

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



June 04, 2016

Managing the Issues of Aging

Aging is an inevitable natural and biological phenomenon. There are many perceptions of the old generation varying from one culture to another. Some people have the positive views like "old is gold", or "old person in the family is a blessing", while some people think that "old is worn out" or "dead wood". In general taking the problem from the point of views of old people themselves and the people around them, it appears that the aged are viewed as a disadvantaged group and present an acute social problem. This points out to the facts that there are negative conditions regarding aging and the aged group which call for some remedial measures for its correction.

The problem apart from its psychological and social components, irrespective of the financial issues, has increased because of improvements in health/medical care and longevity in life. This has kept the aged physically and mentally young. Technology and rapid social changes have, on the other hand, made the aged isolated and worn-out.

Once the old family members were the symbol of wisdom and experience for the young, and their stay with the families were cherished. However, the growing tensions, pressures and achievement motives before the young and adults, particularly in the urban areas of the country, have made the old people burden on the families.

There is a growing need to tackle the issue seriously. There are different sorts of remedies available but more important is to pursue them properly. Both the government authorities and the people must play positive roles in this regard.

The main problem is to keep the old people occupied in one way or the other. The projects and schemes could be started by the private enterprises for the re-employment of the old people with light work of short duration, or the opening up of self-employment opportunities at the local level in small communities. This would be equally applicable both in rural and urban areas of the Afghanistan.

There is a need for the creation of voluntary services in the field of primary education like health and family welfare centers and other voluntary or non-governmental organizations at the local, regional, provincial and national levels. In this way, the old people will have a sense of belonging and contributing to the national development apart from having a sense of pride and honor with maintaining their self-respect and dignity. This would save the old persons from many a socio-psychological problems. It would have very important implications on their mental health. It would be certainly better to contribute to the national development rather than simply waiting for the death and complaining against the friends, relatives and time.

The revival of friendship ties with friends, relatives and neighborhood would contribute to health past-time and establishing relationships in primary groups. The relationships within the family could be reestablished by participating into the affairs of the sons/daughters and grandchildren in a democratic way. This would give the old persons proper psychological satisfaction and emotional contentment, thus, enjoying the retired life in a richer and fuller way instead of total withdrawal and isolation.

Active involvement in the family/community affairs with respect to birth, death, marriage ceremonies and religious festivals would keep the old men and women active and alive and would develop a sense of participation. These social and religious activities are likely to make the old generation happy and contented with a sense of pride and honor – the best way to spending retired life.

The rest and recreational activities are the most suitable means for the old people requiring in active participation. Radio and TV could play an important role in presenting national and international sports events on major and minor games regularly. Same is the case for providing indoor games for the old people. Even participation in local 'meals' would be of much significance to the old people. Such indoor sports and games could be arranged under the shade of a tree, or any other common place. In short, the involvement in community affairs even inter-community affairs would be of much use for the old people where their life-long experiences and wisdom could be utilized by the younger generation on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a source of mental satisfaction for the old people.

Establishing old age houses and even small villages and centers for the mentally and physically handicapped is another solution for problems of old people in urban areas. The poor, unwanted and rejected old people could live there and spend the remaining days of their lives at these places in a meaningful way rather than having an empty life in isolation with a deep sense of inferiority complex.

Last but not the least, regular visits to old family friends and relatives, coupled with frequent travel to various parts of the country in groups would be yet another means of spending old-days in a fruitful way. These frequent visits and traveling with change in environment would certainly help in decreasing their tensions and frustration for some time. It would be better if these visits and travels are made every season or year with close old age friends and relatives.



Salma Dam: A Milestone Towards Development

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

Afghan and Indian leaders are set to inaugurate one of the most important development projects in Afghanistan that are carried out and completed since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. The Salma Dam in Herat province is considered as a major economic and development achievement for Afghanistan and its inauguration is highlighted as an important milestone in the efforts to develop the country while the war is unabatedly going on. India has funded the project through providing \$300 million dollars in aid to Afghanistan. The project is expected to boost economic welfare of inhabitants of Herat and surrounding provinces through providing electricity and irrigation water. It would also be a huge contribution to Afghanistan's economy as the country is struggling to find new sources of revenues to finance its expenses.

The reconstruction of Salma Dam and the new compound of Afghanistan's parliament, have become symbols of India's contribution to reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. The visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Herat province to participate in the inauguration ceremony along with the Afghan president Ashraf Ghani is not only indicating the importance of the project but highlighting the scale and nature of the relations between Afghanistan and India. India has been one of the biggest donor countries helping reconstruction and development of Afghanistan since 2001. The country has been supporting projects in areas of education, health, social, road constructions and security. There are several projects going on in Afghanistan and thousands of Afghan students are getting higher education in India.

The completion of the Salma Dam is coming as a huge success for Afghanistan as its construction was facing enormous security challenges since it was started under the oversight of former president Hamid Karzai's administration. The project was a major target for the Taliban and other like minded groups and the construction works were occasionally halted due to the militants attacks. Dozens of Indian and Afghan workers of the project along with Afghan security forces assigned for security of the site has been killed in the militant attacks targeting the project. Despite the persisting threats facing the project, the Afghan government and India as the sole donor country supporting the project managed to maintain works on the project and until its completion. The Salma Dam project is one of the several major development projects in areas of energy and water which has been under construction in past years and facing severe security and funding challenges.

