



Maryam's water purification machine which fills the bottles outside through a pipe

Zardozi Women 'Breaking the Glass Ceiling'

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How a water filter machine empowered Maryam

Exposed to relentless risk of terrorism, Afghans have to confront a second perilous problem – the acute shortage of clean water in the cities and villages. According to National Environment Protection Agency (NEPA), 70% of the underground water in Kabul is contaminated with bacteria and harmful chemicals which have put many lives at risk. Majority of the people, who do not have another option, consumes the unclean water, as a result of which residents suffer from various waterborne diseases.

In the rising quest for clean water, Zardozi's client in Kabul, Ms. Maryam responsible for a 9-member family of lower class status started her private water business. After attending Zardozi Manbeh's (Community Business Centers), Maryam found the courage to ask her husband to help her with her new business idea and plan. Maryam's husband used to work in a private water supply company, therefore his help was vital to Maryam to run the business. Without any hesitation, Maryam and her husband bought the necessary equipments and filtering machines.

"I started this business because as citizen of this country, I felt obliged to have some contribution to the wellbeing of my people. But starting this business was also not far from risks, because we had to ensure the quality of the water and gain people's trust. Plus the constant power outage is another challenge to overcome since most days of the month we are not able to supply the adequate amount of water; therefore we don't earn much either," says Maryam. However, Maryam is happy full filling her duties as a responsible citizen.

Maryam told us that her business does not run under a specific brand name, but she has built enough trust so that the neighborhood buys the water from her due to their urgent needs. Plus many of her neighbors buy her water, because it is cheaper than subscribing to a company. Gulmaki who is maryam's neighbor says that ever since she has seen Maryam filtering impure water through the water purifiers, the water tastes fine and it is better than the water the district was getting from the wells.

Currently Maryam is able to support her daughter's education who pursues to become a dentist. Maryam's daughter told us about her mother, "I am able to get higher education because of my mother's hard work. My father would have never been able to cover the education expenses of all of my siblings on his own." Even though, the business does not profit the family to a larger extent, they are living happily together and are grateful about how much they earn.

Nooria's first market experience beat her fears



Nooria attends her fourth exhibition where she showcases her products and sells Ashak

"Zardozi took us out of darkness into light," says 38 years old Zardozi client, standing in her booth at the exhibition as she repeatedly pass balls of dough through the Pasta machine thickening each dough to 2 mm and cutting it into 3 cm squares to make Ashak (an Afghan dish prepared on special occasions) – dumplings filled with leeks and sometimes meat. This is Nooria, a mother of two kids who found out about Zardozi five years ago when she was desperately looking for survival.

Today's Nooria is a very different person. Her perspective about life is remarkable. "Five years ago, I didn't know how to talk to people or how to find my way when commuting to bazar, because I had never stepped out of home without a male companion and they would do all the talking for me," sighed Nooria. She added, "The first time I exchanged some words with a Non-Muhram man (a person who is not member of the family) was when a trainer from Zardozi introduced me to a male shopkeeper regarding an order for tailoring. I was very shy, my face turned red and I was constantly sweating. Right now, I am very happy that I can travel alone and don't need someone to accompany me outside home."

Nooria learned tailoring and embroidery – a skill that she knew little about and that would empower her later in life. She also started to cook special Afghani dishes and had a family member or shopkeepers to sell it for her. "I am very grateful to Zardozi's trainers. Their guidance was always helpful."

While talking about her life, Nooria believed that only women can save themselves from the miseries of their lives. She says, "Men don't trust their women, because they think that women are weak and need their protection. But women should prove that they are brave. The outside world is not as scary as we have made it for ourselves."

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 five 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 NisfeJahan 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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