

Dr. Wali Khan EPI Coordinator from Kalash Valley:

A Dedicated Healthcare Champion for District Upper Chitral

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Mr. Ali Muhammad Khan was assigned to monitor the COVID-19 Campaign that was organized from 5th June till 17th June 2023 in selected districts upper Chitral and Booni situated at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Khawa. A successful mission achieved and inspiring insight into Dr Wali, EPI Coordinator, his dedication improving access to healthcare services. Encountering individuals like Dr Wali present hardship and struggle nevertheless compassion remind us of the positive impact that individuals can have on their communities, especially in essential areas in public health.



The journey began with the team set on road travel from Islamabad Capital Territory, a long ten-hour drive through the bumpy, poorly constructed roads towards District upper Chitral. A hazardous situation yet the dire need to reach there could not be waited as time was ticking. The aim to complete covid-19 campaign was eventually the target set; moreover, site routine immunization monitoring in the highly risky areas. Then exploring the hard-to-reach area referred to as the World heritage site by UNESCO, alias Dardic Indo-Aryan, the Kalash community it is ethnically diverse migrated to Chitral from Afghanistan in 2nd century BC. By the 10th Century AD, the Kalash ruled a large part of present day Chitral, Razhawai, Chew, Bala Sing and Nagar Chao were famous Kalash Rulers in 12th to 14th Centuries AD. Their fellow tribesmen in Afghanistan were known as Red Kafirs the Thriving Kalash Culture began to fall in 1320 AD, when Shah Nadir Reyas subjugated and converted the people to Islam. The Villages of Drosh, Sweer, Kalkatak, Beori, Ashrate, Shishi, Jinjirate and adjacent valley in southern Chitral were last Kalash Valleys subjected to mass conversion in 14th Century. The Kalash resided in just three Chitral Valleys Bumburate, Rumbur and Birir by the time Amir Afghanistan forcefully converted to Islam. The red Kafir on the other side of the Border in 1893 renaming the area Nuristan villages of converted red Kafirs in Chitral are known as Shiekhanandeh in the villages of converted ones. To highlight the challenge the Kalash people are an ancient tribe in Pakistan with their own unique identity, rituals, language, and culture. The primitive living conditions observed in traditional wooden and stone houses smoke emanating from cooking meals blackens the surfaces of all houses. Hygiene is an issue most basic water, sanitation and hygiene is not practiced hence lack of clean drinking water, filthy houses, women wear soiled cloths. A paradoxical scenario is that the Kalash valley is abundant with lakes and rivers amidst the lush green trees, nevertheless the people suffer from diseases. Thus, Kalash people have difficulty in accessing essential healthcare services and suffer from inadequate sites of health care facilities or in some circumstances there are no medical facilities in the valley. The patients could not reach the nearby hospital at Ayuun and Chitral women die in delivering baby on the way, due to improper road network, before getting treatment from the hospital. Thus, the infant mortality rate is high in Kalash according to World Health Organization (WHO) 2.4 million children died in January 2020. During the sojourn at the hostel in Kalash valley there is no feel or vibe of mourning, sadness the citizens have just learned to survive. A phenomenon observed while visiting Kalash valley death is a celebration amongst the Kalash people and dance, sing celebrate deaths.

Nomadic traditions have focused the Kalash people on living a plain lifestyle. They do not read newspaper, use roman script textbooks in schools, the rate of literacy is 18% whereas 15% men with an overall 25%. The community is in hope to study aspiring to become qualified doctors one such emerge named Dr Wali, resilient and an achiever aiming to serve Chitrali people, particularly Kalash minorities. Despite austere conditions the inevitable financial hurdles, father being an uneducated farmer background in education at the renowned Edward School matriculation; furthermore, completed FSc Pre-Medical at Edward College. From young Kalash to medical doctor: a remarkable essence of resilience and achievement. Dr Wali was inhabitant of the village Anizh of Kalash Valley (Bumburate). A remarkable degree of MBBS from Ayoub Medical College at Abbottabad under the Minority quota and then with aid of scholarship finished a master's degree in public health MPH from Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan. Currently working as an EPI Coordinator at DHQ Booni Upper Chitral from 2022 to date. Dr Wali swapped from clinical practice to the administrative area. Also is a learned person from the Kalash community in the administrative roles therefore able to mobilize resources; furthermore, connect with people and donors to uplift the health facilities in Kalash areas. Dr Wali traits are often highly valued by healthcare professionals, as they contribute to effective collaboration and relationships within the community. Setbacks and struggles with the Muslim community had erased when Dr M Ali Khan graciously dealt in a tactful and welcoming manner that impacted with Muslims stepping in hospitals to seek treatments and medicines.

Despite the numerous challenges faced, are dedicated to performing your duty to ensure routine immunization and polio coverage in the hard-to-reach areas of Upper Chitral. Dr Wali commitment to this important cause is truly inspiring. His dedication not only contributes to the health of the local population but also sets an example for others facing similar challenges. Efforts are making a positive difference in the lives of the people being served regardless of caste, gender or religion.

