

# Journey of HOPE

FALL 2015

## Girls' Education

We've come far,  
but there is a long  
way to go

by Greg Mortenson

### Writing for change

Afghan women pen  
a new destiny for  
Afghanistan

by Lori Noack

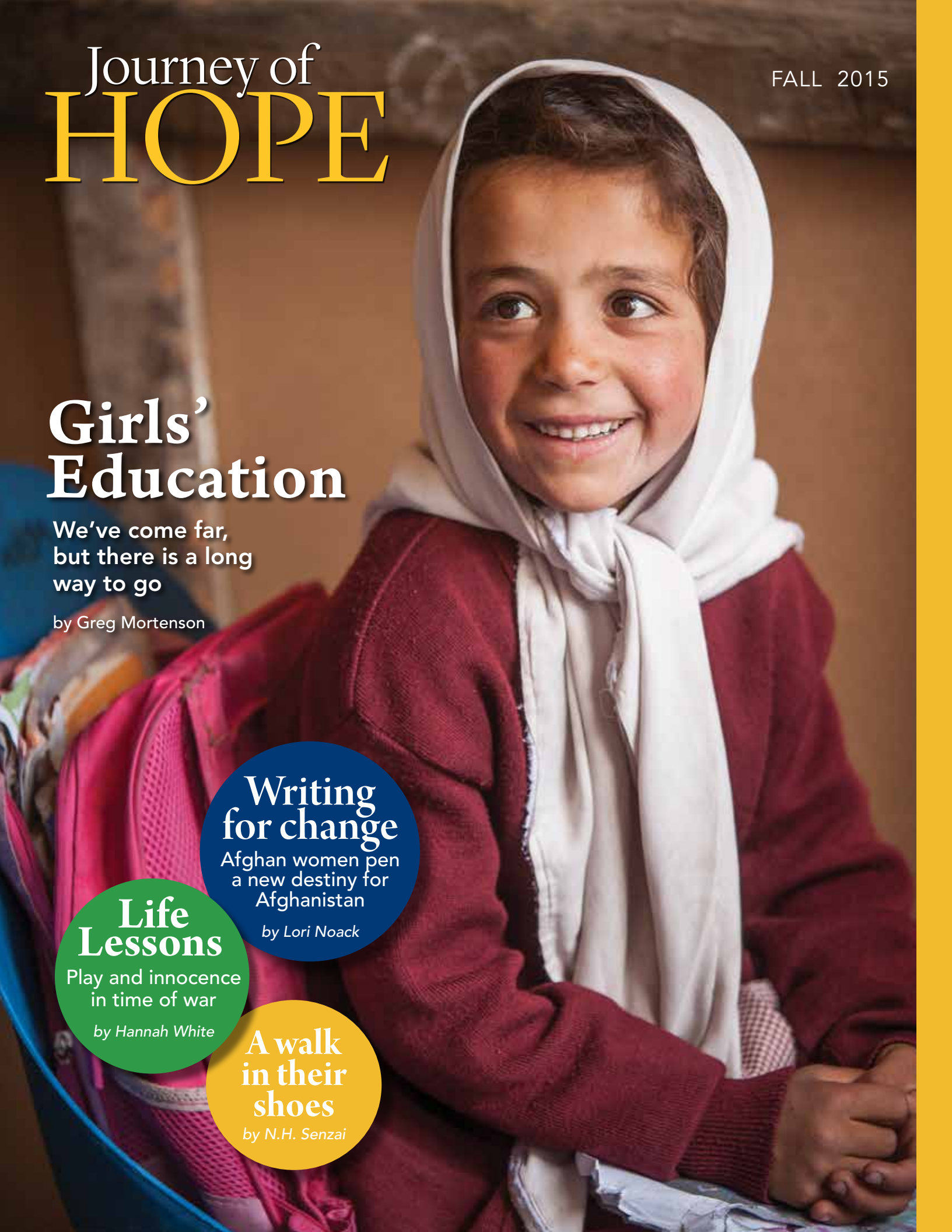
### Life Lessons

Play and innocence  
in time of war

by Hannah White

### A walk in their shoes

by N.H. Senzai







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## In this issue:

- 2 Life lessons: Play and innocence in time of war
- 7 Students, not brides
- 8 When disaster struck Gulmit
- 9 Writing for change: Afghan women pen a new destiny for Afghanistan
- 12 Getting a head start
- 15 Girls' education: We've come far, but there is a long way to go
- 21 Message from Greg Mortenson
- 22 Letter from the chairman
- 23 Ask, don't tell: The recipe for change
- 29 Literacy in a box: Educating a whole community
- 30 Hibbard Elementary School learns a little gesture can have a big impact
- 32 Anyone can build a school, few build relationships. That makes all the difference.
- 37 Education and community action: An antidote for terrorism
- 40 A field report from Pakistan
- 44 Construction complete: Rukut classes move inside ahead of winter
- 46 HER: Hope. Educate. Rise.
- 48 A walk in their shoes

ALSO INSIDE

KID'S SECTION: Games and activities for the whole family



**Cover:** A student smiles during class at the Central Asia Institute-sponsored Imamabad Primary School in Hunza, Pakistan.

**Opposite page:** On the outskirts of Kabul, a young girl listens to her teacher. Part of the nomadic Kuchi tribe, her classes take place in CAI-provided tents.

**Inside back cover:** A young girl plays outside the CAI-sponsored vocational center in Ishkashim, Afghanistan.

**Back cover:** Atta Abad Lake in Pakistan, which was formed when a landslide blocked the flow of the Hunza River in 2010.

Photos by Erik Petersen



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# LIFE LESSONS:

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## PLAY AND INNOCENCE IN TIME OF WAR

BY HANNAH WHITE

A small group of girls huddle around a pile of pebbles on the ground. Their rubber shoes squeak as they shift position, one girl's hands poised over the stones. They are playing *chakore*, as the game is called in the local Burushaski language.

With the tip of her tongue sticking out, the epitome of concentration, the first player tosses a pebble into the air. Quickly she grabs a stone from the pile on the ground and catches the pebble she's tossed before it hits the dirt.

She exhales deeply. Her nimble fingers flutter in excited expectation as she shifts her feet, inhales, and throws the stone again. This time she swipes two stones from the pile.

The ritual is repeated again and again — three pebbles, four pebbles, five pebbles — until eventually her small hands slip and she isn't able to grab the flying pebble in time. Her turn is over.

The little girl next to her moves into position, readying herself to beat the leader's score.

Sitting in the dust, scarves falling around their shoulders, worries forgotten, the girls could be anywhere — Europe, the U.S., or Africa — playing a friendly game of jacks, as we call it.

This particular game is being played in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of northern Pakistan.

They do not use a rubber ball and metal game pieces to play as children in the U.S. might. Instead they use what is available to them, stones.

### TOYS AND TANKS

At home, legacies of former empires serve as substitute playground equipment. Abandoned long ago, T62 tanks, rusting and gutted, become forts and hideouts for the children in the former Soviet Republics and reminders of the decade-long Soviet-Afghan war. Options for games are usually much better at school, though still sparse.

Few schools in the regions where Central Asia Institute (CAI) works have surplus income to purchase toys or playground equipment. Occasionally, if they are lucky, they can scrimp together enough money to buy a few dolls for the young children and balls for the older kids.

Volleyball, badminton, cricket, and soccer are favorites in all three countries served by CAI. In some places girls enjoy card games with cards made out of old notebook paper, and in Azad Kashmir students like to play the board game Ludo, known to us as Parcheesi.

At one school in Tajikistan, there are two old Soviet-era slides. On their breaks, the 320 students jostle for their turn, coming up with creative ways to shoot down the worn metal surfaces.

In Hushe, Pakistan the colorfully painted primary school boasts some modest equipment, and several CAI-supported schools have volleyball and badminton nets.

"Most of the games are same as I played with my friends," said Dilshad Baig, CAI women's development program director in Pakistan. "But we were not allowed to play

the games played by boys, like cricket, or play with boys at football and volleyball."

That's not usually the case these days. You'll frequently see girls spiking a volleyball over a tattered net or tossing the cricket ball from a makeshift pitch. And the girls hurry to school in the morning, just as quickly as the boys, hoping to squeeze in a little playtime before class.

While they don't have recess, when school lets out in the afternoon many children drag their feet; no one is in a rush to get home to chores and homework. Ignoring grumbling stomachs — lunch is not usually eaten at school, except in the case of some young children in Early Childhood Development programs — they will stay after class and play *trippa*, a game where kids push a flat stone with their feet, or hide and seek, a universal childhood favorite. Active games like these are important in this region where it is cold for much of the year. The activities help the children burn excess energy and stay warm at the same time.

### NOT KIDDING AROUND

The importance of a few moments set aside for play every day is apparent when you see the smiles on these children's faces. But arguments in support of playtime run much deeper than those toothy grins.

Play is crucial to child development. Medical practitioners and psychologists tout the many benefits, saying it allows children to develop "their imagination, dexterity, and



A group of girls jump rope at their home near the Vanqala School in rural Tajikistan.

physical, cognitive, and emotional strength.”

Unstructured, child-directed play is especially important. Kenneth R. Ginsburg, for the American Academy of Pediatrics, writes:

“Undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills. When play is allowed to be child-driven, children practice decision-making skills, move at their own pace, discover their own areas of interest, and ultimately engage fully in the passions they wish to pursue.”

Play is an escape from social conditioning and training. It allows children the unfettered freedom to roam, invent, fail, and adapt, all on their own terms and with no particular timeline.

Nowhere is this more important than conflict zones.

## WAR GAMES

When concerned with eking out a living, scrounging enough food and money together to support a large family, and surviving in a country that is plagued by seemingly endless violence, play hardly seems like a priority.

Yet, for children in conflict areas and war

zones particularly, learning to share, negotiate, and resolve issues peacefully can be the difference between life and death or a dark future and a bright one.

School playgrounds become refuges from the violence that surrounds children raised amongst bombs and bullets.

“The school is the only secure place for playing,” says Wakil Karimi, CAI-Afghanistan country director. “Kids are afraid of landmines or violence outside of school.”

The people of Lalandar know this all too well. Located on a thoroughfare used variably by Soviets, Afghan guerrilla warriors,

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“Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning.”

— Mr. Rogers

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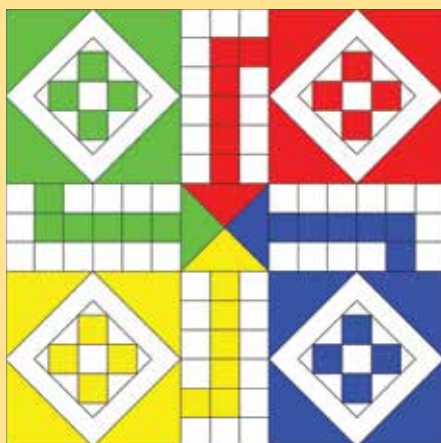
and the Taliban, hundreds, if not thousands, of landmines were buried in and around the town.

Today, white Vs painted on rocks mark the place where mines were buried and removed. From a distance, some hillsides appear to be pieces of abstract art, a sort of grisly herringbone pattern etched in white paint.

Posters meant to help children identify and avoid mines are plastered on the local school’s walls and in 2006 a walkway was constructed from the town to the school. The concrete path is a memorial to Gul Marjan, a young boy who died when he was just 14 after stepping on a landmine. In his excitement to attend the new village school, he herded his goats to a vantage point on a nearby hill to get a look at the school construction. Adults said they heard an explosion and rushed outside to find Gul Marjan very badly hurt. He died of his wounds several hours later.

In 2013 alone, landmines were responsible for 1,050 deaths in Afghanistan — nearly half of them were children. Many more deaths and injuries undoubtedly go unreported.





Ludo, from the Latin “I play,” is a board game played with two to four people. Each player has four tokens and with each roll of the die, tokens are moved clockwise around the board. After going once around the board with a token, the player can move that token up their colored path toward the center. To enter the center, and thus win the game, a precise roll is required. The game is common around the world. Other names for it include Parcheesi, Sorry!, Aggravation, and Trouble.



Free of landmines and secure behind barrier walls, school playgrounds can be sanctuaries for children looking to play without fear of death or injury.

Even so, children are still pulled into the world of adults and exposed to things no child should have to experience.

### INNOCENCE ENDANGERED

On December 16, 2014, in the deadliest terrorist attack in Pakistan’s history, seven gunmen stormed the walls of a Pakistan Army Public School in the city of Peshawar.

Looking to inflict the maximum number of casualties and bearing automatic weapons, the gunmen moved purposefully through the school compound toward the auditorium where students were gathered to begin first aid training. Many students were gunned down, while others reportedly were corralled and forced to watch brutal executions of teachers and administrators.

An Army Special Forces unit responded in force to the incident. Over the next few hours snipers and commandos systematically took control of the compound, but not before 145 people, 132 of them children, were killed.

Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) — an Islamist militant group based out of the Pakistani tribal areas bordering Afghanistan — later claimed responsibility for the attack, explaining it was in retaliation for a Pakistani military operation against the group in North Waziristan earlier that year.

“We targeted the school because the Army targets our families. We want them to feel our pain,” said TTP spokesman Muhammad Omar Khorasani in a phone interview with news agencies.

In war and conflict, children frequently get caught in the crosshairs, paying the price — sometimes the ultimate price — for adult aggression.

Witnesses to extreme violence, civil chaos, and personal tragedy, children learn modern warfare spares no one. The devastating effects of this kind of exposure include physical injuries, mental impairments, displacement, and death. But there are many other consequences, less apparent, but no less damaging.

### GROWING UP TOO SOON

Before the Waziristan operation against the TTP and the Peshawar school attack, children

would have gone about their daily routines — saying their prayers, eating with family, playing with siblings — never suspecting horror was about to invade their lives.

Then, in a moment, everything would change; their childhoods interrupted by gunshots. So delicate, innocence rarely survives such an experience, even if the child does.

What should be a joyful, carefree time, absent adult concerns, is for these children, condensed to a few fleeting moments of relative freedom between birth and premature adulthood.

Children raised in warzones grow up quickly. They have to.

Zainab, a CAI scholarship recipient, is in the ninth grade and lives in Kabul with her mother, grandfather, and three siblings. She wants to be a doctor.

“[She] is very ambitious girl and want to be a doctor in future to serve the wounded people who have no hope for life,” her mother said.

But Zainab’s desire to serve is not reserved solely for the wounded. She wants to help her own family as well.

A few years ago, while working in one of Afghanistan’s most volatile provinces, Zainab’s father was killed disarming landmines. Up until that point, he had been the family’s sole provider, the only one with any real earning potential. Zainab told CAI that now she feels it is her duty to provide financially for her family.

She is 14 years old.

The pressure placed on boys and girls, by themselves and their families, to become breadwinners can be immense and shocking to people unfamiliar with the situation.

In a 2014 *Journey of Hope* article, “Lost Childhood,” CAI reported:

“An estimated 30 percent of Afghan children are forced to work every day to help support their families. Some are orphans, or their families’ breadwinners were killed or disabled during the past 35 years of war. Others reflect the economic reality: In a country where roughly 70 percent of the population is illiterate and the average person earns only \$570 a year, according to UNICEF, there is an unspoken expectation that children will pitch in to help feed their families. Child labor is a reality everywhere Central Asia Institute works.”



edged the importance of play at the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In a resolution of the 1989 conference, the body recognized play as a critical and necessary component of a child's development, and declared it a fundamental right of every boy and girl.

.....  
**"If you want creative workers, give them enough time to play."**

— John Cleese

.....  
 While at first glance it may not seem like jumping rope and kicking a ball should receive the same level of protection under the law as the right to life, liberty, and security, there are many worthwhile reasons for protecting it just as fiercely.

#### LESSONS LEARNED OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Education does not exclusively take place in a classroom. Perseverance can be learned more easily, some might argue, on the back of a bike than it can from a textbook.

Health gurus tell us to take time out of our busy schedules to work out, release stress, and focus our minds. Children in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan don't

have the luxury of a four-star gym or a formal recess period at school. Those boys and girls living in remote mountain villages cannot pop downtown and pick up the latest "it" game at the toy store.

Children in Central and South Asia do not take play for granted.

Play is an escape from violence, fear, and tragedy that pervades the lives of many of the children growing up in remote, impoverished villages. It is a brief moment of respite from the drudgery of daily chores or the backbreaking task of earning money to feed a family of ten or more. Play helps them learn, develop, and make sense of the world around them.

Though disguised as games and gaiety, play should not be discounted as an educational tool. After all, Albert Einstein once said, "Play is the highest form of research."

But perhaps TV personality Mr. Rogers said it best:

"Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning."

To the outside eye, the little girls playing with pebbles in the schoolyard may have looked to be doing nothing important. But if we approach it in a different way, if we tilt our heads just so, maybe we can see that they were actually deeply engrossed in learning, acquiring in an enjoyable way, important knowledge and skills for tomorrow's challenges.

As it turns out, play is no laughing matter. ■

Even if a child is lucky enough to avoid such a fate, they are expected to contribute in other ways, such as doing chores or looking after siblings. In either situation, the child is left little time for leisure.

#### PLAY IS A RIGHT, NOT A LUXURY

Children living in poverty, belonging to the working class, or those exposed to violence face insurmountable obstacles growing up. Benefiting fully from play is an obstacle rarely discussed and almost never spotlighted in the news.

However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights acknowl-

#### FIRST DAUGHTER by Shahida

I am Shahida Sister to four smart kind brothers and a beautiful little sister  
 First daughter of parents proud all their children will be educated  
 I hear how well my teacher speaks English I see how fast my friend  
 Maryam types and I wonder if I will succeed in my own life I am Shahida  
 I worry about being a good student I dream that I am a professor  
 teaching mathematics I could be a cancer doctor I am Shahida  
 I feel if my grandmother and grandfather are fine, I will be happy  
 I cried when my father was sick I try to understand and help my  
 friends when they are sad I am Shahida  
 I dream that I can touch the sky and fly like Harry Potter I hope  
 to be a leader in the future I am Shahida

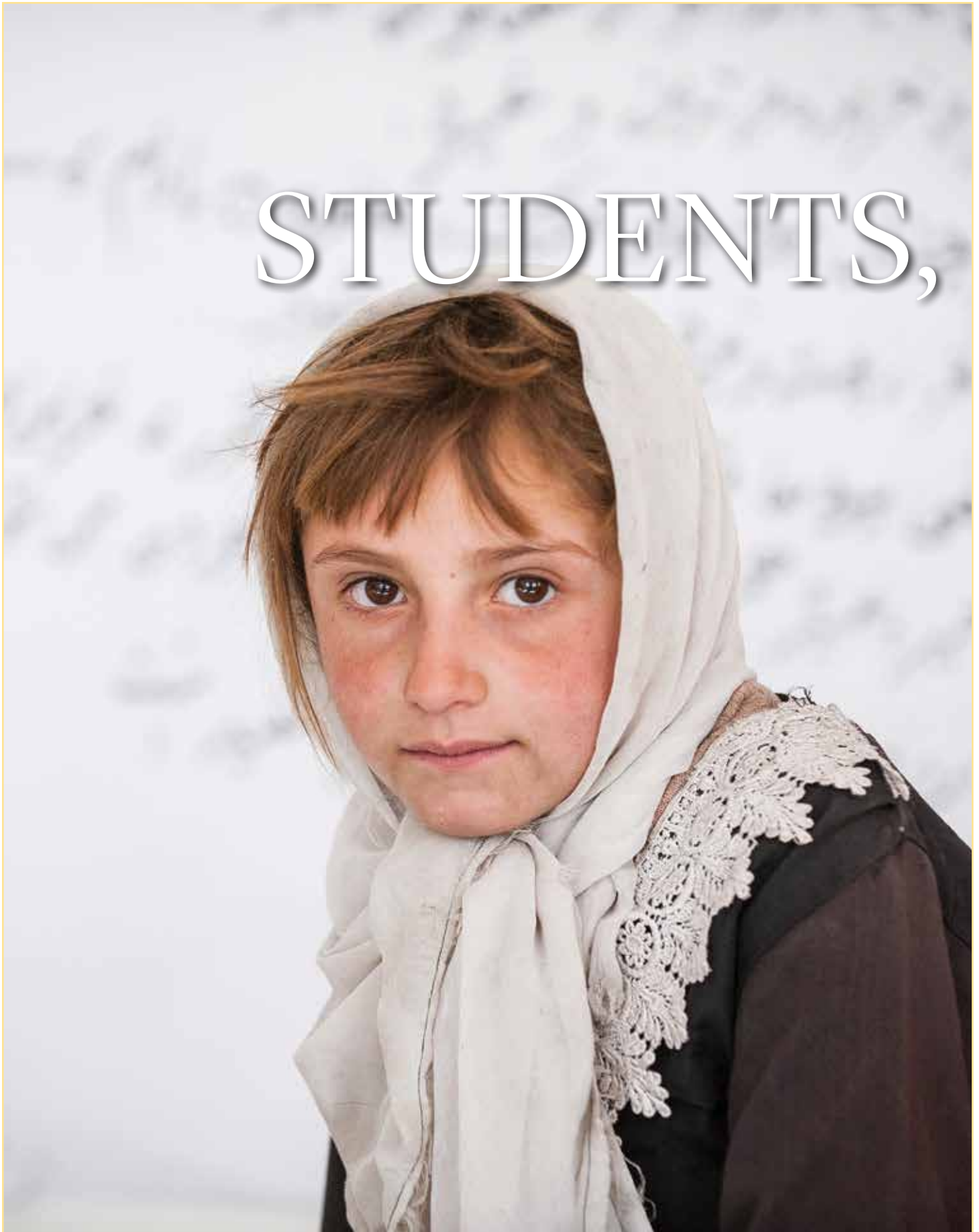


**Hannah White** is the CAI communications director. She came to Bozeman by way of Dubois, Wyo., where she worked for two seasons as a wrangler at the Bitterroot Ranch. Before coming out West, she was communications

coordinator for The Constitution Project, a bipartisan policy organization in Washington, D.C., and communications and development associate at Karamah: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights in Washington, D.C.

