



BRAC INTERNATIONAL
AFGHANISTAN

STORIES OF RESILIENCE



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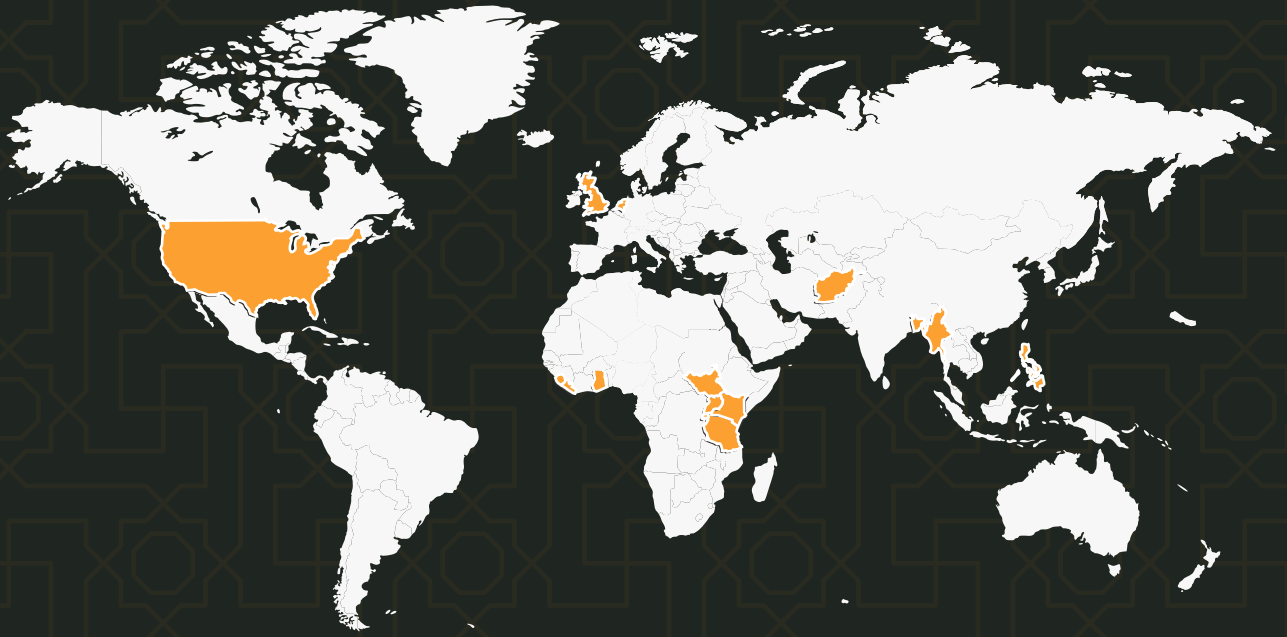


Afghanistan's post-conflict humanitarian crisis was similar to the post-war environment of Bangladesh, the time when BRAC was born. We took the lessons learned from our poverty alleviation efforts to Afghanistan in 2002, BRAC's first country of operation outside of Bangladesh. Afghanistan remains one of the world's largest humanitarian crises, with over half of the country's population living below the poverty line. Decades of conflict combined with climate shocks have cut off communities from livelihood opportunities.

BRAC Afghanistan continues to serve communities in hard-to-reach areas and has reached around **17 million people** through its programmes.



This booklet will take you through seven stories of resilience, featuring stories of women in Afghanistan who have overcome great odds to bring positive change in their lives.



BRAC
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Stories of Resilience

When a decree barred girls from education, they decided to become designers instead!

Up until 2021, 22-year-old Razia dreamed of finishing her studies and of someday having a career. Her two brothers helped out with her education expenses by working as day labourers. But Razia dropped out of school in 2021 after the collapse of the then government.

The political instability also affected the economy and Razia's brothers were out of jobs as well. The two used to support the household, and now with money scarce, tensions flared in Razia's house in the village of Asadabad in Afghanistan's Kunar province.