It is perhaps the first time in last fifteen years that Afghans are witnessing successful completion and delivery of a major project with high economic and social pay-off. There are a number of other development and economic projects that are underway or are planned for the upcoming years. However, most of the large-scale or smaller projects have been facing severe security

and economic challenges. The constructions of many of the projects have been hampered by the ongoing war and attacks from the Taliban. But the successful completion of the Salma project indicates that despite all the challenges and the ongoing insurgency of the Taliban, the development efforts can go ahead and the government can take extra measures to provide security for the important projects.

Afghanistan is hoping to develop its economy and find new sources of revenues in the upcoming decade to help it wean off from the aid money it receives from the international community to keep up its administration and security agencies. The project of Salma Dam and other major projects, some of which are just formalized and agreed with other involved countries, will help Afghanistan to develop its economy and become self-sufficient in financing its expenses if the Afghan government manages to provide security and resolve other challenges involved in their construction. The leaders of the national unity government have boasted of initiating major national and multi-nation economic projects, naming this year as the year of economic revolution in Afghanistan. Perhaps it is the Salma Dam project, CASA 1000, TAPI gas pipeline and others that symbolizes what the Afghan officials boast of about Afghanistan's ongoing development and economic efforts.

However, there is a long way to see if the development projects will actually be successful and help development of economy. Afghanistan is going to deal continuously with the Taliban insurgency for an unforeseeable period of time that may not last soon. With no prospect in sight for the war in the country, it will undermine the efforts to carry out and complete the development and economic initiative at national or regional levels. The government of Afghanistan needs to release itself from the wishful ambitions to reach a final and comprehensive peace deal with the insurgent groups that would end the conflict in the country. Instead, it needs to redouble efforts on winning the war through a war of attrition that could take several years or even decades. It should refocus on stabilizing the country through political and economic developments. A sustainable political system in the country along with a growing economy would help weaken the insurgency and marginalize their mindset as the mainstream steadily grows stronger.

The government of Afghanistan needs to do more to work with the neighboring countries involved in the Afghan conflict in area of promoting economic cooperation and trade aimed on boosting development and welfare of Afghanistan and the whole region. This will pave the ground for a closer regional integration and cooperation among the regional and neighboring countries over the resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan. The Afghan government needs to persuade the regional and neighboring countries that peaceful and developed Afghanistan will lead to broader security and prosperity in the region.

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Spurring Private Investment for Development

By Nirj Deva

Successful economic development has hewed to a well-known pattern. Lifting a country out of poverty and placing it on a path of sustainable growth requires hard work, the creation of a robust system of property rights, and – crucially – private investment.

This method is not specific to a particular region or people. As Asia's spectacular growth has demonstrated, it is transferable across cultures. So it is a shame that development economists and the world's multilateral institutions are failing to apply it systematically in the developing world.

Billions of dollars of aid has been poured into developing countries, but it has not been enough, and the results have been disappointing. The World Bank estimates that one billion people still live on less than \$1.25 a day, while more than 800 million do not have enough to eat. The Millennium Development Goals attempted to apply a comprehensive approach to reducing poverty, but the MDGs failed to address its underlying causes.

On paper, at least, the United Nation's new Sustainable Development Goals, put in place last year, are an improvement. The trouble is that lofty ambitions come with a high price tag, and there remains a funding gap of around \$2.5 trillion if all 17 goals are to be met. A chasm this big cannot be bridged by cash-strapped governments and taxpayers alone.

That is why a recent decision by the European Parliament to back my report calling for the mobilization of private capital in the fight against global poverty is so important. For the first time in the parliament's history, its members acknowledged the private sector as a key partner in wealth creation in the developing world. Given that the European Union is one of the biggest providers of development aid, the decision could be highly significant.

To be sure, winning a vote, while never straightforward, is the easy part. The challenge will be translating words into action. The early signs are heartening. Marianne Thyssen, the EU's employment and labor commissioner, wants work on implementing the report to begin immediately. She has promised that the European Commission will invest more than €2 billion (\$2.27 billion) to support the private sector in the developing world by 2020. She expects that €4.8 billion in EU grants would leverage at least €66 billion in investment in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia,

and Latin America by financial institutions and private firms. If the EU's entire development budget was similarly maximized, we could mobilize about €300 billion of capital, which, if spent on acquiring equipment, plant, and technology from Europe, could give an enormous boost to the current sluggish growth of the European economies.

An important early task in achieving the desired impact will be to create an environment in which private initiatives can flourish. Currently, micro, small, and medium-size enterprises account for some 60% of the developing world's employment. And yet 70% of these businesses receive no help from financial institutions, even though investment would enable them to grow and create jobs.

We must begin to change this by providing the financial and technical assistance countries need to establish reliable banking systems and tax administrations. Adherence to international accounting standards should be encouraged. Transparency must be improved, and corruption must be rooted out. And in many countries, the system of land registration and property rights needs to be formalized, so that individuals and companies gain equity against which they can borrow to invest in their businesses.

The effect will be to increase the number of bankable projects in which both local businesses and international firms can invest. Potential for public-private partnerships exist in energy and telecommunications projects, in wells and irrigation, in the construction sector, in infrastructure such as roads, airports, and harbors, and in processing plants for agro industries, meat, fruit, and vegetables.

Of course, stringent safeguards must be put in place. Private investors will need to agree to binding rules protecting social, environmental, human, and gender rights. To build trust, EU-level forums should be created, in which the private sector, NGOs, think tanks, and governments can discuss development opportunities.

Helping developing countries grow will stimulate investment opportunities for EU companies and open new markets for their goods. The result will be a virtuous cycle of development that benefits everyone – and that moves the world significantly closer to achieving the ambitious goals that it has adopted. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Nirj Deva is a ranking member of the European Parliament and Conservative Vice-President of the Development Committee.

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