

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



February 05, 2018

Poverty reduction: Policy Initiatives

Poverty reduction is one of the hottest debates, especially in the developing countries, but what is missed is lack of enough discussion of what we mean by it. Generally, poverty reduction is used as a shorthand for promoting economic growth that will permanently lift as many people as possible over a poverty line. At the same time, there are many objectives that are consistent with poverty reduction and the government has to make choices between them based on its economic strategic priorities. There are different perspectives and approaches in terms of poverty reduction initiatives, for example, tackling current and future poverty, helping as many poor people as possible and focusing on those in chronic poverty and the perspectives to tackle the causes of poverty and those that deal with symptoms of it.

Governments shall be mindful to consider all dimensions of poverty reduction in their poverty reduction policies and strategies. This is one of the main policy and strategy issue in developing countries, especially those which donors fund most of the budget of such policies and strategies; because they focus on just one dimension of poverty reduction (growth) and marginalize other legitimate objectives such as reducing chronic poverty or providing social services in countries that cannot otherwise afford them. It is one of the main issues in Afghanistan as a country that donors fund all its development projects, including the poverty reduction ones. Afghanistan has developed poverty reduction strategies including the ANDS, NPPs and etc. However, these strategies have not been much successful due to poverty reduction visions between the Afghan donors and the Afghan government.

As the Afghan government does not have enough resources to fund its development projects, it shall persevere a strategic funding diplomacy to satisfy the international community in terms of transparency and accountability in the development projects. Because, aid can be more effective if there are greater recognition of the different dimensions of poverty reduction.

Initiatives to further the effectiveness of poverty reduction strategies

First, to strengthen the competitiveness of Afghanistan and to create conditions for strong and viable economic growth in the country through (1) policies and strategies focused on stabilization of the macroeconomic framework and structural reform, both in civil and security sectors; (2) strengthening the institutional framework conducive to investment and elimination of barriers to development of the private sector; (3) improvement of the Afghan markets as an economic and financial platform that is competitive at the regional level and fostering of the Afghanistan's growth potentials; (4) development of infrastructures and the reduction of production factor costs.

Second, to expedite the optimal use of the Afghan human resources and urban rural development, and preserving the environment at the same time. The objective of this initiative can be: (1) to focus on quality in health and education; (2) to implement a policy to foster employment and vocational training; (3) to improve food security and promote access to clean water; (4) to use the National Strategy as an apparatus for integrating women into development.

Third, specifically design poverty reduction strategies to reduce poverty and to assist highly vulnerable individuals or persons with special needs through programs aimed at poverty areas and vulnerable members of the society. Furthermore, measures in this area will be made to combat unemployment by focusing on development of labor-intensive methods, promotion microfinance, and establishing of social safety nets for the most vulnerable segments of the population (street children, nomads, women who head families, internally displaced people).

Fourth, to improve political, economic, finance and local governance, in order to enhance the government's planning and management capacities, and to modernize its instruments and resources.

Poverty reduction is one of the strategic approaches to eliminate chronic poverty. It is a framework that the government policies and strategies are centered on it. Based on studies, only those policies and strategies of poverty reduction have realized their objectives that have encompassed all dimensions of the poverty. Donors usually are not interested to focus on all dimensions of poverty and it is one of the main causes of poverty reduction policy and strategy failure where economic development policies and strategies are funded by donors, including Afghanistan. To ensure poverty reduction, Afghanistan needs a policy and strategy to encompass all dimensions of poverty and take a very well-tailored initiative ranging from strengthen the competitiveness of Afghanistan to improving political, economic, finance and local governance in the country.

We Must Prioritize Awareness

By Dilawar Sherzai

It can be observed in our society that the people who are thoughtful and wise, they are being neglected. In fact, the seems to be more inclined towards people and personalities that have wealth and authority. Same has been the reaction to being inquisitive. It seems as if contemplation and inquisitiveness are considered against the social setup. However, there have always been few people who have never understood this view or they have intentionally ignored it. They are the same who have a fire of restlessness and curiosity in their hearts, which keeps on burning and compelling such people to show the same to the world.

