

# A guide to Afghan women employment opportunities

A survey conducted before the Taliban took over Afghanistan on 15 August 2021, and updated a year later.

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October 2022



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## Acknowledgments

The Good Practice Guide is conducted under the project "'Dard Kush' II - Strengthening Livelihoods of Afghan Refugees and Pakistani Host Communities (with specific focus on women)". This project is currently implemented by FACES Pakistan in Lahore, together with Caritas Austria and Caritas St. Pölten, in partnership with VIDC and funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

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## Publisher:

Wiener Institut für Internationalen Dialog und Zusammenarbeit  
– Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC)  
Möllwaldplatz 5/9, A-1040 Vienna,  
[www.vidc.org](http://www.vidc.org)

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Editor: Ali Ahmad, Michael Fanizadeh (VIDC)

Proof reading: Shaddin Almasri

Cover Picture: © Banoo Sweets Store

Published in accordance with §25 of the Media Law.

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Basic issues: discussion papers on development policies, international cooperation and south-north cultural exchange, as well as anti-racist campaigning.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the editor/VIDC.

## Inhaltsverzeichnis

<b>1. Preface .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1. Objective of this guide .....	4
1.2. Introduction .....	4
1.3. Challenges .....	4
1.4. Stories .....	8
1.5. Lessons.....	8
<b>2. Good Practice Examples .....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1. AASH e KHOSHA Spaghetti producing and packaging Company .....	10
2.2. SAMARUQ-E BALKH .....	14
2.3. Zanan -e- Mumtaz Bamyar Trading Company.....	18
2.4. Shigofa Honey Producing Company.....	22
2.5. Taaj Handicrafts Company .....	32
2.6. Banoo Sweets Store.....	
2.7. HAWASANA Restaurant .....	37
2.8. Nagin Asia Goldozi company.....	42
2.9. Zahid Dry fruits Store .....	46
2.10. Kunduz Women Social Cohesion Council.....	50
2.11 Manawara Dilawari Handicraft and Carpet Production Company .....	54
2.12. Sihar Silab Food Company.....	58

# 1. Preface

## 1.1. Objective of this guide

The Good Practice Guide (GPG) offers practical help to the various stakeholders in developing vocational training programs to encourage innovative forms of employment for women in Afghanistan. The guide highlights 12 examples of innovative employment opportunities for uneducated or less educated Afghan women in Afghanistan. The projects presented serve as examples for Afghan women who are refugees in neighboring countries, such as Pakistan, and face similar challenges related to gender roles and norms in their communities.

This research is based on stories from 12 businesswomen working in ten different provinces across Afghanistan. The research had initially planned to cover 20 provinces. However due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the deteriorating security situation, it remained limited to ten provinces. The research extensively focuses on cultural and social diversity of the interviewees instead.

Upon the selection of the interviewees (based on different cultural and social background, as well as to cover remote areas and diverse regions) and collection of basic information about them, a set of incorporated questions was developed.

The questions tried to find answers to: (1) challenges the businesswomen faced, (2) the incentive they received, (3) the problems they confronted when starting their own business, (4) the organizational structure in their organization, (5) type of production, source of funding, and (6) their need to further enhance their work.

Businesswomen with outstanding stories were interviewed in ten provinces: Balkh and Kunduz in the north, Bamyan, Daikundi, in central highlands, Helmand and Kandahar, in the south, Hirat and Nimroz in the west, Nangarhar in the east and Kabul, the capital. The interviews were conducted on the phone due Covid-19 restrictions. In some provinces, several interviews were conducted to document activities taking place in different regions of one province.

## 1.2. Introduction

### Introduction

During the first half of 2021, Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC) conducted research in Afghanistan to identify 20 women-led businesses across ten provinces in Afghanistan. Briefs about these businesses were compiled in a brochure just before the Taliban takeover in August 2021. To protect the identity and safety of these women-run businesses under the new de-facto rulers, VIDC delayed the publication of the brochure as well as any information that could pose risks to the business owners and their employees.

Several months after the regime change in Afghanistan, VIDC commissioned Afghanistan Development and Peace Research Organizations (ADPRO) to investigate two key questions pertaining to these

women-owned businesses: firstly, how many of the original batch of 20 women-led businesses are still active after the Taliban takeover and what has been the impact of regime shock on their businesses? Secondly, VIDC sought permission to publish its brochure, either anonymously or under the real names of each business owner.

Between May and June, ADPRO's researcher attempted to reach out to each of those included in the original sample of 20 women-owned businesses through social media and phone numbers available in the brochure. ADPRO's research managed to successfully reach only 12. The remaining eight businesses were not reachable. As the interlocutor that ADPRO had previously relied on had since fled the country, no other contact person or organization was available to support in reaching the remaining eight companies.

The modified version of the original booklet contains the information that was gathered from 12 business owners. For accuracy purposes, all recent interviews were recorded, transcribed and then the recordings were destroyed. The introduction that follows has been updated to reflect recent political changes in Afghanistan when the Taliban took over on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2021.

### ***New era of intervention***

*Following the U.S. military occupation, Afghanistan is now once again enduring invasion but this time by its southern neighbor, Pakistan. The ambassador of Pakistan for Afghanistan, [Mansoor Ahmad Khan](#), for instance, acts as a viceroy and at times issues instructions to certain Taliban leaders.*

*The government of Pakistan, maintaining close ties with the Taliban, ensures control and takeover of sovereign Afghan territory along the Durand Line. Haqqanis, the de-facto rulers of Afghanistan, are silent on this loss of sovereignty and would remain so due to their alliance with Pakistan – all at the cost of Afghan lives.*

### **The Taliban and the systemic erasure of Afghan women**

In August 2021, after the U.S. pulled out its troops from Afghanistan, the Taliban quickly returned to power. For Afghan women, the memories of the Taliban's first rule were still fresh. They lost almost all progress and hard-earned rights that they fought for in the 20 years since the Taliban regained power.

In the span of one year, Taliban have erased women from all public life by issuing "Islamic" restrictive policies and decrees on what Afghan women wear and how Afghan women behave. The new guidelines also restrict women's mobility and access to equal participation in society. The Taliban have gone on to eradicate the presence of women from Afghanistan's political structure.

As the most vulnerable group of Afghan society, girls are banned from attending schools beyond sixth grades. The Taliban have violated all the fundamental rights of women and girls to education, work and free movement. They have brutally suppressed any self-motivated women's movement that demanded 'work, food and freedom'. Women have been detained, tortured, and disappeared for peacefully protesting against the Taliban's misogynistic interpretation of "Sharia law".

"For women in Afghanistan, it is death in slow motion," Amnesty International quoted Afghan female journalist Adila, in its recent report titled "[Death in slow motion: Women and girls under the Taliban](#)."

Amnesty International also reported that most former government female employees have been ordered to stay home, except for medical workers, who must abide by strict behavioral and clothing regulations. The Ministry of Women's Affairs was also converted to the Taliban's Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, who issued a decree in May ordering women to cover themselves completely. Women and girls cannot travel long journeys without a 'mahram' – or male chaperone, states the report. Music, cinemas, comedy shows that mock the Taliban are banned.

In addition, poverty, unemployment, natural disasters, and forced out-migration have intensified since the collapse of the former U.S.-backed government led by [Ashraf Ghani](#), once again disproportionately affecting women. The aid-dependent economy of Afghanistan is on the verge of collapse. After the Taliban's takeover, the United Nations Development Program ([UNDP](#)) warned that 97 percent of Afghans could plunge into poverty by mid 2022 if adequate responses were not directed to lessen the severity of economic situation under the Taliban's rule.

### **Working women under the Taliban rule**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 2021, the Taliban ordered working women to stay home because their fighters were not trained on "[how to deal with women](#)". This temporary instruction has become a permanent practice; a disappearing space for Afghan women since they announced the ruling.

Since the change in administration from the Republic to the Taliban's Islamic Emirate, job losses reached more than half a million. International Labor Organization ([ILO](#)) estimates suggest that this will nearly double to reach a total of one million by mid-2022. The ILO states that, following the regime change, the number of working hours dropped by 13 percent in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 2021. Among the working population, female workers have been disproportionately impacted; not only by shrinking working opportunities, but also by increasingly restrictive policies and Taliban guidelines.

### **Experiences of women businessowners**

Most of the 12 businesswomen with which ADPRO conducted followed up interviews have either discontinued operations entirely or have been struggling financially. Restrictions on women's mobility and compulsory Hijab, coupled with the collapse of the country's economy, have worsened the situation for women. While the situation in rural areas is much harsher than in major cities, the impacts of loss of income and high prices for raw materials have impacted all Afghan women, especially those who are their family's sole breadwinners.

