



EDUCATION:

The Single Most Effective Strategy for Sustainable Success in Developing Economies

Razia's Ray of Hope empowers girls and young women through community-based education in Deh'Subz, Afghanistan. Our nonprofit organization and schools were founded in the knowledge that education is the key to positive, global change for current and future generations.

BACKGROUND

Razia Jan, native Afghan and award-winning humanitarian, is the founder of Razia's Ray of Hope Foundation, a small, US-based organization that supports the Zabuli Education Center, a private, free, K-12 girls' school in Deh'Subz, Afghanistan. Founded in 2008 with 100 students, today the Zabuli Education Center provides exemplary education to 625 Afghan girls, ranging in age from 4 to 22. Previously, many of these girls were denied any educational opportunities. As a result of Razia's vision and leadership, the Zabuli Education Center provides groundbreaking, free instruction to low-income girls in a region with one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. Afghan women face the lowest levels of human development on a global level, inclusive of life expectancy, education, and per capita income. Within this landscape, Razia's students come from impoverished, uneducated households in a society that systemically stifles women's achievement.

As the founder and country director of the Zabuli Education Center, Razia is a tireless advocate for vulnerable and underserved children. When she identifies a systemic need, she formulates an innovative, tactical solution. Instead of donating to an existing NGO or simply wringing her hands over the lack of girls' education in Afghanistan, Razia did what few others have done: She went to Afghanistan and built a school. With her exceptional ability to influence communities and bring people together, Razia overcame national insecurity and entrenched patriarchy and earned the Deh'Subz community's acceptance. Although villagers initially rejected the idea of a school for girls, the Zabuli Education Center has become a celebrated symbol of progress and the advancement of women—and is the pride of the conservative community it serves. Razia's aptitude is an amalgamation of cultural awareness, creative problem solving, and perseverance, epitomized by the first thing she teaches her kindergarten students: how to write their fathers' names in three languages (Dari, Pashto, and English). This one seemingly simple act profoundly changes societal expectations. Many fathers approach Razia the next day, crying with joy; most of them cannot even write their own name.

For nearly a decade, the Zabuli Education Center has monumentally changed the lives of its students, their families, and the community. The education Razia provides her students deeply affects their outcomes, empowering these girls philosophically and pragmatically. Razia's students learn that certain autonomies are not privileges but basic human rights. This understanding fundamentally changes their views of life, society, and themselves. Afforded education and practical skills, Razia's students embark on a path towards opportunity and economic freedom despite the challenging environment. In addition to exceptional education, Zabuli Education Center students are materially supported with free coats, boots, and much-needed meals. Emotionally, they become part of the school family, a community of empowered peers and female role models.

GROUNDBREAKING CHANGE

The Zabuli Education Center is a diamond among stones, providing education that meets or exceeds standards set by the Afghan Ministry of Education. Its success begins with Razia Jan's school-building philosophy: community-based education. As many other organizations have learned the hard way, a school built by an NGO in a developing country will not last long without community support: a 2009 study by CARE found that schools built by NGOs with community participation are much less vulnerable to attack. Razia, in her role as founder and country director of the Zabuli Education Center, worked tirelessly to gain the community's acceptance. Today Razia is hailed by village elders—with whom she meets on a monthly basis—as the “Mother of Deh'Subz.” Families have even begun moving to Deh'Subz just to attend the Zabuli Education Center.

Students in Afghan public schools typically attend school for two hours per day. Public schools often have insufficient infrastructure and inconsistent scheduling wherein the number of students far exceeds the pool of qualified teachers. In contrast, Zabuli Education Center students attend class for 5.5 hours per day for 182 days annually in the primary school and 186 days in the upper grades. In addition, K-12 students are encouraged to attend class during the three-month winter break. At the Zabuli Education Center, the largest class has 27 students. Where other schools meet in open air, crowded tents, or private homes, the Zabuli Education Center is a beautifully maintained, three-story building with educational resources that include a fully equipped computer room, science lab, gym, and library.

The curriculum at the Zabuli Education Center is both academic and practical, taught by experienced, native teachers. The Afghan staff consists of 37 teachers and administrators. Razia purposefully hires dedicated, qualified teachers—a difficult task as certified teachers are rare in Afghanistan. Her team searches for individuals that meet her stringent requirements. Every Zabuli Education Center teacher has graduated high school and many are credentialed or completing teacher training. Remuneration for Zabuli Education Center teaching staff is 40%-60% higher than typical Afghan schools. While Razia hires locally when possible, most of her teachers live in Kabul. To address safety, feasibility, and retention, Razia provides teaching staff daily roundtrip transport.

Razia's philosophy of education and school building has proved remarkably effective. The success and impact of her groundbreaking leadership is seen in the following Zabuli Education Center statistics:

Student attendance rate	93%
Student retention rate	90%
Student passing rate	99%
Classrooms	20
Students in 2017	625
Average number of students per classroom	27
Teachers and administrators	37
Student computers	18
School days per year, K–grade 6	182
School days per year, grades 7–12	187
School hours per day	5
Bathrooms	6
Library	1
Gymnasium	1
Computer lab	1

Where many existing Afghan schools fail to meet even rudimentary standards, the Zabuli Education Center is exemplary. A Ministry of Education official said of the school: “It is perfect.”

