

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



December 28, 2017

Achieving Social Status

All the individuals possess certain positions in the groups and society with which they are affiliated. These positions depend upon the duties they perform. These duties which create different positions for them are called roles. A status or social position is a polar position socially attributed to a member of a group. And social role is the dynamic aspect of the corresponding status. Status is simply a collection of rights and duties. It is a cultural value attainable through the prescribed ways of behavior called social roles.

Status can be both ascribed and achieved. Ascribed status is the position which is assigned to individuals by culture, without reference to their innate abilities. Such status is attached with the physical existence of the individual. For instance, caste, age and sex are the ascribed statuses of the individual. They do not change and are mostly permanent in nature. They begin with the life and end with its end. Suppose a person is father of two children, brother of a particular person, father-in-law of another one, grandfather of his grandson and belong to a particular caste. These are a few of the ascribed statuses of that person.

There are certain determinants of ascribed status. These include ancestry, sex, caste and age. The honor of a person's ancestry rests on legitimacy or illegitimacy, respect of the family and caste system. These are the factors of ascribed status. A child born in royal family is ultimately called a prince. Biologically the sexes have different status in the society. The male is given higher position in order of status as compared to a female. This disparity of status is even wider in rural areas.

Castes is another important element of status. Especially in rural areas, caste becomes the most important factor. The people attach caste with their names for distinction in community. Some castes are given higher status; while some others are considered lower in rank, which marks a divide among the castes.

Moreover, it has been observed that aged people are given more respect and honor in most of the societies. On the other hand, youth are treated more affectionately and casually. These two different kinds of expressions and treatment of society towards two different age groups is because of their age group.

Achieved status on the other hand requires specific qualities from the individuals in role performance. These are not assigned to individuals by birth but are left open for competition and individual efforts. Culture provides certain ways and means for the achievement of certain status. The people compete each other to achieve that status. To become part of the parliament, for example, a person has to qualify certain preliminary conditions of nationality and candidature and win elections of the corresponding constituency. This is an example of achieved status. The university would not give degree to a person until he qualifies for all the conditions of the degree - study of the prescribed courses, and pass the proposed examinations. Hence to attain the status of degree holder, he will have to pass through the processes of time, money and labor. His efforts in this direction are his roles for the corresponding degree. Certain qualities and capabilities are required here to attain an achieved status.

Society does not assign status to people randomly. There is criteria of social approval or disapproval, honor or dishonor to people in societies. Generally, these are contained in social values. Those items of social life to which the people think important and worthwhile are the determinants of social status.

Economic resource is one of the most important determinants of a person's social status. The economic possession of an individual can be measured and counted in easy terms and guessed easily as what status he enjoys in society. The more someone is economically resourceful, the greater the status he enjoys in the society.

Moreover, in our society the type of occupation by which one earns money is an important question. For example, the sweepers, brokers, barbers, cobblers and other menial servants are mostly considered inferior to the business owners, government officers and others.

In certain societies, higher education is a mark of respect in society. The degrees and certificates held from college and university are symbols of status for the holder. Education itself is an end-value, and sometimes a mean for higher social prestige.

The last but not the least is the power. Power is the ability to control or influence the behavior of others. Those who attain more power in the society are treated more respectfully and their status is considered higher. For example, a police man is regarded more respectable compared to a school teacher. It is just because of the difference introduced by power.

A society would be considered a better society that would have more respect for achieved status, but that must be based on a person's hard work, capabilities and talents.



Political Rift Widens

By Hujjatullah Zia

The tension between Afghan officials has resurfaced after a lull. With the controversial result of third round presidential election, which was held in 2014, the National Unity Government (NUG) was established on the basis of an agreement sealed between President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Dr. Abdullah Abdullah. The controversy emerged with the indefinite result of presidential election which put the Independent Election Commission (IEC) under question.

Based on the mutual agreement sealed between President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah, Loya Jirga (Grand National Assembly) had to be convened in 2016 to reform Afghan Constitution with the aim of determining the position of CEO/prime minister, for which Dr. Abdullah is designated on the basis of agreement rather than law. Despite Abdullah's persistent urge, presidential palace denied the issue and called it against constitution.

Second, a rift emerged between President Ghani and First Vice President Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum when he stated in the media that he did not carry the weight of Vice President adding that those who spoke Pashtu was preferred by President. This blunt and harsh rhetoric was denied and denounced by President Ghani. The relation between Ghani and Dostum reached rock bottom after a petition was filed against Dostum by former provincial governor of Jawzjan Ahmad Ishchi accusing him of sexual harassment. Although this case belonged to judicial system, it fueled the tension between Ghani and Dostum indirectly. Dostum was said to be investigated, but he did not surrender to investigators. With the mounting pressure, Dostum abandoned the country and currently lives in self-imposed exile in Turkey.

Few months back, a number of Afghan political figures formed a coalition under the term of Etilaf-e-Nijat-e-Afghanistan (Coalition for the Salvation of Afghanistan) and a new political party titled "Mehwar-e-Mardum-e-Afghanistan" (the Axis of Afghan People). Etilaf-e-Nijat-e-Afghanistan coalition was formed by three prominent officials and former Jihadi leaders namely Gen. Dostum, the Second Deputy to CEO Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq and Balkh provincial governor Ata Mohammad Noor alleging that Afghan President monopolized the power - which was denied by presidential palace.