Women in the province of Southern Kandahar face multiple challenges in the labor market. Pre-Taliban gendered social and cultural norms, access to education, security, and economic difficulties have all been worsened by newly set restrictions.

In Kandahar province, Negin Asia Goldozi Company produced handmade embroidered collars. The company had 10 male and 35 female employees, but the Taliban's order forbidding women to travel long distances has significantly limited its production and women empowerment programs. Most of their women workers were forced to quit because they had to commute long distances to the company.

"Under Taliban's new decree, working opportunities for women have been stolen," said the director with dismay. "Women are psychologically under pressure by the Taliban government. The women have fear from the Taliban. They are scared that our workplace could be raided any time if the Taliban were

to find out that men and women work in the same workplace.” She is unable to comply with the order to separate male and female workspaces, as she has no financial capacity to do so.

In central Afghanistan, where the majority population is of the Hazara ethnicity, Zanan-e Mumtaz Bamiyan Trading Center has lost 90 percent of its regular customers since August 2021, due to mass out-migration. The company, known for its Hazaragi handmade sewing dresses, shawls and women clothing had to reduce its employees from 400 women in pre-Taliban rule to just 80 women with 60 percent reduction in their salary.

Every business owner that ADPRO contacted expressed despair in their private and professional lives. Their lives have turned from bad to worse in less than a year and said they no longer feel important as women. The directors of all 12 businesses have had no interaction with the local authorities of Taliban. Many of them are worried about the possibility of extended their soon-expiring business licenses.

“If situation does not change for women, especially freedom of movement, the status of working women will get worse,” warned the director of Negin Asia Goldozi Company.

### **1.3. Challenges**

*Most women who own and run businesses face challenges in sales, access to markets, and distribution of supply chains. They also face difficulties due to weak knowledge on access to advanced technology and access to finance. Moreover, the economic repercussions of COVID-19 have negatively impacted their businesses as customer demand for their products declined.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, sex-based discrimination, insecurity, cultural constraints, limited access to education, and harassment remain a significant barriers for women in business.<sup>2, 3</sup>*

*Despite government efforts, the country is still facing hurdles in attracting active participation of women in business. Some women interviewed for this guide are living in the areas under the control of the Taliban. They expressed their frustration about the difficulties they faced in running their businesses as they have to hide their work from the Taliban or risk facing punishment.*

*Apart from this, widows who are the sole breadwinners for their families and are under economic strains tend to take loans or aid from their relatives to start small businesses.*

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<sup>1</sup> UNWOMEN. (2020). Gender Alert On COVID-19 Afghanistan: Issue XI: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women’s Economic Empowerment – Women Entrepreneurship and Beyond.

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2020/07/gender%20alert%20issue11-020720.pdf?la=en&vs=455>

<sup>2</sup> Marston, A. (2014). Women, business and human rights: A background paper for the UN Working Group on Discrimination Against Women in Law and Practice. Minneapolis: Marston Consulting. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WG/ESL/BackgroundPaper4.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Ahmad, A. (2018). Refugees Return to Poverty, Unemployment and Despair. Afghanistans labor market and the status of women. Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation. [https://www.vidc.org/fileadmin/michael/studien/afghanistan\\_s\\_labor\\_market\\_and\\_the\\_status\\_of\\_women-1.pdf](https://www.vidc.org/fileadmin/michael/studien/afghanistan_s_labor_market_and_the_status_of_women-1.pdf)



*Women believe that self-employment is a dominant source of income, especially for women with less education or no education or who face mobility restriction, to utilize their skills and enter the informal labor sector.*

## 1.4. Stories

The stories show that women who live in remote areas with limited access to services have initiated home-based and indoor businesses such as sewing, carpet weaving, animal husbandry, poultry keeping and agricultural work with the help of their male relatives.

In 2018, 78% of women were involved in clothing and textile manufacturing businesses, whereas 65% of women were engaged in agricultural activities,<sup>4</sup> however these activities contributed only 20.1% of the total household income<sup>5</sup>.

In some cases, they had to hide their activities to avoid bullies or unwanted interference of their relatives. The study also includes stories of women who have gone bankrupt during the pandemic.

During the pandemic, the prices of all the products increased and people faced economic challenges especially when the cities were locked down. The small businesses owned by women were also hit severely by the economic fall-out of the pandemic as prices for the raw material increased and the customers could not afford to buy their products.

## 1.5. Lessons

A key lesson from these stories is that, in a highly conservative society, it is up to the father, brother, or husband to encourage women in taking part in the family's growth of income, thereby encouraging, and giving a positive example to other poor women. In this sense, working with men to raise gender awareness is particularly important. They must be convinced of the benefits of women's employment, for example, through resulting better living conditions.

One of the key barriers that limit women from their social rights is society's limited access to quality education. This results in the families' restrictive social and cultural norms towards women, as it is often said among people that educating girls and women is a waste of time and money. Therefore, most of the women face restrictions in continuing their education, which then leads to their limited ability to access and use modern technology for running their business.

According to the Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (2016-2017) female labor force participation rate is 20% whereas for the male labor force it is 80%.<sup>6</sup> Also according to ILO-2016 women employment in service sector is 22%.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ahmad, A. (2018). Refugees Return to Poverty, Unemployment and Despair. Afghanistan's labor market and the status of women. *Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation*.

[https://www.vidc.org/fileadmin/michael/studien/afghanistan\\_s\\_labor\\_market\\_and\\_the\\_status\\_of\\_women-1.pdf](https://www.vidc.org/fileadmin/michael/studien/afghanistan_s_labor_market_and_the_status_of_women-1.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Junussova, M., Hashim, N., Iamshchikova, M., Kakar, P., Khan, M. A., Rajabi, S., & Wardak, F. (2019). The Role of Women in the Economic Development of Afghanistan. *University of Central Asia–Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA) Working Paper*, (53).



To ensure women's success as entrepreneurs and to preserve the continuity and long-term success of their businesses, there is a need to promote vocational training through establishing vocational centers and literacy courses for women, as well as training women in marketing, leadership, and mentorship programs for women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, since most of the women living in rural areas face mobility restrictions, training women in indoor activities such as embroidery, animal husbandry or agricultural activities would be an effective approach in increasing women's participation rate in business. Women should also be offered interest-free loans to protect and promote their business specially during the COVID outbreak.

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<sup>6</sup> CSO (2017a). *Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-2017*. Kabul: CSO.

<sup>7</sup> ILO (2016). *Women at Work: Trends 2016*. International Labor Office – Geneva: ILO.

## 2. Good Practice Examples

### 2.1. AASH e KHOSHA Spaghetti producing and packaging Company



*"I wish to extend my business both in terms of product variety and branches to change it into a large company, and to help women who are busy in farming"*

*Chairwoman- AASH e KHOSHA*

#### Background

Aash-e Khosha Spaghetti Producing Company is based in Dehdadi District of northern Balkh province, Afghanistan. This company has had two phases of operations. At the very beginning, in 2016, the chairwoman along with her two sharers started the business. Its main activity was producing noodles and selling their products to local markets in Dehdadi. They each made a small investment, which was used to buy flour.

*"Our company was the first production company in the northern part of Afghanistan to start the noodles production"* said the chairwoman.

In the initial stages, the company faced issues in marketing to sell its products. Nevertheless the business partners continued and after many struggles and losses, they succeeded and were able to find a good market for their products, which resulted in increased sales and more production.

*"We had financial problems in my family, and my husband was also in Iran. A friend suggested to start producing home-made noodles and sell it in the market. This is how we started this company to overcome our day-to-day family financial needs."* The chairwoman

As the demand increased in the market for their products, the company was not able to handle all its orders. To meet demand, it hired other women and increased their total number of employees to 11. In 2017, the USAID project, 'Regional Agricultural Development Program-North (RADP-North)', approached chairwoman and asked her to expand their employment total to 30 women. This was a condition for them to provide the company with necessary tools, equipment, and materials such as a dough mixer, a bakery mixer and a dough rolling machine for the production of noodles. The chairwoman accepted the offer and received the aid from RADP-North to enhance her business. The machinery was contributed to the company to increase its production and distribution. This helped the company in sending its products to Kabul, Pol-e-khomrey, Sheberghan, Jawzjan, and Samangan.

After the closure of the project, the women involved did not want to work with the company. The company was eventually disbanded, and the machinery was sold. The entire capital of all those initial 11 women was lost, including USD 1300 which was put as the mortgage for a house to start the company.

This had a negative impact on chairwoman's work and forced her to start the business all over again. The second phase, which is still operating, started in 2019.

