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ayzh at a Crossroad: Maternal Health for Whom?

“We exist as a commitment to save lives and change lives, one product at a time, making one happy woman at a time.” — Zubaida Bai

It was a crisp fall day when Zubaida Bai, CEO of ayzh and an Ashoka Young Champion of Maternal Health Fellowship, stepped out of the building where she had been attending a Maternal Health Task Force (MHTF)ⁱ meeting in New York City. She had a short break before the dinner reception and wanted to get out of the building, perhaps go for a short walk and sit someplace quiet. As she scanned the street for a place to get a cup of tea and gather her thoughts, she felt excited and humbled by the interest her venture had generated at the meeting.

Bai and her husband, Habib Anwar, had started ayzh out of a deep desire to improve the lives of impoverished women in their native India. They felt that with their education and professional experienceⁱⁱ they could make a positive impact on the plight of these women. With the belief that creating economic opportunity was the most effective way to make a positive impact, Bai and Anwar thought about creating businesses that employed rural women, thereby providing prosperity, which would lead to better health, education, and overall social welfare. The challenge was to find an appropriate business. Their initial ideas for bringing prosperity to rural women consisted of a bio-sand water filter and a hand-operated corn sheller. Neither of these ideas survived their initial feasibility study. Their latest idea had come out of their fieldwork to develop the value chain for the bio-sand filter. As they talked with rural Indian women, it became apparent that infection during childbirth was a significant problem. This problem also resonated with Bai. During the birth of her first child, she had suffered from an infection and had discovered that these types of infections



- i The MHTF is an organization that helps shape efforts to improve maternal health worldwide. The MHTF is supported in part by the Bill & Melinda Gates and the John D. and Catherine T. McArthur Foundations and is a well-regarded organization in maternal health circles.
- ii Bai has a master's degree in mechanical engineering and, at the time, three years of experience in innovation, design, and development. Anwar, with a master's in international business, had ten years of international corporate and intrapreneurship experience.



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