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**AFGHANISTAN**

## SUCCESS STORY

# Young Afghans Challenging the Narrative with Photography

**USAID supported multimedia training enables Afghan youth to tell positive stories through creative expression.**



[Abdullah Sadaqat

***“I could hardly believe I had won the first prize at the photo competition. Now I am even more keen to show a different picture of Afghanistan to the rest of the world!”***

- Abdullah Sadaqat, Bamyan.

Advances in media and technology and the growing popularity of social media continue to open new opportunities for freedom of expression in Afghanistan. However, many young Afghans lack the skills to confidently communicate their views and share opinions with the broader community. With support of the USAID funded Afghan Civic Engagement Program (ACEP), the annual Afghan Youth Voices Festival (AYVF), is providing creative pathways and platforms that amplify youth expression.

Mohammad Nazar Altin from Jowzjan had always wanted to study photography but the opportunity had never presented itself. He was thrilled when offered a chance to participate in multimedia skills training that was being facilitated by the AYVF. “What was special about the training was that it focused on youth and positive change in society, and how to apply this through photography and videography,” he said. Altin decided to use this newly acquired knowledge to take photos and videos of youth engaged in different sports, which he posted on a variety of social media platforms, reaching thousands of people. Altin is determined to pursue a career as a photographer and showcase a different Afghanistan because, as he explains, “...the world only sees our country as a land of horror and terror...now I feel that my dream of presenting the good sides of my country through photography, is no longer unattainable.”

Under the theme of “Youth for Change”, the AYVF engaged over 3,000 youth in Bamyan, Badakhshan, Herat, Jowzjan and Kabul in creative expression. Many who participated in photography and videography training were inspired to produce a diverse collection of photos and videos, capturing rare aspects and images of Afghanistan, through the eyes of youth.

Mahsa Ahmed from Herat whose photo received over 5,000 likes on Facebook said, “I learned new skills that have helped me find myself and the world I only used to imagine.” Ishaq Anis, another participant from Kabul said, “Almost all films made in Afghanistan only show a dark and negative picture of the country, while in this class I learned how to think positively and how to come up with concepts and ideas to make short films that have a positive theme.”