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

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Elections in Democracy Can Ensure Stability

Democracy is considered as the best system of government by many of the states around the world; particularly, by the states that are developed and have achieved political and economic stability. Therefore, it is imperative that this system of government must be pursued by Afghanistan as well, if it really wants to achieve political and economic stability and sustainability. In that pursuit, it must also ensure that different attributes of a democratic system are also taken care of.

One of the most dominating attributes of democracy is the process of elections. If elections continue democracy prospers. This claim can be strengthened by the evidences that lie in the history of greatest democratic states. American democratic history depicts a serious of elections, continued for more than two centuries. United Kingdom's history depicts even a longer continuation of series of elections and today both of the countries enjoy a dominant role in International Political scenario. They both enjoy economic and political might and there are many countries that have been trying to adopt their systems so as to have justice and order in their systems. They are no doubt among the leading countries, with prosperity licking their hands as faithful and invincibility guarding their gates.

In true sense, elections let the public govern themselves; therefore, in a democratic state government is not anything beyond the General Will. People get the chance of listening the motives and mottos of the leaders and they get time even to analyze them properly. Afterward, they are given chance of casting their votes and choosing the leaders whom they consider capable enough to govern them. It is possible that the leaders who are chosen to form government may not be the best, but they are better than the ones who are not chosen by the will of the majority as every nation in the world have the right to choose what they think better for themselves, without bringing harm to others.

However, there are certain thinkers who believe that even though the elections continue the miseries of the people continue as there is no any change in their lives as a result of the elections. They argue that though the elections change faces of the rulers but do not change the lives of the common people who are being ruled. They basically relate to standard of living of the common people and their access to justice and rights and claim that though elections continue, miseries prevail. However, it would be self contradictory statement to say that elections continue and miseries prevail because elections can provide opportunities to the people to choose the sort of government that they like for themselves. In reality miseries prevail because elections do not continue. It would be better to explain it in a simpler manner. In fact, every new election is a new step in the evolution of democracy and every new step is better than the earlier one. That's why we call it evolution. No matter, if the government after new election is corrupt. It is always better than the earlier one as the election before the earlier one had also contributed a little in the awareness enhancement, so will do this new one and the election after this one would have better decisions. People will have a chance to see what the chosen government has been able to offer to them. They can have the chance of not casting their votes to one who have not been able to serve them properly. So now, it would be wise to conclude that when elections continue miseries diminish, awareness enhances, democracy evolves and prosperity reigns.

It would be better to discuss the statement in context of Afghanistan. Recently, there have been different sorts of discussions regarding the upcoming elections in Afghanistan and continuously there have been discussions regarding the democratic system in Afghanistan and its outcomes so far. There are intellectuals who basically believe that democracy will not be able to lead Afghan political system and they even argue that Afghan society is not so far ready for it. But, it would be better to be more logical and scientific. The history of democracy in Afghanistan is very short and before blaming democracy for the miseries in our country, it would be better to ask ourselves, "Has there been democracy in real sense in Afghanistan?" Never! So, when there has never been democracy and elections have a very short history then how can we blame democracy for miseries?

In order to have a fruitful tree of democracy, we need to water it continuously with elections, safeguard it from the parasites of corruption, fertilize it with freedom of expression and above all avoid deforestation by dominancy of dictatorship. Only then we would be able to have true democracy and would be able to stand strong against political and economic challenges.

A Networked Solution to Education Reform

By Amy Black and Alexis Menten

Around the world, some 250 million children are unable to attend school, and many who do have access to a classroom are not learning the skills they need to succeed in life. And, despite a growing consensus about the systemic nature of the challenges affecting education, there is less agreement about how address those systemic challenges. Yet 2018 is shaping up to be a promising year for global efforts to improve educational access and quality. One reason is the emergence of so-called peer action networks, which facilitate knowledge-sharing globally and encourage continuous improvement locally. Such networks, if organized properly, could offer a partial solution to the systemic challenges affecting education.

There are numerous peer groups tackling some of the planet's most difficult problems, but two that are associated with our organizations are worth highlighting. One is the Joint Learning Network for Universal Health Coverage (JLN), a community of practitioners and policymakers from 30 countries supported by Results for Development and other development partners. The other is the Asia Society's Global Cities Education Network (GCEN), which facilitates improvements in urban education systems throughout North America and Asia.

Each of these international peer networks has produced local results. For example, in 2016, Denver Public Schools in Colorado – a GCEN member – created the CareerConnect program, which provides workplace-based learning opportunities for students. The program draws on lessons from vocational education systems in Hong Kong, Melbourne, and Singapore – all GCEN member cities – as well as Switzerland, to help graduates prepare for life after high school. Similarly, the JLN has made significant progress helping developing countries move toward universal health coverage. Network support has enabled members to navigate technical roadblocks and secure political support at home. Adapting the JLN model to support officials of national education ministries could produce comparable gains in education in many countries.

Both of these networks offer a global platform for local practitioners to devise solutions and drive innovation. And both are organized around five principles that we believe successful peer groups – in education or any sector – should strive to incorporate into their own work.

First, networks bring together leaders who are facing similar issues in varying contexts. International peer action networks are most effective when they are cross-cultural; we have found that connecting disparate groups that are working toward similar goals often produces unexpected solutions that are more robust.

Second, the "peer" component of these networks is strongly emphasized. Members are equally empowered to set priorities and contribute to discussions. Networked learning is most successful when participants feel a sense of ownership with respect to outcomes.

