



Afghanistan civil society position paper on Covid pandemic and vaccination **(2022)**

EXECUTVE SUMMARY

This position paper on Covid pandemic and vaccination was developed by GCAP Afghanistan. In this paper the overall situation of the Covid pandemic and vaccination in the country has been covered. The very first confirmed case in Afghanistan was confirmed on 24th February 2020 while in 23th March 2020 the first death case was confirmed in Afghanistan. Following the initial case, numbers rose in March 2020 due to the return of Afghans from Iran, which had a high caseload. The Government responded early with school closures and lockdown measures. A Ministry of Public Health survey in August 2020 estimated that one-third of the population had contracted COVID-19. Overtime, 7783 death cases are registered in Afghanistan with a total of overall 194614 Covid19 registered cases.. The vaccine doses administered in the country till date is 11,588,893 out of which only 30% of the marginalized communities covered. However, more than 60% of the vaccinated marginalized community didn't opt to take the second dose of the vaccine. AstraZeneca Vaccine, Sinopharm Vaccine and Johnson and Johnson vaccine were arrived in Afghanistan in different phases of the pandemic. Internally displaced people, children with disabilities and street workers are among the most marginalized affected by the impact of Covid19. The vaccination priority was given to Patients, doctors and armed forces of Afghanistan. The vaccines were then easily available for groups of people in Afghanistan in July 2021. For the time being, the vaccine is available in all the health facilities of Afghanistan for all the groups of people free of cost, however, 70% of the communities reported unavailability of vaccine for the most marginalized communities at the pandemic peak. 97% of women in the marginalized community reported an increase in violence against them during the pandemic. The most affected sector during the pandemic is the education sector where number of student failed to attempt their school for more than a year.



FULL PAPER

Objective: Short analytical paper on vaccination and COVID situation, particularly from the angle of exclusion/inclusion of the most marginalized groups. This will go as input to the formulation of the National Vaccination Policy and for awareness raising.

- **Covid-19 situation in Afghanistan:**

Afghanistan is the country that was affected by coronavirus like other countries some provinces of Afghanistan were more affected by the Coronavirus, Kabul remains the most affected part of the country in terms of confirmed cases. However, due to the limited public health resources and testing capacity, as well as the absence of a national death register, confirmed cases and deaths from COVID-19 are likely to be under-reported in the country. Hospitals and clinics continue to report challenges in maintaining or expanding their facilities' capacity to treat patients with COVID-19, whilst also maintaining essential health services. As WHO noted, when health systems like Afghanistan are overwhelmed, deaths both as a direct result of the outbreak and resulting from other preventable and treatable conditions increase dramatically.

The ministry of Afghanistan's public health department played a vital role in controlling the different waves of covid-19 in Afghanistan. However, for the first and second waves in 2020 and 2021 they failed to control the pandemic and also to use the resources at its best level. There was a lot of constraints and risen question in spending the resources and funds arriving to Afghanistan for the controlling the pandemic and reaching the most marginalized communities in country. It is reported that there has been a misuse of the resources and funds throughout the process including testing, and treatment as the process was only in place in the capital and well known provinces of the country while the most marginalized communities were left behind for many months. However the government of Afghanistan has never agreed. Afghanistan has witnessed an improvement of preparedness for the third and forth waves of covid-19 due to the number of active health centers and hospitals in almost all of the provinces in Afghanistan. From the 3rd January 2020 to the present, a total of 194,614 confirmed cases has been recorded with 7,783 deaths cases. As of 3 September 2022, a total of 11,588,893 vaccine doses have been administered, out of which only 30% of the total are among marginalized communities.

The confirmed Covid-19 cases has been decreased by a large extent comparing to the year 2021 where the pandemic was at its peak level. The reason behind the decrease in the confirmed cases can be listed as of the easy availability of vaccine, the awareness raising for precautions and vaccination of a large number of people. Considering the low population of



Afghanistan, the Covid-19 could

be controlled much earlier than today, but due to the lack a systematic health interventions, low level of awareness and lack of vaccine availability at first and second year of the pandemic it didn't happened and the pandemic took too many lives of marginalized communities during 2020 and 2021 throughout Afghanistan.

