

# Role of Academia and Universities in rebuilding of Afghanistan

James C. Dabhi

Peace building, reconstruction and rebuilding communities in Afghanistan is a difficult task, particularly when finances, appropriate technologies and competent human resources are lacking. Afghanistan is suffering from the effects of three decades of war and successive regimes whose policies totally marginalized women and scholars.

The feudal system and rigid traditions (stronger among some ethnic groups than others) present in Afghanistan, not to mention widespread corruption, nepotism and exclusive ethnicity have all played a role in curtailing freedom of thought, as well as participatory and sustainable human development in the

and heavy furniture, this assistance ought to be ploughed into much-needed laboratories, libraries, scientific and social research, and experimentation.

Experience suggests that the larger the university the greater the tendency to develop a larger, more rigid bureaucracy. Some universities may have more power sharing and, therefore, the authority and decision making may be adequately delegated. Yet others remain highly centrally controlled to the detriment of larger departmental participation and autonomy. It is vital to invest in developing competent and committed human resources, people who will remain in Afghanistan and contribute to the country,

include plans for dormitory facilities for girls and boys to study.

These universities must formulate courses dealing with the following areas: social diversity and inclusion; conflict; violence and peace; gender equality; rural development; environment; as well as other subjects relevant to the socio-economic, cultural and political situation in Afghanistan.

Private learning institutions are also beginning to establish themselves in Afghanistan. With that comes the real danger, as has been the experience elsewhere, that education will become a commodity for sale, making it available only to those who can afford it while de-

emerged. In order to attend these academic sessions, students and staff expect to have their transportation expenses paid as if they were doing a favour for the providers. This custom provides an unhealthy incentive and in the long run will not help motivate students and staff to take responsibility for their own development. This practice must end.

Countries such as India, which offer 500 scholarships every year for a bachelor's degree for Afghan students, must also consider providing scholarships for research and doctoral degrees to deserving students in Afghanistan. However, a word of caution is needed here. If this is not carefully managed, many of

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country.

The three constitutional institutions - legislative, executive and judiciary - are in need of competent, ethical, committed people in higher positions. Over decades, higher education, scientific and social research have suffered tremendously and, consequently, have failed to provide the human resources required to fill leadership roles at various levels. Universities, educational institutions and centres of higher learning and research play an important

people who will not run be lured away from the country for monetary gain and other incentives. Institutions of higher learning need to engage in well-thought-out experiments with learning and education which are contextually relevant and yet internationally-recognised.

Universities and other learning institutions in Afghanistan must find their way by working diligently not to repeat the mistakes of educational institutes and universities in other parts of

privating those who cannot of access to a quality education. Universities and institutions of higher learning must avoid becoming influenced by manipulative politics and politicians.

Violence, including gender-based violence, does currently exist in the universities of Afghanistan. Often fingers are pointed at the rich and powerful, including the warlords, for this violence. The warlords and their affiliates have done enough harm to the people

these scholarships will go to the rich and influential while competent and deserving candidates will be left out. Nepotism is nothing new in South Asia, and Afghanistan's institutions of higher learning are no exception.

In order for the policies and programmes designed and implemented by government and other agencies to be more informed and effective, universities, research organisations and academia must collectively do their bit.

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institutions - legislative, executive and judiciary - are in need of competent, ethical, committed people in higher positions. Over decades, higher education, scientific and social research have suffered tremendously and, consequently, have failed to provide the human resources required to fill leadership roles at various levels. Universities, educational institutions and centres of higher learning and research play an important role in promoting quality human resources, knowledge and competencies. After having visited various universities, one realises that outside assistance has been received and more has been promised.

However, what is lacking is the effective management and sustainable development of these resources.

There is ample evidence of such resources being wasted on cosmetics rather than being spent to develop real infrastructure. Instead of wasting so much money on exterior facades

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It is imperative that governments at the provincial and national level assess the status of higher education and give it a high priority, along with primary education. Instead of mere political promises made without considering the consequences it is crucial that, in the next ten to fifteen years, Afghanistan establish well-planned universities in each province. These universities will help to alleviate the pressure on the few that currently exist. Any new universities should also in-

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Violence, including gender-based violence, does currently exist in the universities of Afghanistan. Often fingers are pointed at the rich and powerful, including the warlords, for this violence. The warlords and their affiliates have done enough harm to the people of Afghanistan. They must now spare education and educational institutions from their coercive power, corruption and nepotism. If not, then there is little hope left for this country.