White holds a master's degree in Middle Eastern studies from the University of Chicago, and a bachelor's degree in anthropology, sociology, and archaeology from St. Mary's College of Maryland.

# STUDENTS,





# NOT BRIDES

BY HANNAH WHITE

Lalander Village is situated in the Char Asiab Valley, a rural area south of Kabul, on the road to Kandahar. The village is surrounded by dusty hills, whose lines and form please the eye. Rocky outcrops lining the way to the village, beautiful in their austerity, still bear the scars of battles fought some twenty years ago. The road had been used by *mujahedeen* (guerilla-style combatants), fighting the Russians.

“When you get to Lalander you can see it was bombed relentlessly by the Russians, time and time again, even after there was nothing left to bomb,” Greg Mortenson remembers.

Sun-faded posters designed to help children identify and avoid landmines are plastered on several of the buildings. White Vs — reminders of the unseen danger, dormant but still deadly, all around the village — are painted on boulders in every direction, marking the locations of now-neutralized mines.

This is where Saida grew up.

Like that of the village itself, Saida’s story is one of adversity. As a little girl she wanted nothing more than to go to school. She told Greg Mortenson this when he visited the village in 2005, fearlessly tugging on his *shalwar kameez* (a traditional shirt and trouser outfit) to get his attention. But her father Faizel wouldn’t allow it and told her school was no place for girls.

At the time, Lalander had no proper school. But a *jirga* (community meeting) had been called and village elders asked CAI to

help them build one. While the school was under construction, Saida would daydream about her three brothers leaving for school and working on their homework. She was envious of their good fortune.

But Saida would have no cause to be envious, as misfortune after misfortune struck her family. All three of Saida’s brothers died unexpectedly — one boy was killed in a car accident; another contracted an infectious disease, likely typhoid, and passed away; and her oldest brother, Gul Marjan, was just 14 years old when he stepped on a landmine while herding goats.

The family’s world was turned upside down.

And though the deaths were devastating, some good did come from it.

Committed to saving other families from experiencing such grief, Faizel sought out training and began work as a de-miner. And Saida, with her father’s blessing and a scholarship from CAI, was able to go to school.

She took to her studies with the eagerness of a girl who realized the opportunity she had been given. An avid student, she moved to Kabul after fifth grade to live with relatives and attend middle school.

Then, when she was just 15 years old, Saida caught the eye of a prominent police commander. He demanded Saida marry his son.

The man had money, a house, and influence, so Faizel felt he could not refuse. Saida was pulled out of school, sequestered in her new husband’s family compound, and denied

access to much of the outside world.

The girl, who once bravely confronted a foreign man to plead for an education, was summarily silenced and locked away, with no hope of continuing her education.

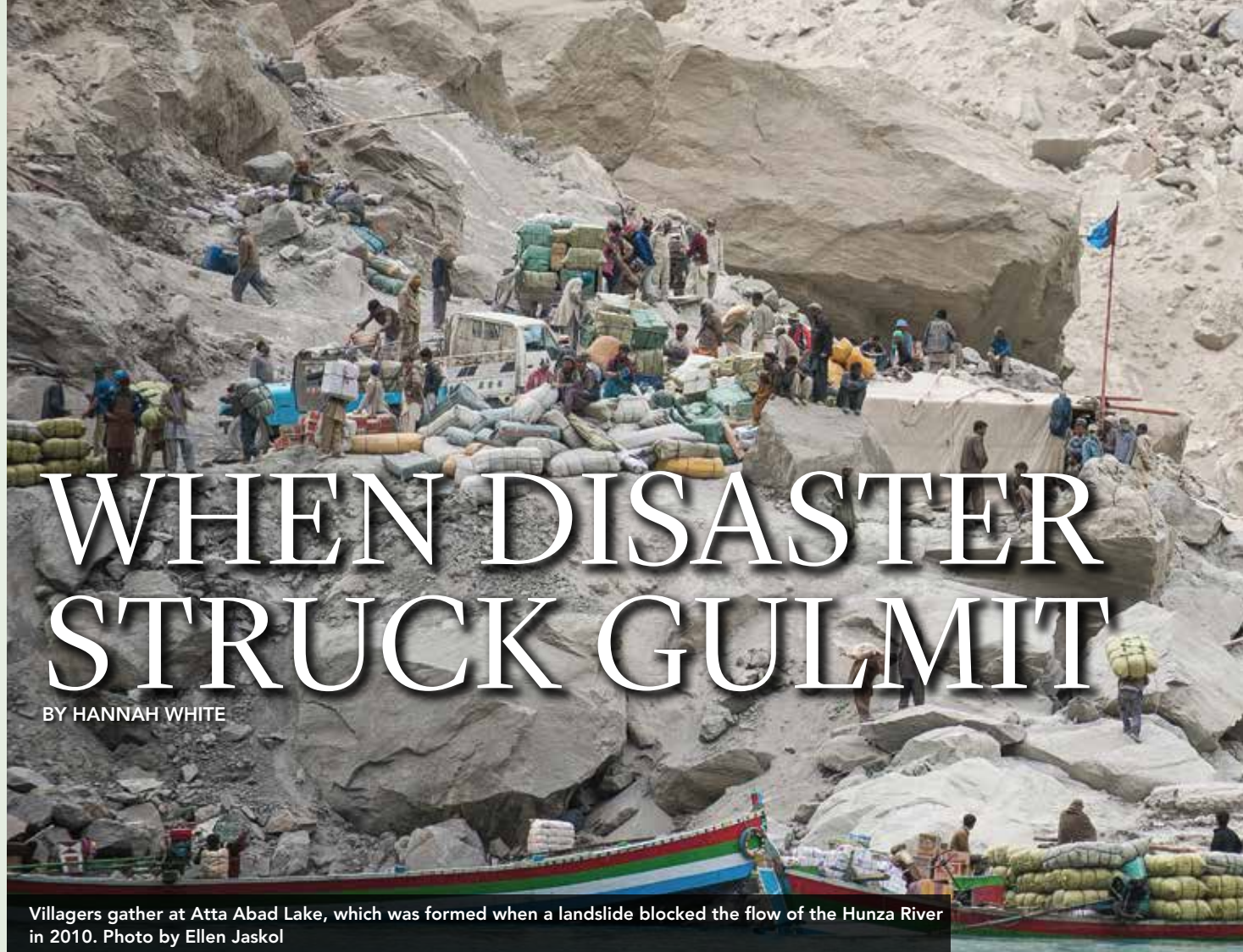
This is the reality for many girls. Married at a young age, they are completely reliant on the sentiments and goodwill of their new family. All too often, their wedding day signals the death of their education.

Early marriage is an epidemic in the region where CAI works. According to UNICEF, 21 percent of Pakistani women are married by the time they turn 18. In Afghanistan, that number is even higher at 40 percent. Sadly, some young women, like Saida, become child brides long before their eighteenth birthday. Sometimes they are as young as 6 years old.

These girls and young women, barred from education, will never know their true potential.

The only way to end the vicious cycle of inequality is to change the sentiments surrounding women’s education. Only when societies realize the great harm they do by restricting women’s access to knowledge, will there be meaningful, sustainable change.

“It is our duty to make sure that other girls do not suffer the same fate as Saida,” said Jim Thaden, CAI executive director. “She could have been a doctor, a judge, or a politician. She could have changed the world. Now we’ll never know.” ■



# WHEN DISASTER STRUCK GULMIT

BY HANNAH WHITE

Villagers gather at Atta Abad Lake, which was formed when a landslide blocked the flow of the Hunza River in 2010. Photo by Ellen Jaskol

The water of Atta Abad Lake in Pakistan, is chalky and an unnatural shade of teal. It was formed when a massive landslide tore down the mountain-side, blocking the Hunza River in 2010.

Steep slopes, hydrological conditions, and seismic activity all contributed to the natural disaster that killed 20 people, destroyed several villages, and blocked a huge swath of the Karakorum highway, effectively cutting off the valley from civilization.

One of the villages affected by the slide was Gulmit, home of Naila Hameed. Naila's family had lived in the village for generations growing potatoes and fruit, which they sold to pay their children's school fees.

But, in a moment, everything Naila's family owned was lost as their fields and crops were buried or flooded.

Newspapers reported the landslide displaced an estimated 6,000 people, and that an additional 25,000 were stranded when the highway was destroyed.

With the destruction of their home and

livelihood, Naila, her parents, and her ten siblings became Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

For the young woman interested in commerce, this development was devastating. She had gone from a comfortable middle-class life to having no home, no income, and no hope for an education.

"It seems impossible for me to continue my studies because there was no[t] any other source of income," she said. "Completing my studies was left like an incomplete dream."

Understanding the seriousness of the situation Naila didn't have the heart to ask her parents to spend what little money they had on her education. She still was attempting to come to terms with the situation, when her parents heard about CAI. The institute had learned of the disaster and was offering scholarships to girls in the area. To Naila's great joy she was selected, along with fifteen other girls, to receive financial aid.

Suddenly Naila, who had been a happy girl before the tragedy, was smiling and laughing

again. She describes her time in school:


"I was the student of commerce and it was my desire to become a businesswoman," she said. "I had a great time in college life with my friends [and] after completing my inter F.A. [high school exam] with good marks I came back to my home."

Naila was able to finish 11th and 12th grades with the scholarship from CAI and went on to get her bachelor's degree. She now is teaching at a government-funded primary school in the Ishkoman Valley of Gilgit-Baltistan.

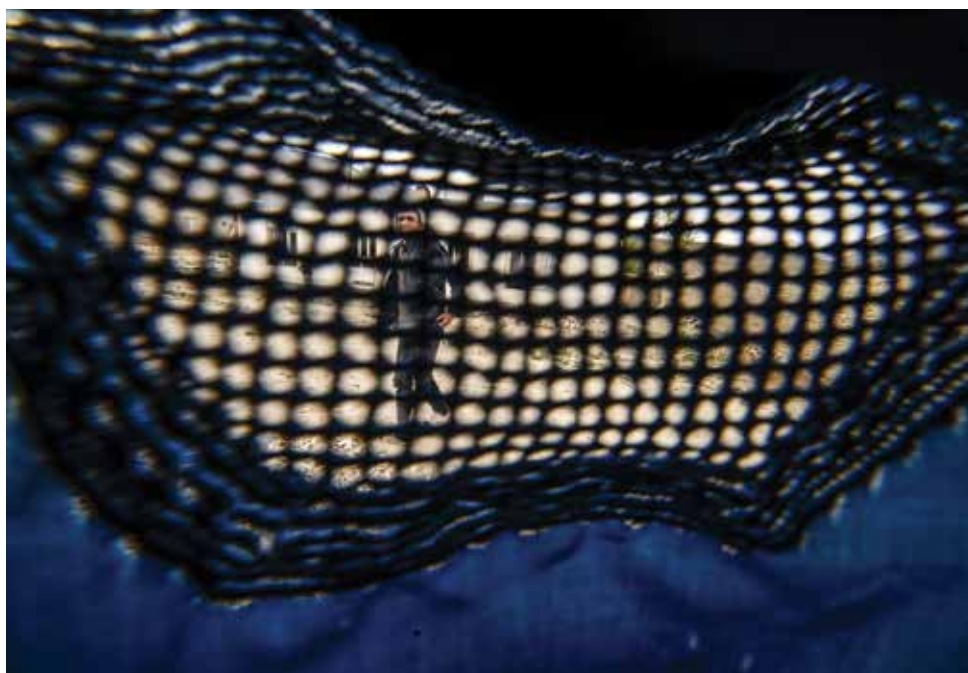
Naila says she is extremely grateful for the opportunities afforded to her, without which she would not have been able to continue her studies. She is a vocal advocate for education.

When asked why she felt that education was a right every person should have access to, she quoted philosopher John Dewey:

"Education is not preparation for life. Education is life itself."

At CAI, we couldn't agree more. 





We all have seen numerous newscasts of Afghan women victimized, marginalized, violated, and stoned. And yet, after fourteen years of hearing these stories about Afghan women, flattened into one-dimensional, burqa-clad victims of violence, how often have we heard the voices of Afghan women themselves? What do we know of the complexities of their hearts and minds? When have we heard, first-hand, what they want?

# WRITING FOR CHANGE:

## AFGHAN WOMEN PEN A NEW DESTINY FOR AFGHANISTAN

BY LORI NOACK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AFGHAN WOMEN'S WRITING PROJECT

*I want to speak from my future.  
I want to tell you how tired I used to be  
of the hardened earth and darkened sky,  
of watching a father sell his daughter for  
money...  
Let me talk, I said. Do not force my  
silence...  
I want to speak, speak and speak.*  
— Leeda

Leeda is one of more than 300 Afghan writers who are encouraged to speak for themselves through the global platform of the Afghan Women's Writing Project (AWWP). Participants are girls and women who grew up in villages across the country,

many of them educated in "secret schools," or at home by their fathers during the Taliban years. Some left Afghanistan to live as refugees during one of the extended wars with Russia, the *muhajadeen* (guerilla fighters), or with the U.S. in 2001, and later returned to Afghanistan. AWWP writers are an eclectic group from different economic levels and tribal ethnicities who share one thing in common: They have come to believe in the power of their voices and are committed to fighting a revolution that starts from within, no matter the consequences. "We have threats. Yes, we do," one author said in a casual tone, when asked about Taliban intimidation about their writing. "And we will have more when the

foreigners leave. But myself is ready to fight with any kind of challenges...even if my life is under threat. I never give up."

That "never-give-up" spirit is prevalent in the writers' poems and essays, even when they write of their despair. AWWP provides them a vehicle to develop and share their voices, and they run with it, offering us their inimitable model of perseverance, of finding beauty in the most unlikely places, and candid conversation about surreal situations that simply must be dealt with.

*I woke up one morning—  
with a happy feeling.  
I woke up happy to go to school.*



**W**hen the rule of law functions properly, the government, individuals, and private entities are accountable under the law. The laws are applied evenly, justly, and without bias; they are well defined, publicly known, and stable. In such a way, the law is able to effectively protect fundamental rights.

The rule of law is the greatest defense against tyranny, oppression, and violence. Who would not want to put a stop to such things?

But if you are unable to read, you can never know if your rights are secure. How could you? If I am illiterate, someone can tell me that I have the right to free bread every morning or that I do not have the right to vote, and I might believe them because I cannot read the law for myself. If you cannot read, you cannot hope to understand your rights, evaluate a politician's platform, or protect your family and property. You cannot rely on others to defend you. You must take your education into your own hands. It is the only way to ensure justice.

— Anisa Rasooli, former nominee for the Afghanistan Supreme Court, head of the Afghan Women Judges Association

*I saw my Blue Burqa next to me,  
ready for me to wear to school.  
My happiness crumbled  
like dust under my feet.  
I said to myself...  
The day will come when I can go to school  
freely  
Suddenly I saw a child  
wishing I could be a child again,  
that I would not get older.  
I wished for freedom.  
I said to myself ...  
Freedom will come by education  
I put on my Blue Burqa.  
I went to school.  
— Tamana W.*



These girls and women are fighting with their pens against entrenched and repressive traditions that restrict women's basic rights and freedoms: The right to have a voice; the freedom to practice self-expression and to feel its transformative power. They are silent feminists in a life and death battle where the daily struggle is for survival and, by comparison, peripheral concerns fade.

After a monthly writing workshop in Kabul, we asked several writers to share their thoughts on the mind-mapping exercise used that day, or on AWWP in general. One woman, her bright green scarf carefully framing her worn face, lit up when she was asked. She began talking, in very broken English, about the pain she had carried in her head for as long as she could remember: physical pain from emotional and psychological fatigue. "Every morning I wake up and the pain fills my head. I have seen too many people hurt or killed. There is too much loss," she said (my paraphrase).



These girls and women are fighting with their pens against entrenched and repressive traditions that restrict women's basic rights and freedoms...

"And then I came to AWWP and you told me I can write my pain. You explained how to set my thoughts on the page," she said, moving her hand as she spoke. "My pen began to write my stories, and as I let them go on the page, the pain, it moved from my head down through my arm, then my hand and onto the page. I wrote and I wrote and for the first time since I can remember, my head it does not hurt."

That is the kind of change a woman takes home to her family and her friends, likely changing her presence in the community. Hers is the kind of story that keeps us forging ahead despite the ongoing difficulties inherent with the situation in Afghanistan. In our work, while we aim to validate the spirit and voice of Afghan women one by one, we also empower our writers with the opportunity to share stories on behalf of illiterate and disabled women who don't enjoy the luxury of literacy.

With digital recorders in hand, Manizha, Majabeen, Malalai, and several other writers have ventured out to new neighborhoods and villages to record the voices of these women as part of the AWWP quarterly Oral Stories Project. When Fatima visited recently with 35-year-old Goolsboshra, a widow in Kandahar, she asked her, "What are your hopes and wishes?" Goolsboshra told her, (in Dari),

*I want to know if Afghan women have rights or not. It is the story of our life. Our men say to us, 'You are women. If you go out of the doors of the house, we will cut off your head from your body'...*

*You came to us to give us this chance, to ask and answer and to find what is in our hearts. Our hearts are full of what? They are full of pain and labor. Our hope is you can collect our ideas and you can raise our voices.*



Goolsboshra, like many of the women interviewed in the ten series published to date, talks about the limitations caused by illiteracy. They speak of the signs and medicine bottles they cannot read, the jobs they cannot get, the forms they cannot fill out, and the helplessness that keeps them dependent on others. Literacy is not our focus at AWWP, but we are daily reminded of the importance of groups like Central Asia Institute that pour great effort into programs that will empower people and, like AWWP writers, enable them to bring positive change to Afghanistan. Because there are so many illiterate women, our Kabul office takes the recordings of the interviews and produces radio broadcasts centered on these oral stories. They are part of our monthly broadcasts to tens of thousands of women in Afghanistan, inspiring them with the possibilities of what a woman can do.



### *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*

by Masooma

*Yesterday my sister was afraid of going outside,  
Today my sisters are going to school,  
And tomorrow they will work outside of the home.  
Yesterday my sister was stoned.  
Today she is studying to be a doctor,  
And tomorrow she will save a life.  
Yesterday my sister's dream was to have a book.  
Now she is in the library,  
And tomorrow she will write the book.  
Yesterday my sister looked at the world through a small window.  
Today she sees the world through her camera,  
And tomorrow the world will see every thing through her documentaries.  
Yesterday my country's women had no rights.  
Now they are fighting for their rights,  
And tomorrow they will have the same rights as men.  
Yesterday my country was a desert.  
Now my brothers and sisters are planting trees,  
And tomorrow, in this garden together, we will live in peace.*



Peace will not come soon to Afghanistan. But if we all can carry out the work that is right in front of us, change will come. In our case, it will come one voice at a time. Pari often writes of her desperate pain in heart-rending poetry and she describes the power of writing with hope and strength for the future:

*Writing began for me as an escape from my burqa... With my pen and notebook, I had a secret place where I gave myself freedoms that were forbidden to me. I expressed my thoughts, a woman whispering on the page, and described the needs I saw in Afghan society. I talked about taboos and I broke them with my pen, my second Voice — I began to see myself as an Afghan woman writer, a powerful being with enough tenacity and courage to meet life's challenges.*

*[When reading pieces by my peers] I heard voices no longer hidden under burqas. I felt power and bravery in the words and I was strengthened. I became proud and hopeful for the future of Afghan women and of the literature we will write.*

*We found the courage through the Afghan Women's Writing Project to write what an Afghan woman is not allowed to say... We are the women of Afghanistan.*

In their writing workshops, Afghan women speak up and write down what they have been told not to say, despite fears of reprisal. Without support and opportunity from organizations like AWWP and CAI, the women of Afghanistan are restricted severely in their ability to influence and drive social change in opposition to the violent extremism they live with every day. Their choices now may be limited, but there is no stopping the power of the pen. They are writing to change. ■



Afghan Women's  
Writing Project

### AWWP MISSION:

The Afghan Women's Writing Project was founded in 2009 in defense of the human right to voice one's story. The empowerment of Afghanistan's women creates possibilities for economic independence and instills leadership abilities as it reinforces freedom of speech. The aim of the organization is to nurture, educate, and carry the voices of Afghanistan's women to the world, while offering readers unique insights into Afghan culture.

