

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

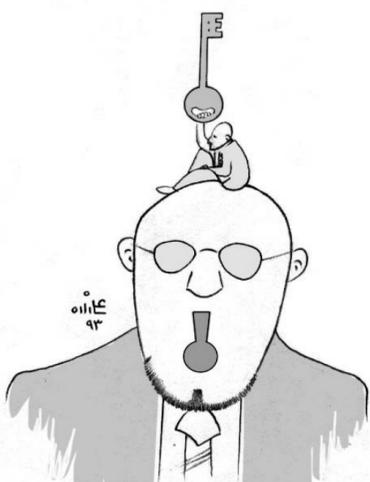


May 09, 2018

Afghan Youth Unemployment: A challenge to Address Urgently

Generally youths are defined as persons between ages 18 to 35 years. In the Afghan Constitution, any person who reaches the age of 18 is legally considered as an adult with voting rights. These are persons who normally would have completed secondary education, and would either be in tertiary institutions such as the university, striving to secure employment, or be already employed. Indeed, this is in the case if they have not been trapped in the war zone areas with prolonging conflicts that have deprived many Afghan youths of education opportunities for several decades. This group of persons, those who had the opportunity to go to school, would need post secondary education, employment, and reproductive health information and services. The challenges facing our youth are a global menace as well. As a result, the issue has remained a major focus of international discuss. Due to this, various meeting have been organized for leaders from all over the world to come together to share views on the nature of the challenges that the youth now face, in order to find practical possible solutions to this social phenomena. Also, we may be aware that, at the regional level, Asia faces a pressing problem of youth unemployment like too. Youth unemployment in many Asian countries, especially in our neighboring countries including Iran and Pakistan, is alarming and has steadily worsened during the last few years. In fact, youth unemployment on the continent is now assuming crisis proportions, and it is one of the main causes of worsening security in the neighboring countries as many of these youth join to the terrorist groups for economic reasons now a days. However, we cannot wait; our government has to explore potential options and take actions to address this challenge with short term Policies in the short period, while it should also put in place programs to address the structural causes of the problem in the long run as well.

The importance of the youth is self evident and they form not only a formidable demographic force, but also make up the next generation of parents, workers and leaders of Afghanistan. As a result, their well being, therefore, has implications not only for their own lives, but also for the Afghan society they would build, maintain and live in it. Youth families, communities and on the commitment of their governments to their development, play a vital role in enabling the youth to meet these goals effectively. Addressing needs of the youth is a major continuing public policy challenge in Afghanistan which calls for constant rethinking of policies, re-assessment of priorities, allocating adequate financial resources, and effective implementation of programs and plans. The government only can allocate more efficient and equitable resources and develop improved policy formulation and implementation when it has a research based and realistic understanding of their needs. Some scholars may see youth as a potentially destabilizing force, especially in Afghanistan. However, social scholars warn that such characterization could lead to dangerous generalizations and the demonization of peaceful majorities in the society. However, they argue the governments and societies to empower the youth and provide them more employment opportunities and engage them in political decision makings. Without such opportunities many youth, young men and women, would not be able to play a useful role in their society. As a general social phenomenon, they are effectively excluded from mainstream society. In such case it is natural that some members of this group may turn to escapism through drugs and alcohol, some may join gang groups, and some others may join the terrorist groups. Some others migrate to urban areas and as the youth movement trend show some will leave the country to migrate to neighboring and western countries searching for better jobs and living conditions. As the experience of Afghanistan shows, even after a conflict, there is always the possibility of ex-combatants returning to an armed struggle if their demands or aspirations are not met. Youth are considered as the most vital ingredient of the society. They have huge capacity to support the society to transform from its turmoil and conflicting situations. They shall be given due opportunities to employment and political decision makings. On the other hand, if they are excluded from the main stream they would change to the most devastating elements in the society. This is why youth employment, should be considered as a vital ingredient in maintaining social stability and supporting nation building initiatives throughout the country by the Afghan government and the international community.



