

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

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Intensifying Stratification in Afghanistan

Since the formation of the so-called democratic system in Afghanistan, after the downfall of Taliban, security is not the only issue in the country, though most of the concentration has been given to it. There are many other social and economic issues that have crept within Afghan society and they have the capacity to eat out the roots of Afghan society slowly and gradually. Among these problems, the issue of growing stratification between the rich and the poor is the most frustrating one. It does not only point to the fact that there has been uneven development in the society, but also reveal the fact that most of the people of the society remain distant from the advantages and services that have been taken on their names.

As a matter of fact, the differences seem to be intensifying and are affecting the society in so many negative ways. It has not been the stratification of a society in different classes that causes much trouble to a society rather it is that the stratification has become intense, which has caused the society to suffer or even suffocate.

The aid and assistance that have come to the in the country in the last 17 years or so for the development purposes do not seem to have benefited the needy people of the society rather they have been accumulated by certain authoritative people who use them for their own benefits and grandeur, which has further boldened the boundaries between the rich and poor classes. Though the stratification into rich and poor classes existed in Afghan society earlier as well, but it has changed its primitive shape; even in the urban regions the stratification is more like modern upper-class and lower-class division.

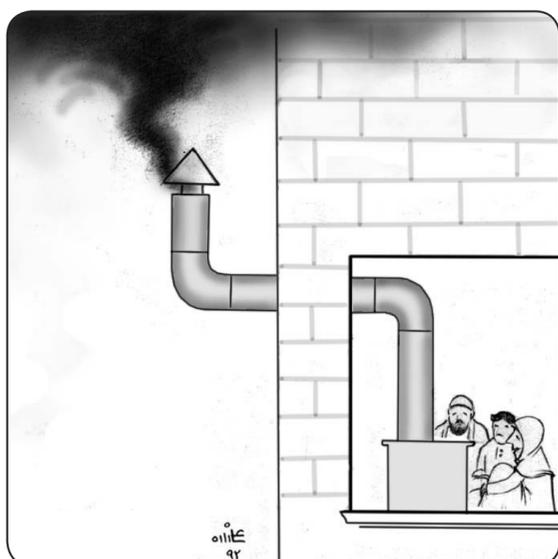
In fact, the current economic system does not seem to be working and there are controversies regarding the future of the system. In fact, if studied closely, it can be found that Afghanistan's economic system is based on capitalist system, and this system has been working for so many countries; however, there are few pre-requisites that are maintained to a varying extent by these countries that have been helping the system to develop instead of facing a failure.

First, it has been made sure that justice should be maintained in its true spirit, i.e. it must not favor only the upper class; rather the upper class itself should be treated by the law and order system in the same way as the other two classes; namely, lower, middle and upper classes. In simpler terms, social stratification has not been changed to social injustice.

Second, social mobility has been made very easy in such societies. Social mobility basically means movement from one social class to another. For example, it has not been very difficult for a person taking birth in a lower class to work hard, develop the capability and move to the middle and even to upper class. There have been equal opportunities for almost all the members of the societies to excel in their lives and become rich. The reverse has been maintained as well, i.e. the people born in rich families but not working hard have been pushed to the lower strata. Social mobility has been able to provide some oxygen for the social setup to inhale so that it must keep on living.

The societies like Afghanistan where the wealth has poured in without much accountability and weak check and balance system, the stratification has led to sufferings. The upper class in Afghanistan cannot be said to be in the form as it exists in an industrialized society. Rather, it includes the landlords, tribal heads and religious leaders. Both political and economic systems tend to revolve around these people who are in total control of entire wealth and its distribution. Further, it is also true that all these people do not seem to have the ability for what they are gifted.

They, in pursuit of their own benefits, have only made the opportunity of development favor themselves. The poor people of Afghanistan, who have been badly stricken by decades of wars, have only suffered the worst manifestations of poverty. There are millions who do not have the basic requirements of life and are compelled to live their lives in the remotest areas, without much support and attention. Food, cloth, shelter and other requirements like education and security are non-existent for them. And at the same time, there are people who own properties worth millions of dollars. These are all the results of an intense stratification. The poor do not seem to be having many opportunities of improvements in their lives and that means that social mobility, which can provide oxygen to a stratified society does not exist, while the social injustice is on the rise. The law and order system, instead of treating everyone alike, has served the purpose of the upper-class alone. The current scenario if goes unchecked can bring further misery to Afghan society.