Online writing workshops partner international writers, educators, and journalists with English-speaking women in seven Afghan provinces. Poems and essays are published each week at [awwproject.org](http://awwproject.org).



Follow the AWWP icon throughout this publication to read poems by participants.

The views expressed in this article are exclusively those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Central Asia Institute.



### Lori Overgaard

**Noack** is a non-profit strategist specializing in development of strong organizational vision and structure, with a focus on connecting stakeholders. She has more than 20 years experience in non-

profit leadership and arts management. She is executive director at the Afghan Women's Writing Project where she has worked for three years defending the human right to voice one's story.



# GETTING A HEAD START

BY HANNAH WHITE

## NECESSARY AND CONSTRUCTIVE

The World Bank reports Tajikistan's population is close to 8 million. Additionally, several million people, mostly men, are estimated to work outside the country. Residents of one of the poorest nations in the world, Tajiks frequently look for employment in neighboring countries such as Russia. With so many men gone, mothers sometimes are left to raise children alone. Childcare is essential for many of these women. Consequently, early childhood development programs are popular with mothers who have children between the ages of 2 and 5.

Mahbuba Qurbonalieva is in her 30s and wears her hair conservatively, tied back in a ponytail with the shorter ends tucked behind her ears. She is not a big talker, but when she does say something her words are chosen carefully and delivered with confidence. Her gaze has power behind it, though you will never hear her acknowledge it. Instead she'll casually wave her hand, as if she were brushing the comment aside. Any air of authority she might possess, she'll tell you, comes from her being the mother to two small children.

Her young boy, age 5, and little girl, age 3, are a lot of work. Always on the move, it is difficult for their mother to contain or focus their energy. But Mahbuba knows that they will slow down and grow up soon enough.

"Children grow so quickly," she says. "One day I will blink and they will be adults. But now is such an important time in their lives. They notice everything, are curious about everything. It may not look like it, because they never sit still — could never sit at a desk or read a big book — but

it is the perfect time for them to learn. They are like sponges soaking up knowledge."

As the country director for Central Asia Institute-Tajikistan (CAIT), Mahbuba understands the importance of education in a child's life, especially during the early childhood period.

The years before children start school are crucial to their physical, cognitive, and emotional development. Mahbuba has seen it firsthand in her many years working with CAI to promote education.

"Neurological research shows that the early years play a key role in children's brain development," Mahbuba said. "I believe that high-quality education and care of the very young is crucial for development of the whole child and the future adult."

Many experts extol the benefits of Head Start programs and endorse a holistic approach to education, citing the potential positive impact it can have on a person's physical, social, and emotional health throughout their life.

The World Health Organization (WHO), for example, reports healthy early childhood development (ECD) programs





“strongly influence well-being, obesity/stunting, mental health, heart disease, competence in literacy and numeracy, and criminality,” among other things.

ECD programs have been available in Tajikistan for many years, dating back to the Soviet era. However, the programs more often resembled daycare centers than educational programs. More recently, the Aga Khan Development Network and Ministry of Education in Tajikistan developed ECD curricula and early childhood development centers, but the centers held classes only a few times each week and had limited capacity for student enrollment. Consequently, many children were denied access to ECD programs, and those who had access only participated in incomplete programs.

As a mother of two young children herself, Mahbuba knew a change was needed. On behalf of CAIT, Mahbuba contacted the Educational Department of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO), in the region of Tajikistan where CAI works. Gharibsho Gharibshoev, then head of the department, informed her that ECD teach-

ers had mostly been trained many years ago without refresher courses, their resources were outdated, and they had limited access to any new developments in ECD curricula.

This was no surprise to Mahbuba. With its dire economic circumstance, nearly 80 percent of Tajikistan schools are in need of repair, new textbooks must be developed and published, and teachers are in high demand as complicated certification requirements continue to cause problems. Before Tajikistan became independent, three years at a pedagogical school counted as higher education, qualifying individuals to work as teachers. That is no longer the case. Individuals with this educational background must now undertake two additional years of schooling to be certified instructors.

Mahbuba wanted to initiate a new program that would give more children access to quality early childhood development programs. In order to do this, she needed permission from Gharibshoev. When approached with the idea, he was extremely happy with the prospect of helping Mahbuba, saying no one

had ever done this before. He promised his support.

Programs with better-trained caregivers and teachers inarguably are more effective. In 2014, in collaboration with the Institute of Professional Development, Mahbuba and her colleagues implemented the Tajikistan Early Childhood Development Vocational Program, geared toward training GBAO kindergarten (kindergarten is interchangeable with ECD in Tajikistan) teachers the latest in early childhood development methodology.

From November 2014 to August 2015, almost all 83 kindergarten teachers from GBAO attended the 12-day training course organized by CAIT and its partners.

Confident that ECD teachers were receiving better training, Mahbuba's next task was to ensure the training techniques were being implemented and that children were benefiting. She decided to visit one of the largest kindergarten buildings in GBAO, Kindergarten #5. She was happy to see that the teachers were in fact using the new methods of teaching, and the 320 children in the program were happy and engaged in lessons.



Mahbuba Qurbonalieva, country director for CAI-Tajikistan.

## Early education in Tajikistan

Grades levels differ from the U.S. system. Children do not typically start school until they are 6 years old, but can be enrolled in ECD programs, or kindergarten, as young as two.

Kindergarten/Early childhood development programs  
Ages 2 to 5

Primary: Class 0 – 4  
Ages 6 - 11

Middle: Class 5 – 9  
Ages 11 - 15

Secondary: Class 10– 11  
Ages 15 - 17



However, during her visit to Kindergarten #5 she noticed a terrible smell from the toilets in the facility.

“The smell was so bad that it was difficult for me to breathe,” she recalled. “On the way to my office, all I was thinking about were the children who have to stay there all day and breathe that bad smell.”

It was cause for immediate concern with Mahbuba. The conditions of the facility created an environment that was not conducive for teaching or learning. How could this holistic ECD program truly be successful if everyone — teachers and students alike — was distracted by the conditions of the building?

She submitted a grant request to CAI-US to repair the toilets, kitchen, and windows of the building. The grant was approved. Subsequently, one block of the building was completely repaired. Repairs included the removal of lead paint, installation of a new sewage system, fixing a leaking roof, and other structural improvements. A second block of the building is under construction.

Mahbuba reports that the impact of CAI support is significant.

“Before improvements were made, parents reported their children did not want

to go to school and would beg that their parents see their toilets,” she said. “Now, Kindergarten #5 has an education system with new methodology. The toilets, kitchen, and windows now meet building standards. The children are happy to have toilets, basins, new kitchen sinks, and hot water.”

However, Mahbuba isn’t going to stop there. She has requested funds for a boundary wall to provide a safe playground for the boys and girls. She also is in the planning stages of the second phase of the ECD training for instructors that will begin in November 2015.

With Mahbuba’s passion, drive, and determination she will complete an entire model project for an early childhood development center that other partners and CAI grant recipients can easily duplicate in the future.

At CAI, we believe that all children have the right to an education. That is our main focus. We also believe that all children have the right to be raised in an environment that allows them to reach their full potential in life.

The ECD teacher-training program and the work done to bring Kindergarten #5 up to the latest standards align with this belief. The children have access to modern, safe facilities; their teachers are versed in the latest early childhood development practices; and others soon will be following in the footsteps of this groundbreaking endeavor. Now it is up to the children to grow and learn to the best of their abilities. We hope this will give them a head start in life. 🌱



## To My Teacher

by Nelab

You are the star in my sky. Alone In the blue sky

You gave me courage to fly. When the Taliban broke my wings And broke my heart

You were there to guide me. You told me *Try! If you try, you can fly!*

When they left me along the highways You took my hand And changed my life.

You showed me The meaning of being a brave lady.

You taught me How to work for liberty, How to be human and support other humans.

Like a candle, you have freed me from darkness.



## Why I Write

by Hila

When I am unaccompanied When I feel weak Disappointed When I have been offended I write

When I feel hurt Lost Tired of life I write

When I feel scorn Can’t find a shoulder to cry on Or feel lonely I write

When I can’t open the door to success When I get scared When I can’t find the light I write

When I hear the stories of my sisters I hear they’ve died Married too young When I hear the cries of children in the street When I know something is wrong

And I can’t help I write

I write of my pain, my broken heart My goals and my feelings Writing is my medicine I will lose my strength

and the stunning world that I create for myself in my writing

If I fail to tell my stories of struggle I will lose myself





*"If you educate a boy, you educate an individual;  
if you educate a girl, you educate a community."*

AFRICAN PROVERB

# GIRLS' EDUCATION:

## WE'VE COME FAR, BUT THERE IS A LONG WAY TO GO

BY GREG MORTENSON

In the late 1990s, Khalida Darwar, a girl in Hussaini — a farming village in Pakistan's Hunza Valley — put on a freshly ironed and spotless school uniform for the first time. Then, in the shadow of snow-covered Shispar Peak, the excited 5-year-old girl skipped and ran down the steep trail for her first day of school.

Little did Khalida know that she was a pioneer, or that her enrollment in school made her one of the lucky ones. At the time, UNICEF estimated 131 million children in the world were unable to attend school due to gender bias, exploitation, slavery, and human trafficking, among other things. Yet there she was, high in the fabled Hindu Kush Mountains, on her way to becoming the first-ever female agricultural scientist in her remote and impoverished village.

She unwittingly had become part of the unstoppable revolution in girls' education.

As CAI celebrates nearly two decades of service to the rural communities of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan through literacy and education, I am convinced now more than ever that the most powerful force of change in the world is girls' education.

Girls' education is, in military parlance,

the ultimate 'force multiplier,' which yields huge dividends in all categories: socio-economics, health, population, sustainable food production, delaying marriage and 'child-bride' practices, political awareness, and much more.

Most important, girls' education gives women a voice and moves them out of a subjugated world of illiteracy, isolation, and ignorance to connect them with a global society. Educated women have the awareness and power to make their own decisions and choices.

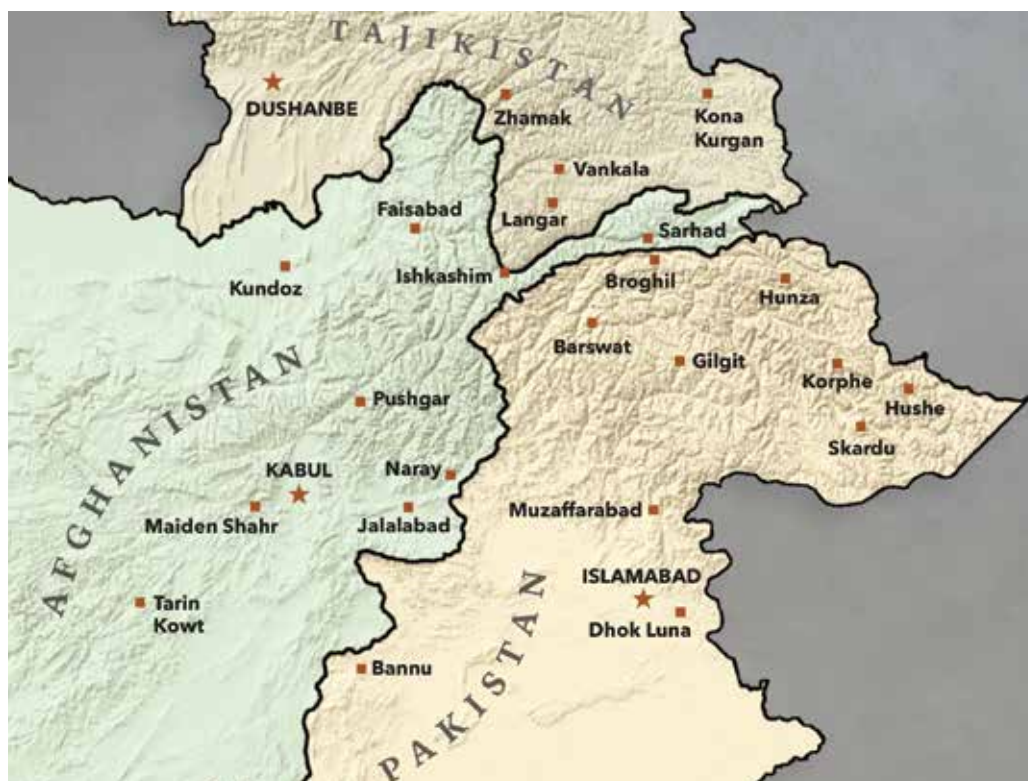
The first wave of women educated in CAI-supported schools went into teaching and nursing. More recently — thanks to greater exposure, awareness, and role models — CAI female scholarship students have pursued a host of subjects including law, medicine, computer technology, engineering, psychology, economics, accounting, journalism, politics, Islamic studies, foreign languages, business, literature, art, music, and education specialties such as special education, administration, and early childhood development (ECD). Some have aspirations to serve in the military, be police officers, and one young woman from Waziristan in

Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa tribal areas is determined to be a jet pilot.

### THE THIRST FOR EDUCATION IS PALPABLE

"I was nothing, just the refugee daughter of a poor widow, in a country that did not want me, and from an Afghan home where many people were killed," Farishta, a CAI scholarship student in Kapisa province, Afghanistan told me this summer. "The only freedom I had was education, and my heart is happy every time I study, and *inshallah* (God willing), someday I will be a university professor of English."





The growing awareness that education, not war, is the ticket to a better future in these impoverished, conflict-ridden countries is embodied by Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani schoolgirl shot by the Taliban in 2012 in retaliation for her work advocating for girls' education. She now is 18 years old, received the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize, and is headed for Stanford University.

Her determination and articulation of the dire need for girls' access to education consistently inspires a global audience yearning for a better world.

"Let us pick up our books and our pens," she said. "They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world."

Khalida, like Malala, has faced many obstacles. Her journey is especially remarkable given the odds against her. Both her parents were illiterate farmers. Her father, Ghulam, died when she was young and she worked hard, balancing her studies with backbreaking chores to keep the family alive. But even in the most difficult of times, her mother, Shah Bibi, insisted that she continue her education. Education kept the lamp of hope lit in Khalida.

She persevered. And it was while she was toiling in the fields to produce meager crops

to support her family that Khalida decided to study agriculture and farming.

### WHERE WE'RE FAILING

This year, we watched in awe as the NASA satellite 'New Horizons' flew by Pluto. It sent crystal-clear photos 4.67 billion miles back to earth. At the same time as the Pluto photos arrived on earth, UNESCO released a report declaring that — tragically — 124 million children still are not in school.

Why is it that, in the 21st century, even though we have nuclear bombs, can land on Mars, and fly by Pluto, we still are unable to provide every child with an education?

It is hard to fathom that we live in a world where, according to a 2012 World Literacy Foundation report, nearly 800 million people are unable to read and write. More than half, or 510 million, are female.

One major reason for this problem is that several countries choose to spend exorbitant amounts on their militaries to the detriment of their under-funded education budgets.

Although a global investment of an additional \$22 billion each year would allow every child in the world to go to school, countries instead have opted to pour money into arms with a global military budget that is roughly \$1.8 trillion.

Pakistan, for example, never has allocated more than three percent of its gross domestic product to education in its 68-year history. By comparison, Nepal dedicated almost five percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) to education last year, and Cuba about 13 percent.

Unless the world heeds Malala's call to invest in pencils and books rather than bullets and bombs, we will remain trapped in a vicious cycle, fighting the by-products of illiteracy, ignorance, and isolation.

*"Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world."*

— Malala Yousafzai

The shortage of money means government teachers are often underpaid (or in extreme cases never paid at all); buildings are nonexistent, shoddily constructed, or poorly maintained; and even the most basic supplies — such as textbooks and chalk — never make it to the schools.

That's not to say people haven't tried to change the odds for girls.

At the turn of the 21st century, when Khalida was still in elementary school, several dozen men (yes, only men) met in a basement room at the United Nations (U.N.) in New York City to create a 15-year strategy to address the world's most pressing problems. Their work led to the universally embraced Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were approved in September 2000, at the U.N., and the world's largest gathering of world leaders. The MDG goals included: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal education; promote gender equality; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop global partnerships.

By the MDGs completion date in 2015, some of those goals were met — extreme poverty was reduced; child mortality rates decreased dramatically; maternal mortality dropped; and more people than ever have access to clean water and sanitation.



But the MDGs goal to achieve ‘education for all’ faltered. A few countries, including Rwanda, Vietnam, and Bolivia, had successfully improved access to education, but the number of girls out of school in the world has increased since 2007. The dropout rate for girls after puberty remains extremely high, and access to higher education is still just a dream for tens of millions of people

## MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL SUCCESSES

**CHILD MORTALITY:** Declined from **12.7 million** in 1990 to **6.9 million** deaths in 2015, according to the World Health Organization.

After the India-Pakistan partition in 1947, the first Pakistan census in 1950 found the overall literacy rate in Pakistan was 14 percent, according to UNESCO. Sixty years later, in 2014, the Pakistan Economic Survey reported Pakistan’s literacy rate at just 58 percent, far short of the 88 percent MDG target. And tragically, the literacy rates for women and girls — especially in rural areas — is as low as 23 percent, according to UNICEF.

More alarming, girls’ education has been more targeted around the world recently. Recent tragedies include the murder of 12 children at Escola Municipal Tasso da Silveira school, Rio De Janiero, Brazil in April 2011; the Taliban’s 2012 attempted murder of Malala; the terrorist group Boko Haram’s kidnapping of about 300 high school girls in northeast Nigeria in 2014; multiple incidents of poisoning and gassing Afghan school-girls; hundreds of girls’ schools bombed in Pakistan and Afghanistan, including the two bombings of CAI schools and murder of CAI school headmaster Ghulam Farooq in Kunar province; and the ongoing horrific rapes, abductions, and attacks on girls and women by ISIS terrorists in Syria and Iraq.

The only way forward is to keep investing in girls’ education. The colossal hurdles posed by family, culture, government, economics, and logistics seem daunting. Yet we know what it will take to clear those hurdles: a steady supply of female teachers, adequate

sanitation and toilets, good lighting, sufficient boundary walls and security to ensure the girls are safe, well-trained and caring teachers, and parents who believe in educating their daughters and sons.

And change is happening, albeit slowly.

“It is easy to get girls in school nowadays from when I first started 15 years ago, but still some problem to keep some girls in school,” said Mohammed Nazir, Central Asia Educational Trust (CAET) field director in Baltistan, Pakistan. “Sometimes girls, when reach marriage age, their father wants to marry them [off], or not allow them to go in school with boys. But slowly, *inshallah*, it is changing for better.”

Today, world leaders are again tackling the issue of universal access to education, this time as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). That small group of men meeting in the basement was replaced with hundreds of people — including women — who surveyed government officials, strategists, and local communities to develop a new set of 17 goals and 169 target areas. Unlike the top-down MDGs, the SDGs are designed to embrace and enhance global partnerships, community-level participation, and government involvement in pursuit of practical, realistic, and sustainable goals.

## FARMER DOCTOR: ONE GIRL, ONE-GENERATION REVOLUTION

Khalida still has a handful of years to go until she is a “farmer doctor” (Ph.D.), but there is nothing that will stop her. She has the support of her family, but also of her village, which has consistently encouraged her quest to achieve her noble goal.

Kahlida is well suited for agriculture studies. “We grew up in a paradise farm, with buckwheat, barley, potatoes, spinach, herbs,

cabbage, carrots, mustard seed, cherries, mulberries, apples, pears, and apricots. My brother, two sisters and I did almost everything — planting, weeding, fertilizing, irrigation, cutting grass, picking fruits, canning, and making jams.”

When Khalida first began school, her village had no cellphones, Internet, electricity, or television. Soldiers at the military post down the hill could communicate with the outside world, but that was only for emergencies, she said.

However, there was a school, thanks to the laudable efforts of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) starting in the 1980s. And the girls attended right alongside the boys.

Khalida does not remember her first day of school. Unlike many American children who have “first school-day” photos, there was no camera to document the occasion.

What Khalida does remember are the joy and excitement she felt that day. She said she had a habit of waking up early, about 5 a.m., eagerly anticipating going to school. She did her morning chores of collecting firewood and water, and then ate a simple breakfast of chapatti (thin unleavened bread) and sweet milk tea before skipping off on her 30-minute hike to school.

*“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”*

— William Butler Yates

## TEACHABLE MOMENT

The Sustainable Development Goals are an excellent opportunity for students, teachers, and parents to be aware of what is being planned on vital issues that will affect generations to come.

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics>





“Both of my parents were illiterate and poor farmers; we say ‘*diquinish*,’” she said in a phone interview from Gilgit, Pakistan. “Even though my father Ghulam was not educated, he was wise and practiced sustainable, organic farming long before most other people. Both my parents were determined their children get education. Later, my father became *fauji* [army soldier] so he could have money to support us through school.

