

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



May 31, 2018

Democracy Ensures Minority Rights

Democracy government system requires holding free and fair elections, establishing functioning political parties, entrenching and independent judiciary. These key challenges in the sphere of institutional design and development are very readily identified and well understood.

However, there is another critical challenge that mostly has less been appreciated: It is, promoting and developing democratic values and principles within a society; in other words to ensure democratic culture in a given society in order to shape and direct the interactions of the people within a democratic framework. Doing so, we ensure putting the institutional architecture of democracy in place. Having a strong foundation of shared and applied democratic values and principles in the society enables the whole society to have a consistent, unified and stable political structure.

Adherence to theory and practice in democratic processes and ensuring the fundamental principles of equity, justice and inclusion, form the core of inclusion of women, men, young, old, able-bodied and disabled alike. It is a tough challenge on the way of democracy that any government system which claims to be democratic should address it properly and if not so, may reveal significant shortcomings. The challenges of ensuring genuine equity, justice and inclusivity, however, are critical to the long-term sustainability of the democratization project in Afghanistan. According to the social scholars, focusing on a key dimension of the tasks of promoting an equitable, just and inclusive democratic ethos and of fashioning institutions and practices intended to entrench it -namely the protection and promotion of minority rights, is the prerequisite to success of democratization in a multi ethnic country like Afghanistan.

These two tasks are practiced in many diverse methods according to the historical, political, social, cultural and judicial environment of the countries and regions concerned. Of course, one should not expect if one method succeeds in a given society it would succeed in their given society as well. However, it is the duty of the governments to localize the successful approaches given the real grounds of their society.

The Minority Rights landscape in Afghanistan

The importance of minority rights in Afghanistan is clear to nearly everyone. Ensuring these rights in terms of continuing democratic progress in the country has been vividly illustrated by sporadic of inter-ethnic violence between different ethnic groups in the past in Afghanistan. As history is like a mirror to reflect our good and bad lessons of the past in order to shed light on our future, it is important to recall that whenever governments have managed diversity within their societies, they could have successfully managed their ethnic expectations and have successfully managed their ethnic tensions if they have been incited by any reasons.

The experience of countries like Indonesia and India has many lessons for Afghanistan. Indonesia and India could have addressed the multiple challenges of protecting and giving fair political representation to their minority populations. Such experience, provides a wide range of alternative approaches and policies based on inclusive, accommodating approaches to the Afghan government. In these countries, important legal safeguards of minority rights are in place and their constitutions human related provisions are generally judged to be quite rich. As a result, they have been able to establish and maintain a shared sense of national identity and most of their citizens remain justly proud to them. Indeed, there are growing challenges in these countries and how to maintain such sense of a shared identity in the new, more volatile democratic era is a question that clearly continues to exercises the minds of many, but as they have shown in the past, they would be able to control such challenges by ensuring the rights of different social groups of their countries successfully and their national identity would act as a guarantee to help them go through the coming challenges as a natural part of democratization process.

The ethnic conflict experience in Afghanistan show that ensuring the rights of different ethnic, religious, gender and other groups is the most successful and less costing approach to manage such conflicts. Democracy as system of government has proven that it has the potentials and capacity to well manage the ethnic, religious, gender diversities and can provide the viable approaches to enable a wide range of different groups to come to a common understanding in order to form a shared national identity in a given society. In Afghanistan, we have the same opportunity to put in place democratic values and principles indiscriminately in order to form a national identity and overcome the long run conflicts in our country by ensuring the rights of different groups in the Afghan society.



Drug and Illegal Mining – The Machine of War in Afghanistan

By Hujjatullah Zia

Afghanistan has large energy and mineral resources which can contribute to the country's economy to a great extent. Afghanistan is also known as a strategic hub in Central Asia located at the crossroads of pipeline routes and a transit country for oil and gas. The mineral fields in the country number more than 1400 containing chromite, coal, copper, gold, iron ore, natural gas, petroleum, etc.

A research shows that Afghanistan has an estimated \$3 trillion of untapped minerals. There are 12 copper mines in Afghanistan including Mes Aynak – one of the world's largest untapped deposits and a 5,000-year-old archeological site in Afghan province of Logar containing an estimated 12.5 million tons of copper – and six lapis mines, the largest is located in Badakhshan province.

The Soviet specialists discovered huge gas reserves in Afghanistan in 1960s and built the first gas pipeline in the country to supply gas to Uzbekistan – the fact which is known to only a few Afghans. The Soviet Union is said to receive 2.5 billion cubic meters of Afghan gas per year.

In spite of the fact that Afghanistan possesses vast mineral and gas reserves, it produces more than 90 percent of world's supply of opium, which is mostly cultivated in troubled areas and has changed to the militants' machine of war.

According to recent reports, the cultivation of narcotic drug covered 328 hectare land in insecure provinces, especially Helmand, last year – which shows 63 percent increase comparing to that of 2016. In the current year, the counternarcotic campaign has not been launched in Helmand province so far in light of escalated war and conflict. "Campaign against cultivating drug had a symbolic aspect. People were told if anyone cultivated drug, they would be prosecuted legally. But unlike previous years, the government's anti-drug campaign team or group did not come to destroy the cultivation," Ata-ullah Afghan, the head of provincial governor of Helmand, is cited as saying.

Regarding mineral resources, a report recently released by Global Witness says that the self-style Islamic State (IS) group controls large talc, marble and chromite mines in eastern part of the country, mainly in Achin district in Nangarhar province, where the US military dropped "the mother of all bombs" against IS-held caves in April 2017.

Nick Donovan, campaign director for Global Witness, said that while the Taliban's engagement in talc mining is well established, the move by IS group into mining the mineral seemed to follow a pattern whereby the groups seek to seize and exploit resources as way of funding its efforts – as IS had moved into crude oil refining in Iraq and Syria.

