

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



September 19, 2018

Afghanistan Election: Participation and Resilience By All Sides As the Viable Solutions

Electoral fraud in Afghanistan is a critical concern for candidates, government and the international community. They are warning that corruption in the parliamentary and district council elections risks discrediting the outcome.

Many Afghans think that the political process is predetermined by powerbrokers rather than constituting a real expression of popular will in the country. Unfortunately, the 2014 presidential and provincial council elections only served to strengthen such a perception, marred as they were by widespread allegations of fraud.

Now, as Afghanistan is getting ready to conduct the parliamentary and district council elections such concerns are the main factors behind the current critical electoral issues.

How Afghanistan Can Ensure a successful Election?

Establishing a joint body

This body will include members of the Afghan political parties, Civil Society Organizations and IEC members. It can play an instrumental role in mediating differences between the political parties and the government confidence building. It shall persuade the political parties to peruse their legitimate demands in the framework of the constitution and other relevant laws. They shall prevent any violence and ethnic based campaigning, and promising that they would accept the results of the elections conditioned to be conducted in a fair and free manner.

Monitoring Mechanism

A monitoring system shall be developed that is acceptable by the political parties and the government. It shall be conducted by the civil society, promoting consensus, establishing mechanisms to track incidents of electoral performance and violence across the country and most importantly through the deployment of electoral observers that all parties trust them. Even right now, there are rumors about buying electoral observers by some candidates and deploying observers that there is no consensus about them among the political parties and government would further exacerbate the electoral conflicts and even post electoral conflicts in the country.

Substantial International presence

The IEC shall ensure the substantial international presence, i.e. United States, EU, other international community members and Afghanistan neighboring countries. This reflects a great degree of international interest in the elections and commitment to a peaceful outcome. The presence of the international community will ensure the legitimacy of the forthcoming elections and can play a vital role to revive the role of IEC as a reliable and trustable institution in charge of electoral processes in Afghanistan.

Public Statements by International Observers

International observers can play a critical role during critical electoral moments in Afghanistan. They shall make public statements encouraging the parties to stick to the electoral process and ensuring that there was no distortion of the public will. If they witness any violations by government or political parties, they shall strongly voice their concerns and take any necessary measures to prevent such violations. As a result, this will prove crucial in reminding the political actors that the international community is watching and is fully engaged in the political process.

Afghanistan electoral challenges have concerned Afghan people, government, political parties and even the international community. As a result, it is time for Afghanistan to develop a mechanism acceptable for the political parties and the government and all parties accept its decisions. If not so, these challenges could jeopardise the tight timelines and derail the elections. It is to the benefit of all political leaders engage constructively to ensure the elections are held on time. And this calls for resilience and persistence by all sides.

Education for Fragile States

By Homi Kharas and Rebecca Winthrop

This week, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will release its annual Goalkeepers report card assessing progress toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Among the expected findings is a prediction that by 2050, nearly 90% of global poverty will be concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa, and two-thirds of the world's poorest people will live in just ten countries. The ability to identify human-development hotspots - what we call "severely off-track countries" (SOTCs) - should, in theory, make it easier to apply solutions. Unfortunately, some aid agencies tend to avoid fragile states out of fear that their resources will be wasted. Currently, less than a quarter of OECD countries' programmable aid is allocated to SOTCs.

But the perception that fragility presages failure is misplaced. With adequate planning, it is possible to implement projects that improve lives in even the riskiest places. Best of all, we know where to start: by investing more in human capital, and especially in education.

According to the Goalkeepers report, the number of children enrolled in primary school in Africa increased from 60 million in 2000 to some 250 million today, and the rate of growth was equal for boys and girls. But while more children are attending classes, school quality remains uneven. The challenge now is to ensure that all children, including those who are in school - at all grade levels - are learning the full breadth of skills they need to thrive.

To give young people the best chance of success, the two "book-ends" to primary school - early childhood education and secondary education - must also be sturdy. Early childhood education prepares children for primary school by teaching cooperation, perseverance, self-control, and other essential skills. These formative years are critical for a child's education, because, according to UNESCO, more than half of all children and adolescents worldwide never develop foundational competencies crucial to becoming life-long learners.

At the other end of the spectrum, secondary education helps adolescents prepare for the job market. To succeed at this level, students must achieve minimum proficiency in reading, math, and numerous non-cognitive skills. But even here, educational outcomes are disappointing. In low-income countries, nine out of ten young people lack basic secondary-education level proficiency across a suite of essential skills, ranging from literacy and critical thinking to mathematics, and problem solving. In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, an estimated 200 million young people (about 90% of the primary and lower secondary-school population) are not able

to read basic texts.

Development specialists know that a good education is transformative for students as well as families, communities, and countries. One study from 2008 found that the quality of a country's education system - and the cognitive abilities of its graduates - positively influences economic growth. That fact alone should be enough to convince fragile states and their donors to invest in expanding access to quality education.

But there are other, more indirect benefits, especially for women and girls. For starters, better-educated women delay pregnancy and typically have smaller families. Development experts, demographers, and education advocates recognize that in many parts of the world, female empowerment is proportionate to family size. For example, our research has found that a woman with zero years of schooling will have, on average, 4-5 more children than a woman with at least 12 years of schooling.

