

**Saving Afghanistan:
20 Transformational Initiatives
to Create One Million Jobs**

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ABSTRACT

Despite the steady stream of alarming news from Afghanistan concerning its stability and security, the biggest threat to the country is not the Taliban, al Qaeda, or Islamic fundamentalists. The greatest failure not only of the many nations that have been assisting Afghanistan in recent years but of the Afghan government itself is their failure to address the greatest problem in the country, and the greatest threat to its security: *unemployment*. One can argue that the single most important indicator of the success or failure of the new Afghan government will be its ability to reduce significantly the number of unemployed on the streets of major cities in that country.

This paper presents a set of 20 transformational initiatives that impact various aspects of Afghan society. This list is by no means an exhaustive list of all the opportunities available to the government, but all the initiatives discussed here can be turned into specific actions plans funded by international donors and private investors, and performed by private businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and even local volunteer groups. The intent of this paper is to start a conversation about possible objectives and goals that can be accomplished in a reasonably short time, while avoiding the national, regional, and international political minefields that will require much more time to resolve.

Although the initiatives presented in this paper are all discussed with reference to Afghanistan, they can easily be applied in or adapted to other third-world countries suffering from similar problems and conditions. Ideally, the discussion started by this study will grow into a global conversation about improving employment, prosperity, and the quality of life.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the steady stream of alarming news from Afghanistan concerning its stability and security, the biggest threat to the country is not the Taliban, al Qaeda, Islamic fundamentalists, or even meddling from the many interested groups in the region. Similarly, the major cause of the failure of donor countries to achieve their developmental goals, despite massive investments over the past decade, continues to go unnoticed and unreported. The greatest failure not only of the many nations that have been assisting Afghanistan in recent years but of the Afghan government itself is their failure to address the greatest problem in the country, and the greatest threat to its security: *unemployment*.

One can argue that the single most important indicator of the success or failure of the new Afghan government will be its ability to reduce significantly the number of unemployed on the streets of major cities in that country.

The worsening situation in Afghanistan can be directly attributed to the reduction and even the drying up of much of the assistance that came from the NATO members and other donor countries over the past decade. The biggest impact of these reductions is seen in the ever increasing unemployment rate of the workforce. Given the present fertility rate in Afghanistan, unemployment will grow in the near future to unprecedented levels even by the Afghan standard. Estimates are that as much as 60 percent or more of the work force is currently unemployed. Reducing this number by creating new jobs will go a long way toward alleviating the malaise currently facing Afghanistan, including concerns about security or the lack thereof.

In their 2012 book *Why Nations Fail* Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson point out that one of the key factors in the development of a nation is the inclusivity of its population in the daily working of social affairs as well as its governance. Applying this observation to the present situation in Afghanistan, it is incumbent on the Afghan government to reduce or eliminate any and all obstacles that prevent citizens from participating fully in the workforce and in public life.

There are many examples of what the government can and should do that require little or no structural changes. Many of these initiatives do not require foreign assistance or greater security than currently exists in the country. Yet they will have quick impacts that will be visible to society at large. These initiatives are for most part service oriented and are independent of any

foreign competition. These are unlike any industry-driven job creation schemes that are subject to intense competition from nearby countries, an issue that has not been lost on the many Afghan entrepreneurs who have seen massive illegal dumping from these countries.

This paper presents 20 transformational initiatives that impact various aspects of Afghan society at large, but it is by no means an exhaustive list of all the opportunities available to the government. The intent of this paper is to start a conversation about possible objectives and goals that can be accomplished in a reasonably short time, while avoiding the national, regional, and international political minefields that will require much more time to resolve. Moreover, all the initiatives discussed here can be turned into specific actions plans funded by international donors and private investors, and performed by private businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and even local volunteer groups. The primary result of the initiatives would be to create hundreds of thousands of jobs. It is not inconceivable that they could create as many as one million jobs, which would have huge positive economic and social consequences for a country like Afghanistan.

The following initiatives are some of the many reforms available to the Afghan government and are presented in the order of their impacts, from the short-term to long-term.

