

COVID-19 IMPACTS ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN AFGHANISTAN



August 2020 Kabul

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Afghan Landmine Survivors Organization (ALSO) was established in 2007 as a local NGO with the Ministry of Economy of Afghanistan by persons with and without disabilities to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities based on national laws and international treaties that are ratified by Afghanistan. ALSO, as a civil society organization, works to ensuring the full realization of the human rights, dignity and well-being of men, women, girls and boys with disabilities in Afghanistan.

The reason for establishment of ALSO was to promote and protect the human rights of persons with disabilities including survivors of landmine, cluster munitions, explosive remnants of war and affected families. Persons with disabilities were facing different type of challenges and barriers in Afghan community. The challenges and barriers were discrimination against persons with disabilities in education, healthcare, employment, recreation and participation in political processes. Persons with disabilities and survivors were and are the most vulnerable groups in the community whose voice to be heard by the authorities and their human rights have to be respected in policies, program and procedure to enable them to have equal access to all services in the community. ALSO has the commitment to follow its mission and to achieve its goal in collaboration with other civil society and stakeholders in Afghan community.

For more information, please visit our website: <http://www.afghanlandminesurvivors.org>

Acknowledgement

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has spread from China all over the world, including Afghanistan. To prevent the spread of the COVID-19, the Afghan Government applied a confinement that included the shutdown of all education and business institutions. The movements were restricted in the country. The Constitution and the UN CRPD obligate the government to provide health, livelihood protection under the COVID-19 crisis all over the country as well. Despite the restrictions and lockdown, the COVID-19 severely affected people's lives and livelihoods. More than 1,400 people died and more than 35,000 people were infected by the virus (as of end of August 2020). The infection continued spreading fast during the writing of this report. But the government was forced to ease the restriction due to economic pressures on the livelihoods and other mounting challenges on vulnerable people, including persons with disabilities and mine victims. The challenges increased in unemployment, loss of incomes, shortages of food, decreased access to health services and education.

To find out about the challenges of persons with disabilities, mine survivors, who make -- 13.9% of Afghan population (The Asia Foundation 2019) -- and the disability rights organizations during the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions, ALSO conducted this assessment with the participation of 42 mine survivors and persons with disabilities and nine disability rights organizations mainly in the provinces of Kabul, Balkh, Bamiyan, Parwan and Nangarhar – some of the most populated cities of the country. The findings of this report will help the disability rights organizations to better understand the challenges, needs and to better collaborate and coordinate their efforts in meeting the needs of persons with disabilities and mine survivors during COVID-19 outbreak and in future pandemic and emergencies, or crisis.

This report indicates that during the Covid 19 lockdown and restrictions, persons with disabilities and survivors experienced breaking challenges. In a nutshell the challenges included the followings:

- Disproportionate unemployment, shortages of daily food, psychological problems, increasing domestic violence and decreasing access to health services, including rehabilitation services.
- The physical rehabilitation centers like those that are provided with by the ICRC, had to reduce or limit their services in order to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and to help with keeping the required social distances and respect the hygienic needs.
- Persons with disabilities and mine survivors were not prioritized in the distribution of bread and other aids, provided by the government. Mine survivors and persons with disabilities had received limited access to the right information about the COVID-19 during the lockdown and confinement, especially women with visual impairments.
- Moreover, during the COVID-19 confinement, the disability rights organizations faced challenges in implementing their programs. They had to reduce their services by 25 to 75%. Some of them ran out of funds thus did not have the capacity and resources to reach out to persons with disabilities, especially those living in rural and remote areas.
- In addition, there was no appropriate collaboration and coordination between the disability rights organizations themselves and the government agencies in their response to the COVID-19 with regards to ensuring persons with disabilities get the right support.

Recommendations

On the basis of this report and our disability rights experts' experiences, we are providing the following recommendations to the government of Afghanistan as well as to other stakeholders in disability rights, health, disaster management and others.

1. The government should provide timely livelihood support to all persons with disabilities including mine survivors to reduce the most immediate impact of the COVID-19 among them.
2. The government must ensure providing accessible information on the COVID-19 pandemic to all persons with disabilities including through sign language, brail, and other accessible means.
3. The Ministry of Public Health should give priority to persons with disabilities including mine survivors in getting required health services during and after the pandemic.
4. The Ministry of Public Health should provide peer counseling to mine survivors and persons with disabilities to reduce the increasing psychological problems including domestic violence.
5. The disability rights organizations should have collaboration and coordination mechanism setup for the COVID-19 pandemic and other emergency incidence.
6. The disability rights organizations should have close collaboration and coordination with government to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and mine survivors.
7. The international donors and the United Nations agencies should consider allocating specific funds to local disability rights organizations to support the mine survivors and persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic and other humanitarian and natural disasters.
8. The government should give priority to persons with disabilities and mine survivors in vaccination process, if it becomes available in Afghanistan.
9. The National Disaster Management Authority of Afghanistan should include the special needs of persons with disabilities into its policies and programed, especially in its preparedness and mitigation plans.

Introduction

Chapter One

Since the COVID-19 outbreak in December 2019 in China, more than 25 million people have been infected and more than eight hundred thousand people worldwide have died as a result of the virus (the number is increasing daily). The virus is still spreading and taking lives around the globe. The pandemic almost paralyzed the economy of the world and posed great risk health risk to people.

To save the lives of the people, the governments around the world took preventive measures against the spread of the virus. This includes the Afghan government. Schools, companies, markets and borders were closed by the authorities. People stayed at homes, but the virus was making its health, social, and economic damages on each of us. The measures taken by some governments have been successful in certain countries, but not all of them. The economic growth of the countries slowed down, peoples lost their jobs, many businesses closed down, impacting the most vulnerable groups, especially persons with disabilities.

Protecting people, especially persons with disabilities, providing health services, information and facilities for vulnerable people are the obligation of the governments in situation of risk and disasters, such as diseases, flooding and conflicts. Regarding persons with disabilities, the Afghan Constitution and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) specified the responsibilities of the government to protect the Afghan civilians, including persons with disabilities. The Article 52 of the Constitution says, “The state shall provide free preventative healthcare and treatment of diseases as well as medical facilities to all citizens in accordance with the provisions [of] the law.” (⋯) Also, Article 53 specifically defines the obligation of the government to protect the rights of persons with disabilities:

The state shall adopt necessary measures to regulate medical services as well as financial aid to survivors of martyrs and missing persons, and for reintegration of the disabled and handicapped and their active participation in society, in accordance with provisions of the law. The state shall guarantee the rights of retirees, and shall render necessary aid to the elderly, women without caretaker, disabled and handicapped as well as poor orphans, in accordance with provisions of the law.

