**Challenges in a more uncertain world**

[Atle Hetland](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/atle-hetland)

June 01, 2023

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns)

We live in a time when most news is negative and worrying. In today’s article, I shall draw attention to some important issues that apply internationally, but also locally. As issues may be difficult, it is also necessary to keep a positive mindset because we must always believe that we can influence the future in a better direction. It is never futile what we think and do, although sometimes it will only be our children that can see the results. Let me discuss a few areas, where we need to direct our attention and focus our work—in a positive spirit.

Structurally, there is growing inequality between rich and poor, within and between countries and groups. Little is done to stop and reverse this unfortunate development in spite of most thinkers and politicians agreeing that more equality is best for high productivity, indeed also avoiding unrest and crime. The gap between the Global North and the Global South must be reduced, as well as the very deep inequalities within many countries. Also, in the West, many people who live on pensions and other government support, including lowly-paid single mothers, require increases in support and allowances to stay above the poverty line. In the last well over one year, there has been high inflation and price increases, caused to a great extent by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, reduced energy supplies from Russia to Europe, and other reasons. Inflation has affected all countries in the world, making life very difficult for many people, especially poor people with large families, but also ordinary middle-class families.

[Toolkits distributed among job project beneficiaries](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Jul-2023/toolkits-distributed-among-job-project-beneficiaries)

In many countries, there is a growing gap between people who have skills, expertise and employment, on the one hand, and those who do not reach the requirements of the working life. In most countries in the West, unemployment benefits are often meagre and those who are not employed are outside mainstream society. Many are refugees and other migrants. In some countries, a large percentage may end up outside mainstream society—without it being their own fault. They may have grown up with a single parent who is a drug addict, alcoholic, or outside mainstream society for other reasons; some are immigrants. The children will then have greater difficulties than others to do well at school and enter mainstream society. It must be an aim, with concrete practical policies, to include every person in the working life and mainstream society, irrespective of school performance and other background factors. Those who are handicapped must also be included with part-time work or other activities so that they, too, can be better included in mainstream society.

[Kashmiris reiterate resolve to destine with Pakistan](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Jul-2023/kashmiris-reiterate-resolve-to-destine-with-pakistan)

Pollution, environmental and climate change issues are not improving as fast as needed. It is also argued that water shortages, both clean water and water for irrigation, as a part of global warming, will affect many countries sooner that admitted earlier, including Pakistan. Reparation support from the West’s pollution as part of its industrialisation will help but action must be taken soonest. It was positive that the COP27 climate change summit in Egypt in November 2022 agreed on the need for such support to developing countries, to begin being effectuated in a year, it was said. But let us see when and how this compensation will begin. If it will be similar to the general development aid, it is not going to be very impressive, neither as for amount nor actual results. On that note, rich countries—and multinational companies—ought to increase their development aid manifold and find new and better ways of implementation with better results.

In many countries, both established democracies and emerging democracies, such as Pakistan, there is reason to worry as for democratic improvements. Some countries relapse and become more authoritarian in certain sectors or overall. Under the circumstances, it is important that politicians cooperate, or at least talk together in cordial language.

[China to facilitate young talents to collaborate in TCM sector](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Jul-2023/china-to-facilitate-young-talents-to-collaborate-in-tcm-sector)

In the West, there are worries about the decreasing number of members in political parties and other political and civil society organizations and groups. In a time when new information and communication technologies are easily available to all, there is room and a need for political parties to take advantage of the new situation. At the same time, we also know that people must have direct face-to-face meetings in order to discuss complicated issues and to get to know colleagues. Internet, social media and mobile phones are useful instruments, but we must also have real, ‘old-fashioned’ meetings.

In education, we are at a crossroads, where the role of modern technologies, including AI, distance education, e-learning and more will change the provision of education dramatically. Also, we can raise questions about how much children need to memorize and learn from traditional school curricula, and how much time they should spend at school. In our time, and the decades ahead, I believe schools should place less emphasis on making students memorise pre-decided curricula, except for certain basic skills in the 3Rs, reading, writing and arithmetic, and one or two foreign languages. Instead, institutional education should focus on skills in how to learn, search for and evaluate information, and put it together in logical and useful formats. I believe that the call for more knowledge and exams, which we for several decades have heard from many politicians, especially on the conservative side, is indeed outdated. At the same time, we should also acknowledge that the world has never had as many well-educated people as today.

[President for strengthening economic ties with Jordan](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Jul-2023/president-for-strengthening-economic-ties-with-jordan)

The most important role of the school in future is to give support and guidance to the individual student and groups of students. Students should learn to learn, be encouraged in what they do, and be advised on what more they can explore; some will be done in classes and groups, and other things individually. It will be essential that the school in future caters for all students, bookish or not. In our time, a large percentage of students, sometimes the majority, find school a burden, especially boys. It is not always the joyful place it should be, and that is a requirement when it is compulsory to attend school. I believe basic education should be compulsory, and secondary open for all, but then it must be joyful for all students, otherwise it is an abuse against those who cannot fit in. Also, schools must help students to live, as children, adults and in old age, also knowing that most of us will face psychological, social, economic and other challenges. It is more important to teach children skills and competencies to master life and be able to look after themselves and others, rather than emphasizing other curricula that may soon be outdated anyway.

[13,500 cops to be deployed in Peshawar for Moharram security](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Jul-2023/13-500-cops-to-be-deployed-in-peshawar-for-moharram-security)

In almost all countries, defence expenses have increased in recent years, indeed in Western European countries after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Even if the war ends soon, which we can only pray for, there will be major reconstruction costs to rebuild all the destruction that has taken place and to help rebuild lives and livelihoods in Ukraine and Russia. It is important that a new chapter in peace and cooperation between Russia and Europe, East and West, begin soonest. China must indeed be included. The huge increases in defence expenses in the NATO countries should be questioned much more than it is. If increases are made, they should mainly be for civilian peace creation and dialogue. It is worrying that the peace movements in the West and beyond seem not to be very active today. In our time and in future, we must focus on peace and cooperation in and among all countries in Europe and worldwide.