“The first year in school was one of the happiest years of my life. Then, when I was 7, some soldiers came to our village with my father in a coffin with a Pakistani flag, and we learned he had become *shaheed* [martyr] and died. For a week, I tried to be brave as many people came to our house to offer *duas* [prayers], but at night I could not stop weeping, as my father meant everything to me. Then my mother, Shah Bibi, told me to channel my sorrow into my studies, because that is what my father wanted most for me.”

When Khalida reached secondary school,

there was no functioning school building in her village, so she had to walk, regardless of scorching heat, sandstorms, hail, rain, and snow, to Al-Amyn Model School in Gulmit village, 90 minutes away. She did this for several years.

Through diligence and hard work — juggling up to 12 hours of chores during the day and studying in the dim light of a kerosene lantern at night — Khalida scored high on her high school matriculation exams. Some friends told her that a nongovernmental organization named Central Asia Institute was offering to help the brightest and most deserving girls with university scholarships, and subsidized room and board. She applied, was accepted and enrolled in the agriculture and food technology degree program at Karakoram International University (KIU), in Gilgit, the Hunza provincial hub.

“Allah blessed me much, because without a scholarship I would have to stop my studies and go home,” she said. “Now I can focus full-

time on my studies, and stay in a safe hostel with other motivated women, who inspire me to work even harder with education.”

“Khalida is hard worker, which she learned from farming, and (a) top student,” says Saidullah Baig, director of CAI-Gilgit. “She also loves sports and playing cricket. But mostly she is a humanitarian who wants to make the world a better place.”

“Khalida is an exceptional student and one of our more hard working stars,” says Najma Najam, former KIU vice chancellor. “We are excited she is paving new grounds in a profession typically reserved for men.”

Khalida will graduate from KIU in December 2015, and finish her thesis in agriculture by March 2016, but she says it is only the beginning.

“Next, I want to go to a number one agriculture university, hopefully in America or Europe, and learn about sustainable agriculture, organic farming, and soil science,” she said. “But most of all, I want to help end



hunger and poverty, and give women more independence and economic power through agriculture.”

### THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

Global studies consistently prove that investing in girls’ education yields huge returns across the board, from socio-economics, health, and population control to delaying the marriage age and decreasing violence. Most important, education gives women a voice and the power to make their own decisions.

*“Men do not live only by fighting evils. They live by positive goals.”*

— Isaiah Berlin, historian and philosopher

With help from countless international partners over the past 15 years, Afghanistan has made huge strides in enrolling children in school, from fewer than one million in 2000 in school, to 8.2 million in 2014, including more than three million girls, according to The World Bank.

However, there remains a critical shortage of buildings, training, revenue, and access to educational materials and support. Several of Afghanistan’s 200,000 teachers went on strike this past summer, protesting their low pay — about \$120-200 monthly — one of the lowest teacher salaries in the world, and that teachers’ pay is often delayed by months. “Although teacher pay and training is our top priority, we simply don’t have the money,” Kabir Haqmal, a spokesperson from the Afghan Ministry of Education told me this summer.

### AFGHANISTAN A SUCCESS STORY, BUT STILL A LONG WAY TO GO

Afghanistan has been at war or in conflict since the Russian invasion in 1979, and almost two generations do not know what it is like to live in peace. The country is landlocked, arid, and isolated; it is frequently wracked by natural disasters, ethnic, sectarian, and political strife; and is at the crossroads where civilizations and more than a dozen empires have waxed and waned.

*“Education is the movement from darkness to light.”*

— Allan Bloom

In the years after 9/11, while most of the news focused on war, violence, al-Qaida, and the Taliban, a quiet and successful revolution was underway as the country saw the greatest increase in school enrollment in modern history.

However, a severe lack of funding, teacher shortage, ongoing violence, and access to education present significant challenges for Afghanistan’s future.

Although a significant teacher shortage exists in Afghanistan, there are few actual job openings for new teachers. New teachers often need connections or an inside track to get a job. The government has limited or no funds for the additional 28,200 teachers who are needed to educate Afghanistan’s approximately 8.2 million students.

Education also has been impacted by politics, ongoing corruption, and lack of foreign interest and funding. The Afghan elections last year unfortunately ended in a contested dispute between the two top vote-getters: Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. In October, with the encouragement of the U.S. and Secretary of State John Kerry, the leaders opted to form a “unity government.”

Soon after, a power struggle ensued, and the appointment of ministers and a full cabinet took up to nine months to complete, par-

alyzing the government and a new strategic plan. In the interim, anticipated foreign funding fell woefully short, and tens of thousands of foreign troops withdrew by December 2014, causing national security to begin deteriorating significantly.

In May 2015, John Sopko, the director of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), gave a speech entitled “Afghanistan Reconstruction: Fact vs. Fantasy” at Weill Cornell Medical College. In it, he remarked that even for all the U.S. effort, education in Afghanistan is not a priority. He told the audience that in Afghanistan since 2001, the U.S. has spent \$700 billion for military operations, \$8.4 billion for counter-narcotics and opium eradication, but only \$768 million for education. This is to say, approximately only one dollar out of each hundred dollars the U.S. put into Afghanistan went to education.

### KEEP REACHING

Fozia Naseer, who is the CAET (Central Asia Education Trust — Pakistan affiliate of CAI) director in Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK), is the first locally educated female attorney out of several million people. She has degrees in law, political science, and education. She



Hussaini village, Upper Gojal, Pakistan

spent an additional two years at Montana State University in Bozeman, Mont., to further her training.

After 2010, she returned to her home in AJK to help support two dozen CAI schools in the region, and be a leader and role model for the next generation of hundreds of girls continuing on with secondary and university education.

“My education was long and difficult, and for many years I did not have a father to help support me, but I never gave up. I was very lucky to realize my dream to be a leader and lawyer,” Fozia said by phone.



## Beggar of Education

by Shogofa

I am beggar of education.  
My hands strain to reach a book and pen.  
My eyes look for peace,  
My feet wait for a way to school.  
I don't want money or a comfortable life  
I don't want to give up, don't want  
to cry from disappointment and sorrow.  
I am beggar of education. Help me.  
I will fight against poverty and illiteracy  
My gun will be a pen and book  
Stop telling me, "No."  
Stop ignoring me, saying I can't do it.  
With an education I could build my  
identity in this society.  
Don't tell me to turn back now.  
I am halfway to my goal. Don't make it  
pointless.  
With an education I could be more.  
Don't hate me, don't beat me  
Teach me a new word, teach me another  
way.  
Education is my one treasure,  
my only power. Don't take it from me.  
With an education, I can have my life.  
Help me.



Khalida Rahim and fellow Hunza Student Federation classmates visit Naltar Valley, in northern Pakistan (2015).

“Now I want to share and give back what I have received in education, and want every girl to have the gift of education, so they have a voice. It will make her family, community, and country stronger. It will make them better. When girls know about the importance of education, it will be passed down from generation to generation, and it is happening now.”

Like Fozia who also lost her father, Khalida is fiercely dedicated to helping her family and village. She took a short break from school this fall. She took time to harvest the fields, till and prepare the soil ahead of winter; and care for her family.

Khalida and Fozia represent millions of individuals who became the first literate, educated members of their communities. Their success is a huge leap forward and they are blazing the trail for generations of women to come.

But as the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals are launched in 2015, we cannot forget the 124 million children left behind. Their fate and access to education could largely determine the future of global society. Humans

plan to land on Mars in 2030, which is the same time the U.N. SDGs aspire to have achieved universal education.

Both are incredible goals. Yet, what good is it if a man or woman can step on Mars if millions of children here on earth still can't read or write their own names, much less spell Mars or find it on a chart of the planets?

As a civilization, we have accomplished a lot in the realm of education over the past two decades. But, there is still a long way to go. Resolutions and declarations are meaningless without action. We must resolve to act now, and work hard until the day that all children around the world can join hands and shout “Zero,” meaning that there is not one child on earth deprived of education.

We can't stop now. We need to keep reaching for the stars. 🌟

ږږي ټپ نه ټک وړي ا هپ لعل  
“A jewel cannot remain in the ashes.”

*Laal pah eero ki na pataigey*  
— Pashto proverb



## MESSAGE FROM GREG MORTENSON

*Dear Friends,*

*Asalaam-o-Alaikum* (peace be with you). This letter is to share with you that I will no longer be a Central Asia Institute employee or board director after January 21, 2016.

To all the CAI team (past and present), board directors, overseas affiliates, and, most of all, our loyal supporters and the dear communities we serve, thank you for the journey of a lifetime. And thank you for all your incredible support to make the dreams of hundreds of thousands of eager children and people come true. But the journey does not end here.

My transition to new beginnings next year is with happiness, renewed strength, and a now healthy heart. With CAI, I will independently support the organization as a strategist, statesman, and relationship builder, and spend more time in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, to write about and share the inspiring stories of CAI's important work.

Personally, I plan to simply remain a humble servant of humanity, continuing to search for solutions to child slavery, girls dropping out of school at puberty, female illiteracy, violence against women, and early marriage — especially in areas of conflict or in cases of displacement, as with refugees.

I also will continue in graduate school with social impact studies. At home, I will cherish more time writing, working in the garden, and sharing long-overdue, precious time with my family, relatives, and friends.

The organization is now in a good place, with the assets, resources, and good people at home and abroad to move strongly into the future.

Thanks to all of you, the thousands of generous and caring people who helped CAI along the way, on this incredible journey of hope, education, and peace. Please continue to support CAI as it provides those we serve with the gift of a lifetime, the gift of education and literacy.

With my profound respect, thanks, and love,  
Greg Mortenson  
CAI co-founder

درداد هار دوخ رس مه زاب دشاب دنلب هک ردق چ ره هوک  
Ko ar qadr ke beland basha, baz am sar-e khud ra dara  
However tall the mountain is, there's a road to the top of it.  
— Pashto proverb



## LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear Friends,

It is with great respect and our heartfelt wishes for his continued success, that we announce that CAI co-founder Greg Mortenson, will retire in January 2016 after nearly 20 years of inspirational service.

More than two decades ago, Greg pioneered the “books not bombs” global movement. Since then he courageously has implemented community-based programs related to literacy, education, health, and vocational training in some of the most impoverished, remote regions of the world. This work has inspired many others and he ardently continues this work today.

Many thousands of girls and boys have been able to attend schools because of his lifetime of humanitarian efforts. We all are very grateful for his tireless perseverance in the pursuit of his belief, and ours, that education is the shortest and surest path to peace.

Although Greg will be retiring as both an ex-officio member of the CAI board of directors and a CAI employee, he will continue his active relationship with CAI. We look forward to his wise counsel on issues where his insight, experience, relationships, and unique skills in international project development can be brought to bear.

Greg’s numerous accomplishments will be acknowledged and celebrated throughout 2016, as CAI looks back on its accomplishments and outlines plans for the future. A tribute to him will be included in next year’s *Journey of Hope*. We also hope to host a gala this coming summer in recognition of Greg’s many years of service.

I know I speak on behalf of the board and all of the friends of CAI when I wish Greg all the best in the next 20 years as he continues to champion essential human rights, especially of girls and women, in Central Asia and around the world.

Sincerely,  
Steve Barrett  
Chairman, Board of Directors







Students take notes in the CAI-sponsored Sykomal Girls' Middle School in Ishkashim, Afghanistan.

# ASK, DON'T TELL: THE RECIPE FOR CHANGE

BY JIM THADEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CENTRAL ASIA INSTITUTE

Nearly 20 years ago, Greg Mortenson and a handful of like-minded partners were working to promote peace and education in the isolated and underserved mountain regions of Pakistan. Though Greg already had worked in the area for several years prior, 1996 marked the first time he was doing so on behalf of the nonprofit organization Central Asia Institute.

As is the hallmark of our work to this day, Greg and his partners carefully listened to the people whom they sought to serve, and worked alongside them to bring literacy and education to individual villages. This approach of listening to the people's needs and responding in ways that invited collaboration, rather than telling them what CAI thought they needed, was the "secret sauce" of our success.

There often was little or no central or provincial government presence in those early days. Nearly all governance emanated from the village elders or district officials. Among the contrast of the beautiful, snow-capped mountains and abject poverty at their bases, these were the days of our passionate CAI leaders forming valuable relationships and listening rather than telling: usually over a cup of tea.

But over the last two decades since CAI's inception, the voices of the central and provincial governments in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan steadily have grown in the rural regions. And while difficulty in effecting change in the regions we serve by no means has disappeared, our work continues to be carried out through thoughtful listening, intentional collaboration, and supporting our local CAI partners on the ground.

## PEACE LEADERS: FRONT-LINE PARTNERS MAKE THE BEST DECISIONS

Working — as CAI often does — in restricted, prohibited, or semi-autonomous border areas presents certain challenges. We have the honor to serve these areas, and the governments of all three countries — Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan — graciously have allowed CAI to function in these often-remote areas. However, recent geo-political events have made ongoing operations more sensitive. Consequently, locally sourced, on-the-ground resources have become that much more essential to the success of our mission.

Having grown up and lived most of their lives not far from the villages they now serve, our project managers have their fingers on the pulse of regional life, and respond quickly and efficiently in the case of an emergency.



Recently Janagha Jaheed, manager of CAI partner organization Marcopolo Social Services and Reconstruction Organization

Trust and relationships are key aspects in doing business anywhere, but they especially are important in Central Asian cultures.

(MSSRO), did just that. Placing himself in harm's way, Janagha delivered supplies and ensured the safety of staff in Badakhshan, Afghanistan as the Taliban moved in and took control of the region.

Thirty hours, three flights, and a three-day drive on rough roads stood between CAI-US staff and those projects. Even if we hopped on a plane as news broke that militants were heading that direction, we never would have made it in time to help. We were grateful for Janagha's quick action.

MSSRO is just one of many organizations that CAI partners with to provide services overseas. Like MSSRO, Star of Knowledge, Central Asia Institute-Afghanistan, Central Asia Educational Trust, Central Asia Institute-Gilgit, and Central Asia Institute-Tajikistan, all deliver customized, proportionate programs and resources to the people who need them most.

Today, our small but growing international workforce of dedicated partners are identifying and distributing improved teaching tools and more flexible and adaptive early childhood development, literacy, education, and vocational training programs. These tools and programs help CAI deliver hand-tailored solutions to local communities based on the residents telling us what they need. And it is all about building relationships.

Staff in the U.S. can't simply send an email to village elders whenever we need to coordinate on a project. Few elders in these far-flung villages are literate, and even fewer have computers or Internet access. Thus we have to build relationships in person.

In tribal societies, community meetings

typically are called for decision-making purposes. In Pakistan these community-based committees are known as *tanzeem*; in Afghanistan the meetings are referred to as *jirgas*. If an important business matter needs to be discussed — such as the building of a school — everyone gathers together, and the issue is decided.

Trust and relationships are key aspects in doing business anywhere, but they especially are important in Central Asian cultures. A friendly face goes a long way in situations such as this.

Empowering local decision-makers does not mean CAI cedes control of the financial purse strings, program caliber, or the quality of construction projects. On the contrary: it allows CAI to pinpoint where money should be spent; tailor programs to specific needs; and encourage local engagement, which typically translates into a sense of ownership.

Our core methodology always has been to listen to the community, work with its leaders, and gain the support of the entire community before building a school and implementing health, literacy, education,

## I HAVE BEEN IN THEIR SHOES BY DILSHAD BAIG, CAI-GILGIT WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR



I am a CAI beneficiary, but in a different sense. Working as women's development director at CAI-Gilgit has been a source of personal fulfillment for me, and a means for me to help my people and community.

Like most girls from my village, I was married after high school at the age of 17. At that time I moved to my husband's village. It was very remote, approachable only by a rutted jeep track.

There was only one teacher at the village's only school. When he went away for training, the village elders insisted that I take his place. I volunteered at the school from noon until 4 p.m. most days, and taught whatever little I knew. I never had taught before and my capacity and capabilities were much the

same as those of the teachers I train today. While in the village, I also took teacher's training and did not struggle after that. Later I was employed formally as a teacher and continued with a career in teaching wherever I went. I am pleasantly surprised that the students I taught remember me as a competent teacher.

After work, I spent time training women in the village how to sew and embroider at a community center. We used its kitchen. I managed to acquire six sewing machines from the district government and the local council for our training program. In the summer, there were still daylight hours left to work in the fields after teaching sewing lessons, so I harvested potatoes and wheat, and took care of livestock.

There is a hard time in every woman's life, memories of which can make her break into tears. My 10 years in my husband's village

were very tough. I gave birth to my first son in the back seat of a jeep en route to the health facility; there was no medical facility in our village. The closest one was 10 miles away. I nearly died of post-partum bleeding.

Motherhood didn't prevent me from carrying on with my education and I went on to complete my graduate studies. In 1999, Greg Mortenson visited the vocational center that I had set up. He got George McCown, now a CAI board member, to donate generously, and the center is now in his wife's name. This is how I got involved with the CAI and continued working with it as a volunteer. In 2012, CAI offered me a position to mobilize women, which I felt was my calling.

CAI has given me the opportunity to help improve my people's condition, for which I did not have the resources myself. I can empathize with those I work with because I have been in their shoes.





and vocational training. The best decisions are made by capable, local CAI leaders equipped with the necessary education and information to help their communities.

### FINGER ON THE PULSE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

The environment in which CAI strives to provide education to all — especially girls — today is just as hazardous, if not more hazardous, than it has been in the past 10 to 20 years. All of the brave students, teachers, and administrators who choose to follow the path of peace through education today truly are inspirational and at the forefront of an ongoing movement to create a better world. They are “peace leaders” opening their countrymen and women’s minds to the possibility of sustainable peace and economic prosperity that only can grow in the fertile soil of literacy and education.

Tensions in Afghanistan are, sadly, increasing. Formerly picturesque mountain roads that once allowed our CAI staff access to bring about change in an impoverished mountain village now are sometimes too

dangerous to travel. Recent fighting in the northern provinces of Kunduz and Badakhshan has hindered our partners’ abilities to move around. Yet, it is not only man-made complications that threaten CAI-supported projects.

Earlier this year, northern Pakistan was hit by a series of devastating floods. Villages down long, narrow valleys like Ghizer, Charpusan, and Broghil were cut off from the rest of the world as torrents of water barreled down mountainsides, taking bridges and roads with them. Children couldn’t access their schools without walking miles down- or upstream to another crossing. Sometimes even then, conditions were too dangerous.

The United States Geological Survey reported there were more than 130 earthquakes in Afghanistan this year alone. Seismic activity is a constant threat to structures and people located alongside these major mountain ranges.

In these ever-changing, volatile environments, being flexible and nimble is essential. Staying focused on sustaining or accelerating the pace of progress in edu-

cation despite external forces requires perseverant, empowered people with the right supplies and financial support to complete their jobs. This approach to education always has been CAI’s greatest strength.

“It is difficult to work in these villages, yes. On any given day, men or nature can impact how we get people and resources to these communities,” says Dilshad Baig of CAI-Gilgit. “But I have been these girls; I have been these women. I know what it is to be in their situation. They want to learn. We cannot afford to let this work slip, to let challenges set back our progress. CAI has worked too hard; the mission is too important.”

### DRAMATIC CHANGES FOR NGO MANAGEMENT

After months of strife over international nongovernmental organizations’ (INGOs) operations in Pakistan, the government announced a new policy to regulate them. The management of these matters has been transferred from the economic affairs division to the interior ministry. Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan is charged with overseeing the registration of INGOs via a streamlined, electronic system. Registration of visas, passports, and identity cards also will be done through this system. It is believed that the policies will be instituted in late 2015.

The United States Geological Survey reported there were a little more than 130 earthquakes in Afghanistan this year alone.

Implementation of these new rules and regulations will significantly impact INGOs, like CAI and many others, working directly with local organizations or individuals. They will change the way we operate, but we expect the establishment of the Central Asia Educational Trust (CAET), a local entity, to improve our ability to function and comply with shifting demands.



“Of course CAI, CAET, and our local partners, are abiding by all the rules and regulations of Pakistan,” explains Shakir Ali, director of CAET. “We are cooperating at every level of government as this situation continues to unfold. But the establishment of a local trust ahead of these regulations made the transition to the new way of doing things much easier for CAI.”

With any new system there is the potential for delays. If there are holdups in processing permissions for visas or travel, it could impact our work and that of our partners.

As often is the case with international efforts such as ours, CAI is not immune to occasional hiccup on the path to progress. Each of the countries — and villages — where we operate presents its own unique set of challenges on a daily basis. This is why having CAI physical presence in each of these areas is crucial. By listening and building relationships, CAI is able to bypass many potential obstacles without so much as a pause.

We are ensuring the revolution in education — especially for girls’ education — is not impacted by changes like those in Pakistan. In the face of continued challenges, we ask ourselves how CAI will sustain

the peaceful revolution of girls’ education in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan?

### SUSTAINABILITY: THE ULTIMATE GOAL


Passion lights many fires, but it alone cannot sustain them. That is why, over the course of the next few months, CAI will begin exploring partnerships with charitable foundations — our ultimate goal being to secure funding that would allow our in-country partners to move toward self-sustainability.

