

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



September 14, 2019

Attention to Central Region: From Slogan to Action

Undoubtedly, it is the responsibility of governments to provide equal services and implement balanced development projects throughout the country, but due to long conflict and mountainous nature of some parts of the country, especially Hazarajat / Central regions have been deprived from equal attention of central governments. In the new era, despite flow of hundreds of billions of international dollars as aid to Afghanistan, and despite its relative security and effective people cooperation with the government such as in disarmament process or DDR, these people have not benefited from international assistance. The main problem of central regions is being fenced by natural barrier and people still suffer from lack of transit and communication infrastructures.

Therefore, during the 2014 presidential election campaign, the transformation and continuity team led by Dr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani put forward the slogan of breaking the natural fence or natural prison of the central regions. Now, after five years of that slogan that we are on the eve of the next presidential election, the fundamental question is how many of those slogans have actually come true? Can the team of Dr. Ashraf Ghani tell to the people how many of the slogans have been met? How much will he focus on fulfilling his past and present promises and commitments if he wins the upcoming election?

In order to reach a clear response to the above questions, this article will briefly compare the past 13 years of previous government services to the current services in terms of building communications and other necessary infrastructure. For example, during the 13 years of Mr. Karzai's and his partners, while in terms of flow of foreign aid and facilities could be called the golden age of Afghanistan, the share of Hazara region from national projects was as follows: (1) Construction of Kabul-Bamyan road via Ghorband, Kotel Shibar towards Bamyan 2) Construction of Kabul-Bamyan route via Maidan Shahr, Sia-Khak and Kotel Hajjig (though not fully completed), 3) Bamyan - Yakawlang Road; And 4) the construction of a small Bamyan airfield named Air-port of National Unity Martyred during the period of national unity government.

During the national unity government, the Central region, like other parts of Afghanistan, received enough attention and many projects are being implemented. As aforementioned, the biggest challenge in the central region, along with many other challenges, is lack of appropriate and standardized transition routes; so far Daikundi and Ghor provinces and parts of Ghazni provinces such as Jaghouri, Malistan and Nahour districts suffer from a lack of asphalted roads. However, the government has paid special attention to country's infrastructure. The development projects that launched during the period of national unity government in the central region as following:

Darrah-e Sof and Yakawlang Road: This road is considered as second phase of the north-south highway. According to technical studies, it is 178 kilometers long, 7m wide, 3m asphalt shoulder on both sides of the road, 2m earthy shoulder, 6 large bridge, 390 small bridges and 70,482 meters of wall. Actually, this road is a major transit route from north to south and to Pakistani ports, including the Gwadar port in Balochistan. If this road complete, it will play an important role in the economic growth of the country, facilitating transportation for crops and livestock reducing traffic accidents in the country. The project has been contracted with CRBC, a Chinese Construction Company, in more than \$ 205 million and will be monitored by Shiladia Company which is funded by Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The second phase of Gardan Dewal Road: This road, which is part of the East-West Road, is about 60 kilometers long, starting from the Afghan Bridge and continued to the Bandeshoy Bridge in the Punjab District of Bamyan province. The project was contracted in 2016 and its asphalt process started nearly two weeks ago. The first phase of Gardan Dewal Road, which connect west to east, was contracted in 2011 supposed to be completed by 2014 but failed due to some reasons; after several extensions, the company again failed to complete the work, and so it was canceled by the economic high Council in 2016. At present, 35% work of this phase is under process and going to be contracted with another company.

West to East Road: This road starts from Herat and continued to Chasht Sharif district. Now, 60 kilometers of this road has been designed while 35 kilometers of which contracted and its practical project also started few weeks ago. The other 25 kilometers of this road is under process in the National Procurement Office.

