

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



March 27, 2018

Afghan WOMEN AND GOVERNANCE: Main gender inclusion barriers

The Afghan woman has remained the perpetual victim of Afghanistan's failing statehood, which is a resultant effect of the social, economic and religious construct of the Afghan society. Broadly, the Afghan woman is continually at a lesser par and treated unequally when compared to her region counterparts in some other nations. The issue of gender equality and women's right in Afghanistan is one that has been recurrently kicked back and disregarded by the government. More often than not culture is usually the justification wielded for the denial of women's right and the perpetuation of gender inequality in the country. Some of these harmful cultural practices pervasively promotes the crimes against the Afghan women and they include, domestic violence, child brides or forced marriages, rape denial of inheritance and many other cases of abuse against women. In today's Afghanistan, the power relations between men and women still undermines women's role in politics, their socioeconomic and diplomatic values due to the cultural consideration of women as only relevant to the social side of life, and the cultural composition of the society that perpetuates these gender roles. Notwithstanding, the role of women in governance in Afghanistan has continued to attract the international community and has been at the centre of the discourse for decades, especially since the Establishment of the new government based on Bonn Agreement in Afghanistan. The current century has been heralded by increased international awareness and legislation on women's right and working modules and resolutions in place issued by the UN and other international multi-lateral organizations, which Afghanistan is a member of and has officially adopted. Notwithstanding, the modules and resolutions aimed at enforcing and implementing a practical manifestation within the Afghan state have had little effect. While the estimated population of the country is estimated about 29.7 million that 14.4 million is male and 13.8 million is female that is about 51.1 percent is male and 48.9 percent is female. - the Afghan women have been significantly underrepresented.

Considering the female population the role of women in participation, politics and leadership is very low; about a fifth of government employees are women, but less than a tenth are employed in decision making positions. Of the 400,812 civil servants in the year 2015, 78.1 percent are male and 21.9 percent are female. The situation of women participation governance and decision making is alarming. Although, the Afghan government has made some progress in women inclusion, but the traditional socio-cultural structural barriers in the Afghan society have strongly resisted against the women inclusion and have hindered the pace of women inclusion severely. As a result, Afghanistan is just at the beginning of the long journey of gender equality and it only can meet the gender inclusion goals with a strong political commitment and cultural perception change in the society.



Let Yemen Survive

By Manish Rai

Yemeni war as entered into its fourth year with more than 10,000 people killed and pushed the country to the brink of famine. Yemen has long been the poorest country in the Arab world, with limited arable land and water resources. Although it has some oil but this resource never made the country rich and is likely to be depleted in the near future. The current ongoing conflict and blockade imposed by the Saudi-led coalition has worsened the conditions. Now more than 22.2 million people in Yemen require humanitarian assistance, including 3 million people in acute need who urgently require assistance to survive according to the United Nations. An around 18 million people, which accounts for more than 60 percent of the total population of the country are food insecure while an estimated 16 million people lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation. In addition to this intensive bombing of civilian infrastructure, including water and sewer systems has resulted in the worst cholera outbreak of recent time. These facts clearly illustrate magnitude of humanitarian crisis Yemen is going through.

In addition to the worst humanitarian crisis Yemen is also witnessing growing influence of Al-Qaeda & ISIS and separatist movements. The current ongoing conflict in Yemen has offered terrorist groups - namely Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS lawless territory to exploit and opportunities to recruit from the Yemeni masses afflicted by a humanitarian catastrophe. AQAP still maintains a presence in the central and northern cities of Ataq, Shabwah, al Bayda and Hadramat, with its leadership based in the urban areas of Ma'arib. Islamic State also have strong network and sleeper cells in the country. Both Al-Qaeda and ISIS have exploited the conflict and the collapse of government authority to gain new recruits and allies and expand their influence. Yemen has suffered from regionalism as well with the southern part of the country an independent state for 23 years never very happy with its 1990 union with the north, which even led to a short-lived civil war in 1994. Now the groups like Southern Transition Council (STC) are encouraging this feeling of separatism. STC not only declared its opposition to the President Hadi, Aden based government, but it also advocates for the

re-division of Yemen into two separate states, north and south. It's being suspected that the transition council is getting support from UAE.

At this point in time Yemen is going through its worst and most difficult phase. Yemen's survival as a unified country appears in doubt as its faces numerous challenges. But the consequences of Yemen collapsing are dire a failing Yemen would entail half of the 23 million population seeking asylum in neighbouring countries. Going forward this will become a significant problem for neighbouring countries. Yemen's collapsing state will also hold negative implications for international maritime trade, as the conflict is occurring near a major trading artery for the global economy, the Suez Canal-Red Sea shipping lane, and for regional security for countries on both sides of the Red Sea, including Saudi Arabia and the Gulf of Aden.