In the rural areas where we work today, the first-generation beneficiaries of the education revolution now carry the torch that CAI, and a handful of other organizations and individuals, once carried alone.

These young, passionate, and educated peace leaders need, and want, the support of international nonprofit organizations such as CAI. Why? Because their governments do not always have the internal resources to provide education to children in these isolated regions.

During the tumultuous years since CAI started its work, many boys and girls from these regions became the first generation in their families to go to school. Many finished high school, some went to college, and a few returned home to become teachers, health

workers, social workers, and personal champions of basic human rights within their local communities. This remarkable change took place in fewer than 20 years.

Since 1996, in the regions we serve, the spark of an unstoppable revolution of education — especially of girls — was kindled with passion. Thanks to the brave hearts of committed people in many local and international organizations, that spark now burns as a bright, shining light today. And it is our local partners who are fanning the flames. When we come together, build relationships, and foster trust, this is a true recipe for change. 



**Jim Thaden** is the executive director of Central Asia Institute. He was Born and raised in Washington, but spent much of his adult life in Philadelphia, New York, and Tennessee. Prior to joining Central Asia Institute, he worked as development director for the Discovery Place, where he played a key role in that organization’s turnaround into a sustainable social enterprise. Prior to his social enterprise work, which he calls his “second career,” Thaden was a successful entrepreneur.



Student at Raheshet Primary School in Panjshir, Afghanistan.





## OUR PARTNERS IN EDUCATION



### AFGHANISTAN

#### Central Asia Institute-Afghanistan

Director: Abdul Wakil Karimi

Locations supported: Ghazni, Kabul

[www.cai.org.af](http://www.cai.org.af)

#### Star of Knowledge

Director: Muhammad Nadir Hanifi (*not pictured*)

Locations supported: Badakhshan, Baghlan, Ghazni, Kabul, Kapisa, Khost, Kunar, Laghman, Logar, Nangarhar, Paktia, Panjshir, Parwan, Urozgan, Wardak

[www.sko.org.af](http://www.sko.org.af)



#### Marcopolo Social Services and Reconstruction Organization

Director: Janagha Jaheed

Locations supported: Badakhshan, Takhar

[www.marcopolo.org.af](http://www.marcopolo.org.af)



### TAJIKISTAN

#### Central Asia Institute-Tajikistan

Director: Mahbuba Qurbonalieva

Locations supported: GBAO



### PAKISTAN

#### Central Asia Educational Trust

Director: Shakir Ali

Locations supported: Islamabad, Azad Jammu Kashmir, Baltistan, Punjab

[www.caet.org.pk](http://www.caet.org.pk)



Azad Jammu Kashmir Program Manager:

Fozia Naseer



Baltistan Program Manager:

Mohammad Nazir



#### Central Asia Institute-Gilgit

Director: Saidullah Baig

Locations supported: Gilgit, Hunza, Ghizer

# IS STUDYING ASTRONOMY AN *IMPOSSIBLE* WISH?

BY ZAINAB



After talking time and again about the problems in our post-conflict society, I feel that I have missed something. I want to take a deep breath and untwist my wings for a flight to my dreams. I want to take some time to think about my wish to become an astronomer.

Maybe this wish is not just a dream for people in other parts of the world. But here, where there is neither an astronomy major nor an instructor, it seems like a dream. We believe that dreams are possible and if we believe in the beauty of our dreams, they can become true one day. But unfortunately, we are living in a society where even dreaming is restricted for women. Even in dreams we cannot bravely soar.

I have seen many girls in my country who think men can read their minds, so they never dare to dream for something they want. I am different, but the situation in Afghanistan is difficult. I grew up in Iran where there were no limits on dreams. I am like a hawk always flying in the sky. But once I open my eyes to reality, I find myself in a cage. Every night I watch the sky lit by shining stars. As much as I sink into the beauty of it, I am awed by its darkness.

Our house is located in the hills around Kabul city. The roof of our house is the most fantastic place at night. One side of the roof is surrounded by the mountains, which are like the guards of our city. On the front side I see a snapshot of the whole city lit by bulbs. When I see the bulbs I wish they were stars, because stars are generous


and shine for the anguished hearts of people during the night. Bulbs are in the control of the government and shine to provide occasional power, without attention to the needs of people. Between the city view and mountains, the azure dome of the mosque in our neighborhood provokes the sense of a peace in me, like the doves that fly around the domes of holy Islamic shrines. These are only my surroundings.

I still have not looked above.

When I look above, I see a different world. In this saintly place, I feel that I am Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī, a famous astronomer from centuries ago in my hometown of Ghazni. I don't know what he could have watched centuries ago, but I know that he loved and felt the sky, and he contributed to the science of astronomy. I feel that I am not

alone and during some surprising moments while watching the sky, I have a warm conversation with this scientist who is the hero of my life.

I remember the night that I saw a comet and he asked me to wish something; I wished one day I would become an astronomer. I would reconstruct his observatories in Ghazni and resuscitate his memories and dedications.

I wish to become so capable in this field that I would contribute to the development of it in my country once again. I want to show that I am a woman who can dream freely about whatever I want. In my world today, the ceiling is shorter than my stature. However, I will not bend, but will continue dreaming and believing in the beauty of my dreams. 

# DRAWN TO ►►► AFGHANISTAN


BY CHRISTEL CHVILICEK



Dr. Sandra Cook

Soon after the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, Dr. Sandra Cook's dream of visiting Afghanistan became a reality. When the regime was toppled, finally she had the opportunity to go to Afghanistan and travel throughout it on local buses and in taxis. In this way, she observed firsthand what three decades of war had left behind: buildings reduced to rubble and people's lives shattered. By the end of her third trip to Afghanistan, she had fallen in love with this fascinating country and decided she had to do something to help rebuild it. One of the most glaring issues she noted was the lack of functioning schools and very few children being educated. She now has spent the past 13 years work-

ing and volunteering in the educational sector in Afghanistan. She has served as vice president of the American University of Afghanistan and served as co-chair of the board of directors of the Louis and Nancy Hatch Dupree Foundation for the Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University. During her time in Afghanistan, she has traveled extensively in the areas served by CAI, recently crossing the remote and fabled Wakhan Corridor on horseback, visiting several CAI schools along the way.

Prior to her involvement in Afghanistan, Cook had 30 years of professional experience as a senior corporate executive, management consultant, and university teacher, much of her work being done internationally. She holds a B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in philosophy and mathematical logic, and an M.S. in economics. She has been on the CAI board of directors since 2014. 



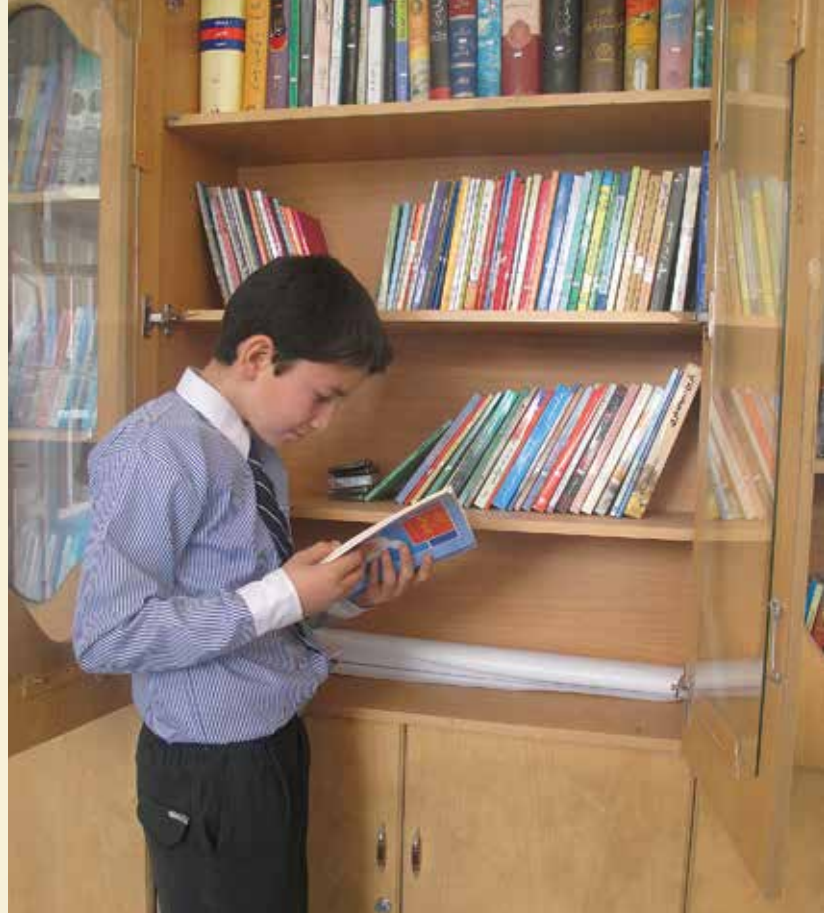
Christel Chvilicek is CAI grants and sponsorship manager. She was born and raised in Bozeman, Mont. and has spent the last eight years working in the nonprofit sector, focusing on education

initiatives through the local Human Resource Development Council and YMCA. Education is a passion of hers and she wants to do her part to ensure everyone gets the opportunity to learn and grow.



# LITERACY IN A BOX EDUCATING A WHOLE COMMUNITY

BY CHRISTEL CHVILICEK



One and a half billion people visited public libraries in the United States in 2014, according to the National Library Association. It's easy to take our access to libraries for granted. For most, it takes only a quick trip by car or bus to get there; some people can walk.

But imagine that you are living in the remote, rugged, and barren wilderness of Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor. In this thin panhandle, bordered by Tajikistan in the north, China in the east, and Pakistan to the south, learning to read and write can be a struggle. With limited resources and families to feed, schooling and literacy often take a back seat to the everyday struggle for survival.

While Central Asia Institute (CAI) cannot put food on the tables of everyone in the region, we can do something about the limited resources for literacy and education. In an effort to help newly literate individuals, CAI plans to purchase "mobile libraries" from the Box Library Extension program of the Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University (ACKU).

"These are libraries in a box, the books being housed in purpose-built metal box-

es, which open to reveal shelves of books," says Dr. Sandra Cook, CAI board member and former co-chair of the foundation that helped fund and build ACKU. "The books are written to the level of a person who is newly literate. Once people have learned to read, they then need something to read."

Each mobile library contains 500 books, focused on subjects that affect people's daily lives. The books are custom-selected to help readers teach themselves about topics such as agriculture, health, and Afghan history. Some basic short novels are also included. Each book is no more than 100 pages long, and written in the local languages of Afghanistan. The libraries are managed by the local community to ensure everyone has access to the books.

While working with ACKU, Cook had the opportunity to deliver mobile libraries to a few villages. She reflected on the situation as a very gratifying project.

"When you brought a box into a community or school where they'd never had a library before, the enthusiasm was unbounded."


Because of Sandra's passion for the people of Afghanistan, her belief in education,

and her newly committed role at CAI, she jumped at the opportunity to bring these miniature libraries to more people. CAI will start by introducing them in several high schools throughout the country. If the program goes well, it will be expanded.

"These libraries will become a center around which people are proud of learning, implementing new ideas and thoughts, and changing the capacity of each community," said Jim Thaden, executive director of CAI.

Successful implementation of the project heavily depends on donor funding. Earmarked donations from committed library benefactors have given us a good start, but we will need more help if we are to expand this program beyond a handful of initial test sites.

Ideally, CAI hopes to raise enough money to purchase mobile libraries for the 27 schools that were constructed by CAI in the Wakhan Corridor. People in these remote communities are excited by the prospect of having a mobile library. They say they will transport the books by whatever means necessary — donkey, yak, or their own backs.

For them, a library never will be taken for granted. 

# HIBBARD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEARNS A LITTLE GESTURE CAN HAVE **A BIG IMPACT**

BY ALANNA BROWN

As we, a group of strangers with video cameras and lots of equipment, walked into Ms. Karrel's fifth-grade classroom the normally rambunctious students suddenly were shy. The videographer told them "act normal" and "ignore the camera," but of course the students continued to look at the camera and giggle as it moved around the room.

It was May and Pennies for Peace (P4P) was visiting Hibbard Elementary School in Chicago. The school kindly had agreed to let us film the students as they completed their latest P4P campaign.

Ms. Karrel's class had been researching and learning about Central Asia for several weeks already. When we arrived, and they had adjusted to our cameras, the students were eager to tell us what they had learned.

"Did you know just one penny can help many students in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan?" one girl asked me.

But the students weren't the only ones having fun. The teachers were feeding off the kids' energy, happy to see them learning about small gestures of kindness that could in turn have a big impact.

"Service learning is important to our work in the classroom because it shows the students that the skills that we develop in class have a real world purpose," said Ms. Karrel. "Service learning empowers the students. It shows them that their voices can be heard and that they can make a difference even at a young age."

For two weeks, four fifth-grade classes had been collecting pennies, searching under couch cushions for spare change, and asking family and friends for contributions. The hard work behind them, it was finally time to celebrate. After lunch, the



fifth graders gathered in the auditorium. Students expectantly took their seats at the tables. The teachers brought in the pennies — boxes and plastic containers full of them — and placed them next to a big box at the front of the room.

Excitement was on the students' faces as the teacher called up two students at a time to dump the full penny containers into the box. When the first container was dumped, a cheer went up, echoing off the auditorium walls. In the end, it was announced that the school had raised more than \$1,000.

A few months later we checked in with Ms. Karrel. She was happy to report the children "felt proud and excited to continue their service work. The students were more observant when it came to issues they heard about in the news, and they began questioning and discussing ways they could help."

P4P brought the school together.

"P4P created an opportunity for the students to rally together to put all their efforts into a shared goal," Ms. Karrel continued. "Upon completion of the fundraising the students were able to celebrate together in their success. It was truly a time that bonded our class and a memory they will cherish."

Ms. Karrel said she would highly recommend the program to any educator who wants to bring service learning to their classroom.

"I think this program is one that is easy to implement into the classroom, it aligns with Common Core [curricula], and it shows our students that they have the power to make a change in their own communities and beyond," she said.

It seems that the school-wide event already has the younger students talking about Pennies for Peace.

"My new group of students remembered



that last year's fifth graders came to their room to make a speech about Pennies for Peace. They remembered raising money in their classroom as fourth graders. The students eagerly asked if they would be able to participate in Pennies for Peace again this year."

We look forward to this next class of students participating in the program. See you guys next year!

Watch the Pennies for Peace video featuring the students from Hibbard Elementary School, and learn how to bring the program to your school at [www.penniesforpeace.org](http://www.penniesforpeace.org)

### CURRICULUM AND TOOLKIT

To help make Pennies for Peace more meaningful for your students, we've created a free curriculum for grades K-12. Our lesson plans and activities help students understand

the complex issues surrounding education in Central Asia.

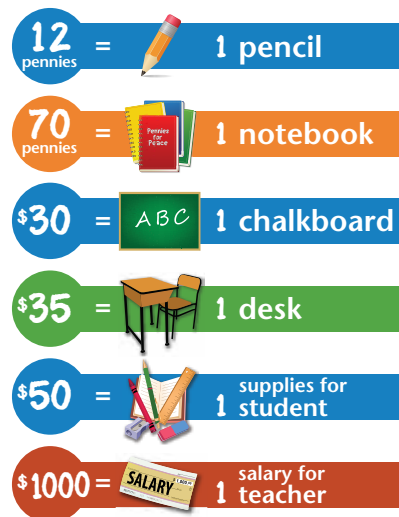
#### The lessons cover themes such as:

- Power of education
- Effects of extreme poverty
- Cultural understanding
- Geography
- Politics
- Humanitarian efforts
- Our responsibilities as global citizens

#### In line with the U.S. Common Core state standards, the toolkit includes:

- A sample timeline
- Fact sheets about the countries in which we work
- Template letters to parents and local businesses
- Videos, printable photographs, additional references, and more.

In Central Asian villages, even small amounts of money can make a profound difference in the lives of children:



### Pennies for Peace **IMPACT**

All **50** states and **31** different countries have participated



Over **7,000** Pennies for Peace campaigns with over **\$7 million** raised

The program has supported over

**100,000** students in **Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan**



CAI has built **190** schools in these countries



We make it easy. To get started, visit [penniesforpeace.org](http://penniesforpeace.org), register, and begin collecting pennies today!

When you donate, 100 percent of your donation goes to programs overseas — building new schools, repairing and improving existing schools, and purchasing equipment such as uniforms, furniture, and school supplies.

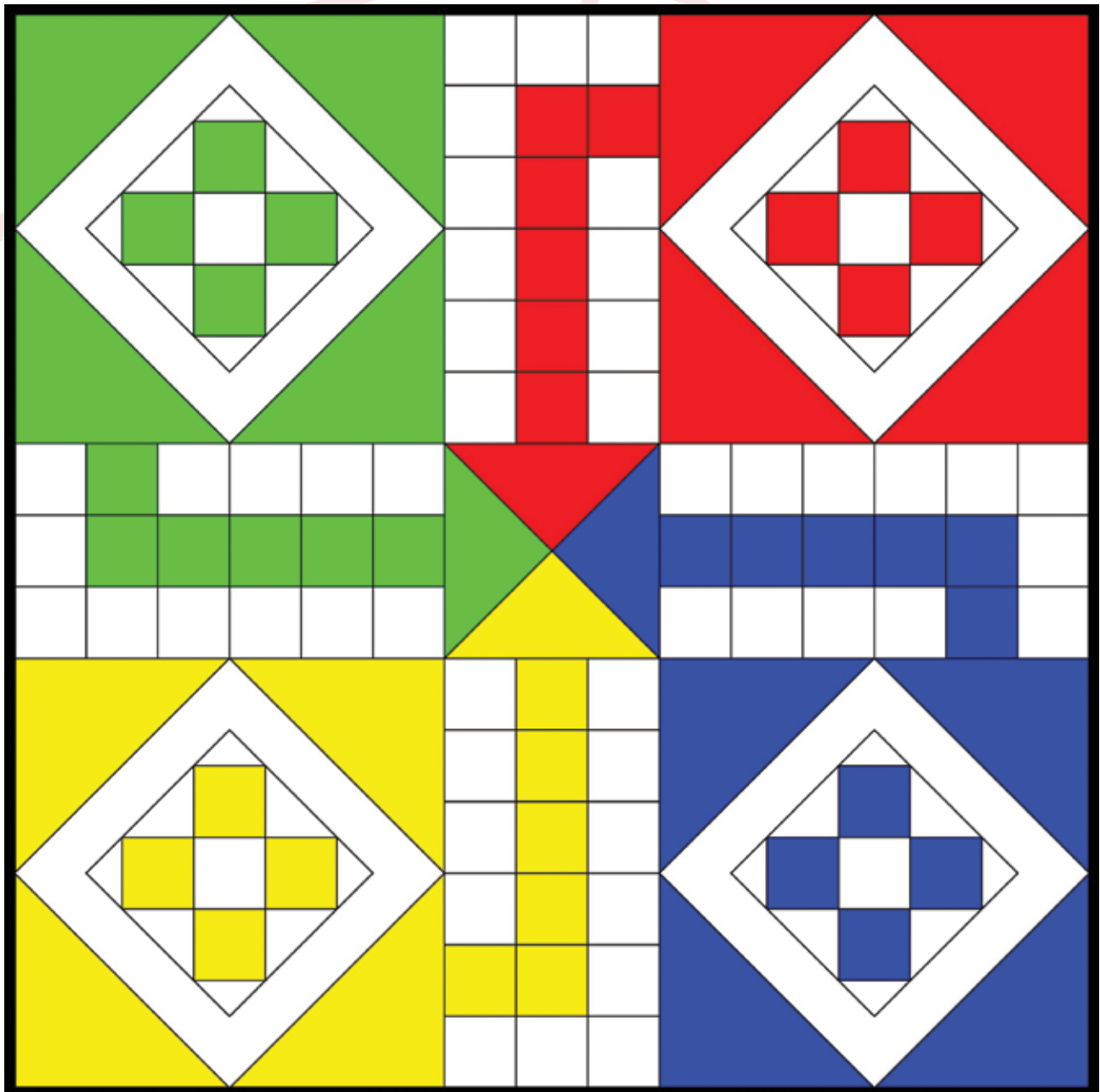


**Alanna Brown** is the CAI Pennies for Peace manager. Brown joined CAI after serving as an alumni relations for the Montana State University Alumni Association. Prior to that, she was outreach coordinator for MSU's Caring for Our Own program, a Native American nursing support program, and an admissions evaluator at MSU. As an AmeriCorps Vista worker,

she coordinated volunteers for Greater Gallatin United Way and did crisis counseling at the Help Center in Bozeman, Mont. Brown has a master's degree in adult and higher education/public administration and a bachelor's degree in family counseling from Montana State University.



**Ludo**, from the Latin "I play," is a board game played with two to four people. Each player has four tokens and with each roll of the die tokens are moved clockwise around the board. Having gone once around the board with a token, the player can move that token up their colored path toward the center. To enter the center, and thus win the game, a precise roll is required. Make or find playing pieces, call your friends over, and have fun!