In addition to the Afghan Constitution, the UN CRPD obligates the State Parties to provide protection and information for persons with disabilities in situation of risk and emergency.

CRPD Article 11:

States Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.

Access to information was/is necessary for persons with disabilities. The Article 21 of the CRPD articulated the freedom of expression and access to information of persons with disabilities by the State Parties. “Providing information intended for the general public to persons with disabilities in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities in a timely manner and without additional cost”.

The government of Afghanistan also took measures against the COVID-19 as other countries to protect the people against the COVID-19 pandemic risk. The education institutions, transportation, companies, traveling and social gatherings were banned all over the country. The multiples restrictions managed to slow down the spread of the coronavirus to some extent. However, according to the Ministry of Public Health Survey, around 10 million Afghan people were infected with the coronavirus. On the other hand, the economic pressures forced the Afghan government to ease its restrictions all over the country, which caused the risk of spread at a higher rate across the country of Afghanistan. As a result of

the restriction during the COVID-19, many people lost their jobs and did not have any income to feed their families, including persons with disabilities and landmine survivors.

Since the coronavirus outbreak in Afghanistan, more than 38 thousand people were identified as being infected with the coronavirus and more than 1400 people have died across the 34 provinces of Afghanistan. Furthermore, more than 29 thousand people have recovered from the virus. The infection has decreased to some extent, but has not been eradicated. Many more people are still getting infected and identified daily and some people also die as a daily result.

The virus still maintains a high spreading risk; the population and the authorities are both concerned about a second wave that could easily happen if people do not follow the restrictions. The herd immunity occurred to some extent, as it is observed in the survey done by the Ministry of Public Health.

The second wave of the virus might hit the country again if the population and the authorities do not correctly apply the hygiene protocol. It might impose more economic, social and health problems on the Afghan population, especially survivors and persons with disabilities.

It is estimated that the coronavirus's economic, psychological and social damage is so deep that it will take much time to recover, especially for people living with disabilities, the most vulnerable groups in Afghan society. Persons with disabilities are vulnerable to the different aspects of society. They are most likely unemployed and have less access to opportunities and services in their community. In Afghanistan, 54.5% of the Afghan population is under the poverty line ^[1], including persons with disabilities. 13.9% of the Afghan population are landmine victims and individuals with severe disabilities who need immediate care and support (The Asia Foundation, 2019).

There's indeed a considerable gap between landmine victims/persons with disabilities and people without disabilities in terms of vulnerabilities. They are vulnerable economically,

psychologically and socially. They need immediate care and support from the government and civil society organizations.

Considering the impact the coronavirus had on persons with disabilities, ALSO decided to conduct a brief assessment on the challenges and access of persons with disabilities to services and aids provided by the government and the civil society organizations in the community. The assessment was mainly focused on two major issues. The assessment was done in Kabul, Balkh, Nangahar, Parwan, Bamyán and Ghor. The first issue was the survivors and persons with disabilities' access to services and their challenges. The second issue is about the operation of the disability-focused organization during the lockdown caused by the coronavirus.

The objective of the assessment

The objective of the assessment report was to find out about (1) the access of landmine survivors and persons with disabilities (PwDs) to different services and (2) operation level and the collaboration/coordination challenges of the disability-focused organizations during the COVID-19 lockdown/restrictions in Afghanistan. This assessment report's findings will help us understand the challenges and will enable us to review the available collaboration mechanism and improve it in the future. The improved collaboration will prevent further problems under any other crisis and effectively support persons with disabilities and survivors in Afghanistan.

A group of persons with disabilities and landmine survivors filling out a questionnaire on impact of COVID-19 in ALSO office – Kabul, 2020



Methodology

Chapter Two

The assessment objective is to find out about the challenges lived by landmine survivors and persons with disabilities, and by the disability-focused organizations during the multiples COVID-19 restriction in Afghanistan. In other words, the assessment findings will help us identify the gaps in needs for improvement in the future.

Subjects and sample size

The landmine survivors, persons with disabilities and some disabilities-focused organizations (DFO) were the assessment's main participants. The data was collected by performing a direct interview with girls, women and men with disabilities. The disability-focused organizations also filled out the questionnaire.

Disability-Focused Organizations participated in the assessment

Nine DFOs participated in the assessment. They are the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), the Afghan Landmine Survivors Organization (ALSO), the Afghan Amputee Bicyclists for Rehabilitation and Recreation (AABRAR), the Accessibility Organization for Afghan Disabled (AOAD), The Community Centre for the Disabled (CCD), the International Committee of the Red Cross, (ICRC), the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA), the Serve Afghanistan, and the ORG Rahyab Rehabilitation Services for Blind (ORRSB).

Persons with disabilities and landmine survivors

For data collection, ALSO conducted interviews with 42 girls, men and women with disabilities through a phone call. The selection of the respondents was done randomly. The only criterion for selecting the respondents for interview was their disability, gender, and somewhat their ages; normally, the respondents' age was considered above 15 who could provide concrete information about the challenges of men and women with disabilities during the COVID-19 restrictions.

The criteria for selecting respondents for the interview were their disability, gender, and age; the respondents' age needed to be above 15 to provide factual information about the challenges faced by men and women with disabilities during the COVID-19 restrictions.

Coverage areas

There were no specific geographic areas considered for this particular assessment, but the provinces' feasibility was assessed with the ease of access to mine survivors and persons with disabilities. In general, the provinces were Kabul, Balkh, Nangahar, Parwan and Bamyan. Respondents from other areas, like Wardak and Ghor, participated in the assessment interview. The interviews were done with the respondents through phone calls and emails.

Data collection tools

The data was collected with open and closed-ended questionnaires to make it easier for the respondents to answer. There were two questionnaires; one for persons with disabilities used by interviewers and another for the disabilities-focused organizations, which was filled by them and shared by email.

Scope of the questionnaires

At the organization level, the questionnaires' focus was mainly directed towards the availability of funding, the different levels of collaboration and coordination amongst the disability-focused organizations' operation, and the evaluation of accessibility to different types of services for persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 restrictions. At the individual level, the questionnaires' focus was on access of persons with disabilities to health services, information/awareness and received support from the government and civil society organizations during the COVID-19 restrictions in Afghanistan.

Results Analysis

Chapter Three

This chapter consists of data and information collected from landmine victims, persons with disabilities, and disability-focused organizations. The data will be analyzed based on the conclusion drawn from this report. The useful information for the analysis is divided into three main sections. The first section is about the survivors and persons with disabilities directly interviewed by ALSO staff. The second section is about disability-focused organizations. The last section represents the observation made by the disability-focused organizations on the multiples challenges faced by landmine survivors and persons with disabilities during the pandemic in Afghanistan; the last section shows the problems and challenges observed against the survivors and persons with disabilities in the community during the pandemic restrictions.

