Administrative Reform and Its Impact on Local Administration: The Case of Islamic Republic of Iran

Mehdi Darvish
Member of Academic Staff
State Organization for Administrative
and Employment Affairs
Islamic Republic of Iran

In the Name of God,
the Compassionate, the Merciful

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Introduction

The meaning and importance of any phenomenon can be appropriately understood only when considered in context. Thus, I think the reader of this article will be interested not only in learning how administrative reforms have affected local situations in Iran, but in gaining an impression of Iranian administration systems in general. Therefore, before reviewing the issue of reforms, and identifying changes created in central and local units, I shall provide a general picture of local situations in Iran and describe some characteristics of Government administration in Provincial areas.

General Contours

Iran is geographically divided into 27 Provinces, each with its own Governor or Governor-General. Many of the 24 Ministries in the government have their own branches (agents, bureaus, offices, directorates, etc.) in the Provinces. Although these Branches act on instructions from their central Ministry, they must also cooperate with the Governor-General of the province so as not to conflict with his activities.

The Governor-General is viewed as the supreme representative of the government and presides over all government agents in the province, except for the judicial law courts. The following summarizes the major responsibilities and duties of the Governor-General:

- Safeguarding and creating a peaceful atmosphere for all people in the Province.
- Implementing government policies concerning regional affairs.
- Reviewing complaints and grievances from government agencies, except issues dealing with legal or penal matters.
- Supplying food and provisions needed in the province.
- Controlling the travel and residency of foreigners.
- Establishing and maintaining relationships with consulates and diplomatic officials.
- Controlling the behavior and activities of all government officials.
- Monitoring education, public exercises or sports and public health.
- Promoting agriculture, industry, and commerce, etc.
- Controlling the affairs of societies and parties, and preventing harmful activities.

- Carrying out protocols and formal ceremonies.
- Controlling the affairs of municipalities and their affiliates.
- Supervising and control of polling stations.
- Encouraging activities in the public interest and convincing people to participate in them.
- Coordinating efforts adopted during natural crises and unexpected incidents.
- Coordinating administrative and executive affairs with those of Islamic Revolutionary Institutes.
- Inspecting government departments and organizations.
- Supervising and controlling the preparation and implementation of public plans and development programs.
- Supervising and controlling radio and television programs through representatives in these organizations.

Governors-General receive guidance from the Leader of the Islamic Revolution when they meet with His Excellency on religious or national occasions during the year. For example, in a meeting with the Governors-General on December 27, 1997, His Excellency clarified guidelines for them, as reported in the Tehran Times:

"The leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, here on Saturday (Dec. 27, 1997) stated the country's governors-general should meticulously carry out their duties with total respect for the laws, and in closest contact with the people.

Addressing a gathering of the Governors-General, also attended by Interior Minister Abdollah Nouri, the Leader called on all segments of the government to do their utmost to maintain the trend of the revolution in the country.

The prestige of the Governors-General emanates from the constitution, said the Leader, adding that they should not allow personal motives and sentiments to get in the way of executing the duties mandated by the constitution.

Consolidating of people's faith in the religion, Islamic system and revolution is amongst major duties of Governors-General. This, the Leader said, requires them to stay in closest contact with the people.

Ayatollah Khamenei further called on the officials to stay up-to-date on people's difficulties, adding that unannounced inspection of various provincial departments as well as frequent presence at public gatherings including the Friday prayers can help keep the Governors-General current on people's problems.

Highlighting the importance of respecting the laws of the land by state officials, the Leader referred to the highly promoted lawful society as amongst the noblest of the goals announced by the new government. Respecting the regulations by government officials would persuade people to have respect for the law, added the Leader. He further called on the governors-general to be a model of accountability. Advising the officials against measures which would widen factional differences, Ayatollah Khamenei called on the Governors-General to always honor and respect the ulema and religious scholars in their provinces." (*TEHRAN TIMES DAILY NEWSPAPER*, December 28, 1997.)

As the foregoing makes clear, the administrative system in Iran is centralized to

a great extent. Any central-based decision is adopted, and affects both central and local agencies.

Sources of Reform

In Iran, administrative reforms can be initiated through three major sources:

1. Supreme Administrative Council (SAC)

Following the Islamic Revolution, the Supreme Administrative Council (SAC) was established in 1990 with the mandate to change the administrative system. SAC is headed by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran; the Secretary of the Council is the Vice-President, who is also Secretary-General of State Organization for Administrative and Employment Affairs (SOAE). SOAE can be considered as Secretary to the SAC, and is responsible for scrutinizing and discussing various administrative subjects, and referring them to SAC for approval. The following list of SAC's reform ratifications (detailed in Section IV) briefly outline efforts to improve the administrative system.