With no prospect of returning to education for the moment, Razia decided she would try her hand at making handicrafts. During this time, she also joined as a participant in BRAC's ABADI-1 programme where she received cash stipend and training on sewing

Razia began sewing clothes and handicrafts with customised designs. Her siblings joined her efforts and did some of the marketing for her- essentially spread the word about her creations among friends and peers.



But her siblings didn't stop there. They worked like a well-oiled machine, each taking on a different role. They visited the markets often, scouting for opportunities to expand and sell Razia's products at the local market. Her custom designs quickly caught the fancy of Asadabad residents and Razia started earning around USD 220 a month from her business.

As her work gained attention, Razia began to receive more orders but soon found out that she was not able to take on all the new orders as she worked on the design or tailoring single-handedly. So, she decided to expand — and taught six other girls in the neighbourhood.

Razia and the story of the six other girls she employs is reason for hope— that if one gets the right tools and that small push, they not only their own lives, but often take others along on that journey.

From homemaker to poultry-farmer; from crisis to resilience

When life threw a curveball at Fatima, she decided to break free of her sheltered existence, went through trainings, learned how to rear chickens and made sure she could support her family

Fatima got married when she was just 21 after studying up to Grade-12. Hailing from Afghanistan's Kunar province, Fatima after her marriage moved in with her in-laws as is the custom in the country.

The couple have three young children and things were mostly going well for them, save the occasional family worries. But in 2021, when Fatima turned 26 her husband suffered a brain haemorrhage, one from which he did not fully recover.

So far sheltered, Fatima was now faced with managing the household of nine – her in-laws, three children and two young brothers-in-law. In hard-to-reach areas such as Kunar, where Fatima lives, jobs or employment opportunities are hard to come by.

What she needed was a set of interventions specifically tailored to her needs, to fill the gaps in knowledge and give her the “big push” she needed to change her situation.

The ABADEI project, being implemented by BRAC in Afghanistan and funded by UNDP, provides participants with that “push”, with livelihood training, essential equipment and starter kits and a cash grant to start your own business.

Fatima was one of the participants in the ABADEI project, where she received training on chicken rearing, along with an incubator, drinker, feeder, solar panel, battery, lamp, switch holder, and necessary vaccination kits and the cash grant of \$1160.

She now has a flock of about 500 chickens and regularly hatches new chicks from the incubator she received from the project. She sells most of the chickens, retaining around 15 for herself, from which she collects about 420 eggs monthly. She keeps half for her family and sells the rest earning approximately **AFN 15,000-16,000 (\$219) per month.**



She spends around AFN 3000 to maintain her poultry business and spends the rest for her family.

While life has not overnight changed for Fatima, she now feels better prepared to face the challenges thrown her way.

How does a young widow manage her way out of poverty in Afghanistan?

Jamila's story could give us few clues

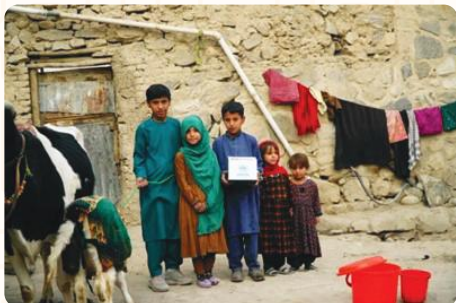
If you are looking for hope in times of despair, Jamila's story may provide just that. It is no secret that life in Afghanistan has had, and continues to have, its fair share of ups and downs, and Jamila is one of those who found a way to navigate these challenges with her head held high.

Jamila is from Tapa-i-Khan, Surobi district in Afghanistan. She is a young widow and a mother of five. Her husband had been the sole breadwinner, and with him gone, she struggled to figure out how to care for her children and keep up with the family expenses. She reached out to her neighbors and other people in her community, hoping they could provide guidance or help.

