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Gas Policymaking in Iran: The Requirements of Sustainable Development and Regional Role-Making in the Islamic World

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Extended Abstract

The natural gas industry, as one of the most significant strategic advantages of Iran's economy, plays a pivotal role in advancing sustainable development—a form of development that extends beyond economic growth to encompass environmental protection, social justice, inclusive participation, and responsible governance. In the contemporary global discourse, sustainable development has emerged as a multidimensional paradigm that seeks to balance economic efficiency, environmental integrity, and social equity. Within this framework, energy resources—particularly natural gas as a relatively cleaner fossil fuel—are considered critical transitional assets for achieving long-term sustainability goals.

From a Western theoretical perspective, sustainable development is closely asso-

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ciated with principles such as transparent and accountable governance, inter-generational equity, rational management of natural resources, environmental impact assessment, and meaningful stakeholder participation in policymaking processes. These principles emphasize the need to ensure that present development trajectories do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. At the same time, environmental stewardship, institutional coherence, and policy integration are regarded as essential components of sustainable energy governance.

Parallel to these Western conceptualizations, Islamic teachings offer a complementary and normatively rich foundation for sustainable development. In Islamic thought, natural resources are viewed as divine trusts (*amanah*) bestowed upon humanity, obligating societies to exercise moderation (*wasatiyyah*) in resource exploitation and to avoid wastefulness (*israf*). Environmental protection, social justice, collective responsibility, and solidarity among the Muslim community (*ummah*) constitute core ethical principles that resonate strongly with contemporary sustainability discourses. Consequently, an Islamic approach to sustainable energy development underscores balance, ethical governance, cooperation, and the pursuit of collective welfare rather than narrow economic gains.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, possessing the world's second-largest proven natural gas reserves, holds considerable potential to play a decisive role in regional and transregional energy architecture. Iran's geostrategic location, combined with its vast gas resources, provides unique opportunities for enhancing energy cooperation, strengthening economic interdependence, and promoting energy diplomacy within the Islamic world and beyond. Natural gas, in this context, can function not only as an economic asset but also as a strategic instrument for fostering political dialogue, cultural exchange, and regional stability.

Despite these significant advantages, Iran's gas policymaking framework faces a range of structural and institutional challenges that have hindered the realization of sustainable development objectives. Among the most critical obstacles are fragmented governance structures, weak policy coordination, inconsistencies in decision-making processes, insufficient stakeholder engagement, and inadequate attention to strategic environmental assessments. These chal-

lenges have resulted in short-term, reactive policies that often prioritize immediate economic or political considerations over long-term sustainability goals.

Furthermore, the absence of an integrated governance model has contributed to inefficiencies in energy planning and implementation. Overlapping institutional mandates, lack of transparency, and limited mechanisms for accountability have undermined policy coherence and reduced public trust. Environmental considerations, although formally acknowledged in policy documents, are frequently marginalized during implementation, leading to adverse ecological impacts and missed opportunities for aligning gas development with environmental justice principles.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to address the central research question: What are the main obstacles and requirements for achieving sustainable development in Iran's gas policymaking, considering the country's regional and transregional role? The core hypothesis of the research posits that achieving sustainable development in Iran's gas sector requires more than merely removing institutional barriers. Rather, it necessitates the establishment of participatory governance structures, the formulation of long-term strategic visions, and the purposeful utilization of natural gas as a tool for strengthening economic, political, and cultural linkages with regional and transregional partners—particularly within the Islamic world.

Methodologically, this research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach grounded in the theoretical framework of sustainable development. The study relies on library-based and documentary data, including academic literature, policy documents, official reports, and international frameworks related to energy governance and sustainability. To systematically examine the data, thematic analysis is employed as the primary analytical method. This approach enables the identification of recurring patterns, key themes, and underlying conceptual linkages relevant to sustainable gas policymaking and governance.

The findings of the study reveal that structural reform in energy policymaking is a fundamental prerequisite for advancing sustainable development in Iran's gas sector. Specifically, the results highlight the necessity of transitioning from fragmented and sectoral governance toward an integrated and unified governance model. Such a model would enhance policy coherence, reduce insti-

tutional conflicts, and facilitate long-term planning aligned with sustainability principles.

Additionally, the research underscores the importance of strengthening transparency and accountability mechanisms within energy governance institutions. Transparent decision-making processes, access to information, and clear lines of responsibility are essential for improving policy effectiveness and ensuring that environmental and social considerations are adequately addressed. Enhanced accountability not only contributes to better governance outcomes but also fosters public trust and stakeholder confidence.

Another key finding relates to stakeholder participation. The study demonstrates that inclusive and meaningful engagement of stakeholders—ranging from governmental bodies and private sector actors to local communities, environmental organizations, and academic institutions—plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable energy policies. Participatory governance enables the incorporation of diverse perspectives, reduces policy resistance, and enhances the legitimacy and social acceptance of energy projects.

Moreover, the findings suggest that aligning Iran's gas policy with broader objectives of the Islamic world can significantly contribute to achieving balanced and justice-oriented development. By framing natural gas cooperation within a shared ethical and cultural context, Iran can leverage its energy resources to promote solidarity, mutual benefit, and collective resilience among Muslim-majority countries. This approach not only reinforces Iran's energy diplomacy but also integrates moral and normative dimensions into energy policymaking.

Importantly, the study highlights the potential of integrating Western sustainable development frameworks with Islamic principles to create a hybrid and context-sensitive model of energy governance. Such a model recognizes the value of international best practices—such as environmental impact assessments, policy integration, and stakeholder engagement—while grounding them in indigenous cultural and religious values. This synthesis can enhance the legitimacy, adaptability, and effectiveness of sustainability-oriented policies in Iran and similar contexts.

In conclusion, the research argues that achieving sustainable development in Iran's gas policymaking requires a comprehensive and multidimensional

strategy. This strategy should encompass institutional reform, participatory governance, long-term strategic planning, environmental justice, and proactive energy diplomacy. By adopting an integrated approach that draws upon both Western sustainability paradigms and Islamic ethical principles, Iran can transform its natural gas sector into a catalyst for balanced, indigenous, and justice-oriented development.

The findings of this study offer both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, the research enriches the literature on sustainable energy governance by highlighting the compatibility and complementarity of Western and Islamic perspectives. Practically, it provides policymakers with actionable insights for revising and redesigning energy policies in a manner that aligns economic objectives with environmental protection, social equity, and regional cooperation. Ultimately, this study suggests that Iran's natural gas resources, if governed sustainably and ethically, can serve as a powerful engine for national development and constructive engagement within the regional and global energy landscape.

Key words: Energy policymaking; Sustainable development; Integrated governance; Islamic energy diplomacy; Environmental justice.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.