

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



March 11, 2018

China – A Poverty Alleviation Role Model for Afghanistan

China seeks to form a prosperous society and freedom from what has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the ruling party. The blueprint for poverty alleviation has been highly fruitful and it will bear the desired result in 2020. Achieving a prosperous life, the Chinese will enjoy the fruit of socialism with Chinese characteristics and reap the benefits of reform and opening-up began four decades ago.

To view the campaign of China's government against poverty only within the past five years, more than 68 million people (70 percent) have been lifted out of poverty and the Chinese central government appropriated over 280 billion yuan to fund poverty reduction. Moreover, the government created 13.51 million new urban jobs and joblessness was the lowest in China in recent years. Last year, GDP grew 6.9 percent and personal income rose 7.3 percent. Chinese government also established a system to provide living allowances for the poor and the disabled.

In addition, China has actively played its role in regional and global issues and pursues the idea of win-win cooperation between China and other states. Besides opening its door wider to the world, China sought to settle tension between states and strengthen peace and prosperity in the region. For example, Beijing hosted a trilateral meeting with the foreign ministers of Afghanistan and Pakistan on 26 December to revive a friendly relation between Kabul and Islamabad so that both the countries could discuss the issue of peace process and reinforce their combat against terrorism. Similarly, China is a key member of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) which is comprised of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and the US and takes effort to bring peace in Afghanistan.

For the coming five years, Chinese Premier of the state Council Li Keqiang – who presented the past five-year achievements of the state in the first session of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) on 5 March – said that Chinese government would deepen reforms in all spheres of social and economic life and lift over 10 million people out of poverty. In such a case, the 30 percent of people will be lifted out of poverty within the coming three years and the poverty alleviation will be accomplished in 2020. According to him, China will strengthen her efforts to improve social and economic issues at national and international levels.

He also said, "We will foster a positive culture in which women are respected, children are cared for, the elderly are treated with respect, and people with disabilities are treated considerately." He further maintained, "Ours is a government of the people, and everything we do should reflect their will."

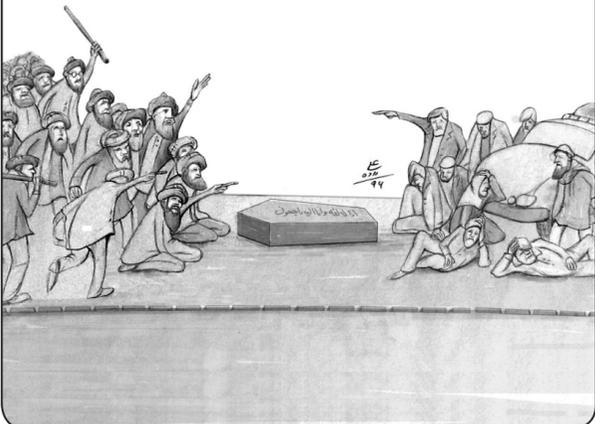
He added that the government will promote harmony between religions and encourage religious leaders and believers to engage in promoting economic and social development.

To view the aforementioned issues, Afghanistan is also in dire need of alleviating poverty and encouraging religious believers to promote tolerance and harmony. Afghan government will have to map out a route to end poverty and create jobs for people, especially for the youth. The government must have short-term, mid-term, and long-term plans, the same as China, for reducing the level of poverty and appropriate certain amount of money every year for this purpose.

It is believed that the large number of people who joins militancy are from poor families. They fight not for an ideological reason but to alleviate their hunger. In the same way, scores of Afghan youth and manpower take refuge to foreign countries to survive poverty and hunger. Poverty is also one of the main reasons behind the crime, which has been increased in Kabul city in recent months and those who live in the slums are involved in pickpocket, burglary, kidnapping, killing, etc. In short, poverty engenders great challenges across the country.

To stop the brain drain, prevent citizens from taking refuge to other countries, reduce crime, and mitigate insurgency, the government will have to create jobs rather than exerting pressure on them. Even death punishment will not reduce the level of crime and insurgency, unless jobs are created and people are lifted out of poverty.

The second issue which is encouraging harmony between religious believers will widen the room for peace and brotherhood and it is a necessary step to be taken in all countries, mainly in Afghanistan. Both Afghan government and religious scholars need to promote tolerance and harmony across the country to free it from violence and conflicts. In short, to form a violence-free and prosperous society, Afghan government should take China as a role model in social and economic spheres and work for the progress of society with strong determination and commitment.