# Culture Quilt

Do some of your friends practice a different religion or have different family traditions? These are some of the things that make up a person's culture.

Explore your own culture with the quilt below.

List the elements of your culture in each square and use crayons, pencils, or markers to illustrate them. Or make a collage in each small square using magazine photos.

MY FAVORITE CLOTHES:

MY FAVORITE FOODS:

SOMETHING I DO FOR FUN:

A FAMILY TRADITION:

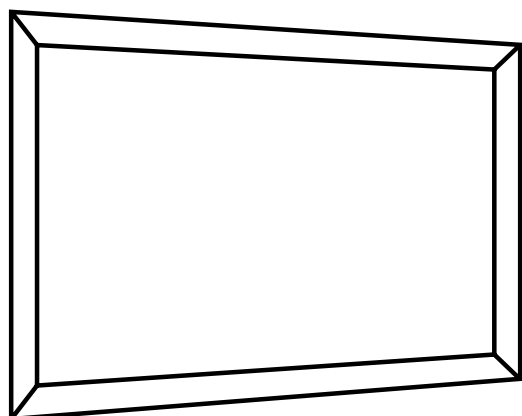


# Class room

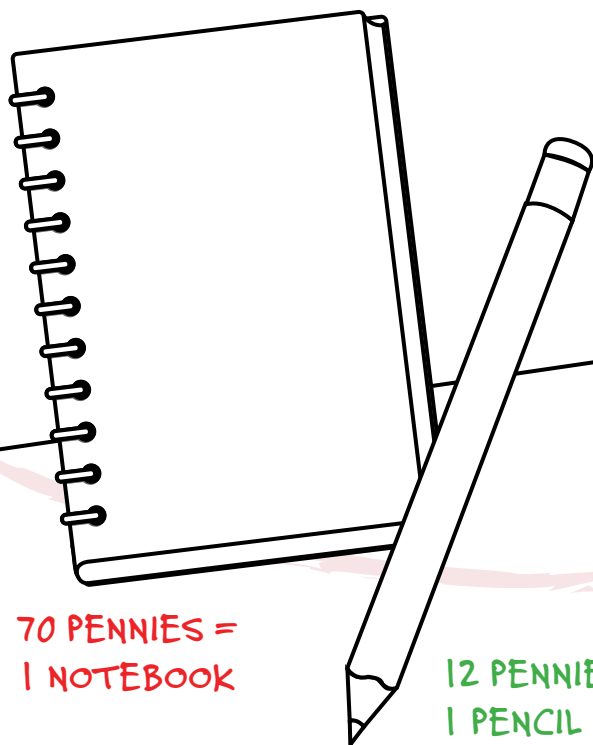
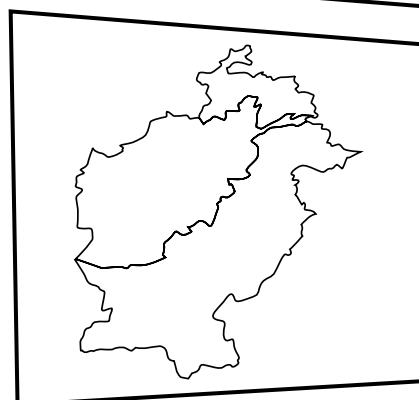
One penny. A world of change.

In the U.S. a penny doesn't buy much, but in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan a few pennies buy a pencil, or a notebook.

Color the items below and learn about the value of a few pennies.

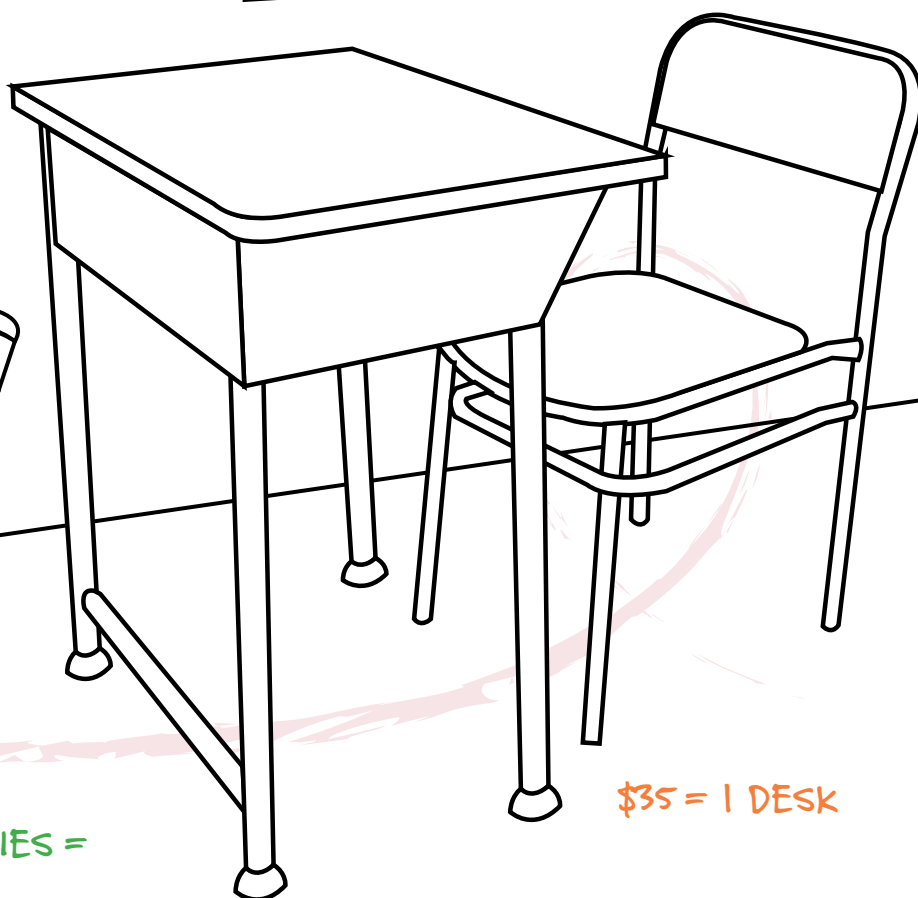


\$30 = 1 CHALKBOARD



70 PENNIES =  
1 NOTEBOOK

12 PENNIES =  
1 PENCIL



\$35 = 1 DESK





# Pennies for Peace Good Citizen Pledge

I (name) \_\_\_\_\_  
promise to be a good citizen in (circle one)  
my classroom / my school / my family / my  
neighborhood / my city / my country / the world by:

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Now, use magazine clippings, small scraps of paper,  
and other materials that you already have in your  
classroom to create a collage to illustrate your pledge.

# ANYONE CAN BUILD A SCHOOL

FEW BUILD RELATIONSHIPS. THAT MAKES  
ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

BY CHRIS KOLENDA

In early 2007, my unit — roughly 800 men and women of 1-91 Cavalry, 173rd Airborne Brigade — was scheduled to deploy to Iraq. We were busy with pre-deployment training that focused on the history and culture of Iraq as well as the basics of the Arabic language. Some of the paratroopers with an exceptional aptitude for languages even received special Arabic language training. All of us were doing our best to learn as much as possible in a short amount of time.

Then, unexpectedly, orders changed. We were instead headed to Afghanistan. All of our research about Iraqi culture and our Arabic language training suddenly became useless.

In a crunch for time — deployment was only a few weeks away — I frantically read everything about Afghanistan that I could get my hands on. Despite it all, my unit and I were not prepared fully for the complexity of Afghanistan.

Then we were deployed to one of the most violent areas of Afghanistan.

The firefights in the complex mountainous terrain were intense and deadly. We won every time, but four of my paratroopers had been killed and scores were wounded in an area roughly the size of Rhode Island.

Most recently, in late August 2007, Pfc. Chris Pfeifer was mortally wounded. He fought valiantly for his life, but would die of wounds a month later, the day before his daughter Peyton was born.

The insurgents suffered far worse in the fighting, but that was not good enough for me. I was not satisfied just winning individual firefights. I wanted us to win absolutely: to defeat the insurgency and stabilize the area. To do that, we first had to understand.

I nearly had exhausted my books and articles, and waited for more to arrive.

I had one book left: Greg Mortenson's, "Three Cups of Tea." Frankly, I wanted something a bit more academic; something that would help me gain a better understanding of this dynamic and war-torn country. I figured I could plow through it before other books arrived.

I always appreciated the importance of education. People across the globe want what is best for their children. I believed supporting children was something that could bring people of diverse cultures, languages, and religions together.

I picked up Greg's book expecting a feel-good story. I hardly could put it down.

## A NOVEL APPROACH

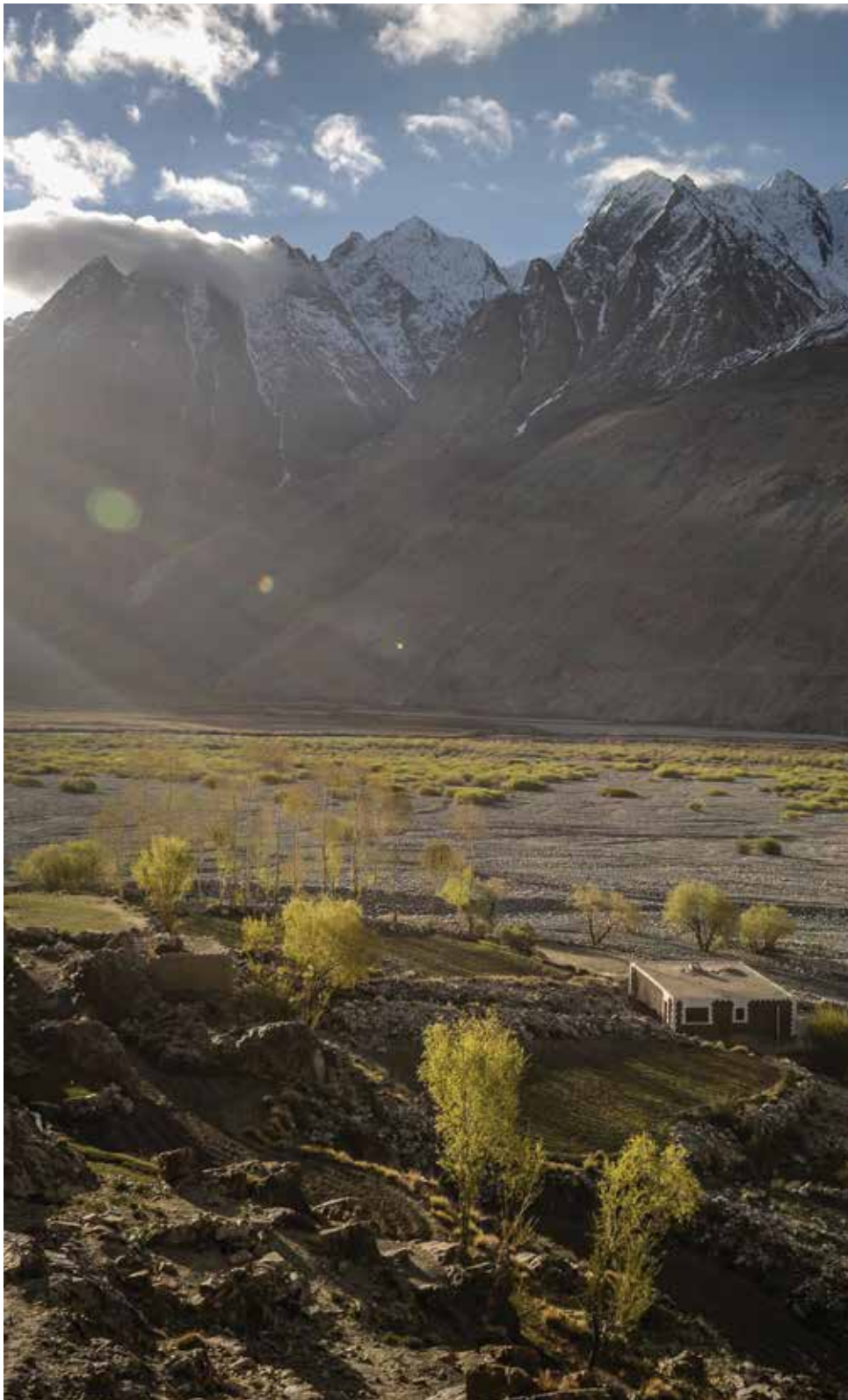
Saw Village was one of several hundred in our area of operations. It also was one of the more troublesome. For several years, militants from the Saw Valley in Afghanistan had been firing rockets at our sprawling base on the banks of the Kunar River. We had been in Afghanistan only a few weeks and we were being bombarded by these attacks regularly.

The rockets they launched largely were inaccurate. Most landed outside the base. Sadly, a few had harmed and killed local civilians. Some landed inside the base, and two



CAI-Afghanistan Director, Wakil Karimi, and Chris Kolenda.





paratroopers were wounded. A lucky shot in a village or on the base had the potential to kill others. We needed to put an end to these attacks before anyone else was hurt.

Simply killing or capturing insurgents was unlikely to turn the tide and stop the bombings. They could replenish their ranks easily as long as the people supported them. Something needed to change. We needed to explore other options.

Lt. Col. Sher Ahmad was from Herat, a city in western Afghanistan. His unit had been in the area only a few weeks longer than mine and he was working with U.S. forces in the region. His short black hair, hooknose, and deep brown eyes revealed his Pashtun ethnicity. He had little formal military training, but was highly skilled at engaging with local leaders. So I asked him what he thought we should do. He suggested taking a patrol of his soldiers to the village. He wanted to talk to the people.

Saw Valley was nearly inaccessible on the opposite side of the Kunar River, tucked against the Pakistan border. But Sher Ahmad's smaller vehicles could cross the tiny, ramshackle bridge spanning the river. He planned to send word of his intentions ahead and his party would be large enough to discourage any attack. Our forces covered his movements from positions on the west bank.

Sher Ahmad toured the village and met with the elders for several hours. Finally, he came back to base and what he reported was fascinating.

Rather than professing ideologically-based, anti-American sentiments, the elders said the attacks were the results of offended pride. A few years earlier, the villagers had been subjected to, and outraged by, nighttime searches of their homes by U.S. and Afghan forces. Soldiers, they said, had kicked in their doors, rummaged through their belongings, searched their women, stole their jewelry, and placed bags over the heads of elders before hauling them off for



questioning. Such actions were deeply humiliating. The rockets we had been dealing with were retaliation.

I too would be pretty upset if someone had done that to me in front of my family.

"What else did you learn?" I asked.

"They want their kids to go to school," he replied. "They only have one tiny building for 500 children. It has three walls and no roof."

We saw this as an opportunity to build a bridge with the community.

Working together with local leaders and parents for Afghan children was a key part of our game plan for building relationships. When families and friends asked what our unit wanted in care packages, we encouraged them to send school supplies such as notebooks, pens, and pencils. They responded generously and within a few weeks we had collected truckloads.

I asked Sher Ahmad if he was willing to return to Saw Village to bring the supplies we had collected to the school. He agreed eagerly.

The very next day, the Saw Village elders walked 15 miles to our Forward Operating Base. They wanted to meet.

The large, rectangular meeting room was adorned with carpets and pillows and pictures of Americans and Afghans working together. The elders stood to greet us. They each wore the *pakol*, the famous round, flat headgear of eastern Afghanistan, and the traditional *shalwar kameez*, a long shirt and trouser outfit. Many gray beards were present, as well as a few younger representatives. The chief *mullah*, or religious cleric, and the school headmaster were there, too.

The *shura* (council) leader handed me a stack of papers. "Commandant, these are

from our children," my interpreter translated from Pashtu as he handed me the package.

Not knowing what to expect, I thanked him and unfolded the top sheet of lined notebook paper revealing a neat and precise Arabic script.

"They are thank you notes," he explained, "written with the pens and paper you sent."

I was stunned. "There would have been more," he continued, "but many children did not believe their handwriting was good enough to show you."

The humility and kindness of this simple gesture was touching. We spoke for hours over tea. The elders told Sher Ahmad and me about their village, the recent history and negative interactions with earlier U.S. and Afghan forces, and their hopes for the future. They asked nothing for themselves: no money, no humanitarian assistance, and no projects.

When I asked about their top priorities, they said they needed a school the most. They explained the three-walled, roofless building. Several hundred girls crammed into the building each morning. The boys came in the afternoon. They had one chalkboard. Everyone wrote numbers and letters in the dirt; that is, until the notebooks and pens arrived.

Several hours later, after tea and lunch, the elders walked the fifteen miles back across the river to their homes. We all had the sense that something important had taken place that day. And we were right.

Soon thereafter, the rockets stopped. This experience was yet another example among many across our area of operations that our approach was working.

It was simple: understand, build relationships, work together with communities on their priorities, and clobber the militants. Once the people viewed those perpetrating the violence, rather than us, as the obstacle to community goals and aspirations, we would have the upper hand. With no support from the community the militants could not replenish their ranks. Their morale

The first time you share tea ... you are a stranger. The second time you take tea, you are an honored guest. The third time you share a cup of tea, you become family, and for our family, we are prepared to do anything, even die.

would plummet. Who would want to continue getting hammered for a cause no one else supported?

Many thought this approach was preposterous, but Greg's book validated it.

#### LETTERS FROM UNEXPECTED PLACES

Building relationships and working together for common goals was our first step toward understanding the people of Saw Village.

Greg's experiences reinforced the importance of relationships, mutual understanding, and community ownership. Anyone can build a school. But it takes patience, perseverance, and partnership to make a lasting impact. He writes:

*The first time you share tea ... you are a stranger. The second time you take tea, you are an honored guest. The third time you share a cup of tea, you become family, and for our family, we are prepared to do anything, even die.*





Greg captured elegantly what we were experiencing in many communities.

Inspired by his story and seeing so many parallels with our experiences, I wrote an email on September 15, 2007, to the address at the back of the book:

Dear Central Asia Institute,

... I am convinced that the long-term solution to terrorism in general and Afghanistan specifically is education. The conflict here will not be won with bombs but with books and ideas that excite the imagination toward peace, tolerance, and prosperity. The thirst for education here is palpable. People are tired of war after 30 years and want a better future. Education will make the difference whether the next generation grows up to be educated patriots or illiterate fighters. The stakes could not be higher....

Sincerely, Christopher Kolenda

A week later, an email from Greg Mortenson arrived. I never expected a response to my letter and doubted it would actually get to Greg, figuring it was one of thousands of supportive letters. It was, but Greg took the time to write back. That kind of thoughtfulness, I have come to know, is part of Greg's DNA.

Greg let me know that he was looking to expand CAI operations in Afghanistan — did I know of any place that might be interested in a school?

I knew of the perfect village.

### IF YOU SWEAT FOR IT, YOU PROTECT IT

Central Asia Institute-Afghanistan partners Sarfraz Khan and Wakil Karimi met with the elders of the village on several occasions, eventually completing the school in 2008.

CAI's patient approach focused on building relationships first. Once the mutual trust was established, the community needed to demonstrate commitment. Sweat equity was one of the key signs of seriousness. Communities working with CAI were asked to donate land, materials, and unskilled labor to support the school, teachers, and students.

This method made so much sense. Part of the reason no one washes a rental car or takes it for an oil change after driving it is their lack of ownership. But when people

own the problems and solutions, they make sustainable changes for the better. By the time a school is completed, the community feels a sense of ownership, achievement, and shared sacrifice.

In mid-2008, Pakistani militants began operating in the area near Saw Village. The villagers defended the school and children from harm for years, even receiving support from local Afghan Taliban. Afghans have a wonderful saying: "If you sweat for it, you protect it."

This is the critical difference in CAI's approach. For many non-profit organizations, constructing a building is their goal. For others, graduation rates are how they measure success. For CAI, the building is a symbol of the community's commitment to education and their children. They sweat for it, protect it, keep their children in school, support learning, and demand teacher performance.

Why does this difference matter? Building schools and having children graduate both are worthy goals. But that which is measured often drives approaches and incentives. You can build a school, but will that building still be in use a year later? Many children may graduate from school, but if they learn nothing because teachers are absent or parents are unsupportive, then the piece of paper stating they graduated means little.

CAI's focus on relationships and understanding of ownership aligns incentives toward sustainable education in the community.

### DOES IT MATTER?

Sadly, in December 2014, after six years of relative safety, the Saw Village School sustained major bomb damage. CAI featured the school in its 2015 Spring Capital Campaign, hoping to raise enough funds to underwrite the repairs.

Meanwhile, the community continues to educate some children in homes while working to rebuild the facility. And it's all because CAI built the relationship first and got the community invested.

I am asked often: what is the point of supporting education if militants attack schools?

