

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



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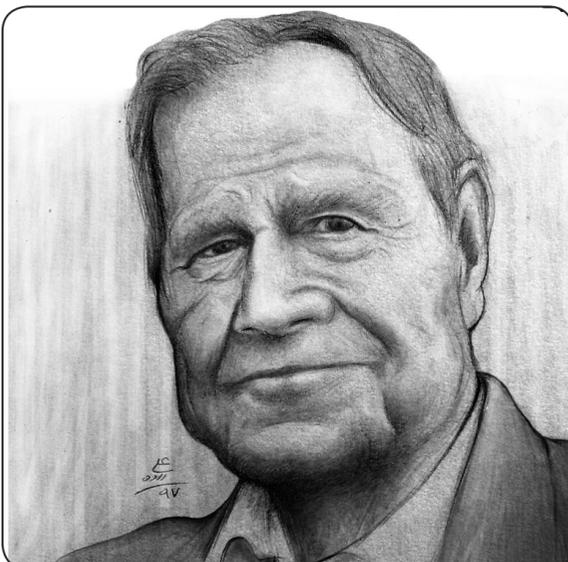
A Democratic Political System Ensures Citizens Involvement in Decision Making Process

Awareness and positive involvement of the citizens in civic and political matters play a key role in the political stability and development of any political system. This is why democracy demands from the common man a certain level of ability and character: rational conduct and active participation in the government. In Afghanistan, political parties, politicians and transition programs have been marked with turbulence, uncertainties and violence. Afghan politics is characterized by greed, love of power, violence, assassination, thuggery and election rigging. Unfortunately, violence has become equal to Afghan political culture such that virtually all elections held so far in the country are violent ridden. It is common that, during the election, there are reported cases of underage voting, distribution of money, manipulation of voters' register, diversion of electoral materials, ballot box snatching, unlawful possession of firearms and other electoral offences. This political scenario engendered lukewarm political attitude and participation among many Afghan citizens.

In a democratic political system, the citizens shall be involved in the political process and decision making by joining political process, political party, voting during election, participating in electoral campaign, community affairs and other political activities. Indeed, the level and pattern of political participation of the citizens determine, to some extent, the success of the political system. In Afghanistan, politics is seen by a number of people as a dirty game which must be avoided. This goes back to the background of undemocratic politics in Afghanistan. And undemocratic tendencies, deception, violence and uncertainties that characterize the political system are the results of such a political system in the past. In fact, political apathy displaced by some Afghan citizens during general elections, can be laminated as: voters' apathy in Afghanistan is no longer contentious. Voters turnout in the just concluded general elections in the past have provided a scientific and empirical evidence of the existence of voters' apathy and disinterestedness of sections of the electorates in elections and it may be more prevalent in the coming elections. This scenario will have very negative implications for popular participation and governance in the country.

However, the development and nourishment of true democracy in Afghanistan depends, to a large extent, on the electoral system. The electoral system of Afghanistan shall ensure the confidence of the citizens in the electoral system and their participation in the electoral process in order to bring the responsible and democratic leaders to the stage. As a result, the success of the 2018 Wolsi Jirga election requires transparent electoral process and mass participation of the electorates.

The political culture in Afghanistan is characterized by intolerance, intimidation, thuggery, assassination, bitterness, apathy, indolence, money, religious and ethnic politics. As a result of this, the ingredients of democracy have not been able to thrive in the country. Therefore, the Afghan electoral system shall act in a way to change the assumptions that the citizens possess and demonstrate some civic capacities. These civic capacities involve three qualities: intelligence, self-control and conscience. The citizens must be able to understand the interest of the community, to subordinate his own will to the general will and must feel his responsibility to the community and be prepared to serve it by voting. This can ensure nation building and one nation with one goal in Afghanistan.



Counter-terrorism Needs an Eagle Eye

By: Hujjatullah Zia

The number of cases of armed violence including terrorist activities increased to 24,202 worldwide in 2016, a rise of 25 percent year-on-year and dozens of times more than a decade ago, according to Statics from Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center in the UK.

Lack of socioeconomic opportunities, marginalization and discrimination, poor governance, violations of human rights and the rule of law have been listed in the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism as reasons behind the nurturing of violent extremism.

