

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

Daily Outlook  
AFGHANISTAN  
The Leading Independent Newspaper

April 09, 2019

## Challenges before Anti-Polio Campaign

Afghanistan is one of the three countries, alongside Pakistan and Nigeria, in the world where polio remains endemic. The number of reported cases has been reduced in recent years in the wake of effective campaign against poliovirus. Polio Eradication Initiative (PEI) seeks to immunize every single child in the country to minimize its risk. The decline in polio fills the air with optimism, but there are obstacles which impede the campaign.

Reports show that the number of officially reported wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) cases in Afghanistan dropped from 80 in 2011 to 37 in 2012. The downward trend continued with 8 cases of WPV1 confirmed, in eastern part of the country, during January-September 2013, compared with 26 within the same period in 2012. In 2016, 13 polio cases were registered, down from 20 the year before and 28 in 2014. In 2015, in which polio reduced to a great extent, 40 per cent of cases were reported from eastern Nangarhar province, which borders Pakistan.

In 2017, the total cases of polio in the country was 14. However, the cases had been reported 21 last year in Afghanistan - 15 cases were in restive provinces such as Kandahar, Helmand and Uruzgan. In the current year, two cases of polio have been reported so far in Kandahar province.

The international efforts decreased the number of endemic countries from 123 in 1988 to two in 2015, when Nigeria was delisted from polio-endemic countries. Nonetheless, Nigeria returned to the list when four cases of polio were found out in August 2016 in state of Borno - where the Islamic extremist group Boko Haram is active, but no cases were reported in 2017.

Although the campaign against polio continues, as the Taliban have agreed to vaccinate children in the mosque in restive provinces, they refused house-to-house vaccination. Omer Zawak, spokesperson to Helmand Governor, is cited as saying that the anti-polio campaign had been implemented without pause in the Taliban-dominated areas except for Nawzad and Musa-Qala districts. It is said that the reason behind the Taliban's disagreement for polio campaign in the two districts were not clear.

Three reasons are believed to be behind the militants' opposition to the administration of oral polio vaccine (OPV) to kids. First, the fake vaccination scheme, which was used as a cover to track the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden in 2011, triggered mistrust and hatred among terrorist networks. Second, they may consider the anti-polio campaign a ploy by the US policy-makers rendering recipients impotent or infertile so as to reduce the Muslim population as the Taliban once called it even against Islam. Third reason is vis-à-vis female workers. Militants' attacks against female health workers, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, might be mainly the result of their misogynistic view and their mindset denying women's social role and discriminating them on the grounds of their gender. Health workers are threatened not only by terrorist groups but also by counter insurgency war. For example, dozens of health workers and patients were killed in October 2015 as a result of the US military air attack on the Kunduz Trauma Center. Similarly, eight polio workers were killed while performing their duty in 2014. War is a serious threat to health workers impeding their activities.

Few years back, parents were also said to lose their trust in health workers in the Taliban-dominated areas and tribal belts as a result of the Taliban's campaign against polio vaccination.

With this in mind, a National Islamic Advisory Group for Polio Eradication was founded in 2016 to bridge the gap between parents and health workers, brought about by the militant fighters. Consequently, almost 90 per cent of Afghans accepted how critical immunization was for their children and the improvement paved the ground for the implementation of 2016 polio-free in 99 per cent of Afghanistan's districts.

The clerics have to continue their support for anti-polio campaign and endorse polio vaccines through issuing decree. Constitutionally, the state is committed to "provide free preventative healthcare and treatment of diseases as well as medical facilities to all citizens in accordance with the provisions of the law." Thus, Afghan government has to pave the ground for smooth implementation of anti-polio campaign across the country. The government should also ensure the safety of health workers to support the process of the campaign.

To sum up, the government has to provide a safe ground for health workers and make sure that every single child is vaccinated against polio so that Afghanistan could be free from polio.

## Optimism and Challenges of Agriculture Industry in Afghanistan

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Agriculture and agriculture-related industries are fundamental means of livelihood in Afghanistan supporting around 80% of its population. The climate of Afghanistan is well suited for the cultivation of horticultural crops, and so Afghanistan is the geographic origin of many high-end crops like raisins, pomegranates, apple, pistachios, Chilgoza Pine, almonds, saffron and so on. Intensive commercial farming increases sustainable economic growth in rural areas, encourages competition, contributes to regional development and helps sustain the growth of private businesses related to it. Investment in agro-business and agro-processing will make a positive impact on the economic development of Afghanistan and will feed millions more people if the agricultural industry gets rid of current challenges.