It was through her community that she learned about the BRAC Ultra-poor Graduation programme. The Graduation approach is a holistic, time-bound, and sequenced set of interventions aimed at enabling ultra-poor households to find a pathway out of extreme poverty.

Through the programme, Jamila received one cow and five chickens, marking the beginning of her journey of transformation. She was diligent in managing her livestock, and over time, **her poultry flock grew to 21 chickens, which now produce a dozen eggs each day**— a precious resource that helps Jamila feed her family. Jamila's cow also produces 7 kilos of milk, which she sells in the local market.

She sells the surplus eggs at the local market, further diversifying her income. The sale of eggs and milk in the market earns Jamila an average of \$8 per day.



Where Jamila lives, this steady income can be life-changing, offering the big push she needed to ensure her children do not fall into the cycle of extreme poverty. It's not just about the money though; Jamila has developed a newfound sense of agency and pride, knowing that she has taken the first step to reclaim her future. She is confident in her ability to overcome adversity.

Gulrang and her many roles: The polio survivor, the entrepreneur, the mother

Muqadas Tailoring— that is the name of Gulrang's tailoring shop. Loosely translated, Muqadas means holy or sanctified. And for Gulrang, her small shop in Afghanistan's Balkh province is indeed a sacred place, for it helps her not only care for her family of four but also employ other women in her neighbourhood.

But don't let the Gulrang of today obscure any sense of just how far she had to come. She contracted polio as a young girl and was left with physical disabilities. While cases of polio have seen a 99% decrease in the world since the launch of Global Polio Eradication Initiative, Afghanistan remains one of only two countries, alongside neighbouring Pakistan, where polio has continued to spread. Gulrang happens to be one of many individuals in Afghanistan bearing the brunt of poor access to healthcare.

However, Gulrang is not one to be bound by her circumstances. She started learning to sew clothes on her mother's old sewing machine when she was just 17. She kept practising and was soon selling the clothes she tailored. In three years, Gulrang saved enough money from her sales to purchase a second-hand manual sewing machine and launched her tailoring business. She could now contribute to household expenses but it was not enough to fully support her husband, who sold vegetables on a cart.

The manual sewing machine was out of date, limited in its capacities and required her to sit on the floor for a long time, which was difficult owing to her disability.



“The machine was also quite old and backdated, I was unable to sew good quality overlock stitched clothes, which had reduced demand for my clothes in the market,” Gulrang says.

She was looking for opportunities to upgrade and expand her business. Gulrang was selected as a participant of the ICRAR project, being implemented by BRAC in Afghanistan and funded by UNDP. The project was aimed at supporting women-led enterprises, by giving them training in business management and incubation along with grant assistance to cover operational expenses.

With the grant, she bought an automatic overlock sewing machine and some raw materials. It took some time but her business began to grow; better made clothes meant more sales. She employed and trained 30 other women from her community, reminding us that when you invest in women, the returns go far beyond the individual.

When creativity sparks innovation: Amina's pickle business now employs over 15 women

Amina, from Nahre Shahi village in Afghanistan's Balkh province has all the makings of a great entrepreneur, even though she does not always have the necessary resources at her disposal.

Thirty-year-old Amina now runs a pickle business, which over time has grown and employs 15 women from the same neighbourhood. A spark of genius and an intense need led Amina to open her business. She and her husband are a family of eight, with six children. Managing expenses for their growing family was proving difficult on a single income source.

While she did not have any formal education, Amina is a natural when it comes to marketing and launching a good idea. She noticed how popular her mother-in-law's pickles were among relatives and friends, and decided to give pickle-making a shot.

Amina wanted to scale her business but lacked the funds. Her income was hardly helping with household expenses, let alone think about expansion. When she was selected as a participant in the ABADeI project, being implemented by BRAC in Afghanistan and funded by UNDP, she made sure she used the opportunity to grow her business. She was provided with business training, support and financial assistance to expand her business. She used the funds to purchase materials and machinery to expand her business.

