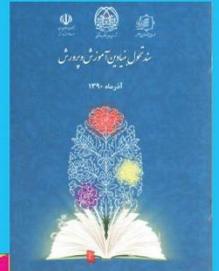
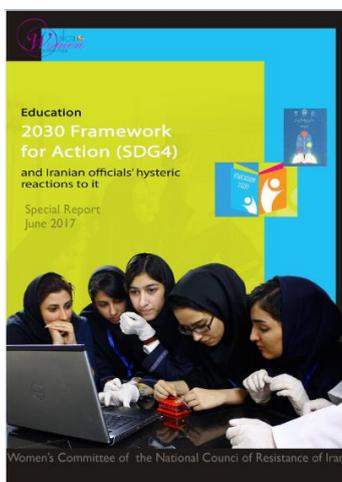


Education 2030 Framework for Action (SDG4)

and Iranian officials' hysteric
reactions to it

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Introduction

The Heads of State and Government and High Representatives met at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 17-25 September 2015 at the UN General Assembly and decided on 17 new global Sustainable Development Goals. All member states, including the Iranian regime were required to start implementing the Agenda in 2016.

In the months leading to the Iranian regime's presidential elections, however, the Agenda 2030 and its Education 2030 document turned into a focal point of controversy and an issue of wrangling among the regime's internal factions. Tehran officials expressed their opposition to the agenda, one after the other, with the mullahs' supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, weighing in.

On June 13, 2017, the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution (SCCR) meeting presided by the mullahs' president Hassan Rouhani decided to stop implementation of the agenda in education and instead consider the Fundamental Reform Document of Education (FRDE) adopted under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in December 2011, as the benchmark for all educational affairs in the country.

This study aims to examine the reasons for the Iranian regime officials' hysteric reaction to the agenda and its education document.

A glance over the statements of Iranian regime officials

In a meeting with teachers on May 7, 2017, Khamenei blasted the Agenda 2030 and said, "The UNESCO 2030 education agenda and the like are not agendas that the Islamic Republic of Iran should have to surrender and submit to." (Khamenei.ir website - May 7, 2017)

Mehdi Zahedi, chair of the Education and Research Committee of the mullahs' parliament, said Education 2030 contradicts the Iranian regime's security. He said, "There are many serious criticisms to this document with regards to security issues because it requires data which contradicts Iran's security." (The state-run ICANA news agency - April 17, 2017)

The state-run Tasnim news agency, affiliated with the IRGC Quds Force, wrote an article about Education 2030, expressing alarm that, "We cannot provide international organizations free access to the country's data. We should be careful about preparing grounds for infiltration

in this sector. Data are raw material which could be used to make arbitrary analyses under pretexts such as citizens' rights, inequality of women and men, etc. and put pressure on Iran." (The state-run Tasnim news agency – January 22, 2017)

Three months later, Tasnim repeated its warning more vividly. "In the (Education) 2030 Framework for Action, there are references to terms such as global citizenship and gender equality. These issues have been criticized by some experts particularly in the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution. Some are even convinced that the adoption and implementation of this document would transform national education in many ways. Among them, one can point to the omission of sexual stereotypes, teaching of sex education to children, and omission of some Quranic concepts and values from text books to promote peace and non-violence." (The state-run Tasnim news agency, May 7, 2017)

Kobra Khaz'ali, representative of the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution in the Cultural and Social Council of Women which is an entity affiliated with Khamenei, said in this regard, "One of the worst mistakes in western thinking on women is the very issue of gender equality." (The state-run Fars news agency, January 30, 2017)

She called Education 2030 a "disgraceful" document which must not dominate Islamic societies. She added, "Education 2030 document seeks to change all future generation youths according to western culture by 2030." (The state-run Tasnim news agency, June 9, 2017)

Comparing it to the 2009 uprising which was about to topple the regime in its final phase, Ali Saeedi, Khamenei's representative in the IRGC in Isfahan, warned, "The 2030 document is much more dangerous." (The state-run Tasnim news agency, June 5, 2017)

Abdul-Karim Abedini, the Friday prayer leader of Qazvin, noted in his sermon, "Why should others decide for us?... The content of the 2030 (SDGs) is colonialist, very dangerous and one of the most bitter manifestations of (foreign) infiltration. This document has been produced under the wings of Zionists." (The state-run Tasnim news agency, June 9, 2017)

Mashhad's Friday prayer leader, Ahmad Alam-ol Hoda, called the Agenda 2030, "American" and said, "We don't argue about the articles of this document and whether they are compatible with our religion or not. We question the very essence of the document that contradicts our intellectual foundations, the principles of our beliefs, our values and our religion." He urged the Judiciary to rescind the document. (The state-run Tasnim news agency, June 2, 2017)

Mokhber Dezfuli, secretary of the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution, was cited by Shabakeh-Khabar news network on May 7, 2017, as saying that UNESCO "tries to inject liberal and secular values to the educational and training system to prevent future generations from confronting arrogant and capitalist regimes."