Section one

Section one is about the challenges of the landmine survivors and persons with disabilities during the pandemic in Afghanistan; it shows which problems and challenges survivors and persons with disabilities have been facing during the pandemic.

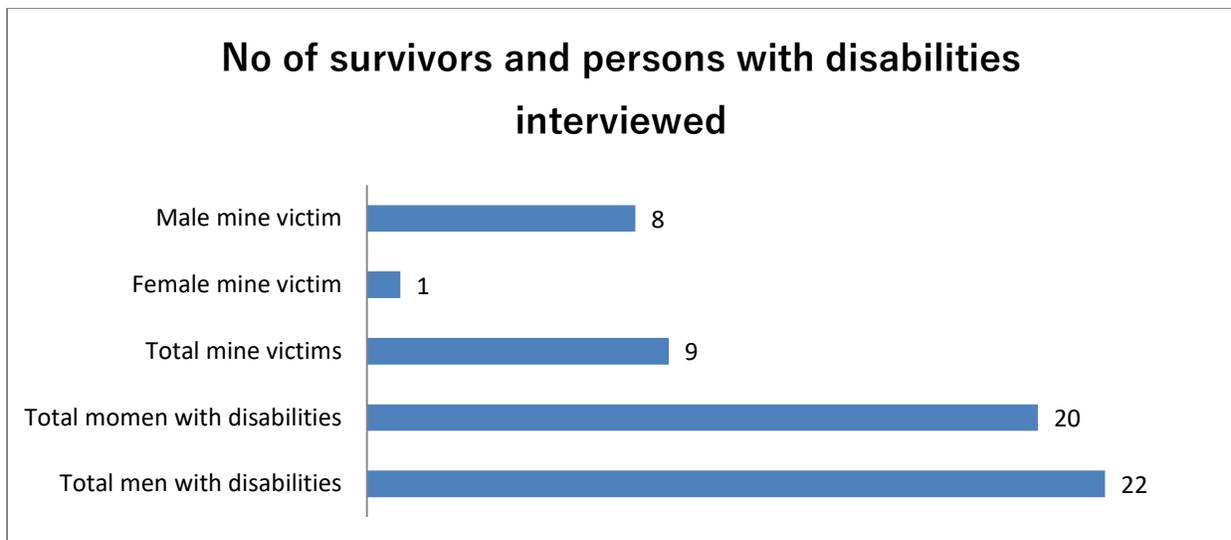


Figure 1: Men and women with disabilities participated in the assessment

In this assessment, 53% of the respondents were men, and 47% were girls and women with different types of disabilities, while 21% were landmine victims.

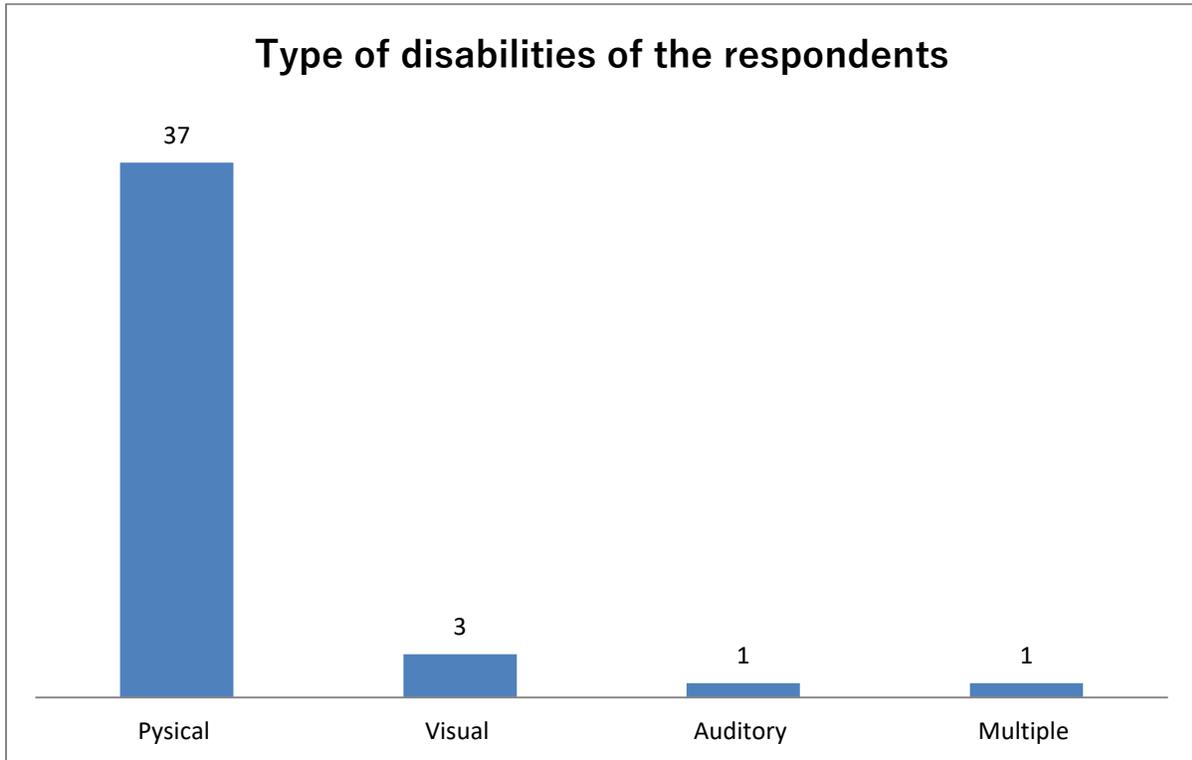


Figure 2: Type of disabilities of the assessment participants of this report

As depicted in Figure 2, the majority (88%) of the respondents were men and women with physical disabilities. The second (8%) highest category is persons with visually impaired respondents. As shown, persons with auditory and multiple disabilities represent the lowest percentage in this assessment. The difference between the two percentages is due to the random selection of participants in this assessment. It is important to note that each individual's type of disability was not considered a decisive factor in this assessment.

