

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



October 22, 2016

Alarming Rise in Child Casualties

As the war and insecurity continue in Afghanistan, civilians suffer the most; particularly the weaker among them, like women and children. Children are undoubtedly the most innocent and their lives must be protected and safeguarded the most. The parties in the conflict must ensure that they take care of the lives of children and take necessary measures to avoid any child casualty. However, that does not seem to be the case in Afghanistan and many children lose their lives every year.

According to a recent report by United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), only in the first nine months of this year, 2,461 child casualties (639 deaths and 1,822 injured) were documented, which shows a 15 percent increase as compared to the same period in 2015, though the overall security situation in the first three quarters of 2016 show a one percent decreased as compared to the same period in 2015.

The report revealed that more than half of all child casualties in 2016 were caused by ground engagements. It also showed that the intensification of ground fighting is directly related to the increase in civilian casualties from ERW, or unexploded ordnance.

UNAMA documented 510 civilian casualties (160 deaths and 350 injured), a 67 per cent increase from the same period in 2015. According to a statement by Danielle Bell, UNAMA Human Rights Director, "Eighty-four percent of victims from unexploded ordnance were children. All parties must systematically track, mark and clear unexploded ordnance in order to protect current and future generations of children from harm."

Meanwhile, Giorgia Novello, medical coordinator for the Kabul Emergency Hospital said in a statement on Thursday that the number of war wounded being admitted to the hospital has increased and that 30 percent of them are children.

The recent rise in insecurity in Afghanistan clearly depicts that it would be very difficult to protect the innocent children from the horrors of war and destruction. Though as Nicholas Haysom, the head of UNAMA had once suggested, "Even if a conflict intensifies, it does not have to be matched by corresponding civilian suffering provided parties take their international humanitarian law and human rights obligations seriously. Failure to respect humanitarian obligations will result in more suffering in a nation that has suffered enough." However, the ongoing conflicts are mostly insensitive to such thoughts and emotions.

It is also important to mention that mostly Taliban insurgents are responsible for the deaths of poor children. They, otherwise, claim to be the protector of the rights of the people but their actions show otherwise. It is really important that they should at least observe Islamic ethics in their actions. Islam clearly says that the lives of the civilians and particularly of the children must be secured in every sort of war or clash. However, Taliban do not seem to be following the true teaching of Islam.

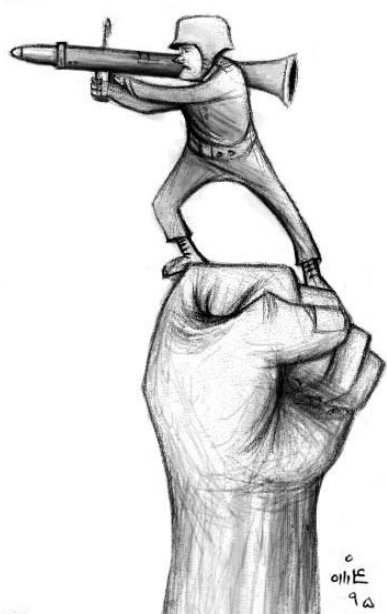
Apart from these incidents of violence there are many other ways through which violence is practiced against children. They are recruited by Taliban as 'fighters' and mostly as suicide bombers. There have been many incidents of suicide attacks in different parts of the country, wherein the attacker were below 16 years of age.

Recruitment of the children by militants ultimately results in violence against children and their abuse. The attitude of a trained militant clearly depicts the fact that the training sessions in their training camps do involve severe kind of violence and maltreatment. There have been certain incidents wherein the trainees of such camps have made confessions about the way they are treated. They disclosed that they were beaten and tortured and even raped by their tutors.

Another type of violence includes the killing and maiming of the children because of the conflict-related violence. This also includes accidental killings or injuries by the national and international security forces, which, though relatively are much lower than the ones committed by the terrorists. Unfortunately, most of the deaths or injuries in this regard have been the result of the violent attacks of the terrorists on schools and hospitals.

Such attacks do not only take precious lives but tend to inflict fear among parents and children regarding attending schools.

The security of the children against all sort of violence and their proper nourishment are the most important considerations to contemplate on, if the government is really serious to safeguard the rights of the children. The same children are going to be the builders of future; their proper care should be ascertained through every possible means. Apart from the government the members of the society can also play a tremendous role in diminishing violence against the children by safeguarding their children from the terrorists and their evil intentions. Particularly, they can rescue their children from extremism and terrorism if they keep them away from extreme religious conditioning and do not let them become the cadre for insurgency and violence.



