and Management”, *Motale’at-e Zanan*, 3 (7), pp. 77-103.

Second principle: Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination

According to this principle, some factors of Ahmadinejad's and Rouhani's governments have been compared to each other as follows:

Equal pay for equal work

Despite emphasis by the article 38 of the Labor Law and article 89 of the Civil Service Management Act, equal wage has never materialized in Iran. As emphasized by the World Economic Forum we have examined three indicators of equal wage presented in Table 2. The first indicator is equal pay for equal work. Statistics from Iran under Ahmadinejad's government in 2009 compared to 2012 exhibits an increase of 5 percent, and its score has raised from 0.59 in 2010 to 0.63 in 2012. Interestingly, Rouhani's government data showed the opposite. By a decline of 0.04 in score Iran that ranked 94 in 2013 dropped to 101 in 2016. This indicates a seven level of decline in global ranking.

Another indicator relates to gender gap. Within the framework of this indicator, Iran ranked 110 in 2009, (the first year of Ahmadinejad's controversial second term). Iran's ranking declined 20 levels and dropped to 130 in 2012. Its score from 0.41 in 2009 dropped to 0.21 in 2012. During Rouhani's government, Iran further declined to 131 with a score of 0.21 in 2013. This ranking went down again in 2016 to 141 with a score of 0.16. With continuous drops one may easily argue despite differences in the ideology and slogans of the two governments, there seems to be no difference between Ahmadinejad and Rouhani regarding equal payment. A possible counter argument can may include Iran's economic situation and the ongoing sanctions, but there is a big inconsistency between political will and financial obstacles. In the case of Iran there is no evidence of political will to overcome gender gap and therefore economic hardship is only a secondary factor.

Table 2: Equal Payment and Revenues

Government	Year	International Labor organization ²⁴	World Bank ²⁵	World economic forum ²⁶								
				Gender Payment gap	Women's share of payment in non agricultural section (%)	Equal payment for same work (polling)		Legal suppose from equal payment	Estimation of gained income (\$)			
						grade	score		grade	score	women	men
Ahmadi nejad's	2009	Not presented	15.3	Not presented	Not presented	-	110	0.41	5777	14150		
	2010	Not presented	15.3	97	0.59	-	121	0.32	5304	16449		
	2011	Not presented	Not presented	96	0.60	-	114	0.40	6564	16386		
	2012	Not presented	Not presented	87	0.63	-	130	0.21	3912	18834		
Rouhan i's	2013	Not presented	Not presented	94	0.61	-	131	0.21	3895	18785		
	2014	Not presented	Not presented	98	0.59	-	138	0.17	4656	26644		
	2015	Not presented	Not presented	98	0.59	-	142	0.17	4787	27744		
	2016	Not presented	Not presented	101	0.57	NO	141	0.16	4963	29468		

Flexibility in working conditions for women, e.g., in time of pregnancy without negative influence on their job position and payment

According to the Plan for Increasing the Population proposed by Ahmadinejad's administration, "the government is permitted to extend maternity leave to nine months and their husbands are granted two weeks of compulsory father leave. This law includes mothers with infants less than nine months, while the mother may enjoy maternity leave till ninth months of infancy"²¹. Ahmadinejad's government passed the law of extension of maternity leave from six to nine months. After Rouhani's presidency it was banned, but was later implemented again since 2013.²²

Apparently, the law has been passed to facilitate pregnant women's working conditions but statistics of women losing their jobs suggests that its main purpose was to push forward the policy of population growth at the expense of women's jobs. So, if governments are unable to provide needed budgets in order to realize these plans and have not sufficient supervision on employers in private and public sectors, clearly, such plans are more harmful to women than being beneficial.

²¹<http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13920414000197>

²²<https://www.farsnews.com/printnews/13920609000646>

Third principle: Ensure health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.

- *Development and implementation of appropriate policies to eliminate violence against women*

The law to ensure women's safety against violence is the first and last law on eliminating violence against women. The draft was presented by Ahmadinejad's government. Currently in 2019, Rouhani's government is in his second term. However, the law has not yet been ratified by the Parliament. It is still waiting for additional modifications by the Judiciary power.