In Afghanistan there are various groups and universities from abroad that offer academic courses and training for students and staff of universities. By and large these courses/training are designed in such a way that they do not financially burden the universities, students or staff.

But in spite of this, an unfortunate tradition has

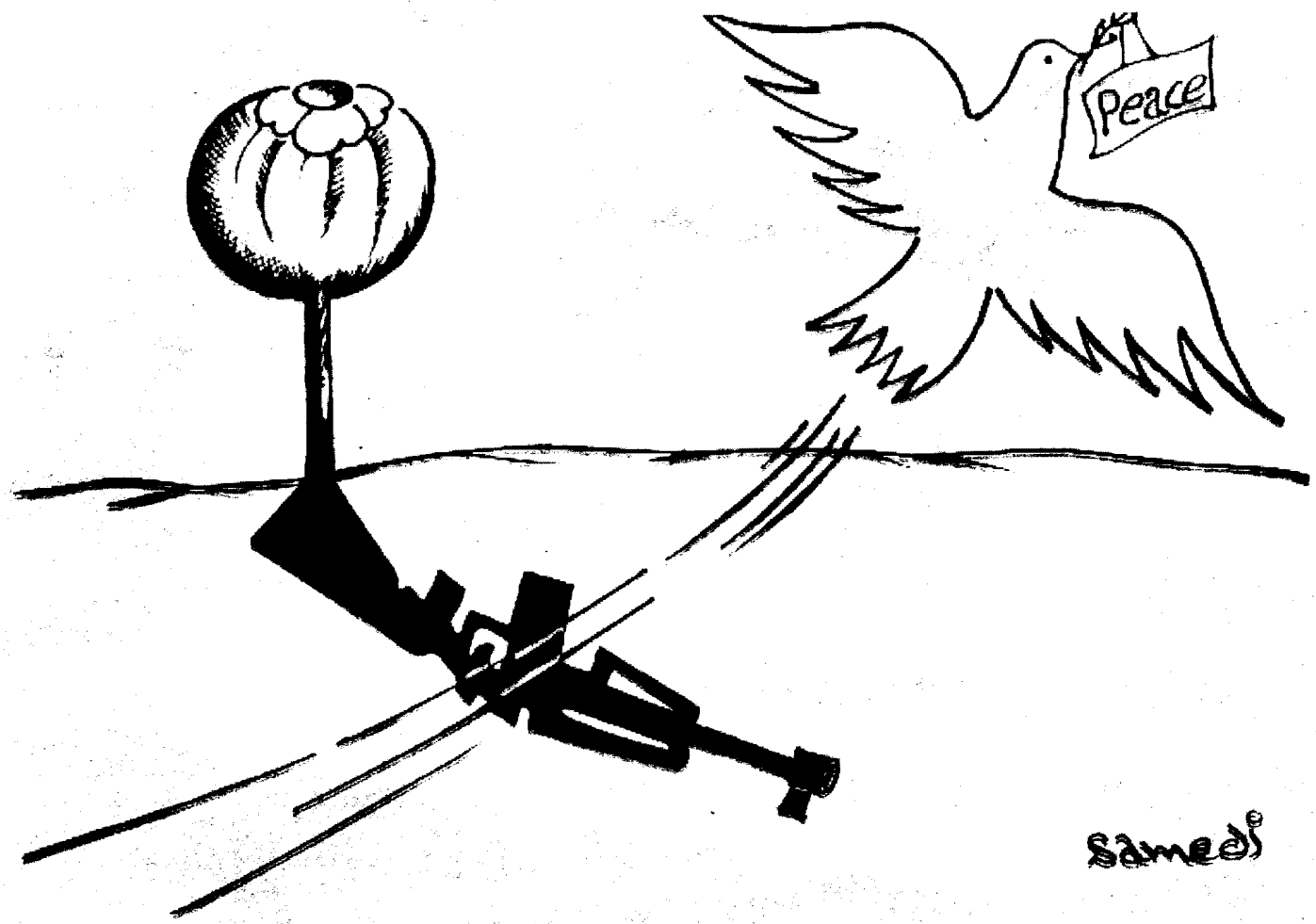
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In order for the policies and programmes designed and implemented by government and other agencies to be more informed and effective, universities, research organisations and academia must collectively do their bit.

They must endeavour to carry out research at various levels and provide useful data and analysis to assist in these efforts.

Inclusive and sustainable development requires sustained research in a variety of sectors. Higher education with a strong research base coupled with policy advocacy will be invaluable tools in helping to rebuild Afghanistan.

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