

'Radical decentralisation' needed in Iran to allow Kurdish communities to benefit from natural resources, study argues

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A radical decentralisation of politics and decision-making in Iran is needed to allow Kurdish communities to benefit from natural resources, experts have argued.

Kurdish regions in Iran have rich minerals, dense forests and massive surface and underground water deposits.

But deforestation, exploitation of the environment and the irregular and unconsidered extraction of gold and aluminium has resulted in environmental and [health issues](#) among the Kurdish people as well as droughts and [water shortages](#).

The study outlines how many Kurds view the Iranian state's economic and development policies in Kurdistan as unsustainable, discriminatory and colonialist. Kurdish environmental groups have been highly targeted by Iran's security and judicial systems.

Researchers say [water management](#) is seen as destructive and mismanaged because it is transferred from Iranian Kurdistan to other regions. This threatens to bring desertification and land subsidence. As part of the Turkish state's Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) 22 dams have been constructed in Kurdistan is another form of exploitation of Kurdistan's natural resources. This has had an adverse impact on the landscape and culture in the region.

The study says the Kurdish people could benefit from Kurdistan's natural human resources if there was a radical form of decentralization of the political and decision-making system so they could participate in different aspects of political and [economic activities](#) determined by their cultural and national values, needs and preferences.

The study, published in the *Journal of World Systems Research*, was conducted by Dr. Allan Hassaniyan, from the University of Exeter and Mansour Sohrabi, an independent researcher.

Dr. Hassaniyan said: "In recent decades, Kurdistan's natural environment has been subject to massive degradation, and Kurdistan's natural resources—which should have been the source of wealth and prosperity of the region's population—have been comprehensively exploited by different state institutions, among them the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its sub-organisations and contractors.

"People face drought, soil erosion and deforestation. Damage to the natural environment in Kurdistan is caused by [climate change](#) and human activities, including the government's mismanagement of environmental issues and catastrophes."

Dr. Sohrabi said: "The Iranian state's economic and developmental approach to Kurdistan's natural resources, and the extraction and exploitation of these resources, have resulted in extensive environmental degradation, affecting public health.

"The state-centric approach to socioeconomic development, exemplified through dam construction, water transportation, deforestation, the location of polluting industries such as [oil refineries](#) in or close to natural sites, are among the governmental initiatives that pose an extensive threat to environmental sustainability and the socioeconomic integrity of different communities in the region."

More information: Allan Hassaniyan et al, Colonial Management of Iranian Kurdistan; with Emphasis on Water Resources, *Journal of World-Systems Research* (2022). [DOI: 10.5195/JWSR.2022.1081](https://doi.org/10.5195/JWSR.2022.1081)

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