There is no quick fix to problems like the ones facing the Afghan people; no silver bullet solution. Think about how long our country has been trying to sort out issues such

## Girls and Education

BY FARIBA

Every time girls go to school

I feel totally changed

Disappointment and anguish appear

My thinking goes down

Even the environment changes

As I think of all their barriers

Their fathers and brothers

Their safety

I want to tell them about my father

Who tells me to always continue

studying

Who tells me what I want, what I like

Who never keeps me from school

It worries me a lot

Thinking about if I were those girls

Killing me to think about who stops them from school

To think who stops them from bringing change

Killing me when I see their brothers going to school

When I see them where I cannot do anything

I want to be their role model

I want to bring change in their life

I have to work for them



as equal rights, racism, and discrimination. Change is even harder in a country wracked by nearly 40 years of war and violence.

The Afghan people are experiencing significant social and political trauma. The forces of intolerance and repression are dashing the hopes and aspirations of Afghans seeking peaceful and prosperous lives. Sustainable education will make a lasting impact. The process will be slow, but inexorable: the people want education.

When I visit a school or vocational training center, I am inspired by the dreams and aspirations of Afghan boys, girls, women, and men. The women in particular tend to focus on careers that address the social ills seen in their communities. They want to be lawyers to address injustice, engineers to rebuild their country, social workers to help people in need, doctors to care for the sick, and teachers to educate the next generation.

The right organizations make a difference to real people in places such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. I have seen firsthand how they work with communities and why their impact is sustainable and that is why I am an enduring supporter of Central Asia Institute. ■

*The views expressed in this article are exclusively those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Central Asia Institute.*



**Christopher D. Kolenda** is the president and CEO of Kolenda Strategic Leadership. Kolenda consults with nonprofit organizations, including Central

Asia Institute, on leadership, strategy, and human security. In that capacity, he is supporting CAI efforts to improve its domestic governance, fundraise, and manage Afghanistan operations. He also is the senior military fellow at King's College London.

Kolenda recently worked as the senior adviser on Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Department of Defense senior leadership, and has served four tours of duty in Afghanistan.

He has written numerous articles on leadership and national security issues for professional journals. His new book "The Counterinsurgency Challenge" serves as an experiential tutorial on adaptive leadership in complex and dangerous combat environments. Kolenda is a long-term friend of CAI. He first contacted Greg Mortenson in 2007 while deployed to Afghanistan. The story of their interactions appears in Mortenson's book "Stones into Schools."

## ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT MAKE EDUCATION POSSIBLE

BY NAZIRA BEGUM



I am from Shamsabad, Ishkomen and am 20 years old. My initial schooling was from my own village in Shamsabad. In 2010, I joined grade nine in the CAI higher secondary school in Immit. I stayed with my grandmother's cousin in Immit, only a 20-minute walk to school.

It was hard being away from home and living with relatives, but somehow I managed it for four years. It is better to be in school than home. The environment was great and I really liked Teacher Zahid who taught English in such an interesting way.

I became engaged in 2012, when I was

18, and I was married when I was 20. Out of 13 girls in my cohort, five were married like myself. They also are still studying like me in Gahkoch and Chator Kand. I am in the bachelor's degree program in education in Gilgit and CAI is funding the cost of my tuition, stay, meals, and transportation.

My sister-in-law takes care of household chores so I can have time for homework. Marriage should not deter girls from going to college. My husband is a teacher himself and encourages me to get an education. I wouldn't be here talking to you otherwise. I am lucky to have his and CAI's support.





Students leave school under a poster showing pictures of landmines at Gumran Girls' Middle School in Afghanistan's Logar Province.

# EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY ACTION: AN ANTIDOTE FOR TERRORISM

BY FARID SENZAI

The work of Central Asia Institute (CAI) to educate girls in some of the most remote parts of the globe remains vitally important, and yet is a daunting task when done in the midst of violence. This especially is true as we witness ongoing attacks against teachers, and students wanting nothing more than to promote and pursue education. The attack against Malala Yousafzai in Pakistan perhaps is the most well-known incident in a series of ongoing acts of violence. These attacks epitomize the seemingly senseless carnage that so often results from the political radicalization of individuals. As the world hears more about, and zeroes in on, such incidents, one often

struggles to make sense of the perpetrators' true motives. But understanding the circumstances and motivations that lead up to such viciousness is key if the work of CAI is to continue in the future.

What motivates an individual to join a terrorist organization or a group? Is it ideology, politics, poverty, or something else? What might be done to de-radicalize an individual who has joined such a group or prevent radicalization in the first place? The reality is that there is no single pathway.

Over the decades, scholars have had much to say about the dynamic processes that lead to violence, the relationship between the individual and the terrorist group, the

role of identity in violent conflicts, the links between religion and politics, and the ideological motivations that support extremism. A logical first step in creating an effective counter-radicalization program requires one first to understand the motivations that often lead to radicalization. Yet few issues have proven more divisive and controversial among experts, both within and outside of government, than trying to identify the reasons that would drive an individual to embrace radical views and then to act upon them in violent ways. Martha Crenshaw's seminal article, "The Causes of Terrorism" on the subject remains one of the most important in the field. In it, she highlights the

difficulty of finding general explanations for terrorism and contends that it is possible to distinguish different types of variables as a starting point for further research on causal relations. Her work differentiates between three groups of variables: strategic, structural, and psychological.

In an effort to increase understanding, let's look more closely at the possible motivations of terrorists.

A brief review of the academic literature suggests a wide range of theories articulated by scholars in hopes of explaining the motivations leading to radicalization and terrorist activity. These can be categorized broadly as sociological motivations and psychological motivations.

### SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS

According to Jeff Victoroff, the sociological factors might include relative deprivation (i.e., poverty), oppression, and/or national culture factors. The first of these sociological theories is what scholars refer to as *deprivation theory*, which suggests that economic disparities and poverty causes terrorism.

More recently, increasing differences between the material welfare of the haves and

have-nots have been postulated to provoke a new era of political violence that will accelerate as globalization not only creates new foci of poverty, but facilitates communication among those who perceive themselves to be the victims of globalization.

A second theory proposed, also within the sociological camp, focuses on the issue of *oppression*, which in their view provokes political violence.

A final theory from the sociological perspective includes what scholars have referred to as the *national and cultural* motivations of terrorism.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS

In contrast to sociological theories that emphasize factors influencing the behavior of an entire group, psychological theories of terrorist behavior primarily emphasize individual factors.

The first of these psychological theories focuses on *identity*. It has been proposed that candidates for terrorism are young people lacking self-esteem who have a strong or even desperate need to consolidate their identities.

A second psychological approach places its attention on what Harvard psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton referred to as *absolutist* or *apocalyptic* theory. In it, he suggests that cults and apocalyptic groups envision mass destruction as a path toward replacing the corrupt world with a pure new social order.

The third psychological theory deals with *humiliation* — and the consequent internal pressure for revenge — and has been hypothesized to drive terrorist violence. Revenge for humiliation by an oppressor is, in fact, an ancient cultural tradition with direct links to the current violence in the Middle East.

A fourth theory on terrorism focuses on *group psychology* within idiosyncratic subcultures that coalesce in reaction to circumstances they perceive as intolerable. For these scholars, membership in a terrorist organization offers disciples a heady liquor of a well-defined personal role, a righteous purpose, the opportunity for revenge for perceived humiliations, and the lifting of constraints on the expression of otherwise prohibited behaviors, all of which free the member from personal responsibility for attacks on out-groups.

### RADICAL JIHADISTS

What do we know and what could be said about radical jihadists? A striking similarity among many radicalized jihadists is how little they actually know about Islam and the Qur'an.

Those who join violent extremist groups rarely have formal training or disciplined religious teaching. In fact, in most cases they have no more than a rudimentary understanding often shaped by online sources or talking to extremists online. Akil Awan, a lecturer in political violence and terrorism at Royal Holloway, University of London, suggests that those drawn to jihadism usually are raised in largely secular households or possess only a rudimentary grasp of Islam that rarely extends to religious practice. Research shows in many cases these would-be jihadists were hardly strict adherents to Islam's major tenets before turning to violence.

Awan points out this crisis of identity often leads minority individuals to a dislocated sense of self, one characterized by alienation from the mainstream and parental cultures. These susceptible youth who succumb to emotional and psychological schizophrenia soon begin to feel a sense of increased isolation, of not belonging to either camp. Their precarious predicament makes the ideas pitched by radical recruiters and preachers of violent extremism — being part of an *ummah* (community) that does not worry about one's race, ethnicity, or place of birth — persuasive and attractive. The prospect of membership, expressed as an opportunity to be on the side of like-minded believers besieged by evil forces, and of being part of a cosmic struggle against the military onslaught of "Western Crusaders" attempting to impose their will on Muslim societies, appeals to many vulnerable youth. And why not, for its worldview and sense of purpose are clear and easy-to-understand. Such perceptions also allow them to respond to the political and economic grievances held by other Muslim groups.

This does not exonerate religion, but as Awan correctly suggests, religious interpretation also is a product of social, economic, and political factors that become translated into solutions for these individuals. In most cases, terrorist actions are motivated by political





concerns that are, perhaps, couched in religious terms to validate their heinous crimes. Religion might provide the motif or stamp of approval for their action, but not for the original motive.

### MOVING FORWARD - EDUCATION, TRAINING, INTERVENTIONS, AND COMMUNITY ACTION

**T**his perversion of Islam into an ideology that allows the wanton killing of innocent people in pursuit of a utopian society needs to be confronted directly. Yet — contrary to what many believe — what is needed is more Islam, not less. It must be the normative, traditional Islam: the Islam that exemplifies centuries of scholarly and theological consensus that neutralizes such perversions. Any other version of Islam is not likely to have credibility among extremists. The consensus is clear: the murder of innocent people under any circumstances is prohibited. This message must be conveyed forcefully and instilled into the minds of vulnerable youth who have fallen for misinterpretations of Islamic scripture.

Muslims are engaging and leading an ideological and theological battle that only reputable and legitimate Muslim scholars can win. And yet this approach cannot unfold if the broader society continues to stigmatize, modernize, and/or secularize these individuals, for such reactions often do more harm than good and usually play right into the jihadi narrative that “outsiders” are attempting to malign and misguide Muslims from “true” Islam. Various types of de-radicalization education programs are in place around the globe, including Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Jordan, Malaysia, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Indonesia.

Governments that are serious about improving public safety by mitigating radicalization and terrorism must encourage this kind of work. This cannot be done if the state continues to alienate Islam, in sociopolitical terms, as a belief system that naturally urges its adherents toward violence and, therefore, somehow must be curbed. Such an antagonistic approach will only backfire.

Appropriately-trained Muslim scholars who represent the authentic Islamic tradition must be empowered to lead this effort

and equipped with ways to allow their voices maximal reach. For example, unstable Yemen’s de-radicalization program, based on the Committee for Religious Dialogue program, features well-established, authentic Muslim scholars who engage with suspected al-Qaida members and sympathizers to discuss basic Islamic concepts. Participating religious figures pay special attention to the concept of jihad to address the misconceptions held by radicalized individuals. This particular program needs a great deal of help in terms of their institutional capacity building and messaging capabilities. Government outreach initiatives need to develop partnerships with the Muslim community that will enable the latter’s leaders to be the first line of defense via community-led interventions. Many Muslim scholars and community leaders can provide professional counseling, counter-radicalization programming, and religious retraining within an authentic religious paradigm.

Community-led interventions should address social alienation. Public and private foundations should fund community centers that foster a sense of belonging through sports and creative arts programs. Mentors who can talk realistically about shared values and non-violent approaches to conflict and disagreements instead of just repeating platitudes should be located and made available.

The Internet remains a problem due to the number of radical websites. A way to debunk these online arguments must be found through engaging local Muslim leaders, imams, and scholars who can produce moderate, counter-radical websites firmly grounded in mainstream Islam. Local community centers and mosques should inform parents of what they can do to prevent their children from falling for the online indoctrination produced by ISIS and other terrorist groups. U.S. leaders also could work with their allies and partners abroad to find ways to shut down those sites that attract susceptible recruits living in the West.

More broadly, the general public needs to be educated about Muslims and Islam. Given the media’s increased attention to home-grown terrorism and the misunderstandings between Muslims and non-Muslims in America, a public, national dialogue needs

to be initiated to counter the misperceptions many have about Muslims. Government officials need to be far more assertive in their effort to organize public forums that address the threat of domestic radicalization along with the differences between radical and mainstream religious tenets of Islam. One major problem associated with such attempts, however, is how to convince the general public that such undertakings are not Muslim propaganda.

Similarly, public and private foundations should provide resources for intra-Muslim discussions and the subsequent implementation of organic, bottom-up counter-radicalization efforts. Also needed are public awareness campaigns against radicalization, such as issuing statements against radical ideologies that breed violence and hatred, and publishing pamphlets and booklets that highlight the Islamic values of religious tolerance, pluralism, gender equality, and social cohesion.

In short, the fight against radicalization must address both the supply and demand side of the equation. Both the West and Muslim communities need to adopt a more comprehensive and inclusive approach that takes account of all these issues in order to address the problems we face. Only then, will we be able to provide an adequate and more realistic response to radicalization. A world without radicalization has more space for peace and education. ■

*The views expressed in this article are exclusively those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Central Asia Institute.*

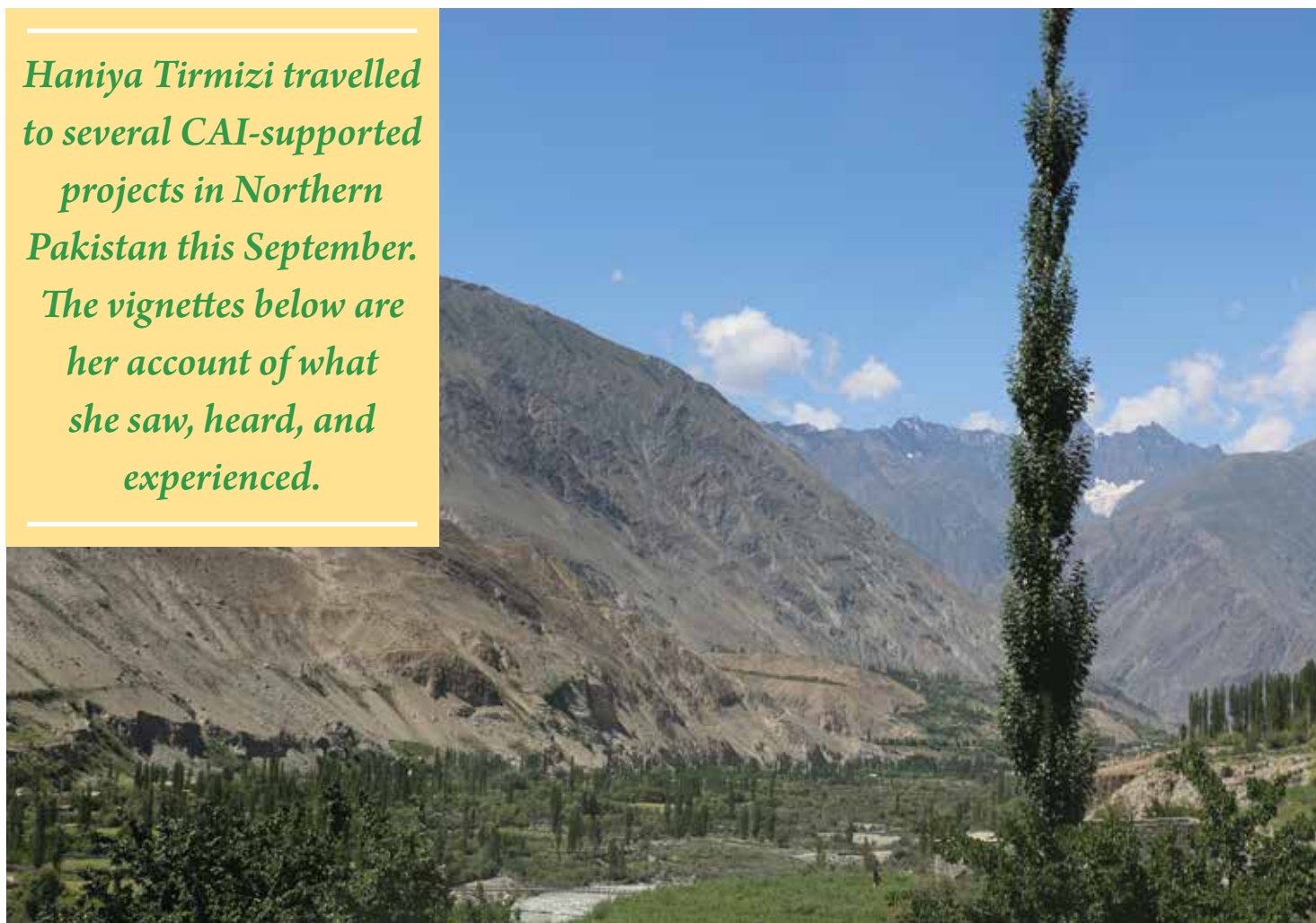


**Farid Senzai** is an associate professor of political science at Santa Clara University where he teaches courses on U.S. foreign policy and Middle East politics. Dr. Senzai was previously the director of research at the Institute for Social

Policy and Understanding where he conducted extensive research projects on American Muslims. He was also a research associate at the Brookings Institution and a research analyst at the Council on Foreign Relations. Dr. Senzai is on the board of advisers at The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and a board member at the Central Asia Institute. His most recent book is “Political Islam in the Age of Democratization” (Palgrave, 2013).



*Haniya Tirmizi travelled to several CAI-supported projects in Northern Pakistan this September. The vignettes below are her account of what she saw, heard, and experienced.*



## A FIELD REPORT FROM PAKISTAN

BY HANIYA TIRMIZI

### THE WINDS OF CHANGE

I nvolved in the educational field for more than 20 years — from teaching English as a second language to development of instructional materials — I was excited by the prospect of taking on a writing assignment for Central Asia Institute (CAI). Yet, as my departure for the northern provinces of Pakistan grew closer, I hesitated. There were so many unknowns: the projects I would visit were a long way off in the mountains, flights were uncertain, patches of road were buried under landslides, and the languages spoken were unfamiliar.

When I stepped out of the plane all my apprehensions and misgivings vanished.

Timeless, arid, and with gigantic mountains surrounding us, the valley we landed in was magnificent. It was a glorious day and the scorching sun did not bother me, even after a long Illinois winter. There was something vaguely familiar about this place. The weather-beaten faces with mongoloid features, green tea, grapevines, climate, rugged terrain, and the pace of life were reminiscent of years I had spent in Turkmenistan in my 20s.

Hard pressed for time, CAI-Gilgit Manager Saidullah Baig and his wife Dilshad Baig who is the women's development program director for CAI-Gilgit, decided we must get to work right away.

The drive along the Ghizer River to the vo-

cational centers was somewhat surreal; the wide river with its grey, river-rock frame is never far away from the road. On day one, we managed to visit two centers in the villages of Gitch and Singul in Ghizer District, located on the main road to the capital, Gahkoch.

Interestingly, the center in Singul had a sign outside with its rather English-sounding name, Hill Bush Quilting House, written phonetically in Urdu.

Both centers were local initiatives, conceived by the community and supported by CAI. Several years ago, word had spread through the villages that CAI's co-founder, Greg Mortenson, was helping nearby communities. When the villagers heard that someone from the organization would be





in the area, they decided to make contact. A group of local women ambushed the manager's vehicle on its way to another project and demanded he support their vocational training program.

This was not part of CAI's mandate at the time; the organization focused primarily on girls' education. However, they convinced the manager to consider the project, arguing education was important for people of all ages.

The driving force behind this endeavor was Paritaoos, a dynamic local lady. With Paritaoos at the helm, the local women had organized themselves to form a community organization (CO), complete with an annual membership fee. It had approximately 120 members and they had been meeting in rented space since 2008. The rented space was expensive and cramped; they needed somewhere better suited that could accommodate all their members.

CAI could not refuse the proposition; it funded the construction of a vocational center building for \$20,000 on land that the CO had acquired already. With the monies promised, CO members got their menfolk to contribute five days of labor each to help construct the building.

This was the beginning of CAI-Gilgit's work with a different kind of education,

one aimed at providing vocational training to women, enabling them to be skilled entrepreneurs.

Once the building was complete, the CO was in need of trainers to teach the local women various crafts: CAI underwrote the cost of two expert trainers from Hunza. CAI lent further support later by providing materials, machines, and some furniture from its sustainability fund. With all of these elements in place, 60 CO members were trained

“Education, integrity, and hard work are the three things that can change a woman's life.”

over a period of six months in 2012 in cutting, sewing, embroidery, and duvet making. One year later, 20 master trainers were selected out of the original group that had been trained, and they were elected to teach another group of sixty women.

The CO secretary, Jehan, spoke of how CAI continued to help and guide the women, showing them how to expand their clientele beyond the limited local market. Women from the CO were taken to Islamabad and shown how to expand their sales by setting up stalls at several expositions and festivals.

“We knew nothing at that time, but this year we had no trouble in managing our sales in cities further south. You know, we went all by ourselves,” Jehan said, beaming. She is a petite girl from the mountains in the north, thrilled to be experiencing the grind of city life on her own. But her biggest thrill comes from being able to help provide for her family.