SHORT-TERM INITIATIVES

The short-term initiatives described below are capable of being adopted and executed within six months to one year, and will produce visible results within that time period. In almost all cases, the role of the government is to create incentives and remove obstacles, allowing private businesses to do the work—a form of public-private partnership that has proven effective in many parts of the world.

1. Clean City Initiative

Fifty years ago, before chemical fertilizer was widely available, Afghan farmers used to come with their donkeys to clean outhouses in many urban neighborhoods, not only in Kabul but across the country. The lack of chemical fertilizer created a market for human waste and placed monetary value on it.

Today, most Afghan cities are drowning in trash, everything from scrap paper, plastic bags, and litter to ordinary household refuse. If the government placed a nominal value on city-generated waste (either by weight or volume) and designated several landfills around the major cities to receive—and pay for—waste—the existing transportation infrastructure created during the boom years of reconstruction (and that is currently idle) will be the first to collect and remove trash from city streets. Many people would no longer simply throw trash away but would actually try to find ways to collect and sell it to the middlemen who deliver to landfills. This initiative would not only create jobs but would improve public health and remove eyesores in many city centers. Its positive impacts will be economic, psychological, and aesthetic.

The jobs created by this initiative would be local, and the benefits would be local. Foreign competition in such urban trash collection would be minimal or nonexistent. The success of this initiative will come from the efficiency of its initial planning, the setting of precise goals and objectives, and proper implementation.

2. Improving Traffic Flow

The major cities in Afghanistan such as Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Mazar, Jalalabad and others currently suffer from major traffic jams. Thousands of private and commercial drivers waste countless hours and significant amounts of money stuck in traffic, while fumes from their vehicles add to the air pollution that covers many cities. One of the primary reasons for these traffic jams is the lack of adequate parking throughout the cities. Many cars are parked and even doubled parked along key roads, creating bottlenecks and logjams. At the same time, most of these cities were designed with many wide roads that, if used properly, could not only alleviate many present ills but also become a source of job creation and a force for economic growth.

The municipalities should use these wider roads to create diagonal parking spaces that can be leased to private entities that would administer them as parking lots. In exchange for a nominal fee, drivers would get safe, clean, and legal parking spaces in formerly congested areas. This simple initiative would not only reduce or eliminate traffic jams but would create permanent jobs, provide needed revenue to cities, reduce air pollution, and improve the quality of urban life.

This reform has already been tried in Kandahar to a limited extent and has produced its intended results. According to the most recent accounting, the Kandahar municipality earns as much as 6 million Afghanis per year from this initiative.

3. Small-Scale Mining

Small-scale mining operations take place throughout Afghanistan. Most of these operations are not government sanctioned; many are conducted under unsafe or environmentally harmful conditions. Materials produced in these operations are mostly used within the country or sold abroad in their original forms without any added value. Although these mining operations are illegal, they do create jobs and contribute some value to the Afghan economy. They also have the potential to do much more good for the country. Giving these mines a legal status consistent with the law of the land but without disturbing their operations should be a priority for the new Afghan government.

Instead of prohibiting small-scale mining or forcing miners to abandon their work through intimidation or excessive taxation, the government should view these operations as a means of job creation that will reduce Afghanistan's reliance on foreign assistance. The government should adopt policies that will improve mine safety and environmental protection, assist in better product marketing, provide low-interest loans, train miners to increase efficiency and productivity, and promote private ownership of mines. Such reforms are the best way to exploit the underground wealth of Afghanistan for the long-term betterment of its economy and its people.

4. Public Washrooms in City Centers

Cities in Afghanistan are not equipped with public toilets. The lack of such essential facilities is not only a major public inconvenience but a significant sanitary and health problem for many urban centers. And yet there is a simple solution that could eliminate the problem while also contributing to job creation and economic prosperity.

Under this initiative, municipal governments would identify economically strategic parts of each city in which public toilets are most needed. Private entities would bid for the opportunity to provide portable facilities that would be available to the public for a nominal fee. The fee would be set by the free market—not by government—and may vary from site to site depending on local conditions and usage. Municipal governments would charge the operators of these facilities a licensing fee for the right to operate on public property. The operators themselves would be responsible for facility maintenance and waste removal.