Forth principle: promote education, training and professional skill development for women

- *Women's education*

Despite all the barriers facing women, the number of educated women has increased significantly to the extent that the number of female students of universities is more than their male counterparts. Table 3 exhibits the number of women in education based on Gender-related Development Index (GDI), the World Economic Forum and the World Bank.

The School Life Expectancy is an indicator that refers to the total number of years of schooling an individual may participate in at different educational levels (elementary, middle, secondary, and higher education). This indicator in Ahmadinejad's government raised by 21 months in 2012 compared to 2010 while under Rouhani's government it dropped down, irrespective of gender, by one month in 2015 compared to 2013 (last year of Ahmadinejad's term).

The next indicator is the Mean Years of Schooling (MYS)²³ used as a component of the global Human Development Index (HDI) to determine the average number of completed years of education per adults aged 25 and older. This indicator for women in 2012 compared to 2010 exhibited an increase of 0.4% and for men a reduction of 0.2%. The MYS data in 2015 for both men and women showed a rise of 0.2%.

The Mean Years of Schooling in the report of World Economic Forum showed that in 2012 Iran's ranking declined by 5 and its score raised by 0.01 compared to 2009. Literacy rate in 2012 compared to 2009 increased by one, and its score raised by 0.02. Comparing 2013 and 2016, the country

²³For a Methodology for Estimation of Mean Years of Schooling see: http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/uis-methodology-for-estimation-of-mean-years-of-schooling-2013-en_0.pdf

has observed a decline of 7 in ranking and its score has reduced by 0.01. In terms of achieving equality, the elementary school enrollment in both governments was ranked the same.

Secondary school enrollment in 2012 compared to 2009 shows a decline of 13 and its score has dropped by 0.07 meaning that Rouhani's government achieved gender equality regarding secondary school enrollment. The indicator of higher education enrollment in Ahmadinejad's government, exhibited favorable condition. In Rouhani's government it has dropped from the first ranking in 2013 to 101 in 2016 and its score has reduced by 0.07.

Since records of the indicator of literacy rate among individuals aged fifteen and older, as well as the youth of 15-24 have not been presented on an annual basis according to World Bank report, it is not possible to compare the performance of the two governments within the framework of this indicator.

Table 3: women in education

government	year	Gender Development Index (GDI) ²⁸				World economic forum report ²⁹										World Bank ³⁰			
		School life expectancy		Mean years of schooling		Education indicator		Literacy rate		Elementary school enrollment		Secondary school enrollment		Higher education enrollment		Literacy rate of 15>		Literacy rate of 15-24	
		women	men	Women	men	rank	score	rank	score	rank	score	rank	score	rank	score	rank	score	Women	Men
Ahmadinejad's	2009	-	-	-	-	96	0.96	10	0.81	1	1.00	10	0.94	1	1.00	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented
	2010	13.1	13.2	7.7	8.6	96	0.95	10	0.82	11	0.95	81	1.00	1	1.00	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented
	2011	13.6	13.7	7.9	8.7	10	0.92	10	0.90	1	1.00	12	0.75	1	1.00	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented
	2012	15.0	15.1	8.1	8.8	10	0.91	10	0.90	1	1.00	11	0.77	1	1.00	78.41	88.87	97.66	98.33
Rouhani's	2013	14.7	15	8.3	8.9	98	0.96	10	0.91	10	0.98	90	0.97	1	1.00	79.75	89.54	97.43	98.10
		14.6	15.0	8.5	9.0	10	0.94	10	0.89	10	0.98	10	0.95	1	1.00	79.83	89.63	97.67	98.19
	2015	14.6	15.0	8.5	9.1	10	0.95	11	0.90	10	0.98	10	0.95	10	0.94	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented
	2016	-	-	-	-	94	0.97	10	0.91	1	1.00	1	1.00	10	0.93	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented	Not presented