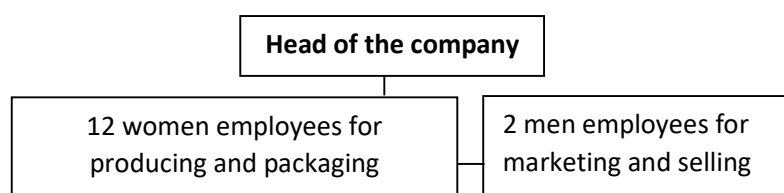
The second stage of re-establishing the company has been put forward from scratch in September 2019 by the chairwoman alone, with an initial capital investment of 530 USD inside her own house.

She now has 14 employees. All of the women who are employed with the company are from within the village "Shaikhabad" in the district of Dihdadi. Women employees are working in two different shifts, the first, from the morning to noon, and the second, from the afternoon to the evening. Those who go to school in the morning take the afternoon shift, and those who have school in the afternoon work in the morning. The employees are from poor families and use the income to cover their educational expenses, from buying stationery to paying the fees for tuition classes.

The chairwoman has benefited from participation in training that covered topics on how to start and manage a self-owned business and marketing. This was conducted through the Directorate of Industry and Commerce for marketing in Balkh province, which is functioning under the Ministry of Industry of Commerce of the Afghanistan government.

#### **Organizational structure:**

The company has one chairwoman and 12 female employees who produce and pack spaghetti and 2 men employees who are engaged in marketing and selling.



#### **Products:**

The company currently facilitates the production and packaging of noodles only and has distribution in northern Balkh province. Since they do not have advanced machinery such as a dough mixer, a bakery mixer and a dough rolling machine for noodles production, the company uses 2 simple manual machines to produce noodles. They are operated manually and do not require electricity. At the moment, the company is not able to extend its distribution to other cities and provinces of Afghanistan, like it did previously.

For the production, they make the dough using different ingredients. It is then transferred to the extruder which kneads the dough into a homogeneous mass, controls the rate of production, and influences the overall quality of the finished product. Then the uniformed sized noodles are hung on wood so that they don't stick together and let them dry after which they pack it for selling.

**Sources of Funding:**

The company started with a sum of USD 530. There are no other sources of funding whether from donors, government or organizations.

**Problems and type of support required:**

The main problem the company faces is a lack of machinery and financial support. The company needs machinery to install and increase the production and distribution of their products to other cities and provinces of Afghanistan. Currently, everything in the company is done manually, from production to packaging. This is time-consuming and costly and restricts production and distribution rates. The women and men working in the company need training in marketing in order to improve sales.

**Update 2022**

Aash Khosha Company has continued to operate since the Taliban takeover, however they have been suffering significant financial losses. The number of women employed at the company has dropped from 14 to only six women over the course of one year. The company carries out its production work in a small private room in Dehdadi district of Northern Balkh province. With the Taliban's return, the company has also lost most of its former customers most of whom were local supermarkets and governmental offices.





## 2.2. SAMARUQ-E BALKH



*“Every woman should have self-confidence and patience to do something. If she can be a mother, then she can do anything. Losses and gains are everywhere and in everything. They should have patience and perseverance to succeed – and eventually they will”.*

MA

Owner, Samarq e Balkh

### Background

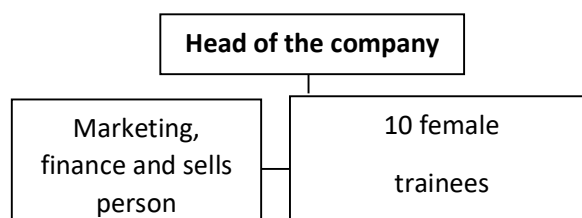
The initial idea of founding Samarq-e Balkh company dates back to 2013, but it was officially launched at the start of 2021 in the Dehdadi district of the province of Balkh. MA's main objective was to start her own business, earn income and to create job opportunities for under-privileged Afghan women in Balkh.

A high-school graduate, MA participated in an agricultural training supported and facilitated by a development project, Support of National Priority Program 2, at the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL). The training program was funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in 2020. The aim of the training was to focus on the cultivation and growing of mushrooms.

In the initial stages of cultivating mushrooms in 2020, IFAD contributed some basic equipment and supported the company through conducting practical and theoretical training. Later, once the IFAD projects were complete, the business was launched.

### Organizational structure:

MA is the founder and chairwoman of the company. Her son works with her and he is responsible for the marketing, finance, and selling of products. MA has 10 trainees who work for the company. The trainees receive a daily honorarium for their services and training from Samarq-e Balkh. MA also delivers training on the process of cultivating mushrooms.



**Products/Projects:**

The company mainly produces mushrooms and their spawn, which are cultivated and grown by them. Once ready for harvest, the products are packed in different packages weighing 200-300 grams. If any customer needs more, then the company makes packages as per the order. No chemicals are used while producing to avoid the products from being toxic.

The company has no agricultural land, as this is not required for the process of cultivating mushrooms. Instead, mushroom can be cultivated inside a room in the basement. Thus, she cultivates mushrooms in a basement in her home while undertaking the highest precaution measures. Aside from mushrooms, the company also sells its spawn and supplies to the market. They sell it to customers who are keen on cultivating mushrooms themselves and who may use this to start their own businesses.

**Source of Funding:**

Samaruq-e Balkh company started with capital from both MA (30%) and IFAD (70%). Currently, the company is self-sustaining through selling its products. In the early stages of the company, MAIL, through IFAD, provided 70% of the investment required for the cultivation of mushrooms, such as basic equipment, and facilitated physical and theoretical training on know-how of cultivating and growing mushrooms. The products are sold to customers who are mostly households within the province. The spawn is supplied to different customers and some provinces, like Badakhshan, Kunduz, and Kabul in small quantities.

**Problems and type of support required:**

For MA, cultural barriers were a bigger problem than security. Dehdadi is relatively secure, but there was weak community acceptance of women working and generating their own income. Although some people have become more open-minded about women working outside their home, dominant cultural norms continue to be a challenge for women.

The company requires financial assistance to be able to expand. It also needs further training to learn better techniques that could increase production.

*"I still wear hijab while going out due to the cultural restrictions. Regardless, people still look strangely at me when I go out." MAI*

**Update 2022**

Samaroq Balkh Producing Company in Northern Balkh province collapsed after the fall of former government. It has struggled since then to stay operational because of lack of funding and the reduction of national support for women. Instead, the chairwoman started a new clothing business called 'Pushak-e Banwan Darwazi (Darwazi Women Clothing)'. She also started the Association of Mushroom Production in Kunduz, Mazar-e Sharif and Kabul to encourage women to grow mushrooms. The objective of the association is to increase support for local products to reduce reliance on imports of agricultural items from neighboring countries. Like many other women-led businesses, financial support, further equipment, and training is required to sustain operations.







## 2.3. Zanan -e- Mumtaz Bamyan Trading Company



*“Women cannot make illiteracy an excuse. I believe that if they are provided with an opportunity, they can use their talent to start their own businesses”.*

**ZK**  
*Owner and head*

### Background

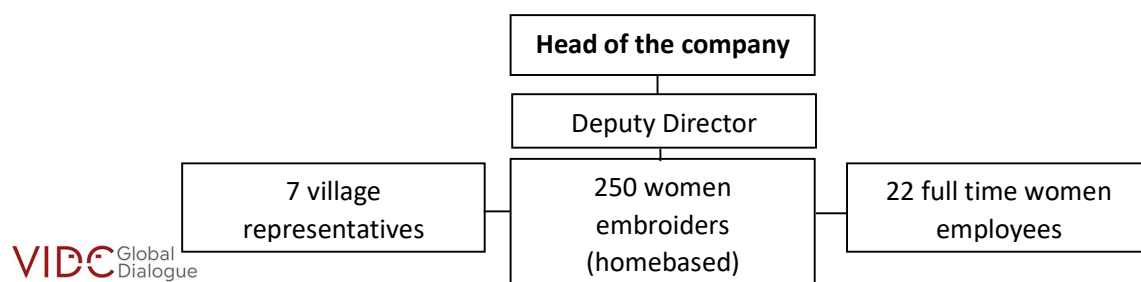
Zanaan Mumtaz Bamyan Trading Company (also known as Bamyan weavers) is a textile company located in the center of Bamyan Province. ZK established the company in 2004 with the objective to empower women, especially widows or women that were not able to access higher education due to familial and cultural barriers. A high school graduate, ZK used to work in the handicraft and carpet weaving sector under the first Taliban rule in Dasht-I-Barchi, in western Kabul, in the 1990s. In addition, ZK participated in different workshops and training programs to enhance her marketing skills and develop expertise in the handicraft sector.

ZK also trains under-privileged Afghan women. Most of ZK's employees cannot read or write. These women are now self-reliant through their jobs at Zanaan Mumtaz Bamyan Trading Company, where they acquired new skills and were able to earn their own incomes.