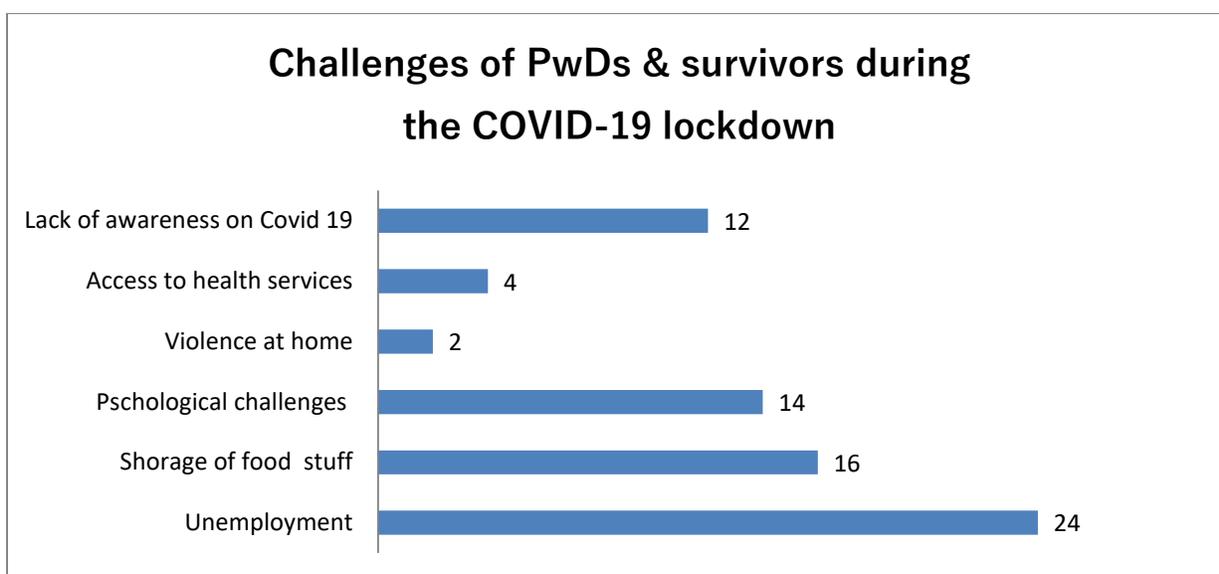


Figure 3: Challenges of persons with disabilities and survivors in accessing services and supports during the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions

Some challenges encountered by survivors and persons with disabilities are presented in Figure 3, which shows that during the COVID-19 lockdown, the majority (58%) of the respondents with disabilities said that unemployment was their main problem. Shortage of foodstuff (38%) and psychological pressures (34%) were the second major problems during the COVID-19 lockdown. Also, the lack of awareness about the COVID-19 virus (29%) was the respondents' third major challenge. Some of them did not have access to health services and experienced domestic violence. Globally, violence at home against women was a major concern for the United Nations during the pandemic restrictions.

Case stories

Economic story

Mr. Hamid, a landmine victim and one of the respondents in Bamiyan, said: “I am a university graduate. I very much tried to find a job in the government offices, but the government did not employ me. I then bought a taxi to earn my living. During the COVID-19 lockdown, I could not work with my taxi because all movements were banned. I faced serious financial problems. I only received a small package constituted of pasta and bread, which was not enough for my family and me”.

From Balkh, living with a disability and is a university graduate, Mr. Karim said: “I have a printing press workshop, but due to the pandemic, my workshop closed. It has been a long time since my

workshop has been closed and caused me many financial issues. We need financial support from the government and from civil organizations to support our businesses.”

Access to health service story

One of the participants said: “I went to a hospital to get an appointment with a doctor, but good doctors were not available at the hospital because they were scared to contract the COVID-19 virus.”

Mr. Asef, a landmine victim in Kabul who was infected with the COVID-19 virus, said: “I went to Afghan–Japan Hospital to get tested for the COVID-19 virus. The hospital was way too crowded; there was no priority for persons with disabilities in getting a test. Having a disability, it was so difficult for me to wait for long periods of time. I was not feeling well due to the virus I contracted. Finally, I got tested, but with a lot of difficulty.”

Access to information story

Ms. Zahra is visually impaired and lives in Kabul. She said: “The awareness program on COVID-19 was not enough, especially for a woman with visual impairment. The challenges for women with visual impairment are much more than others.”

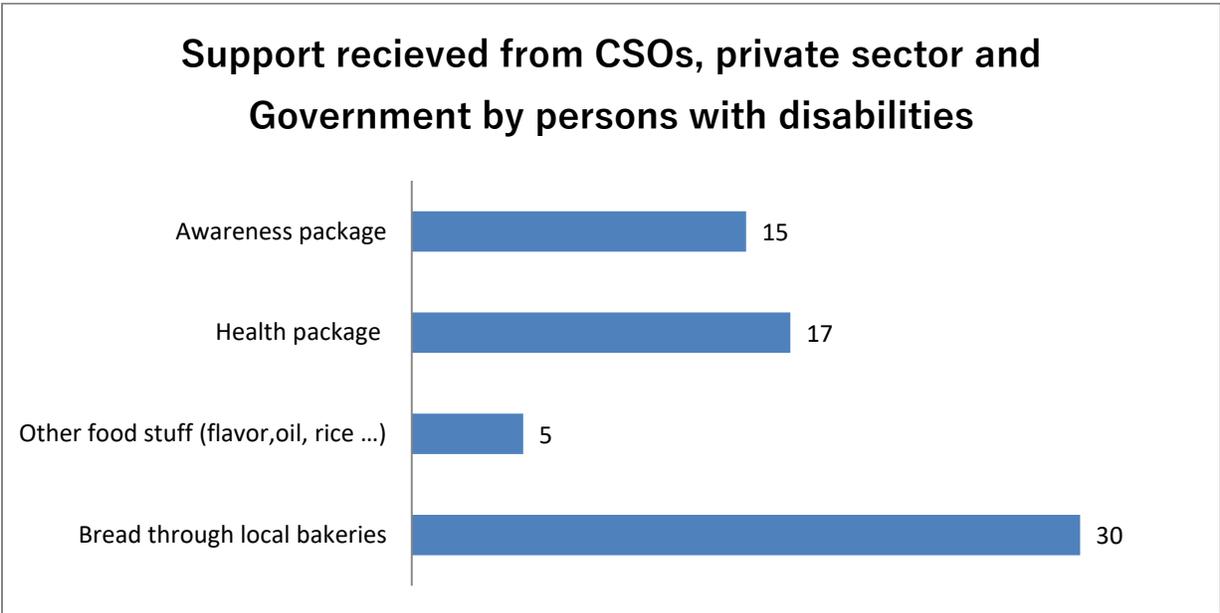


Figure 4: Persons with disabilities and survivors received aids and supports from CSOs, private sector and government during the COVID-19 lockdown

During the COVID-19 lockdown, civil society organizations, private sector/ companies, and the government provided food supplies for people in need. The standard way they supported the population was with health packages, awareness packages and livelihood

packages. One of the significant livelihood supports was a distribution of bread by the government through local bakeries to the financially vulnerable people, including survivors and persons with disabilities in the community.

