

Empowering Women to Work in Key Positions

Afghanistan may still be one of the least peaceful countries in the world – even more than 15 years after the Taliban were overthrown – but significant progress has been made in improving the social and economic status of Afghan women since 2001, with the support of the international community.

The small government office appears sombre, but the mood lifts as soon as a tall, graceful woman with an infectious smile strides into the room. Thirty-three-year-old Wazhma Ghani is a natural leader. “It’s a work in progress,” says Wazhma Ghani, an officer at Afghanistan’s Ministry of Mines and Petroleum (MoMP), whose key responsibility is to help improving gender equality.

Ghani was among 14 women from the ministry’s gender department who was selected by the Afghan-German Cooperation’s programme to promote good governance in the extractive industry to do a four-year Master at Mashal University in Kabul. By coordinating and funding short and long-term educational programmes for women, the initiative seeks to help the MoMP train a number of competent female employees who would be able to handle different administrative and technical responsibilities.

The third year law student, Wazhma Ghani, says that the higher education programme has enabled her to perform her duties in a professional manner: The MoMP’s gender department looks into cases of gender abuse and inequality in various departments, projects, and programmes of the ministry, in addition to working on enhancing women’s skills and creating key positions for them.

“Earlier, we approached cases of gender abuse and harassment from an administrative point of view. Now, we take a legal and professional approach towards them,” she says, adding that she now knows all of the laws concerning gender abuse and harassment.

Whenever a complaint is brought to the gender department’s attention, the team delves deep into the issue and prepares a report after talking to everyone concerned. They gather all relevant information and detail. “Once we have gathered all details, we send the report to the Minister with all supporting documents,” Ghani says. “In the last case that we had, the accused was always denying the abuse he was inflicting on the victim, but we had enough documentation and evidence,” she says. They included messages and a letter with the person’s signature. “We won the case... the Minister himself approved the decision. The person was punished.”



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Afghanistan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2003. The country's constitution of 2004 says that all citizens have equal rights and duties before the law.

However, the country still faces many challenges in creating opportunities for women, not just in the MoMP, but in general. The ministry's commitment to become more professional has, for example, curtailed opportunities for women, because a bachelor's degree is required for higher positions, says Ghani. "The level of education that women have is very low. They (women) have not been able to obtain university and college level education," she says. "As a result, the role of women in decision-making remains very low."

While there are 195 women working for the MoMP in Kabul, the number of female employees in the provinces is low, Ghani explains. To change that and to help more women find jobs across the country, policymakers need to do much more. Ghani is confident that organisations such as the Afghan-German Cooperation will continue their support for initiatives to empower women in Afghanistan.

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Programme: Promoting Good Governance in the Extractive Sector in Afghanistan

Commissioned by: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

Partner: Afghan Ministry of Mines and Petroleum

Implementing organisation: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Provinces: Kabul

Programme objective: Transparency and inspections within the mining industry help to regulate state revenues, promote investment and combat corruption in the long term.

Overall term: May 2013 – August 2018