Such public facilities are common throughout the world and help eliminate odors and disease, not to mention the inconvenience now faced by citizens with no place to attend to their basic human needs. This initiative will create thousands of jobs not subject to foreign competition and will make an immediate and highly visible improvement in the quality of urban life in Afghanistan.

5. Leasing Power Substations

Waste and pilferage are some of the most common inefficiencies in the distribution of electrical power in most if not all developing countries. With its old and dilapidated systems, and a reliance on electricity purchased abroad, Afghanistan suffers from massive waste and inefficiency in its electrical-power industry. One simple reform that would go a long way toward reducing these inefficiencies would be to allow private operators to run and maintain the many neighborhood substations in every town and city.

Under this initiative, each substation would be outfitted with an electric meter before the transformer that would allow Da Afghanistan Berishna Sherkat (DABS), the government-owned power entity, to measure precisely the amount of electrical power delivered to it. Operators of

the substations would be required to pay for all the electricity that flowed through their substations, and would collect utility payments from all neighborhood users. Since their own income would be a percentage of these payments, private local operators would thus have a strong financial incentive to reduce waste, eliminate pilferage, and provide better customer service.

6. Annual Vehicle Inspections

For more than a decade there has been a flood of cars, trucks, and vans coming into Afghanistan from various parts of the world. The majority of these vehicles are old and poorly maintained. Their owners then drive them on dangerous roads damaged by war or weather that have not been repaired in years. The result is that hundreds of people lose their lives every year in automobile accidents that could be prevented by common-sense safety reforms. Older cars and trucks are also a major source of air pollution in large cities. In Kabul, for example, there is a dramatic difference in the level of air pollution between weekdays and weekends where there is less traffic.

One simple way to improve highway safety and reduce urban air pollution would be to require annual motor-vehicle safety inspections, a common practice throughout the world. For an annual fee, the government would license private auto-repair shops to perform these inspections, and would set safety and emissions standards for different classes of vehicles. This reform requires no major investment from the public sector but would create a demand for skilled mechanics to perform inspections and any necessary repairs, reduce highway fatalities and pollution, and improve the quality of life throughout the country.

7. Work Visas

Sending workers abroad is a tried and true means of boosting employment and growing a country's GDP. Of the many countries around the world that send workers abroad, two countries have virtually turned it into a science. In the Far East, the Philippines has more than 13 million expatriates (the single largest group of expatriates of any country) working in almost in every

county around the world, while El Salvador in the Western Hemisphere earns more than 60 percent of its GDP from foreign remittances.

Over the past 30 years, many Afghans have traveled abroad looking for work in Iran, Pakistan, and various Middle-Eastern countries. In almost all cases, these expatriates have traveled without any support from their government, or even without much knowledge about how and where to go. As a result, many workers have wasted time and money looking for jobs, have had to accept jobs and wages below their skill levels, have had to work illegally, and have even been cheated and defrauded by foreign employers and officials.

The Afghan government should spearhead an initiative through the foreign ministry and its embassies to formalize a work-visa program with selected countries that need labor. Each ambassador should be expected to garner an appropriate number of guest-worker visas from his or her respective host country, and should be evaluated on meeting those benchmarks. The government should also license private employment agencies to recruit and certify suitable candidates for employment abroad, provide technical training, and prepare candidates for the rules, customs, and basic facts about living and working in a foreign country.

This simple initiative will produce well-paid jobs both inside and outside the country, lower unemployment, protect the health and safety of Afghans working abroad, and increase foreign remittances. Over time we should also expect Afghan workers returning home to inject new ideas and innovations into the domestic economy, further improving prosperity and employment.

8. Small Business Loans

The best and the fastest way to grow an economy and to create jobs has always been to have a growing small business sector. This has been shown throughout the world and is no different in Afghanistan's case. Simply to survive, small businesses must be efficient, productive, and attuned to their customers' needs and wants. One of the most common problems in starting any small business is the availability of the financing that is key to its success and growth.