Worst of all, Nargis Nehan, the acting minister of Ministry of Mine and Petroleum, says that in addition to the Taliban's involvement in illegal mining, a number of Afghan MPs are also involved in this issue. She added that some MPs moved into mining coal in Dar-e-Souf. To prevent it,

Nehan said she had suggested establishing a checkpoint with 300 policemen to the Interior Ministry. According to her, if talc is managed well, Afghanistan will be one of the ten largest talc producers in the world.

The involvement of insurgent groups, mainly the Taliban and IS, in drug trafficking and illegal mining is beyond doubt. For instance, the Beijing-based China Metallurgical Group Corp (MCC) obtained the rights in 2007 to extract copper from Mes Aynak. However, Chinese engineers stalled their work following a series of rocket attacks in 2012 and 2013. The Taliban also killed eight mine-clearing specialists in 2014, which shows their direct concern to Afghanistan's mineral resources and their engagement in them.

Considering Afghanistan's rich mineral resources, a number of political pundits believe that the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan is part of a profit driven agenda, i.e., a war of economic conquest and plunder or "a resource war".

To view the aforementioned issues, one will clearly notice that the insurgents are widely funded by narcotic drug and illegal mining. That is to say, these two financial sources of the insurgents are the main reasons behind the protracted war in Afghanistan. I have constantly pointed out in my commentaries that for defeating the insurgents, Kabul government and its international allies will have to eradicate the factors supporting war. Indeed, if insurgents are pressured financially, they will not be able to continue the war. Secondly, the corruption in the government's machinery such as the engagement of MPs in illegal mining and widespread bribery in judicial system will impede the war on terror. For instance, the issue of missing pistols from the Interior Ministry leaked to the media shows the prevailing corruption in the government's body. Perhaps, those pistols might have been sold illegally. What if pistols and rifles are sold to the Taliban? It does not seem impossible. Hence, corruption in the government is one of the main reasons behind the protracted war. If Kabul government seeks to win the war on terror, it has to put an end to corruption and prosecute the corrupt officials – be it MPs, influential figures, generals, etc.

Moreover, the government has to protect the mineral resources of Afghanistan and exploit them in the best possible way. If the country's mineral resources are used appropriately, Afghanistan will be changed into a strong economy and the rate of unemployment will decline tremendously. To view other countries, they protect their mineral resources the same as the life of their people. Afghanistan is called "a poor man lying on gold mines" because it is rich in mineral resources but does not exploit them properly. Hope, this "poor man" uses his "gold mines" to put an end not only to poverty but also conflicts and stop the machine of war.

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Education Saved My Life

By Mohamed Sidibay

My family was murdered before I could tie my shoes. As a young boy in Sierra Leone, years that should have been playful and carefree were spent fighting in someone else's war. For me, childhood was a nightmare; escape always seemed impossible. But when the war officially ended, in 2002, I began finding ways to recover. One of the most important has been an opportunity I couldn't have imagined as an angry, illiterate, nine-year-old soldier: school.

I am living proof of the transformative power of education. Thanks to hard work and lots of good fortune, I managed to graduate from high school and then university. Now, in just a few months, I will begin graduate classes at the Fordham University School of Law, an unimaginable destination for most of the former child soldiers in my country.

And yet, throughout my brief educational journey, one question has always nagged me: why did luck play such a crucial role? After all, education is supposed to be a universal human right. If only it were that simple.

Today, more than 260 million children are out of school, and over 500 million boys and girls who do attend are not receiving a quality education, as the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity discovered. By 2030, more than half of the world's school-age children – some 800 million kids – will lack the basic skills needed to thrive or secure a job in the workplace of the future.

Addressing this requires money. But while education may be the best investment a government can make to ensure a better future for its people, education financing worldwide is far too low. In fact, education accounts for just 10% of total international development aid, down from 13% a decade ago. To put this in perspective, developing countries receive just \$10 per child annually in global education support, barely enough to cover the cost of a single textbook. In an age of self-driving cars and smart refrigerators, this dearth of funding is simply unacceptable.

Over the past few years, I have advocated on behalf of three global education initiatives – the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity (Education

Commission), the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and the Education Cannot Wait fund (ECW). I have done so eagerly, because these organizations are working collectively toward the same goal: to raise funds to make quality education for every child, everywhere, more than a matter of luck.

One of the best ways to do this is by supporting the International Finance Facility for Education, an initiative spearheaded by the Education Commission that could unlock the greatest global investment in education ever recorded. Young people around the world understand what's at stake. Earlier this month, Global Youth Ambassadors presented a petition, signed by more than 1.5 million children in some 80 countries, to United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, calling for the UN to support the finance facility. By leveraging roughly \$2 billion in donor guarantees, the finance facility aims to make \$8 billion in new funding available to countries that need it most. If adopted widely, the program could make it possible for developing countries to provide quality education to millions more children, including refugees, young girls, and former child soldiers like me.

Politicians often say that young people are the leaders of tomorrow. That's true; we are. But platitudes not backed by financial support are meaningless. Simply put, the world must unite to fund quality education for everyone. The International Finance Facility for Education – which is already backed by the World Bank, regional development banks, GPE, ECW, and numerous UN agencies – is among the best ways to make that happen.

Twenty years ago, law school was an impossible dream for me. Today, thanks to hard work, global support, and much good fortune, my future is brighter than it has ever been. But my story should not be an exception. To ensure that others can gain a quality education and follow the path that has opened up to me, we must remove luck from the equation.

Mohamed Sidibay is a youth representative to the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, a peace activist at the Global Partnership for Education, and a former peace ambassador with the My Hero Project.

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