

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



July 12, 2016

World Population Day

July 11th was celebrated as the World Population Day around the world. Basically the day was adopted in 1989, after the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) recommended it. The purpose of the day is to focus attention on the urgency and importance of population issues. This year the theme of the day was, 'investing in teenage girls'.

One of the most important factors that guarantee proper management of the population within a society and address the issues pertaining to it is the comprehensive and detailed record or enumeration of the population, which is termed as population census. Population census includes not only numbering of the people but also certain attributes attached to them like, gender, age, profession and other necessary attributes. A detailed census also includes the information regarding the distribution of population and the number of houses. Population census must be carried out for a particular period of time and it must be recurring. Mostly, a period of ten years is considered suitable for the census to be repeated.

The data produced as a result of a census can prove to be an asset for the governing authorities in particular and the nation as a whole in general.

It is believed that reliable information is of utmost importance for policymaking, planning and decision making and administration. So, the authorities relevant to public administration can receive valuable information from census data, which makes them capable of making better decisions and design effective policies and arrangements.

Without reliable census data, the deficiencies and the shortcomings in different administrative and governance areas cannot be ascertained and the authorities cannot carry out effective decisions on how and where to allocate resources and how often to do so. One of the most important uses of the census data is in the demarcation of constituencies and the allocation of representation to governing bodies. This use of census data can be helpful in providing just government system, which is one of the most basic requirements of a democratic society. Proper representation of the people in accordance to their number and their constituencies strengthens the grass root democratic patterns and provides a platform to resolve conflicts and to give every member of a society representation in the government. This concept is the true demand of diverse societies, like that of Afghanistan, which is composed of various races and ethnic groups.

The developed countries of the world are very serious about carrying out population and housing censuses. They make sure that the census process should happen regularly; i.e. after every ten years, with some of the countries even opting for repetition after every five years. This is one of the reasons of effective management of their countries. There are countries in the world that are yet to have their first population census. Such countries are mostly the third world countries that suffer from intense economic problems and continuous waves of clashes and wars. The socio-political and socio-economic conditions in such countries have never given them an opportunity of having detailed population census as peace has been one of the main pre-requisites of a detailed population census. Afghanistan is one of the same kinds of countries. Its first comprehensive and scientific census is yet to be carried out. The country's first census carried out in 1979-80 could not be completed because of the political changes in the region. For almost thirty years the country depended on the same data, which contained major errors.

The census scheduled 2008 and further postponed for 2010 has not been conducted yet. Estimations that are available as that of 2010 are also with many controversies. They are derived from the incomplete census of 1979. These estimations are not considered true representative of the people of Afghanistan. The circumstances prior to first presidential election in 2005, were most suited for this purpose, but the insincere considerations of political groups spoiled everything. The diverse and suffering people of Afghanistan have been in dire need of such census. So much fund and support have poured in Afghanistan for the last few years but because of no detailed data available for its population, the deficiencies have not been identified appropriately and the funds and supports have not been able to be used effectively and for the required areas.

Furthermore, the structure of Afghan society has been very diverse. The estimations depicted today about Afghanistan's demography by many statistical sources are overwhelmingly opposed by different ethnic groups in the country. They believe that these estimations tend to misrepresent different ethnic groups. Such controversies in the country can serve as severe blow to democratic evolution and can discriminate the people from their true representation in the government.

The solution lies in the comprehensive, detailed, scientific and unbiased population census in the country. The relevant authorities in the country must take practical measures in order to facilitate such a census. World Community along with UNFPA, that are determined to carry on population census in all the countries of the world that have been suffering in this regard, can cash the opportunity in Afghanistan to inculcate in the minds of the concerned authorities and common people the importance of a detailed population census. The government, simultaneously, must make sure that all efforts in this regard are facilitated in the best possible way and with complete devotion and sincerity.

