



Socio-Economic Research and Applications (SERAP) & Action for Development

AFGHANISTAN BULLETIN



This newsletter aims to highlight urgent development challenges in Afghanistan and collaborate with development practitioners, economists, scientists and civil society representatives to overcome those by providing state of art technical knowledge and project development expertise by SERAP and AfD.

The first COVID-19 case in Afghanistan was identified on 22 February 2020 in Herat City, bordering Iran, in an Afghan returnee from Iran. As of May 31, 2020, an estimated 16,000+ confirmed cases and 270 deaths are officially recorded in Afghanistan. Based on the MoPH projections, these recent trends show that the country is heading towards medium and high transmission of the disease scenarios that are respectively 110,000 and 190,000 infected people.

The effects of the pandemic in Afghanistan, like elsewhere, will not be confined to the health sector. There are bound to be severe economic and social effects from the slowdown of the world economy as well as global and regional trade. The economic burden of COVID-19 would be much higher in Afghanistan than in other countries due to the fragile security situation and low capacity of equipment and personnel in the health centers. COVID-19 comes to an already fragile economy with high levels of poverty, serious threats to security and safety, and an unclear political future.

Data & Statistics

As of July 5, 2020...

*As of July 5

Source: ARTF, WB

Total Population: 37.6 Million

↑ **32,951**

Confirmed Cases

↑ **88**

Cases per
100k capita

44%

Test-Positivity
Rate

-5.5%

Real GDP 2020
Projected Change*

[Afghanistan faces humanitarian disaster as COVID-19 spreads undetected, warns the IRC \(June 1\)](#)

In the month of May alone, the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 grew by 684%, and experts estimate that the number severely underestimates the number of cases in the country. The Afghanistan Ministry of Health reported that they are unable to test nearly 90% of samples received due to a lack of testing capacity.

National response to COVID-19

In a recent interview with the Atlantic Council, President Ashraf Ghani stated that his government envisions five phases in managing the Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak and that the country is now in the phase 3: Adversity. He also stated that the economic consequence of the outbreak means that 88 – 90 % of the Afghan population requires food assistance and medical attention. Government authorities explain these phases in the following sense. Awareness – as in countering dismissal of the impending catastrophe by certain elements among general public and overcoming regressive social narratives; Diffusion – as in containing the spread of the virus by instituting lockdown, regulating social gatherings, imposing movement restrictions, and maintaining uninterrupted food supply; Adversity – as in minimizing fatalities and severe hunger at the peak of the crises, Relief – convalescing and restoring normalcy across the country, and Recovery – as in regaining lost aptitudes and resources of the country.

Since the first case in February, the central government has been working to stabilize market prices by protecting food supply into the country and reopening borders for supplies. In March, the government announced restriction on movements and social distancing regulations which was followed by a nation-wide lockdown. The Ministry of Public

Health assigned a number of state-owned hospitals across the country as intensive care units and COVID-19 testing centers. In April, the government opened national food reserves for public use and experimented with distribution of wheat in West Kabul. In May, the government started a national program to fight hunger that led to distribution of over 100 million units of bread through local bakeries across the country. In the meantime, charity foundations, celebrities, private sector firms and NGOs started distributing food and medical supplies across the country. In June, the Ministry of Public Health reported shortage of testing kits and treatment capacity at state-owned health centers. MoPH instructed private hospitals and clinics across the country to start diagnosing and treating COVID-19 absent tests and based on clinical symptoms and approved plasma transfusion for therapy in critical patients. MoPH estimates that that infection will peak at some point in mid-July.

On June 6, the government announced that it was extending the nationwide lockdown for three more months, issuing new health guidelines for citizens to follow. According to the new guidelines, people must wear a face mask in public places at all times, maintain a 2-metre physical distance, avoid gatherings of more than 10 people, disinfect all workplaces, and ensure older people stay at home. Additionally, all schools and educational centres, hotels, parks, sports complexes and other public places will remain closed for three months since the announcement. Public transport facilities, such as buses, carrying more than four passengers will not be allowed to travel. Despite the announcement, implementation of these measures continue to differ across provinces, with provincial governments having been given the authority to decide on and implement their own lockdowns. While a number of provinces have already begun easing their lockdowns formally or informally, other provinces instead reinstated a full lockdown from the end of May as the number of infections began increasing.

