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AFGHANISTAN

From Struggle to Success: Empowering Afghan Women Through Handicraft Apprenticeship Programs

AVCP partners with agribusinesses to empower women through fiber value chain apprenticeships, enhancing skills and securing local jobs.



Photo: USAID/AVCP

Nabila practicing shoe gluing at the local firm's workshop

"Joining this firm as an apprentice and receiving the stipend has brought immense relief to my husband and me. We no longer worry about our livelihood, as we can now fulfill all the essential requirements of our family. Moreover, the savings we have made during this apprenticeship period have provided us with a sense of security," says Nabila.

Handicrafts in Afghanistan are more than products; they embody the nation's rich cultural identity and have a vital economic role. Women are central to this sector, creating traditional arts that support families and communities. The leather products industry specifically provides steady income and employment for Afghan women.

Women in Afghanistan face high unemployment and limited job opportunities, especially in sectors that could benefit from their skills. Many handicrafts' firms suffer from a lack of skilled labor, hindering their ability to improve quality and stifles firm growth. To address these issues, USAID's Afghanistan Value Chain program (AVCP) partnered with a local cloth design firm to implement a three-month apprenticeship program, training 50 women in new skills.

Nabila, a 28-year-old mother of four with a 12-grade education faced severe financial difficulties. Her husband's modest earnings from operating a handcart in Kabul's Mandavi marketplace were insufficient, making it challenging to provide for their children's basic needs and education. With two children in school, Nabila often struggled to afford necessary supplies.

Nabila began working with the local firm as an apprentice in leather production and design. As an apprentice, Nabila receives a monthly stipend of \$150, significantly improving her family's situation. Nabila expressed her gratitude, saying, "Joining this firm as an apprentice and receiving the stipend has brought immense relief to my husband and me. We no longer worry about our livelihood, as we can now fulfill all the essential requirements of our family. Moreover, the savings we have made during this apprenticeship period have provided us with a sense of security." Upon completing the program, Nabila hopes to secure a full-time position within the company.

Nabila's story highlights the transformative power of USAID's AVCP apprenticeship and support programs. By investing in the handicrafts sector and empowering women, Afghanistan can unlock significant economic potential, preserve cultural heritage, and promote social inclusion. Nabila's success exemplifies the profound impact of USAID's AVCP on Afghan women's lives. Through continued support and targeted training programs, the initiative fosters economic growth and empowers women to build a better future for themselves and their families.

As of May 2024, USAID's AVCP has placed 753 apprentices in various sectors within 13 anchor firms, including fiber, crops, dairy, and handicrafts. Among these, 340 apprentices have graduated from the program. By the close of AVCP, the project expects to have placed 1,600 women apprentices.