

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



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## Insecurity Influences the Pursuit of Education

Insecurity and economic hardships have been influencing Afghanistan in various ways. Apart from targeting the people directly, they have been influencing their lives indirectly as well by keeping them away from positive activities. One of the positive activities that the people have been kept away from is the pursuit of education. Education is one of the most important requirements in the current scenario but unfortunately, the students are being kept away from it because of insecurity and economic hardships.

A current report has disclosed that in the last year about 100,000 students, that also included many girls, dropped out of school only in western Herat province. According to a statement by chairman of Herat's Directorate of Education, Abdul Razaq Ahmadi, these students are not getting education due to various reasons that include financial issues or other reasons. Moreover, he has also shown concerns regarding 3,000 other children who are of school-going age but currently are not enrolled. This is the situation only in Herat; many of other provinces in the country also face such issues. Unfortunately, there is no reliable data in this regard and without updated information, it is very difficult to ascertain how many children are actually out of school and what measures can be taken to support them so that they are able to join schools and start their pursuit of modern education.

Modern education is a crying need of the country, but unfortunately, it has been targeted by extremism and terrorism. Particularly, Taliban have been against modern education to a large extent. They showed that during their rule in Afghanistan and show now as well by threatening schools and school-going girls and women in different ways. They have thrown acid on the innocent girls going to schools, poisoned them in different ways and even demolished their schools completely.

With the rise of Taliban in 1996, the decline of modern education system which was already not in a satisfactory condition, started. Taliban banned the female education and promulgated the madrasah system of education. The students were confined to a single approach towards education and that was the Clergy approach, which depended on an extremist interpretation of Islam and Islamic concepts. Investigation and research were banned strictly, and students were not allowed to question their teachers. Rather, they were asked to blindly follow what the Clergy approach had to offer them. The basic purpose of education was thus non-existent in the so-called education system of Taliban.

Unfortunately, their approach towards education has not changed even now and they have the same view and approach regarding education. They even consider violence justifiable so as to stop such education.

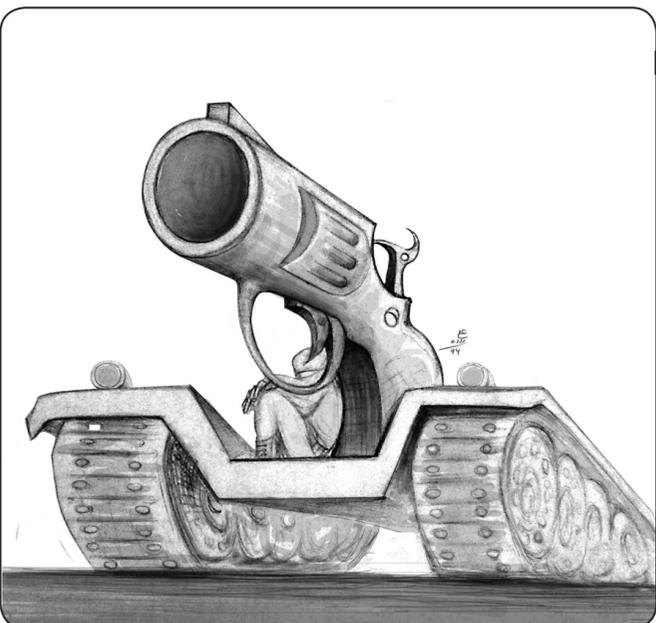
Nonetheless, we need to understand that Afghanistan requires years of improvement and development regarding education; therefore, it is important that all the efforts that are meant to discourage education must be dealt with iron fist. History has been the witness to the fact that the people who have pursued education with complete devotion and dedication have been able to make remarkable development and progress. It has been through proper development in the education sector and education system that such countries are standing much apart from others with well-being and dignity kneeling before them submissively. Through their modern education system they have not only served humanity by opening new vistas of knowledge but have also facilitated their people by bringing comfort and facilities on their door steps. Apart from that, they are on the driving seat regarding the international socio-political scenario, while the countries that lack proper emphasis on education are left much behind in almost all the fields of life.

However, the nations that have opposed education have, in fact, blocked their own way to success. They are the ones who have actually themselves have tied their feet and hands with the ropes and are not able to move ahead even though they need to do so. At the same time, they are the ones who have blindfolded themselves and think that there isn't anything around them to see. They are, in short, in the process of fooling their own selves.