- Developing working policies to promote women occupational status

Though women enjoy equal status as men in schooling education, this is not the case in job market. Table 4, reviews jobs available for women and men based on International Labor Organization. In 2010, the indicator of Labor Force Participation Rate has been reduced by 0.6% in general;

women's proportion has decreased by 0.4%; men's proportion has decreased by 0.7%. Men's participation is 4 times greater than women compared to 2009. In 2011 and 2012 there is no statistics for the Labor Force Participation Rate. Compared to 2013, in 2016 the Labor Force Participation Rate has increased by 1.9% in general. This is 2.5% for women and 1.1% for men. During Rouhani's government, men's participation has been over four times greater than women. In 2010, employment to Population Ratio has reduced by 1.1% in general compared to 2009; this is 0.9% for women and 1.3% for men. Employment to Population Ratio for men is four times greater than women in 2009 and 2010. There are no statistics regarding Employment to Population Ratio in 2011, 2012 and 2013. Employment to Population Ratio in 2016 compared to 2013 has increased by 1.3% in general. This is 2.1% for women and 0.4% for men. Men's employment in 2014, 2015 and 2016 is four times greater than women.

Unemployment Rate in 2012 has been reduced by 0.3% in general compared to 2009. This has exhibited an increase of 3.1% for women and a decrease of 0.3% for men. Unemployment Rate for women in 2009, 2011 and 2012 is 2 times greater than men. Unemployment Rate in 2016 has been 2% in general compared to 2013. This has increased by 0.9% for women and 1.9% for men. Throughout the 4 years of investigation, the unemployment Rate for women has constantly been 2 times greater than men.

There are no statistics for the indicator of Youth Unemployment Rate in 2011, 2012, and 2013. The indicator of Youth Labor Force Participation Rate in 2010 has reduced by 0.3% in general (both for male and female Labor Force) compared to 2009. Furthermore, Youth Labor Force Participation Rate for men shows a decline of 1%. Men's Youth Labor Force Participation Rates have been 3 times greater than women's in both years. This indicator in 2016 has increased by 1.9% in general, 2.4% for women and 1.1% for men compared to 2012. Men's Youth Labor Force Participation Rates have been 3 times greater than women's in 2014, 2015, and 2016.

The Youth Unemployment Rate in 2010 has increased by 4% in general or 8.8% for women and 2.8% for men compared to 2009. The Youth Unemployment Rate in 2016 compared to 2014 has increased by 7.9% in general or 0.4% for women and 0.2% for men. Women's Youth Unemployment Rates have been 2 times greater than men in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Table 4: women's employment

governmen t	year	International Labor Organization Report ³¹														
		Labor Force Participation Rate			Employment To Population Ratio			Unemployment Rate			Youth Labor Force Participation Rate			Youth Unemployment Rate		
		ge ne ral	W o m e n	men	Gen eral	wom en	men	gen eral	wom en	men	gen eral	wom en	men	gene ral	wom en	men
Ahma dinej ad's	2009	38.9	14.5	62.8	34.2	12.1	56.0	11.9	16.8	10.8	29.6	12.5	46.2	24.7	32.5	22.7
	2010	38.3	14.1	62.1	33.1	11.2	54.7	13.5	20.5	11.9	29.3	12.2	45.2	28.7	41.3	25.5
	2011	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	12.3	20.9	10.5	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d
	2012	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	12.2	19.9	10.5	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d
Rouh ani's	2013	37.6	12.4	63.0	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d		10.4	19.8	8.6	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d	Not pre se nte d
	2014	37.2	12.0	62.5	33.3	9.7	57.0	10.6	19.7	8.8	24.7	8.6	40.3	21.3	43.8	25.2
	2015	38.2	13.3	63.2	34.0	10.7	57.4	11.1	19.4	9.3	25.1	9.6	40.0	26.1	42.8	22.3
	2016	39.5	14.9	64.1	34.6	11.8	57.4	12.4	20.7	10.5	26.6	11.0	41.4	29.2	44.2	25.4

Fifth principle: Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women

- Gender sensitive approach to remove financial obstacles and loan service for women

As reported by *Mehrkhaneh*²⁴, in 2016 Shahindokht Molaverdi, the Vice President in charge of Women and Family Affairs in Rouhani's Government, and Narges Norallahzadeh, the director of Mehr Entrepreneurship Fund, signed an agreement to support woman entrepreneurs, though there is no evidence of its impact on women's employment.

