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## Faces of Mine Action: Manizha Rasheed Kamal

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# Manizha Rasheed Kamal



Manizha Rasheed Kamal accepts her certificate at the closing dinner of the 2012 Senior Managers' Course held by the Center of International Stabilization and Recovery at James Madison University.  
*Photo courtesy of JMU photo services.*

**W**ith a law degree from Preston University in Pakistan and in her current role as a contracts-management coordinator at the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan, Manizha Rasheed Kamal has more education and experience than many other Afghan women. “I was born into an educated [Afghan] family. My father allowed me to get an education, even during the Taliban time when all schools were closed for girls [in Afghanistan],”

she says. Fortunately for Kamal and her sisters, her parents moved the family to Pakistan in order to provide their daughters the opportunity to continue their education. While in Pakistan, Kamal and her sisters sewed burkas to pay for their schooling. Kamal worked throughout the day and attended university in the evenings until she attained her degree.

When she completed her education and could return safely to Afghanistan, she moved to Kabul seeking a position

that would accept her as a woman with strong qualifications. Although she is highly educated, securing a well-paying, responsible job in a mine action (or any) organization in Afghanistan is not easy for a woman.

### Gender Discrimination

For Kamal, a woman working in Afghanistan presents its own unique challenges. During the five years of Taliban-controlled Afghan government (1996–2001), women were prevented from receiving an education and were not allowed to leave the house without permission from a male relative. This mindset carried over into today's society, with many men in the country restricting the opportunities for women to work outside of the home.

Kamal observed that even in situations where mothers, daughters, sisters and wives are permitted to hold a job, their opportunities and rights are limited in the workplace. Lack of education contributes to the problem. Women uninformed of their rights do not know what is available to them. Many organizations attempt to educate Afghan women through programs and training, but community elders, groups traditionally comprised only of males, discourage it.

Kamal is fortunate that her parents valued their daughters' education. As the eldest child in her family, she solely supports her parents and sisters. When her husband's family asked for her to marry their son, she would not agree to marriage unless she was allowed to continue working to support her family. They eventually agreed and she says, "I am happy that my husband is an open-mind[ed] person so he allows me to work."

Kamal was honored to attend the 2012 Senior Managers' Course in ERW and Mine Action at James Madison University as the first woman from Afghanistan. On the opportunity to attend the course, she says, "I gained a lot. Before [I attended the SMC] I was just only focused on the contract work, but now I think about the overall program strategy, planning, quality assurance, human resource and finance."

### The Changing Workplace

However, working in a male-dominated society is difficult. When MACCA hired her in 2003, she was one of only two women working there. She says that when she first began at MACCA, the Taliban threatened her by saying, "Do not work. Do not support foreigners." Then early in 2012, the Taliban

sent letters to her house, demanding she stop working. Instead, Kamal held her ground.

"I did not want to stop working, so I changed my home. I am trying to work for my country and encourage women to work and build their capacity." Today, nine years after she began working at MACCA, it now employs 32 women in MAPA.

In her position as contracts management coordinator, Kamal oversees the processes by which implementing partners are selected and donor funds to the UN Mine Action Service administered Voluntary Trust Fund for Mine Action are allocated. Contracts with implementing partners are designed to create an outline of the operation plan, expected cost and the ways in which a contract will coincide with international and national mine action standards. Kamal seeks to ensure that the demining work in Afghanistan is contracted by IPs that provide the greatest value for the donor's money in a transparent and thorough manner.

MACCA is supported technically and financially by the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and on behalf of the government of Afghanistan coordinates the work of the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan, one of the largest organizations of its kind and the world's first humanitarian mine action program.<sup>1</sup> For the past two decades, MAPA partners have worked to demine Afghanistan, clearing more than 20,000 hazardous areas, but the endeavor is unfinished.<sup>2</sup> Estimates indicate that 570.9 sq m (247.1 sq mi) of Afghanistan is still contaminated, affecting 1,717 communities. In addition, Afghanistan, a State Party to the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and their Destruction* (Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention or APMBC), submitted an extension request in March 2012 to extend its mine impact-free deadline to 2023.<sup>3</sup>

Kamal hopes that one day, she will have the opportunity to earn a degree in law, and advocate in the government of Afghanistan working for women's rights. She intends to send her children to an international school to acquire their education; she further expects them to bring that experience back to work in Afghanistan. Kamal wishes that one day women in Afghanistan will be free to pursue any job without threat of repercussions. ©

See endnotes page 73  
~ Paige Ober, CISR staff