**Role of Individuals and Institutions in States**

By: Dilawar Sherzai

With the evolution of state and politics, there has been a movement from personality-centered structures and setups to the institutional-led structures. A thorough study of the journey from monarchy to today's democratic era will substantially prove the mentioned argument. The monarchies were the setups dominated by the personalities of the kings that ruled them. They largely depended on the kings who used to be all in all and were not answerable to anyone and enjoyed extreme authority. Though institutions existed in their primary forms they were not able to function on their own and they all waited for the orders of the kings. As the kings had to order for all the matters in the country, the systems did not use to be very much efficient and effective and largely depended on the use of power and authority and even violence to get the works done.

As the English historian, politician & writer John Emerich has said, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely," therefore, the extreme authority, with which the monarchs were gifted, had corrupted them to a large extent. And on most of the occasions they were very much likely to use their authority in a wrong manner because many of them would not consult others and would even take decision on the basis of past experiences and whims. They even did not have much time to ponder upon the issues as they had to deal with so many issues at a time. There was no distribution of responsibility and there were no marked boundaries among government institution like executive, judiciary and legislature and the king was all of them at a time. Even there was no distinction between the state and the government as is in the modern concept of state and government.

However, the development of institutions continued even within monarchies and most of them in the certain parts of their histories had strong institutions that stood in support and on certain occasions in conflict with the king. One such institution was the religious institution. Kings largely depended on them while taking decisions and they used to have a great say in the affairs of the government. For example, during the Dark Age in Europe, the church used to have a strong position within the monarchies. On certain occasions even the kings used to be dominated by them. As the people including kings were highly influenced by religion and religious beliefs, the church used to be their favorite and it was able to exert its authority within the system. However, during the Enlightenment or Renaissance, the authority of church was challenged and efforts were made to keep the church away from the affairs of the state. It was the time when the concept of Secularism was introduced within the European society.

The later period of Renaissance was also the time when efforts were made to move from monarchy to a democratic state and it was also the time when the institutions that are very much necessary for the better performance of the government and democratic setup were formed in the modern sense. The famous concept of "Separation of Power" was revitalized during the same era, which proved to be the

foundation of the modern political institutions.

In the concept of separation of power, the state is divided into branches or estates, each with separate and independent powers and areas of responsibility. The normal division of estates is into an executive, a legislature and a judiciary. The opposite of separation of powers is the fusion of powers, often a feature of parliamentary democracies. In this form, the executive, which often consists of a prime minister and cabinet, is drawn from the legislature. This is the principle of responsible government. Although the legislature and executive branches are connected, in parliamentary systems there is usually an independent judiciary and the government's role in the parliament does not give them unlimited legislative influence.

The term, "Separation of Powers" is ascribed to French Enlightenment political philosopher, Baron de Montesquieu. Montesquieu described division of political power among an executive, a legislature and a judiciary. He based this model on the British constitutional system, in which he perceived a separation of powers among the monarch, parliament and the courts of law, but such separation, in reality was difficult to be marked. Among the abovementioned organs of the state, Montesquieu insisted greatly on the judiciary; he specified that the independence of the judiciary has to be real and not apparent merely. The judiciary was generally considered by him as the most important and the least dangerous of powers, and he suggested that it must be independent and unchecked.

There is no doubt that today the most of the democracies of the world have the concept of division of power in their systems in one way or the other. According to the modern concept of state and government, the nature, form and characteristics of institutions of executive, legislature and judiciary decide the form and quality of the system. However, the most successful (in terms of promoting democracy) among the systems of the world are the ones that have the independence of the institutions mentioned above and their transparency and accountability.