Prospects of Poverty and Income Inequality in Afghanistan

By Farzana Rashid Rahimi

Inequality of income is a global phenomenon that has attracted a lot of attention across the world, especially in developing nations. In broader terms, inequality has many aspects but talking specifically about inequality of income, it implies a situation where the wealth is distributed unevenly among the various population groups. This results in creation of huge income gaps between the rich and the poor, thus making the rich richer and the poor poorer. Income inequality is more common in developing countries where economic policies are either not responsive to eliminate inequality, or are not effectively implemented due to corruption, insecurity etc. Afghanistan, in spite of considerable economic developments over the last one and half decades, still remains one of the poorest countries where, according to the World Bank report (National Risk & Vulnerability Survey data in 2007-08 and 2012), 36% of the population lived under poverty line. The World Bank further reported that though the annual GDP rate grew at 6.9% through this period, the Gini index increased from 29.7% in 2007-8 to 31.6% in 2011-12, which remarks a widened gap between living standards of the poor and the rich.

The factors that contribute to eradication of poverty may at the same time contribute to reducing income gaps. However, to specifically target income inequality in a society it is important to support development of robust fiscal and monetary systems. While monetary policies direct the countries' financial systems, the fiscal policies enhance proper collection of revenues and rational allocation of public funds.

Afghanistan has had achievements in the fiscal and monetary sectors over the last few years but the country still struggles with a lot of challenges in the areas of revenue generation and collection. Domestic revenue as percent of GDP has been growing but it still constitutes only a minor percentage. According to IMF reports, the percent of domestic revenue to GDP was estimated at about 10.2% in 2015 which is lower than the countries in the region.

Informal payment systems and informal businesses complicate tax-collecting procedures, in most cases making it impossible to track transactions and to tax them. On the other hand, corruption paves the way for tax evaders to pay smaller amounts in bribes and thus avoid payment of large amounts in taxes. To add more, public funds are inclined to be misused at various levels instead of being allocated for provision of decent social services to the public. This means the poorer segments of the society remain underprivileged in receipt of basic public services such as health, education, transportation etc.

Insecurity is another major issue in the Afghan context that further widens the gap between the various income groups. Private investments are usually halted because of insecure conditions within

the country and thus investors prefer to invest their funds in other countries where they feel more secure. Putting aside the fact that the state does not gain any benefit by taxing them, the wealth is not invested so as to create employment for the locals.

Lack of technical skills and educational opportunities for the poor is another major obstacle hindering chances of the poor to gain better living standards. Decent education opportunities are only available for the upper classes of the society while the rest either rely on public education, or are totally deprived of schooling.

Besides the public policy issues, there are concerns on individual spending decisions at household levels. Making inadequate expenditure decisions is something that is led by social norms and values, which worsens situation of the poor. For instance, even the poorest people make huge expenditures on occasions such as weddings, funerals and the like. By doing this, they spend their life time savings during such occasions, which they could rather invest in a profit bearing activity to improve their livelihood. Similarly, spending massive amounts on extravagances such as luxurious cars, smart phones, ornaments, and the like have become part of daily fashion for the upper income groups.

In a way, the factors that contribute to income inequality fuel one another and thus causing the gap to further widen. Reducing income gaps require strategic policy reforms, resources, and hard work.

Formalization of businesses should further be strengthened in order to heighten the tax base. Besides that, tax policies require to be amended with the intention of targeting the sectors that are under-taxed or that are not taxed at all. Financial sector activities need to be further expanded in order to cover maximum financial transactions and thus stop informal and illegal flow of funds within and outside the country. In regards to provision of loans to the general public, though a considerable number of microfinance programs are currently active across the country, expansion of such programs is necessary to respond to the ever-growing demand for low cost loans.

Focusing on education of the poor can create hope for a promising future of their children and therefore must remain a high priority. Additionally, skills development programs for adults are important in providing them with ability to work in more technical occupations and earn better income. Besides design and implementation of sound macroeconomic policies responsive to eradication of poverty and inequality, there is need for widespread public awareness on how to make sound expenditure decisions and to invest funds in profitable businesses. On the other hand, in areas where people use traditional techniques for earning income, it is essential to enhance their abilities so that they utilize the available resources using modern techniques and thus attain improved efficiency.

