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## SUCCESS STORY

# Crucial Support for Aspiring Female Journalists

**USAID support offers Afghan female journalists a career start.**



*Ms. Zainab Akbari, intern at Arzu TV in Balkh conducting an interview.*

***"Thanks to the internship program, I learned new skills and experiences as part of a TV production team. I firmly believe that now I have the ability to work effectively in the media".***

- Zainab Akbari, intern from Balkh

While Afghanistan's robust and diversified media sector operates comparatively freely to in 2016, there remains significant issues related to access to information, instances of violence against journalists, harassment by authorities, and escalating provincial insecurity. Despite these challenges, many journalism graduates are enthusiastic to pursue a media career. However, there are limited options available – specially concerning women – to access hands-on television, radio and print experience. Under the USAID funded Afghan Civic Engagement Program (ACEP), female journalism graduates are offered opportunities to obtain a crucial start in gaining exposure and valuable experience in a media working environment.

The need for this activity was highlighted when this year's call for internship applications received a record response, resulting in 22 female journalists from public universities faculties in Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat and Kandahar being placed at highly regarded media establishments. Many ~~and~~ demonstrated acumen and skills that has led to interns being offered ongoing employment.

Ms. Robina Farhad interned at Zma Radio in Kandahar, found it very difficult to embark on a media career, due to negative perceptions in her local community. Over the course of her three-month internship, she had the opportunity to practice many journalism skills, and is now comfortable producing news reports. Farhad explained, "This program is really valuable in helping me to develop my career. My supervisors always provided constructive feedback, and everyone at the radio station supported and guided me. I was very proud when they offered me a job. I plan to continue working in this field, so I can improve myself and increase my chances of employment with national and international media outlets." She was one of two interns recruited by Zma.

Bashir Ahmad Saleh, the Director of Zma Radio, says that female interns like Robina have an important role to play on the daily programs, especially with respect to the station's increased support for female-focused stories. According to Saleh, "The interns were very qualified, punctual and eager to learn new skills. I can see their professional abilities and realize they have the potential to be very good journalists, and so I was pleased to offer them jobs."

With many social and cultural barriers that prevent women who want to work in the media sector, this internship program offers journalism graduates real opportunities to kick-start their careers. Importantly, it ensures that women have a presence in newsrooms and can contribute towards content diversity, and continuing to raise the collective voices of women in Afghanistan.