The Nilli Shahrstan Road up to Qouragh: Daikundi Province had not even one meter asphalted road in past 13 years of previous governments. Only a non-asphalted road was to connect the province to Bamyan via Nilli, Sharistan and Mera-more but it has not been completed yet. During the National Unity Government, the Nilli-Waras road as planned 155 km will be constructed in the near future; the technical and economical studies of its first phase completed but the second phase is under process. In addition, the internal road of Nilli city will be constructed in length of 8 kilometer. Last year, it was inaugurated but due to length of way and mountainous route its material could not reach on time but it will be completed within the specified time.

Moreover, there are several other projects either under technical studies or under implementation process such as Jaghori - Qara-Bagh road, 220 KV Dushai-Bamyan power line, water dam in Daikundi, second grade road in Yakawlang, Espilan-Waras asphalt road and north-south road (Yakawlang - Qandahar). The last but not the least, it is up to the Afghan people to judge whether the slogan of "rescuing the Central Region from Natural prison" has been realized or not. Undoubtedly, if these projects are completed, the central region will not only be released from natural prison but also change to a crossroad between East to West and North to South.



How to Address Social Issues

By: S. Asim

No problem can ever be solved unless it is identified properly. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to do it. There are different problems within a social and political life and people are caught in them in such a way that it is always difficult to come out of them. In most of the cases people become accustomed to those problems and never realize that they have the option of getting rid of them. This situation is further complicated by different interpretations of the problems and their solutions. Different people view social, economic and political problems with different spectacles and they have their own versions of how the problems are solved; therefore, they create a sea of confusion that drowns everyone.

At this stage it is important for the political and social leaders to come forward and provide guidance to the people. They should be educated, trained and experienced enough to understand the true problems and make the best choice among the choices that are available for their solutions. However, in case of Afghanistan, the political and social leaders, themselves, further add to the confusion of the people, instead of providing them solutions. In most of the cases, they even highlight the wrong problems so that people get diverted towards those issues and forget the real issues that the society faces. In this way they are able to achieve their self-centered objectives and keep on meeting their personal goals.

People, on the other hand, remain confused and unaware of their social and political responsibilities. A cursory glance at the mindset of the common people will depict that though there is a realization and complain against myriads of problems, there is no clear idea or vision about how to tackle these problems and what to prioritize.

As a matter of fact, we have forgotten the real issues and we are so lazy that we do not want to reach to the roots of the issues that we are facing; that is why we are not able to solve our issues. We keep on cutting the leaves, while never touch the branches, the trunk and most importantly the root, and we expect that the leaves would not grow again, which is really weird.

We believe that changing few things here and there may solve our real issues, but that is not the case. In fact, the measures

that we take to change few things are all based on the wrong diagnosis. The medicine that we have suggested for the infection in our society is not suitable for it at all because the diagnosis is not appropriate. Unless, we have proper diagnosis, how can we suggest the proper medicines? It is really impossible that the medicine for fever must cure tuberculosis.

There are many in our society, among our so-called leaders, the most intelligent among our government authorities and intellectuals who claim that they are paying service to their countrymen, and they believe that they have the treatment of all sorts of our social diseases and infections. They keep on insisting that they the society has the same disease that they have cure for; they do not let us know that it is possible as well that our disease is of the type they do not have any awareness about. Nonetheless, now we have to decide that how long these sorts of insane and illogical approaches and practices would continue? How long would we keep on suffering from the, otherwise, curable infections?

Now is the time that we adopt a somewhat logical and reasonable approach. We require understanding that we have to change the society as a whole if we are really interested in curing its disease. We need to rebuild and strengthen its immune system so that it is able to resist against the infections successfully. We have to make it believe that it can live without an infection and that it has a choice to do so. We need to make it appear beautiful and clean and let its susceptibility to diseases shrink. We need to fill its stomach with the hard-earned and easily digestible food, and make its veins filled with the blood full of energy and life. We need to strengthen its bone with the vitamins of determination and iron will. We need to make its mind clear and able to think logically and rationally. We need to make its legs and hands supportive enough so that it will be able to stand on its own and do things independently.