Third, membership includes those with the authority and the ability to influence change. For example, many challenges at the national or city level in education planning require both political and technical solutions. For a network to be effective, policymakers and practitioners must work in concert to find solutions to shared challenges.

Fourth, the JLN and the GCEN are committed to measuring collective and individual progress. While gauging success in education can be difficult, especially across contexts, peer action networks must be oriented toward achieving results, and that means measuring their effectiveness. Moreover, accountability metrics should be derived from systems that members are already using at home.

Finally, these networks strive to be sustainable. To drive large-scale and lasting change through a network in any sector, but especially in global education, requires consistent vision, staffing, and financial resources. Peer group participants cannot simultaneously work as policymakers or practitioners and collaboratively run a network organization. Budgeting for central teams to manage the technical support to members and operations of the network is critical to success.

Unfortunately, very little education funding is currently set aside for investments in new learning networks. Increasing investment in peer action networks could help to bolster leadership and implementation capacity – critical to expand learning opportunities around the world, a key objective of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

There are no easy solutions to providing high-quality education to every child on the planet. However, as the growth in peer action networks demonstrates, global education leaders are not in this struggle alone. When like-minded policymakers and practitioners share ideas and collaborate on solutions, the world's educational challenges become a little less daunting.

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Food Security's Social Network

By Leah Samberg

In 2015, when the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals were officially adopted, the clock began ticking on an ambitious goal: ending global hunger by 2030. At the time, that target seemed achievable; during the previous 15 years, the number of undernourished people on the planet had been reduced by half, a staggering achievement attributed largely to international investment in agricultural and economic infrastructure.

And then the world got hungrier again; in 2016, the number of people without enough to eat increased to 815 million, up from 777 million the year before. What happened?

Part of the answer is as old as civilization itself: droughts, floods, conflict, and displacement have hurt harvests and weakened output. But a more intangible factor is no less important: many of the networks on which farmers have traditionally depended to cope with these disasters have been lost or degraded.

Ending global hunger is not just about breeding drought-resistant corn; it is also about having a plan for when that corn fails anyway. In other words, it is as much about reimagining social networks as it is about deciding what goes into the ground.

For the world's poorest smallholder farmers and pastoralists, unpredictability is the only constant. To mitigate risk, people in rural areas have always relied on their personal networks for information to help them weather crises, improve productivity, and limit crop losses. In return, these relationships have facilitated the exchange of information and goods, diversified diets, strengthened farming techniques, and guarded against hunger. Today, though, farmers' personal networks are weakening. Farms are being hit more frequently by severe weather, and violent conflict is increasing in poverty-stricken regions; these and other variables are uprooting farmers everywhere. While people have always left their homes in search of safety or opportunity, a record number of people currently are on the move.

All of these changes are negatively affecting traditional social structures that communities depend on for survival, and insufficient attention is being paid to these structures' role in ensuring food security. If global hunger is to be eradicated, the underpinnings of rural resilience must be supported, expanded, and diversified.

One of the best ways to do this is by investing in new technologies that enable farmers to connect with information and institutions that can decrease uncertainty and mitigate risk. According to a 2017 working paper by the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture, and Food Security, some of the most promising innovations in rural agricultural are technology- and service-based. With access to data, markets, and financial services, farmers can plant, fertilize, harvest, and sell products more effectively.

At the moment, these types of innovations are not featured prominently in most hunger-alleviation strategies. But that is slowly changing, especially as more people in emerging economies connect to mobile networks, and apps designed to collect and share agricultural information become increasingly accessible.

For example, in Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia, local extension services are delivering real-time weather data to vegetable farmers via SMS. In West Africa, private companies such as Ignitia are expanding the accuracy and precision of SMS weather alerts to remote farmers.

In Mongolia, rural herders receive information about disease outbreaks to help them maintain the health of their livestock. And farmers throughout the Global South are turning to SMS-based services for technical support that allows them more easily to adopt new crops and growing techniques, with benefits for both natural resources and household income and nutrition. Connectivity also improves the functioning of markets by allowing farmers and herders to access accurate price information, coordinate transport and other logistics, and facilitate easier exchange of perishable but nutritious foods such as animal products and vegetables. Mobile money and price information also enable pastoralists to adjust herd sizes to changing environmental conditions, while enabling farmers to secure seeds and fertilizer for future harvests.

Furthermore, by enabling the quick and secure transfer of funds, mobile-banking services allow producers to access markets more efficiently, reduce their transaction costs, and tap into higher-value market sectors. Mobile payment systems are also facilitating remittances from urban to rural areas, an increasingly important component of rural livelihoods.

Of course, the mere existence of this technology will not end hunger. The challenge is to broaden access to all of these tools, and to ensure that they meet the needs of the farmers who use them. This demands that mobile technologies take into account differences in gender, education, and resource levels among farmers, and are responsive to changing circumstances. The impact and success of these tools and programs should be monitored and evaluated, with ineffective approaches being improved or replaced.

I've conducted research in rural communities around the world, and one of the features they all have in common is the difficulty that farmers and pastoralists confront in accessing reliable information about markets, weather, and financing. With neighbors on the move, and climate change a growing concern, traditional information networks are no longer sufficient. Farmers everywhere, but especially in developing economies, need the support of digital communities.

For hundreds of millions of people, information is the difference between food security and hunger. But, amid the triple threats of climate change, violent conflict, and mass migration, how that information is gathered and shared is changing. Farmers' personal networks are now global and online. To feed a rapidly changing world, we must use new technology to re-imagine the oldest form of risk mitigation: community.

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