

Return to a Better Life

Customers are constantly coming and going at Mohammad Hassan Rezaiee's small grocery shop in the Sarak-e Kelkin area of Mazar-e Sharif. Women sniff the yoghurt and cream that Rezaiee – a 33-year-old family man – sells from an attractive special stand inside the shop. Having checked the quality, one of them then nods approvingly and puts a few yoghurts in her shopping bag. Business is brisk: Rezaiee has taken on five employees over recent months, and sales are growing steadily.

Yet until recently, things were not so good. Rezaiee and his family returned to Afghanistan in 2016 after 15 years in Iran. There, too, economic conditions were very tough, he recalls: 'We all had such great hopes of finding a good job in Iran and having a better life. But it remained a dream, so I thought it would be better to come home.' Back in Afghanistan, Rezaiee resumed the family business he ran before leaving for Iran. He opened a small grocery shop, selling homemade yoghurt and cream made from the milk produced by his cows. But his products were not of particularly high quality, and he processed only 70 to 80 litres of milk a day. Rezaiee worked hard but earned only around 10,000 Afghani a month (about 115 euros). It was nowhere near enough to pay the rent on the shop and to feed his family. And he certainly could not afford to employ staff.

The turning point was an encounter at an agricultural fair in Balkh. Here, he heard about training courses for dairy producers launched by the German government. He signed up and learned from dairy and cattle experts how to increase his milk yield, process milk more efficiently, improve his dairy products' quality and successfully market them. Now the proud shop-owner is delighted: 'I can hardly believe it: with my new knowledge, the amount of milk I process each day has more than doubled. I'm working to new quality standards, and my customers love my yoghurt and cream. I am earning three times more than I used to!'

He also now has a better sales strategy. On advice from the trainers, he has set up an attractive special stand in the shop devoted to his own dairy produce. Customers can go straight to it to buy the yoghurt and cream he makes and, says Rezaiee, it has been a huge success: 'My customers really like the special stand. They don't have to queue and they know that that is where they will find my own dairy products. I'm planning another stand, so that I can serve even more customers quickly. And the new staff make that possible.' Rezaiee has now fulfilled his dream of a better life – but back in his home country.

Seema Behboodi's experience is similar. The 37-year-old mother and her



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family lived in Iran for nine years, returning to Afghanistan in 2015. She makes and sells dairy products and faced the same difficulties as Rezaiee – low milk yields and poor quality products. But now, after training, her business too is taking off. ‘I’ve doubled my yields and tripled my income’, she says, ‘and I now have three new staff. I’m planning to expand, too.’ This self-confident woman adopted an idea from exhibitors at the trade fair. She noticed that many of the representatives there had business cards and advertising material available on their stands and, she says, ‘that seemed a good idea, so I immediately did the same. It’s really paid off: having cards made it easier to make business contacts with traders, who are also potential customers.’

Many Afghan citizens in Balkh Province in northern Afghanistan, including returnees like Rezaiee and Behboodi, have benefited from German Government support with setting up their own dairy business. And they have all created jobs, taking on up to 10 new staff in some cases.

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