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**OXUS Afghanistan supported Afghan citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic by financing the production of masks.**



OXUS Afghanistan is one of Afghanistan's largest microfinancing institutions. It has supported Afghan citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic by financing the production of masks through OXUS borrowers in partnership with ACTED International NGO. OXUS Afghanistan's clients in Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif produced an astonishing 1.8 million washable cloth masks between April and June 2020. This joint initiative financially supported more than 700 clients in these two main cities. OXUS Afghanistan also implemented awareness campaigns about Coronavirus and protective measures for its staff, customers, local communities, and local shopkeepers. The masks were handed over to the provincial governors in the presence of the leaders of the

Communities, the Directorate of Economy , Health, the Afghan National Police, Higher Education, Women's Affairs and other provincial government departments to the most vulnerable population, the Municipality's bread initiative recipients, the School, the Scholars' Council, the Police Headquarters, the Firefighting, the Colleges and the governments. This initiative aimed to protect, raise awareness, finance, and build job opportunities for Afghans and strengthen the spirit of compassion for Afghan people. OXUS Afghanistan remains committed to supporting Afghan citizens through financial and humanitarian assistance to work in remote areas to avoid the spread of Coronavirus by raise awareness amongst local populations. All OXUS employees in Kabul and other provinces have been trained in standardized procedures to prevent Coronavirus from spreading. Branch staff is an example of how to take necessary measures by adhering to the essential measures by adhering effectively to the guidelines provided by health centres. The Face Mask Project financially supports the needy population and builds trust between communities, thus creating balance and stability in life. We have shown that we, as humans, care for one another, lend a helping hand in life-threatening situations, and stand for humanity. Led by Mr. Salim Khan the CEO, and Mr. Mahboobullah Shahid, the Face Mask Project Manager of OXUS, the project launched with a team-building exercise to encourage teamwork, motivate staff, and harness Afghans' sense of compassion during this critical period. The staff of Oxus approached the project with enthusiasm and energy. This project helps the vulnerable financially and builds trust and confidence among the communities that OXUS operates in, leading to improved stability and cohesion. "We showed that we, as humans, care for each other and take each other's hands even in life-threatening situations and stand by each other for humanity," Salim Khan the CEO of OXUS Afghanistan.

### ***Face Mask Production Process***

- Planning

The NGO, jointly planned with ACTED, provided OXUS with the necessary raw materials, such as spinning, fabric, and yarn. The materials were distributed to branches according to the number of customers and capacities that the operating team identified.

2. Distributing OXUS identified potential clients who were able to prepare the masks according to the specifications provided in a training video. The distribution of materials to clients was based on adherence to appropriate safety and health measures and ensuring a hygienic production process. With set targets and deadlines for the number of masks expected to be produced, the raw materials such as fabric, yarn, and sewing supplies were delivered to the borrowers' home.

- Training

The training was provided to participating customers using a brochure that contained instructions and the face masks specifications. Since most customers are non-literate, the staff provided the sewing, ironing and packing instructions verbally while maintaining all the necessary hygiene measures, such as using masks and gloves during the entire process and especially during the packing.

- Collection

Clients received cash payments on the same day after the masks were collected and checked by OXUS's staff. The masks were then packed for distribution and delivered to the ACTED office. After completing the first batch of masks, OXUS found customers happy and appreciative that OXUS served the public by offering free masks and financially supporting them during the lockdown period when they had no income. The income borrowers received from the mask order project will help them meet their daily expenses and repay OXUS's loan installments.

- Distribution

In the presence of representatives from municipalities, the Directorate of Economy, Health, Afghan National Police, Higher Education, and Women's Affairs, and other government entities, OXUS, with the cooperation of ACTED, provided the masks to the various entities.

### **Client Interviews**

Ms. Suraya Sayed Qasim, a female client, said, "I have four young daughters and two young sons to take care of. Feeding and providing for them is not an easy task for one person. I have a tailoring business, but after this lockdown period due to COVID-19, I lost my customers since no one is preparing new clothes for themselves. Everyone is saving their money for necessities. I had no customers; therefore, no income to support my kids. I received a request from OXUS to sew masks, and I accepted it happily. They provided me materials and guidance on how to prepare the masks, and the good thing was that I had been offered to sew them while at home. During the past four days, I sewed 5,500 masks and received cash from the OXUS branch. Each mask price was AFN 5, and I was paid AFN 27,500. This was huge money for me,

which enabled me to buy food and sanitary materials for my family to protect them during the Coronavirus, and I was also able to repay my loan installment to OXUS.

### Hand in Hand Afghanistan's COVID-19 Response Efforts



Hand in Hand Afghanistan has started the second phase of the COVID-19 Response Project in Balkh province, supporting 3,500 households to raise awareness about COVID-19 transmission, prevention, and access to hygiene kits. The project Field Managers perform individual COVID-19 prevention awareness sessions for each household using posters and banners, giving the most vulnerable households with information and teach families to use hygiene kits. Phase three of this project will be carried out in the province of Kabul. The research is carried out in collaboration with the provincial departments of Public Health, Economy, and Refugees & Repatriation.



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Our mailing address is:

Afghanistan Microfinance Association (AMA)  
House # 552, Street 3, Taimani Project  
Kabul -  
Afghanistan

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