2. State Organization for Administrative and Employment Affairs (SOAE) and its organizations affiliated to SOAE

State Management Training Center (SMTC), Civil Retirement Organization, and State National Archives Organization. Note that as mentioned above, most of SOAE's reform suggestions are passed to the Supreme Administrative Council, to be ratified and enforced.

3. Ministries

Ministries issue circulars and facilitate the affairs of their branches in the Provinces. SOAE may delegate authority to the Ministries, and they may either retain that power, or transfer it to local areas. Difficulties arise when the Ministries do not act in accord: some hold a positive attitude toward independent action in the Provinces but others are more cautious about freely transferring authority to outside units. The following sections note many general items that affect both central and local units and some specific items that affect only local or provincial units.

Some major reform programs have already been identified and delineated in the Five-year Economical, Social, and Cultural Development Plans. The following are items from the second 5-year Development Plan regarding administrative and executive systems:

- Decentralizing, and in some cases eliminating, administrative bureaucracy, and simplifying procedures for implementing affairs and transferring duties to Provinces.
- Modifying administrative and organizational structural orientation towards the transfer of functions to private and cooperative sectors and reinforcement of Provincial centers.
- Decentralizing the planning system in terms of policy making, decision mak-

ing, setting priorities, execution and control.

- Establishing Islamic Councils in provinces, townships, cities, rural districts, and villages for control of all developmental, cultural, executive and economic affairs within Council jurisdictions.
- Emphasizing paving the way for the education and human growth of people in rural areas and areas of deprivation.
- Designing methods to identify the duties and authorities of the Governors and Governors-General appropriate to their responsibilities in the Provinces.
- Designing methods to identify how Governors and Governors-General can control local managers of Ministries branches and how they can relate to central government authorities in the Capital.

Given the above, the following sections first discuss some general reforms which will eventually affect both central and local situations, and then focus on some specific reforms which directly affect Provincial areas.

Examples of Reform Programs with Special Reference to Provinces

Outlined below are major administrative reforms ratified by Supreme Administrative Council, mostly related to Provincial affairs.

1. Modification of procedures in the country's airports

Prior to the implementation of reforms, there were many problems in airport procedures, such as slow passenger service and delays in releasing goods. People were dissatisfied with both airlines and airport officials. To reform air travel procedures, a "Committee of Facilities, Standards and Evaluation of Airport Affairs" was organized within the Civil Aviation Organization. It is empowered to determine the appropriate timing for the transfer of passengers and goods, and then to: a) design a suitable framework to administer the affairs of passengers in domestic and international travel; b) facilitate and accelerate the release of goods and expedite customs procedures; and c) establish an effective security system.

All pertinent agencies were required to train their personnel to meet the established standards, and the Organization had to prepare and supply all the advanced technology necessary. The Customs Office had then to notify passengers of the rules and regulations.

