

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



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## Skewed Development in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is one of the countries that have not been able to make necessary economic developments and defeat the most threatening evil in the society, i.e. poverty. Though billions of dollars have been given to it by the international community, particularly US, for development purposes, it has not been able to use it for the right purposes. Therefore, the country is now suffering from 55 percent poverty rate (as per the survey by Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS), a joint study by European Union and Afghanistan's Central Statistics Organization).

As a matter of fact, the so-called development in the country seems to have been skewed and it has favored only some people who have accumulated wealth that can be sufficient for their several generations. On the other hand there are many others who have been suffering for many generations. The widening gap between the rich and the poor or the class disparities can be best observed in capital Kabul. There are some tall, luxurious and magnificently built houses with visibly all the facilities of life while on the other hand there are houses that cannot be termed houses in the true sense of the word. Many of them are nothing more than tents that cannot guard the people against the severe weather conditions. Then there are many people who live without houses. They have to spend their nights along or under the different bridges in the city.

These disparities between the rich and poor are affecting the society as a whole. Though the stratification into rich and poor classes existed in Afghan society earlier as well, but it has changed its primitive shape; even in the urban regions the stratification is more like modern upper class and lower class division.

Some argue that this stratification of the society in different classes is a necessity. They believe that it is because of interaction of various strata that the society tends to function as whole. However, this argument is quiet debatable. Actually the class based setup in a society is mostly the outcome of the practice of Capitalism. Capitalism, at least in theory, tends to follow justice and demands that everyone should be gifted according to his ability. Thus people with more ability can have as much as they deserve lawfully. Further, the system of Capitalism also allows the individuals to have lawful private property.

This system seems to be working for most of the developed and developing countries. In fact, if this system has been working for so many countries, there are few pre-requisites that are maintained to a varying extent by these countries that have been helping the system to develop instead of facing a failure.

First, it has been made sure that justice should be maintained in its true spirit, i.e. it must not favor only the upper class; rather the upper class itself should be treated by the law and order system in the same way as the other two classes; namely, lower, middle and upper classes.

To put it in simpler terms it can be said that social stratification has not been changed to social injustice. Second, social mobility has been made very easy in such societies. Social mobility basically means movement from one social class to another.

For example, it has not been very difficult for a person taking birth in a lower class to work hard, develop the capability and move to the middle and even to upper class. There have been equal opportunities for almost all the members of the societies to excel in their lives and become rich. Social mobility has been able to provide some oxygen for the social setup to inhale so that it must keep on living.

It is also vital to note that in Afghanistan the wealth has poured in without much accountability and weak check and balance system, therefore, the stratification has led to sufferings. The upper class in Afghanistan cannot be said to be in the form as it exists in an industrialized society.

Rather, it includes the landlords, tribal heads and religious leaders. Both political and economic systems tend to revolve around these people who are in total control of entire wealth and its distribution. Further, it is also true that all these people do not seem to have the ability for what they are gifted.

They in pursuit of their own benefits have only made the opportunity of development favor themselves. The poor people of Afghanistan, who have been badly stricken by decades of wars, have only suffered the worst manifestations of poverty.

There are millions who do not have the basic requirements of life and are compelled to live their lives in the remotest areas, without much support and attention. Food, cloth, shelter and other requirements like education and security are non-existent for them.

And at the same time there are people who own properties worth millions of dollars. These are all the results of an intense stratification. The poor do not seem to be having many opportunities of improvements in their lives and that means that social mobility, which can provide oxygen to a stratified society does not exist, while the social injustice is on the rise. The law and order system, instead of treating everyone alike, has served as the slave of the upper-class. The current scenario if goes unchecked can bring further misery to Afghan society.



## The Difficulty of Fighting Corruption in Corrupt Structure

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Celebrating the international anti-corruption day on Monday, the NUG high ranking Officials including the president and vice president emphasized Afghanistan's commitment to fight against corruption. In the same time, the Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) releases their biennial survey showing no big changes in the fight against corruption in public's mind. According to the IWA survey in 2018, 61 percent of respondents stated that they were either 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' with the situation in their home provinces, compared to 54 percent in 2016. The report said 62 percent of those surveyed felt the government had not done enough to tackle these problems over the past two years – a slight decrease on the 67 percent who felt the same way in 2016.

While there has been a significant increase since 2016 in the number of respondents who say they would pay a bribe (33 percent up from 22 percent. The vast majority of Afghans (83 percent) believed that corruption had negatively affected the life of people in their local areas. In addition, the international community was increasingly the target of much criticism. More than half (52 percent) of those surveyed did not believe the international community wanted to fight corruption in Afghanistan, compared to 45 percent in 2016, 36 percent in 2014 and 37 percent in 2012.

However, the NUG government has made some efforts to combat against corruption, but these efforts have not yielded tangible results yet. These efforts have been largely focused on recruiting and competing on government positions. The officials from the Administrative Reform Commission have repeatedly spoken of their achievements and successes in the recruitment process, but that has not been reflected in society and has not found its place in the public's minds. Even, if we talk about balance and justice in the field of the country's recruitment system, it seems more ridiculous and joke in public opinion than a real word.

The reason for this is that the Administrative Reform Commission has focused on one section and one dimension only. Though their procedure is very good, there are many tales and question in the process. In fact, the combating corruption has many dimensions that seem to be still neglected. In the aforementioned ceremony, the vice president referred to another aspect of the fight against corruption, namely the formulation of 390 legislative acts within four years which has been drafted, approved or amended. He termed it a revolution in legal and regulatory field in the country. Nevertheless, it seems to be inadequate, and expectations are more than what has already been done. The reason for the dissatisfaction of public opinion is the depth of corruption and its extent, and more importantly, the existence of discriminatory structures and inequality that is rooted in the history of our country. All the work that has been done over the past years is, somehow, related to formal and apparent affair. But corrupt structures

and corruptions substrates are still remaining. In recent years, we have been able to meet some of the expectations in the legislative part but in the administrative structure, we are still tied to the past.