Mining and Construction, Two Important Industries to Drive Economic Development of Afghanistan

By Mohammed Gul Sahibzada

Economic prosperity and political stability are inextricable for a country to become prosperous and rich. It has been more than one and half decade that international community and United Nations are assisting Afghanistan in her struggling to stabilize. Hundreds of billions of US dollars were invested in the country during this time for this purpose. Fortunately, the struggle and sacrifices of Afghans have shown major improvement in areas of nation building, relative economic development, reduction in child mortality rate, increased literacy rate and the building of strong defense apparatus i.e. a well-trained and equipped army and police organizations. In order for this process to self-sustain, and to break free from donor and grant relied economy, the President of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, has suggested to exploit Afghanistan's huge minerals, mines, precious stones and petroleum reserves. He proposed to the President of United States, Mr. Donald Trump in January last year to partner in development of extractive industry of the country.

Afghanistan is sitting on important minerals, iron ores, copper mines, precious stones, gold, uranium, lithium, petroleum, gas reservoirs and immense water resources. The iron ore is second in size in the world, and has the best quality. Copper mine is one of the largest in the world. Lithium mines were discovered by United States geological survey team in 2008 and was estimated to worth more than three trillion US Dollar. Compared to population density and geographical land mass of the country, these resources can turn Afghanistan as one of the richest countries in the world. In order to exploit these resources economically, Afghan government should put in place a comprehensive and all-inclusive strategy and plans for development of extractive industry in the country. The strategy should include building infrastructure, such as tunnels, bridges, roads, electricity, rail tracks and residential townships in areas where these underground resources are sitting. In addition, the government should direct Universities to train young students in the fields of mines and extractive industries. One of the ways to do so is to take advantage of the scholarships offered by friendly countries and encourage students to go for mining and extractive industries training. Security is vital for building viable business environment for investors.

Construction is the second most important industry when it comes to building economically viable extractive industry. It is unfortunate to mention that construction industry in Afghanistan is in dire state. A lot of efforts are needed to bring about standing and strong construction companies which can take on the potential work opportunities presented by mine/extractive industry in the country. In order to address this problem, government of Afghanistan should encourage existing construction companies to join venture with specialized construction companies from friendly countries and take on works as joint ventures. This can bring in skills, knowledge and training for local companies, which can enable them to stand alone and take on existing infrastructure work. Government should take heed of this problem at early stages so that technical and knowledge base is in place by the time major mining and extractive operations begin. It is a shame to see Afghan construction companies failing despite more than one and half decade of construction works opportunities presented by international community since the year 2002. Though it is understandable that a leveled playing field was not provided for business by previous government, still the blame is on construction

companies' owners as they lacked long term planning and missed opportunities to gain and store skills and knowledge, which were available for by the presence of large number of foreign companies and engineers as part of huge international aid and ongoing reconstruction program for Afghanistan.

Keeping in view the challenges before government of Afghanistan to attract large international corporations to develop and economically exploit extractive industry in the country, it is inevitable for government to present profitable plans for investors. Most of the mines, minerals, petroleum, precious stones and gas reserves are located in mountainous, highland regions in the country where there is no infrastructure, electricity, energy, transport root or life support facilities. This would translate into a plan that makes it parts and parcels of any contract for investment on the part of investing companies to build required infrastructure that include roads, tunnels, electricity production plants, and large processing plants in the country in order to make these resources economically viable and build access to neighboring countries ports to commercially export it. This is huge investment and hard for international corporations to swallow if they don't see attractive offer by government to invest. Therefore, it is advisable for government of Afghanistan to take these points in mind, and offer attractive terms - better than other countries do. But in longer term, Afghanistan can profit from the infrastructure built by these investors, and to use the same connecting roads, tunnels, bridges, rail tracks and plants for other mines located in the same region.

Indian investors have started to invest in the largest iron ore in central highland regions of the country. They plan to invest in building roads, bridges, tunnels, rail tracks to connect to border points for exporting the metal. They also plan to build large processing plants. Also, China has agreed to invest in developing the largest copper mine in the country. They also plan to build large processing plants, bridges, tunnels, roads and electricity production plants. Since Afghanistan is a landlocked country, India has already built a new commercial port in the Chabahar area of Iran, which connects to Nimroz province of Afghanistan and will be used for exporting the proceeds from these mines out of the country. But it has been more than ten years that no major breakthrough in starting to build the required infrastructure has happened. But an ambitious plan to connect the entire country with rail tracks stretching from North to South, East to West and running through mountainous central highland is already in place. Construction of this rail track has already been started at major border points between Uzbekistan-Afghanistan, Turkmenistan-Afghanistan, Iran-Afghanistan and a future construction of road and rail track at China-Afghanistan border.