Following the coalition, it was reported that Gen. Dostum's helicopter was supposed to land in Balkh province, but it was not allowed by the government - which was later denied by his ally Ata Muhammad Noor.

Now the tension has increased between President Ghani and Noor who has been removed from his position after being the provincial governor of Balkh for a decade and half. Gen. Ata Muhammad Noor, who is the member of Hezb-e-Jamiat-e-Islami along with Dr. Abdullah, said that Abdullah played against him and sought his removal. He further said that Abdullah was appointed as CEO through Hezb-e-Jamiat-e-Islami and this party could also replace him.

As a reaction toward Noor's statement, Abdullah said that he had made no mistake from holding the position of CEO up to then. Without mentioning a name, he maintained that some political figures - most probably means Noor - sought to remove him from his post but their struggles were proved abortive.

A former Jihadi leader Muhammad Ismail Khan denounced the removal of Balkh provincial governor adding that it would lead to horrible consequences. According to him, Noor's removal will pave the ground for political tension and for the firm foothold of members of the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Northern parts of the country.

In fact, the tension among officials will put an adverse effect on national issues. First, the officials' political interests will outshine national interests and the challenges such as security and economic crises will be downplayed.

Furthermore, the tension will dash the public hope and make them lose their trust in officials. The officials' tension and harsh rhetoric against one another will increase the level of disappointment in the country.

Officials are believed to mitigate the challenges rather than aggravating them. But the rift, which has widened recently, will take its toll on the country's social, political, and economic issues. It should be noted that transition of power within the government's body is an ordinary issue and no one is supposed to monopolize a position or power. Ata Muhammad Noor who was the governor of Balkh province for a decade and half should not take his removal personal. No government official is supposed to resist against transitioning his/her power to a next person. Otherwise, it will be a blow to democracy and law.

Since all, including officials, are equal in the eye of law, they have to practice upon constitution and their political agreements.

If Afghan officials ignore constitution, agreements, or their commitments, it will compound the challenges and push the country to a social and political quagmire.

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Improving African Women's Health through Financial Inclusion

By Carl Manlan

In late October, the World Health Organization's Regional Office for Africa signed an agreement with the United Nations International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The aim of the unlikely partnership is to encourage the use of digital services "to save lives and improve people's health." But perhaps the pact's most innovative feature is the vow to merge financial inclusion strategies with modern health-care delivery.

Financial inclusion is a proven pathway to improving people's health, especially the health of women in developing countries. Women who can easily access bank accounts or cash payment options tend to invest more in their businesses and families. In turn, they live healthier, more satisfying lives.

Yet, too often, initiatives like the one signed in October focus on one or the other - e-health or financial products like insurance. Because Africans' ability to earn and save money can be the difference between good care and no care at all, this represents a missed opportunity to help patients and build more resilient communities.

The cost of this choice is disproportionately high for Africa's women. In Nigeria, for example, 400,000 women live with obstetric fistula, a disabling condition often caused by complications in childbirth.

In Tanzania, some 8,000 women die annually during pregnancy or delivery; most of these deaths could be prevented. And, across the continent, women's life expectancy at birth is just 58 years, compared to more than 80 years in developed countries.

Progress is being made to connect women's health solutions and financial inclusion. At a recent conference in Dar es Salaam, experts from the technology and financial services sector joined investors, philanthropists, and development specialists to devise ways to make finance work for Africa's women. Through programs like these, development experts can advocate for digital solutions as a means of social and financial empowerment.

Unfortunately, cooperation like the pact signed in October is the exception, rather than the norm. Banks, regulators, finance ministries, and telecommunications companies all frequently gather to consider financial inclusion without the local and global health community. This must change if we are to build more inclusive platforms for African patients and clients.

The first step is to identify missed opportunities. A big one stems from the disparate approaches to bringing financial services and digitized health care to rural parts

of Africa. At the moment, banks and mobile network operators are working to expand their digital banking services to unbanked and under-banked clients. At the same time, community health workers (CHWs) are operating in these regions to prevent, treat, and refer patients to clinics. Combining these efforts makes sense, because both initiatives rely heavily on trust.

Through pre-established networks, CHWs could augment their e-health offerings with financial products, like mobile cash payment systems. Broadening digital disease management and access to health information to include financial wellbeing would create natural synergies. While there are some concerns that adding responsibilities to CHWs could undermine health-care quality, a fragmented approach to prosperity is even more damaging.

Once opportunities for expansion are identified, other issues will need to be addressed before women's health and financial inclusion programs can be widened.

For starters, a lack of sex-disaggregated data makes it difficult to draft policies based on health quality and financial need. Although some countries, such as Burundi and Senegal, are working to improve their gender-specific data collection, a broader, more coordinated push is needed.

Raising the region's financial literacy will be another challenge. The ability to understand and execute matters of personal finance is the weakest link in transforming women's opportunities through financial inclusion. Moreover, financial literacy is a pre-requisite for the roll-out of financing initiatives, such as programs that support women-led small and micro-enterprises.

If financial literacy levels can be raised, women can access resources such as land and credit, tools that hold the keys to business development, social mobility, and personal growth. Progress has been made in leveling the playing field, but these gains must be sustained.

The agreement between the WHO and the ITU will help promote wealth creation in parts of Africa where access to health care and financial services is lacking. To maintain this momentum, deeper commitments are needed, especially from the global health community.

But, however African governments proceed in digitizing their health and financial services offerings, women's needs must remain at the center of any solution. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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