The Blame Game Continues

By Hujjatullah Zia

Our regional initiatives with neighbors are beginning to yield significant cooperative dividends. The exception is with Pakistan - despite clear commitments to a quadrilateral peace process; their dangerous distinction between good and bad terrorists is being maintained in practice," these words were spoken by Afghan President Muhammad Ashraf Ghani at a NATO summit in Warsaw.

The Afghan-Pak relations have been tense for more than a decade due to differences over counterterrorism strategies and mutual distrust except for a brief period following Mr. Ghani's administration during which efforts for a rapprochement were made by both sides. However, the brief bonhomie ended with the collapse of the reconciliation process between the Afghan government and the Taliban last year in Murree following the revelation of the Taliban's supreme leader Mullah Omar death and the subsequent surge in terrorism in Afghanistan.

Another effort began in December last year, which resulted in forming the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), consisted of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the US, for bringing peace in Afghanistan, but that was also proved abortive as the Taliban refused to sit around the negotiating table with Afghan government.

Death of the Taliban's leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour, in a US drone strike on Pakistani soil in May widened the gap between Kabul and Islamabad since Pakistani officials condemned the attack whereas Afghan politicians deemed it an appropriate and wise decision. The incident resulted in mistrust among members of the QCG and reduced their hopes for seeking talks genuinely. With the escalating militancy and terrorist attacks in Afghanistan under the terms of "spring offensive" last year and "Omari Operation" this year, which heightened the graph of civilian and police casualties, Afghan officials believed that Pakistan does not seek a bona fide peace. Therefore, Afghan politicians, including President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, put Pakistan's honesty under question regarding peace process. They claimed that Pakistani officials do not practice what they preach arguing that Pakistan's soil is a safe haven for the Taliban and Haqqani network.

It is not only Afghan politicians but US officials also urge Pakistan to combat terrorism with great force. As a result, following the attack outside a building of the National Directorate for Security in Kabul that killed more than 70 people and injured around 350 others, the director of the US State Department's Press Office, Elizabeth Trudeau, said, "We have consistently expressed our concerns at the highest level of the government of Pakistan about their continued tolerance for Afghan Taliban groups such as the Haqqani network operating from Pakistani soil." She added that Pakistan had reiterated that it would not

discriminate between terrorist groups "and we continue to call on them to live up to that commitment".

On the other hand, however, Pakistani officials have constantly stated that they would combat terrorism genuinely and would not let their soil be used against Afghanistan. To indicate their good intention, Pakistan refers to Zarb-e-Azb operation carried out against the Taliban insurgents. In addition, Islamabad always pushes for negotiation and deems it the only viable option for peace rather than military action.

In response to Ghani's statement in Warsaw, Pakistan's Foreign Office said that it was "unfortunate that Afghan leaders continue to make hostile statements against Pakistan and blame Pakistan for all failures in Afghanistan". It added that Pakistan would continue with its efforts for peace and stability in Afghanistan and asked Kabul to cooperate in its fight against terrorism.

Terrorism, this chronic problem, continues unabated despite the downfall of the Taliban's regime when the US invaded Afghanistan as a backlash to the 9/11 episode. The warring factions, mainly the Taliban, have changed into a can of worm and challenge the security situation in spite of both soft and hard mechanisms - i.e. seeking negotiation and resorting to military action - adopted by Afghan and the US officials within the past decade and so. The Taliban's activities inside and across the porous border has been an interminable bone of contention between Kabul and Islamabad. It is believed that Pakistan can bridge the gap through combating terrorism and rooting out the sanctuaries of the Taliban leaders and Haqqani network from its soil. It is likely that the death of the Taliban's high-ranking officials in Pakistan's soil will damage its reputation at international level.

To show its true counter-insurgency to the world, Pakistan can target at least one or two Taliban's leaders or simply hang some Taliban prisoners, the same as Afghanistan. To put it succinctly, Pakistan should use its "leverage" against the Taliban for two main reasons: either to come to negotiating table and hold talks or abandon its soil. Hence, the Taliban should not be able to fish in troubled water.