By putting a strong management process and a viable, multi-dimensional strategy in place for building mine/extractive industry; and to bring about a strong construction industry to partner in the process, government of Afghanistan can take advantages and benefits from its huge mines, minerals and petroleum resources to support ongoing nation building and improve quality of lives of its citizens. Also, by bringing about a centralized extractive sector in the country, government can easily get rid of the present illegal mining, extraction and exploitation of these important national resources by warlords and terrorists in the country. Peace will ensue when economic development takes place.

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Bringing Gender Equality to Global Public Health

By Helen Clark and Sania Nishtar

Over the past few decades, the international community has tasked itself with achieving a wide range of social and environmental objectives, many of which are enshrined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for 2030.

We have advocated for many of these goals, as well as similar efforts that preceded the SDGs, because we believe that such collective projects are necessary to create the type of world we want for our children and grandchildren. But we have also come to realize that far too many efforts to fulfill global commitments lack the meaningful reporting mechanisms needed to succeed. If we are serious about translating lofty pronouncements into real progress for people and the planet, this will have to change.

Consider public health, an issue that affects everyone. The global agenda in this area determines the norms and standards that shape how public and private actors promote health, prevent disease, and administer care. It encompasses research initiatives and global public goods such as vaccines and emergency-preparedness programs for epidemic outbreaks. And it brings people together to work toward providing universal health coverage and ensuring everyone's right to health.

In the SDG framework, the separate issues of gender and health are intertwined, because gender itself is a major driver of health outcomes. Gender can influence whether one smokes tobacco, exercises regularly, or has access to nutritious food. And given that over 75% of the health workforce worldwide is female, it also often determines who will care for you when you are sick.

For decades, the global health community has paid lip service to the critical role of unequal power relations, particularly relating to gender, in determining health outcomes. At this point, one might expect to see a high degree of gender equality in the health sector. But a recent report by the advocacy and accountability group Global Health 50/50 shows otherwise.

In fact, the report, which reviewed 140 organizations working in the global health sector, makes for disturbing reading. Many of these organizations are falling embarrassingly short on addressing gender disparities. Half of the organizations' strategies do not include a specific commitment to gender equality; and while a third do focus on the health of women and girls, they make no mention of gendered risks.

The situation is even worse for men and boys, who, regardless

of country, can expect to live shorter, unhealthier lives than their female peers. According to the Global Health 50/50 report, only a third of organizations take a gendered approach to the health needs of the whole population, and no organizations target men and boys specifically.

Moreover, only 43% of the organizations that were surveyed have specific measures in place to support women's careers in public health, despite the overwhelmingly female composition of the health workforce. It should come as no surprise that the majority of these organizations are run by men. Across the full sample, 80% of board chairs and 69% of chief executives are male.

For us, one of the report's more dismaying findings is that two-thirds of the organizations do not disaggregate data by sex. Without data, transparency, and adequate reporting on gender disparities, there can be no progress toward gender equality.

Still, the report's findings are not all negative. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Bangladesh-based organization BRAC, Save the Children International, and The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria are among a dozen or so organizations that perform well across the board. What they have in common are committed leaders who have taken proactive steps to ensure progress. The successful organizations have all adopted clear policies and roadmaps for driving organizational change. They have established systems of accountability, including measures to ensure that gender competence is included in job descriptions and staff performance evaluations. And they have created flexible work environments, featuring parental leave and other family-oriented policies.

Looking ahead, we hope to see all global health organizations adopt concrete measures to address the shortcomings identified in the Global Health 50/50 report. Failing that, we would recommend that next year's report also rank the organizations in question, to make clear which of them are still falling behind.

Women once had to fight for the right to vote, and we are now fighting for paid parental leave and equal pay. But we must go further, by also advocating for accountability and gender equality in the sphere of global public health.

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