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FIRST PERSON

Putting Afghanistan's Women To Work

USAID's Women in Government Internship program is helping to bridge the gender gap



Photo: USAID/EGGI

“Now, I can proudly say that I can serve my country through working with the Ministry of Finance”

- Lima Khurram

As she stood in line with 29 other women, Lima Khurram finally felt she was ready and able to serve her country. Lima, a 24-year-old mathematics graduate from Kabul University, had just completed a USAID-sponsored, four-month Women in Government internship.

“This internship program provides a great opportunity for new female graduates to develop their skills and find full-time jobs,” Lima said as she accepted her certificate and prepared to start work to rebuild her country.

Lima, who interned with the Ministry of Finance, is one of 183 participants in the program so far. With an impressive placement rate of 76%, the scheme is meant to put more women to work in Afghanistan's government. The country's goal is for women to account for at least 30% of all government employees by 2013. Lima is a good example of the gains made and the challenges ahead. At the Ministry of Finance, where she interned, women are a mere 5.6% of the workforce.

“The USAID-sponsored internship program helps bridge Afghanistan's jobs gender gap and I am sure that the rate of female employees in government agencies and private sectors can be further increased through similar programs elsewhere,” says Lima.

She adds that the internship program is particularly effective for new graduates without prior professional experience. “This program is a good start for us to build our career with the government. Besides on-the-job training, there were many capacity-building training sessions. Now, I can proudly say that I can serve my country through working with the Ministry of Finance and become a beneficial citizen of my country.”