The most important factor shaping a discriminatory and corrupt structure is a discriminatory mentality that is actively institutionalized in all administrative sectors of the country. Still, everyone in any position, think that the office under his control belongs to a particular ethnicity, which himself belong to. Still there are efforts to prevent certain ethnic and political groups from many of the country's departments. For example, the security sector, ministry of foreign and overseas departments, the financial and economic sector, and the infrastructure sector are still prohibited areas for many citizens of the country. No one can hide the fact that the diplomatic apparatus and foreign affairs department of the country are still monopolized by a small number of those who are close relatives of senior politicians and senior officials.

Undoubtedly, in such situation the talents and meritocracy are killed. These are a few examples but many of the offices are in the same condition. Even the scientific and cultural institutions of the country are also suffering from the same condition. For example, along with dozens of scientific and research offices, there is an office called the "Academy of Sciences", apparently they are responsible for the country's scientific and research affairs but they are engulfed with a certain circle of monopoly that do not accept any kind of modernization. These are only parts of some structural corruption in the country's administration, which has largely challenged the fight against corruption. Therefore, we can call the corruption in Afghanistan as a monstrous threat that still threatens our collective life, and we have a long way to go.

Undoubtedly, some of NUG initiatives are appreciated but the history rooted corruption needs historic will to bring deep and structural reform in the country. Structural reform is not only important in terms of fighting against corruption but also important in national trust and national unity. In addition, we need to push through key civil service reforms and ensuring the verification of asset declarations of all senior public officials and the imposition of sanctions for failure to register. The government should continue its recent progress in simplifying business processes and reducing red tape in order to further reduce the opportunities for administrative corruption. Areas which require further simplification include registering property, dealing with construction permits and enforcing contracts. Finally, government departments, business, civil society organizations and donors need to work together in the fight against corruption and to promote a culture of integrity within the civil service and society in general.

Corruption is like a ball of snow, once it's set a rolling it must increase. – Charles Cateb Colton

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## Lies, Damned Lies, and AI

By: Diane Coyle

Algorithms are as biased as the data they feed on. And all data are biased. Even "official" statistics cannot be assumed to stand for objective, eternal "facts." The figures that governments publish represent society as it is now, through the lens of what those assembling the data consider to be relevant and important. The categories and classifications used to make sense of the data are not neutral. Just as we measure what we see, so we tend to see only what we measure.

As algorithmic decision-making spreads to a wider range of policymaking areas, it is shedding a harsh light on the social biases that once lurked in the shadows of the data we collect. By taking existing structures and processes to their logical extremes, artificial intelligence (AI) is forcing us to confront the kind of society we have created.

The problem is not just that computers are designed to think like corporations, as my University of Cambridge colleague Jonnie Penn has argued. It is also that computers think like economists. An AI, after all, is as infallible a version of homo economicus as one can imagine. It is a rationally calculating, logically consistent, ends-oriented agent capable of achieving its desired outcomes with finite computational resources. When it comes to "maximizing utility," they are far more effective than any human.

"Utility" is to economics what "phlogiston" once was to chemistry. Early chemists hypothesized that combustible matter contained a hidden element – phlogiston – that could explain why substances changed form when they burned. Yet, try as they might, scientists never could confirm the hypothesis. They could not track down phlogiston for the same reason that economists today cannot offer a measure of actual utility.

Economists use the concept of utility to explain why people make the choices they do – what to buy, where to invest, how hard to work: everyone is trying to maximize utility in accordance with one's preferences and beliefs about the world, and within the limits posed by scarce income or resources. Despite not existing, utility is a powerful construct. It seems only natural to suppose that everyone is trying to do as well as they can for themselves. Moreover, economists' notion of utility is born of classical utilitarianism, which aims to secure the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people. Like modern economists follow-

ing in the footsteps of John Stuart Mill, most of those designing algorithms are utilitarians who believe that if a "good" is known, then it can be maximized.

But this assumption can produce troubling outcomes. For example, consider how algorithms are being used to decide whether prisoners are deserving of parole. An important 2017 study finds that algorithms far outperform humans in predicting recidivism rates, and could be used to reduce the "jailing rate" by more than 40% "with no increase in crime rates." In the United States, then, AIs could be used to reduce a prison population that is disproportionately black. But what happens when AIs take over the parole process and African-Americans are still being jailed at a higher rate than whites?

Highly efficient algorithmic decision-making has brought such questions to the fore, forcing us to decide precisely which outcomes should be maximized. Do we want merely to reduce the overall prison population, or should we also be concerned about fairness? Whereas politics allows for fudges and compromises to disguise such tradeoffs, computer code requires clarity.

That demand for clarity is making it harder to ignore the structural sources of societal inequities. In the age of AI, algorithms will force us to recognize how the outcomes of past social and political conflicts have been perpetuated into the present through our use of data.

Thanks to groups such as the AI Ethics Initiative and the Partnership on AI, a broader debate about the ethics of AI has begun to emerge. But AI algorithms are of course just doing what they are coded to do. The real issue extends beyond the use of algorithmic decision-making in corporate and political governance, and strikes at the ethical foundations of our societies.

While we certainly need to debate the practical and philosophical tradeoffs of maximizing "utility" through AI, we also need to engage in self-reflection. Algorithms are posing fundamental questions about how we have organized social, political, and economic relations to date. We now must decide if we really want to encode current social arrangements into the decision-making structures of the future. Given the political fracturing currently occurring around the world, this seems like a good moment to write a new script.

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