

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



December 28, 2016

Justice System should Serve the Weakest

Different incidents in Afghanistan show that there are serious concerns regarding violence against women. Though there have been many discussions recently about the issue and there have been certain pressure as well on Afghanistan from the international community, the response of Afghan authorities have been lackluster. They do not seem in the mood to pay serious attention to the issue.

One of the major points of concern is the fact that there have not been speedy justice in response to the cases of violence against women. The cases that are brought to the law enforcement agencies are not pursued with proper vigor and determination and the result is that the culprits easily get away with their crimes. If the culprits are caught on time and they are brought to justice this will give a very clear message and will enhance the confidence of the people on the justice system.

This can also be helpful in encouraging those victims who never go the law enforcement agencies to file their complaints against different types of violence that are carried out against them.

Nevertheless, their experiences have shown to them that their tribal norms and values and the draconian code of conduct that rule over their society stand more powerful than the hold of the justice that can be provided to them through the police or court of law. One of the most basic demands of justice is that the people should be provided justice on time.

It is believed that a justice delayed is a justice denied; therefore, the government machinery should be reliable and speedy enough to ensure such a justice.

Moreover, it is also imperative that it should be easy for the victims to knock at the doors of the institutions that provide justice. If they feel comfortable and they are provided a welcoming attitude, they will rush to such institutions and will also develop a positive attitude towards government and its institutions.

Most of the women have complaints that they are harassed by the authorities who are supposed to provide them justice. If they opt to go the police they have to face a discriminating attitude of the authorities in most of the cases. In many other cases, police does not have the required access and authority in many of the remote areas. Several times it has been observed that the women who want to complain against any sort of violence or discrimination reach to Kabul city to do so. As they know that their voice will not be heard in their own area.

This sort of inconvenience plays a major role in discouraging women to turn to police or court of law.

Currently, there was an emphasis that the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law has not been implemented because of unfamiliarity of most of the people about it but one of the major aspects of the failure of the law is the absence of institutional mechanism to ensure proper implementation of such law. Police is not present in all parts of country. In so many districts they are present only to overlook security incidents as a whole. Moreover, the presence and role of local police have also hindered the role and performance of formal police.

Same is the case with the role and presence of formal courts. Most of the remote districts have their own courts based on Jirga or Shariah. These sorts of courts do not necessarily follow the EVAW law or do not consider it suitable for their tribal setup. Most of the cases of violence against women that are pursued are because of the media, NGOs and civil society.

Thus, it can said without any hesitation that the institutional deficiencies have incapacitated the law to have its desired outcomes. And, this has resulted in continuation of incidents of violence against women.

On Monday, December 26, in a similar incident, a 30-year old woman was beheaded by a group of armed men in Sar-e-Pul province. Provincial governor spokesman Zabiullah Amani, while confirming the incident, said that the armed men were linked with Taliban.

The incident took place in the remote village of Latti in Sar-e-Pul. The village is under Taliban control and so far no one has been arrested. However the Taliban rejected any involvement.

Such incidents will keep on occurring unless, the justice system, strengthened by strong and authoritative institutions, take tangible actions against the culprits.

The criminals always take advantage of the justice system that is lethargic and an inefficient justice system would keep on creating more and more criminals. Therefore, it is important for Afghan authorities to divert attention towards institution building for providence of justice to all the people of country, particularly women who are treated as a weaker stratum.

If a justice system is not able to protect the most vulnerable and the weakest, it cannot be believed to be based neither on democracy nor on basic teachings of Islam.

Budget: The Real Key to Rescue from Crisis

By Muhammad Zahir Akbari

A government budget is an important government document presenting the government's proposed revenues and spending for a financial year that is often passed by the legislative, approved by president and presented by the finance minister to the nation. The budget is also known as the Annual Financial Statement of the country. This document estimates the anticipated government revenues and government expenditures for the ensuing (current) financial year. For example, only certain types of revenue may be imposed and collected.

Property tax is frequently the basis for municipal and county revenues, while sales tax and/or income tax are the basis for state revenues, and income tax and corporate tax are the basis for national revenues.

This document is as important as key to rescue a nation from all types of crisis due to many reasons: it enables the government to plan prioritize and manage its financial resources to support the implementation of various programs and projects that best promote the development of the country.

Through the budget, the government can put into action its plans, programs and policies within the constraints of its financial capability as dictated by economic conditions. Moreover, it is a strong tool to reduce poverty, provide employment opportunities and social security but unfortunately, the Afghan centralized planning, budgeting and decision making processes with dramatic government budget consultation and traditional mechanism has not only increased poverty, insecurity, and unemployment, but also negatively affected inflation rate, brain drain and investment which worsen the economy and development of the country.

On the whole, there are many issues with in national budget of Afghanistan but the most common question which is raised is being unbalanced. For example, in past years, there was less than 2% of national budget allocated for central parts of the country while they form about 20% of Afghan population. That's why, the current document which was drafted for 2017 vastly criticized by many civilians including members of upper house and lower house. Though, the budget has approved by upper house of the parliament with certain recommendations to ensure balance in development throughout the country but it was unanimously rejected by the MPs in the Lower House, due to being unbalanced in its allocation to development in provinces, lack of details on domestic revenues, lack of revenue producing projects, inclusion of implemented projects and lack of attention to education and women. Some MPs believe that it was unprofessional and there unfair regarding the allocation of funds for projects in certain provinces and other MPs argued that there are many issues within the draft budget which need to be tackled by government including the inclusion of money for some suspected ghost projects and being unbalanced.

Furthermore, there is no public awareness about national budget and people have no role in the budget allocation, execution and oversight processes, especially during budget consulta-

tion process in order to ensure budget transparency, accountability and participation. More importantly, media and civil society groups should understand that national budget is the real means to development of a nation. They must advocate the government to establish and implement international-standard mechanisms through which the government allocate fair budget ensure the best practices and development of the country. This will also open floor for the citizens to advocate for their own and citizens' priorities to influence people and country development. The government is making very little budget information public on timely basis with lack of clarity in the revenue generation, budget allocation and execution. This is because the government does not implement international good practices to establish fair policies and mechanisms and specify roles and responsibilities of stakeholders while budget formulation and execution where transparency budget, accountability and participation are respected.

Beside political issues, the poor budget management, low budget execution rate and poor control over inflation rate are the authentic factors to worsening the economic and security condition in Afghanistan. After a decade and half of Western aid projects it was expected to make the Afghan economy self-sufficient but government revenue continues to fall short and the government is still almost entirely dependent on foreign donors to shore up its budget. Taxes and customs tariffs are the only significant sources of revenue, but those collection processes are riddled with problems and corruptions. If these challenges remain unsolved, poverty, insecurity, unemployment, brain drain, violation of citizens' participation rights, corruption, inflation and many other issues that worsen the country economy and development will remain stable.

The Ministry of Finance (MoF) should establish and implement a proper mechanism for budget transparency, justice, accountability and participation to be consistent with international best practices and International Monetary Fund (IMF), and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), guidelines. The government should establish proper mechanisms with specified authorities and responsibility to the stakeholders, especially giving the role of planning and budgeting to the provincial councils and role of oversight to the civil society. The MoF should mobilize CSOs in order to establish and present a proper framework where CSOs could collaborate with the MoF for further citizens' awareness in the planning, budgeting and oversight from budget execution at national and sub-national levels. The government should allocate budget based on citizens' priorities to reduce poverty, provide employment opportunities and encourage investment. The Budget Commission of Parliament-Wolesi Jirga should engage CSOs and media in the consultation meetings related to draft of the national budget at the Parliament. The Budget Commission of Parliament-Wolesi Jirga should engage CSOs and media in the consultation meetings related to draft of the

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The Plant-Based Solution to Hunger

By Barbara Unmüßig

The way we eat in the industrialized world is unhealthy, unjust, and unsustainable. Far too much of the meat we consume is produced under questionable ecological, ethical, and social conditions. And now our industrial model for meat production is being exported to the global south - especially India and China - where meat consumption is rising among these countries' emerging middle classes.

Worldwide, 300 million tons of meat are produced each year, and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that the annual amount will increase to 455 million tons by 2050 if demand continues to grow at the current rate. Such large amounts of meat can be produced only on an industrial scale, and at high social, political, and ecological costs.

Meat production is a tremendously inefficient use of agricultural land, because considerably more plant-based food is needed to feed livestock than we would need to feed ourselves directly through a plant-based diet. For example, producing one kilogram of chicken meat, pork, or beef requires 1.6, three, and eight kilograms of animal feed, respectively. This pits farmers and animal-feed producers against one another in a fierce competition over land.

Meanwhile, the production of soy - the world's most important animal-feed grain - rose from 130 million tons in 1996 to 270 million tons in 2015, with 80% of output going to meat production, especially in China (70 million tons) and Europe (31 million tons).

This expansion of soy agriculture, as a result of the growing demand for meat, is driving up land values. Consequently, in the global south, common land is being privatized, rainforests are being destroyed to make room for agricultural cultivation, and international agribusinesses are expropriating the land that one-third of the world's people still rely on for their livelihoods. Animal-feed production, and the intensive cultivation of agricultural land that it requires, is not only destroying ecosystems and reducing biodiversity; it is also fueling climate change. Worldwide, our industrial agriculture system produces an estimated 14% of the world's greenhouse-gas emissions; including emissions indirectly linked to deforestation, and those associated with fertilizer production, increases that share to 24%.

Moreover, the extensive use of fertilizers and pesticides - 99% of the world's soy is genetically modified, and is routinely treated with pesticides - is also contaminating ground-water sources, destroying biodiversity, and eroding the soil. We can no longer ignore the external costs of this system. If we are serious about addressing climate

change and securing every human being's right to proper nutrition and food security, we must challenge the presumption that an industrial agricultural model, let alone meat, is necessary to feed the world. In fact, that presumption has little merit.

The UN Environment Programme estimates that, by 2050, an area between the size of Brazil and India will have to be repurposed into cropland if current food-consumption trends continue. But if the 9.6 billion people expected to inhabit the planet by then were to have a plant-based diet, industrial meat production could be abandoned and all of them could be fed without the need for any additional agricultural land.

For many people, the competition for land is a fight for survival. Land access, which is more unevenly distributed than incomes, is a deciding factor in whether someone suffers from malnutrition: 20% of households that experience hunger do not own land, and 50% of people who experience hunger are small-scale farmers.

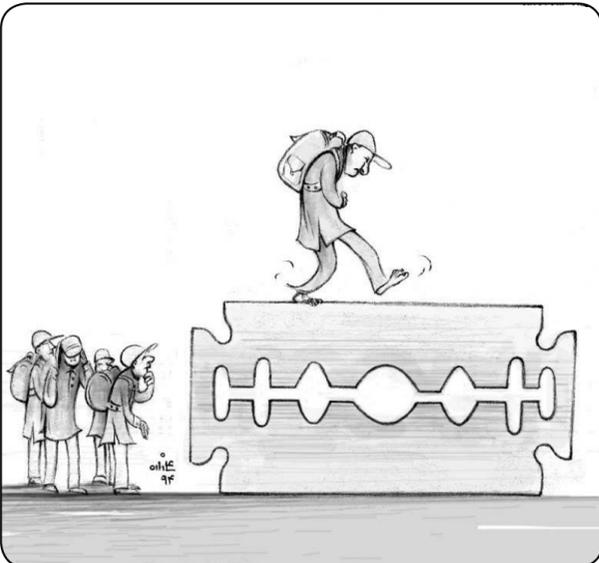
The industrial agriculture system's production chains must be replaced with local, decentralized, and sustainable production chains. It is incumbent upon governments to prioritize people's right to food and nutrition above private economic interests. People should not lose their livelihoods and food security for the benefit of agribusiness profits.

To move toward an ecologically sustainable and socially equitable agricultural model, we can leverage existing political frameworks, such as the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy. As it stands now, large-scale industrial meat producers are profiting extensively from EU subsidies; but these subsidies could be redirected as investments in decentralized meat and grain production chains that adhere to a more sustainable model.

Doing so requires recognizing that realistic alternatives to industrial agriculture do exist. For example, "agroecology" - a system based on traditional and indigenous knowledge that is passed down through the generations - is easily adaptable to all geographic circumstances. In fact, in 2006 Jules Pretty of the University of Essex found that this mode of production can increase harvest yields by 79%.

But, to implement this shift, governments must ensure that all people have guaranteed access to land and potable water, and they need to create political frameworks to promote ecologically and socially just agricultural models - which, by definition, excludes industrial agriculture.

The challenge of feeding every human being should not be viewed in opposition to - or as somehow ruling out - questions of social justice and the future of the planet. Poverty, malnutrition, and hunger are a result of politics, not scarcity. Barbara Unmüßig is President of the Heinrich Böll Foundation.



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