According to *Mehrkhaneh*, Vice President Molaverdi has performed feasibility studies in addition to advertising and offering educational program to prepare women before entering the job market. Identification and selection of individual entrepreneurs and approving their ability in managing the business, and introducing them to the Mehr Entrepreneurship Fund" was part of the preparation phase.²⁵

²⁴<http://mehrkhane.com/fa/print/29393>

²⁵Ibid

Reportedly, “the most important responsibility of the Mehr Entrepreneurship Fund is to allocate finance and loan to the applicants introduced by the vice presidency after technical and economic assessments based on terms and conditions of the Fund.” It is also the vice president’s duty to “supervise and cooperate in establishment of business enterprises, cooperation to hold local, county, regional and national exhibitions in coordination with other administrative organizations.”²⁶

Sixth principle: Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy

- *To stakeholders of society, authorities and other cooperating with each other to eliminate discrimination and exploitation against women and to develop opportunities for girls and women.*

Each of the two governments during their lifetime introduced a new development plan. Ahmadinejad’s plan was named “The Fifth Development Plan (2011-2015)”²⁷ and the Rouhani’s plan “The Sixth Development Plan (2017-2021)”²⁸. One may expect the two plans should have broader perspectives on their gender equality and women empowerment. Unfortunately, there is no significant or direct references to women’s empowerment and or promoting gender equality in any of the two national plans of development. However, both program emphasize on women’s role in family. It can be concluded that the notion of gender justice in mindset of the regime differs from the internationally accepted gender equality norms and standards.

- *Seeking help of humanitarian programs and international financial aid resources to improve gender equality*

UN established a new organization (UN Women) in 2010 to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. In 2015 Iran’s membership was accepted to this world agency “for women empowerment in sharp contrast to the West’s easy defeat of Iran’s 2010 bid by backing an alternative candidate.” This time “out of possible deference to the nuclear talks with Iran” the EU and the US supported Iran’s request to “a top post on UN Women” by two thirds of the votes.²⁹ This membership expires in 2019.

²⁶Ibid

²⁷<http://isacmsrt.ir/files/site1/pages/barnamepanjom.pdf>

²⁸http://bodjeh.areeo.ac.ir/_bodjeh/documents/6th_agenda_full.pdf

²⁹http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/60/csw60_membership.pdf?la=en&vs=1719

<https://unwatch.org/eu-us-allowed-iran-win-top-seat-un-womens-rights-board-rights-group-says/>

“UN Women”, is determined to reach out and help member states to implement gender equality standards and provide technical and financial support to applicant countries as its main responsibility to achieve women’s empowerment worldwide. However, there has been no report indicating that Iran has received any international aid for the purpose of improving and promoting gender equality was found. Given the fact that the Islamic regime is sensitive to receiving international aid to promote gender equality. It is possible that Iran has not applied or publicized receiving such aids.

Seventh principle: Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality

- Public reports on policies to promote women’s empowerment and achievement of gender equality in society

Policy making to empower women, in general and to promote gender equality in particular, was completely forgotten during the time the two aforementioned governments served. There is no public record or report about such policies. The focal point of governmental programs related to women has been family which is obviously not the same as “women”. There was some emphasis on female-headed households and the notion of empowerment was only relevant or emphasized when the heads of the household was a female. As such, it is not possible to consider this kind of action as the existence of any policy or project developed to promote gender equality.

- Internal and external reports on progress in gender equality using gender – based data

Regarding internal and external reports, Rouhani’s governmental performance is better than Ahmadinejad’s. It did submit some annual reports about women’s issues to the international organizations. The vice presidency of “women and family” made some announcements and mirror statistics on women in various parts of Iran. Such reports usually included information or statistics on women’s status and advancements, governmental practices, etc. In some other occasions reports were made public, however Ahmadinejad’s government refused to issue such information.

Analysis

In an attempt to compare and contrast the performance of the two governments in the context of “Gender Equality and Empowerment in Iran” the followings are highlighted:

On implementation of women's participation and boosting gender equality in high level corporate leadership Iran had insignificant improvements between 2005 and 2019.