[Preliminary Stakeholder Engagement Plan: Afghanistan COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project \(March 13\)](#)

MoPH

The SEP developed by Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health outlines a three-step program focusing on improvement in communication and behavior. By properly communicating the current state of COVID-19 in the country and future actions to be taken, the program aims to increase trust between project teams and the public to most effectively overcome the COVID-19 crisis. Team members will work on a national and local level to improve social distancing behaviors and preventative practices.

[Afghanistan COVID-19 Impact: Short Term Disruptions and Policy Considerations \(April 15\)](#)

UNDP Afghanistan

Afghanistan faces multiple challenges in its response to COVID-19 as a result of ongoing conflict and the majority of its population living below the poverty line. Policies should focus on the short-term goals of reducing the spread of the virus, seeking additional funding and financial aid, and implementing other social protection measures. It is recommended that the government grant a social pension for the elderly to assist low-income families best. The UNDP will increase its support for Afghanistan and the pandemic.



[Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2018-2021 \(June 2020 Revision\)](#)

OCHA

The Humanitarian Country Team and its partners updated the Humanitarian Response Plan to take into account the effect of COVID-19 on Afghanistan's population and development. The disease created new issues and greatly exacerbated old ones. The HRP now requests US\$1.1 billion to be used to assist 11.1 million people. Even with this increase in funding, the HRP will be unable to help all of the 35M people in need of a social safety net, and other international organizations must step in to help. The top three areas of spending are respectively, Food Security and Agriculture (370.3M), Health (171.1M), and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (152.2M).

Community response to COVID-19



[Waiving Rent and Making Masks, Afghans Meet Coronavirus with Kindness \(March 31\)](#)

Mujib Mashal, Asadullah Timory, and Najim Rahim

Local communities across Afghanistan are coming together to support their neighbors during the COVID-19 crisis. Landlords are waiving rent, various groups are holding fundraisers and food drives, and shopkeepers are distributing free disinfectant and homemade facemasks.



[Afghanistan Uses Green Stimulus to Hire Lockdown Jobless, Boost Kabul's Water Supply \(June 25\)](#)

Sayed Hassib

The Afghan government is employing over 40,000 workers who lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 crisis to dig rainwater trenches and improve Kabul's groundwater supplies. The Kabul water project plans to run for at least one year as it continues to simultaneously tackle both job loss and water shortages.



[In Afghanistan, Health Care Workers Fight Misinformation to Curb COVID-19 \(May 28\)](#)

World Bank

Health specialists from the government program Targeting the Ultra Poor (TUP) are working with the community leaders of villages in three districts across the Nangarhar province. The specialists teach villagers the proper safety measures to use and warn against taking unprescribed antibiotics. The program has already improved the wellbeing of poor households in 6 other provinces.



[With Bike Chains and Car Parts, Afghan Girls Build Ventilators \(June 4\)](#)

Stefanie Glinski

A team of teenage girls in Kabul have created makeshift ventilators using only car and motorcycle parts and machine sensors. Afghanistan is currently facing a shortage of PPE and only has about 480 standard ventilators available. The team's device cannot permanently replace medical-grade ventilators but can count and control the number of breaths and amount of oxygen entering a patient's body.



[Street Snacks to Sanitiser: the Afghan Women Fighting Coronavirus in Kabul \(June 10\)](#)

Stefanie Glinski

When the coronavirus arrived in Afghanistan, Kabul's food carts were unable to continue business as usual. Instead, over 100 female food cart drivers have turned their carts into disinfection units. The carts travel around the city disinfecting cars, shops, and door handles. The women also hand out free PPE, gloves and hand sanitizer. The project was started by the NGO Ebtakar, funded by the UN, and implemented by the government of Afghanistan.



[Afghan Students in Kazakhstan Take Up Online Learning as COVID-19 Shuts Universities \(May 22\)](#)

UNDP Kazakhstan

Afghan women studying at the top universities in Kazakhstan as part of an EU-funded education initiative have switched over to online learning during the pandemic. The ALMA university allocated study rooms for students to learn, and some teachers report an increase in focus and discipline. The UNDP is currently recruiting a new group of students to join the program next year.

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