This report (Figure 4) shows that the majority of (72%) the landmine survivors and with individual disabilities received “bread” through the government program during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second major support was the health package (41%) and awareness package (36%) for the survivors and persons with disabilities. Some of the respondents with disabilities have received foodstuffs (12%), like rice and cooking oil from civil society organizations and companies.

Case story

Ms. Sama, one of the disability rights activists in Balkh province, said: “Persons with disabilities were not a priority in the distribution of food supplies for the government and private sector, but we advocated attracting the attention of the authorities towards persons with disabilities.”

Section two

Observation of the disability-focused organizations on challenges lived by persons with disabilities and landmine survivors during the COVID-19 restrictions and lockdown.

In this section, the collected data is about the challenges lived by the landmine survivors and persons with disabilities from the disability-focused organizations' point of view during the COVID-19 pandemic; the disability rights organizations observed multiples problems related to access supports and aids provided by the government and other organizations during the actual pandemic.

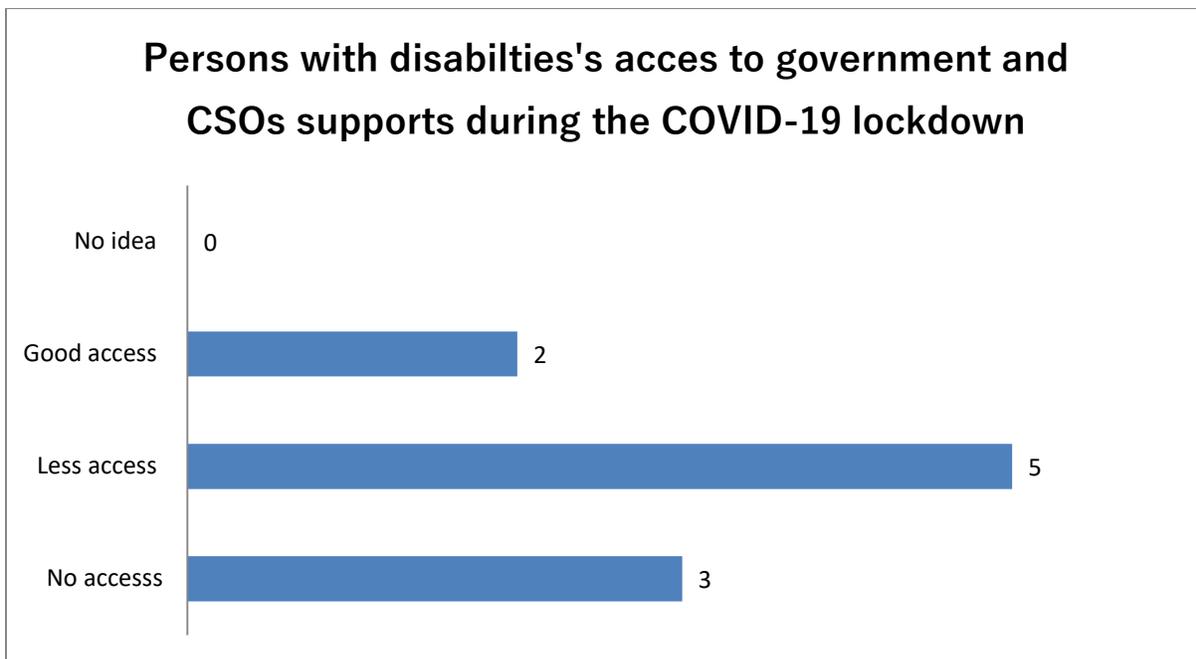


Figure 5: Access to government and CSOs support and services during the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions observed by the disability focused organizations.

Persons with disabilities and landmine survivors are the most vulnerable groups in a community. They are highly susceptible to disasters, from both human-made (ex: war) and natural events (ex: earthquake); they need immediate support from the authorities.

Figure 5 indicates that during the COVID-19 restrictions, five organizations mentioned that persons with disabilities had less access to the support offered by the government and the civil society organizations. However, three of them said that individuals with disabilities had no access to the government and civil society organizations' resources. In contrast, two organizations interviewed believe that landmine victims and persons with disabilities had good access to government and civil society organizations' support during the COVID-19 lockdown. To summarize, most organizations (89%) observed that landmine survivors and persons with disabilities "had less or no access" to the government's support and civil society organizations provided during the COVID-19 in Afghanistan.

Mr. Hussain Ahmadi, a landmine victim, said: "I did not receive any government support during the COVID-19 lockdown although district representative (Wakil) collected my identification card for registration to get help and support as a person with a disability".

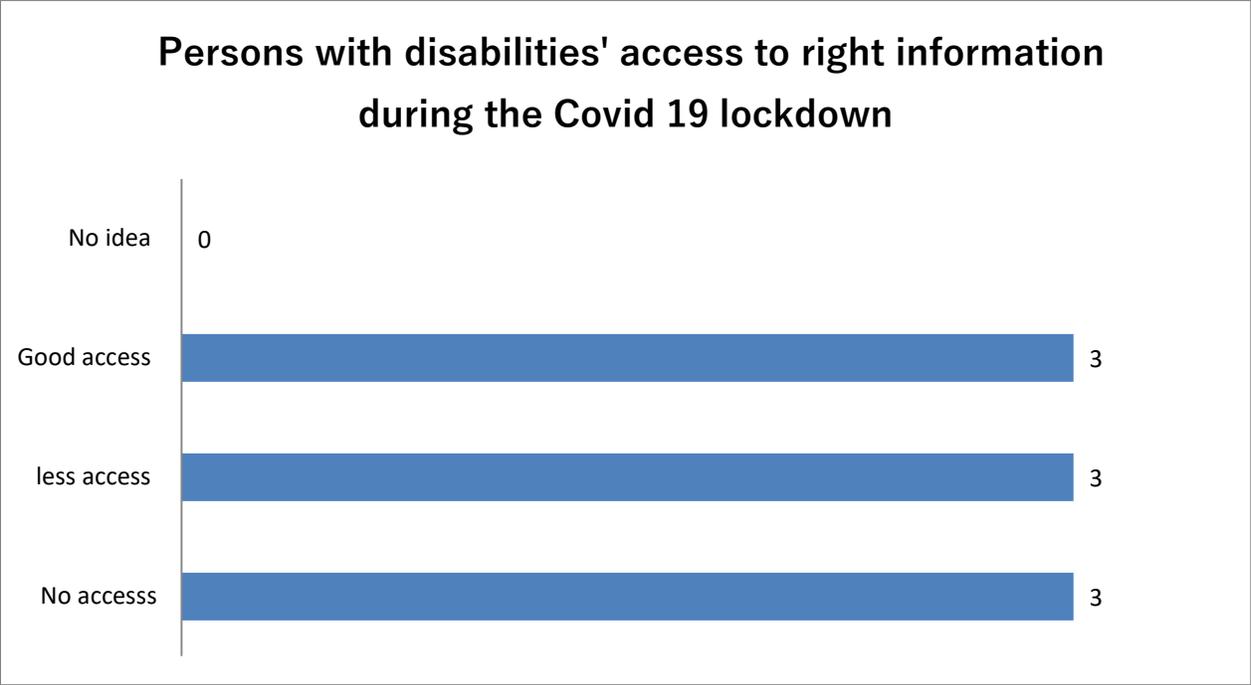


Figure 6: Access of persons with disabilities and survivors to right information awareness during the COVID-19 lockdown and restriction in the community based on the observation of the disability-focused organizations in Afghanistan