The power struggle within the regime regarding the Education 2030 document led to a letter by 151 members of the mullahs' parliament (Majlis) from Khamenei's faction to Hassan Rouhani, urging him to revoke the government's pledge to implement the document. (The state-run Tasnim news agency, June 3, 2017)

In reaction to criticisms, Hassan Rouhani said, "Many similar UN documents and conventions, particularly those of the UNSECO, are not binding... As for the 2030 document, too, it has been clearly announced that we will implement the agenda only within the limits of our religious, legal and cultural principles." (The state-run Eghtesad news agency, May 30, 2017)

Earlier, the government spokesman, Mohammad Baqer Nobakht, told his weekly news conference that Khamenei who "supervises all the affairs from the standpoint of a leader, made comments last week about the 2030 document and naturally, his views are important for the government that later announced that it would stop all forms of activities in this regard until the ambiguities about the document are resolved." (The state-run Tasnim news agency, June 9, 2017)

Finally, the tensions over Education 2030 document were resolved with the decision of the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution to stop implementing it. The SCCR meeting was held on June 13, 2017 and presided by Hassan Rouhani.

Mehdi Golshani, an SCCR member, said in this regard, "It was agreed that the Fundamental Reform Document of Education (FRDE) be placed on the agenda of education officials and (SCCR) members did not get into details of the 2030 document."

Education 2030, Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action

The fourth goal of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Agenda 2030 is about education.

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

The document called, Education 2030, Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, was adopted in the World Education Forum 2015, in Incheon, South Korea. Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 set out a new vision for education for the next fifteen years. The declaration was later adopted by ministers of education from more than 90 countries in the 38th General Conference of UNESCO from 4-6 November 2015 at the headquarters of UNESCO in Paris.

Under the heading I. VISION, RATIONALE AND PRINCIPLES, the document underlines the central role of education in the realization of all 17 SDGs:

4. Education is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and essential for the success of all SDGs. Recognizing the important role of education, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights education as a stand-alone goal (SDG 4) and also includes targets on education under several other SDGs, notably those on health; growth and employment; sustainable consumption and production; and climate change. In fact, education can accelerate progress towards the achievement of all of the SDGs and therefore should be part of the strategies to achieve each of them. The renewed education agenda encapsulated in Goal 4 is comprehensive, holistic, ambitious, aspirational and universal, and inspired by a vision of education that transforms the lives of individuals, communities and societies, leaving no one behind.

The targets and means of implementation of SDG4 have been listed as the following:

4.1

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

4.2

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

4.3

By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

4.4

By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

4.5

By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

4.6

By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

4.7

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a

culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

4.a

Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

4.b

By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

4.c

By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

Parts of the targets have been underlined to highlight the fact that SDG4 seeks to eliminate gender discrimination in education to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

In target 5, we see that it seeks to “eliminate gender disparities in education” by 2030.

Target 7 emphasizes acquiring the knowledge and skills through education needed by all to ensure sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

Fundamental Reform Document of Education (FRDE) and its goals

Explaining the history of the Iranian regime's catastrophic conduct in any of the above said fields does not fit into this study. Those interested can refer to the website of the NCRI Women's Committee (www.women.ncr-iran.org) and examine the documents section to find information.

However, a general review of the Fundamental Reform Document of Education (FRDE) which replaced the Education 2030 Framework for Action reveals the ambitions of the Iranian regime.

Not only they do not seek to eliminate inequalities, create a culture of tolerance or promote peace and non-violence, but they seek to preserve and enhance the fundamentalist views of the ruling regime under the banner of Islam. They seek to further enhance gender, religious and ethnic discriminations.

In the introduction to this document, we see that the regime's goal in drafting the FDRE is to realize "the lofty values and ideals of the Islamic Revolution."

In contrast to the 2030 Agenda SDG4 and its targets that seek to facilitate everyone's access to the necessary knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development and eliminate gender discrimination, the FDRE promotes the grounds for such discriminations, particularly against women. Under the pretext of "modesty", the regime seeks to enforce the veil, gender segregation and regulations against women when it frequently repeats this term in the articles.

