

A Gender Quota in Shighnan

The nearest major town from Shighnan, the centre of the district bearing the same name, is around seven hours away by car. The town is located in Badakhshan province in the border region of Afghanistan's mountainous northeast. Tajikistan is right on the other side of the river.

The illiteracy rate in Shighnan is below ten per cent, while in the rest of the country around 60 per cent of the population can neither read nor write. Many young people from Shighnan have a secondary school leaving certificate or even a university degree, but the vast majority of them are unemployed. That was unacceptable to the village elders, so in April 2015 they approached the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission of Afghanistan.

With support from the German government, the commission launched a nine-month internship programme in the public sector for young women. That was because just 20 per cent of the 1,500 public servants in the Shighnan region are female. The regional government in Shighnan wants to raise this figure and enable women with a tertiary degree to enter public service via an internship.

Suhaila, aged 23, was awarded a place in the internship programme's first round. The qualified teacher was unable to find a job after completing her degree and has now seized the opportunity to enter the workforce through a lateral career change. 'The entry test was for just 15 internship places, and 450 women applied. I'm so glad I made it.' Then began a period of intense study. The mornings were filled with bookwork in areas such as management, financial control, administrative law, procurement, human resources and project management. The afternoons were dedicated to putting the theory into practice. 'I moved to a different institution every month and that allowed me to gain really deep insights into different offices' work. I spent time in a girls' school, a health centre for women, the district hospital, the school administration and a centre for substance addicts. I gained experience and knowledge at every station,' Suhaila recounts with a smile.

Since the end of her internship, she has been working at a school – both as an administrator and as a teacher. Here she can put her training and practical experience from the internship to good use. 'I am working as a substitute teacher and also assisting with administration. During the internship, I learned how to formulate applications and draft official letters. I can use those skills here.'

29-year-old Soraia had a similar experience to Suhaila. The mother of two is also a trained teacher and was unemployed for six years. She is full of praise



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for the programme. ‘The internship has helped me get my bearings in my everyday work routine. I’ve learned how to organise tasks and projects and have been able to rediscover forgotten knowledge from my degree course.’ The young mother is working as a teacher at the school in Viyar now, about one hour’s drive from her home in Shighnan. She sees her job as very important. ‘Our district has only very few female teachers. However, it’s important for children to learn from both male and female teachers. So I’m hoping that the internship programme will continue and that more women who complete the scheme will be hired as teachers.’

Both women agree that after this experience they would not hesitate to supervise and support the next set of female interns from the programme at their schools. ‘We want to share our positive experiences with other job-seeking women and open up job opportunities for them, too,’ Soraia affirms.

<p>Publication: 01//2018</p> <p>Programme: Promotion of good governance (RCD)</p> <p>Commissioned by: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)</p> <p>Partner: Independent Directorate of Local Governance, Afghan Ministries: Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), Ministry of Information and Culture (MOIC), Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA)</p> <p>Implementing organisation: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH</p> <p>Provinces: Badakhshan, Baghlan, Balkh, Kunduz, Samangan, Takhar</p> <p>Programme objective: Public authorities are capable of providing services at sub-national level and responding appropriately to citizens' enquiries.</p> <p>Overall term: July 2014 – March 2018</p>
