



Zardozi Kadar from Mazar regional office helping woman at local *Manbeh*

# Zardozi Quarterly

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## Zardozi Volunteers Bringing Change

Volunteers have often been referred to as the backbone of causes worldwide, building and rebuilding societies through the sheer power of goodwill. Zardozi is also proud to be engaging with volunteers who are starting to provide the leadership and dynamism needed for a sustainable project.

Named as *Kadar*, Zardozi's volunteer initiative was inspired by a visit to an organisation in Indonesia called PEKKA, that implements most of its projects using volunteers. "We saw how successful and effective the programme was for PEKKA, we decided to implement it within Zardozi as well," informs Laiq Samim, Programme Director at Zardozi.

Started in November 2015, Zardozi now has four volunteers in two regional offices of Kabul and Mazar.

These volunteers, all women, identify issues as well as core areas needing improvement in Zardozi's ongoing programmes. "They visit our local business centres and assess how the projects are being implemented. They talk to our clients and stakeholders and not only identify areas for improvement, but also suggest viable solutions," explains Hasina Aimaq, Programme Development Manager at Zardozi.

The volunteers have a weekly discussion with the regional office presenting their review of ongoing work in Zardozi-led workshops, business centres etc. Hasina regularly meets all volunteers. "I find them very committed and honest. They help bring more transparency to all our systems," she adds.

Since the volunteers are independent observers, they provide a very helpful "outside view" of the organisation's work. "They've also not only helped identify cases of fraud among some clients, but they also helped solve the problems they identified," she shares.

Zardozi plans to enroll 12 more *Kadars* in 2016. They will be jointly selected by Zardozi staff based on set criteria and by the existing four *Kadar* "We aim to have at least one *Kadar*, for every three to five community business centres," informs Hasina.



### Being a *Kadar* Empowers Me

I am Durdana from Ghazni and I'm among one of the first batch of *Kadar* (volunteers).



### Cab Service for women

"How wonderful it would be if Afghan women had services of female taxi drivers they could trust"



### PEKKA Comes to Kabul

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Volunteers will receive training in addition to the leadership, good governance, civil society, gender and rights training modules which are already on offer to Zardozi clients. "We will also train them in communication, if required," adds Hasina.

The *Kadars* are not only eyes and ears for feedback and for problem solving, it is planned that they will be at the centre of strategy development. Already they are included in senior management discussions concerning Zardozi's vision, goals and objectives. Their current responsibilities include monitoring community business centre management, responding to complaints, interacting with the community, encouraging unemployed women to come to the business centres, supporting *Nisfe Jahan* Executive Committee members. "They also help liaise with local authorities and community elders," adds Hasina. In future, they will also undertake research, networking and advocacy.

For their efforts, the volunteers receive a small daily honorarium and transportation costs. However, Hasina explains, "These are women who are more interested in supporting other women than earning money."

"We've only had these volunteers for a couple of months, but they are already at the heart of the programme," she adds.

## Zardozi *Kadar* empowers me



**Durdana one of the first batch of *Kadar* (volunteers)**

I am Durdana from Ghazni and I'm among one of the first batch of *Kadar* (volunteers) nominated by Zardozi.

My journey with Zardozi began nearly a decade ago. Before I became a part of the organisation, I operated a small women's bakery in my house in Kabul's Dasht-e-Barchi area. I also supplemented my income by spinning wool for three years.

All this, I did to support my family of nine that includes my grandchildren and my 110-year-old mother-in-law.

When Zardozi approached me in 2005, I did not need to think twice to participate. I have since gotten more involved in Zardozi activities with each passing year. I was

elected the chairperson of *Nisfe Jahan* and held that position for nearly four years, and had to give it up when I decided to go for *hajj* (pilgrimage).

Zardozi not only trained me in business skills, but also helped find a market for my handicrafts. My income and standard of living improved significantly and I further involved myself in Zardozi.

