Afghanistan - Development and Governance with Equity, Arai, 2014.docx

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A series of in-depth dialogues with Afghan political, civil society, and community leaders from diverse regional, ethnic, and tribal backgrounds have generated important insights into their basic human needs at stake in a range of ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan. At the heart of their challenges is their struggle to establish more equitable access to resources and opportunities for livelihood. These challenges are compounded by the sustained insecurity and the absence of functional governance that hampers Afghans’ struggle for development. While it is impractical to seek short-term solutions to these challenges, it is imperative to recognize that Afghans of all political, ethnic, tribal, and regional backgrounds yearn for peace and development.

What follows is a list of possible visions generated by the present inquiry conducted by an independent Japanese social scientist with extensive international experience in diverse conflict-affected societies. None of the suggested visions is definitive or authoritative in nature. Instead, these visions are presented for exploratory inquiry. They seek to stimulate constructive dialogues among Afghan people in their own effort to arrive at long-term solutions to the problems they face.

1. Develop a multi-party, multi-ethnic coalition government of national unity, modeling after Switzerland’s multi-lingual, multi-party executive and legislative branches as well as its highly decentralized yet well-integrated system of national, provincial, and communal governance. To support this process of nation-building, draw lessons from both Afghan and international examples of “revolutionary partnership”, which refers to the kind of peacemaking partnership that adversaries in conflict can establish to overcome seemingly irreconcilable historical differences. Peace processes in such conflict-affected societies as South Africa and Northern Ireland include elements of such partnership.

2. Establish an enforceable legal system of financial accounting, transparent contracting, and non-discriminatory hiring practices that currently perpetuate corruption in government offices. Senior government leadership must make a decisive commitment to a zero tolerance policy, learning from such conflict-affected societies in transition as post-genocide Rwanda. Respected Islamic scholars and leaders can play a significant role in articulating and publicizing relevant Islamic principles of economic fairness at all levels of Afghan society. Furthermore, in each of the government offices, companies, civil society organizations, and other institutionalized contexts of economic transaction, a bottom-up movement for “Uniting with Ten Partners of Integrity”, which brings together at least ten like-minded volunteers to stand together and collectively refuse all forms of
corruption within the institutional context in which they work, may be organized and mainstreamed throughout Afghan society.

3. Prioritize the construction of schools, health clinics, paved roads, water and irrigation facilities, and other forms of basic infrastructure while building public awareness that doing so will not only reduce poverty but also help achieve greater security, especially in socio-economically deprived rural areas. The construction of basic infrastructure must go hand in hand with a sustained political commitment and resource allocation to capacity-building for educators and relevant professionals who can make the best use of the newly-built infrastructure.

4. Expand the existing best practices and introduce new ones to support technological innovation in agriculture. To facilitate this process, secure equitable water access by initiating cross-border dialogues with Afghanistan’s neighboring countries and proactive dispute resolution among Afghan communities concerned with water issues. Use the media and community meetings to showcase the best practices of highly-valued agricultural produce and processed products that can be exported. Expand community-based cooperatives through subsidies that enable them to acquire equipment and skills necessary to process agricultural products and increase their marketability. Assist the cooperatives and commerce associations in their effort to establish access to international markets, including through direct Skype conversations between Afghan producers and potential international customers.

5. Enhance and build on the existing practices and networks of peace committees by allocating greater resources for the long-term reintegration and security of former combatants and their families. In addition, explore context-specific ways to integrate both the best Afghan and international practices (such as participatory theater) of long-term national reconciliation, learning from such contexts as South Africa, Rwanda, and East Timor (the latter being part of Indonesia formerly). Link the integrated process of reintegration and reconciliation to concrete development initiatives, including skill-building and community-based livelihood projects.

6. Learn the best international practices of attractive television programs that powerfully promote and restore the Afghan culture of social equity, intercommunal harmony, and mutual respect, including in rural areas that have recently established television access. (See peace-promoting television programs in Macedonia in Europe and Burundi in Africa, for example.)

7. Facilitate trans-generational dialogues between elders and younger people based on the support of respected elders who seek to incorporate young people’s fresh ideas for development and peacebuilding. Identify and showcase the best Afghan practices of trans-generational partnership in appropriate media outlets. Demonstrate the long-term benefit of such partnership for all Afghans. While taking these steps in both civil society and government, enable youths to educate and organize themselves in view of long-term
social transformation across generations, starting with social and organizational contexts in which such transformation is presently possible.

8. Systematically identify political, religious, community, and civil society leaders open and committed to girls’ education and women’s social engagement. Enable them to facilitate dialogues among concerned men, as well as between men and women ready and willing to enter such dialogues. Long-term benefits of women’s education and their participation in political and economic activities must be scientifically studied, publicized, and openly discussed, including in school curricula, religious sermons, and community meetings. Concrete examples of Islamic practices in cross-gender partnership may be derived from such contexts as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey.

9. Initiate a Central and South Asian Conference for Security and Development, modeling after the Helsinki Process, a multi-year conference that brought together thirty-five divided European and North American countries during the Cold War. The proposed high-level regional conference can jointly explore the root causes of cross-border issues that have continuously accelerated the cycle of insecurity and mistrust between Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. In addition to these countries, Turkey, Kashmir, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan may be invited as participants. Well-facilitated multi-year dialogues must be solution-oriented in nature. These dialogues must simultaneously address issues of mutual concern in three baskets, (a) security (regional disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; regional peacekeeping), (b) development (a regional regime for water resource management; oil, gas, and energy supplies; joint development of border regions; regional trade and investment; best practices of alternative livelihood development), and (c) religion and culture (curricula development in both formal and religious education; media exchange). USA and its NATO allies, Russia, China, India, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and other countries concerned with the region will be granted the status of observers, if they so wish, with the option of channeling their resources to a UN-monitored non-partisan funding mechanism that supports this regional process.

10. Establish an Afghan Center for Peace Policy and Dialogue that brings together credible and innovative scholar-practitioners from both Afghanistan and abroad to facilitate high-level capacity-building workshops, conciliation dialogues, and policy-oriented research. The proposed Center may be organized as a consortium of relevant institutes that already exist in Afghanistan or as a new self-standing entity that actively coordinates with existing Afghan-based institutes. Skill-building aimed at realizing the above-mentioned proposals will be a priority that the Center will need to tackle. One possible way of utilizing the Center is to make it a convener and facilitator of a participatory workshop for all incoming ministers and high-level officials who will benefit from increased awareness and skills in political ethics and accountability, analytical thinking, administrative efficiency, creative problem-solving, and program evaluation. The Center can also help facilitate conciliation dialogues by applying both Afghan and international
practices of reconciliation and conflict resolution. The New Palace in Kabul’s Paghman District, which was established in March 2014 for a joint Afghan-Iranian-Tajik celebration of Nawroze (New Year), can provide a secure, accessible retreat setting in which some of the proposed trainings and dialogues can take place.