Afghans are an entrepreneurial people by nature. The many small vendors around the large cities and villages are testimony to their work ethic and desire for self-employment. These

entrepreneurs are funded for most part through loans from relatives and family financial pools. This may be adequate for the smallest operations but any business seeking to grow needs access to reliable, low-interest credit.

Unfortunately, obtaining a business loan in Afghanistan today is almost impossible, as both public and private banks make the process long and difficult. A shorter and less arduous underwriting process, based on the loan amount, would help unlock institutional credit to small businesses. A modern and simplified approach needs to be instituted with the lending institutions to give banks greater incentive to extend credit to small businesses, not just gather deposits.

9. Reforming Procurement Rules

Afghanistan is strewn with incomplete and subpar quality projects. These projects were primarily funded by the many donor countries that came to Afghanistan with a genuine desire to rebuild the country after three decades of war. For more than a decade, these donors have used a single strategy of awarding contracts to large foreign companies with little or no experience working in countries like Afghanistan. This strategy may have made more sense in earlier years, but with the passage of time it has become counterproductive and has resulted in a great number of projects being left incomplete or completed with sub-standard quality.

This strategy has also been the major reason for cost overruns and an impetus for corruption throughout the life of the projects. Specifically, the strategy assumes that Afghan companies are incapable of completing large projects on their own, and that they need foreign companies to lead them. Procurement rules that require offerors to demonstrate past performance discriminate against qualified local companies, while favoring large foreign firms that, in many cases, do not have relevant experience in Afghanistan.

Current procurement rules also allow for a major share of the project costs to be spent on items that have very little relevance to the intended purposes of the respective projects. Many foreign companies allocate as much as 30 percent of total project costs to security, extended overhead, and general administrative costs, even before adding the profit or fee for the projects.

The biggest obstacles facing Afghan-owned companies are the unnecessarily stringent requirements placed in the request for proposal (RFP). These requirements are typically copied from similar projects in other countries but may have little or no relevance to local conditions in Afghanistan.

For future projects in Afghanistan to be successful, a new procurement strategy must be adopted that levels the playing field for local and foreign firms and evaluates competing firms exclusively on their ability to work in the unique and challenging conditions in the country.

10. Loan Insurance

A major stumbling block to developing and nurturing small businesses is the availability of a favorable financing mechanism. The availability of low interest rates coupled with easy means of obtaining loans is essential for Afghanistan's small businesses to flourish. The banking system in Afghanistan is no different from other businesses that seek the highest rates of return with the lowest risk. Consequently, the current system of incentives sets the interests of the banks directly counter to the financial needs of small businesses in Afghanistan.

The Afghan government should initiate a plan that removes the existing financial obstacle in the marketplace. One way the government can reduce risks for banks is by providing loan insurance. It should also reduce taxes on interest earned on loans and ensure that tax savings are used to bolster the banks' capital and increase liquidity. The implementation of these two simple ideas will go a long way toward lessening or eliminating financial obstacles for small businesses lending.

11. Formal Land Titles

There are no reliable figures on the percentage of existing real-estate properties in Afghanistan that have formal or government issued deeds. Considering the huge influx of refugees, economic growth, and unprecedented levels of construction in the past decade, some experts estimate that 70 percent or more of the properties in the country do not have formal land titles. Whatever the amount, losses to both municipal and provincial governments in unpaid and underpaid taxes are

huge. If collected, this sum would go a long way toward closing current annual budgetary shortfalls facing the Afghan government.

Unpaid taxes also mean that municipalities do not have money to provide for trash collection, road repairs, and many other essential services. Providing these services creates jobs and improves the quality of life.

The impact of formalizing deeds for homeowners across the country will be huge. It is no exaggeration to say it will increase the wealth of the nation. At present, properties that do not have government-granted deeds and that are not registered in the municipalities' books have a much lower value than similar properties in the same area that do have formal deeds. Owners who receive formal deeds will see the value of properties increase substantially, contributing to their net worth and providing a source of collateral if ever they need to get bank loans.

12. Formalizing Property Boundary Lines

In Afghanistan, the customary method for defining property boundary lines is based on an antiquated system in which properties are located relative to adjacent properties, and are measured with tapes or ropes whose dimensions vary with temperature. Over time, as properties change hands and different measuring tools are used, small errors become bigger so that determining precise boundary lines is all but impossible.