Yemen's problems are not confined to its borders, a regional approach should be employed to resolve the Yemeni crisis. First of all, immediate ceasefire ending all foreign military attacks is very much required. After the ceasefire is in place and being observed by every party to the conflict humanitarian assistance can be started for the needy people. Later on, broad national dialogue can be conveyed through this dialogue, the establishment of an inclusive unity government can be achieved. The Sultanate of Oman, which has refused to take sides in the conflict, could act as a broker, much like it did in the run-up to the Iran nuclear talks can convey this type of national dialogue. The aim of such talks could be to establish a federal state, as first proposed during the National Dialogue of 2013-2014. A successful deal would balance the grievances and worries of the Northern Zaydi tribes and of the Southern and Eastern tribes. This deal should put forth a system of obligatory power sharing, as domination of the federal government by one tribal alliance would quickly lead to a new conflict, as history has proven. With the strengthening of the state and its institutions much attention can be given on elimination of Al-Qaeda and ISIS. It should be understood that peaceful and stable Yemen is not only in interest of Yemenis but also in interest of neighbouring countries and region at large.

Manish Rai is a columnist for Middle-East and Af-Pak region and Editor of geo-political news agency ViewsAround can be reached at manishraiva@gmail.com

Saving the Shrinking Middle

By Mohamed A. El-Erian

There was a time when many regarded being in the middle of the distribution - socially, politically, and in the business world - as a favorable, stabilizing, and desirable outcome. From the anchoring role in society of the middle class to the agility and resilience of mid-size firms, the middle was seen as consistent with both individual and collective wellbeing. Yet, in recent years, the middle has become less stable, less predictable, and more elusive, and its primacy - in economics, politics, business, asset management, and even sports - has become increasingly unsustainable.

Driven by structural changes, as well as lagging business and policy responses, the middle has been eroded - or is at risk - almost everywhere you look. Should this trend continue - which is subject to some debate - the implications would be far-reaching.

For decades, a rising median household income in advanced economies anchored the growth of a middle class that often opted for the political center. Together with stable and trusted institutions, the middle class acted as a stabilizer for a more prosperous society. In business, too, an environment in which mid-size firms flourished was viewed as desirable, because it reconciled small firms' lack of balance-sheet strength with their larger counterparts' tendency to slip into oligopolistic complacency.

But median incomes have stagnated, which, combined with the impact of technology and insufficient policy attention to the potential distributional effects of unfettered globalization, has gradually hollowed out the middle class around the world. As a result, both the hope and reality of a satisfying middle-class life, with its potential for upward social mobility, are in decline.

In addition to weakening an important social stabilizing force, the diminution of the middle class has fueled the politics of anger and undermined the political center, hitherto dominated by established parties. As polarization and fragmentation have increased, bipartisan policies have become a lot more difficult to pursue.

This trend is also reflected in declining public trust in expert opinion and established institutions. And all this has supported the growth of more extreme political parties and/or anti-establishment movements.

The middle is also proving less friendly and stable for business. In sector after sector, mid-size companies face greater competition from small disruptors and/or their large counterparts. This includes the financial sector, where higher regulatory and compliance costs have eaten away at the sustainability of mid-size providers. This is visible in the number of mergers among mid-size asset managers that lack a strong corporate parent.

Sports, too, is losing its middle. In the absence of forced equalization mechanisms (such as those used in the

United States' National Football League), European soccer is now dominated by a handful of teams that have become business behemoths.

This last example also sheds light on important questions concerning what lies ahead. Is the erosion of the middle really inevitable? Are we in the midst of what economists call "multiple equilibria," in which one unfavorable shift makes another, even worse, shift more probable? Or will a mix of natural mean reversion and responsive policies restore the soundness and benefits of the center?

Given the rapid changes in technology and political disruptions, it is hard to know what lies ahead. But there seem to be enough indicators to suggest that, in certain areas, a strong middle can indeed be reclaimed if policies adapt quickly enough. That is probably the case when it comes to economic policies, where there is at least greater recognition of the importance of structural changes and distributional effects.

For example, economists are beginning to resist the inclination to rely on too many simplifying assumptions that facilitate modeling but are removed from reality. They are also beginning to redress the inadequate inclusion of financial linkages and insights from behavioral science, as well as overemphasis on single equilibrium conditions. And they are deepening their understanding of accelerating structural changes associated with technology, the impact of China and other emerging economies, and the politics of anger.

The more these changes feed into better policies, the greater the potential for political parties to present more compelling agendas, especially if they are presented by more engaging leaders.

The decline of the middle in business is also likely to result in some pushback, though the impact will differ significantly by industry and will be continuously challenged by structural headwinds. It is more likely to occur in some industries, such as big tech, where a regulatory response will probably be one outcome of a developing backlash, and less likely for asset management.

These developments have the potential to slow what, for now, has been a self-reinforcing migration away from the middle. But restoring faith in the feasibility and desirability of the middle - belief that the middle is strong enough to promote stability and prosperity - will take time, and sustained effort. And that loss of faith, compounded by accelerating technological change and the fragmentation of international order, goes a long way toward explaining why the future seems less predictable, and why the average person feels more unsettled.

Mohamed A. El-Erian, Chief Economic Adviser at Allianz, was Chairman of US President Barack Obama's Global Development Council and is the author of *The Only Game in Town: Central Banks, Instability, and Avoiding the Next Collapse*.

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.