Given the aforementioned role of agriculture in the country, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock held the Fifth National Agriculture Promotion Summit in Kabul with the presence of three thousand farmers from different parts of the country. During the National Summit, the President Mohammed Ashraf Ghani emphasized on Exporting Crop Products, saying that the work of every embassy, diplomat and minister should be marketing. If we cannot improve our marketing, we cannot increase our products. Mr. Ghani said the government is trying to pave the ground for livestock and farmers' exports through the establishment of aerial corridor. Emphasizing on national exports, the president said that the key to economic independence is in the hands of farmers, especially women farmers and entrepreneurs.

In another part of his speech, he emphasized on need of water management, saying that at least 20 billion cubic meters of water should be collected in the country, the foundation for water management has been laid down in the country but need to accelerate. He also added that the land should be the means of production, not the means of paperwork and usurpation. The president also emphasized the management of pastures, he said, we will give priority to nomads for creating modern livestock and the relevant ministries must take action in this regard. "Our main economic goal is to transform Afghanistan from the importing country into an exporting country of agriculture and food products," he said. Mr Ghani assured farmers and livestock owners that the government is ready to take any possible steps to protect and strengthen the domestic market, and they should see themselves in a valuable chain.

According to reports, more than 80 percent of the country's population is engaged in agriculture and livestock and the country's economy is based on agriculture and livestock. Abdul Qayyum, a farmer from Herat province, said that in the past the farmers and gardeners had migrated to the cities because of lack of profit from their crops production, but due to the efforts made by the Ministry of Agriculture in standardization of this field they have returned to the villages and resumed their

farming activities. He said farmers and gardeners would ask the president to create an unprofitable agricultural bank for farmers and give farmers and gardeners long-term loans, and our agricultural products should be exported under the name and address of Afghanistan.

Nasir Ahmad Durrani, the Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock said that last year drought brought a lot of losses to the agricultural sector, but the Ministry of Agriculture, despite its limited facilities, managed to prevent from the great catastrophe. Mr. Durani emphasized on development and promotion of the agricultural sector and said: "Investors who invest in the agricultural sector, the Ministry of Agriculture will provide them with full cooperation and support." He added that the ministry has prepared a long-term plan for 1398 and submitted to the presidency for further examination.

Thus Zafar Maroof, the chairman of Poultry Union of the country, also thanked the president for his attention on the poultry industry, saying the union has 10824 farms in Afghanistan and has invested \$ 983 million in this field. He added that in this sector, 120 thousand workers have directly employed and 263 thousand are working indirectly, and the annual need for poultry meat is estimated at 295 thousand metric tons. The poultry Union of the country has managed to produce 219 thousand metric tons of Poultry meat last year. And the annual need for eggs is 1160 million, and the Afghan Poultry Farm has been able to produce 600 million eggs. The chairman of the Poultry Union also raised the demand of poultry farmers to strengthen domestic poultry for poor women and to make land available for poultry development.

Then Mrs. Rouhana, a farmer of Surobi district of Kabul province, spoke and explained the demand and suggestions of women farmers to pay more attention to the agricultural sectors such as creating cold-rooms and marketing the agricultural products. As agricultural products is the essential part of Afghan economy, it is highly important for government or private investors to establish new cold rooms and improve handling practices inside Afghanistan. Off season products can be offered to consumers fresh at premium prices; thus, cold rooms can be used as instruments to link consumers' demand and organized supply.

According to experts, the process of purchasing, processing, storing and selling produce at a particular time and in a particular market involves an organized supply chain of goods, services and investment. Consumers can benefit from the cold room units because the produce is kept fresh longer (out of season). Producers benefit because farm gate prices tend to be higher and less volatile. Managers of the cold room storage facilities sell fresh produce at premium prices when seasonal supply has declined and have the option for exporting products if linkages are established with markets.

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## How Western Economies Can Avoid the Japan Trap

By: Mohamed A. El-Erian

Not too long ago, the conventional wisdom held that "Japanification" could never happen in Western economies. Leading US economists argued that if the combined threat of weak growth, disinflation, and perpetually low interest rates ever materialized, policymakers would have the tools to deal with it. They had no problem lecturing the Japanese about the need for bold measures to pull their country out of a decades-old rut. Japanification was regarded as the avoidable consequence of poor policymaking, not as an inevitability.

