



We Train Future Leaders



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Other women listen as Zarina to the right talks about women in leadership roles

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Yes, Women Can Be Leaders, too!

"Some examples of great leaders are Ashraf Ghani, Karzai, our fathers, and our husbands," answered a group of women when the leadership trainer asked them about who they recognize as leaders. But none of the examples of great leaders were women. Even when women play central roles in their families and societies, they are still undermined—a result of the lack of awareness that people have about the positions and potentials of women. Most of the women in the room don't recognize the fact that they, too, are leaders, and that they make an equal contribution to society as their male counterparts.

Zardozi acknowledges this problem by sequencing its priorities, determining which programs can best fulfill the needs of women. We have set leadership trainings at the top of the agenda because these workshops help build women's sense of importance to step out of their homes and make a difference.

As the information circles around the room, more women speak up about what leadership is and who can be a leader. Samina, 18 and educated, says, "All mothers are leaders." Frozan also jumps in to explain the traits of good leaders: "A leader should be open minded, educated, honest, be able to solve people's problems, and be a person who has a vision for the betterment of the future." The trainer, Ms. Farida, simultaneously asks different questions from the 10 women who are present in the room on Tuesday's session. Since most of these women have not had access to basic education, Ms. Farida acquires different ways to help the trainees understand better. In her training materials bag, she brings leadership related pictures (mostly images of female leaders), a laptop to show various videos, and other materials that can be used in performing games or carrying out role-plays.

In her feedback, Zarina speaks about her experience, "I haven't missed even one day of the training sessions. Attending these classes has helped me know myself and my value. Now I know that yes, women can be leaders, too!" She further adds, "Women are not made for hiding at the corners of their rooms. We have had strong female leaders back in history and we still see them standing there for the rights of other women and building this country."

Zardozi's leadership program not only spreads general awareness, but aims to empower more women to engage in Nisfe-Jahan—to evolve into an organization that will be entirely run by women and for women. The program educates women to vote for and choose Nisfe-Jahan's leaders who will then represent them and provide them with support. All of these efforts and work for the empowerment of women do come at a cost. Zardozi's long term goal in attracting larger number of women is a challenging task. While some women attend Zardozi programs secretly, others face abuse on the street while going to the Community Business Centers (Manbeh). The number of women attending the trainings drops at certain times while Zardozi staff has to make settlements with community leaders and local Mullahs. These groups then collaborate with Zardozi by holding meetings with community members to encourage families to allow their wives and sisters to take advantage of the services.

Frozan's Entrepreneurial Spirit Led Her to Live a Better Life



Frozan is working on another 50 pairs of wedding dresses order

Ms. Frozan comes from a small district of Mazara Sharif, Hajat Rawa. She has three children, and the eldest of all is 12 years old. Like many beneficiaries, Frozan took the opportunity and extracted the utmost advantage from Zardozi's programs to earn as much she could in order to provide her children a standard education and a healthy lifestyle. Frozan's friendly behavior and human connections enabled her to attract many customers and build connections with sellers and contractors.

Within one month, Frozan became the leader of her team at Manbeh and taught other women tailoring skills in the absence of Zardozi's trainers. "Frozan became a good friend in less than an hour when I first saw her. Her tailoring skills are impressive," said Habiba—a close friend of Frozan at the Manbeh. Within 3 years, Frozan also started her personal tailoring workshop and bought necessary machinery by taking a loan from Zardozi. She hired six other women at the workshop who help her manage big contracts and complete public orders on time. "My first big contract was making 300 pairs of party dresses. The income derived was 300,000 AFS. I had never dreamt of earning this amount of money," exclaimed Frozan.

Ms. Frozan's husband, a shopkeeper, says that he is very proud of his wife and encourages her to further expand her business. Frozan proudly mentioned, "My husband supported me at times when people spoke ill of me while attending Manbeh. He trusted me and never stopped me even once." Frozan's children are now in one of Mazar-e-sharif's best schools. Both she and her husband run the house smoothly without large financial difficulties.

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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