Today, her pickle business produces **50-80 bottles everyday**, allowing her to earn **18,000 AFN (\$253.89) in profits per month** and **employs 15 women**.



Amina's story reinforces our belief that investment in women is a force multiplier. When women have better access to healthcare, education, and livelihoods, the effects go far beyond a single individual. A woman multiplies the impact by creating a better life for herself and the people around her.

What does it take to break free of the poverty trap?

For Nagma and her children, it meant regaining their sense of confidence in their ability to bring positive change

Nagma grew up in the hustle-bustle of the Afghan capital - Kabul. But she had to leave the city and move to a different province when she got married. She now rents a small house in Surobi district's Tapa-i-Khan, where she lives with her husband and ten children.

The Afghan economy has been in trouble for a long time now and communities in marginalized conditions find it especially difficult to manage a decent livelihood. Nagma's husband is a person living with disability and is unable to work. In traditional Afghan society, it is not common for women to head households but Nagma took on that role. She kept looking for steady employment sources, while her two eldest sons took on odd jobs, contributing what little they made to the family. Nonetheless, providing for the large family – schooling, medical bills, house rent – were all proving too much to handle.

People like Nagma who live in extreme poverty are trapped, unable to escape their situation and at risk of being left behind. They need an approach tailored to their needs. This is where the Graduation approach comes in. It is designed to meet the complex needs of those living in extreme poverty, which we know is multidimensional- so empowering people to escape the poverty trap requires a multidimensional approach.



Nagma became one of the participants of the Ultra-Poor Graduation Programme being implemented by BRAC Afghanistan.

As part of the Graduation programme's holistic approach, she received livelihood assets, skills development, and a stipend. Nagma got training on livestock rearing, a support package consisting of cash stipend, a cow, and five chickens. She bought a sewing machine with money from selling the eggs. She and her son also set up a small business – selling potato chips and corn fry. She now believes in diversifying her income sources – from running the shop to rearing chickens to managing her tailoring business – Nagma is full of newfound confidence in her ability to change her circumstances.

Thriving and not just surviving: The story of a female poultry farmer in Afghanistan

It is not easy being a woman. It is especially not easy being a woman in Afghanistan, where basic rights are more often than not restricted or entirely denied. When 23-year-old Zahra lost her father in the midst of the pandemic, these challenges only magnified further. He was the sole breadwinner for the family and now Zahra had to figure out a way to sustain her two younger siblings and her mother while navigating the unknown.

With no formal education and no prior experience, finding a job or an income source was proving increasingly difficult. Giving up was not an option though.

There is an old saying, luck favours the prepared and when the opportunity presented itself Zahra was prepared.



Through members of her community, Zahra found out about a programme where she would learn how to rear poultry but most importantly the project promised to help develop her skills and provide income generating opportunities. When BRAC in Afghanistan began selecting candidates for its Area-Based Approach to Development Emergency Initiatives (ABADEI) project, Zahra joined as a participant. Zahra went through a 36 day-long capacity development programme on rearing chicken and received start up kits - an incubator, a battery powered solar system, chicken feed, etc. and a \$1160 grant from BRAC Afghanistan to kick start her business.

Zahra is smart with her business- so far she has raised approximately 800 hens and has managed to sell them in the local market. Her farm also provides the family with a steady

source of protein – the eggs laid by her hens. Not all is for consumption though, the eggs also add to her income. She has started saving for her family's future and is helping her mother raise her two siblings. The challenges remain but Zahra has a newfound sense of confidence in her ability to bounce back from the curveballs life throws at her.

Zahra is one of 3,000 participants in Afghanistan, 60% of whom are women, who received Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in trades such as tailoring, livestock, poultry farming, mobile repairing, horticulture, apiculture, and mushroom cultivation under the Area-Based Approach to Development Emergency Initiatives (ABADEI) project.

Zahra's is one of many such stories of resilience in face of extreme hardships in a country battling constant political upheavals and unrest.

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