In just few month of Covid-19 pandemic, the positive and death cases of marginalized people of Afghanistan increased tremendously due to lack of health facilities and awareness. The death rate has also risen to a large extent due to the movement of people and not considering quarantine for providing their daily wages to afford food. However, some of the provinces were quarantined at the time of the pandemic but the marginalised people did not have any other choice rather than continue working on the street to bring food on their table risking their lives. In an interview one of the street workers in one of the Afghanistan's provinces stated that, if I don't work my family will die of hunger first as an answer to question why is not taking covid-19 seriously. Marginalised people also effected due to the lack of vaccine availability for them, after 8 months of vaccine availability in the country, marginalised people could get vaccinated by travelling to the capital of Afghanistan from different provinces.

Testing and treating process at the beginning of the pandemic was one the main reason for Covid-19 to be separated and people infection to a large extent. In the year 2020 -2021 only one hospital was operating, testing and treating covid-19 patients with number of challenges.

At the beginning, no private hospitals were allowed to test and treat the covid-19 patients as the Afghanistan government for some reason didn't allow them to do so. Challenges were recognizable at the only hospital which were considered to work for covid-19 patients in Kabul. Lack of proper testing and treatment system, lack of patient's bed, lack of enough oxygen balloons for patients and a long line of marginalized patients waiting for their turn to get a chance to take Covid-19 test, were the most challenging aspects in the hospital. The treatment was not taken in place in standards and every doctor was afraid of risking their lives for Covid-19 patients because of the low precautions being in placed for the doctors. The situation got slightly under control after the government allowed private hospital to operate and start working on testing and treating the covid-19 patients only in the capital. However, the scenario for the most marginalized communities were same as they couldn't afford paying a huge amount of cash for testing and treatment, they had continue waiting for their turn to get tested in the government hospitals. By this time, many covid-19 hospital and health



facilities



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were



constructed in different

provinces of Afghanistan. However the situation for marginalised communities were still tough as they could not get hospitalised for their treatment easily as a matter of fact that powerful and rich people were given priorities.

The pandemic has impacted people's livelihood and caused increase in the poverty rate throughout the country. After the government of Afghanistan decided to quarantine the country for the sake of controlling the Covid-19 pandemic, the livelihood of people has changed and the rate poverty increased. Over 72% of people in Afghanistan are earning and spending on daily basis. After the quarantine, millions of people lost their jobs and millions weren't be able to feed their families 3 times a day.

- **Vaccination situation:**

The first batch of COVID-19 vaccination doses through the COVAX facility arrived in Afghanistan on 8th March, 2020 and the country has now (2022) received 11,588,893 doses of the vaccine – 468,000 from the COVAX facility and 500,000 directly from the government of India in 2022 including, AstraZeneca Vaccine, Sino pharm Vaccine and Johnson and Johnson vaccine

However, vaccine rollout were much slower in countries like Afghanistan than other countries due to people beliefs, weak health system, and the people awareness. Marginalized communities including the internally displaced families, returnees, and people living in remote areas being particularly difficult to reach, and there is an urgent and continuing need for support to get. Conflict, natural disasters, and extreme weather have continued to affect and displace thousands across the country, compounding pre-existing issues faced by these families and the communities they settle in, and leaving them more vulnerable to serious consequences from COVID-19. Harsh conditions continue to cause suffering for families in inadequate shelter, and millions are struggling to get by amid soaring poverty driven by the economic shock of COVID-19.

