

Success Story 5

Zainab Heider: A Story of Empowerment

“I want to be; it is hard to make something out of one’s self in the midst of all the poverty and the social pressures. Yet, I will continue to fight for my place in this world and I won’t give up.”

Zainab Heidar also known as Zouzou Kaa’besh is a 31 year old female; living in Luxor governorate in Asna’ district. Zouzou is the eldest of her two siblings. Since the death of her mother - Zouzou at the early age of 15 years old - began to physically and emotionally support her siblings and carry a large responsibility. Zouzou is an optimistic young woman who found herself carrying a large burden at an early age and faced by a society where women were always deemed inferior to men. The community of Luxor is isolated and tribal by nature. She believes that she is the man of the house after her father and that she endures and is responsible of tasks more than any men. Zouzou is extremely self-reliant in order to face her harsh living conditions.



Zouzou received a diploma in Business and had to stop her educational path to support her siblings to be able to complete their education. Zouzou belongs to the lower Egyptian social class and has seen years of poverty and deprivation. Zouzou began to buy and sell clothes in Luxor and one day while waiting for transportation, she met a woman who encouraged her to attend a training workshop on handicrafts. She faced the refusal of her family first then after 3 whole months, she stood up for herself and convinced them that she had to work outside of the house and not only in buying and selling clothes. After the training received, Zouzou met members of human rights NGO and they convinced her to receive training in human development and be part of their NGO. The fact that Zouzou was not aware about anything related to human rights was a challenge but that was her first step into civil work.

Zouzou faced tough criticism from her family and people in her community and was even pushed to believe that work could challenge her marriage potentials. Zouzou did not listen to all this and followed the path that she believed was written for her. She met a journalist at her job and decided she could learn the job as well. In addition, Zouzou is very talented and creative and she began to learn, design and sell the art of handicrafts as well.

For Zouzou, it was the first time to participate in a development project and be part of the SET projects in particular. Zouzou discovered the CDS application form online through a friend of hers; she loved the idea but lacked self-confidence at first to apply and thought she was never going to be selected as a participant because she did not have enough experience. Zouzou was also very reluctant to apply because she lost faith in development agencies and every time she applied to be part of a project; the core team selected their neighbors and/or friends. Zouzou decided she was going to try again and apply to SET III. After filling the project application form, Zainab waited and finally received a phone call from CDS saying that she was selected as one of the 30 participants amongst 250 in Egypt to be part of SET III.

When Zouzou got accepted and first arrived to Cairo; she felt she was so out of place and felt demeaned since the participants were all better educated and financially stable. She decided that she could not

participate and was on her way back when she thought that CDS had chosen her because they saw something in her and her willingness to prove herself was bigger than her social and financial status.

When Zouzou participated in the first SET III seminar; she felt that she was good enough to have a say and other participants respected her and her point of view. Zouzou never saw herself having enough self-confidence and knowledge to become a trainer. Throughout the SET III training phases, she became responsible for the training group and was empowered by the encouragement and support of the project team as well as her fellow participants.

A couple of months into the simulation, Zouzou felt that she has gained enough skills to organize the local workshop in Luxor which was a great success. Then, she transferred the method of the simulation game learnt during the project to the members of the NGO she works in. She gained facilitation and communication skills and is proud to be able to stand up in front of a crowd and speak her mind with no restrictions. She also gained self-confidence and trusts that she can be a leader in her community. In addition, Zouzou has always been living in a closed community and SET III opened doors to a large network all over Egypt with the participation of 35 members from 12 governorates to the project.

Zouzou is also very talented in handcrafts and she gave several training workshops in Egypt and China regarding her work. Zouzou did benefit from her newly acquired networking skills and is confident that she can sell her products online. Zouzou is an exceptional young lady with a confident empowered smile like no other. She believes that nothing is impossible as long as the person has the willingness to fight *“I want to be; it is hard to make something out of one’s self in the midst of all the poverty and the social pressures. Yet, I will continue to fight for my place in this world and I won’t give up.”*