The introduction of modern technology such as the global positioning system (GPS) can make formalizing property lines easy and accurate. Under this initiative, municipal and provincial governments would license private land-survey companies to produce modern, accurate measurements of property boundary lines. Fortunately, Afghanistan already has a strong and available cadre of engineers and surveyors who were trained in the use of GPS technology during the past decade of the construction boom. This simple reform would thus not only provide needed employment to skilled professionals, but by creating an accurate map of all private-property holdings in the entire country it would also help reduce or eliminate local land disputes.

13. Single Tax Rate

Taxation is a contentious issue everywhere in the world and it is no different in Afghanistan. The current tax processes and procedures in Afghanistan are unduly difficult and are subject to many irregularities. Consequently, taxes not collected in a timely fashion, they are not collected to the full extent of the law, and even when they are collected they often are not even accounted properly.

The complex requirements of the existing tax codes have created an accounting nightmare in which taxpayers are asked to keep accounts of every single transaction, no matter how large or small. This system developed at a time when the economy was still in its infancy and the climate was ripe for financial mischief. An unfortunate byproduct of the complex tax code has been the advent of corruption throughout the government and the public sector. The recently proposed value-added tax (VAT), if enacted, will exacerbate a bad situation to a point that corruption will become a way of life. Should that come to pass it may take generations for Afghanistan to restore public trust in government.

The Afghan government needs to adopt a new, simplified tax code that will increase compliance, produce more revenue, and reduce opportunities for corruption. The new tax code should be based on a single rate for any given type of economic transaction. Imported materials, for example, should be taxed at one flat rate that includes all the valued added from arrival in the country to final consumers. The same should apply to labor rates and real-estate rental rates that are already set at 20 percent and at two months of the prevailing charges, respectively. Small businesses should be charged a yearly license fee that is not excessive and burdensome.

No one likes paying taxes, especially when one thinks that others are paying less than they should, or are not paying at all. Developing a tax code that is simple, fair, and transparent will build support for the government and provide the revenue required to satisfy public expectations of their elected officials.

LONG-TERM INITIATIVES

The distinction between short- and long-term initiatives is somewhat arbitrary, but most of the long-term initiatives presented here can be realized in two or three years. But even those initiatives take longer to achieve their full potential can be expected to show partial positive results in the short term.

14. Nurturing Cottage Industries

In the past Afghanistan had many cottage industries mainly offering services and products that were used within the country. Example of these industries include Istalef pottery making; silk cloth and handkerchiefs from Herat; Persian lambskin hats and coats from Kabul; calligraphy, shoes, and sandal making throughout South and East; and many other trades. Currently these industries are a mere shadow of their former selves. There are no structures, formal or informal, to rekindle them, and only a few of the master craftsmen are still alive to pass their knowledge on to younger generations.

A comprehensive initiative is needed to revive these industries and create jobs throughout the country, everywhere from large cities to smaller towns and villages. A two-pronged approach would include both training the next generation of craftsmen and creating domestic and foreign markets for their products.

To compete in global markets these resurrected industries must offer quality workmanship and products at an attractive price. Craftsmen must be trained in the latest design methods and must have access to top-quality raw materials. Government can help by offering grants and microcredit, as well as by offering loan guarantees to banks that provide credit to these nascent industries. Afghan embassies can also help promote them and bring foreign investment to the country.

15. Reviving the Jewelry Industry

Being a landlocked country, Afghanistan must pursue initiatives that promote industries that produce high-value, low-volume products such as jewelry. Afghanistan is blessed with abundant gemstones and all the other raw materials necessary to produce world-class jewelry. It is surely a great irony that a country that once produced so much beautiful jewelry is currently flooded with low-quality imports.

The Afghan government can revive the jewelry industry by implementing simple reforms that provide essential training and marketing support. Afghan jewelers will be competing with their counterparts in nearby countries that already have robust jewelry industries. For the Afghan jewelry industry to thrive, it must produce luxury goods that will appeal to the richest 1 percent of the world's population. Afghan jewelers must therefore be trained to meet or exceed industry standards for quality and workmanship. At the same time, they will need financing, tax exemptions for foreign investors, and marketing support to create a new global brand for quality jewelry from Afghanistan.

