

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



March 25, 2018

## New Solar Year: Year of Education transformation

The new solar year was officially launched by the President Ashraf Ghani. He termed the new solar year as education year. The president stressed the need to pay more attention to the development of the education sector in Afghanistan.

Education is a human right. And all governments are entitled to take the necessary measures to ensure access to education. There are many children being denied not only this right, but opportunities; a fair chance to get a decent job, to escape poverty, to support their families, and to develop their communities. To this end, the president envisioned converting the Education Ministry into a thoroughly professional institution as the top priority of his government. However, it is a challenging task: 50 percent of schools in the country have no buildings, half of teachers do not meet modern standards, 3.5 million eligible children are out of school and around 1,000 schools are closed across the country. Many of those who remain out of school are the hardest to reach, as they live in areas that are held back by insecurity, traditional social values and norms. Construction of school buildings require financial resources while revenue generation is very meager and there is not enough funding resources by the international community for Afghanistan. Reopening the closed schools is far more challenging because they are either in the areas under control of the Taliban or there are high security risks that families of the children deny sending their children to school in these areas.

To address the fact that about 3.5 million children are not learning the basic skills they need to enter the labor market is more than a moral obligation in Afghanistan. It amounts to an investment in sustainable development and prosperity of the nation. For both Afghanistan and these children, there is a direct link between access to quality education and economic and social development that no one can deny it. One of the other vital issues is ensuring that Afghan girls are not kept at home, but can complete education to play an equal role in shaping the future of Afghanistan as their male counterparts; because, Afghanistan will not reap sustainable benefits relating to health, equality and job creation unless it provides equal education access and opportunity for both girls and boys. To ensure that Afghanistan succeeds in achieving progress and prosperity, it needs an educational system to enable and foster "twenty-first-century skills," like critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and digital literacy. Based on this, Afghanistan educational curriculum requires reviewing and aligning with the current needs of the country and also it requires professional and trained teachers to translate such a curriculum into practice.

Job creation is one of the other vital factors in Afghanistan. It is necessary for Afghan policy makers to ensure that the right policies are established so that enough jobs are created and filled in the country. Addressing this, requires a robust education system equipped with qualified, professionally trained, motivated, and well-supported teachers. As a result, quality of education and sustaining it, plays a vital role in the education system. To ensure this, the government must work with the private sector and civil society organizations to find the best ways to improve the quality of education and sustain it. Also, the government shall support the innovation and forging new partnerships in the education sector in Afghanistan.

Education is one of the most vital sectors in Afghanistan. It can ensure the socio-economic development and prosperity in the country. However, education sector faces numerous security, economic, human resource and quality challenges in the country. Addressing these challenges require a vibrant education ministry, political support and curriculum standardization in Afghanistan. Also, ensuring public-private sector partnership, close cooperation with the civil society organizations, and forging national and international partnerships in the education sector are preconditions to a quality education system in Afghanistan. Further, the policy makers shall ensure establishing policy frameworks for job creation and filling them with qualified individuals to ensure socio-development and prosperity in Afghanistan.



## The Need for Economic Development

By Hujjatullah Zia

With holding the 40th anniversary of reform and opening-up, China had a look at the past achievements. The dream of the ruling party for a civil and prosperous society has come true and people live a peaceful and comfortable life.

The government has lifted more than 800 million people out of extreme poverty which is a remarkable achievement in the history of China - the second largest country in the world in the face of being one of the poorest countries. Meanwhile, there are a lot of tremendous projects in the pipeline and one can claim with full confidence that China will alleviate poverty in 2020.

To view the four-decade-back China, it was a highly dependent country but it developed step by step through struggle. For example, watches, bicycles and sewing machines were the three durable consumer goods of China in 1970s. In 1980s, China produced three more durable goods television, refrigerator and washing machine. It widened the realm of its goods and produced air conditioners, telephones and personal computer in 1990s. After 200, China also produced car, mobile phone, automobile, etc. and stood on its own feet economically.

Now the question is that how China was changed from a periphery country to a core country? If a country seeks to stand on its own feet, there are some steps to be taken which were also implemented by China. The first step is that it will have to improve human capital and prioritize education so as to provide high skill labor force for development. Secondly, vocational education and on-the-job training are very important for development. Moreover, China expanded the opening to the outside world and made better use of the international market. It launched a number of major interconnection and economic cooperation projects for developing its economy. It should be noted that China called many foreign investors and companies after the reform and opening-up to invest in China and the lands would be free for them for five years and they were also exempted from tax. This did not only benefit the foreign investors but also contributed to China's development. For instance, first it created jobs for the Chinese. Second, the Chinese had to learn from them and then launch their own companies to compete with them.

In addition, China pays value to its historical and cultural

heritage and makes use of them in the best possible way. Simply take the Palace Museum in Beijing, for example. The director of Palace Museum Shan Jixiang is a very creative person. He had the old buildings decorated and renewed, gardens improved, harmless light in dark rooms installed, and got it facilitated with chairs, trash bins, toilets, etc. He said that the cultural heritage had to be made alive through putting on exhibition. Now every day, a large number of tourists from outside and inside China visit this museum every day, which is a great contribution to China's economy. According to the director, on some special occasions, about 80 thousand people visit the Palace Museum on one day. It is not only this museum, there are many other museums and historical places in China which are a great source of income. Similarly, there are some parks in which a large amount of fruit is produced and sent to market.