The organizations that participated in the assessment report did some observation (See Figure 6) about the access and the availability of the COVID-19 virus information to survivors and persons with disabilities during the lockdown. Three of the participating organizations believe that survivors and persons with disabilities had “good access” to information about the COVID-19, and three other organizations believed that persons with disabilities and landmine victims had “less access” to the right information. Simultaneously, three others considered that individuals with disabilities did not have access to the right information during the COVID-19 lockdown. To conclude, adding up the “less and no access” figure shows that the majority (67%) of the organizations observed that the survivors and persons with disabilities had a challenge in accessing the right information about the COVID-19 virus issues.

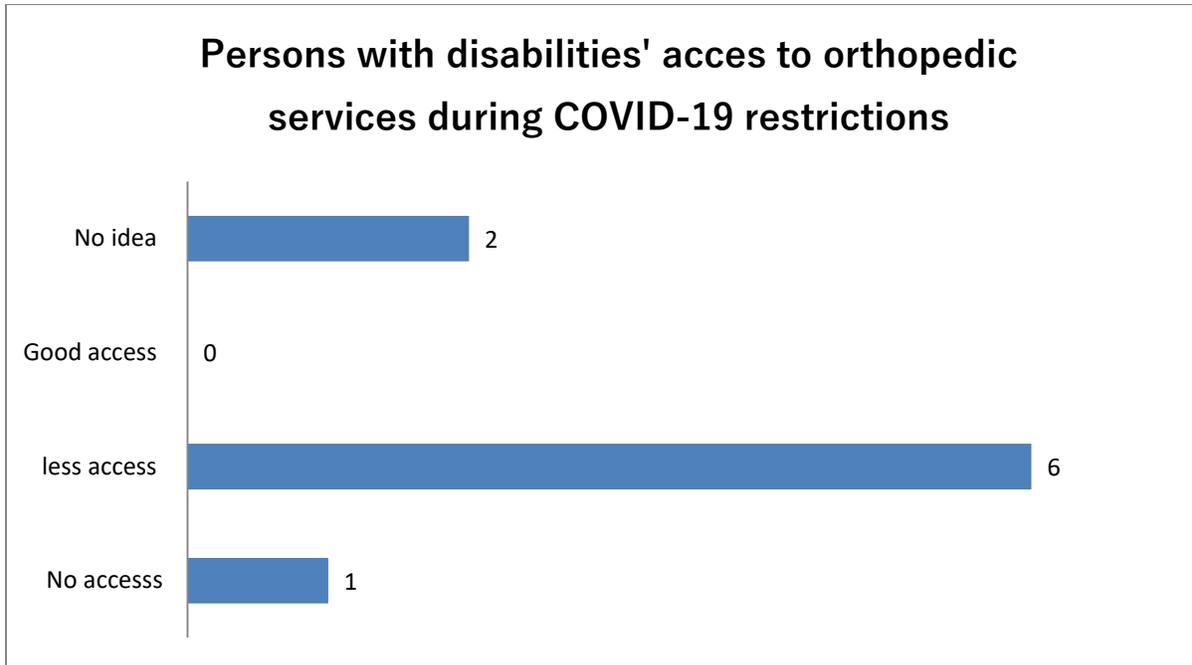


Figure 7: Access of persons with disabilities and survivors to orthopedic services during the COVID-19 lockdown

Afghanistan's population is witnessing daily civilian casualties due to ongoing wars, conflicts, and landmine explosions in every city and village, leaving many disabled or dead. The disabled people need immediate medical, physical, mental and social rehabilitation support to reintegrate society properly. The physical rehab includes orthotic and prosthetic services for children, men and women with disabilities provided by ICRC, for instance, and other organizations. Moreover, many survivors and persons with disabilities need continuous orthopedic services, an absolute necessity for their daily lives. If they do not have access to those services, they might face severe barriers in their social lives. Access to conscious orthopedic services is a vital need for survivors and persons with disabilities to live their everyday lives.

This report (Figure 6) indicates that most organizations (67%) said that survivors and persons with disabilities had less access to orthopedic services during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in Afghanistan. If we add up the "less and no" access figure, 78% of the organizations said that persons with disabilities and survivors had less to no access to orthopedic services during the COVID-19 restrictions. For instance, ICRC, a major

orthopedic service provider for landmine survivors and persons with disabilities in Afghanistan, reduced its service by 25% for landmine survivors and persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions. Alberto Cairo, Head of Program of ICRC, said: "The number of patients had to be reduced to ensure that the social distancing and hygiene measure are respected. The activities are progressively increasing, starting from those being less risky to spread the virus."

