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### Where to Start the Reform Process and Why We Choose to Ignore the Big Picture

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## **Where to Start the Reform Process and Why We Choose to Ignore the Big Picture**

In many developing countries, we devote too much attention to the details of reform and simply ignore the flaws in the big macro picture. We focus on the external façade and outward symptoms and refuse to deal with the root causes of the problem. It is very much like focusing on what kind of buttons to use for a suit, what color, what shape and what size, and making sure they are beautiful, stylish, polished buttons, while the suit itself is decaying, falling apart, out of shape and out of fashion. But still the main focus is on the buttons to be used. Multiple examples abound for how this happens in many spheres.

We may have lengthy discussions about the digitization of voting within national parliaments, while ignoring the fact that the parliamentarians did not come to office through truly free and fair elections, that the rate of participation in the election process that led to the election of the parliamentarians was very low, that opposition is not properly represented or given a fair chance, that even when a digital voting system is put in place, its utilization is dependent on the discretion of the Head of Parliament, or more seriously that many of the MPs do not understand their legislative role as needs be, that they should be representing their constituents and holding government accountable, not just rubber stamping laws and supporting autocratic regimes in whatever they do.

We allocate resources to the construction of new buildings for government organizations, or we spend lots of time and energy designing training programs for government executives, while choosing to ignore the deep-rooted problems of corruption, overstaffing, very low compensation, low efficiency and low morale with very little chance that those who received the training will be able to transfer the skills learnt, if any, to their workplaces later on.

In pre-university education, we may insist on introducing technology and allowing high school students to have their exams through using tablets. However, we fail to train teachers on how to teach while using the new technology, give them incentives to change their teaching methods, and a fair compensation that would enable them to meet their basic needs without resorting to enforcement of private tutoring on their students at school, or else fail them.

In the health sector, we spend a lot of valuable resources in assessing the phenomenon of stunting amongst school children, but simultaneously limit access to subsidized food items and do not create sufficient awareness amongst families about proper eating habits and values.

In Universities we introduce changes to the curricula, follow a credit hour system, seek accreditation of degrees, encourage international publishing of research, but do not devote similar effort to the overall context the universities are operating in, including the degree of freedom of expression allowed faculty and students alike which is a key prerequisite for creativity and innovation in research and a main building block for developing the capacity of the future generations of students who will shoulder the responsibility of building their nations in the future.

In Urban Planning, we build new suburb areas but do not invest in new public transportation means, so we end up recreating the same traffic congestions in the old districts. We demolish slum areas and move the inhabitants to better housing facilities, but ignore studying their earlier life styles and the sociological context they belong to, like how and where they earn a living, where they send their kids to school, and how they manage daycare for their children amongst neighbors and extended family. We renovate pavements, paint borders, plant trees and flowers

because an important official will be passing by this route, but we fail to make sure there is a sustainable method for irrigating the plants, and so they wilt and shrivel in less than a week.

In the media sector, time and money may be spent on the setup of studios in government owned T.V. channels, anchor persons may be admonished about how to act and look professional, but all these efforts disappear in thin air and do not result in increased viewership, because the channel lacks credibility. Viewers know that since it is a government owned channel, it is biased to the government's view points, so they switch to other more diverse, if not necessarily, reliable sources.

Why does this happen? I think the only explanation I have is that it is easier and much less costly on the short run to react to the immediate problems, to introduce facelifts to the city and its services, rather than deal with the root causes. A thriving nation needs well established institutions, rule of law, a good system of checks and balances and simply a good governance system to envelop it all. If the emphasis on reform does not cover the macro level and is limited to the bits and pieces, here and there, very little actual development will be realized.