To start the economic development, a country needs to invest on public infrastructure construction. There is a well-known saying in China that "if you want to be rich, you must build roads at first." The transportation construction is a key condition of economic development and will promote regional economic coordinated development. There is no doubt that if one builds a factory in the middle of nowhere, the goods will not be sold. Hence, constructing roads and airports are highly important, according to Chinese economists, for economic development. Since we live in the global village, all countries share close economic ties with one another. So, to promote trade with the region and the world, constructing roads and airports are the basic needs in a country.

To view Afghanistan, it is located in the heart of Asia and will be the best trade center. That is to say, since economic connectivity is a significant issue in today's world, Afghanistan can make the best use of its geo-politics for economic development. Simultaneously, the government will have to pay attention to cultural monuments and put them on exhibition at least for local people. As cultural heritage is a great source of income in other countries, Afghan government should not underestimate the value of our cultural monuments, either. Adopting short-term, mid-term, and long-term plans for alleviating poverty will be also very constructive and the government must campaign against poverty.

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## She stood up to defeat TB

By Shobha Shukla

The youngest of 3 sisters, Ingrid Schoeman grew up in Pretoria and later started working as a dietician in a government hospital in Port Elizabeth in Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. She especially enjoys working in children's wards in hospitals as part of her dietician's job. But the year 2012 nearly shattered her happy and peaceful existence.

She had a harrowing experience as TB struck her like a massive wave. But she rallied back and stood up to not only defeat TB, but also inspire others who are battling this disease. One night in 2012, while on duty in the hospital, she developed high fever and a very rapid heartbeat - pulse rate was 160 - and pain in her chest. At first the doctors thought that it was some severe form of pneumonia, because the chest X-Ray did not look like one of TB. But when she did not respond to pneumonia treatment, a lung biopsy was done that confirmed pre Extensively Drug-Resistant TB (XDR-TB).

The toxic TB medication almost killed her Ingrid immediately sought treatment in a private hospital. But the medication that eventually saved her life from TB, almost killed her. During her treatment she not only suffered physical pain - the injections were painful - but was also bedridden for a long period of time. Hers was a case of direct transmission of a severe form of drug resistant TB. Moreover, the medicines affected her liver.

"I developed liver failure due to side effects of the anti-TB drugs. My abdomen swelled and I looked 8 months pregnant. I was in hospital for 75 days, out of which 30 days were spent in the ICU. I even slipped into a coma for a few days. It was nothing short of a miracle that I recovered, thanks to my excellent doctor (Dr David Stickells) and all the support I got from my family and friends. Apart from being a brilliant physician, Dr Stickells was very caring and gave me a lot of moral support. On days when I was very down or crying, he would just come and sit beside me, despite his very busy schedule."

Patient-centric approach does work Ingrid took a long time to recover. She had to undergo physiotherapy, as the disease, as well as the medication, had left her very weak, and unable to walk beyond a few steps at a time. Even though she had lost a lot of muscle, she had no appetite and barely managed to drink supplements.

Ingrid wants health systems to be patient centric, which means that people should have access to new drugs and treatment regimens, with dignity. There is need to explore the use of newer and less toxic drugs. But it is not only about having new treatments and diagnostic tools - it is also about countries being ready to roll them out quickly once they are there and people being informed that they are available.

"I had access to the latest drugs and I survived. But what about those who do not have access to quality care and treatment? Also, I had tremendous support from my family, friends, doctors, and nursing staff. How do the majority of TB patients, who do not have the kind of support that I had,

manage to get through TB treatment?" wonders Ingrid. Shorter+safer treatment regimens are the need of the hour "At the end of the day, newer, safer and shorter TB treatments and their availability to all those in need of them are necessary. There should be enough communication so that a person with TB knows about the latest drugs available and be able to make an informed choice. This decision making process on the patient's part also involves knowledge about the side effects of drugs. Health systems must keep the patient in mind and be able to offer quality TB care to all those who need it. This includes not only treatment, but nutrition and psychological support also" said Ingrid to Citizen News Service (CNS).

After completing her treatment Ingrid became a TB advocate and activist. She joined TB Proof - South Africa's leading TB advocacy organization comprising a community of advocates and people affected by TB. Many of TB Proof's core members are healthcare workers who, like Ingrid, developed occupational TB. One of the initiatives of TB Proof is 'My patient's choice pledge'.

Stigma and discrimination in TB still lurks... Ingrid shared that, "At our last annual general meeting of TB Proof, some doctors said that they were stigmatised even by their own colleagues. A colleague from Mexico shared that it took 4 years for her to talk about her TB as she was ashamed of it—as if she had done something wrong to have got it. We must remember that TB can happen to anyone as it is in the air. It happened to me, it can happen to you".

As per WHO, 4.1 million TB patients are not being reached by the health systems. Ingrid calls this a global ethical failure. She wants more TB champions who can openly talk about having got cured of TB and start conversations around TB at community forums and in schools. While making the TB community more aware and knowledgeable is necessary, engaging with people outside the TB community is equally important.

"We have to engage with policy makers, communities, our own friends and families and send out consistent messages and information based on scientific evidence to the people in a language and manner that they understand. It has to be a participatory approach; a top down approach cannot reach the people. All people should be treated equally and have a platform to share their personal experiences and stories".

Ingrid calls upon governments to ensure that their actions reflect their promise of ending TB by 2030; to invest in research (that should reflect in a country's budget) for newer and shorter treatment regimens with less toxic side effects; and to ensure that all TB patients get quality care and can make informed choices regarding TB treatment. Affected communities, general public and leaders will have to work together to end TB.

Shobha Shukla is the Managing Editor of CNS Citizen News Service and has written consistently on health and gender justice for several years. Follow her on Twitter @Shobha1Shukla or visit www.citizen-news.org

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