

Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam

MSocSc in Rural Development (1996)

Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam graduated with a Masters of Social Science (MSocSc) in Rural Development from the University of Birmingham (UoB) in 1996. Originally from Birmingham, she has worked for many years as a consultant and country expert on Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. From informing the military and UK Ministry of Defence to defending Afghan women's rights both before and during the reign of the Taliban, Sippi spent 16 and a half years working both in Afghanistan and all around the world imparting her wisdom on Afghan politics, development and culture. We recently caught up with Sippi to find out the impact the MSocSc has had on her life and career.



“After graduation, I decided to travel to Afghanistan as an unpaid volunteer,” begins Sippi. “After volunteering for several months for Afghan Aid, an international humanitarian and development non-governmental organisation, Merlin, the UK's leading international health charity, employed me. I went on to work with a number of international and national NGOs, eventually donor agencies and government bodies and now finally NATO forces via the UK Ministry of Defence. Through studying my MSocSc in Rural Development at UoB, I learnt the basic skills, and critical analysis which enabled me to both begin and progress within my current career.”

Having decided to pursue an MSocSc qualification, Sippi explains why she chose to study at UoB and her subsequent fond experiences:

“I grew up in Selly Oak and had many links with academics and students on campus; UoB had a great reputation and when I visited the department, I got the sense that I would be looked after. This personal experience sealed the deal for me and I decided to study for my degree at UoB.

“My department was in a nice detached house on Pritchatts Road and, thanks to the diverse body of students who attended both the university and the course, it felt like a mini UN camp. I met students from all over the world, some of whom I have even bumped into at various jobs and conferences in different countries since graduation. This exposure to so many different people and cultures was a good initial networking opportunity, a skill which I learnt as a student and now use regularly.

“As far as international development was concerned, my understanding was greatly expanded at UoB; the lecturers encouraged debates between students which challenged and informed our knowledge. I was taught by inspirational people who had lived and worked abroad so had extensive field experience. They were able to offer both academic and practical advice, a service I found hugely beneficial and motivating as the lecturers appreciated the experiences we were going to go through.

“Before my MSocSc, I did not have adequate technical skills or knowledge of development to go to another country and contribute professionally to field work, even as a volunteer. After I completed my course, I gained a solid introduction, research skills and vision to get involved with project work in Afghanistan.”

Looking back over her experience at the university, Sippi recalls the challenging nature of the course and some of modules she found to be particularly useful:

“The course continuously challenged me as I was always learning something new but the lecturers at the UoB were the best resource as they were always available to offer support.”

“Getting to grips with different research methods in village communities was extremely valuable as were the broader rural development components. The teaching approach was very hands-on and practical and all the skills I learnt I used at some stage along the way.”

In recommending UoB to potential international students, Sippi says:

“Attend as many conferences and networking events available through UoB as possible. Networking for exchange of information and finding out what others are up to in your field is an extremely important skill and one that I still use now. Thanks to good networking skills I have been able to apply my Afghanistan knowledge to great effect – I have not had to look for for a job in over a decade as my reputation secures me a key position in a number of international networks focusing on Afghanistan and the region!”