

SUPPORTING AT-RISK COMMUNITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On October 22th, 2020, Asia Culture and Art Organization and the UNDP Kabul Office held a webinar with medical professionals to discuss supporting at-risk communities during the Covid-19 pandemic. Panelists discussed the future and what it contains, what we need to do now to create healthier communities, and what role the United Nations can play.

While we all have suffered during the Covid-19 pandemic, some of us have multiple hardships. It is essential to know how different populations have been affected so that organizations can prioritize supporting them.

The webinar is part of a series of global consultations that the United Nation's Secretary-General has launched for its 75th anniversary. This consultation will continue until the end of 2020.

We thank the following distinguished panelists for their participation in the webinar and their unique insights:

1. Abdul Hadi Saleh, Technical Officer, the Afghan Red Crescent Society
2. Mahfuzollah Sultani, Manager, Forensic Medicine, Badakhshan province
3. Dr. Rohullah Mohammadi, Dentist, Emam-e-Zaman Clinic
4. Naim Farzad, microbiology graduate
5. Mahdavi Joya, Professor, Kabul Medical University
6. Hussain Sultanfar, Eye Specialist at the Kabul Noor Eye Hospital
7. Ali Khan Ehsani, Pediatric General Surgeon at the Herat Regional Medical Center
8. Ahmad Ali Afzali, Professor at the Kateb University
9. Dr. Sayed Bashir Hashimi, Assistant Professor Zawul University

The following is a summary of this discussion:

RECOVERING FROM THE PANDEMIC

The virus is new; the world lacks a strategy to combat the virus globally despite equipped laboratories. Because the disease is a global pandemic, global efforts are required to fight it. The international community needs a long-term, scientific, and well-thought plan to recover.

Further, different countries have adopted different strategies to fight this pandemic because of unequal access to equipment and knowledge. Some countries lack resources to procure basic hygiene and personal protective equipment, and livelihood substances to support self-isolation. The international community is advised to support poor-income countries to fight the pandemic.

The global community should prioritize better access to healthcare and increase people's awareness through social media. Investment to regain the trust of the public is also advised. Lack of confidence, embezzlement, and widespread corruption in the public sector results in ineffective response to the pandemic.



Further, countries and officials should have effective strategies/policies to respond to the needs of persons displaced by war and natural disasters. The MoPH should create groups to assess the internally displaced persons' health situation and identify presumed cases of Covid-19. Additionally, they should give them awareness and provide health and hygiene products.

COVID-19 AND THE VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Participants were skeptical about the accuracy of information about the current state of the pandemic in Afghanistan. The majority did not visit clinics, get tested, and obey quarantine measures. Lack of awareness and fake information has eroded trust in the health sector. Regardless, the prevalence rate is not as high as in neighboring countries.

Societies, in general, lacked technical and financial preparedness to fight the pandemic. Communities that were affected by war and natural disasters are vulnerable in terms of mental health. They have limited access to safe shelter, healthy nutrition, safe drinking water, and healthcare which makes them vulnerable to many diseases.

SITUATION IN 2045

Most of the participants were cautiously optimistic. Participants believed that as we go forward, public awareness and perception will increase. With the availability of antibiotics, resistance against diseases will increase. Technological advancement, access to these technologies, and increased proximity to health facilities will help people have a better life.

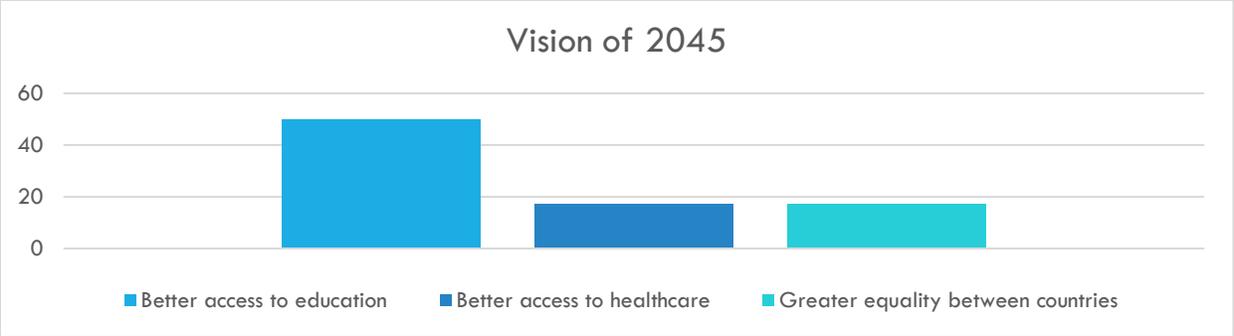
In peaceful countries with strong economies, the health situation will be good. Even if they fail to develop effective drugs, they will have the epidemics under control through proper awareness and educated generation.

In Afghanistan, the situation will depend on geopolitical and economic calculations. War has damaged the economic infrastructure, and Covid-19 has deteriorated the situation further. As a result of war, literacy, access to education, health awareness, and access to health facilities has been limited. It is necessary for infrastructure to be revived and the conflict to be ended.

VISION OF 2045, WHEN THE UN WILL TURN 100

Participants wanted better access to education, better access to healthcare, and greater equality between countries, in order of importance. They also wanted more employment opportunities.





CHALLENGES

The majority of participants identified lack of access to essential hygiene products, health information, poverty, and war as significant challenges that affected their vision of 2045. Corruption, climate change, and lack of honesty were additional challenges brought up by the panelists.

ROLE FOR GLOBAL COOPERATION AND THE UNITED NATIONS IN MANAGING THESE CHALLENGES

Participants believed that assistance between countries around the world is necessary. Right now, governments do not honestly collaborate. Countries that were good at managing the pandemic did not share information with other countries. They recommended the transmission of data between countries and inter-governmental cooperation for vaccine development.

The global community must be honest in saving the lives of people. Health issues should not be politicized. It is vital that the international community support low-income economies through financial aid, monitoring, and vaccines access in the future.

United Nations should promote peace and stability to facilitate access to healthcare/vaccines in warzones. World Health Organization should increase scientific awareness of the pandemic.

Countries should efficiently manage their stock of resources. Increased solidarity within countries is also required to fight this pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UN GENERAL SECRETARY:

Participants recommended that the United Nations General Secretary advocate for international cooperation, encouraging developed countries to help developing countries by sharing resources. One country can recover from epidemics only if their neighbors and other countries recover.

Independence of the United Nations was also emphasized.

International agencies should be created to combat disasters globally. Further, like the WHO, a single organization should be charged with disseminating accurate information about diseases, their transmission, prevention, and possible treatments, which will help fight fake news and propaganda. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, we saw different organizations advancing different theories, various claims about herd immunity or vaccines from Russia, Israel, South Korea, etc. People also died as a result of drug abuse in attempts to prevent or cure the pandemic. Lack of coordination will create confusion.