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Why Can't We End Polio?

By Ilona Kickbusch, Stephen Matlin, and Michaela Told

October 24, 2016, should be a unique day in the history of polio. If all goes according to plan, it will be the last annual World Polio Day before the disease is eradicated. But now is not the time for celebration or complacency; while we know how to eliminate polio, we have not yet finished the job.

Consider this: in August 2014, the World Health Organization declared the Ebola crisis in West Africa a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC); it lifted that status in March 2016. In May 2014, the WHO declared the international spread of wild poliovirus a PHEIC as well; yet that status is still active today, leaving one to wonder if world leaders are paying sufficient attention.

They should be. The continuing polio PHEIC is endangering the success of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), into which the world has invested \$15 billion since it was launched in 1988; and it threatens global health generally.

For starters, the GPEI effort to interrupt poliovirus transmission could miss its latest target date; unfortunately, it would not be the first time. By the original 2000 target date, the incidence of polio had been reduced by more than 99%, from an estimated 350,000 cases in 1988. Since then, however, a long, stubborn "tail" of infection has persisted, mainly in remote, poor regions and conflict zones. The effort to tackle these lingering cases is laborious, and it remains incomplete, despite PHEIC status.

To be sure, there have been some successes, such as in India, which was certified polio-free in 2014, and in Nigeria, which interrupted transmission the same year. But there have also been setbacks: in 2016, Nigeria suddenly had two new cases among children from an area that had just been liberated from the militant group Boko Haram.

The two other polio-endemic countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, missed their 2015 eradication target and have had to extend it by another year, at a cost of \$1.5 billion. The root causes of both countries' missed deadlines will require delicate, skilled political handling to resolve. They include internal conflicts that make children inaccessible to public-health professionals, opposition by some religious leaders, and public mistrust of national governments and international initiatives.

Eradicating polio is expensive, but it would cost tens of billions of dollars more to fight the disease in perpetuity. Politicians and policymakers should be reminded that a polio-free world would be a global public good, that eradication is by far the best bargain, and that sustained financing and political support is necessary to ensure the GPEI's success.

But it is also important to ensure that valuable assets and practices built up by the GPEI over time are not squandered once polio is gone. These include cold chains to preserve vaccines during transport from factories to patients; established "immuniza-

tion days" and negotiated "days of tranquility" in conflict zones, when vaccinations can be administered; trained health-care workers; and systems for surveillance, laboratory analysis, and rapid response. These assets have proved their worth in combating other diseases: Nigeria was able to stop Ebola's spread during the West Africa outbreak owing to its efficient polio-tracking system.

The reality, however, is that countries will be able to absorb GPEI assets into their health systems only if they are supported financially, logistically, and politically. A major effort will be required to transfer materials to where they are needed, and to coordinate surveillance and laboratory operations. Doing so would not only boost global-health security and resilience for the next outbreak; it would also help us reach the United Nation Sustainable Development Goal for universal health-care coverage.

More broadly, lessons from the GPEI and other eradication efforts must not go unlearned. In 1980, smallpox became the first disease in people to be successfully eradicated, and there were prior unsuccessful campaigns against hookworm, yaws, yellow fever, and malaria. But many lessons that were already known by the 1980s went unheeded for too long - such as the importance of tackling remote infection reservoirs and maintaining high immunization levels everywhere so that health systems aren't overwhelmed.

A complex array of political pressures, motives, and aspirations determines which lessons we take from history, and which new global-health targets we set for ourselves. World Polio Day is thus an occasion to urge politicians to renew their commitments to polio eradication, and to apply lessons from the GPEI to improve health everywhere.

In the fight against polio, the world is largely relying on the generosity of the United States, Rotary International, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and European countries such as Germany, Norway, and the United Kingdom (with additional political support from others such as Monaco). Other European countries and the European Commission itself should do more to contribute to the eradication effort.

While G7 member states renewed their commitment to eliminating polio at a summit in Japan earlier this year, a subsequent G20 summit in Hangzhou, China, where two-thirds of the world's population was represented, made no reference to it; nor did the G77 group of 134 developing countries at its last meeting. That is not good enough. After years of effort, it is now clear that only a strong, consistent, worldwide commitment to full eradication can end the polio emergency. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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