Based on statistics presented on women's share of managerial posts and other indicators as reported by the International Labor Organization³⁰, the number of women managers in Ahmadinejad's government was slightly higher than Rouhani's. Obviously Ahmadinejad's governmental performance on this specific issue was slightly better than Rouhani's. Regarding other indicators related to the first principle as reported by World Bank and World Economic Forum there is no available data, so a comparison between the two governments has been impossible.

Second principle: Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination

- Women's and men's payments and revenues

The comparison of the statistics of payments and revenues of women and men workers, reveals that there is no difference between Ahmadinejad's and Rouhani's governments regarding equal payment. Article 38 of the Labor law is about equal payment; also, the article 89 of the Civil Service Management Act proposed by Ahmadinejad's government and approved by Rouhani's government. Furthermore, there is no difference regarding women's wage and statistics demonstrate the situation getting worse.

- Flexibility in working condition for women, e.g. in time of pregnancy without negative influence on their job position and payment

According to the Plan of Increasing the Population proposed by Ahmadinejad's government, the maternity leave extended from six to nine months. It was implemented in Ahmadinejad's and Rouhani's governments. Instead of facilitating women's occupation especially pregnant ones, the plan ends in their losing jobs. Legislation without considering women's job security results in eliminating them from Labor market. What is evident in Ahmadinejad's and Rouhani's governments, is legislation without considering needed financial resources to enforce them and lack of supervision on employers to preserve women's job security.

Third principle: Ensure health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers

³⁰<http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/statistics-overview-and-topics/employment/lang--en/index.htm>

Development and implementation of appropriate policies to eliminate violence against women

The bill of guaranteeing women's safety against violence is the only motion of governments after the revolution regarding violence against women. Moreover, Ahmadinejad's government has accomplished nothing more than merely preparing a draft. The original bill, was revived by Rouhani's government three years later. Furthermore, 32 volumes of national report prepared under the 9th government (President Mohammad Khatami), has been lost under Ahmadinejad's government. Obviously, there was no interest among the successor governments to address violence against women, create laws and implement them to confront violence against women.

Fourth principle: promote education, training and professional skill development for women

- Women's education

According to statistics, in some indicators like School Life Expectancy and Mean Years of Schooling, women had only slightly better status in Ahmadinejad's government than Rouhani's government.³¹ According to World Economic Forum Report, the indicators of women's education and enrollment in Secondary Education revealed that Rouhani's government has surpassed Ahmadinejad's.³² Women's Literacy Rate and enrollment in higher education is slightly better under Ahmadinejad's government, but then it drops down under Rouhani basically because a high percentage of educated youth have no employment. This does not conclude that Ahmadinejad performed better than Rouhani. As shown by statistics there is no major difference between Ahmadinejad's and Rouhani's governments regarding improvement of gender equality in education.

- Developing working policies to promote women occupational status

As mentioned previously, despite women's achievements in academic fields, their status in labor market shows no advancement. Women's Participation Rate is low and Women's Unemployment Rate is high. A comparison of the performance of the two governments regarding women's employment status shows the following results:

³¹<http://hdr.undp.org/en/data>

³²Will the future be gender equal? <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/will-the-future-be-gender-equal/>

According to the International Labor Report, Rouhani's government has a better performance in the indicator of women's participation as labor force compared to Ahmadinejad's government. Men's participation as labor force is four times greater than women in both governments. Women's Unemployment Rate in Rouhani's government is less than Ahmadinejad's government though both governments show a women's Unemployment Rate two times greater than men. The statistics related to Youth Labor Force Participation revealed a higher rate for women in Rouhani's government. Youth Labor Force Participation Rate of men is two times greater than women in both governments. Based on statistics there is no difference between performance of Ahmadinejad's and Rouhani's governments in the field of women's employment.

Implementation of the fifth principle on gender sensitive approach to remove financial obstacles and loan service for women:

The agreement signed in November 2016 between Shahindokht Molaverdi, then the vice president in charge of Women and Family Affairs in Rouhani's government and Narges Norallahzadeh, the director of Mehr Entrepreneurship Fund was supposed to grant loans to applicants (women and family members). This financial support was aimed to enhance women employment, but until today there has been no evidence to prove the program achieved its declared goals. Its impact on women's occupation has not been measured, though.