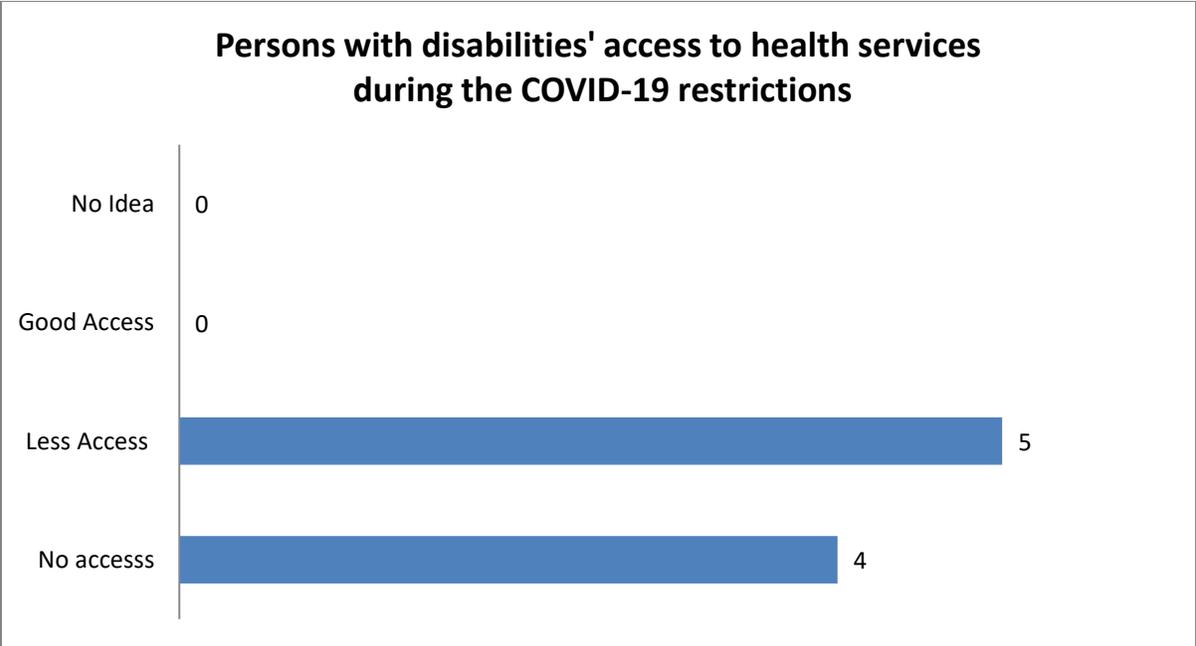


Figure 8: Access to health services during the COVID-19 lockdown according to the disability-focused organizations' observation.

During the COVID-19 restrictions, access to health services was crucial for survivors and individuals with disabilities, either related to the COVID-19 virus or other health issues. According to the interviewed organizations depicted in Figure 8, five organizations said that landmine victims and persons with disabilities had less access to health services. In contrast, four of them said that persons with disabilities had no access to health services during the COVID-19 restrictions in Afghanistan. If we add up figures, all survivors and persons with disabilities had problems accessing health services during the COVID-19 restrictions in Afghanistan.

Section three

Disability rights organizations

This section is related to disability-focused organizations' challenges during the COVID-19 lockdown regarding implementing their programs and activities to support and include persons with disabilities in Afghanistan.

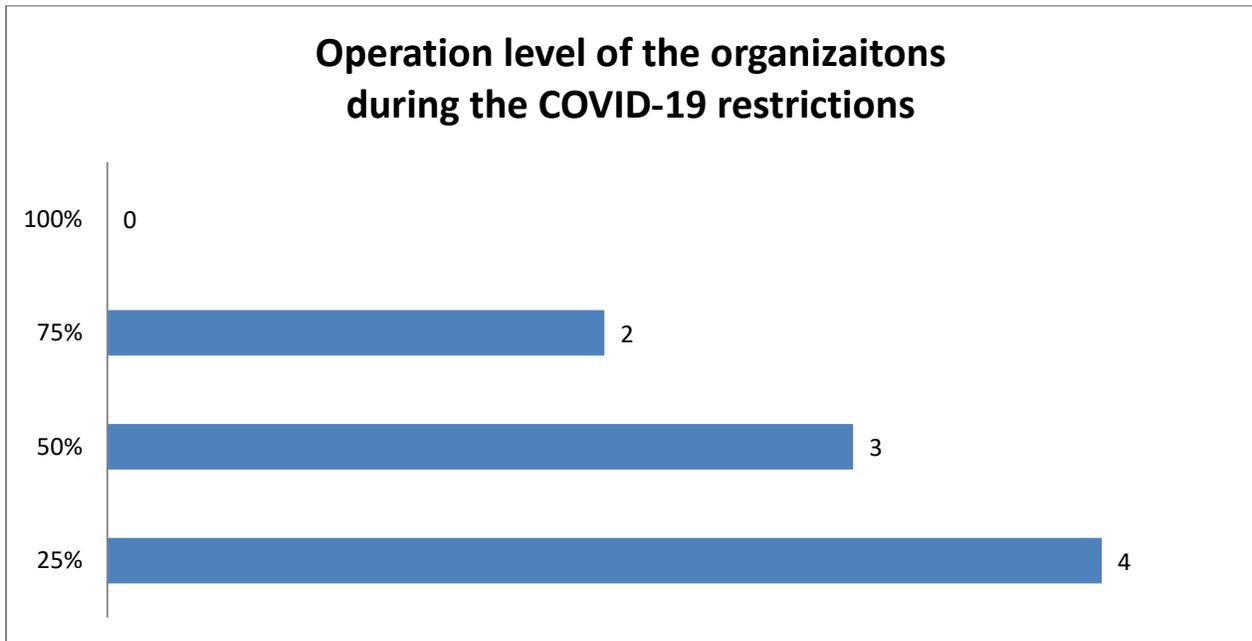


Figure 9: Operation of disability-focused organizations during the COVID-19 restrictions

The COVID-19 pandemic forced all sectors to restrict or completely shut down their activities, including civil society organizations, to prevent the virus's spread. Despite the restrictions, some civil society organizations had to continue their activities, especially those working in the health and livelihood sectors. This assessment shows (Figure 9) three organizations that kept running their program up to 50%, four of them up to 25% and two organizations up to 75% during the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions.

