



Bushra and her co-workers packaging the Masala (spices) products

Zardozi Newsletter

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Bushra- Kitchen spices mini-factory

The economic empowerment of urban and rural women is a sign of progress for a country, which is why it is of great importance for Zardozi to introduce women to different business ideas. These women will later contribute to the economy of the country. Stung by poverty, women in rural areas are more vulnerable to violence. Our work with women in these areas is fundamental and most required. NGOs in Afghanistan have done skill trainings in many sectors, but Zardozi not only provides trainings but has found markets for the women to utilize their new found skills and help them move forward.

Bushra, 35 lives in Kaubl Hada village of Jalalabad province. In a village where even men are struggling for job opportunities, Bushra, with Zardozi's help, learned how to tailor. She was then able to provide income for her children. As Bushra's self-confidence and capacity grew, she wanted to try other different sectors of business. "Now that I was introduced to bazaar and saw how things work, I thought I could try something else starting from my kitchen," Bushra said. With a loan from Zardozi, she opened the first Afghan kitchen spices run by women. She named her kitchen, 'Eftikhar & Ilyas Masala'. Her mini-factory has also found jobs for five other women in the village.

Zardozi Jalalabad Regional Office provided valuable assistance to the Eftikhar and Ilyass kitchen spices mini-factory. They helped to build, market, and introduce Bushra and her co-workers to exhibitions where they were able to do marketing for their new Masalla products. Salima, who works in the factory, says that the exhibition was a good opportunity and the results were very good because after each exhibition they would receive many orders from the consumers.

Nasima, 22, who is another worker at Bushra's factory showed satisfaction and appreciation to Zardozi. "Previously we did not know anything about planning, packaging procedures, and customer relations. With Zardozi's help, we overcame our problems and now we have our own income."

Bushra thinks big and is more confident. "Our biggest goal is to get into a position that we sell our products in all of Afghanistan as well as export it to other countries. I want to make people realize that women can also run big businesses and own successful factories."

Introducing New Board Members



On December 11th, Zardozi- Markets for Afghan Artisans conducted an introductory meeting in order to introduce the new members of the board of directors for Zardozi. The two new board members each Katherine Jane Wilson, the previous Executive Director for Zardozi (2005 – mid-2016) and Heather Grace Jones were appointed by the existing Board Members and were welcomed and introduced by Executive Director, Homa Usmany to the Kabul main and regional offices staff members in the meeting.

It's with great pleasure to announce that Zardozi has a complete board of five committed members including Marnie Gustavson, Ghulam Rasoul "Rasouli, Katherine Jane Wilson, Heather Grace Jones and Mary Larkin as the Chairperson.

Sadat- The only woman shopkeeper in her district



Sadat with her customers at shop

“Why does one person have to bear all the financial burden and responsibility of 5 other people in family? I believe in coordination and teamwork when it comes to the economy of the family. I am as much accountable as much as my husband is.” insisted Sadat, a 25 year old mother from Herat who lives with her husband’s family. Sadat joined Zardozi in 2015 and today she is a shopkeeper selling handicrafts, cosmetics and clothing.

She started as a bead worker but since she didn’t have enough earnings, she left the job. She also left bead working in hope of achieving bigger goals and serving the community at a higher level. That is when she decided to open a shop, a scary and more difficult task to manage.

Sadat says that without Zardozi’s trainers help, introducing her to new business ideas, she wouldn’t have been able to figure out what and how she would start a business that has a higher profit margin. Although Sadat had liked the idea of opening a shop, she thought of many challenges that would come her way. Family restrictions, inadequate cash flow to rent a place and purchase items were some of her concerns.

In addition to that, the emergence of female shopkeepers is new in Afghanistan. There are many safety and risk factors that add to the challenge. In provinces like Herat, there are more security measures in place. Most men seem to be more open-minded in this province than in more conservative areas. They will allow their sisters and wives to work outside so that they have the freedom to stand on their feet and practice their rights. This situation applies to some people but for some, like Sadat, she had obstacles to overcome.