2. Expediting applications for certificates in Civil, Technical and Vocational Training Organizations in the Provinces

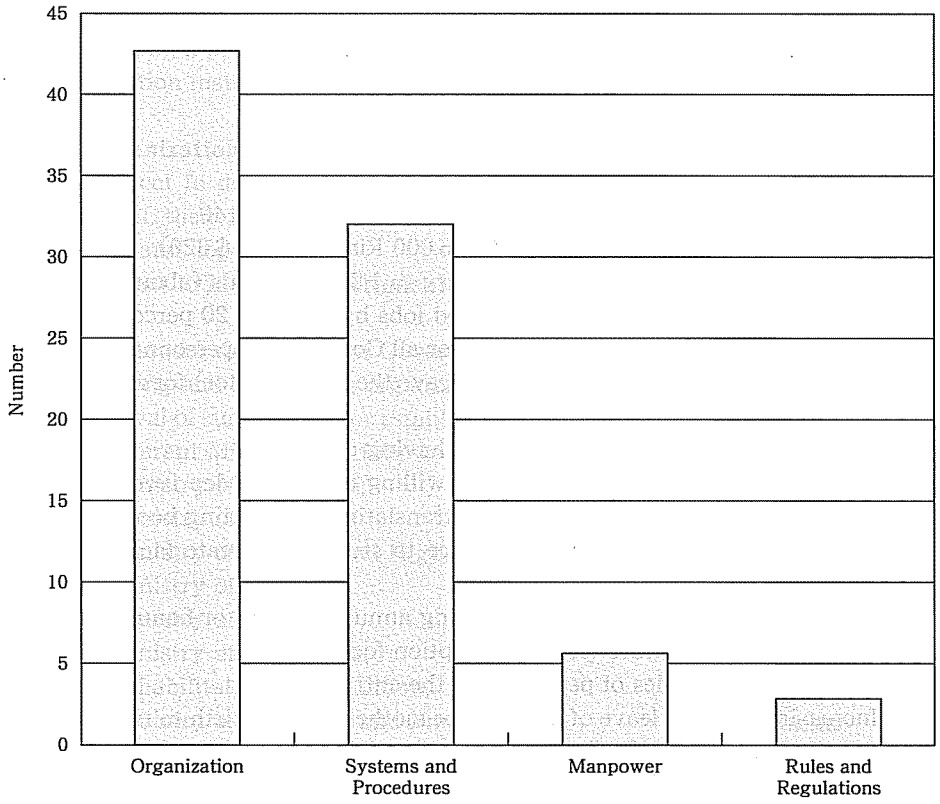
Prior to the reforms, it took 60 days to issue certificates following tests and release of the results. The situation was much improved by eliminating many unnecessary steps in the process . The reforms mandated that technical and vocational certificates were to be issued within 3 days in Provincial centers, and within 6 days outside the Provincial centers, practical testing was to be carried out 5 days following written tests, and duplicate copies of certificates were to be issued within one day.

3. Coordinating and facilitating the participation of Governors and Governors-General in evaluating the performance of Directors-General of Ministries working in Provinces; creating incentives to increase competence.

Prior to implementing this reform, the performances of Directors-General working in the Provinces were evaluated solely by senior officials in the Capital. As a result, these directors had little interest in either obeying or cooperating with the Governors, who therefore had difficulty in coordinating provincial forces for specific functions. As implemented, the reform transferred part of the authority to evaluate directors' performances to the Governors-General: at the end of each year the Directors-General's performances are evaluated both by their superiors in the Capital and the Governors-General in the Provinces on a two-thirds to one-third ratio. Cooperation between the Directors-General and the Governors-General has improved, and the Governors-General are encouraged to give prizes and bonuses for the best performance.

4. Empowering Provincial centers and expanding the authority of Provincial Institutes.

SAC's Ratifications in Terms of Administrative Dimensions Referred in First and Second Development Plans



Implementing this reform required organizing a tripartite committee for establishing ports in the Chabahar region. The result of this committee's work was good, making use of all machinery available in the military port project of Chabahar, accelerating the design and execution of small ports network, and creating jobs for the people of the region.

5. Merging the Medical Sciences Universities and Faculties in the Regional Health Organization.

This reform involved delegation of authority by the Deans of Medical Science Universities in the Provinces to the Deans of Medical Science Universities in the Townships.

6. Selection of exemplary provincial employees by provincial Directors-General and awarding prizes and bonuses in a ceremony held by the Governor-General.

Owing to space restrictions, I am not able to mention all of the reforms that have been implemented here, however, it is worth noting that up to 1997 more than 80 reforms were ratified by SAC. The diagram below shows the administrative distribution of the reforms.

The Different Areas of Reform

A. Manpower affairs

Reforms were implemented in three categories.

1. *Salary and wages, job classification, and personnel*

- Increasing salary table coefficient from 100 to 120 and 140.
- Increasing the minimum salary to 185,000 Rials (about $620).
- Increasing the maximum level of salary to 1,200,000 Rials (about $4000).
- Increasing the allowance in specialized jobs by a rate of 20 percent.
- Determining a piecework allowance for all Government personnel.
- Ratifying a special allowance (not to leave the Public sector) for managers and specialists.
- Ratifying an allowance for personnel having children.
- Ratifying an allowance for personnel willing to work in deprived regions.
- Ratifying allowances for composing, translating, and editing books.
- Establishing a committee or staff office to study and create facilities for the welfare of personnel.
- Suggesting a procedure for determining annual rewards or bonuses.
- Suggesting a procedure for tax exemption for personnel.
- Modifying the grades of personnel at the entry level.
- Increasing medical leave of absence for mothers giving birth to twins or more.
- Suggesting an increase in the investment for life insurance.

