

STARTING A CAREER SAVING LIVES DURING CHILDBIRTH

• STORIES OF CHANGE SERIES

Rayhan Alem, a 22-year-old native of Badakhshan Province in Afghanistan's far northeast, wanted to be a midwife from when she was a teenager. She graduated from the Midwifery Institute of Higher Education in Kabul in early 2015, but without any work experience, she couldn't find a job as a midwife in any of Kabul's maternity hospitals. Now, with UN Women's support, she is preparing for her career through an internship at Ali Seena Hospital in Kabul.

"The story of why I wanted to become a midwife started in my own village. When I was a high school student, I was walking back home from school one day and learned that my neighbor's wife had died in childbirth. It really pained me and I thought if I became a midwife, I could help the women of my village to assist with safe deliveries. When I discussed this with my father and mother and other family members, they really

appreciated my idea and assured me that they would always be on my side. This boosted my morale and made my decision to become a midwife stronger.

After I graduated from high school, I was admitted to the midwifery school and successfully completed a two-year programme. I then had to work in a hospital to practice my skills. Luckily, I also learned about UN Women's internship programme. I successfully passed the entrance exam and attended two months of training where I learned skills like listening, preparing a CV, applying for jobs, and interview techniques and a lot of other things

After completing two months of in-class training ... I was placed at Ali Seena Hospital, where I will work for four months. During my first two months, I assisted other midwives during delivery, and in the next two months, I will have the chance to attend deliveries independently.

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: The governments of 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.

I am very excited about this. This is a golden opportunity for me to practice midwifery and develop the skills midwifery requires.

As soon as I complete my four months of practice at Ali Seena Hospital, I will go back to my province, Badakhshan, and will work at the government clinic in my village. I know that I will have a very difficult time there because I am a recent graduate with less experience in this field, and I assume that women who come to clinic for delivery or to receive guidance on their pregnancy may not trust my ability and expertise, so I will need to work harder to prove myself to people and win their hearts.

Everyone knows that the shortage of midwives in Afghanistan is a big problem and this is one of the reasons behind the high mortality rates. I believe with the increase in the number of skilled midwives, the mortality rates will decrease. I am sure that all midwives will be very proud of their work because they are saving the lives of mothers and babies. My role as a midwife will impact service delivery because I am a skilled and trained midwife and, of course, when midwives are properly trained they can offer cost-effective and quality services to the community.



“Since becoming a midwife and receiving training, everything in my life has changed for the better. I am now a role model for family, friends and relatives. I am really proud to be called a midwife and become part of the Afghanistan healthcare staff.”

Rayhan Alem, intern with Ali Seena Hospital

If UN Women didn't have the internship programme, I believe my dream to become a skilled midwife never would have come true. I remember during the first day of my in-class training, I couldn't speak in front of others because I was so shy. But after receiving training on leadership and communication skills, I am now able to apply the skills I learned and speak with my own voice and this is because of the UN Women internship programme. Thank you UN Women.”

UN Women Afghanistan started its Internship Programme in December 2015, with an initial intake of 50 female university graduates seeking to enter the job market. The women first receive two months of classes on professional development skills including personal development and leadership, office management, use of office equipment and tools, language and communication. They are then placed in a four-month internship at government offices, NGOs, private firms, and financial and other institutions to gain practical work experience in their chosen fields. UN Women provides participants with stipends to support them during the internship phase.

14%

of Afghanistan's population is currently employed. The widespread exclusion of women from the labour force is a huge economic burden.¹

396

The current maternal mortality ratio in Afghanistan, down from 1,600 out of every 100,000 live births in 2002.²

5.1

The fertility rate for women in Afghanistan, down from 7.9 in 2000. The rate drops even further to 2.8 among women with higher levels of education.³

FOOTNOTES

¹ <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2016/02/25973259/afghanistan-systematic-country-diagnostic>

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

³ <http://www.unfpa.org/news/midwives-help-lower-afghanistans-towering-maternal-death-rate>

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