Safety was not the only issue bothering Sadat. Family strictness and the Mullahs were also against the opinion of women shopkeepers. Sadat’s father and brothers were not happy about her shop. As head of the District Council, Sadat’s father was afraid that people would criticize him for his daughter’s work. but since money was tight, they had to allow her work and open the shop inside the house. Sadat said, with a smile on her face, “It is funny how everyone that was against me turned out to be nice to me and respect me later. It is because their needs were completed through my shop and the men would send their women only to my shop, because they felt their women are safe interacting with female shopkeeper.”

In an Afghan society, men are more comfortable when their women interact with female doctors, co-workers and shopkeepers. However, most of these men also do not allow their women to be in these positions so that women can go to them. Brave women like Sadat have taken steps forward to fight circumstances, to resist and make sacrifices to become facilitators in society. She says that it is because of her shop that the women are able to come out and speak comfortably about their needs to a woman shopkeeper.

Sadat says, "There are so many difficulties for women to speak to male shopkeepers especially when buying inner garments. A woman who is not allowed to go much out of home and is not permitted to speak to Non-Mahram feel embarrassment and an unpleasant experience to buy the necessary things from male shopkeepers. I have also learned from my female customers that they were harassed many times, and that is why they express gratitude to my shop."

Sadat has been able to manage her business successfully and visits Zardozi's Manbeh when she seeks advice.

How Fawzia put an end to 11 years disastrous marriage life



Ms. Fawzia busy with her tailoring work. Afraid of being threatened, she did not allow her face to be appeared publically

"When I woke up with swollen eyes from the previous night's crying, I realized he did not deserve a second chance after all the times he had beaten me and had burnt my house that almost killed me and my children," Fawzia told us about her drug-addicted husband in an emotional voice. Fawzia, living in the outskirts of Herat, tells us about how as a 13 year old girl, she was swindled into marrying a drug addicted man and was later harassed by her father in-law and brother in-laws.

Afghanistan is the world's biggest supplier of illegal opiates, producing 90 percent of the opium poppies worldwide, which has largely contributed to drug addiction, domestic violence and

more economic difficulties for families in Afghanistan. Women, like Fawzia, are the main victims of this miserable drug war. They either fight the hardships or lose their lives as a result of violence from their drug-addicted fathers, brothers and husbands.

As she continues to speak about her bitter past, she cries, "My husband would get angry soon, because he was not conscious of his acts. He beat me and my children. We did not have any savings and all the money that I would earn through tailoring, he would waste it on buying weed and opium while lying to me that he had started a business with it."

Fawzia admitted her husband to a treatment center but the doctors found it impossible to cure him. The daily violence went on until Fawzia decided to divorce him after 11 years.

When Fawzia joined Zardozi a year ago, the organization took her case into special consideration by allocating a larger loan amount for her through which she could build a room in her mother's house and buy tailoring machines. Zardozi director, Ms. Homa Usmany, met Fawzia personally and found her in dire need of moral support and confidence to stand on her feet, to try to better her life. Fawzia attended the Manbeh where she could receive trainings, share her problems, interact with other women like her and get her problems solved through the trainers. "I became motivated by other women's success in Manbeh and looking at them gives me hope and energy to be as successful like them," said Fawzia.

Fawzia says that she has not seen her husband since, but she still fears that he will come back and harm her and the children.

Fawzia can cover most of her expenses with the tailoring money, but first she has to pay back the loan money, and then have some savings which she will later invest into buying her own house and opening a tailoring workshop there.

About Zardozi

ZARDOZI is a local non-government and non-profit organization aiming to provide economic and social services to around 6,000 Afghan women in four provinces such as Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad and Kapisa with its main office in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Zardozi's objective is to support and empower Afghan women living in the urban and rural areas through its business skills development programs to engage them in the market economy. To achieve this goal, Zardozi has established Nisfe Jahan as an independent membership-based civil society organization which also runs local Community Business Center where women gather to receive business startup loans; and technical, advisory, business and marketing skills trainings.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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