To run her own business, ZK has fought cultural barriers. She says, “at the beginning of my work in Bamyan, religious scholars and community leaders were against my work, but I tried my best to convince them.” Now, the main barrier that she is facing is security. To participate in training programs or exhibitions, she must go to Kabul. However due to the present security threats along Bamyan-Kabul highway, she is unable to make the journey. Despite security issues, she is optimistic and would like to further promote her business and introduce her handmade products at the international level. She wants to create more job opportunities for Afghan women and to introduce their talent, skills and artistic handicraft work to the world.

### Organizational structure:

The company employs 22 women who work in the company from 8 am to 4 pm. These women are either widows, young women who cannot read or write, or women whose male relatives are unemployed. The company also employs about 250 women who are working from home across 4 districts of Bamyan, Panjaw, Waras, Kawland, and Sheebar, who are paid after the delivery of products. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they had to reduce the number of women embroiders to 100. For business purposes, there are 7 representatives in different villages to whom the primary products are sent. They then help in distributing the primary products to women in their houses.



**Projects/production:**

The main products of the company are handicrafts, embroidered products, purses, shawls, scarfs, footwear, gloves, bed sheets, tops, bags, and small accessories. They also produce *barak*, a fabric produced from the wool of sheep, out of which they make carpets, vests, and laptop bags.

Business sales are often dependent on seasonal change.

“We sell our products on seasonal bases as we produce different products for each season, for instance, in winter we sell high number of footwears, gloves, shawls, winter coats and in summer, demand of scarfs and summer tops are high”. ZK

The company both manufactures and designs/tailors *barak*. *Barak* is a well-known Afghan product and has a well-performing market among foreign tourists who visit Bamyan, along with other handmade products.

**Sources of funding:**

ZK sold her gold and used her savings to start her business. Zanaan Mumtaz Bamyan Trading Company does not have any donors or sponsors. However, there are international and national companies helping them to better reach national and international markets through online applications. For instance, [ASEEL](#), which is an Afghan online shopping application, introduces Afghanistan’s handmade products at the international level. Also, with the help of [click.af](#), which focuses on e-commerce and providing online shopping to Afghans, ZK is introducing her products at the national and international level. Furthermore, ZK has friends living in Canada who help in advertising her products among Afghan diaspora residing there.

**Need for further loans and training in marketing**

Zanaan Mumtaz Bamyan Trading Company require zero-interest loans, which will assist in expanding their business and in hiring more women employees at their company. They also need support in marketing and advertising their products.



“We have to support widow and uneducated women in enhancing their entrepreneurial skills. In my capacity, I am helping them to become self-reliant and find their way to national and international markets for selling their products,” said Kazemi.



#### **Update 2022**

Since the Taliban takeover, the company reduced 80% of its activities due to the loss of its working staff. Since the collapse of the Republic, they have had to reduce their workforce from few hundreds to 80 employees, who work with little motivation and a reduced salary from 6000Afs<sup>8</sup> to 2000Afs per month. The reduction in salary and production has been due to the out-migration of some 90% of ZB's customers since the Taliban takeover. Currently, the major buyers of ZB's products are the Afghan diaspora in Australia and Europe. The director of ZB stated that the Afghan diaspora remain the only hope to keep her business going despite of economic, political and social challenges facing her and ZB.

ZB owned two shops in central Bamiyan province where it was selling its handmade products and had rented a whole house for her workers. Since August 2021, it is managing its business from a single room rented out for 5,000 AF in Bamiyan province. ZB has hired two women to sell its products in its only shop in the city center of Bamiyan, but continues to struggle to operate.

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<sup>8</sup> 1.00 Euro = 88.54 Afs (6000 Afs = 67.75 Euros as of 22 August 2022)



## 2.4. Shigofa Honey Producing Company



*"I did not want to have my CV in hand while knocking on office doors asking them to hire me, just so my boss behaves the way S/he wants to. I wanted to be my own boss and work the way I would like."*

ZA

*Chairwoman, Shigofa Honey producing company*

### Background

ZA founded Shigofa Honey Producing Company in 2019 in the Bamiyan Province of Afghanistan. The company was established not only to help farmers reach the markets but also to generate income and create job opportunities for women and men in Bamiyan city, where living standards are very low and women face challenges in finding work. In remote villages and districts, the farmers do not possess the necessary equipment and machinery to filter honey and sell it in the market. This situation inspired ZA to establish a business that collects honey from these farmers to then filter and sell in the market. This approach not only helped farmers to sell their products, but it also helped them introduce their product to the market.

ZA holds a bachelor's degree in biology. She initially started this business from her house in small quantities, but after receiving training organized by the University of Central Asia and funded by the Agha Khan Foundation (AKF), she gained technical skills in processing and producing honey. She also received training on marketing and how to start a business. She received support from AKF with basic equipment to officially establish her own company in the center of Bamiyan city.

ZA faced cultural problems in the early stages of her business. People used to bully her while she opened windows of her shop, as being a woman and running a shop at the center of Bamiyan market, where all the neighboring shops are occupied by men, was socially unacceptable and shocking.

Security and the horror of suicide attack is still a problem. ZA's shop is located on the street where a recent blast took place in November 2020, resulting in the deaths of 14 people and the wounding of 45. The explosion has also caused significant losses to the shop.<sup>9</sup>

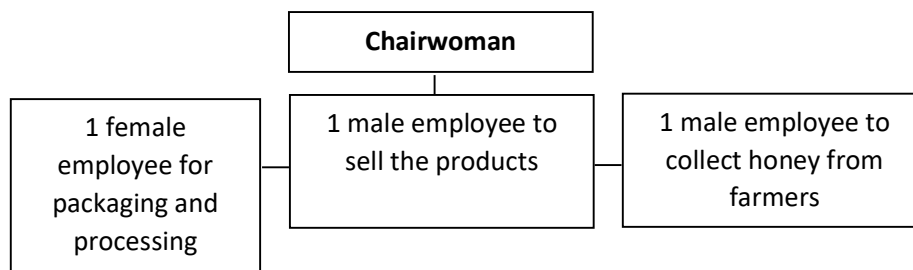
### Organizational structure:

ZA is the chairwoman of the company, and she employs two men and one woman. One man works as a salesperson and manages the shop, while the other man collects the honey from various districts and villages. The female employee has a bachelor's degree. She is engaged with the processing and packaging of the product.

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<sup>9</sup> Aljazeera. (2020). Two bomb blasts kill at least 14 in Afghanistan's Bamiyan.  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/24/two-bomb-blasts-kill-at-least-14-in-afghanistan-officials>





### Products/Projects:

The company produces at least 7 different types of honey that vary based on season and location. These include 3 types of mountain honey (Kohi) which is produced in different months of spring,; these are wildflower honey, garden flower honey, and clover honey. Each type of honey varies based on the season and plant that the hive's bees collect nectar from.

Shigofa Honey Producing Company uses very basic ways of processing the honey since there is no machinery available with the company. First, they fill a large pot with water and place it on the stove to heat until it reaches 50 °C. The honey is then poured in a bottle. This bottle is placed in the warm water. At this stage, particular attention needs to be paid to the temperature of water: if the honey is overheated, it will lose its quality and nutritious enzymes. To control for this, they use a thermometer to ensure the heat measurements are accurate. After the honey is softened, it is filtered and processed, after which AZ and her employee fill the bottles with honey. As for labeling, the company does not have the right machinery. They order the labels in a printing shop in Kabul and use these on the honey bottles. At the moment, the company's product can be found only in the city of Bamiyan.

### Sources of Funding:

AZ started the company with a private capital of about USD 700. She previously worked in an office in Bamiyan and, from this, had leftover savings. She also sold her jewelry and took out a small loan to start her business. AKF helped the company by providing showcases and shelves for the shop. Apart from AKF, ZA's company has not received any financial aid from any organizations or donor agencies. The company sustains itself by selling its products.

### Support required:

To expand, the company needs financial support to buy machinery and rent a space where it can process, pack, and supply honey to the market. Equipment for quality check of honey is another necessary item that AZ need in order to be able to expand her business.

There are fine complexities in the process of producing honey. Currently, the company relies on manual methods such as thermometer checks with some basic machinery. However there are advanced machinery to develop and process these in a more efficient way that the company cannot currently afford. To expand, some support in acquiring this machinery is needed.

*“Everybody can change if they put some effort. Women who are not educated can support themselves. They can start something, share their thoughts with others, stand against cultural problems even if raised by their family members. They can change it by standing against it,” said AZ.*

#### **Update 2022**

The state of women’s businesses have gone from bad to worse since Taliban came to power last year, according to the director of Asal-e Shegofa. The level of her sales dropped dramatically in one year. The situation was not ideal even under the previous administration, but it was open enough for women to work outside their homes and generate their own income.