The political system in Afghanistan has been facing certain problems regarding the separation of power and the nourishment and dominance of the political institutions. The system is, to a certain extent, marked with the dominance of personalities, rather than the institutions, while the institutions are ill-managed and ignored and they are not even given their due authority. The executive is not, in true sense, answerable to the legislature and even, in a sense, to judiciary, which has generated concerns regarding the transparency and the accountability of the executive. Even the members of the executive are chosen on the basis of personality traits, rather than their experience in the political institutions like political parties. Therefore, it is really important for the political system in Afghanistan to respect the institutions and try to create circumstances that can play a dominant role in the development and nourishment of the political institutions. True political institutions will guarantee a long-lasting and durable democracy as they die hard and have larger scope of influence.

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How to Achieve Health Equity

By: Eric A. Friedman

In 2015, the world committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals - a comprehensive agenda covering virtually all aspects of development - by 2030. But the world has yet to embrace the kind of deliberate, systematic, and inclusive approach that is needed to eliminate inequities that prevent billions of people from enjoying a long and healthy life.

Last year's United Nations report on progress toward achieving the SDGs showed that the number of people facing hunger is actually growing, as is the number of malaria cases. Moreover, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the consequences of climate change are emerging much faster than anticipated. The world's poorest and most vulnerable will be disproportionately affected.

This is no way to fulfill the pledge contained in the SDG framework, called the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, that "no one will be left behind." But it should not come as a surprise. The world has made limited efforts to eliminate inequities, including in health. The SDGs' predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals, brought modest improvements in health equity for many countries, but in a substantial minority of countries, poorer segments of the population fell even further behind.

In Nigeria, access to basic reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health interventions remains five times higher for those in the top wealth quintile than those in the lowest (68%, compared to 13%). In Bangladesh, 74% of the wealthiest quintile has access to skilled child-birth care, whereas only 18% of the poorest does.

Serious health inequities persist even in the advanced economies. In the United States, residents of Baltimore's largely white and wealthy Roland Park neighborhood can expect to live 16 years longer than residents of the largely black, impoverished Greenmount East neighborhood, located just a few miles away.

Ensuring that the SDGs succeed where the MDGs did not demands a carefully designed, comprehensive, and inclusive response that directly tackles "the inequitable distribution of power, money, and resources" that underlies health inequities. The health equity programs of action framework, proposed by the O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law at the Georgetown University Law Center, aims to facilitate the development of just such a response.

Grounded in countries' human rights obligations, the programs of action could be implemented through national health plans or through national development, SDG, or social inclusion strategies. They would adhere to seven principles:

- Enable empowering participation and inclusive leadership. People from disadvantaged and marginalized populations would be decision-makers, helping to lead all relevant structures and processes.
- Maximize health equity. Disparities in rates of all diseases and other health threats must be addressed, as must the structural determinants of health.
- Health systems and beyond. The full range of social, cultural, environmental, economic, and political determinants of health must be considered.
- Every population counts. Beyond addressing common causes of health inequities - such as discrimination, poverty, inadequate housing, and unequal access to education - factors that are particular to any one or several populations must be addressed as well.
- Actions, targets, and timelines. Actions must be specific, and linked to measurable, time-bound targets.
- Comprehensive accountability. Actions and targets must be incorporated into sectoral strategies and encompass thorough monitoring and evaluation (including by independent entities), capacity building, and structures that embed accountability at all levels of the health system and other relevant systems.
- Sustained high-level political commitment. Programs of action can be implemented only if political leaders have the will to work consistently and systematically over a prolonged period, allocating the relevant resources as needed.

We have less than 12 years to achieve the SDGs. Without a comprehensive and steadfast effort to eliminate health inequities - the kind promoted by health equity programs of action - we will fail. That is why countries should urgently adapt the seven principles to their circumstances and incorporate them into their health and development planning processes. To this end, they can take advantage of the newly released implementation framework for health equity programs of action.

The UN and the World Health Organization - whose principles are consistent with those of the health equity programs of action - should encourage governments to adopt this framework. So should development and funding agencies, including the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, as well as civil-society organizations. Health inequities are not inevitable. They are the product of injustices that people have created. Eliminating those injustices is within our power as well.

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