There is no more room for mistakes, laziness and ignorance. The time would never wait for us and the history is never lenient to the ones who are not prepared and who waste their time in repeating their errors. We need to re-diagnose the infections of our society and need to suggest medicine as per the proper diagnosis.

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How Pooling Can Beat Stunting

By: Philippe Douste-Blazy and Carl Manlan

In many developing countries, women come together on a regular basis to contribute their earnings to a common pot. Together, these micro-contributions can pay for school fees, kick-start a joint business venture, or buy the best available seeds for the next planting season. Pooling resources has a community-wide impact.

Of course, these individual contributions are small compared to the broader challenges of improving nutrition and creating employment, let alone achieving the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Meeting the SDGs will cost trillions of dollars, and financial pledges to date fall well short of what is required. Community solidarity must therefore become an integral part of a global citizen movement to contribute to human progress.

Fortunately, the rapid growth of digital platforms and payment systems makes it possible to replicate the community-level pooling mechanism on a global scale to help those most in need. Although community pooling of funds is not new, large payment platforms such as WeChat, GoFundMe, and M-Changa have digitized solidarity, making it easier than ever for communities around the world to cooperate in addressing problems and responding to crises.

This sense of community was evident this year in the aftermath of large-scale disasters, including Cyclone Idai in southern Africa and the fire at the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris, as it was following the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. Yet technological advances in the intervening decade and a half meant that the responses were very different. After the tsunami, individuals could not respond directly to help the affected communities in Southeast Asia and Africa. Today, mobile banking can translate compassion into dollars.

But what about less visible tragedies, such as stunting in children? It is harder to galvanize people around issues that do not make global headlines. Yet stunting, or chronic malnutrition, is a huge problem that cries out for community collaboration to address it.

Stunting is the result of limited or no access to adequate nutrition during pregnancy and the first two years of a child's life. Globally, the condition affects about 22% of children under the age of five; most live in Africa and Asia.

By slowing children's physical and cognitive development, stunting limits their opportunities in life and makes them less able as adults to contribute to their country's social and economic transformation. The resulting skill shortage poses significant risks to future economic growth in Africa, South-

east Asia, and India, and hence globally. Although the initial cost of stunting is borne by the child's family, the economic impact affects us all.

Whereas natural disasters tend to be one-off events that demand a massive immediate response, providing mothers and children with the nutrients and vitamins they need requires a consistent, sustained effort over time.

That is the thinking behind UNITLIFE, a new UN initiative that aims to tackle stunting with the support of people around the world. By mobilizing individual voluntary micro-donations, UNITLIFE will help to fund nutrition programs in developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. The initiative, which is hosted by the UN Capital Development Fund, is based on the successful innovative finance organization UNITAID, whose \$3 billion fund to fight diseases is financed by an air-ticket solidarity levy implemented in ten countries.

Over the past 15 years, telecoms operators, banks, and fintech firms have developed mobile and e-payment systems that allow people to transfer money at the speed of a tweet. From the comfort of her home, a resident of Los Angeles or Nairobi can donate to support an anti-stunting program in eSwatini (Swaziland). And shoppers can contribute affordable amounts at the checkout, turning the simple act of swiping or scanning their cards into a global phenomenon for development impact. Anyone, in fact, can contribute to UNITLIFE by scanning a QR code and adding an affordable contribution to their online or in-store purchases. And with 20 billion credit, debit, and prepaid cards in circulation around the world, there are almost limitless ways to support the fight against stunting.

People are the world's most important resource, yet stunting limits human capabilities and reduces current investment in the future. Fortunately, the rapid growth of digital technologies means we can now imagine a world in which millions of small voluntary donations help to end this scourge, improving the lives of women and children immeasurably.

By pooling resources locally, women across Africa and Asia are raising their communities' living standards. With a global community pot, we can strengthen the foundations of life, contribute to human progress, and secure our collective future.

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