I have made some really close friends at Zardozi. We share so much in common—their lives, struggles, stories are so similar to mine. I met my best friend Kobra at Zardozi. Zardozi approached her around the same time as I joined the organisation—we've been fast friends since the first day that we met at the Dasht-e-Barchi *Manbeh*. And here we are today, both of us, veteran members of Zardozi, nominated as proud volunteers to overlook local operations.

We love our jobs, because we get to help the people, solve their problems. The newer members don't always feel comfortable sharing their problems with their trainers, but we find that they are more open to talking to us. For instance, once at the Haji Nabi *Manbeh* there was a misunderstanding between one of our new clients who wanted to purchase a tailoring machine, and the Zardozi staff. The shopkeeper informed the staff member that the client purchased the machine at a much lower price, but wrongly informed the organisation that it cost much more. This client, however, strongly denied doing any such thing. There was a lot of bitterness and things had gotten very nasty when they brought the issue to us. We took all parties involved to market to meet with the shopkeeper, along with all the bills and documents we had. We matched them with the bills the shopkeeper had, and it turns out that there was no discrepancy at all!

The clients trust us so much that they not only discuss business issues with us, but also their family problems. We often consult with their family members to help solve their domestic issues. And we are glad to be able to be of help to these young women.

I'm grateful to Zardozi for this opportunity. It gives me a platform to inspire and encourage more women with my own story. I often tell the younger women at the *Manbehs* how I started with just 2000 Afs and then build my house, married off my sons, and went to pilgrimage—all by myself.

But, more importantly, the best part about being a Kadar is the responsibility of decision-making that Zardozi has given us. They don't just consult us, but follow through on our decisions.

Our work at Zardozi has brought us respect in the community. There was a time when people would call me names because I worked outside of home, but now the very same people respect us. Within our families, too, we have a better position. My husband, for instance, helps around the house so that I have more time to give towards my job as a *Kadar*. My son does not make any major decision without my consult.

Our work at Zardozi has empowered us in so many ways!

## Cab Service For Women, By Women

Zahra takes a cab to work every day—a designated driver picks her up at star 7.40 am, and drops her at her office at 7.55 am, albeit Kabul traffic. He later picks her at the end of her work day at 4pm and drops her back home.

If Zahra needs to meet her friends over the weekend, or travel elsewhere, her brother is gracious enough to drive her around Kabul. It's a comfortable arrangement, but Zahra has yearned for more—to be able to drive for herself.

She has, several times, watched her brother get behind the steering wheel, switch on the engine, and pull the mighty vehicle that is their white corolla out of its parking space, into the roads of Kabul. She has watched with much admiration as he commanded not just their car, but also the roads that otherwise seem so inaccessible to someone like Zahra. "I avoid travelling alone, and would never take a taxi on my own," she shared. "Being able to drive will not only give me control over my own movements, but will also be a safer alternate to taking cabs," she added, referring to the many incidence of theft, harassment and kidnappings by unsolicited cab drivers.



Zahra one of Afghanistan's first female taxi drivers

It also creates an opportunity for women to get into the taxi driving business—making a living ferrying other women—an opportunity the enterprising Zardozi women are eager to grab.

"How wonderful it would be if Afghan women had the services of a female taxi driver—someone they and their families could trust," Zahra pointed out. "It will not just be useful to the women who take up driving, but also to other women who will have greater mobility with a female driver at hand," she reasoned.

The idea, as Rahima Paiman, marketing development manager at Zardozi, explained was derived from the sole Afghan female taxi driver from Mazar-i-Sharif. "Sahra Bahai has been driving for the last 11 years and has been a taxi driver for the last four," Rahima narrated.

### Challenges—first steps are never easy

In a highly conservative society like Afghanistan, where women are still grappling for basic rights, of course, it won't be as easy to start a women-only taxi service. "We are still in the draft stages of the plan and are conducting risk assessment, and identifying challenges that will be posed," explained Rahima.

For instance, the first batch of female drivers will only cater to female clientele—mostly students and young professionals.