And yet the specter of Japanification now looms over the West. After the 2008 financial crisis, the recoveries in both Europe and the United States were more sluggish and less inclusive than the majority of policymakers, politicians, and economists expected. And, more recently, hopes for achieving "escape velocity" out of the "new normal" of low growth and persistent disinflationary pressure have been dashed in Europe and Japan, and some worry that they may be receding in the US.

Europe, in particular, is back in the grips of a worrisome regionwide slowdown. Growth projections have been consistently revised downward, and the European Central Bank has acknowledged that its earlier optimism about achieving on-target inflation was misplaced. With yields on government bonds having fallen, the global trade in securities at negative interest rates has reached around \$10 trillion.

Meanwhile, Japan is approaching its fourth consecutive decade of consistently low nominal growth, inflation, and interest rates. And in the US, a growing number of economists are worried about a coming slowdown, with some urging the US Federal Reserve to cut interest rates, and others calling for it to adopt a higher inflation target in order to combat the risk of excessive disinflation.

Were all those Western economists who dismissed the threat of Japanification in the past being too glib? Yes and no.

Today's Japanification fears stem from legitimate worries about structural disinflationary forces that could cause lower, less inclusive growth, both directly and indirectly. These forces include societal aging, rising inequality (in terms of income, wealth, and opportunity), social and economic insecurity among broad segments of the population, and a loss of trust in institutions and expert opinion.

Along with the zombification of firms after the last asset bubble, these structural factors have led to lower demand, as well as increased risk aversion and self-insurance, rather than growth-promoting risk-pooling, at the margin. Innovation, particularly in artificial intelligence, big data, and mobility, is another factor. Though the economic impact of these technologies is ambiguous, there is no doubt that they are reducing entry barriers across a growing number of economic activities and putting downward pressure on prices (the "Amazon effect"), at least in the short term. Nonetheless, their long-term effects on growth and productivity remain to be seen.

Growth is also being undercut in less direct ways. For example, persistently low - and in some cases negative - interest rates tend to eat away at the institutional integrity and operational effectiveness of

the financial system, thereby reducing bank lending and limiting the range of long-term products that insurance/retirement firms can offer to households. Another indirect effect stems from expectations about the future. The longer growth and inflation remain low, the more tempted households and companies will be to postpone consumption and investment decisions, thus prolonging low growth and inflation.

The Western economists who initially underestimated the threat of Japanification did so because they had downplayed or simply ignored these direct and indirect factors. In retrospect, they should not be surprised to find that the societies with the fastest-aging populations and less inward migration are the ones now struggling with Japanification. Still, those economists were not wrong to argue that policies can play a decisive role in macroeconomic outcomes - especially when structural forces are being amplified by excessive cyclical tightening, as was the case in Japan in 1989. The problem is that they have tended to focus too narrowly on monetary policy, while overestimating its effectiveness. Countries at risk of Japanification need a much broader mix of policies to address both the demand side and the supply side of the economy.

Monetary policy, after all, is less effective near the "zero bound" and in scenarios where other "liquidity trap" factors are in play. Large-scale balance sheet operations like quantitative easing (QE) can buy time by seeking to inject more liquidity directly into the system. But they don't address the underlying issues, and they come with their own set of costs, forms of collateral damage, and unintended consequences.

The strongest protection against Japanification, then, is a combination of demand- and supply-side measures at the national, regional (in the case of Europe), and global levels. In countries with adequate fiscal space, this could mean looser government budgets and more productivity-enhancing investments (such as in infrastructure, education, and training). And in any country facing skills shortages, increased legal migration and better policies to facilitate labor mobility can help close the gap.

Moreover, these policies would need to be accompanied by more effective protections for the most vulnerable segments of the population, particularly when it comes to health, training, and labor retooling. None of this will materialize without better political leadership and more enlightened global policy interactions.

Japanification offers three lessons that Western policymakers and politicians have yet to internalize sufficiently. First, structural pressures make prompt action to reverse low growth, disinflation, and zero-to-low interest rates all the more critical. Second, unconventional monetary measures may be necessary, but they certainly are not sufficient. And, third, when crafting the required comprehensive policy response, we must recognize that the hurdles are a lot less technical, and a lot more political.

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