In less than one year, the company’s three employees resigned because it was unable to pay their salaries as it simply did not generate enough income. The director stated that the Taliban might not be everywhere to control women, but it is more the *fear* that they have created. She does not go out because she also fears the Taliban’s lashing and mistreatment.

The director of the company has developed a network of friends and relatives to whom she sells honey. This remains the main source of income for Asal-e Shegofa. The director is committed to develop her honey producing company further despite legal, social and political challenges that the Taliban have created for women. She seeks professional support in fundraising and training in producing and processing of honey.









## 2.5. Banoo Sweets Store



*"Ladies who have business ideas must put their ideas into action and create job opportunities for women. They should help people and their province. Do not let your ideas be in your minds only."*

SA  
Owner, Banoo Sweets Store

### Background

The first pastry company in Neili, the capital city of Daikundi province, was founded in January 2021. "Daikundi Pastry (DP)" is chaired by SA. She has a diploma in Business Administration and currently pursuing her bachelor's degree in Political Science.

Before starting the pastry store, SA had noticed that there were no pastry shops in Daikundi province that could provide fresh and good quality sweets to residents. People did not have access to cakes to celebrate important occasions and life events like weddings, birthdays, International Women's Day and other occasions. The shopkeepers used to buy biscuits from Kabul and deliver them to Daikundi. Since the transportation costs were high, to save on costs, the shopkeepers would buy low-quality products from Kabul. Seeing that the residents of Daikundi did not have access to fresh and good quality pastries, especially cakes, to celebrate their joyful occasions, Amiri decided to open her shop and help people in accessing fresh and high-quality pastries.

### Organizational Structure:

SA is the chairwoman of the company. She leads the marketing and finance part of the company. Initially, there were four women employed with the company; they were assigned with tasks of cleaning, preparing dishes, designing cakes and cookies. As the quantities of dough were large, its preparation was considered a difficult task for women. For this, they hired two male employees who make dough and bakes cakes and cookies in the oven. One of the female employees has a bachelor's degree in political science. Her job is to calculate and record raw materials used for production. Other employees are engaged in cleaning, preparing dishes, and designing cakes and cookies.

### Projects/Products:

Their main products are cookies and cakes. They are producing at least 12 different types of cookies including creamy, salty, sweet, milky, and different fruit flavors. At the moment, these are only sold in Daikundi city and not in the districts.

While making cookies and cakes the company uses cumin, almond, walnuts, and saffron as the main ingredients. These ingredients are also products of Afghanistan. The market for these products is good, as there was no similar company previously operating in this market. The sales of the company are good, especially during occasions, such as Mother's Day, Teacher's Day, graduation parties, or

Valentine's day. By producing cakes and cookies in Daikundi, less of these products are brought from Kabul. SA adds, "most of the customers prefer to buy from our store as we offer fresh products."

Banoo Sweets Store is now producing cookies and cakes and supplies them to the customers in the province both in wholesale and retail. SA states that sales are good, and the company is selling the products within the center of the province. The company is planning to expand its product supply to all the districts soon to transition from a small business to a large company. The company is currently planning to use the profit earned from these sales to buy machinery to produce cream cake.

#### **Sources of funding:**

SA used USD 5,300-6,600 of her own savings with additional 5000 USD from donors. Now the company uses the profit earned for the products to run the business and pay salaries to the employees.

#### **Problems and Support required:**

The main problem that the company faces now is the higher prices of essential raw material, as local shops have raised their prices due to COVID-19 pandemic. Another problem is the lack of facilities such as electricity. Daikundi is a remote province and does not receive much attention from the central government. Unlike other provinces, Daikundi has fewer security issues in some of its districts. Fortunately, there are no security issues in the center of the province.

The company requires financial support to purchase machinery to further increase its production to meet demand. If the company receives the support it requires, it will supply products to all the districts of the province. The company also needs capacity-building workshops to enhance employee managerial and leadership skills.

*"As a resident of Daikundi province, I always had the hope to have fresh pastry. I started this business and put my idea into practice to help my people and create job opportunities for the women." SA*

*"I used to say 'I wish I had money to use and establish a business, I wish I had this or that'. This 'I wish' was always the word I was using, and what always used to bother me was that we had women with higher education and were unemployed. This led me to start my own business to inspire women and show that they can do something and to create job opportunities for other women." SA*

#### **Update 2022**

During the chaotic departure of US forces from Afghanistan, almost all of Banoo Sweets Store's workers fled to neighboring countries. The pastry shop has been closed because prices of raw materials have risen significantly, coupled with increasing restrictions on women. The store had only launched in January 2021 in Central Daikundi, and the regime change took place on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August later that year. SA had relatively easy access to provincial officials during the Republic era, however the Taliban local authorities refuse to meet with women.



The director of Banoo Sweet Store requires economic backing from local and international non-governmental organizations in order to sustain the business, otherwise it would soon collapse. SA has also requested training on how to sustain and develop women's business during critical period such as under the Taliban.





## 2.6. Taaj Handicrafts Company



*"The idea to start such a business was due to violence against the rights of women, and myself. I started a small tailoring business to protect women's rights."*

AA

*Owner of Daikundi Handicrafts*

### Background

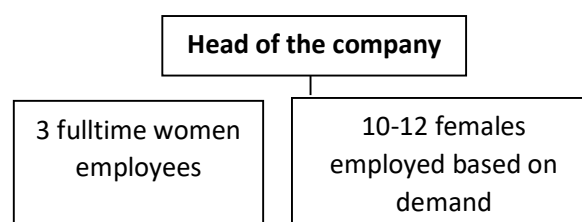
Taaj Handicrafts company was initially established in 2006 by AA, who could not continue her studies after the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The company originated as a small tailoring to protect the women's rights and to create job opportunities for women in Daikundi. Initially the idea of creating this business was due to violation of AA's rights. She says, "I didn't want to rely on men for money. When you ask them for money, they start yelling at you and refuse to give you any."

Most of the women in her town face domestic violence while being financially dependent on their partner. To challenge this, she devised a women's council where she could address women's problems. She also founded her tailoring business that later expanded into handicrafts to help women in generating income. Thus, Taaj Handicraft aims to create job opportunities for the women who are dependent on the men.

The company sells its products, including rug, scarfs, napkins, and tablecloths, in Kabul, Bamiyan, and Daikundi provinces. To sell products outside Daikundi, AA travels to Kabul to attend exhibitions. In Daikundi, they exhibit and sell their products at the *Panjshanba Bazar*, i.e., the Thursday Bazar.

### Organizational skill:

The chairwoman is AA. Only three women are employed regularly for rug-weaving and between 10-12 women are employed on-demand under for embroidery. The company has no office or workspace due to limited finances and thus resort to hiring employees on a project basis.



### Products/Projects:

The company produces handicrafts, including rugs, napkins, ladies' scarves, and decorative materials for rooms such as pillow covers and tablecloths. Before 2019, the company received orders from different donors such as Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), and others. When engaged in these programs, the company managed to produce and sell in the embroidery sector.

**Source of funding:**

The company is established with the AA's personal capital. These were savings from her private tailoring business, which amounted to just USD 60. The business sustains itself through product sales – rug weaving especially sells well. The company never received any financial aid or any contribution in terms of machinery.

**Problems and type of support required:**

The company's greatest challenge is the unavailability of the market within the province to sell the products. Financial support through any organization or government will help the company to expand its business, ensure its sustainability, and further create job opportunities for women.

Women in Daikundi face two main challenges: security and cultural barriers. Security is not an issue within the center of Daikundi, but this is not the case in remote districts. The cultural problems were the issues that the women of Daikundi province face. Social norms and cultural barriers still exist in Daikundi. For women who do face these restrictions, AA provides them with the raw material, so that they can work from home.

*“During the past 14 years, I am trying to raise awareness with men about the importance of women's involvement in an income-generating activity. Recently, with the efforts put by myself and other seekers of women's rights in the town, men are awakened and understand that it is not a problem if women work and earn money.” AA.*

**Update 2022**

Taaj Handicraft Company is active but has substantially lost much of its customer base. In Central Daikundi, a province home to Hazara ethnic minorities, women are also no longer allowed to leave their home without a *mahram*. The women in Daikundi enjoyed relative freedom of travelling in and out of their province until August 2021, after which these freedoms have largely diminished.

“The money dried up since the Taliban gained power. I cannot provide materials to sew. When there is no product, there is no money. How am I supposed to pay my rent if my business earns me almost nothing?” asked the chairwoman of Taaj Handicraft Company. She now fears leaving her home to sell her company's products in Daikundi. The company has been facing financial instability for one year; she hopes and expects the Taliban regime to open up more social and political space for working women in Daikundi.