Chapter 7, Article 3. Promotion and deepening of a culture of modesty, virtue and Hijab (Islamic dress code) related to the capacities and capabilities of the country's general formal education system (1, 2)

Strategy 3-1: Revision and reproduction of curriculum, contents and educational approaches in order to internalize, deepen and promote the culture of modesty, virtue and Hijab (the Islamic dress code)

Strategy 3-2: Taking proper measures in recruiting, training and using qualified, committed human resource who observe modesty, virtue and Hijab at educational environments

Strategy 3-3: Drawing the families' constructive and effective participation in preserving, deepening and promoting modesty, virtue and appropriate Hijab among the students

Strategy 3-4: Making necessary arrangements to create coordination among the media, development of textbooks, and teaching materials, stationeries and educational equipment to promote the culture of modesty, virtue and proper Hijab among the students

Strategy 3-5: Designing and introducing suitable, variable, beautiful and neat dresses, based on the Islamic- Iranian culture, for both male and female teachers and students in line with consolidation of the Islamic-Iranian identity

Strategy 3-6: Planning for intellectually preparing the students to truly and willingly accept modesty, virtue and Hijab and act thereon by imparting the Islamic view to them

Strategy 3-7: Rendering counseling-upbringing services at all levels of schooling to boost the students' physical and mental health

In the same chapter in strategy 14.2, FDRE stresses gender segregation in academic areas.

"Strategy 14-2: Adaptation of physical, educational and pedagogical spaces to the students' specific needs and gender differences with an emphasis on institutionalization of the religious culture, modesty, dress code and observing the Islamic decrees on intimacy at schools"

In article 17, it paves the way for censorship of the media and the internet and writes, "17. Promotion of the quality of education and training process with an emphasis on intelligent application of modern technologies along with active and conscious use to prevent and control its adverse consequences (1,2,3,7)"

In Chapter 2, article 25, under the pretext of spreading Islam, the regime declares its ambition to interfere in the affairs of the neighboring countries.

“25. Appraising the scientific and empirical achievements of the man within the framework of the Islamic norm system and paving the ground to reach the world’s scientific reference position.”

In Chapter 5, Goals, the regime reiterates its domineering intentions. Article 2 states, “2. Promotion of the role of the general formal education system and the family in the country’s progress and development, dissemination and edification of the public culture and paving the ground for scientific strength and reference, evolution of Islamic–Iranian civilization in line with the realization of the global Mahdavi Just Community with an emphasis on gaining religious, political insight, deepening of knowledge, commitment to ethical values, loyalty to the Islamic Republic of Iran’s ruling system, practical and theoretical commitment to religious jurisprudence, religious democracy,”

In the same chapter, Article 14 states, “14. Development of educational capacities and capabilities for active and constructive presence at regional and international levels to achieve the Goals and missions stipulated in the Constitution, the country’s development plan vision, the general policies of the supreme leader, and the country’s 5-year development plans (Goals 2,7,8)

In Chapter seven, Operational Objectives and Strategies, we read:

“Strategy 1-4: Establishment of mechanisms for promotion and institutionalization of religious jurisprudence, culture of making friendship with the good and avoiding the evil, advising for the good and refraining from the evil, holding the morale to fight for Islam and to wait for the rule of Mahdi (Paving the ground for the establishment of the Just Ruling of Mahdi) with an emphasis on utilization of the capabilities of seminaries, the exemplary role of teachers and improvement of the methods of practices”

In Chapter seven, FDRE also prepares the grounds for involving students in the agencies in charge of repression: “Strategy 8-3: Pavement of the ground for active representation of students at the relevant official and legitimate associations, based on the internal and external capacities of the Ministry of Education, including the “Student Militia”, scientific and cultural clubs and the “Islamic Associations of Students”

“Strategy 8-5: Elucidation of scientific and technical achievements of Islamic–Iranian civilization at school curricula and strengthening the spirit and belief of accountability among the students to achieve the new Islamic civilization towards realization of the establishment of Mahdavi justice-restoring society”

Conclusion

As it was noted earlier, the Iranian regime's officials view the Education 2030 document as a "disgraceful" document "bearing a colonialist content" which manifests "one of the most bitter examples of infiltration" and promotes "educational transformation", "elimination of sexual stereotypes", "gender equality", and "global citizenship", causing grave "security" concerns.

The reason why this "non-binding" document with the genuine goal of equitable education and learning opportunities for all sends such tremors through the ruling clique in Iran, goes back to the regime's own objectives as well as its instability and lack of minimum social popularity.