Even if some women choose not to sell their crafts at market, they save money by





stitching clothes at home for their families, and keeping them warm with their hand-made duvets during the brutal winter.

“We cannot thank CAI enough for eradicating poverty that the whole village was trapped in,” said Jehan. “Education, integrity, and hard work are the three things that can change a woman’s life.”

## BEAUTY IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

I opened the door to one of the rooms in the second vocational training center and found myself in a small beauty salon. Basic, with only a mirror, one chair, and a long table covered in beauty products bought in Gilgit, the space was still one where women would want to spend time gossiping and being pampered.

Adorning the walls were two bridal outfits — one red and one gold — displayed for the purpose of renting. Pictures of elaborate henna patterns were pasted on the walls. For weddings or special occasions, women often will stain their skin — typically hands, arms, and feet — with the dye. Squeezed out of bags or little tubes like cake frosting, the brownish plant purée is then left to dry on the skin. The longer it is left on the darker the design.

A price list tacked to the wall revealed an impressive range of services including pedicures, facials, makeup application, and haircuts.

The salon belongs to Rasheela, a vocational center trainee who had taken beautician courses in the provincial capital of Gilgit, and was renting the space for her business. She is a 22-year-old high school graduate who chose to open the first-ever salon in her village. Since her father’s death, she has been helping support her family with what little money she brought in from the salon. She said she mostly was satisfied with what she made during the wedding season, which usually picks up right after the summer harvest. Without this extra income, her brother would have been the sole breadwinner for a family of seven.

Rasheela received her training through an apprenticeship at a beauty salon in the provincial capital, Gilgit. She lived there for a year, taking courses and learning on the



job. When she returned home, finding a safe, public space for her trade wasn’t easy. However, the vocational center opened, and suddenly she had an ideal location.

I had the pleasure of visiting only two of 21 such vocational centers supported by CAI in the districts of Ghizar and Hunza.

The centers serve as public spaces for families and women to meet. They are safe havens where advice is sought and given, gossip exchanged, and many happy and productive hours are spent. They add value to hundreds of lives.

It is in these spaces that women emulate progressive changes they see in other women’s lives, such as sending girls to school and practicing better hygiene. According to rough estimates from project managers, barely five percent of people over age 40 in these villages are literate, compared to a 95 percent literacy rates for members under the age of 21. Communities today are cognizant of the value of education and don’t want poverty to hold them back. The winds of change are sweeping these remote communities.

## CAI BEGINS WHERE THE ROAD ENDS

As our jeep moved on shifting dirt tracks up the mountainside, the gravel and stones beneath gave way. Where bridges disappeared, we drove over rocky streambeds to reach the villages where CAI had set up schools.

We drove over old suspension bridges

that creaked with the weight of the vehicle and swayed with the wind. On this trip, we were to visit five schools supported at various levels by CAI: all located off the beaten track.

In the village of Chator Khand, we drove past a construction site of a government school that had started in 2009, the same time that the first CAI school we were visiting was built. While the CAI school was fully functional, the government school construction was still incomplete. It was a reminder to me of just how difficult it can be to build in these remote areas, with weather, funding, and labor all factors that can delay even the best of projects.

The ethnic diversity of this federally-administrated area is striking. Four main languages are spoken, none of which have a script. The official language is Urdu, which can be seen in the graffiti written on the boulders and rocks by the road. The language changes from one village to the next and there are numerous multi-ethnic villages as well.

## GOING TO SCHOOL IN HEART’S LOVE VALLEY

The collection of our identification cards at an army checkpoint before the village of Tashnaluk was a reminder of our close proximity to the Afghan border. We were allowed to continue on our way without any trouble.

Tashnaluk is situated in a beautiful valley. However, the romantic name of the valley,





Ishkomen (which translates to “heart’s love”), contrasted with the poverty of its people. Still, despite their poverty, there were two primary schools in the valley.

The first school, Tameer-e-Millet primary school, got its name from a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that supported the school after a visiting engineer constructed it several years earlier.

By 2010, the school closed down; CAI intervened and adopted it in 2011. Renovations included adding washrooms, a boundary wall, and an office for the teachers. The finishing touch was the gift of uniforms and school supplies.

In trying to explain the past failure of the school, a village elder named Mayo Khan, pointed to poverty as the primary reason it was abandoned. It was difficult to lure teachers from more developed places to stay in the village of Tashnaluk. Additionally, some parents had misgivings about an outside organization educating their children. Consequently, enrollment had been very

low when the school first reopened.

In response, CAI asked a local religious cleric to encourage families to send their children to school. The plan was a success. Now the school has two full-time teachers, enrollment is up, and classes go up to the third grade. The teachers have been given training in early childhood development techniques, and students struggling with language courses learn basic phonics to improve their proficiency. A committee has even been formed in the village to run the school in order to engage parents as stakeholders.

It was heart-warming to see that all 50 households in the village now are willing to send their girls to school. The CAI-Gilgit manager, Saidullah Baig, is hopeful that these local schools will generate the next generation of local teachers, thus ensuring the school’s future.

## MAJAWEER LEADS THE WAY

**T**he next stop on our expedition was to the CAI Middle School in Majaweer. This school was built from the ground up by men from the 60 households in the village, as are all CAI-constructed schools. Today, they own it with pride.

This school had a small fee of 350 rupees (US \$3.50) per month. For some of the reluctant parents, the fee initially was waived to encourage them to send their children to class. Over time the situation has changed. With children spending productive and happy hours in school, even these financially hard-pressed parents are now willing to keep the children in school without the subsidy.

This past summer, staff received training in Gilgit from qualified trainers associated with Aga Khan Education Services. Ayesha Bibi, one of the teachers, felt it made a huge difference in her teaching style.

“I am basically a math and science teacher who also has

to teach social studies and English,” she explained. “It’s with the latter that I feel uncomfortable. I went for a ten-day training in Gilgit organized by CAI. There were 61 other teachers and I got a chance to meet new people.”

“I learned new methodologies for listening, speaking skills, and activity-based learning,” she went on to say. “It was all new. Before, I found the duration of the lessons too long and hard to fill. There was always spare time left, but now I finish on time. Earlier, I did most of the talking myself, but now I give the students a chance to practice speaking.”

It is not just the teachers who are happy with the way things have progressed. Juldush Khan, chairman of the school committee, spoke emotionally: “We wish CAI success. Thank you for thinking about our future. We had no school system before. Our students take interest in studies now. We thank first Allah and then CAI for changing our lives and caring for our well-being.”

The students are thriving. Nowadays, girls out-number and out-perform boys at the middle school. But one did not need statistics to see how the school was doing: the glowing faces of the girls and boys tell the whole story. It was clear to anyone who looked that the community was completely invested in the education of their children and they were doing everything in their power to further improve the quality of education in the village. Apparently, they had already bought land and were planning an expansion for the school. Communities like this should be an example to us all. If only everyone cared this much about their children’s future, the world would be a better place. ■

*The views expressed in this article are exclusively those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Central Asia Institute.*



**Haniya Tirmizi** has more than 20 years of experience as an educator, involved in ESL instruction, English language testing, and material development. She has undertaken freelance consultancies

with the U.N. Development Programme, and national and international nongovernmental organizations.

# CONSTRUCTION COMPLETE:

Rukut is a small village on the Yarkhun River. Approximately 20 families call it home. Located a short distance from the Afghanistan border in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, the village is remote to say the least.



A featured project of CAI's 2015 Spring Capital Campaign, funds were collected to build a permanent school in the village. Construction began in May on land donated by the community.



CAI purchased and delivered materials, such as wood and concrete, while villagers collected gravel and stone from the nearby river. The community came together to provide unskilled labor to assist the skilled laborers brought in by CAI.



The building was completed in September, ahead of the cold weather. The school boasts four classrooms, one office, two toilets, and a boundary wall.



Previously there had been only one teacher, Mr. Essa Khan. After teaching in two other CAI-supported schools north of Rukut, Khan is happy now to be working in his home village.



# RUKUT CLASSES MOVE INSIDE AHEAD OF WINTER



This year the school will get an additional teacher and add class two – the school already offers class one and an early childhood development program. Thirty-eight students are currently enrolled, up from the 27 students last year.

Students and parents are excited about the new school. They have a celebration planned for the spring when the weather is nice, a delayed grand opening.



Saidullah Baig, the regional project manager, says the community's next step is to secure teacher training for the instructors. An additional teacher would be welcome, as well. They are keen to increase the number of classes offered at the school.



CENTRAL  
ASIA  
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# HER: HOPE. EDUCATE. RISE.

## Inspire Change

BY LAURA BRIN



Hope . Educate . Rise .



**W**e are proud to announce a new Central Asia Institute initiative: an innovative, engaging way for you to get involved and help us fulfill our mission, promoting peace through education.

HER participants raise awareness and funds by doing creative, personalized fundraisers. Every cent donated through

the HER program—100 percent of what supporters like you raise—will go toward CAI education programs overseas. Your generous support will build schools, subsidize scholarships, train and pay good teachers, create and sustain women's vocational and literacy centers, and support other vital community programs.

**This is much more than a program — this is a movement.**

The more people who know how important women's and girls' education in Central Asia is, the more women and girls can be educated in the remote areas of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan.

Education can change their lives forever. The more women and girls who are able to earn an education and improve their communities, the closer we are to achieving peace.



By hosting a dinner party, asking for donations instead of birthday gifts, or running a marathon, you'll let your family and friends know about the importance of women's and girls' education, especially in these often overlooked areas. You will be the voice for those women and girls overseas who can't be here to represent themselves. Even though they are thousands of miles away, you and your loved ones can transform their lives for the better.

This holiday season, consider adding HER to your gift list and Celebrate for HER! It's not a trendy trinket or a big-screen TV; it's a gift that will matter and make a lasting difference. All donations made by December 31 are fully tax-deductible for 2015.

As a token of our appreciation, if you become a founding member, we are offering you an exclusive HER journal.

Drop by drop, a river is formed. Those words are ancient — a proverb

passed down through the generations in Afghanistan — but they're still true today.

Every action you take, every little bit you do to help, every time you choose to do something for HER, you'll be making an impact in the real lives of women and girls in Central Asia. You'll be adding one drop, and together, just like in the proverb explains, we can build a mighty river that will transform and enrich life across Central Asia.



If you're interested in starting something for HER to make an impact within your community and in Central Asia, please visit [www.forHER.org](http://www.forHER.org) or send an email to [info@forHER.org](mailto:info@forHER.org).



**Laura Brin** development manager for CAI, has been dedicated to the organization and its mission of peace through education for more than three years. Originally from Denver, Colorado, Brin earned

her bachelor's degree in sociology from Pitzer College, a member of the Claremont Colleges in Claremont, CA. Prior to joining the CAI team she worked for a Montana non-profit called Aware, Inc. and now serves on the board of directors for another local organization, BridgerCare.





# A WALK IN THEIR SHOES

BY N.H. SENZAI

*“You never really know a man until you understand things from his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”*



This quote is from one of my favorite books, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee. In this passage, Atticus Finch, a southern lawyer, is giving his daughter, Scout, a crucial piece of advice that guides her development through the novel — to live with sympathy and understanding toward others. The lines have always struck a chord with me and are a variation of a proverb from the Cherokee Nation, “*Don’t judge a man until you have walked a mile in his shoes.*” It beautifully evokes the sentiment of how you cannot truly empathize with the plight of others without experiencing the life they live.

As a writer I know that a way to walk in someone else’s shoes, so to speak, and experience the trials and tribulations of another’s life, is through literature. Through the pages of a book a reader can crawl in to the skin of an orphan in mid-century London wanting more porridge, a refugee fleeing Afghanistan, or a professor on the track of an elusive code through Paris. Through the pages of a book a reader journeys in the footsteps of the characters, vicariously experiencing their plight and emotions. Nowhere is this truer than in the literature for children, since stories play a huge part in a child’s social and emotional development.

Reading allows children to look into a window of another world — it sparks their imagination and expands their horizons. A tale that brings them into the life of someone else provokes curiosity and allows them to experience an unknown culture, time, and land. Literature triggers questions, the opportunity to research and discuss findings. It is especially useful to use stories when talking to children about challenging and difficult issues. Thus, reading about characters that may be different from themselves, but who they can empathize with and find commonalities, is priceless. Teachers, librarians, and educators are using a wide variety of books to promote mutual understanding across racial, cultural, religious, political, and geographical divides. As young people learn more about the challenges faced by children around the world, they become sympathetic and, in turn, become agents of change.

A critical, global issue that many writers are addressing is the access to education. For kids in the United States it’s a concept that’s a bit foreign to them since they’ve never questioned the possibility of not attending school. Many would love to play hooky, but it’s not an option. And many don’t connect the necessity of attaining an education for

future success in life. For a child living in the United States, education, for the most part, is easily accessible. There is no question that a child will not go to school, either public or private. As of 2001 there were 92,858 elementary schools (68,173 public, 24,685 private) and according to the National Center for Education Statistics, in the fall of 2009 almost 3.5 million students attended public primary schools

So how would a child living in Chicago, Atlanta, or San Francisco be aware of the fact that children in developing countries are not so privileged? They probably have not read the 2012 UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report that shows 61 million children, the majority girls, are out of school. Worldwide, girls constitute over half of the children out of school and only 30 percent of all girls are enrolled in secondary school. In many countries, less than one third of university students are women. The average sub-Saharan African girl from a low-income, rural household gets less than two years of schooling and never learns to read and write, to add and subtract. Many are not aware that the path out of poverty is education — it literally transforms lives for generations. How do we bring awareness about these children? Have





them walk in their shoes through the pages of books. The books below offer a glimpse into the lives of children striving to fulfill their dreams of attaining an education. Walking in their footsteps other children can learn a great deal, and provide a helping hand.

### *Nasreen's Secret*

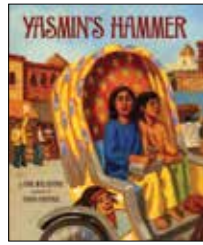
**"Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan", by Jeanette Winter (Ages 8+)**

When Nasreen's parents are removed from their home by the Taliban soldiers, her life is turned upside down. Because they forbid girls to get an education, a neighbor opens a secret school for girls. Based on a true story, and set in contemporary times, this story highlights the struggle for freedom that some children face today.

### **Beatrice's Goat**

**"Beatrice's Goat", by Page McBrier (Ages 4-9)**

In a small Ugandan village, a little girl desperately wants to go to school. When a fat, new goat is given to their family, they have milk to drink and sell, and later sell one of the goat's kids. Soon the family has enough money to send the children to school and build a stronger house. Based on a true story of a family who received a goat from Heifer International, this story is a heart-warming reminder that not everyone has equal access to education.



**"Yasmin's Hammer", by Ann Malaspina 2010. (Grades 1-5)**

Yasmin and her sister spend their days working hard in the brickyards to help make money for their family. Yasmin dreams of going to school so that she can have a better life ("... I don't want to sweep a rich lady's floor"), and decides to take action herself to help her dream come true.

### **Ruby's Wish**

**"Ruby's Wish", by Shirin Yim Bridges (Ages 4-8)**

Set at the turn of the century in China, little Ruby has an unthinkable dream: she is determined to attend university when she grows up, just like the boys in her family. The last page of the book reveals that it is based on the true story of the author's grandmother, with a photograph of her at university. I was incredibly moved by this story, and believe the age level should be age 4 through adult!

### **THE RED PENCIL**

**"The Red Pencil", by Andrea Davis Pinkney (Ages 9 and up)**

Twelve-year-old Amira has a wonderful life in a small farming village in Darfur, Sudan.

The poems give us glimpses of her life, their traditions, her chores, and a dust storm that passes through. One day the *Janjaweed*, "evil men on horseback," attack and her family has to flee, ultimately living in a refugee camp. The second part of the book describes her new life in the refugee camp and her journey toward healing. A relief worker gives Amira a red pencil, which helps her work towards recovery and keeps her dream alive that one day she'll be able to go to school.

### *I Am Malala*

**"I Am Malala", by Malala Yousafzai with Patricia McCormick, Little, Brown Books for Young Readers (Ages 10 and up)**

Malala Yousafzai was only ten years old when the Taliban took control of her region. They said music was a crime. They said women weren't allowed to go to the market. They said girls couldn't go to school. Raised in a once-peaceful area of Pakistan transformed by terrorism, Malala was taught to stand up for what she believes. So she fought for her right to be educated. And on October 9, 2012, she nearly lost her life for the cause: She was shot point-blank while riding the bus on her way home from school. Now Malala is an international symbol of peaceful protest and the youngest-ever Nobel Peace Prize winner. In this Young Readers Edition of her bestselling memoir, which has been reimagined specifically for a younger audience and includes exclusive photos and material, we hear firsthand the remarkable story of a girl who knew from a young age that she wanted to change the world — and did. 📖

The views expressed in this article are exclusively those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Central Asia Institute.



**N.H. Senzai** is the author of "Shooting Kabul", which was critically acclaimed and on numerous award lists. Publishers Weekly called it "hard hitting, emotionally wrenching." Her second

book, "Saving Kabul Corner", was nominated for an Edgar Award. Her third novel, "Ticket To India", a contemporary novel about the Great Partition, will be released in November 2015.



## Ways you can help:

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### Get involved:

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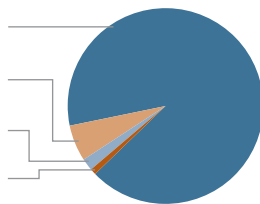
CAI is a registered nonprofit organization  
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## ANNUAL SPENDING (FY 2014)

Global outreach program .....	\$521,940 .....	5.6%
Overseas education .....	\$7,422,084 .....	79.2%
<b>Total Programs .....</b>	<b>\$7,944,024 .....</b>	<b>84.8%</b>
General and administrative expense .....	\$1,137,072 .....	12.1%
Fundraising expense .....	\$286,025 .....	3.1%
<b>Total Expenses .....</b>	<b>\$9,367,121 .....</b>	<b>100%</b>

## DONORS

■ Individuals .....	91%
■ Organizations .....	6%
■ Corporate .....	2%
■ Foundations/grants .....	1%



## Why it matters

Until children, especially girls, are educated, societies won't change. Education is the antidote for ignorance, poverty, and war.

- More than 569 million women and girls worldwide are illiterate.
- A woman's earnings will be 10-20% higher for every year of school she completes.
- The child of a literate mother has a 50% greater chance of surviving past age 5.
- Children with educated mothers are 50% more likely to go to school.
- Of 57 million children of primary school age who aren't in school, 31 million are girls.





## SHARING IS CARING

**Y**ou have probably heard the age-old adage, sharing is caring. This saying is very true for many of the communities we serve in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan where storytelling is an essential part of the culture. When stories are shared acquaintances become friends, friends become family, and families become stronger.

In this publication we have shared the stories of the people we serve with you. By reading them you, advertently or inadvertently, have become part of our extended family. We have shared, you have cared.

If you find joy in these stories and value in the work that we do, please consider supporting CAI with a one-time gift or a recurring monthly donation. Even the smallest gesture of kindness can have a big impact.

From our family to yours, thank you.

## KIND WORDS FROM FRIENDS:



*It is a great joy to contribute my small amount to help with the valuable work we are doing together. You have my thanks for all that you do!*

— Priscilla Mustin, monthly donor (2009-present)



*I am [an] 18 year old teenager [from] Swabi, Pakistan. The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit are sweet. I want to help too. I want to be useful to my country. I want to do something for the development of my beautiful homeland. Thanks for showing me the right path.*

— Khaula, supporter (2014-present)

## CENTRAL ASIA INSTITUTE PROJECTS INITIATED



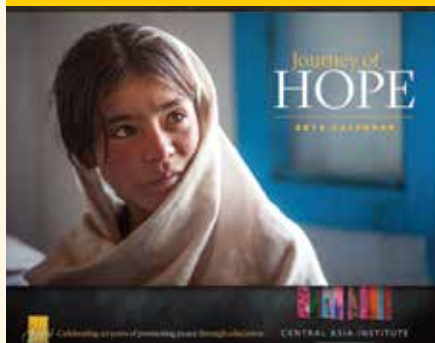
CAI PROJECTS BY COUNTRY	Afghanistan	Pakistan	Tajikistan	TOTAL
Schools built *	93	92	4	189
Schools supported **	64	55	1	120
Vocational and literacy programs	30	35	0	65
Community programs	5	10	0	14
Public health programs	7	28	2	37
Scholarship programs	5	5	1	11
Teacher support programs	2	10	2	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>451</b>

**Note:** This information is current as of October 2015. Please visit our website [centralasiainstitute.org](http://centralasiainstitute.org) for the most up-to-date information.

Schools built\* – CAI provided funds to build new schools or improve existing structures with a partial expansion. In most cases, CAI also provides additional ongoing support to these schools.

Schools supported\*\* – CAI did not provide funds to build the school, but provided funds for school supplies, uniforms, equipment, repairs, maintenance, boundary walls, or other support.

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*I would like to thank everyone who made this year's Journey of Hope possible — our consultants, advisors, contributors, staff, international partners, and volunteers.*  
– Jim Thaden, Executive Director

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