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Afghan expat returns to help rebuild her country



It was a shot heard around the world, but for Rohina Samim, then an Afghan expatriate working in Swiss banking and Management it was a wake-up call that could not be ignored. The "shot" was television footage of a woman being executed by the Taliban in an Afghan soccer stadium.

During her first trip to Canada in November, Rohina, for fundraising, now executive director of Women for Women International MFI (WWIMFI), MEDA's microfinance partner in Afghanistan, recalled how those images, witnessed 10 years ago, haunted her. "I felt this woman was talking to me, asking me why no one was coming to help her and other women in Afghanistan."

For Rohina, it was An important moment. She decided to leave the comfort of her life in Switzerland, to which her family had fled during the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and return to Afghanistan. Rohina was determined to find the woman's family and help them.



"It took me 8-9 months, but I found her seven children – living without water and electricity, with no money for school books. Now, with my support, these children have attended school and have a future. From that experience, I saw that I could bring change to the community. And I decided to work for different developing projects with focus women empowerment through economic sustainability.

Each day in her office in the Afghan capital of Kabul, Rohina meets persons who are struggling to help their families and survive in a harsh environment that is decidedly unfavourable to women and children. She has many stories to tell of how a small loan could change lives. Like the woman who has a bakery.

Rohina says that the main victims of the war in Afghanistan are women and children.

Rohina is particularly excited about MEDA's role in the Afghanistan Challenge, in which the Canadian government matches dollar for dollar individual and group donations that are directed to rebuilding efforts in her country. For her, it means more capital to help afghans.

"We're used to expecting things to happen quickly. If you don't get your result you move on. In countries that have deep issues it takes generations to make changes," she said.

Ms. Samin manages a portfolio of about US\$3 million. Since the program started 57,000 women have taken out a micro-loan, she said.

"When you help one woman, you help the whole family! She may be illiterate, but she is smart. Her focus is to send her children to school to benefit a better future." You save the entire family with a very small sum. I can confirm the sense that says „small sum but huge impact! »

By the numbers: WWIMFI (as of October 2009)

- 18,000 clients
- 99.35% repayment rate
- Average loan \$250
- 1 of only 2 MFIs in Afghanistan focused on serving women
- 180 staff members – 85% women
- Average loan officer portfolio – 300-350 clients

Interested in supporting this exciting program? Go to www.meda.org/give or you can support the Afghanistan Challenge at <http://www.medatrust.org/>

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