The increase of violent extremism and terrorist activities are widely felt in Afghanistan, which has borne the brunt of terrorism and insurgency in recent years, mainly following the withdrawal of US forces. The large-scale sacrifices of Afghan soldiers and civilians in the wake of terrorist activities and the endless sufferings of the public show that terrorist groups seek to continue their deadly activities. Although Kabul government and its international allies have been fighting terrorism strongly for years, the root of terrorism was not addressed. Currently, the issue of terrorism has been highly complicated for many reasons. First, there are a number of terrorist groups fighting for multiple objectives. It seems that mercenary members of insurgent groups have surpassed that of ideologues. They are simply paid to fight. It is also believed that a number of individuals who are involved in systematic crimes such as smuggling country's mineral resources are affiliated with insurgent groups. For instance, a number of mine workers in Afghanistan were killed by unknown armed men. It indicates that smugglers and even irresponsible armed groups have hands in gloves with insurgents. Hence, the bulk of terrorist groups are most likely to fight for financial interests. If such groups integrate into the government's body, they will be able to orchestrate broader illegal activities.

Second, there seems many mysterious hands to back terrorist groups. That is to say, the reinforcement of terrorist groups, mainly the Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan, arouses one's doubt about their supporting sources. It is not only the insurgents' strong and modern weapons, but also their organized plans, strong intelligence, and military tactics. Since a number of terrorist groups are used as pawns in political games, they are trained and equipped with heavy weapons and instruments. Members of retired militaries and intelligence of countries will be among the militants for training them, providing them with information and organizing attacks. Thus, the issue of terrorism is more complicated than one imagines. If this category is integrated in the government's body, it will be

highly perilous and their masters will get access to the top secrets of their rival countries.

Third, the financial resources of terrorist groups are still ambiguous for Afghanistan. In other words, Afghan government and its international allies need to do a thorough research about the financial resources of terrorist groups and make it clear what percentage of financial support do different groups get from illegal mining and smuggling of country's mineral resources, what is the percentage of support from narcotic drug, and what are other financial resources. Fighting terrorism should not be reduced to only killing insurgents while turning a blind eye to the root causes, ideological supports and financial resources. To ponder the aforementioned issues, Afghan government needs to refer to think-tanks and researchers and establish more research bases for unraveling the complexity of the issues.

The next solution, also proposed by Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, is engaging earlier to address the drivers of extremism through such actions such as eradicating poverty, empowering youth and strengthening strategic communication on the internet and social media.

Ratifying Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 in February, 2015, the UK laid legal bases for education program to counter extremism in the strategy for terrorism prevention which prompted those potentially susceptible to influence of extremism to receive education of their own accord. Thus, Afghan government has to prevent from closing schools. Those youths who do not attend schools will remain a tempting prey for terrorists as their ignorance increases their vulnerability to insurgency.

The last solution which seems to me very effective is recruiting locals as militias, a plan which was proposed by US officials and was put into practice in some parts of the country but has been discarded. In Ghazni province of Moqor district, which was one of the most insecure districts, the local militias have played very effective role and turned Moqor to one of the secure districts. Since local militias are operating without uniforms and know more about those who have been recruited by the Taliban and their whereabouts in their areas, they are able to fight them in more effective way. In short, the root cause of terrorism must be tackled and their financial resources must be cut off so as to counter terrorism successfully and defeat the armed insurgents.

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Women, Work, and India's Rickshaw Revolution

By: Kasturi GVL

When resources are limited, it is human capital that defines the sustainable development of a community, especially in the case of costly misallocation and underutilization, as is often the case in developing countries. Nowhere is this truer than in India, where the value of the current demographic dividend hinges on a grossly underutilized resource pool - the female workforce.

Despite rising education levels and a female literacy rate of 65%, only about a quarter of Indian women participate in the labor force. Increasing women's workforce participation by a mere ten percentage points could add \$700 billion to India's GDP by 2025. And that requires removing one of the main obstacles to achieving this objective: broken transportation services.