Pakistan's Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz had earlier said, "Terrorism could only be defeated with unity and cooperation." Indeed, a sincere "cooperation" between the two countries will end the problem. Continuing the blame game will raise the sense of mistrust rather than mitigating the tension. It is simply said that "actions speak louder than words". Therefore, it will be far effective to avoid using rhetorical statements and prove mutual honesty through good deeds. Now, it is time that both countries work in tandem to root out the terrorist networks.

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Education for Sustainable Development

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Currently, Afghanistan abounds with dreadful environmental, economic, social challenges while not seen any significant milestone en route for long term action program in recent years. The main developmental indicators such as mentioned notify that Afghanistan is not heading towards a sustainable development or bright future. The Government, parliament and political parties are engulfed with tiring individual and tribal issues.

Sustainable development cannot be achieved by investment on superstructure projects, political regulation and arguments on small stuffs. We need to change the way we think and act. This requires a long term investment on prioritized national agenda; as the most important one, providing quality education to young generation and learning for sustainable development at all levels and in all social contexts. Education for Sustainable Development means to enable to constructively and creatively address present and future global challenges and create more sustainable and resilient societies.

As a modern global citizen, we need to know that we live in a world of 7 billion people by means of cultural diversity while every year increase about 80 millions further with limited natural resources, regional and global competitions. We have to learn how to live together and take responsible actions based on the justice system and understanding that actions here and today can have implications for the lives and livelihoods of people in other parts of the country, as well as for future generations. We need to empower learners to live responsible lives and to address complex global challenges means that education has to promote competencies like critical thinking, respect cultural differences, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative way. This calls for new approaches to learning, the development of vibrant green economies and societies, and the emergence of a "modern global citizenship".

Empirical practices show that lack of education is a main cause of poverty and many social crises. It is recognized as a key to development, poverty alleviation and defeat terrorism. Turning around this trend is the only way to break the cycle of poverty as well as social issues. Better education supports the development, health and sustainability of a community and it lays a foundation for long-term stability.

The current educational system in Afghanistan backing to hundred years ago whilst it is an essential need of the time to standardize the schools and universities as a place where young people not only acquire knowledge, but where they learn how to use it, how to live in a multicultural society or world, how to make an argument with historical events and how to think with numbers.

In fact, School and University are the places where young people learn how to think with and through each other, how to jointly puzzle over a problem how to make sense of discordant views, how to arrive at consensus. School is a place where your world can open up—mine certainly did—through history, and geography, and literature, but, too, through the people you meet and through your own growing sense of where you fit in the scheme of things. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is not a particular program or project, but is rather an umbrella for many forms of education that already exist, and new ones that remain to be created. ESD promotes efforts to rethink educational programs and systems (both methods and contents) that currently support unsustainable societies. ESD affects all components of education: legislation, policy, finance, curriculum, instruction, learning, assessment, etc. ESD calls for lifelong learning and recognizes the fact that the educational needs of people change over their lifetime. Many individuals and organizations around the world already implement ESD (e.g. a teacher weaving sustainability themes into primary education using participatory methods; a community development worker raising people's awareness on rights which are denied to them; or a public health worker training people to draw water from clean sources). There are many programs using an ESD approach to learning which is critical for achieving sustainability. On the other hand, Education for girls is more important than boys but the barriers and tribal illusions keep girls from attending school are often higher than for boys. Keeping girls in school provides life-changing benefits not just for individuals, but for the entire community. Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. If you educate a man, you educate one man but if you educate a woman, you educate a generation.

Based on expert's consensus, education is the best strategy to a sustainable development and to a secure Afghanistan in the longer term. That's why we need to choose it as a top national priority, and as a best way to reaching a peaceful, stable and strong Afghanistan. That's why it is repeated that education is the foundation of all infrastructures which means the whole environmental, social, cultural, political and economic challenges rooted to this great issue. It is suggested to include education as an obligatory duty in national constitution. And call for international support for the purpose of reaching to a sustainable and useful country both for neighboring and for the rest of the world with free ignorant and free terrorist ground at all.

"Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world." Nelson Mandela.

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