## 2.7. HAWASANA Restaurant

*“Every Woman should work. There is nothing wrong to work and help the family. Women should put in some effort and have the courage to do something for themselves and their families.”*

AMA

Owner Hawasana Restaurant.

### Background

AMA owns and runs Hawasana Restaurant. Aside from running the restaurant, she also teaches in a literacy school. AMA started this business to support her family, as her husband had paralysis due to an illness. She wanted to help her family financially, especially to help her four daughters and two sons to continue with their education.

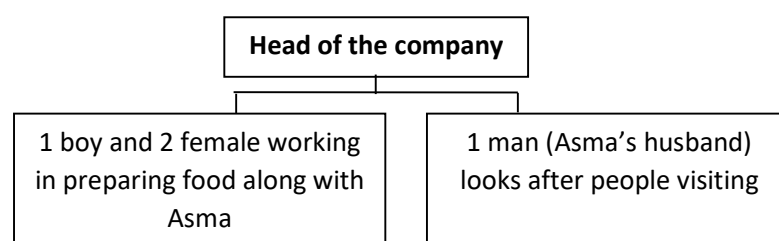
This very small restaurant, with a total area of about 12 m<sup>2</sup>, was launched in 2019 in Qalay Fatihullah of Kabul City. The restaurant can accommodate only 6 people at a time. With financial help from her nephew, she could rent a small space. To accommodate the small area, she added a partition, where on one side the team cooks, and on the other side, the tables and chairs are placed for visitors.

AMA says, “finding a job for educated people is a big problem in the country. For a woman who has only graduated from school, it is almost impossible. This was a better option: to start a small business and then to expand it.”

Currently, AMA is hiding her work from her husband’s family. They assume that AMA is only teaching. She says, “if they come to know about my work, they will start bullying me.” Her restaurant only serves women customers for dining in, however she also accepts takeaway orders from men.

### Organizational structure:

As the founder of the restaurant, AMA runs Hawasana Restaurant. AMA’s cousin, her partner, and AMA’s husband, who has since recovered from his illness, are working at the restaurant.



### Products/Projects:

The restaurant offers Afghan special food such as Bolaani, Ashak, Mantoo. The restaurant also prepares Samboosa, and Aykhanom depending on customers’ requests. The restaurant is currently located in Qalay Fatihullah of Kabul city.

### Sources of Funding:

AMA's initial investment of around 1300 USD was provided by AMA's nephews, her sisters' sons, and was spent on renting a shop and providing the required equipment for starting and operating. The restaurant has only one branch in Kabul city where she plans to open other branches.

**Problems and type of support required:**

Hawasana Restaurant needs financial support to be able to rent a bigger space and to employ more women.

*"I am trying to generate some income through a legal and proper way to help my family financially, but still people around us and relatives will always have a reason to criticize because I am a woman. I do not care even if they come to know about me. I am not doing anything wrong." AMA*

**Update 2022**

"Where is the money?" asked AMA. "Cash is missing and people have no money to even buy bread let alone eating in restaurant."

After August 2021, AMA was not able to pay rent for nine consecutive months. Despite the challenging situation, AMA is still optimistic for the future of her business and hope to find regular customer to sustain her business.



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## 2.8. Nagin Asia Goldozi company



*"I invite all Afghan women to have a strong will and fight the problems coming their way. Every time they fall, they should stand stronger and claim their share in the economic sector of the country to reach their goals."*

*RH*

*Owner, Nagin Asia Goldozi*

### **Background**

In 2013, RH established Nagin Asia Goldozi Company in the southern Kandahar province of Afghanistan that works in the embroidery sector. RH holds a Master's degree in Business Administration from India. Nagin Asia Goldozi's main objective is to create employment opportunities for women in the country, to show and increase the value of their handmade art, and to generate income for the owner as an entrepreneur. Kandahar is very well known for its unique intricate hand embroidery called *Khamak*. Women learn this ancient art in their childhood and continue producing different patterns in clothes, scarves, and shawls.

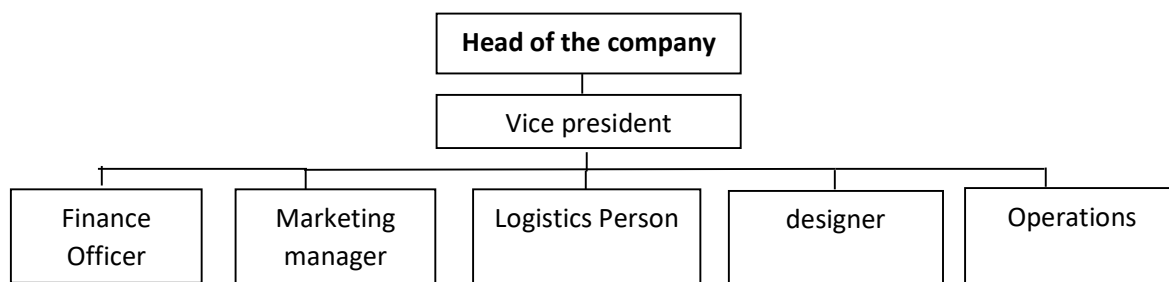
In its initial stages, the company started with producing handmade embroidered collars and supplying them to the market through their women employees. RH later expanded production and included machine embroidery in the production process. In hand embroidery, the seamstress would use cotton or silk threads and a fabric that is placed on a hoop. The seamstress then stretches the fabric by hand using a needle and colored threads to design different patterns. As for machine embroidery, the patterns are input into a computer program that controls the stitching on the embroidery machine.

Nagin Asia Goldozi Company also aims to help women who do not have higher education and cannot come out of their home due to cultural restrictions. Kandahar is a historically very conservative province where women are seen less in public spaces compared to the rest of the country. To support women with employment and to empower them financially, Nagin Asia Goldozi Company provides job opportunities for women inside their homes.

### **Organizational structure:**

RH is the owner and president and she employs a vice president, finance officer, marketing manager, logistics officer, designer and operations lead. There are 10 male employees working in the technical, managerial, marketing, designing and logistics positions. Some of these male employees are also employed by the company to produce machine embroidery. There are also around 35 women employed by the company in the tailoring and embroidery section on a full-time basis. The company has 15 part-time and on-call employees as well.





### Products/Projects:

The company started by producing only handmade embroidered collars. The company's production has since increased and expanded to producing a variety of handmade and machine embroidered collars, scarfs, dresses, hats and shawls. The company supplies its products to the neighboring provinces of Zabul and Helmand.

These products are produced inside the company and are then supplied to 8 wholesalers within Kandahar which are then supplied to the local market for retail sale. Nagin Asia Goldozi Company plans to further expand its production to supply other markets in different provinces, including Kabul.

### Sources of Funding:

RH used her private savings of approximately 600 USD without any support by an organization or individual. The company is now worth around 100,000 USD and uses its income to pay employee salaries, prepare raw materials, and cover all other operational expenses.

### Problems and type of support required:

Loans are not easily available for women, and investment opportunities are limited. Due to cultural and customary norms, women cannot list properties in their own names, which makes it difficult for women to take loans and start a business.

Due to family restrictions, girls attend schools until the age of 14 or 15, after which they are pulled out of the school and become homemakers or are married. In rural areas of Kandahar, the situation is worse, as women are illiterate and are dependent on male family members for their daily livelihood. When women and girls are set to be married, they are often sold for a huge amount of money to their future husband. This results in experiencing increased violence in the homes of their in-laws.

### Update 2022

The new Taliban's restrictions on women's mobility and gender segregation have affected Nagin Asia Goldozi. The de-facto rulers' national ban prevents women travelling beyond 43 km in and outside the cities without a *mahram*, i.e. a male chaperone. Many female staff were forced to resign because they travelled long distances from various districts to the cities in Southern Kandahar province. The company has separated women and men's working spaces, but women employees fear arrest, workspace raids and accusations of 'moral corruption' by

the Taliban. Such misogynistic restrictions have put women under enormous psychological pressure since August last year.

The company's chairwoman warned that if the situation does not change for women especially women freedom, and their mobility, the situation will get much worse. The company hopes to extend their license, but worries that the Taliban may reject their application.