Astha (name changed), a 35-year-old teacher working in the district headquarters of Jhunjhunu, in the state of Rajasthan, is one of the youngest teachers ever to be nominated for a promotion to school headmistress. But accepting the promotion meant transferring farther away from home. She took the new position, only to find the commute difficult and unsafe, as she left in the early hours of the morning, walking 1.5-2 kilometers every day. Two months into her new role, unable to depend on being escorted by family members to the bus depot daily, she gave up the job and returned to a lower position at the nearby school. Lack of reliable transportation led her to give up this opportunity.

According to the National Sample Survey Office, more than 60% of rural and urban households use buses as their main mode of public transportation, followed by auto-rickshaws, taxis, railways, and cycle rickshaws. While we have come a long way in reach and coverage when it comes to bus and rail networks, India's door-to-door transportation network is still dispersed and unreliable. Unfortunately, working women are the most severely affected by inadequate service.

When safe and efficient public transit is unavailable, women typically settle for lower-paid jobs closer to home. This is reflected in the distance women travel for work in urban areas. In Bengaluru, for example, the average daily commute for women is just over a mile, while men travel twice as far for their jobs. In Delhi, 75% of women work within a three-mile radius of home, whereas 75% of men work within eight miles.

The biggest transportation roadblock for women in India lies in what planners call the first-last mile problem - getting to and from the station, a concern that Astha knows well. While this problem is a feature of any transportation network, in developing countries it adds significantly more time, cost, and safety constraints to every journey. In Delhi, for example, the first and last miles constitute 41% of the total time and 47% of the total cost of the trip. Clearly, the consequences of the first-last mile challenge are profound - not only for women, but also for India's economy. How, then, can planners improve transportation to get more women working?

There is only one persuasive answer: better auto-rickshaws. India has more three-wheeled vehicles than any other country, and ev-

ery day, millions of people are whisked through narrow streets and congested traffic in these easy-to-manuever carts. Yet Indian rickshaws have not evolved in the last 50 years to serve either the rider's or the driver's needs. They are poorly distributed, unsafe, and not future-ready. To solve women's urban mobility challenges, we need a completely reimagined vehicle that is electric, shared, safe, and "smart."

Indian women's travel is characterized by "trip chaining." They make shorter and more frequent trips than men, and their trips often involve more stops, to run errands, shop, pick up children from school, and so forth. This increases their dependency on first- and last-mile transportation. However, most rickshaws operating in India today are unorganized and ply only the busiest, most lucrative routes.

With the right innovations in technology and policy, we can bring order to the scattershot nature of India's auto-rickshaw fleet and bridge the demand-supply gap. For example, ride-hailing apps and booking platforms could efficiently match rider demand with rickshaw supply, as would well-orchestrated feeder services to bus and rail networks. Policies that encourage ride sharing could multiply fleet capacity.

In terms of safety, it is necessary to consider both accidents and crime or harassment. For starters, nearly 40% of all accidents involving these vehicles cause them to topple. And a study in Delhi showed that 51% of women had faced some form of harassment while using public transport, and 42% while waiting for it.

We need innovations in accident-prevention systems and other technologies that would make such technologies a feature of low-cost three-wheelers. Technology can also help connect transportation nodes and vehicles to police and medical systems, substantially reducing the response times for emergency services.

Safety from crime, on the other hand, needs a connected, smart ecosystem with auto-rickshaws at its heart. Rickshaws equipped with GPS systems could enable passengers to share real-time location data with family or friends. A mandatory SOS alert system would give passengers and drivers a means to call for help, regardless of whether they were carrying a mobile phone. Government regulations already require panic buttons in taxis, public buses, and other public transport; requiring them for rickshaws is the natural next step.

Last but not least, we need these reimagined vehicles to be future-ready. Air pollution is a ticking bomb: 14 of the 15 cities with the world's highest concentrations of fine particulate matter are in India, underscoring the urgency of switching to low-carbon, battery-powered vehicles.

When women can travel to work conveniently, choosing affordable transportation, without fear of harassment or abuse, India will have arrived. Talented women like Astha will never need to choose between a job they love and a commute they loathe. Indian women need affordable, safe, and reliable options to help them overcome the first-last mile problem. A reimagined rickshaw may be just the ticket. Kasturi GVL, a One Young World Ambassador from India, is Associate Director at Ola Cabs, a mobility company based in Bengaluru.

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