16. Power from Private Generators

Many thousands of small and large generators were imported into Afghanistan over the past 12 years. Most of these generators were used by the coalition forces and were left behind as foreign troops left the country in recent years. These generators, along with those owned by the private sector and the Afghan Security Forces, constitute a large and important source of power-generating capacity in Afghanistan today—and it is already in country, ready to go.

As an initial step toward the eventual privatization of the utility industry in Afghanistan, these private generators should be connected to the existing distribution network to provide backup or extra generating capacity during times of peak demand. Purchasing power from locally operated private generators will be by far more cost-effective than buying imported electricity (despite the current tax on imported diesel fuel) and will keep hard-earned foreign currency from leaving the country. In addition to creating numerous good jobs it will also help jump-start the development of an independent power grid all across Afghanistan.

17. Scholarships and a Culture of Learning

History is full of stories of the impact of new technologies on human progress throughout the ages. Keeping up with new technology is a must for any society to advance and prosper—in many cases it is necessary even to survive. In this context new technology means both hardware (tools, equipment, materials) as well as software (theoretical advances and processes, new standards, rules, and regulations, conceptual research) that have potential for future applications.

Over the past decade, many advanced countries have assisted Afghanistan through capacity building in a variety of fields. With few exceptions (Fulbright scholarships, for example) a great deal of this capacity building consisted of short seminars and trips abroad that had very small—if any—significant long-term impacts in Afghanistan. Far too many of the scholarships that were awarded did not take into account the country's needs, the attrition rate of participants in the programs, or their success upon their return home. At the same time, 30 years of war and social upheaval had all but devastated institutions of higher education and the learned professions in Afghanistan. Consequently, the need for scholarships and advanced training today is far greater than ever before.

In addition to learning specific academic and technical subjects, the next generation of Afghan scholars and professionals needs to learn not only how to use digital tools, electronic communications, and online sources of information but also the culture and work habits of workers in more advanced countries. The best way to promote such learning is through practical training, not just classroom teaching. Afghan students need greater exposure to the professional workplace to see how teamwork and collaboration solve problems and increase productivity. And after they return home they need to remain connected to professional associations and to have access to life-long training and career-development opportunities.

Afghanistan's ambassadors should be tasked with obtaining as many foreign scholarships and study-abroad opportunities as possible for qualified Afghan students, similar to the expectation that they will obtain foreign work visas.

18. Leather Tanning and Shoemaking

As an agricultural country, Afghanistan produces a large number of cattle and sheep. Many of these animals are slaughtered and consumed within the country, while also producing a large numbers of animal skins. Today, these animal skins are exported to nearby countries as a source of raw materials for their local tanning industries. The tanning industry is not unknown in Afghanistan but in the past it existed mostly as a cottage industry. The revival—and expansion—of this industry is another opportunity for the new government to create good and permanent jobs.

Ideally, this initiative would involve a public-private partnership in which the government provides free land, tax exemptions, and subsidized loan rates to investors in the tanning industry. The government can also create a demand for its products by revitalizing shoemaking and other leather-based manufactures through similar incentives. To create the initial—and highly significant—demand for the manufactured products, the government should also purchase footwear for the Afghan security forces from these new manufacturers, instead of importing hundreds of thousands of boots from other countries in the region.

The revitalization of these two industries closes the loop on an otherwise inefficient use of these valuable products. Any investment in this area will have a quick but long-term impact on the country's path to industrialization and greater employment.

19. Export of Semi-Finished Products

As a landlocked country Afghanistan is at a severe disadvantage with respect to the mass exportation of its mining products. The country's infrastructure is not suited to shipping large amounts of raw materials to distant customers, or even to the seaports of neighboring countries. Afghanistan must therefore resort to more innovative means of producing and delivering these products to their intended destinations. Since the development of a robust infrastructure capable of carrying raw materials is years away, the need for a more innovative approach to reduce the weight and volume—and to increase the value—of these raw materials becomes essential.

