

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



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Why Peace Talks Shall Be Led by Afghan Government

Afghanistan as any other democracy has an elected president. It has a legitimate government that represents Afghanistan at the regional and international levels. As any government, it has to lead and manage the country. Therefore, Afghan government shall be involved in any process which is relevant to Afghanistan.

Afghan peace talk is one of the national processes of the country. Any deal on the peace talks, to be good or bad, has direct consequences on Afghan citizens. If Afghan government is not a central part of the peace talks, it will not be acceptable for the Afghan government and any decision made by such a process neither would be acceptable and nor it would be implementable in the future; Because when Afghan government is not involved as a central part of the peace talks, there is nearly no guarantee to implement the peace deal.

The Consequences of the Peace Talks Stumbling Afghan Government

This round of the talks shows that Khalilzad pursues to have the support of Pakistan in the peace talks. He actually wants Pakistan to make the Taliban engage fully in the talks with the United States to reach a peace deal. However, Khalilzad is pushing the same strategy to marginalize the Afghan government. In this case, even if there is a peace deal, it will not last and will not be implemented.

Rejection of a peace deal by India

As the experience shows, India as one of the main players in Afghanistan is sidelined again from the talks. Considering the geopolitical location of Afghanistan, it is not logical to expect that India to accept a deal with Taliban. Because in this case Taliban as the proxy group of Pakistan will come to power and will threaten the national security of India either directly or through its affiliate terrorist groups.

Emarat can lead to a new round of civil war in Afghanistan. Afghan people see no change in military and political approach of Taliban. As the group insists on its harsh ideology, it pursues establishment or revival of Emirat. How Afghan people from different walks will accept a discriminatory system that rejects them the human rights and basic rights? Taliban has ruled Afghanistan in the past. Taliban clearly called other ethnic groups as people of other countries and not Afghan citizens and wanted to force them to leave the country. Such group cannot provide an environment that all Afghans feel they are equal before the law. As a result, even if Afghans accept the Emarat due to fatigue of continued wars in the country, they will ultimately rise against the group. This will lead to a new civil war in Afghanistan.

All Afghans want peace. At the same time, they want a peace deal to ensure that the new Afghan democracy and its 18 years achievements will be preserved. Afghans want a peace deal to protect the Afghan constitution, civil liberties, basic rights and freedoms. Thus, Afghans want a peace and a political system that considers all Afghans as equal citizens of the country. Therefore, only an Afghan led and Afghan owned process under the leadership of Afghan government can ensure a lasting peace in the country.

Agricultural productivity in 2019 and its persistent challenges

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

The agricultural sector plays an important role in economy of Afghanistan as around 80% of Afghan populations are fed by this industry. The climate of Afghanistan is well suited for the cultivation of fruits, vegetables and multiple types of corns and other natural food though it faced ups and downs due to drought issues. Afghanistan is known for producing some of the finest fruits, especially apples, apricots, cherries, figs, grapes, melons, sweet mulberries, peaches, and pomegranates. Building and using greenhouses is a fast-growing industry in the country, especially large cities such as Kabul, Herat and Northern provinces. The Northern provinces are famous for pistachio cultivation, but their melon and water melon are unique within country or beyond. Provinces in the east of the country are famous for pine nuts. The northern and central provinces are also famous for almonds and walnuts. The Bamiyan province in central province is famous for growing superior potatoes which on an average produces 140,000 to 170,000 tones.

According to a recent report, the agricultural productivities have improved due to increasing rainfall and mechanization of the agricultural system in 2019. For example, production of cereals and vegetables have risen more than 20% percent compared to the same time last year. Thus, the production of the grapes have increased by 16%, figs more than 25% and saffron 33% compared to the same time last year. Meanwhile, many of the farmers complain about persistent challenges such as lack of enough cold room, lack of market sales and enough facilities to export their agricultural products to foreign markets.

In the first decade of new era, agriculture largely improved due to the infusion of international assistance, especially. The assistance that came from expatriates and outside investors caused some improvement when there was more political reliability after the fall of the Taliban regime, but with decline in international assistance, continuity of war and paying less attention to agriculture industry, which is considered the backbone of Afghanistan economy, it steadily declined. Though Afghanistan has unprecedentedly expanded its transit infrastructure, it will not be enough without increase in domestic production. As ever, there is a huge gap between imports and exports in the country. The imports stand over worth of \$6 billion goods per year while the exports nearly \$1 billion only, mainly fruits production.

Moreover, the agricultural productivity is extremely dependent to generosity of climate and natural rainfall in the country; in few last years, Afghanistan gravely suffered from drought and climate change. For example, Afghanistan saw about 24% decline in wheat production and 30% decline in milk production in 2018, according

to a World Bank report. In addition to drought in Afghanistan, there are other challenges which negatively affect agriculture industry; the first challenge which usually discussed by experts and local farmers is the issue of marketing. However, the establishment of air-corridor has largely responded to this challenge but in some provinces the airports do not have the capacity to load the grapes and send it to foreign countries. If the condition does not improve, we cannot increase our products because a large amount products spoiled or sold by auction before it reach anywhere. Addressing this issue will not only encourage the farmers, but also contribute to decrease of unemployment and social crime reduction in the country.