2. *Recruitment and manpower*

- Establishing a scheme to gather data on the number of Government personnel.
- Designing a procedure to estimate the demand and supply of government employees in the next decade.
- Establishing a design to standardize all jobs in the Government.
- Designing a system to keep files on all war veterans working for Government or being candidates for such work.
- Designing a project to computerize all agencies.
- Designing a system to estimate the manpower of each agency in future.
- Establishing a list of those leaving the government service.

3. *Manpower development and productivity*

- Designing a comprehensive plan to train Government personnel.
- Designing a project to establish short-term training courses to promote a work ethic and enhance productivity.
- Designing projects to improve the content of curricula.
- Designing a project to establish a data bank of international training institutes to fulfill the training needs of Government personnel.
- Establishing a data bank to maintain information on all personnel training institutes within the country.
- Designing a project to select exemplary employees.
- Designing a project to determine the validity and reliability of performance evaluation instruments.

B. Organizational Structure

- A project to determine duties and authority of Governors and Governors-General, their relationship to central and local authorities, and a system to install and depose them.
- A project to identify Government duties transferable to the non-government sector.
- A project for dissolution of Government monopolies.
- Preparing and confirming organizational design of Ministries.
- Approval of suggestions for establishment of administrative units in Provinces for different Ministries as follows:

①	Ministry of Education,	80+units.
②	Ministry of Health,	50+units.
③	Ministry of Culture and Higher Education,	30+units.
④	Ministry of Foreign	Affairs, 2 units.
⑤	Ministry of Interior,	80+units
⑥	Ministry of Commerce,	2 units.
⑦	Rehabilitation Organization,	20+units.
⑧	Ministry of Economy and Finance,	4 units.
⑨	Ministry of Road and Transportation,	1 unit.
⑩	Ministry of Agriculture,	3 units.

⑪ Ministry of Mines and Metals, 1 unit.
⑫ Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, 8 Units
⑬ Cultural Heritage Organization, 1 unit.
⑭ Endowment and Charity Organization, 6 units.
⑮ Plan and Budget Organization, 2 units.

During the past five years, a great number of positions have been established (58,783), eliminated (47,266), transferred (837), or had their titles changed (6,913).

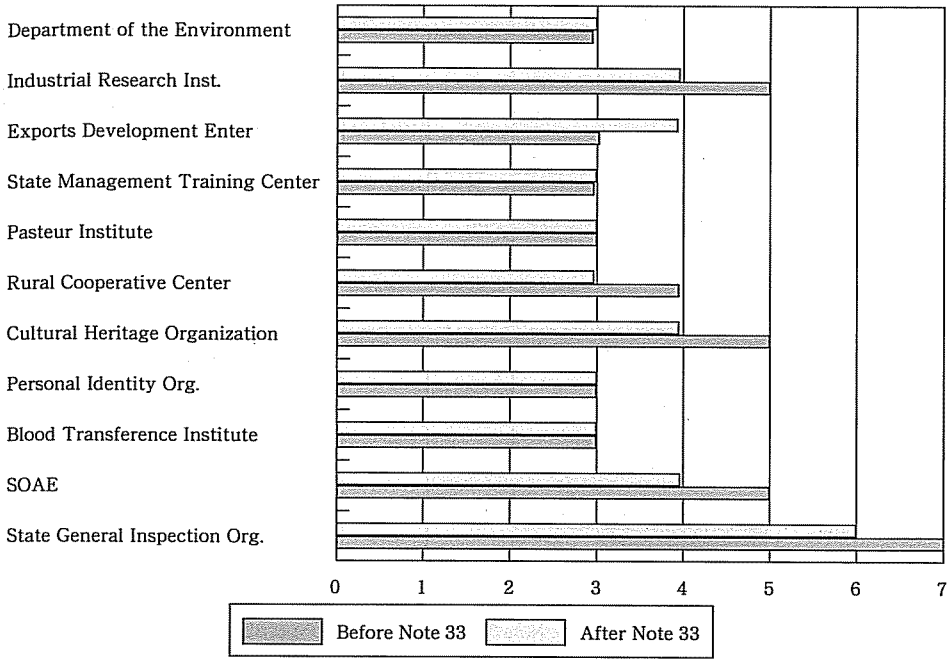
One major reform in the area of Government agency organization was the SOAE sanctions on the limits of the vice-minister's and director-general's positions in agencies. In fact, according to Note 33 of the Law of Second Five Year Economical, Social, and Cultural Development Plan (1996–2000), all Ministries, Institutes, and State-owned Companies were required, within the first year of the Plan, to review the structure and design of their organizations, in view of the criteria given them by SOAE, regarding their number of vice-ministers, their level of organizational, and their range of activities. They were then required to adopt the goals and policies of the plan, transferring affairs to the non-governmental sector, empowering staff units in the central area, transferring executive affairs to the Provincial units, and then submitting the results to SOAE for approval. SOAE criteria stated that the number of vice-ministerial positions in government agencies and the Presidential institute should not exceed 6, and that each vice-minister have only 6 bureaus or directors-general. In State-owned Companies the number of vice-chairmen could not exceed 3, with the number of bureaus or directors-general the same as the above agencies. These criteria necessitated downsizing or streamlining the top and middle managerial levels in the public sector.