Those who have blind beliefs are actually deprived of the awareness of the life. They are the ones who themselves have locked their minds and do not know that their minds are locked and the keys are with themselves. Nothing is able to change such people as they are not open to any view or any discussion. Even education cannot change such people. If such people even go to educational institutions, there is no chance that they would improve as they take with themselves their dogmatic beliefs. They have already decided everything for themselves and made final decisions. For them, it would be better even not to go the institutions, as they have already filled their minds and there is no empty space to learn new ideas or concepts. Education must support in understanding new things and when there is not such a chance, there is no need of education as well.

It is also important to note that the type of education the educational institutions are disseminating in our society is also debatable. The educational institutions have become the factories, where robots are generated who, themselves, cannot think anything, but act as per the commands that are fed into them. There is no room for doubt and questions in our educational institutes. Those who commit the crime of asking too many questions are punished in the severest manner. Such institutions can only produce students who get education to negate education, and unfortunately such people are the most suitable for our society and most educated for our so-called education scholars. However, they are those puppets who play in the act based on education but themselves do not know the purpose of their act.

This is really weird that our youth is being kept away from

better and thought-generating education system. The endeavors are being made to keep the young and capable minds away from the food that can nourish them and make them discover the world, universe and their mysteries. True education can even reduce hatred in the hearts of the youngsters and teach them the lessons of love and brotherhood for the fellow beings. In fact, there are certain people who strive to keep such education away from youngsters because they know that it would generate so many views and perspectives which can even unveil the realities that they want to keep hidden.

We should teach our youngster not to emphasize on a single perspective and try to learn how to live with different ideas and thoughts. They need to know that others can differ from what they think and what they feel and they need to realize that others can be right as well. They even need to go deeper and assume that there are many ideas that have not been thought yet and with open minds they can have the opportunity to discover such thoughts. They also require to understand that whatever has already been thought for them can be wrong; this way they can come to know about the mistakes in the history and know the real truth.

Unfortunately, in our society the blind beliefs and careless claims have been given free hand. However, it has to be comprehended that the moment a person lets blind belief enter his mind, the next moment the possibilities of having better understanding and gaining knowledge run away from him. And, this phenomenon is totally against the requisites of education.

Our youth have to be emancipated from following the forced beliefs. They have to be given the freedom of free thinking. Only those youngsters have the right of getting education who understand that they can doubt and challenge what is already known and who want to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong through their own minds. The educational institutions must first of all develop an attitude of learning, which requires a questioning nature. They should not be the places where the students are spoon fed. It has to be understood that if the educational institutions are able to generate an attitude of learning the rest will follow itself. Then the teachers do not have to force or punish the students to learn; they will learn themselves as they would be thirsty to do so.

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Will IEC hold a sound election in Afghanistan?

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

After long arguments, the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan (IEC) has completed its formation team with selecting the new chief, Gula Jan Abdul Badi Sayad, by an intra-organizational election process last Wednesday. Wasima Badghesi and Mahazullah Dawlati have been elected as the deputy chiefs of the Independent Election Commission. Gulajan Abdul Badi Sayad previously worked as spokesman and secretary of Afghanistan Independent Election Commission. The voting for the election of the new election commission chief organized more than two weeks after the last commissioner, Syed Hafizullah Hashemi, was appointed by President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. These follow long term disputes and the dismissal of former chairman of Independent Election Commission as raised doubts over whether parliamentary and council ballots scheduled for next year will take place as planned. He had faced pressure after repeated delays in election process and had lost the support of both Ghani and disillusioned foreign donors. Succeeding a contentious presidential election in 2014, marred by allegations of massive voter fraud on both sides everyone emphasizes on the need for successful elections next year. The bitter 2014 presidential election produced no agreed winner and led to a U.S.-brokered deal which saw former rivals Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah forced into an uneasy coalition that has struggled to win popular support. Eventually, it took months for both candidates to agree on a US-brokered deal to form a "national unity government".