Ultimately, they are the ones who would be greatly influenced by the negative impacts of all such behavior. Though they think that they are performing some great service to their nations by keeping it unpolluted and unaffected by the germs of education, in reality, they are bounding and isolating themselves and letting themselves decay instead of being active part of the real world that demands progress, growth and modern education.

Negative approach and efforts to discourage education are really tragic and the government must make efforts to launch practical measures to curb the situation. Condemning the incidents that are meant to discourage education alone would not be sufficient to discourage such ruthless activities and would in the long run deprive the people of Afghanistan from better opportunities to get education.

At present time, nothing is so urgently required for our nation as modern education – education that should be based on up to date information, analysis and developments in different fields of knowledge and must be aided with modern technology; education that can give the coming generation of Afghanistan an outlook other than extremism. And all these have to be provided to the people of Afghanistan without charging them much, as majority of the people are already suffering severely under the reign of deteriorated socio-economic situation.



## Making the Business Case for Gender Equality

By Achim Steiner and Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

Around the world, gender bias is attracting renewed attention. Through protest marches and viral social-media campaigns, women everywhere are demanding an end to sexual harassment, abuse, femicide, and inequality.

But, as successful as the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements have been in raising public awareness, the struggle for parity is far from over. Empowering women and girls is key to achieving all 17 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. At the moment, however, gender bias remains a significant obstacle to global progress, and it is particularly acute in the workplace.

Today, only 5% of S&P 500 companies are led by women, according to Catalyst, a non-profit CEO watchdog. That dismal figure is all the more remarkable when one considers that 73% of global firms allegedly have equal-opportunity policies in place, according to a survey by the International Labour Organization (ILO). Moreover, while research shows a clear link between a company's gender balance and its financial health, women occupy fewer than 20% of governing board seats in the world's largest companies.

Addressing such deficiencies is both an economic and a moral imperative. A 2015 report by the McKinsey Global Institute found that if women and men played an "identical role in labor markets," \$28 trillion would be added to the global economy by 2025. These global gains would be in addition to the benefits for individual companies. Firms with greater gender equality are more innovative, generous, and profitable. But, at the current rate of female empowerment, it would take nearly 220 years to close the gender gap. The world cannot afford to wait that long; we need a new approach.

To help chart a path for companies to hire, retain, and promote female employees, we are joining more than 400 global business leaders and government representatives in Santiago, Chile, this week for the Fourth Global Forum on Business for Gender Equality. The gathering – organized by the Chilean government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in partnership with the ILO and UN Women – will highlight the importance of gender equality in the private sector.

One solution that will be on the agenda is the UNDP-supported Gender Equality Seal program, a unique initiative that cer-

tifies companies that have eliminated pay gaps, increased the number of women in decision-making positions, and worked to end sexual harassment on the job.

Today, these UNDP-certified companies are leading the way in building a more balanced global workforce. For example, Chile's state-owned copper mining company, Codelco, is increasing its ranks of female employees – and boosting productivity in the process. Similarly, Costa Rica's Banco Nacional has promoted dozens of women into managerial roles; the bank is now a leading regional provider of financing to female entrepreneurs. And in Canada, Scotiabank has used a female mentorship program to become one of the industry's most gender-balanced companies. Our hope is that many more firms will strive for gender equality certification, possibly even by signaling their intent this week.

Another initiative to be discussed is the Women's Empowerment Principles, a set of operating guidelines developed by UN Women and the UN Global Compact that embodies the business case for gender equality. More than 1,700 CEOs have endorsed the principles, while nearly 300 companies in 61 countries have used the initiative's free gender gap analysis tool to help managers implement them in the workplace.

To be sure, global meetings, certification systems, and free software are only part of the solution. Women still bear disproportionate domestic burdens, and pressures stemming from social and cultural norms often rob them of the chance to attend school, start businesses, or participate in public life. Moreover, women who do have paying jobs outside the home are on the wrong side of a gender wage gap that averages 23%, suggesting that equality is not only about opportunity.

Businesses, communities, and families must work together to level the playing field. Fortunately, the cost of doing nothing is too high for any business – and economies as a whole – to bear, which is why we are optimistic that eliminating gender bias at work is possible. When companies make female empowerment central to their business strategies, growth and equality can be mutually reinforcing to leave no one behind.

Achim Steiner is Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka is Executive Director of UN Women.

