



The Human Reach of Franchising – Business Women In Afghanistan

By Robert Shaw, Managing Director, EGS

During my professional career I have had the privilege of conducting business in more than 50 countries around the world. Yet one of my most memorable international experiences took place in January 2005 in nearby Arizona. EGS was honored to be asked to be a part of Project Artemis, a program sponsored by the US Agency of

International Development and hosted by my alma mater, Thunderbird, The Garvin School of International Management.

Project Artemis was created to provide a group of Afghan women with entrepreneurial training, coaching, mentoring and access to intellectual and financial capital. Our educational segment of the program focused specifically on the fundamentals of franchising and international franchising. We discussed business models, and the roles and relationships in franchising. We found ourselves talking in detail about how franchising can help developing countries by creating new businesses, jobs and supplier opportunities, as well as adopt certain international standards. And how all of these are so important in helping many people in their country improve their living standards.

The Afghan ladies were very intelligent and well-educated, with bachelors, masters and doctorate degrees from local and western universities. All seem to speak English reasonably well and in some cases fluently. In addition most of them spoke two of Afghanistan's principal languages, Dari and Pashto. Professional experiences ranged from publishing to medicine to civil engineering.

At times certain traditional cultural tendencies created a need for one student to ask her peer to act as a Q&A intermediary. Some were simply a bit more hesitant than others to speak directly to a male, even in this environment. This led me to ask one of our "star" pupils to allow me to use her new "fictitious business", as an example of a franchise system. She gracefully and confidently agreed to become a franchisor. Others then volunteered to be franchisees. This enabled us to personalize the opportunities, roles and responsibilities. It worked!

A week later, while watching President Bush deliver the State of the Union address on television, I did not expect to see the franchisor of "Homira's Delicious Pies Restaurant Franchise, Inc." on my screen. Was it really her? Yes it was! There, sitting next to our First Lady, Laura Bush, was Ms. Homira Glassery. She was introduced by President Bush, himself, as a woman who represents all women of Afghanistan, who now enjoy many new freedoms including the right to vote in free political elections.

Ms. Glassery currently teaches leadership development at the University of Kabul School of Law and Political Science and trains female civil servants to assume roles in senior management. She hopes to establish a venture capital firm for Afghan women in the near future. We can only support her efforts, and that of her peers, to succeed. And hope that it is just a matter of time before premier franchise systems find their way to Afghanistan to play needed roles to help the Afghan people develop their economy and standard of living.

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