A Tale with a Difference

By Shobha Shukla

This is the story of Razia, a girl from village Bahpur in Moradabad district of Uttar Pradesh. It has all the ingredients of a fairy tale, but with a difference. Razia might not be a run-of-the-mill princess depicted in fairy tales, rather she represents a brave and mighty character in her own right. Razia comes from a very poor Muslim family belonging to the barber community. Abject poverty, an unemployed and visually challenged father; a daily wage-earning mother, striving unsuccessfully to make ends meet—all these were enough to snatch away a care-free childhood from her.

Why would one think of education, when even getting the next meal is replete with uncertainties? Poverty had prevented Razia's elder brothers from studying beyond class 2. They felt better off trying to eke a living to supplement the family income.

But Razia was determined to find a way out and luck also favoured her. With the support of Malala Fund, Oxfam India and Nav Bharat Samaj Kalyan Samiti (NBSKS) led a campaign in Uttar Pradesh to promote girls' education in the state. Under this campaign, girls groups were formed and motivated to track out of school girls and bring them to schools, parents were counseled, and teachers were engaged to make gender friendly environment in schools, track drop out children and support them in improving their skills. This, along with the RTE Act, 2009 (that guarantees eight years of continued free education for all children from six to fourteen years), presented Razia with the opportunity of going to school. And she seized it with all her might.

So what if the income from her family's 1 bigha of land, sale of milk of their sole buffalo and her mother's sporadic earnings (as a farm and construction laborer) almost always falls short of keeping the hearth burning, so what if Razia has had to go hungry many a times, so what if she has to work alongside her mother to supplement the meagre family finances, so what if she has to do all household chores along with attending school, so what if she has to study under candle light as there is no electricity in the house, so what... the list is endless. But for Razia, all this is a small price to pay for what she has got in return—the gift of education. Razia studied till Class 5 in her village primary school. After that her mother and brothers said there was no need for her to study any more. But Rehana Rehman of NBSKS came to her rescue. She was known to Razia's parents as she had earlier helped them get a buffalo under some government scheme for BPL (below poverty line) cardholders. She explained to Razia's mother the importance of education for girls and managed to get her consent for Razia to continue with her studies in an upper primary school of a nearby village. Today, Razia is studying in Class 8 and is slowly but steadily inching towards realizing her dream of becoming a teacher.

Razia's face glows with pride as she shares: "Once madame (Razia's mentor, akin to a fairy godmother) organized an elocution competition where we had to speak something on education. I took part in it and spoke without hesitation in front of 400-500 people. I got a lot of appreciation from the audience for my speech. They said, "Wow look how studies have brought out the talent of this girl from a very poor family. This gave me a lot of encouragement. It also strengthened my resolve to become a teacher so that I can teach other girls like me who are unable to study because of poverty. All this has honed my leadership qualities. I am very fortunate to have come in contact with NBSKS and Oxfam India, who gave me a platform to come forward."

Razia is a bright student. She takes part in all school activities, and is a very good orator who is not scared to speak out her mind in front of others. This trait has helped her to convince other girls to get an education. No wonder she is among the chosen girl-leaders from Moradabad district who are tracking out of school Muslim children and motivating them to join school.

Razia's simple request to the government is to make education free for girls till class 12 and also to open more higher-secondary schools for them in their neighbourhood. Currently there is just one Intermediate College for girls in the whole of Kundarki block, which is about 15-20 km away from many villages of that area, and there is no mode of direct transport either. This further acts as a damper for girls to continue their education after class 8.

The RTE Act makes government accountable for providing 8 years of free and compulsory. Girls' groups have been formed under the campaign, who track the out of school girls, provide the list to respective schools to get the girls enrolled, meet with parents to mobilize them towards their girls' education, and hold meeting with School Management Committees to seek their help. This year the campaign is working with 20 schools in Moradabad district. The aim is to (i) Increase the ambit of RTE by covering pre-primary to higher secondary level education, (ii) Effective implementation of provisions of RTE Act, (iii) promoting girls' education to reduce inequalities. This is in consonance with Sustainable Development Goals 4, 5 and 10.

