UN Volunteers addressing gender parity, giving a voice to women in Afghanistan

On the occasion of International Women's Day 2020, we reflect on the difference Afghan women are making as UN Volunteers with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to empower women in their home country.

For the first time in the history of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 30 Afghan women are engaged as national UN Youth Volunteers – supporting people and institutions in achieving peace and stability, across the country.

This has been possible through a partnership between UNV and UNAMA on a National Female UN Youth Volunteer Project, launched in January 2019 and funded by the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). The project has played an instrumental role in attempting to overcome the barriers to entry to the UN workforce in the country.
Becoming a national UN Youth Volunteer is not only an opportunity for me to deepen my knowledge and professional skills; it is also a path to fulfil my dream of supporting women in my country. Through community outreach, I can mobilize more vulnerable women to participate in social and political activities. --Zahra Hussaini, national UN Youth Volunteer Political Affairs Assistant, with UNAMA in Bamyan

Human resources are limited, especially at field level in Afghanistan, due to various constraints within the country and the community. This has created a challenge in incorporating the voices and needs of women into the mission’s work to advance the women, peace and security agenda.

The women national UN Youth Volunteers serving with UNAMA contribute significantly to addressing this issue. In addition, they play an active role in the areas of operations and resource management, service delivery, security and supply chain management, among others.

We are proud that the volunteers are actively engaged in integrating women’s voices in peace and development processes - especially related to peace and reconciliation, human rights monitoring, conflict prevention, management and resolution, and preventing violence against women. By engaging female representatives from local communities, we are also giving women in these communities a voice. --Iram Batool Programme Manager, UNV

Despite efforts to address the gender parity stemming from social and
cultural factors, UNAMA remains one of the gender-imbalanced missions, with overall national female staff at 9 per cent.

The efforts of the project have been crucial in attempting to address the gender gap within UNAMA, in line with the UN system-wide strategy to achieve full gender parity by 2030.

UNV/UNAMA Team (from left to right): UNV Programme Manager Iram Batool, UN Volunteers Humaira Nazari (national) and Andrea Sandoval Baez (international).

Currently, 90 national and international UN Volunteers are serving with UNAMA, 68 per cent of them women. Of the total 232 women currently working with UNAMA, 56 are UN Volunteers. Among them are the 30 Afghan women serving as National UN Youth Volunteers, providing substantive support across various pillars of the Mission.

"As a UN Volunteer, one of the most heart-warming experiences for me is when I hear from the supervisors of my fellow UN Volunteers how proud they are to engage the wonderful Afghan women who are giving their best to integrate voices of women in the peace and reconciliation efforts of the mission," says UN Volunteer Humaira Nazari, serving as a Programme & Administration Associate with the UNV/UNAMA Field Unit.
The UN Volunteers are also provided capacity building opportunities and exposure to different occupational categories enhancing their professional skills.

"Being a National Youth Volunteer is a good opportunity for me not only to build my career but get a first-hand experience of the work environment. Moreover, as a national youth UN volunteer, it's us who can change the mindset on volunteering and encourage others to join our volunteer family, to engage and motivate others to grow, and to become a source of inspiration for the new generation," says Manizha Nuzhat, Finance and Budget Assistant, with UNAMA.

The UN Volunteers with UNAMA contribute to SDGs by supporting peace, justice and strong institutions, and gender equality through volunteerism as an effective means of implementation and people engagement and the integration of volunteerism. Through the National UN Youth Volunteer Project, UNAMA and UNV have had the opportunity to empower Afghan women with the possibility of influencing cultural and social change, contributing to the peace and development of Afghanistan.

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Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 5: Gender equality, SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals