



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

SUCCESS STORY

Apprentices Learn and Earn in Afghanistan

“I want to learn about metal work, and eventually open my own shop so I can help my family more. But you cannot have a shop or earn any money if you cannot read or count.”

—Najib, 16 year old apprentice.

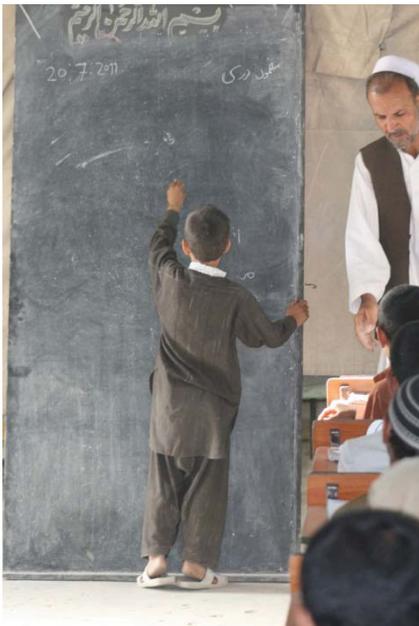


Photo credit — MEDA, ASF

A young apprentice practices on the chalkboard during a numeracy training session. ASF offered literacy and numeracy training to 220 apprentices who lacked access to formal education.

Notice: This Success Story is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of MEDA and FHI 360 and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States government.



One year ago, 15 year old Najib was selling candy on the street to help support his eight person household. The family relied completely on the meager earnings of Najib and his brother. At the time, Najib had never attended formal education and could not read or write.

Cases like Najib’s are all too common in Afghanistan. Although there have been some economic gains in recent years, most Afghans continue to struggle financially, and an estimated 90% of Afghan families rely on informal employment to support themselves. Young people from poor families are generally unable to afford costs associated with formal schooling, which places them at a disadvantage when seeking to enter the workforce.

Apprenticeships are a common and sustainable pathway for youth to gain vocational skills within the informal sector in Afghanistan. In response, the Afghan Secure Futures (ASF) project has engaged youth apprentices and informal sector small enterprises, in order to improve economic opportunities for vulnerable children and youth apprenticed in small workshops in the construction trade. The activity was implemented from August 2008 to August 2011 by MEDA (Mennonite Economic Development Associates) under the STRIVE program managed by FHI 360, with funding from USAID’s Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF).

ASF supported 363 workshops that were providing employment to 1,063 youth apprentices. Workshop owners benefited from business training and market linkages to improve their productivity and identify new opportunities. In addition, ASF provided basic literacy and numeracy training to 220 apprentices who, like Najib, had no access to formal education.

“The youth come from very poor families,” reports Mohamed Yousef, founder of Aschiana, a local organization that partnered with ASF to provide literacy and numeracy training. ***“The costs for uniforms, stationery, and transport prohibit them from going to school. For a lot of the kids in the literacy program, the classes are a haven three days a week, for a couple of hours. The degree of drug abuse, domestic violence, and disorder in their households is high.”***

Initially, workshop owners were resistant to the idea of literacy and numeracy training for apprentices, but ASF’s efforts to link the workshops to larger market players, business associations, and financial service providers helped to change those attitudes. The classes ran outside of regular business hours, at no cost to the owners, so there was no negative impact on their businesses. This built project trust and credibility with owners, and offered opportunities for apprentices to learn a wider range of marketable skills.

Today, Najib has apprenticed in a metal working shop for about a year and can read, write, and count at a functional level after completing literacy and numeracy training, with the support of ASF. He earns about 400 AFG (\$9 US) a week, doubling his income from one year ago. His goal is to become an entrepreneur. ***“The classes are the first education I have ever received. They are helping me get ready to be a workshop owner,”*** he said.

January 2012