## 2.9. Zahid Dry fruits Store

*“Women should put effort as an active member of the society. They can start a business from home, study from home or also participate in awareness-raising events. Women must never lose hope.”*

ZZ

*Owner of Zahid Dry Fruits store*

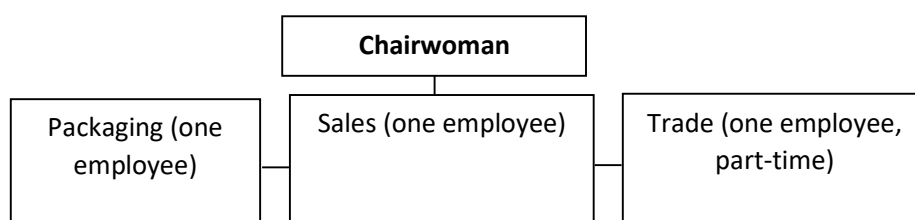
### Background

ZZ founded Zahid Dry fruits Store in 2018. When ZZ was a student in school, she used to work in poultry, buying and selling dried bread, and producing yogurt at home. She sells dry fruits from the Zabul province since Zabul is famous for its variety of nuts, almonds, and raisins. Upon returning to Afghanistan, she started the business.

She says, “Afghan products were exported to Pakistan, where they were repackaged and re-exported as a product of Pakistan. This made me very uncomfortable”. She thus ensured that the products be recognized as products of Afghanistan. This inspired her to both serve her people and to introduce the variety of dry fruits of Afghanistan to other countries. Zahid Dry fruits Store was running smoothly in its initial and later stages, but due to the COVID 19 pandemic, she went bankrupt and sold the products at a low price with the help of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. This forced her to close her store.

### Organizational structure:

ZZ was the head of the Zahid Dry fruits Store. There were two women employed in the store, one in charge of sales and the other in charge of packaging. ZZ’s husband supports her informally in delivering dry fruit from Zabul to Kandahar, as the Zabul- Kandahar Road is very insecure. However, her husband cannot work with her full-time since he works as a university lecturer.



### Products/Projects:

Zahid Dried Fruits Store used to supply 20 different types of almonds, variety of raisins, dried apricot, nuts, figs, and other dry fruits. In the Zabul province, processing of dried fruits is a family business



passed from one generation to the next. Farmers harvest fruits from their garden and dry either under the sunlight or in specified rooms. For instance, to make raisins, a room named *kheshmish khana* or 'raisins room' is used to dry a variety of grapes and produce different types of raisins. Farmers face challenges in accessing national or international markets, therefore they contract local businessmen or women in the villages to help them in selling their products. ZZ, with the help of her husband, had contracted farmers in Zabul province to produce dried fruits.

After receiving the fruits, ZZ and her two employees used to pack them in plastic bags, usually using packaging to fit either half-kilogram and one kilogram in total. After packaging and labeling, the fruits are sold in Kandahar and Kabul. Since the business was in its earlier stages, the COVID pandemic caused the business to be closed and the store went bankrupt.

#### **Sources of Funding:**

Despite all the challenges and threats received from those opposing women's work, ZZ opened a shop in a women's market in Aynu Meena neighborhood in Kandahar. The women's market was established by the government of Afghanistan in August 2019 to support women in initiating their business. When the market first opened, the shops were given to businesswomen with no rent for the first 6 months, and the electricity was also free of charge for the first 6 months.

ZZ also used personal savings of about USD 350 to launch and run Zahid Dried Fruit Store. She was not offered with any financial support by any organization or individual to start her business. Since the COVID-19 pandemic had created a public health crisis and economic crisis, ZZ's business performed poorly and went bankrupt.

#### **Problems and type of support required:**

A challenge that ZZ highlights is the ongoing corruption among police stationed along the Zabul-Kandahar highway. This has caused Zahid Dried Fruits Store a huge problem. The police often extort money and this delays the delivery of her company's product from one province to the other.

The store is closed now due to bankruptcy and now requires financial support to re-open the business. ZZ mentioned that she is looking for interest-free loans to restart her business.

*"I need financial support to restart my business. I have the responsibility to my family, my children, and myself to be financially independent."* ZZ

#### **Update 2022**

While previously selling different types of dry fruits, Zahid Dry Fruits Company now only sells grains and raisins. After the rise of the Taliban to power for the second time, the market and economy of Afghanistan crashed, reducing customers' purchasing power. People cannot afford to buy dry fruit as often as they could prior to the economic downturn. Since women cannot go freely outside their homes under the Taliban, the fruit company is managed remotely from home. The company has not made any substantial profits over the course of one year because of new Hijab mandates as well as other mobility restrictions on women.



“For one year, we have not made any profits because women are not allowed to work or do jobs outside their homes,” said ZZ. “I cannot sit with a veil in the store and sell fruits,” she continued over the phone.

The company owner initially sought support from Kandahar’s Women Chamber of Commerce, but was turned back by the Taliban who told her that there was no need for her to work. She said that the reputable Afghan dry fruit gets trafficked to Pakistan, where it is repacked, relabeled and exported as Pakistani products.

Like many of the previously mentioned companies, a major concern for Zahid Dry Fruit Company is the extension of its soon-expiring licenses. Financial aid and training in standardized packing and labeling are the two major areas of interests if any national or international organization is willing to cooperate.





## 2.10. Kunduz Women Social Cohesion Council



*“Women are not allowed by the family members to go out and work, but they can work at home and sell their products in the market once or twice a month to avoid problems in the family.”*

NQ

*Chairwoman of Kunduz Women Social Cohesion Council*

### Background

The Kunduz Women Social Cohesion Council is chaired by NQ, who holds a bachelor's degree from the Kunduz University of Education. In 2019, the council was established to support women and act as a bridge between illiterate women of Kunduz and local government and non-governmental organizations. The main objectives of the council are twofold: first, to support women in accessing their rights, enhancing skills, and creating employment opportunities, and second, to help the most needy and vulnerable group of women gain access to clothes, and processed food such as jams and pickles at lower prices.

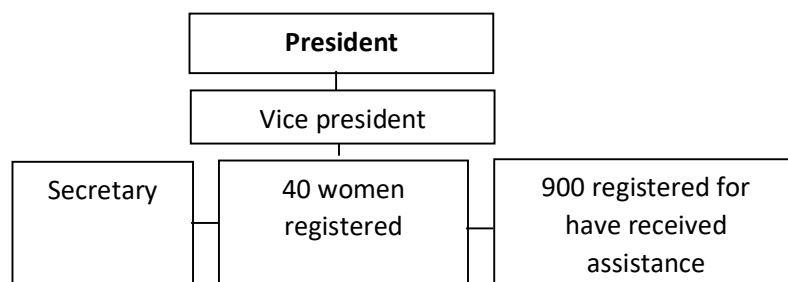
Any woman can visit the council to share her problems and the council will litigate for her. The council does not receive fees or payment for this service, and everything is done free of charge. The council members pay a monthly membership fee of USD 1.

This council mainly works to find solutions for women and to help the poor by attracting donations from national or international organizations and businessmen. For instance, women in need of medical kits contacted the council. The council then reached out to a local NGO called 'Afghan Women's Skills Development Center' who proceeded to provide the requested medical kits.

The council provides training and skill-enhancement opportunities for women in order to find employment in the market. The council is used as a platform to encourage women who are well-educated to use their skills and training to integrate in the labor market. The council has established a small business for tailoring and production of jam and pickles. This aims to both train the women in producing these products and in familiarizing them with the labor market and business functions.

### Organizational structure:

The Kunduz Women Social Cohesion Council has a president, NQ, a vice president and a secretary. The council consists of three different committees: cultural, educational and awareness-raising. Nearly 900 women are registered with and have benefited from the services of Kunduz Women Social Cohesion Council.



### Product/Projects:

The Kunduz Women Social Cohesion Council provides tailoring services and produces jam and pickles. They produce clothes and pickles and supply them to the market. To support the tailoring services, the council provides the fabric to women, which are collected from shopkeepers at low prices. These fabrics are usually the ones that are left over in the shop. The purpose of using leftover fabrics is to keep prices low so that the low-income families who cannot afford to buy from stores, could buy it from the council.

The council also provides raw material such as cucumber, apples and containers to the women to support with pickling and jam production. At the moment, the products are only supplied within the city of Kunduz. The market for pickles and jam performs well and these can be easily sold within the city.

### Sources of Funding:

The council runs with the minimum amount paid by the members of the Kunduz Women Social Cohesion Council as membership fee. Machinery is purchased by NQ through the support of a relative who lives outside of the country and also owns a company for tailoring services and pickle production. The council then uses the income from selling the products to prepare raw materials for production.

To support day-to-day activities and running costs, the council runs on revenue generated through sales of the products. Building rent is paid through the council membership fees.

### Problems and type support required:

Security is a problem in the city and the employees must ensure that they do not attract attention while working. Another problem is the weak infrastructure for network connection, mobile, and internet. In the evening, all mobile phone networks are deactivated on the order of Taliban. Telecommunication companies are consistently pressured by the Taliban to switch off services at night and have threatened to blow up towers if the companies do not comply.<sup>10</sup> Kunduz Women Social Cohesion Council is in need of support to get machinery to be able to effectively perform its activities and expand operations.