C. Work Procedures in Government Agencies

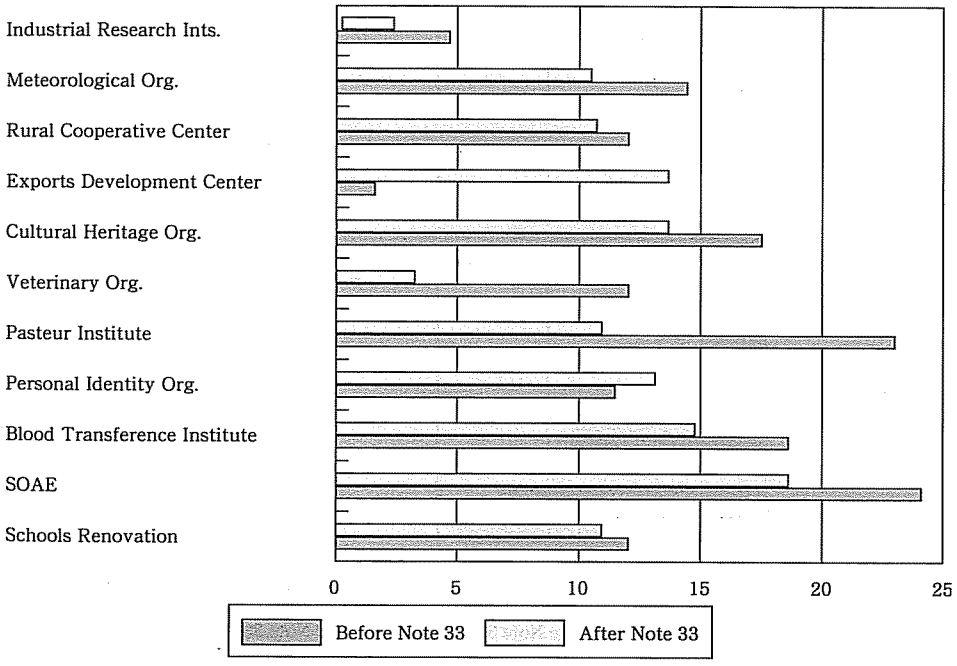
The following reforms were implemented:

- Modifying procedures for issuing licences to establish non-profit schools.
- Modifying procedures for receiving passengers, selling tickets and accepting luggage on the Railroad.
- Modifying procedures for receiving water, electricity, telephone and gas subscriptions.
- Modifying procedures for managing the affairs of the disabled.
- Modifying procedures for the establishment of unemployment benefits for the Social Security Organization.
- Designing procedures to review the affairs of people not allowed to leave the country.
- Designing procedures for the affairs of released prisoners of war.
- Preparing a project for "service windows" in executive agencies.
- Designing a method for receiving insurance payments for the Social Security Organization.
- Modifying the plan for establishing Tourism offices.
- Preparing a plan to review entrance and exit gates in land travel.