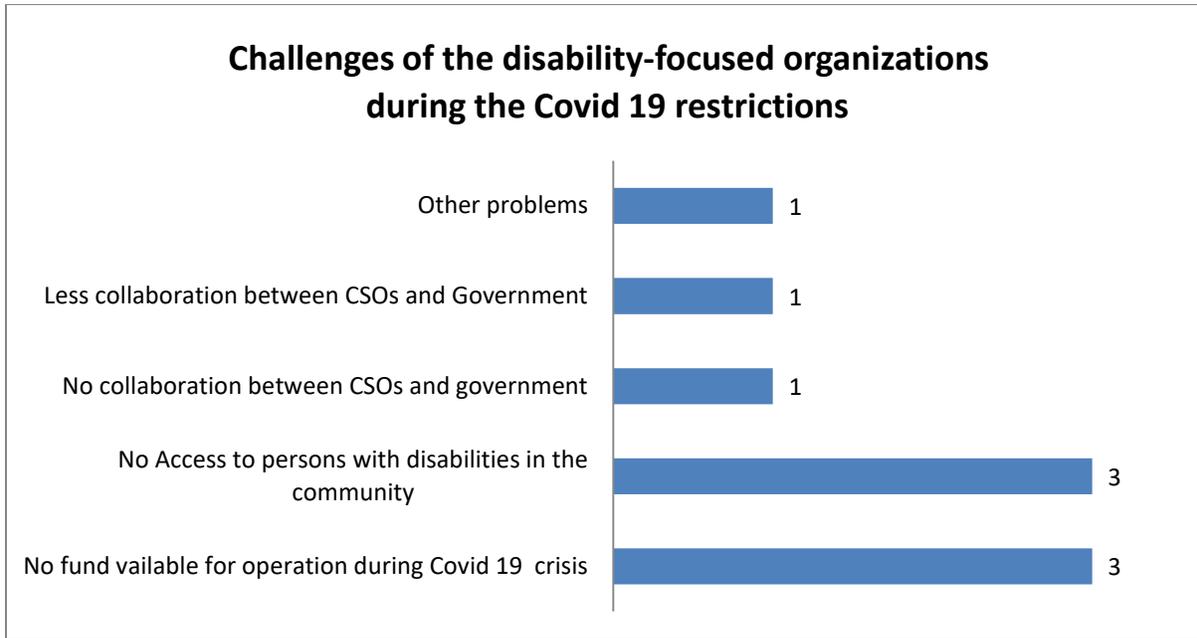


Figure 10: *Challenges of the disability focused organizations during the COVID-19 restrictions*

It was confirmed that the COVID-19 negatively impacted all activities and created different types of problems in every sector for each organization. Those problems caused them to stop or limit their program during the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions.

This assessment report (Figure 10) indicates that three organizations did not have access to persons with disabilities and landmine survivors because of the COVID-19 restrictions. Three organizations did not have any funds available to operate or provide services for persons with disabilities and survivors during the Covid 19 pandemic. While trying to support individuals with disabilities and landmine victims, two organizations said that "less or no collaboration" existed between the disability-focused organizations and Afghanistan's government during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Figure 11: Collaboration and coordination amongst the disability-focused organization during the COVID-19 lockdown in Afghanistan

This assessment shows (Figure 11) that four organizations mentioned that less collaboration and coordination existed between them. In contrast, one organization said no partnership existed amongst the other organizations working in the disability sector, but two of them mentioned that good collaboration was established between the organizations during the COVID-19 restrictions. Finally, two organizations had no idea whether collaboration existed or not during the COVID-19 restrictions.

ALSO’s observation on collaboration of the disability rights organizations

During the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions, ALSO observed that coordination and collaboration were less among disability-focused organizations supporting persons with disabilities and landmine victims. The gap between them felt tangible because no one would know what was going on in the disability sector. However, there were reasons for the existing gap. The first reason was that the COVID-19 was a new phenomenon in which people did not have experience and knowledge of preparing for the consequences the virus would cause. Second, the disability-focused organizations did not have any specific emergency coordination program for such a pandemic, which brought them multiple

dilemmas, confusion, and stress. Third, the organizations restricted their programs according to the Afghan government's restrictions, which resulted in less communication and collaboration between the organizations; everyone was uncertain about the future impact of the COVID-19 virus.

Regarding the collaboration with the government, the disability-focused organizations' cooperation with the government was fragile or did not exist. The government had its program for the vulnerable people by distributing bread through local bakeries to reduce the community's pandemic's economic impact.

As a whole, the situation put the disability-focused organizations completely in confusion. The disability-focused organizations' position was not very clear on collaborating to provide support for persons with disabilities directly or indirectly during the COVID-19 pandemic in Afghanistan.



A group of landmine survivors and persons with disabilities – Kabul 2020

Conclusion

Chapter Five

This chapter focuses on the conclusions of the assessment report based on the findings presented in the chapter four.

Challenges of persons with disabilities

During the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions, unemployment was one of the major challenges a person with disabilities had to face; their jobs and businesses were shutdowns. Second, people with disabilities faced a shortage of food supplies, psychological problems, and violence at home. They also had restricted access to health services during the COVID-19 lockdown and restriction. With multiples services offered, persons with disabilities and landmine survivors were not considered priorities depicted their vulnerability. However, most persons with disabilities and landmine survivors received food and bread distributed by the community's local bakeries. On the other hand, most disability-focused organizations observed that landmine survivors and persons with disabilities had "less or no access" to the government and civil society organizations' support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding access to information, persons with disabilities had less access to the right information about the COVID-19 virus, especially women with visual impairment. Persons with disabilities and landmine survivors had less access to orthopedic services because of the restrictions put in place by the Afghan government and the service providers.

The orthopedic centers, like ICRC, limited their services to prevent the coronavirus's spread. Also, persons with disabilities and survivors had less access to health services. Most of the doctors were not present at hospitals, and their clinics were closed due to fear of spreading the virus.

Collaboration challenges of disability rights organizations

During the COVID-19 restrictions, most disability rights organizations kept running their activities to 25% and 75% but faced some challenges in implementing their programs. First, some organizations did not have funds to operate or provide services. Second, they did not have access to persons with disabilities and landmine survivors due to restrictions. Third, collaboration and coordination did not exist between the disabilities rights organizations to support persons with disabilities. There was no communication and specific program related to the issues brought by the COVID-19 virus for persons with disabilities and landmine victims, which is a big gap that needs to be filled by the organizations working in the disability sector. Besides, the collaboration of the disabilities rights organizations with the government was far from being satisfactory. The government had its own livelihood program, such as bread distribution through local bakeries. The disability rights organizations could collaborate internally and with the government for better support for landmine victims and persons with disabilities.



Advocacy Committee Meeting in ALSO office on 8 July 2010 in Kabul

Recommendations

Chapter Six

These recommendations were made based on this report's findings for the disability rights organizations and the government to consider necessary measures to solve the exiting problems for better support of persons with disabilities being caused by the COVID-19 and any future crisis in the future.

1. The government should provide timely livelihood support to all persons with disabilities including mine survivors to reduce the most immediate impact of COVID-19 among them.
2. The government must ensure providing accessible information on COVID-19 pandemic to all persons with disabilities including through sign language, brail, and other accessible means.
3. The Ministry of Public Health should give priority to persons with disabilities including mine survivors in getting required health services during and after the pandemic.
4. The Ministry of Public Health should provide peer counseling to mine survivors and persons with disabilities to reduce the increasing psychological problems including domestic violence.
5. The disability rights organizations should have collaboration and coordination mechanism setup for Covid 19 pandemic and other emergency incidence.
6. The disability rights organizations should have close collaboration and coordination with government to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and mine survivors.
7. The international donors and the United Nations agencies should consider allocating specific funds to local disability rights organizations to support the mine survivors and persons with disabilities during the Covid 19 pandemic and other humanitarian and natural disasters.

8. The government should give priority to persons with disabilities and mine survivors in vaccination process, if it becomes available in Afghanistan.
9. The National Disaster Management Authority of Afghanistan should include the special needs of persons with disabilities into its policies and program, especially in its preparedness and mitigation plans.

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