IMPACT

The impact Razia Jan has had on the lives of individual students, educators, families, and the education community is incalculable. Over its multi-millennial history, Deh’Subz, Afghanistan, *had never educated girls*. Given the profoundly positive social and economic impacts of educating girls, where data shows that educating women and girls is the *single most effective strategy* to ensure the well-being and health of children and families and the long-term success of developing economies, Razia’s leadership, vision, and perseverance as a champion for the girls and young women of Deh’Subz will have a continuous ripple effect for years to come. The mere fact of increasing the literacy rate of the population of Deh’Subz will have enormous positive impacts for the community as a whole.

In 2015, the Zabuli Education Center graduated its first class of twelfth graders, followed by the second in 2016. These two classes of graduates totaled 22 girls, four of whom now attend the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul and one of whom attends the American University of Istanbul. In December 2017, 18 more girls will graduate and by 2020 the school will reach a steady state of graduating 50 girls every year. Remarkably, the class of 2017 includes students who are married—and even a married student who is pregnant with a baby girl. It is difficult to overstate how unimaginable these scenarios would have been just a few years ago.

In keeping with these remarkable changes, Zabuli Education Center graduates now have access to post-secondary education. In March 2017, Razia opened the Razia Jan Institute (RJI) adjacent to the Zabuli Education Center. RJI is a post-secondary midwifery school that provides a sustainable career path for Zabuli Education Center graduates as well as other members of the community. RJI students are also offered skills-based training in computer and financial literacy, in addition to broadened opportunities for post-graduate workforce development. The new facility will include a clinic where midwifery students train alongside doctors and midwives. As the district hospital in Deh’Subz is more than an hour away, RJI’s medical facility will have a considerable impact on a severely medically underserved area.

Currently, Razia’s Ray of Hope Foundation and the Zabuli Education Center are partnering with the University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO) to implement a project with the overarching goal of promoting peace in Afghanistan through education. Recognizing that Zabuli Education Center teachers are significantly more experienced and accomplished than peer teachers at area public schools and that Zabuli Education Center staff members function as exemplars of best practices in pedagogy, UNO will partner with Zabuli Education Center teachers and administrators to train local public school teachers and administrators in the following areas:

- Teaching Conflict Management Skills to Youth
- School and Classroom Management Skills
- Supporting Innovative Teaching Techniques
- Teacher Engagement and Retention

This project is approached with the understanding that the success of the Zabuli Education Center can be an inspiration for other schools in Afghanistan, and that by replicating the school’s, it is possible to improve the general education for other schools across the country.

INSPIRATION

As a champion for girls' and women's education in Afghanistan, Razia Jan has overcome extraordinary hurdles to accomplish more than many ever dream of. Born in Afghanistan, Razia moved to the United States in 1970. The proprietor of a small tailoring business in Duxbury, Massachusetts, for 20 years Razia served as president of the town's local Rotary Club.

In the aftermath of September 11, Razia rallied her adopted New England community to send over 400 homemade blankets to rescue workers at Ground Zero. Her efforts expanded to include sending care packages to US troops in Afghanistan. Through her involvement in the US Army's Operation Shoe Fly, she coordinated the delivery of over 30,000 pairs of shoes to destitute Afghan children. Her handmade quilts commemorating September 11 have been exhibited at Madison Square Garden, the Pentagon chapel, and at fire stations in New York and Massachusetts.

Razia has received many awards for her humanitarian work, including 2012 CNN Top 10 Hero Award, the 2007 Woman of Excellence Award from Germaine Lawrence Inc., multiple Rotary Club International Peace Awards, and certificates of appreciation from the Army Corps of Engineers and the American Legion. She has spoken on Afghan women and children's issues at venues across the United States, as well as in Europe and Afghanistan. In 2014, Razia was named Social Innovator by the Lewis Institute at Babson College, and in 2015 she was awarded a Woman of Action Award from Rotary International at the United Nations in New York City. In 2016, she was honored with Rotary International's Service Above Self Award. Razia has served as a member of the Interfaith Council, the No Place for Hate Committee, and Jordan Hospital's board of directors. Her humanitarian efforts were honored in First Lady Laura Bush's 2016 book *We Are Afghan Women* and the Emmy nominated, award-winning documentary *What Tomorrow Brings*. Today, Razia regularly travels between Afghanistan and the United States to continue her humanitarian work, school administration, and fundraising efforts while spending time with family.

Razia Jan is committed to a life of service. Her work demonstrates that anyone can step up and create positive change—so long as we have the vision, persistence, and courage.

“In Afghanistan, women are working to overcome years of oppression to secure basic rights, including the right to be educated. Afghan women continue to face intimidation and violence in their pursuit of this right. Razia's Ray of Hope provides means and a shining path of example for many Afghan females. Razia Jan's life's work to help the girls of her country obtain an education is key to the empowerment of future generations of women. The UNO Center for Afghanistan Studies is proud to be associated with Razia Jan and the Razia's Ray of Hope Foundation.” —*Thomas Gouttierre, Senior Officer for Global Engagement; Dean, International Studies & Programs; Director, Center for Afghanistan Studies, University Nebraska Omaha*

RAZIA'S
RAY OF HOPE
FOUNDATION



Razia's Ray of Hope improves the lives of Afghan girls through community-based education at the Zabuli Education Center and the Razia Jan Institute in Deh'Subz, Afghanistan. Our nonprofit organization and schools were founded in the knowledge that education is key to positive, peaceful change for current and future generations—and that we must empower girls and young women through education and resources to work toward brighter futures, in their own villages and well beyond.

www.raziasrayofhope.org • 781-431-7894 • moreinfo@raziasrayofhope.org