After all, this is a regime that deprives girls from studying in some 80 fields of education in universities. Every month, dozens of Bahai's are expelled from universities for adhering to their faith. Many girls are forced to quit school due to the laws allowing parents to forcibly wed their daughters as young as 9 and 10. Many cannot attend school because of poverty and lack of government support for children's education before the age of maturity.

Based on figures published by the National Statistics Center of Iran, some 9,483,028 people are considered illiterate, 6,025,965 of whom are women. This means that two-thirds of illiterates in Iran are women.¹ This includes 3,200,000 children who are deprived of education.² Illiteracy among women and girls is a cause of concern and considered a crisis in 40 Iranian cities.

In the southeastern province of Sistan-o Baluchistan, there are 169,000 children, including 156,000 girls, who are deprived of education.³ In the city of Abarkooh, in the central province of Yazd, 97% of women between 10 to 49 years of age are illiterate.⁴ In the 2016-2017 academic year, there were 799 high school girls were identified as being deprived of education in Charmahal-e Bakhtiari Province, 218 of them due to early marriage.⁵

According to the General Director of Education in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, most of the students who quit school in this province are girls and they do so due to economic problems. In the southern province of Hormuzgan, 14000 students are deprived of education.⁶ In West Azerbaijan Province, 1500 elementary students are deprived of education, a six-fold rise compared to last year.⁷

¹ The state-run Mehr news agency – Dec. 27, 2015

² Shahindokht Molaverdi, Rouhani's deputy in women and family affairs, the state-run Khabar Online website, Sep. 24, 2016

³ Alireza Nakhaii, gen. dir. of Dep. of Education of Sistan-o Baluchistan Province, the state-run ILNA news agency, Jun. 16, 2017

⁴ Nabi Rasouli, governor of Abarkooh in Yazd Province, the state-run Mehr news agency, Feb. 2, 2015

⁵ Behrouz Omid, gen. dir. of Dep. of Education of Chaharmahal-o Bakhtiari Province, Feb. 28, 2017

⁶ State-run Fars and Mehr news agencies, Dec. 28, 2015

⁷ General director of Department of Education in West Azerbaijan Province, Dec. 27, 2016

A total of 14,088 students are deprived of education in the southwestern Khuzistan Province, 78 percent of whom are girls, most of them between 7 and 14 years of age. Most of the students living in poor districts marry in early age and do not continue their education.⁸ Sixty per cent of the 500 students who have quit school over the past three years in the city of Dezful, have been girls.⁹ In some districts in Ahwaz, the capital of Khuzistan, only one out of every four girls get high school diplomas.¹⁰ Another expert said the number of girls deprived of education is twice the number of boys. She said girls usually become deprived of education due to economic problems, shortage of educational spaces, social problems, and living in places where it is difficult to have access to schools.¹¹

In October 2015, the General Director of Tehran's Department of Education said there were 25,000 school-age children in the capital who worked to earn a living.

The above facts make it crystal clear that gender equality and equal opportunities for women target the heart of the fundamentalist regime ruling Iran and indeed, this is the essence and root cause of the regime's animosity and antagonism to Education 2003 Framework for Action and the Agenda 2030 as a whole.

In addition, the Iranian opposition "believes in complete gender equality in political, social and economic arenas. We are also committed to equal participation of women in political leadership. Any form of discrimination against women will be abolished. They will enjoy the right to freely choose their clothing. They are free in marriage, divorce, education and employment."

We are also "committed to the equality of all ethnicities. We underscore the plan for the autonomy of Iranian Kurdistan, adopted by the National Council of Resistance of Iran. The language and culture of our compatriots from whatever ethnicity are among our nation's human resources and must be revived and enhanced in tomorrow's Iran."¹²

⁸ Ardeshir Shojaii, deputy for elementary education of Khuzistan Province, the state-run Asr-e Iran website, Mar. 16, 2016

⁹ Director of Department of Education of Dezful, the state-run Fars and Mehr news agencies, Dec. 28, 2015

¹⁰ Fazel Khamisi, head of Department of Education, 4th district of Ahwaz, the state-run Mehr news agency, Sep. 17, 2016

¹¹ Laili Nazarpour, expert on women's affairs in Khuzistan Province, the state-run Asr-e Iran website, Sep. 17, 2016

¹² Ten-point Plan of Maryam Rajavi, President-elect of the National Council of Resistance of Iran.

<http://women.ncr-iran.org/ten-point-plan-for-iran>

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