The current political and security uncertainties have created serious hurdles to Afghanistan's economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis causing poverty to increase in it's never before record. A slower pace of recovery means higher unemployment, lower government revenues, and – ultimately – more difficult living conditions for Afghans. Afghanistan received Covid-19 vaccine doses shipped via the COVAX facility, a partnership between CEPI, GAVI, UNICEF, and

WHO. This is a historic step toward ensuring equitable distribution of Covid-19 vaccines globally. The Afghan government equitable distributed the Covid-19 Vaccine to all provinces



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districts
considering the facilities

available with the help of NGOs and NNGOs. However, there still many problem in distributing the vaccine throughout the country especially in the remote areas and marginalized communities.

Since July 2021 the United States, China, and India have shared a safe and effective Covid-19 vaccine for Afghanistan – free of cost through the government of Afghanistan. The vaccine was distributed to all the health facilities of the capital and the remote areas free of cost. The better approach was taken by the government in the year 2022 was to make sure the vaccines are available for everyone easily, and for the same sake, the vaccines were distributed to the masks in many areas of the capital and provinces of Afghanistan. After few months of the intervention, the government had to withdraw the decision due to low registered of peoples getting vaccinated to avoid unnecessary expenses. The vaccines were distributed throughout Afghanistan free of cost by all means. After normalization of the pandemic to some extent and easy availability of vaccine, no one has excluded from taken covid-19 vaccine including marginalized group. **However, the situation was different at the beginning of the pandemic and taken vaccine for marginalized group was not easy at all.** The marginalized group had to wait for their turn's months to get vaccinated due to the high demand of vaccine during the first and second waves of the pandemic.

Due to the media propaganda and some religious beliefs, the **hesitancy by people was high**, a huge number of people especially in the remote area living, people didn't want to get vaccinated. Negative rumors, lack of awareness and unavailability of easy vaccine were the causes people hesitate to get vaccinated.

People in different provinces of Afghanistan were trying to find a local way of Covid-19 treatment which caused another problem in the already existing problems of the country related to covid-19. Number of people lost their lives due to opting local level Covid-19 treatment. There are still people throughout Afghanistan who hesitate to take the vaccination as per the number of vaccine doses administered. In total around 30% of people in Afghanistan have taken the covid-19 vaccine which is not a good enough percentage considering the fact that the vaccine is easily available in the country. **The government aim and the policy was to vaccinate more than 80% of people in Afghanistan till mid-2022.** One of the main reasons for missing the target was the recent changes in the government of Afghanistan which again left people with shock and added to their social and economic problems which to some extend they have forgotten about covid-19 at all.



- **Findings of the survey by GCAP Afghanistan in 2022, suitably to show the situation of the marginalized communities**

Afghanistan has experienced protracted crises for 35 years and is also prone to natural disasters, which hamper poverty reduction and development. The lack of direct government control in many areas poses challenges in the provision of services, implementation of projects, data collection and monitoring. At the time of writing over 18 million people are classed as being in need of support, of which 5.1 million are children. In the past 3 years, the Government, with the support of development partners and civil society organizations, implemented number of Covid-19 intervention project to support people on awareness of covid-19 pandemic and prevention. GCAP Afghanistan conducted a rapid assessment of the effects of Covid-19 on situation of the marginalized communities across 9 provinces of Afghanistan and the responses of individual people to this pandemic. The survey shows the least improvement in the situation of the marginalized communities in the country. Over 70% of the marginalized communities are reported not taken the covid-90 vaccination when the pandemic was experienced at its peak.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing health, well-being and protection issues for the marginalized communities in Afghanistan. Women in the marginalized communities are likely to be badly affected by the Covid-19. Sanayee Development Organisation (SDO) estimates that the proportion of girls married before they are 19 will increase above the current 57 per cent as families try to cope with the effects of the virus, such as lower or loss of household income. Girls also face an increased risk of violence in the home and according to the survey 97% of women in the marginalized communities said violence had increased since the start of the pandemic.

