

LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

• STORIES OF CHANGE SERIES

“I remember when I was a child in Peshawar, and my family received food from WFP. And now I'm working for them. This is a dream come true.”

It's hard to ignore the excitement in Nabila Azizi's voice as she talks about her work with the World Food Programme (WFP). The 25-year-old graduate has a finance degree, but finding a job in Afghanistan is tough for anyone, and it's even tougher for a woman. It's for this reason that UN Women started the internship programme that placed Nabila with WFP

Women in Afghanistan are disproportionately affected by poverty, discrimination, and exploitation, and for a long time, were not allowed to work outside of the home. Today, 64% of Afghans agree that women should be allowed to work, and nearly 23% of Afghans say that women contribute to their household's income¹. Yet those beliefs haven't necessarily resulted in improved

economic opportunities for women.

UN Women's internship programme is designed to support women's economic empowerment by giving women graduates exposure to different working environments. The six-month programme is split into two months of classroom training and four months of job mentoring inside a relevant government agency, financial institution, private firm, NGO or within the UN itself.

Elzira Sagynbaeva, UN Women Country Representative in Afghanistan, explains that women's economic empowerment is an essential building block for achieving gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth.

“For too long, young women in Afghanistan have been denied opportunities for mentorship, professional training and on-the-job experience. This programme

UN WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN

Location: Office in Kabul, active country-wide

Programme sectors: Normative support; violence prevention and protection; national planning; economic empowerment; leadership and participation.

Key donors: Belgium, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.

Individual Capacity Building: UN Women works with senior civil servants, high school and university graduates to build their capacity through developing

their leadership, management, English language, and ICT skills, as well as offering scholarship and internship opportunities.

Livelihoods, Entrepreneurship & Employment: UN Women activities include supporting women entrepreneurs to have better access to markets, and rural women to undertake livelihood development activities.

is about investing in these women to help them unlock and realise their true potential and by extension contribute to reducing the gender gap in economic spheres at the national level.”

Nabila was so determined to be a part of the programme that even after she applied, she continued with personal development trainings and courses to ensure that she would be the best, most prepared candidate available.

Eight months later, she received notification that she was accepted and began the practical skills course. Conducted by the Afghanistan Centre for Excellence (ACE), the course focused on personal development, business development, and job skills.

“Every day I was learning something new, something that would help me in my future. I don’t think I would have found that anywhere else,” Nabila says.

Following the practical skills course, Nabila was one of 12 interns taken on by WFP. She started her placement in the nutrition department, but her commitment, enthusiasm and hard work led to a promotion into the procurement department – one of WFP’s busiest departments. Nabila now sees a future working in procurement and finance, and thanks WFP for showing her the way.



PHOTO: UN Women/ Hamayoon Sediqi

“Finding a job in Afghanistan as a young woman is hard, but my experience at WFP has empowered me and made me a more attractive candidate [for employers]. I can’t thank UN Women and WFP enough.”

Nabila Azizi, intern with the World Food Programme

Claude Jibidar, WFP’s Representative and Country Director, says the partnership with UN Women is an example of UN agencies working together and using their respective resources to achieve common goals. We at WFP are trying to provide more balanced recruitment and learning opportunities for Afghan women, which in turn helps to build a future talent pool for upcoming vacancies.”

He explains that gender balance is crucial to the achievement of WFP’s goal of Zero Hunger in Afghanistan, something that will also contribute to building the capacity of Afghan women and the country’s long-term development goals.

“WFP Afghanistan will gladly host new interns in the future. Not only have the interns learned a lot, they have contributed very positively to our work.”

While Nabila’s internship is coming to an end, she has already received two job offers – an achievement in and of itself.

“The job market is tough, and finding a job in Afghanistan as a young woman is hard,” Nabila explains, “but my experience at WFP has empowered me and made me a more attractive candidate [for employers]. I can’t thank UN Women and WFP enough for this opportunity.”

63%

of Afghanistan's population is under 24 years old, making it one of the youngest countries in the world.²

400k

The average number of people estimated to enter the workforce each year over the next decade.³

71%

of Afghans think that unemployment is the biggest problem facing the country's youth.⁴

FOOTNOTES

¹ <http://asiafoundation.org/publication/afghanistan-in-2015-a-survey-of-the-afghan-people/>

² <http://afghanistan.unfpa.org/news/investing-youths-empowerment-education-and-employment-way-forward-afghanistans-future>

³ <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2016/02/25973259/afghanistan-systematic-country-diagnostic>

⁴ <http://asiafoundation.org/publication/afghanistan-in-2015-a-survey-of-the-afghan-people/>

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