## The Main Features of Democracy

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Undoubtedly, democracy is the most important factor in stabilization and development of post-conflict countries; on the contrary, there are no kingdoms or autocratic systems being successful in reconstruction of war-torn countries. In fact, today's crises in Afghanistan are the outcome of those inheritable political systems which were handed over by kings to their heirs and then to their grandsons. While today's world economic and political powers came out of collective will of people after they decided to move from barbarism and racism to rationalism.

In other terms, Afghanistan has experienced many political systems such as Kingdoms, Italianism, and Centralism and so on, but none succeeded to change the destiny of the Afghan people. The Afghan citizens eagerly want to move towards peace, prosperity and an efficient democratic system; in fact, they are really tired of long-term war and imposed conflicts in their country. In 2001, the new democratic system with intervention of international community was welcomed by all the Afghan people. It means, they realize the needs for strategic partners but they also expect changes and thorough implementation of the agreements. Thus, they anticipate the country leaders not to waste the opportunities came out by several decades of fights and through presence of international allies. Now many Afghans, especially young generation believe that reaching peace and prosperity is impossible without institutionalizing a decentralized democratic system and rule of law in Afghanistan. In democratic countries, rulers' decisions are made on the basis of ruling laws and people's will. Accordingly, the legitimacy of a political system within a country is judged on the basis of lawfulness which is the significant indicator of democratic. If the rulers are negligent to laws and law enforcement, it shows that democracy stabilization and democratic values are not important to them. Therefore, it is pinpointed that foundation of democracy is laid on the basis of lawfulness and people wills.

Based on this, widespread corruption is not only the important manifestation of lawlessness but also the mother of all threats to country's democracy and sustainable development. Recently, Afghanistan got the fourth place of corrupt country in the world; this has also shown the position of our democracy in the world. However, the Afghan National Unity Government (NUG) repeatedly promised fighting against corruption. Ghani launched a national anti-corruption strategy that rests on five pillars: national leadership; security sector reform; improving the quality of civil service recruitment; and increasing our ability to oversee how money is transferred and spent.

The next feature of democratic system is holding transparent elections; hundreds of developed countries achieved their economic prosperity and political stability through transparent democratic elections. On the other hand, in emerging democracies and post-conflict societies, it has a great potential risk to plunge a country back into violent conflict, to undermine processes of stabilization and to discredit democratization. The presidential elections in Afghanistan in autumn 2009

are one of the recent examples for this risk. Elections are not only a tool of democratic participation but also a severe contest for positions of leadership, power and access to resources. Generally, the political management experience shows that only way to realizing political and economic stability is transparent election system in a country. Heeding the imperatives and lessons learned by prosperous countries, of being key importance can contribute significantly to reducing these risks. Yet, carried away by abstract, resounding rhetoric on the need for democracy and free and fair elections, politicians and leaders in the Western capitals as well as in international organizations often fail to be serious about implementing them. This is particularly true with regard to safeguarding the independence and integrity of Election Commissions and Electoral Complaints Systems. Moreover, the absence of strong executive entities is another threat to stabilization of democracy in a country.

The other feature of democratic system is freedom of media and freedom of speech; In fact, freedom of media and speech are freedom of thoughts but in conflict or post-conflict countries such as Afghanistan – there is a dire need to promote media literacy as a safeguard against hatred speech in otherwise volatile circumstances. An audience that is educated in the tenants of media professionalism is more likely to demand high quality media content and play active role in institutionalizing of a unifying political literature.

So, media literacy is also important for new or transitioning democracies. In these circumstances legal frameworks are usually under development and will greatly impact the future state of independent and free media. Furthermore, citizens may experience a rather sudden explosion of news sources and media formats after decades or more of controlled and sparse media. The greater the media literacy, the more prepared audiences will be in deciphering messages and recognizing value and credibility. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy.

To end with, democracy means rule of people on people but because of several aforementioned barriers and improper beds, especially lack of modern political culture, role of people is not determining in Afghanistan; The more people are aware of their role, the more they will control the steering of power towards peace and prosperity. Unfortunately, most of the people are unaware of their role in forming governmental system and political decision making process. So long as they are not rescued from basic economic needs, it does not seem to find chance to think about their secondary needs as participation in political process. Conversely, economic growth causes social classifications motivating them to contribute in political process for their own interests. So, government, as a key actor should prepare the bed for democratization, such as economic growth, security improvement and promotion of political culture.

Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



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