Razia's story does not end here, rather it spells the beginning of a new dawn. It shows that a little compassion, help and good laws can act as a magic wand to rescue thousands of girls like Razia from the shackles of an inequitable and patriarchal society, and allow them an education that would help them soar to freedom.

While this story did not begin with "Once upon a time...", I would like it to have the proverbial fairy tale ending of "And Razia lived happily ever after!"

(Shobha Shukla is the Managing Editor of CNS (Citizen News Service) and has written extensively on health and gender justice over decades. Follow her on Twitter @shobha1shukla)

What Boosts Gender Equality in Developing Countries?

By Bobbi Gray

WASHINGTON, DC – On March 8, the world will celebrate International Women's Day, an annual opportunity to recommit to gender equality. This year's observance comes at an important time for women's rights, as global movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp are refocusing attention on the discriminatory practices that women confront in their social and professional lives. But while women in the developed world are waging big battles over gender bias, women and girls in developing countries remain focused on smaller victories. On this International Women's Day, we must not forget that in the world's poorest communities, poverty, hunger, domestic violence, and discrimination remain endemic obstacles to gender parity.

I have studied gender and development in the Global South for 15 years. My research, which has included thousands of interviews with women from India to Burkina Faso, has centered on one question: How can the international community improve the welfare of the world's poorest women? The answer, it turns out, is to help them do what they are already doing on their own.

One of the most effective ways to empower women anywhere, but especially in the developing world, is by promoting financial independence. In many areas, that means supporting "informal savings groups," networks of like-minded women who pay dues to build a shared pool of resources. This money can then be drawn on to fund any number of items, such as small business expenses, school fees, or health-care costs.

Community-based savings groups – there are millions in Asia and Africa alone – are changing lives every day. I once met a woman in Burkina Faso whose son owes his life to the financial resources of a savings network. One evening, when the boy was violently ill with diarrhea, his mother called a taxi to take him to the nearest clinic. But taxis, like ambulances, must be paid for in advance, and the woman had no money. Fortunately, a neighbor who belonged to a health savings group was able to contribute and pay the fare. That immediate access to cash very likely saved the boy's life.

Most savings group loans are similarly small. In Benin, for example, the average loan size in one group is just \$9. But, in a country where the average annual income is less than \$800, small amounts can make a huge difference.

Unfortunately, many savings groups, as important as they

are, do not scale; most operate in isolation from official services, which weakens their effectiveness. Women in poor communities must rely on one another, but they also need access to government and international agencies if they are ever to escape from hunger and poverty. That is why my organization, the Grameen Foundation, is using digital technology and mobile phones to connect savings groups with other service providers.

One of our largest projects is in Burkina Faso, a desperately poor country in West Africa where an estimated 55% of the population is food insecure for at least a portion of the year. Since 1993, we have worked with more than 73,000 women in nearly 3,300 savings groups, bringing services directly to the women who need them. Our average participant is 40 years old, illiterate, and earns just \$7 a week selling crops like sesame and peanut. When we began the program, only about half of the women we worked with said they felt empowered in their homes; many feared their husbands.

Today, those sentiments are slowly changing. By serving as a bridge between informal savings groups and banks, health centers, schools, and agricultural extension services, we are helping women make better decisions about food use, nutritional practices, and spending. Our goal is to reduce poverty rates by strengthening asset-management skills, which would give women a greater voice in their communities. "Gender dialogue sessions" that we host are also strengthening family bonds.

During each of my field visits, I have been amazed at how these efforts are affecting women's lives. On one recent trip, I met Rasmata, a young mother who told me that thanks to the safety net of her savings group, she was managing to support her family despite her husband's emigration abroad, her father's recent death, and a lingering drought. She was diversifying her income, managing her finances, and even adopting climate-smart farming techniques. The best part was that she described herself as a "hard-working, respectful, rigorous, and ambitious woman."

Those are adjectives that women everywhere, regardless of their financial situation or education, deserve to ascribe to themselves. So this week, as the world celebrates the incredible progress that women have made on the long march to parity, I will be thinking about women like Rasmata, who have accomplished so much despite having so little.

Bobbi Gray is Research Director at the Grameen Foundation, a global nonprofit dedicated to ending poverty and hunger.

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

Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.