

## WOMENS' HOPE FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

### AFGHANISTAN PROJECT UPDATE

#### AUTUMN 2014

With UK troops having finished their campaign in Helmand province, Afghanistan is appearing less frequently on our screens. But our partner, Afghan Women's Education Centre (AWEC), continues to work with communities elsewhere in the country who are living in the wake of decades of conflict.

We asked you to pray for the elections in the summer when a new government was elected. Since then, the community is more hopeful about the future. However, in Faryab province, where much of this work takes place, it is still dangerous for the project staff to carry out their work. Because the local police have offered to assist staff in their work, this has not led to significant delays for the project. But please continue to pray for project staff as they work day-to-day.

#### Fareshta

Fareshta is a 28 year old mother of two little daughters. Her hopes are similar to most young mothers:

**'I desire to have a peaceful, comfortable and happy life with my family.'**

Due to the social restrictions on women, this desire for peace, comfort and happiness is all-too-often hampered; that's where AWEC steps in. They saw that Fareshta was one of the poor and uneducated women in her village. She was then selected as a member of the village shura. There she learnt about the rights available to both her and her daughters. She was able to learn about basic healthcare as well as conflict resolution. Where women receive very little education, Fereshta, along with 1050 other women, was trained in peace, women's rights and conflict management.



**Fareshta at the AWEC training centre.**

Before taking part in this project Fareshta described herself as being 'completely deprived from society.' Today she says, 'we feel that women also have a role in community decision making and have a right to learn, work and take part in social life and development as well as men.'

#### Frozan

Frozan is 30 years old and has four children between 19 months to 5 years old. She says, 'Afghanistan is our country and it is our home, I want to make it better and would really like to work with my countrymen, especially with the women in my village.' This is bold statement for a woman to make in the Balooch Payaan village where there a few job opportunities for women. It is only through being involved in her village shura that she is able to consider such involvement. She says, 'I feel changes in my

life since I joined the project, now I can write, read and even run a small business.'

Many of the women who have taken part in literacy courses want to continue up to secondary level education and even up to 12th grade (year 11 or 6th form in the UK).

In order to use their newly developed literacy abilities, our partners have selected and designed small grant projects for the women to apply their skills directly as well as gain experience in running small scale businesses. Each project will run for up to 6 months and involve around 20 women. Some examples of the projects are: saffron production, dairy farming, soap making, shop keeping, tailor and embroidery.

### The ripple effect

Training women like Fereshta and Frozan doesn't just benefit them. They both have children whose upbringing will certainly be positively affected by their mothers' new knowledge and world outlook. They say, 'we desire that our children are educated and have a peaceful, bright future, free from poverty and violence.' What mother wouldn't desire this for their children? Now Fereshta and Frozan recognise that this is not possible to eliminate poverty without education. It is through their own education and experience of working outside of the home that they are able to support their families, especially in regard to their children's continuing in education. Their hopes for the future now seem possible, they say:

**'This project has contributed to our hopes.'**

Before this project, these women were not able to work outside of the home let alone participate in decision making within the community. Now, they are learning how to run their own businesses as well as moving towards being given more influence over decision being made at a community level.

This has been difficult in a very male

dominated context where men have a very negative view of women and their abilities. They said, 'usually men don't respect or value a woman's role in the family and at a community level. They don't trust women's abilities and think that only men can take part in society development and decision making. But through this project we have proved that women also have the abilities to do work, learn and take part in community decisions and development.'

It is in response to this change in her perception of herself and her abilities as well as the changing perceptions of men towards women that Fereshta says, 'I desire to be an educated woman of my community and to serve my village.'



**Frozan in her beautiful hijab.**

It's churches like you who are helping to change lives through this important and culture-changing project. The deadline for donations is 31st March 2015. The next update you receive will be the final one. In the meantime, why not hold another fundraising event but this time with an Afghan feel? Perhaps a soap making workshop, a tailoring master class or selling locally produced eggs? It's the final push to raise funds- you can do it!

You are making such a difference to the lives of women like Fereshta and Frozan- thank you.



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