### Update 2022

Kunduz Women Social Cohesion Council is still active in the Northern Kunduz province. They aim to support women with vocational training, provide assistance with finding job

<sup>10</sup> <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/mobile-phone-service-blackout-has-kunduz-residents-fuming>



opportunities, and improve the lifestyle of women in rural areas. After the Taliban rose to power, the director of the Council was forced to flee to Iran. She continues to manage the council's activities via WhatsApp messages and calls with council members. Their activities have significantly reduced compared to the pre-Taliban era, and their mode of operation has switched from face-to-face into an online mode for their strategic meetings. If they do come together, they convene in smaller number compared to the past to avoid the Taliban's attention.

Despite the Taliban's harsh rules and high prices for raw materials, the Council still provides its services to several families in Kunduz. The council has not received any aid. NQ told us that "the situation gets tougher with each passing day."







## 2.11 Manawara Dilawari Handicraft and Carpet Production Company



*"I used to think of my own family and their future, but now I am thinking about all women who are my trainees and work with me. If my company closes, all these women will be jobless and their families will face problems. I am trying my best to keep the company running to help them all."*

NR

*Chairwoman, and owner, Menawara Handicrafts company*

### Background

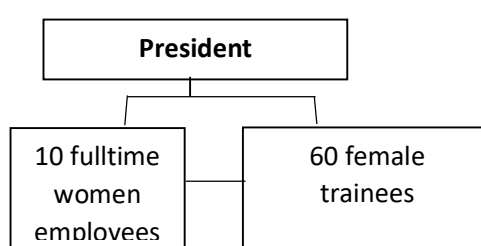
Munawar Dilawari Handicrafts and Carpet Production Company is owned by NR. As the head of the company, NR is the only income-earner in her family. She has seven children, and her husband is ill. Munawar Dilawari Handicrafts and Carpet Production Company was established in 2020, just before the pandemic hit, in eastern Nangarhar province.

The company employs and trains women who intend to work and start business. It was running with full force in its very early stages when the pandemic started. But COVID-19 had a negative impact that resulted the closure of the company.

Munawar Dilawari Handicrafts and Carpet Production Company provided employment opportunities to sixty women. These women had no formal education or did not have permission from their families to work in a male-dominated environment. This company not only helped women to earn money for themselves, but it also created an opportunity for women to enhance their skills in handicraft. The company had 60 students who came from difficult backgrounds, Some did not have formal education, or their husbands had problems with addiction; others were the only income earners of their families since they did not have close male relatives.

### Organizational Structure

Munawar Dilawari Handicrafts and Carpet Production Company is chaired by NR and employs a vice president. The company also had a marketing manager who was handling the administration and finance work. The company employed 10 women as full-time trainers in handicrafts. Most of the trainees are illiterate with skills in handicraft and tailoring.



**Projects/Products:**

Munawar Dilawari Handicrafts and Carpet Production Company's main productions are doing handwork on scarves, dresses, clothes for children and other decorative materials. To promote the company's handicrafts, NR would reach out to fashion designers and shops who needed handmade products for their stores. The shops or fashion designers provided the raw material to NR and she would distribute it among her employees, depending on the needed skillset to complete the order. The company received orders from Nangarhar and Kabul. Since all the work was done by hand, the company did not make use any advanced machinery and instead relied on two machines that were used for picot stitches on the edges of the scarves.

**Sources of Funding:**

Munawar Dilawari Handicrafts and Carpet Production Company has no official source of funding. NR borrowed money from close relatives within Afghanistan to start the business and purchase equipment such as a picot machine, hoop for embroidery, thread, and needles. The company generates an income from selling its products.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact and forced Munawar Dilawari Handicrafts and Carpet Production Company to close down. NR has a work license but needs financial support to re-launch the company again. Since the outbreak of coronavirus, the company has not been able to pay neither the rent nor its employees.

**Problems and type of support required:**

The company requires financial support to avoid bankruptcy and pay rent for their workspace. They also need machinery to restart the company and continue its previous operations. NR also faces security risks. To take orders, she usually visits the center of the city, where several explosions have taken place.

**Update 2022**

Monawara Dilawari Handicrafts and Carpet Weaving Company discontinued operations after the Taliban rose to power. Currently unemployed, the company owner could not afford to pay rent, despite it costing less than USD 100 per month. The company only accepts rare orders from former customers. However due to high prices of raw materials, it cannot afford to meet demand. All its former female workers have become unemployed. NR receives frequent calls from her former women staff, asking whether the company can offer them any source of income-generating opportunities such as handicraft work and carpet weaving.

Like most other women-led businesses in this brochure, Monawara Dilawari Handicraft and Carpet Weaving Company needs financial support to restart its operations. Besides that, the company seeks subsidies for raw materials.









## 2.12. Sihat Silab Food Company

*“It was hard for me to see basic necessity products being imported from neighboring countries, while we can produce them by ourselves. I started this company and succeeded in it.”*

NB

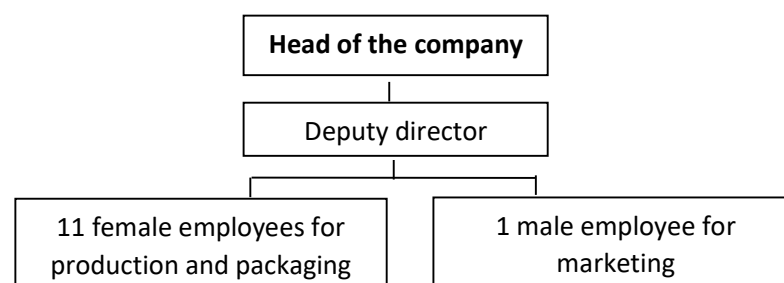
*Chairwomen of Sihat Silab food company*

### Background

NB established Sihat Silab Food Company in 2019, in eastern Nangarhar province. The company produces a variety of jams, pickles, and wheat starch. The main objective of starting this company was to create employment opportunities for women, provide training for women in the skills of starting a business, and to produce good quality local products in Nangarhar city. NB stated that she noticed that, despite Afghanistan’s production of good quality wheat, wheat starch is usually imported to Afghan markets from foreign countries. Thus, she established a food company where she could introduce Afghanistan’s starch into the market while also producing jams and pickles.

### Organizational Structure

NB is the director, and she employs a deputy director. In total, there are 11 female employees and a male. The deputy director is responsible for financial matters. Currently, the company plans to restructure the company to improve management.



### Products/Projects:

The Sihat Silab Food Company produces a variety of jams, pickles, and wheat starch (a starch made from wheat grain and used to thicken most types of sauces, soups or gravies). The products are packed in cans. Currently, the company’s focus is on producing wheat starch. These products are supplied in Nangarhar city and sent to Kabul. Starch is produced using very basic tools and equipment and the raw material is purchased from the city market. NB added that, while the company has no standardized machinery or packaging, the starch products are of high quality. An organization compared Sihat Silab Company’s starch with starches produced by other countries in the region.

**Source of funding;**

The company was established with approximately USD 100 in 2019. This capital rose to nearly USD 12,000 before the pandemic started in 2020. The company relies on income from sales to support staffing and operational costs. It has not received financial support by any entity or individual thus far,

**Problems and type of support required:**

Sihat Silab Food Company faces many challenges. The main problem is the absence of the standardized machinery for production. If this was made available to them, it would help with enhancing production and expanding supply offering in and outside of Afghanistan. To fulfill these needs, the company requires financial support.

NB says “cultural constraints always exist that we can’t unsee them. However, since my main supporter is my family, I don’t consider cultural barriers as an issue for my business.” NB mentioned that the government should help them by providing subsidized land or workspace, to help them save on operating costs.

*“I encourage women not to underestimate their abilities, to make some efforts, to work equally as men and to help their family. They should never say that we cannot do this, rather, try and they will succeed”. NB*

**Update 2022**

Since the Taliban’s capture of the Nangarhar province last August, the Taliban’s “misogynistic policy is changing every day,” stated the chairwoman of Sihat Silab Food Company. NB also said that there was no need to impose religious sanctions on women because they are already Muslims.

Since the regime change in August 2021, expensive raw materials have had disproportionately negative impacts on businesswomen, as they receive lesser financial support than men under the Taliban. Women in conservative Nangarhar province face major challenges in dealing with Taliban local authorities. The Taliban officials refuse to meet with female entrepreneurs and business owners.

Sihat Silab Food Company license is set to expire soon, but the company chairwoman is not sure if Taliban would be willing to extend it as it is owned and run by women. Lack of business opportunities and market places for women-led companies in Nangarhar, and widespread of low quality Pakistani and Iranian jams, pickles, and wheat starch pose major obstacles to run businesses in the area.