Sixth principle: Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy

- *To engage Labor Market to observe gender equality and women's empowerment*

The Plan of Increasing the Population was passed by the parliament and approved by the Guardian Council was imparted by Ahmadinejad. It demands abolition of all state-sponsored population control passed since 1993.³³ Obviously, the Plan does not seek to increase women's social participation and advancement of gender equality. Abolishing law of population control aims to increase the size of families that without proper infrastructures leads to women's losing job.

- *To stakeholders of society, authorities and other cooperating with each other to eliminate discrimination and exploitation against women and to develop*
This compares the Fifth and Sixth Development Programs related to

³³<http://www.rooznamehrasmi.ir/Laws/ShowLaw.aspx?Code=1054>

Ahmadinejad's and Rouhani's governments respectively, and makes comparison of the performance of Ahmadinejad's and Rouhani's governments regarding the indicator of authorities' contribution to eliminate gender discrimination and developing opportunities for women. Items of the Fifth Development Program related to women issues, includes only empowering women heads of household. It means instead of women as a whole, it supports merely women heading households.

The priority of the Sixth program is to empower women with a focus on disadvantaged groups. Given to the Fifth and Sixth Development Programs one may conclude that Ahmadinejad's government has disregarded gender equality and Rouhani's government has focused on gender justice emphasizing on strengthening family instead of gender equality in its policies and projects.

- *Seeking help from humanitarian programs and international financial aid resources to improve gender equality*

No report on receiving international aid to improve gender equality was found. Given the fact that the regime is sensitive to receive international aid to promote gender equality, it is unlikely to acknowledge or circulate such information in case it existed.

- *Clearing up and public reports of polices to promote women's empowerment and achievement of gender equality in society*

There is no policy making to promote women's empowerment and gender equality which in turn produces public reports. Rouhani's government has addressed the issue of gender justice and Ahmadinejad's government has not gone further than highlighting women's traditional roles inside family in its policies.

The Seventh principle requires measuring and publicly reporting any progress made to achieve gender equality

Unlike Ahmadinejad who refused releasing reports, Rouhani's government has submitted annual reports to the international organizations on women issues. Occasionally, Rouhani's Vice President for Women and Family affairs has released reports on her website.³⁴ The contents of these reports have little to do with gender equality and in most cases they refer to women's status in the society. Some of the subjects include women's legal rights and government's cooperation with other countries in regard to women small business activity. In most cases the website publishes news and future plans rather than real achievement in the field of gender equality.

³⁴<http://women.gov.ir/>

One can conclude the performance of Rouhani's government in regard to submitting internal and external reports seems better than Ahmadinejad's government.

Conclusion

It is believed that ideology of governments has a major impact on gender equality. Based on the findings however, the attitudes of Ahmadinejad's (conservative) or Rouhani's (moderate) government had no evident impact on realization of gender equality. As long as such policies continue, different outcomes cannot be expected. In other words, by shifting from the hardliner to the moderate government, the gender policies have not changed. Gender related policies are increasingly controlled by higher authorities including the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, who has the ultimate power in practically every aspect of the nation's life. He is also extremely against gender equality and considers it "most probably part of a Zionist plot to destroy human society".³⁵ As quoted by a report in Radio Farda, he criticized concepts like "gender promotion" and "gender equality" by strongest words and describes those who put forward such debates as "negligent ones who undermine women's housekeeping" duty. He further said: "While housekeeping means human upbringing and generating the most sublime product and goods in the world that is human being".³⁶

As demonstrated in this paper, it seems quite obvious that changing governments with different attitudes have had no tangible impact on elimination of gender discrimination. As long as the ruling governments in the Islamic Republic of Iran are driven by ideology and view women through their narrow conservative lens, and as long as there is no political will to improve women's condition, concepts like women empowerment remains far from reality.

³⁵For details of his talk to a group of visitors see: <http://ana.ir/fa/newsprint/167069>

³⁶<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/o2-eh-khamenei-on-women-discrimination/28378735.html>