The Afghan government through its ministry of mines should encourage the mining industry to develop new and innovative ways to turn raw materials into semi-finished products whose added value would offset the cost of transporting them long distances overland. These initiatives should also contain provisions that provide additional employment for Afghan workers.

20. Natural Refrigeration for Food Warehousing

The geography and climate of Afghanistan lend themselves to a number potential economic opportunities. The tall mountains of Hindukush that bisect the country also provide naturally cooled air throughout the year. In most parts of Afghanistan, the temperature differences between higher and lower elevations are large enough to allow for properly constructed warehouses to keep food at refrigerated temperatures with little or no electrical power. These warehouses can be used to keep many farm products fresh for a longer period of time, moderate seasonal price fluctuations, and increase farmers' income during the harvest seasons.

Ideally this initiative would focus first on those areas that already have infrastructure such as roads and airport access. The mountains of Paghman, for example, are only 12 kilometers from Kabul and would be an excellent candidate for this initiative. The temperature difference between Kabul city and the higher elevations of Paghman can be as much 15-20 degrees Celsius during the day and even greater at night. With the farmlands of Wardak, Logar, and Kabul provinces within striking distance, naturally cooled warehouses would be an ideal way to keep apples, onions, potatoes, and many other farm products in peak condition for an extended period of time.

As with many of the other reform initiatives proposed in this paper, the role of the government is to provide modest tax incentives, low interest rates, and land grants or leases. Private businesses would build and maintain the warehouses and negotiate the terms and conditions of their services with the famers who use them.

CONCLUSION

Afghanistan today is at a crossroads. The withdrawal of most foreign military forces, and the election and inauguration of a new government, have created many opportunities for the Afghan people to move beyond the violence and underdevelopment of recent decades toward a future of greater prosperity and self-reliance. This paper discusses 20 transformational opportunities to create jobs and build a more open and inclusive society. These initiatives are not the only means available to the Afghan government and its foreign partners but they represent opportunities that could have the fastest and greatest impact on lowering unemployment in the country. These reforms also promote inclusivity and spread wealth throughout the society without regard to tribal, linguistic, or religious affiliations.

Fundamentally, the wealth of a nation is directly related to the resources it has at its disposal. These resources include not only to their physical manifestations such as population, natural resources, and geographic location, but also such nonphysical resources as its political institutions, rule of law, independent media, and others. Of all these factors, perhaps none is more important than the inclusion of the populace in the affairs of a nation. That is why creating jobs and reducing unemployment is critically important not only for the economic well-being of Afghanistan, but for its political and social well-being. That is why having a job and participating in public life makes citizens immune to the dead-end appeals of violent extremists. As the American president Abraham Lincoln said of those who died in the Civil War, we too may say of those who died in Afghanistan's struggle for freedom, that we will dedicate ourselves to their unfinished work so that "Government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."

The nature of unemployment and under-employment is the same across the globe. Its impact is well documented in both developed and developing nations. Countries with high rates of employment invariably enjoy stability and prosperity. Economic growth, wealth creation, and health and longevity are just some of the desirable by-products of high employment rates. Conversely, high unemployment rates are the source of warfare, instability, and human misery. Although the initiatives presented in this paper are all discussed with reference to Afghanistan, they can easily be applied in or adapted to other third-world countries suffering from similar

problems. Ideally, the conversation started by this study will grow into a global conversation about improving employment, prosperity, and the quality of life.

The author invites readers to comment on or respond to this paper by writing to azimi@technologistsinc.com.

About the Author

Sayed Aziz Azimi is founder and chief executive officer of Technologists, Inc. (Ti), an international engineering and management consulting firm that works primarily in developing countries to build infrastructure, improve governance, and increase human capacity. Since 2004 Mr. Azimi has directed Ti's operations in all parts of the Afghanistan, where the company has completed more than 70 major projects for public- and private-sector clients. The initiatives presented in this paper are based on Mr. Azimi's extensive travels, research, and work experiences in a career spanning more than 35 years, plus his conversations with foreign donors, public officials, NGO professionals, and business leaders involved in rebuilding Afghanistan.