The education sector mostly in the marginalized communities faces clear challenges in mitigating the impact of Covid-19. The Government already has a challenge in adequately and equitably providing learning opportunities to marginalized communities due to a lack of resources within households, an inability to deliver learning resources to children at home. The lack of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities across schools hampers their ability to follow the Ministry of Public Health guidelines for covid-19 prevention.

- **Why free and universal vaccination is important**

For a country like Afghanistan, where more than 87% of the population suffers from poverty free and universal vaccination is vital. In the most provinces of Afghanistan, the marginalized communities suffers from poverty and they couldn't follow covid-19 precautions by staying



home to
covid-19



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prevent the

virus. According to a survey by GCAP Afghanistan, 56 people out of 74 people stated that if they follow quarantine, their family will die from hunger first. It is also reported that the number of street workers in the marginalized community can't afford leaving their jobs for the sake of getting vaccinated even if the vaccination cost them 2 to 3 hours of their time. It is vital for vaccination to be free and also easily available for all the people around the world especially for the least developed countries like Afghanistan where the people's priority is to feed their families to avoid losing them as a result of poverty. No one can afford paying for vaccination and even if they could, they won't pay for the vaccination considering the priorities they have for their families.

- **key demands/recommendations:**

- Expand vaccination process to more remote areas and investigate how it can be expanded to support most marginalized communities
- Mobilize communities to support vaccination
- Reduce dependence on donor-funded, NGO implemented covid-19 project
- Increase the awareness of the virus
- Ensure community leaders are trained on health and safety measures as well as provided with training to support vaccination, particularly for those most excluded.
- Free and universal vaccination
- TRIPS Waiver at the WTO of the vaccines, test and treatment
- Priority to the most marginalized communities
- A national policy for free and universal vaccination with marginalized people given priority in line of Leave No One Behind principle

Summery Sheet

The table below provides a snapshot of the pandemic information for Afghanistan.

HEADLINES	INDICATOR/QUESTION	INFORMATION
Covid-19 situation in Afghanistan	Date of first confirmed case	24 February 2020
	Date of first confirmed death	23 March 2020
	COVID-19 cases and deaths over time	7,783
	COVID-19 Registered cases	194,614
	total of vaccine doses have been administered	11,588,893
	Percentage of Marginalized communities vaccinated	30%
	Details about the pandemic and Government responses and supports	Following the initial case, numbers rose in March 2020 due to the return of Afghans from Iran, which had a high caseload. The Government responded early with school closures and lockdown measures. A Ministry of Public Health survey in August 2020 estimated that one-third of the population had contracted COVID-19.
Vaccination situation	1st Batch of COVID-19 arrived in	COVAX, on 5 th March 2021
	Priority given	Patients, doctors armed forces of Afghanistan
	Easy availability of vaccine for ordinary and marginalized communities	July 2021
	Dosage	More than 60% of marginalized communities didn't opt to take the second dose of vaccination
	Current situation	Vaccine is available all over Afghanistan in every health facilities
Findings of the survey suitably to show the situation of the marginalized communities	Marginalized group affected by the impact of COVID-19 at the most	Internally displaced people (IDP), children with disabilities street workers.
	Provinces surveyed	9 (Kabul, Sanmangan, Badakhshan, Saripul, Herat, Balkh, Takhar, Pakia, Qandahar)
	% of communities reported Unavailability of vaccine for marginalized communities at the pandemic peak	70%
	% of women reported increase in violence	97%
	The most effected sector reported	Education
Why free and universal vaccination is important	Reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More than 87% of the population suffers from poverty - Marginalized communities cannot pay for vaccination - Free vaccination is the only hope for most marginalized communities
Key demands/recommendations:		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand vaccination process to more remote areas and investigate how it can be expanded to support most marginalized communities Mobilize communities to support vaccination Reduce dependence on donor-funded, NGO implemented covid-19 project Increase the awareness of the virus Ensure community leaders are trained on health and safety measures as well as Free and universal vaccination TRIPS Waiver