The biggest challenge for these women, though, will be in getting societal acceptance. Bahai, 41, who is now a veteran of sorts in this field shared how strenuous it was for her to break into the industry. She often faced verbal and physical abuse, her taxi was vandalised on many occasions. "While talking to Sahra about her experiences, I found how difficult the process was for her, but she continued anyway, because support from the female community was equally overwhelming," shared Rahima. "First steps are never easy," Rahima explained. "The success of this project will require a lot of patience and hard work, but Zardozi women are, if anything, relentless in their pursuits," she added, confident that Afghan women were harbinger of social change.

## Pekka Comes To Kabul For Knowledge Exchange



**Nani Zulminarni, Director of Women Head of Family Empowerment at PEKKA**

As part of a cultural exchange and collaboration initiative, Zardozi invited representatives of the Indonesia-based household empowerment programme called PEKKA—an initiative similar to Zardozi in many ways.

This trip was a follow up to Zardozi's visit to Indonesia in May, 2015, and an opportunity for both organizations to learn from one another. Having been around much longer, PEKKA had a lot of experiences to share with Zardozi during the visit last year.

Much like Zardozi in Afghanistan, PEKKA supports female heads of households to

contribute towards a gender-equal society. There are 750 PEKKA groups in 475 villages of 19 provinces across Indonesia, working with widows, women abandoned by their husbands, and unmarried women who have dependants.

PEKKA received various accolades and has been named as the best project funded by the Japanese Social Development Fund (JSDF) and the World Bank.

Last month, Zardozi hosted Nani Zulminarni, director at PEKKA, along with their manager of institutional development Kodar Tri Wusaningsih in Kabul from February 20 to 25. While here, they visited several *manbehs* (community business centres), an event celebrating successful Zardozi women, as well as an exhibition conducted by the Kabul regional office. They also met with Zardozi clients and *Kadar* (volunteers) getting a firsthand account of Zardozi's work in Afghanistan.

"We were very impressed with the way Zardozi responds to the situation of women, especially towards women at the grass root level, in an urban setting of Kabul," said Zulminarni, who is also a well known women's activist in south Asia. Her work in gender equality and development, was sharpened by her personal experiences of being a divorcee in a discriminatory society.

Since then, however, Nani has managed to mobilise hundreds of underprivileged women under the PEKKA umbrella.

And so, her visit to Kabul was a mutually enriching experience for her and Zardozi.

Talking about lessons learned, Zulminarni shared, "We learned so much from the approach that Zardozi uses, to respond to the difficult situation of women living in an insecure environment and dealing strong traditions in these spaces."

"*Nisfe Jahan* is a good initiative that allows women to work together and build a strong community that shares experiences and learns from each other," Wusaningsih shared. "It will help improve their conditions in society."

Another take back for the PEKKA representatives was Zardozi's initiatives to not just train women in business skills, but also to connect them to markets. "Zardozi uses different strategies to link these women with markets, for example, by conducting exhibitions and providing capital to start shops in their own homes," she added. "These are things we need to learn from Zardozi since markets are very important in economic development."

PEKKA representatives were also intrigued with Zardozi's attempts to reach out and connect with family members of their clients, through events that celebrate successful women. "Not only are the women appreciated at such events, but also their family members—especially supportive husbands—this is very strategic smart approach in a context where women have lots of restrictions," she said.

"It helps set a good example for families of other women," added Wusaningsih.

The visit by PEKKA representatives concluded with a commitment for long term engagement between the the two organizations.

## About Zardozi

**ZARDOZI** is a local non-government organisation based in Afghanistan providing business services to women.

Zardozi receives donor funding; Over the past three years, Oxfam Novib and DfID have been the primary funders to run programs in the city centers of Kabul, Jalalabad, Mazar, and Herat.

The programme provides business support services to some of the poorest Afghan women living in urban and semi-urban areas.

Zardozi provides these women with an initial package of a broad range of business trainings together with whatever skills upgrade training is considered necessary.

Zardozi staff then work with the client to develop a product and to find the first orders; the new client is mentored by staff through their first orders and then handed on to the professional association Nisfe Jahan (see website for details on the association).

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