The legal term of Parliament already expired in mid-2015 but polls were postponed due to concerns over whether the vote could be fair and transparent after a disputed presidential election as explained. President Ashraf Ghani extended the assembly's mandate until elections were feasible, prompting many to question the legality of his decision. The other quarrels occurred over selection of new commissioner; according to the Electoral Law, President Ghani was supposed to appoint a new commissioner from amongst the 14 remaining candidates suggested by a selection committee in 2016 for the IEC within two weeks' time. The IEC, in its new composition, would then elect a new chairman from among themselves. However, it was argued that none of the candidates were sufficiently qualified and, as a result, decreed that the former selection committee should reconvene in order to enlist new competent and experienced individuals.

Accordingly, no one is sure if the new and unexperienced IEC has the ability to hold a successful election despite numerous challenges and barriers exist ahead election process: Firstly, there are extraordinary logistical problems due to extremely rugged terrain and poor means of transportation. Secondly, the security risks are dramatic as an estimated 40 percent of the districts are highly volatile. Thirdly, in spite of the IEC receiving significant

amounts of support going back to 2002, the election authority has lost many of its most experienced professionals at its headquarters and provincial offices.

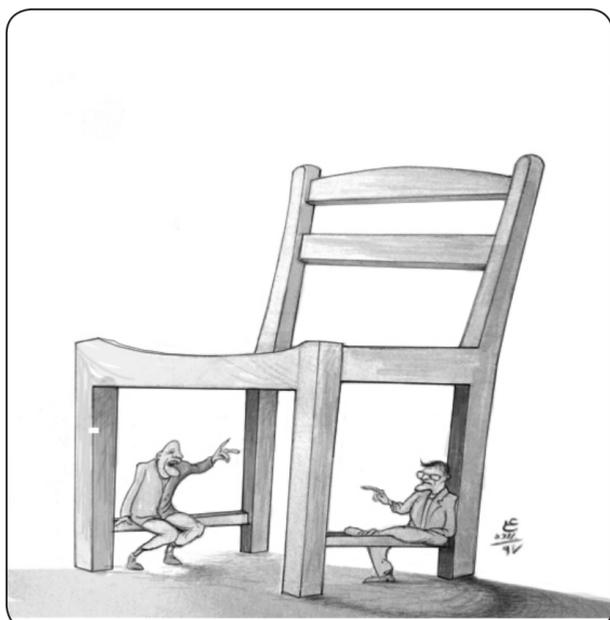
Fourthly, elections in Afghanistan face strange integrity risks owing to a myriad of fraud and malpractice problems. ACCRA, on the other hand, is expected to manage and implement its first nationwide ID card (Taskera) distribution programs to approximately 10 million people prior to a 2018 poll. This was finally proposed by the IEC is to create a totally new "paper based" voter register and issue tamper-proof registration receipts to all eligible voters. Voters would first be required to show the national ID card in order to register.

Moreover, the Afghan government insists that it does not have the financial ability to finance elections alone and, thus, needs the support of the international donors. According to the IEC, an estimated 210 million dollars is required for holding parliamentary and district council elections. While it is said that only 100 million dollars are promised by donors and 40 million dollars are available in the Ministry of Finance. This falls short of the IEC estimation of 210 million dollars required for the parliamentary and district council elections. This clearly indicates that there is no common understanding between the IEC and donors about the budget to finance the elections. On the other hand, Afghanistan itself lacks the financial ability to finance an enormous operation, such as elections, and thus has heavily relied on international donors for funding ever since the first electoral cycle in 2004/05. The other issue is limited deadline as set July 2018 but officials from international partners including the United Nations told the Afghan government that even under the most favorable conditions, the earliest date on which an election could feasibly be held is October 2018.

While Many Western diplomats believe even that date is impossible. If not ready by October, Afghanistan's mountainous terrain, bad roads and lack of security mean that registering voters and setting up balloting stations across the country are likely to face severe delays over the winter months, potentially pushing the date into the next year.

Given the aforementioned issues and lack of enough legal reform in election system as was committed, there no prepared bed to ensure a transparent election in Afghanistan. On the other hand, various political groups especially the insurgents, will also struggle to interfere or challenge the process in their own interests. In an ideal situation, resolving each of these challenges would require sustained technical expertise, honesty and enough time to overcome the issues. This process extremely needs national and international supports otherwise it may cause further political crises and severely harm democratic process in the country.

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