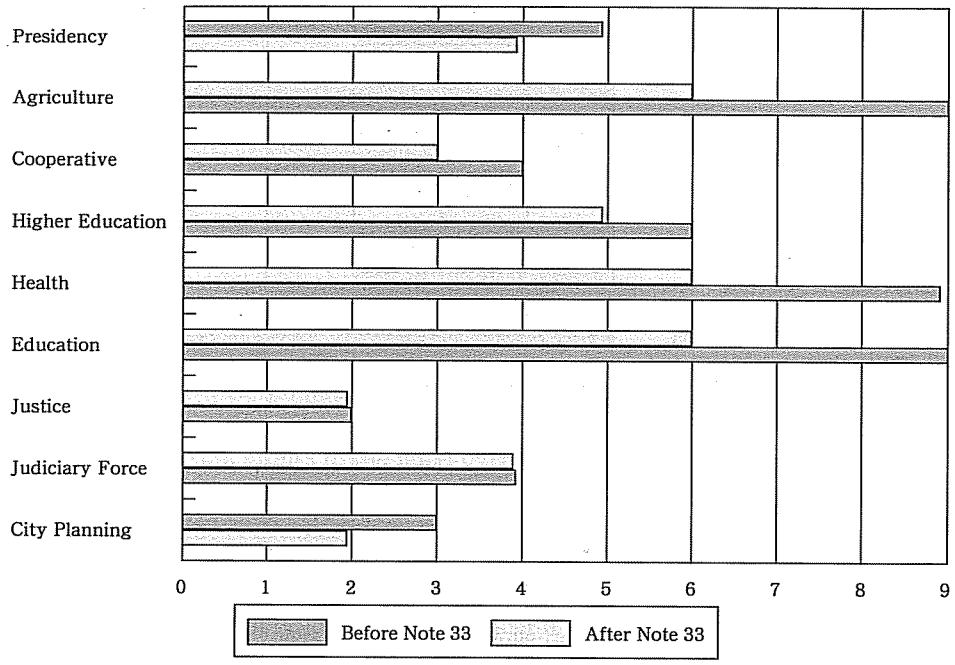
Number of Vice-Chairmen in Government Agencies in Carrying Out Note 33 of Second Development Plan Law



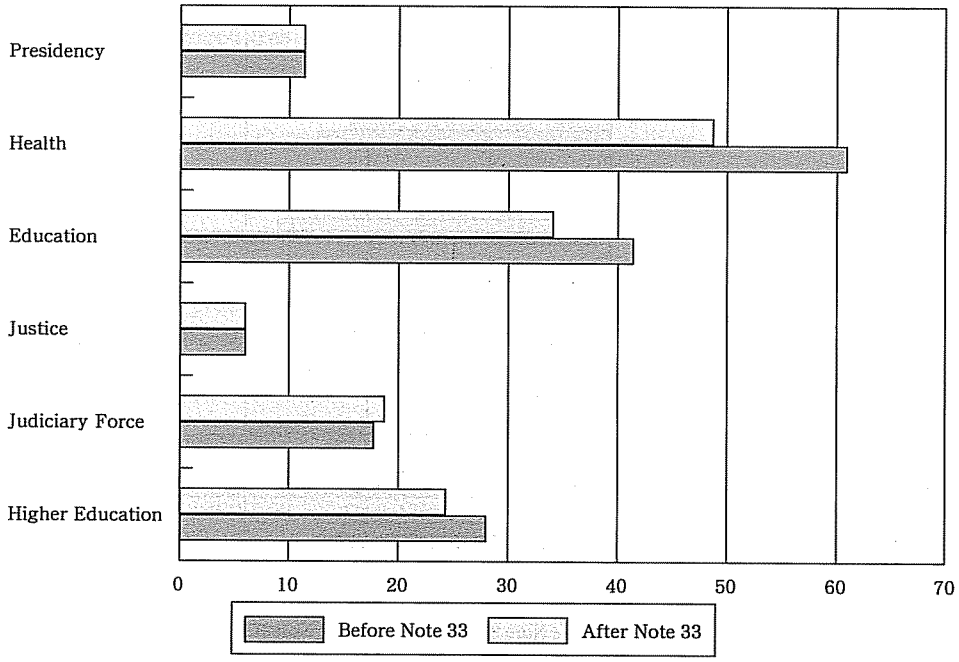
Number of Managerial Positions in Government Institutes in Carrying out Note 33 of Second Development Plan Law



Number of Vice-Ministers in Carrying Out Note 33 of Second Development Plan Law



Number of Managerial Positions in Ministries in Carrying Out Note 33 of Second Development Plan Law



Reform in the State Management Training Center

The State Management Training Center (SMTC) has been very active during the last decade, establishing branches in all 27 provinces in Iran. Previously, nearly all students who wished to study public management had to travel to Tehran; now they apply to a branch of SMTC in their own province to pursue their studies. Provincial branches select their own students and run courses approved by SMTC: a 2-year college degree, a 4-year bachelor's degree, and a 3-year master's degree. Ph. D. courses are available only in Tehran. Students in the academic year 1996-1997 numbered 3,973 for the College degree, 3,843 for the Bachelor's, 4.331 for the Master's, and 15 students in the Doctorate program.

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