The second problem is lack of enough cold storage facilities to store fruits, especially grapes. Each type of fruit products suddenly decanted to markets either spoiled or sold by auction due to lack of enough cold room in country. Therefore, it is highly important for government or private investors to establish new cold rooms and improve handling practices inside Afghanistan. Off season products can be offered to consumers fresh at premium prices; thus, cold rooms can be used as instruments to link consumers' demand and organized supply.

According to experts, the process of purchasing, processing, storing and selling produce at a particular time and in a particular market involves an organized supply chain of goods, services and investment. Consumers can benefit from the cold room units because the products can be kept fresh longer period (out of season). Producers benefit from it, because farm gate prices tend to be higher and less volatile. Managers of the cold room storage facilities sell fresh produce at premium prices when seasonal supply has declined and have the option for exporting products if linkages are established with markets. Overall, the Investment in agro-business and agro-processing will make a positive impact on the domestic production of Afghanistan and will feed millions more people if the agricultural industry gets rid of current challenges.

The third challenge in agriculture industry is social and political insecurity in the country. The insecurity issue has affected everything including investment in agriculture industry. The recent intensified insecurity-related issues are also disruption to revenue collection and may undermine the capacity of government to maintain basic services. Given the increasing population and low employment in the country, we need to accelerate reforms in agricultural industry; the agricultural growth is likely to remain slow with limited progress in reducing poverty. Reforms are required to both improve general investment confidence and mobilize existing economic potential, especially in agriculture and extractives.

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Greening Our Cities

By: Emma Navarro and Nanda Jichkar

LUXEMBOURG - With global leaders having recently gathered in New York City for the UN Climate Action Summit, it is important to remember that cities are not just convenient settings for our coexistence and dialogue, but also leading sources of greenhouse-gas emissions.

As hubs of employment, trade, and innovation, cities are the engines of our economic growth, accounting for over 80% of global GDP. By mid-century, more than six billion people - almost 70% of the world's population - will live in urban areas, up from about four billion today. Yet cities already use more than two-thirds of the world's resources and energy, accounting for over 70% of carbon dioxide emissions. As cities continue to grow, so will these numbers. Between 2011 and 2013, China used more cement in cities development than the United States did during the entire twentieth century.

The future of our planet, then, depends on how we manage urban development. In addition to being the biggest contributors to climate change, cities are also among the most at risk, and thus have the most to gain from going green. With 90% of the world's urban areas on coastlines and at risk from rising sea levels, there is significant work to be done to protect the bulk of the world's population from these and other climate-related threats. Cities are where spending on climate action will have the biggest impact. Making cities more compact, connected, and coordinated around green policies could yield economic savings of up to \$17 trillion by 2050. For starters, we must do far more to reduce energy consumption, harmful emissions, and air pollution, not least by improving energy efficiency in urban areas. Given that urban infrastructure is hard to change quickly (and lasts a long time), the time for a new conversation about urbanization is now. Cities need to develop plans to reduce CO2 emissions, build resilience, and involve all relevant sectors of the economy in the shift toward clean energy. Policymakers should be planning for adaptations to existing infrastructure and new long-term investments.

Many cities around the world are already integrating climate goals into their urban-development plans. Copenhagen has emphasized increasing its buildings' energy efficiency. Bangalore is investing in sustainable transport. And, among other good examples, Mexico City is focused on strengthening the resilience of its most vulnerable residents to extreme weather events.

More and more cities have come to realize that climate-friendly policies have immediate benefits in terms of both quality of life and economic growth. Green investment makes economic sense, because it tends to result in better municipal services, cleaner air, and safer water. Indeed, solar energy is now often cheaper than fos-

sil fuels, and plastic recycling - a key to cleaning up our oceans - is a source of steady jobs.

But cities also need to go further, by recognizing the benefits of a circular economy that minimizes waste. "The 15 circular steps for cities," a guide from the European Investment Bank, shows that cities and their residents have much to gain - including a smaller carbon footprint - from reduced consumption and reuse of resources. Around the world, international development banks are providing cities with financing and technical assistance for climate-related projects. For the EIB, the priorities are energy efficiency, renewables, and sustainable transport.

At the same time, governments need to introduce new regulations and offer bigger incentives to get projects off the ground, and to encourage more innovation among businesses. To that end, we need all stakeholders to be connected and on the same page. City networks such as C40 Cities, ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, and the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy offer a good starting point. These groups have the power and influence to get the right people around the same table, discussing concrete policies.

For its part, the EIB and the Global Covenant of Mayors have joined forces to help cities finance climate action and build greener cities for future generations. Under this new partnership, we launched the Global Climate City Challenge a year ago to provide technical assistance that helps prepare and fast-track the financing of urban climate action projects. After soliciting 145 climate-policy ideas from more than 100 cities around the world, we have selected 20 proposals involving a total investment potential of €1.4 billion (\$1.5 billion). By extending technical assistance and financing for climate projects to cities in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the EU, the program will create jobs, cut energy bills, improve air quality, strengthen the management of waste and wastewater, and build resilience.

To address the critical lack of grant funding necessary to advance projects to a stage where they are ready for feasibility analysis and ultimately investment, the City Climate Finance Gap Fund was launched during the United Nations Climate Action Summit. It aims to raise more than €100 million in grants in order to unlock at least €4 billion in projects.

Government and financial leaders gathering in New York City should bear in mind that they are not alone. They have the support of a growing global community of mayors, local officials, and private-sector leaders who are determined to usher in greener cities for all citizens. Our task is to ensure that these voices are heard.

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