Increasing educational opportunities for girls would also benefit the planet. The International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis has projected that if every girl in the world completed secondary education, fertility rates would drop and the global population growth would slow by as many as two billion people by 2045, and more than five billion by 2100. The deceleration would be even greater if the 214 million women worldwide who want to avoid pregnancy but cannot acquire contraception could access family-planning services. It is no coincidence that many of these women live in countries where fewer girls than boys attend school.

Taken together, schooling and family planning could translate into a 120-gigaton reduction in carbon dioxide emissions over the next three decades, as fewer people consumed fewer resources. It is no surprise that environmentalists like Paul Hawken believe that education - and educating girls in particular - is among the most effective steps the world can take to combat climate change.

The annual Goalkeepers report is a reminder issues like gender inequality, malnutrition, violence, and political instability will plague the world's poorest people for decades to come. Among solutions, few are as effective as quality education. If fragile states and international donors directed more resources to strengthening education's three pillars - early, primary, and secondary - the world's SOTCs would finally have a chance to get back on track.

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Imran Khan Pledges to Grant Citizenship to Afghan Refugees

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said in a surprise announcement that he would grant citizenship to Pakistan-born children of Afghan and Bengali refugees, many of whom have lived in the country for several decades. "Afghans whose children have been raised and born in Pakistan will be granted citizenship inshallah [God willing] because this is the established practice in countries around the world," Khan said as quoted from Pakistani media. "They are humans. How come we have deprived them and have not arranged for offering them national identification card and passport for 30 years, 40 years?" He said that the identity crisis of thousands of Bengali and Afghan immigrants is pushing them to crime and thus the children's lack of documentation and education has also prevented them from getting jobs and social rights.

Mr Khan made the announcement during a visit to city of Karachi, which has a large Afghan population and has also been plagued by gang violence. "Terrorism and target killing has declined in Karachi but there is a major reason behind the street crimes. It is an underclass. They are illiterate and jobless. They are the Bengalis and Afghans who are living in Pakistan, he said, adding that "These immigrants have lived here for decades, their children were born here, but they don't have identity cards and passports," he said. The people of this deprived class can't get jobs without ID cards and passports, so our government has decided to issue them computerized national identity cards and passports, Khan said according to Pakistani media.

The United Nations has welcomed Imran Khan's announcement. According to the United Nations refugee agency, Pakistan has had one the largest refugee population in the world, including roughly 2.7 million who went from Afghanistan. About 1.5 million would be affected by the announcement. They include the displaced families have who fled decades of conflict, ethnic and religious persecution, poverty and economic hardships in the country. There are also some 250,000 Bengalis, many of whom arrived during Pakistan's civil war in 1971, when East Pakistan broke away to declare independence and become Bangladesh.

The fate of these refugees has had a long-running source of tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Islamabad believes it has borne the burden of millions of its neighbors for long enough and has repeatedly threatened mass repatriations. On the other hand, Afghans blamed Pakistan for using refugees as a political pressure against Kabul. There is also analysis that suggests as political motive for Khan's move, saying the large number of Pashtuns who voted for Khan's party as the refugees belong to the Pashtun ethnicity.

In fact, the history of these wondering refugee get back to many decades ago When the Soviets retreated from Afghanistan, a wave of voluntary repatriations took place but the conditions in post-Soviet

Afghanistan were hardly conducive to their safe return. The early 1990s saw a constant state of civil war between the seven Mujahideen parties; this warfare ended in 1996 when the Taliban took over most Afghan territory. Despite a dramatic improvement in security for ordinary Afghans, the Taliban era was one of exceptional in terms of poverty and absence of economic opportunity. This meant that a second wave of repatriations in the late 1990s also was not successful as expected. Between 2001 and 2005, millions of Afghans returned home to the promise of stability and security in their homeland. Sadly, this third wave ended the same way the previous two had.

In 2016 a wave of forced repatriations sparked fears of a humanitarian crisis, with Human Rights Watch issuing a scathing report describing Pakistan's "coercive" approach. It accused the government of arbitrary detentions and other violations. Eventually, this move was welcomed by human rights activists in Pakistan, who have called for Afghans born in the country to be given nationality in accordance with Pakistani law, which grants citizenship to anyone born in the country. So, it should be a happy news for millions of refugees who have faced police and bureaucratic harassment, and are often accused of harboring or encouraging militants and posing a security risk.

In recent years, when the relations between two neighbors have deteriorated they accused one and other for the issues. Kabul accused Islamabad of harboring Taliban militants who carry out attacks across the border but Pakistan denies the charge and blames Afghanistan for providing sanctuary to Pakistani Taliban militants responsible for attacks that have taken place on its soil. There were concerns that Islamabad planned to repatriate refugees back to Afghanistan after Pakistan extended the stay of Afghan refugees living within its borders by only 60 days.

On contrary to past, the move happened after some optimism about new changes in policy of Pakistan. Few days ago the new Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, traveled to Kabul and met with Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani, Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah, and Acting Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani. In their discussions they agreed to work on security and stability in the region, joint efforts against terrorism and the implementation of Afghanistan-Pakistan action plan. Showing their good-will, Pakistan offered thousands scholarships for Afghan students and Qureshi handed over a letter from Prime Minister Imran Khan, addressed to President Ghani, marking the first consignment of 40,000 tonnes of wheat gifted to the Afghan people. Considering these and Given the expressions released from the both parts, some of the local analysts hoped for opening a new constructive chapter of relation Kabul and Islamabad new administration.

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