

Discovering the Potential that Lies Dormant Within Us

Hafizullah, Aria and Shahrooz study economics at Takhar University. They also work part-time as teachers to pay for their studies and support their families. Now in their fourth year of university, the students have plenty of academic experience. However, a supplementary training programme gave them the opportunity to learn about many topics that are not covered in schools or universities.

Over a six-month period, the students attended courses on stress management, leadership skills, dialogue, non-violent conflict resolution, networking and constructive lobbying. The German government set up the courses in cooperation with civil society and public sector partners. These encourage young people in Afghanistan to get involved in voluntary work to promote their country's democratic development.

Aria's face lights up as she explains why she found the courses so special: 'I always had goals, but to me they seemed more like a dream beyond my reach. Now I know that I can turn my goals into reality. They're no longer just in my mind – after attending the courses, I now have them down on paper in black and white.' Aria realised that she had been holding herself back and that she was lacking self-confidence in some areas. She has now set out her own path for the future. The young woman smiles as she describes her clear vision: 'Once I've completed my bachelor's degree, I'd like to do a postgraduate degree in economics and then become minister of education.'

While her plans take shape, Aria has a part-time job teaching mathematics. She wants to share her experiences from the training courses with the girls in her class, and has introduced a special programme for the last five minutes of her lessons. 'I use this time to teach my pupils about the tools I learned about. In our last lesson, I explained to them that when they talk to people, they should always look the other person in the eyes, hear them out completely and discuss different opinions objectively. This way, in each lesson, I can pass on some of what I have learned.'

Hafizullah, an economics student and English teacher, also wants to pass on his newly acquired skills. He is confident that his pupils will really benefit from this: 'I often encounter children who have very little self-confidence because of the difficult lives they live. After our lessons, I get them to write down what they feel are their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and problems. Then we discuss the results, and they suddenly realise that they actually have a lot of potential.'



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Shahrooz, from Herat, also boosted his self-confidence during the training programme. The topic that interested him most was how to cope with stress. After three decades of long-standing and sometimes armed conflicts, a difficult labour market and other problems, psychological stress is not an uncommon phenomenon among the Afghan people. 'I have learned methods for dealing with psychological stress and pressure, to stop it getting the better of me. I can now analyse difficult situations better and develop solutions to overcome them.' The 23-year-old is sharing these skills with young people in Herat during the semester holidays.

When he announced a two-day course in his hometown on the Internet, 62 people immediately registered to participate. This experience has spurred him on. 'Day-to-day worries and problems are preventing so many young people from developing a career path,' he says. 'In my course in Herat I've passed on the stress management tools that I learned during the training programme.' Shahrooz wants to see an Afghanistan in which people are not dependent on jobs provided by aid organisation or the state, but where they start to think like entrepreneurs and get things off the ground themselves. 'We all need to discover the potential that lies dormant within us. That way, we'll be able to move our country forward. The training helped me to find these skills within myself, and I want to pass them on to as many people as possible,' says a determined Shahrooz.

Publication: 12/2017
Programme: Civil Peace Service (CPS)
Commissioned by: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Partner: Afghan non-governmental organisations and government agencies
Implementing organisation: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Provinces: Badakhshan, Balkh, Kabul, Kunduz, Samangan, Takhar
Programme objective: Consolidate peace at local, regional and national level
Overall term: Since 2004