

IMPACT



**Championing
Equality and Justice** | page 6



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Affordable High-Quality Healthcare** | page 9



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Inclusive Education for Lasting Change** | page 10



**THE SPARK
OF HOPE**
FOUNDATION

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Message from The Chair & CEO



We are thrilled to have celebrated our 10-year anniversary in 2024. A key factor in our progress has been the leadership and insight of our Directors, and we convey our heartfelt gratitude to Tanneke Heersche for her long tenure as a Director and her pivotal role in guiding many initiatives. She will be greatly missed, as will Cassandra Dorrington. We wish them the very best. At the same time, we are delighted to welcome Adela Mall and Anaar Dhanji as Directors for three-year terms.

To mark our 10th anniversary, we hosted Awareness & Appreciation Events in Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver. These gatherings provided an opportunity to hear from alumnae about the scholarship's impact on their lives and the change they are driving in their communities. The Foundation's mission, achievements, and future goals were shared with attendees. Donors were also able to speak about their continued passionate support for our work. We are grateful to our Board Directors, donor hosts, donors and participants for their thoughtful observations and look forward to continuing these events in 2025.

Since 2014, we have grown at five times the pace originally envisioned, awarding 273 scholarships by the end of 2024. Our 190 alumnae make us proud, using their education, leadership, and confidence to transform some of the world's most vulnerable and isolated communities. In this issue of *IMPACT*, we highlight some of their inspiring journeys, including Tahira Ali's story on Page 10—one of our very early scholarship recipients.

We are thrilled to celebrate the graduation of 23 scholars in 2024 and extend our warmest congratulations to them. We also admire our 66 current scholars, including 27 welcomed this year, six of whom the Foundation is supporting through a second degree.

In 2025, we are embarking on a strategic review with volunteer external consultants to explore sustainable funding strategies and expand our support for women leaders. Our dream is to double the number of students we serve each year—an ambition only possible with the continued generosity of our partners and donors, as well as new support. We look forward to deepening our impact together in the decade ahead.

We'd love to hear your thoughts on this issue of *IMPACT*.

Cora Di Pietro
Chair, Board of Directors

Narmin K. Ismail, MBA, M.S.M.
Founder and CEO

KEY NUMBERS

⇒ **273** Scholarships
(66 current students)

⇒ **88** Scholarships
at the Master's level

⇒ **66** Students in
S.T.E.M. fields
(Science, Technology, Engineering and Math)

⇒ **53** Students pursuing
Medical studies

⇒ **13** PhD Students:
International Public Law; International Monetary and Financial Law; Mobility
and Transport; Forestry Sciences; Social Forestry; Wood Sciences;
Educational Studies; Hepatology; and Electrical & Computer Engineering.

⇒ **75** Institutions
attended globally

⇒ **34** Countries of origin:
Afghanistan, Argentina, Benin, Brazil, Cameroon, Chile, Colombia,
Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Iran, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kosovo,
Kyrgyz Republic, Lebanon, Liberia, Madagascar, Mexico, Nepal,
Nicaragua, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, South Africa, Syria, Tajikistan,
Tanzania, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

⇒ **5X**

Multiplier effect
for every donor
dollar contributed,
thanks to the
generosity of our
partners

OUR ALUMNAE

Where are they now?



“ I want to incorporate environmental preservation and intergenerational equity into economic analyses. ”

Mohrukh Talabkhuja | Tajikistan

BA, Global Economics
University of Central Asia
Tajikistan

MSc, Agricultural and Resource Economics
University of Alberta
Canada

In my academic journey, I learned about the finite nature of natural resources and critical need for nations to diversify their economic foundations. We need to grasp the future risks associated with the depletion of non-renewable resources, which led me to focus on incorporating environmental preservation and intergenerational equity into economic analyses. I want to research areas of mindful management of depletable natural and renewable resources, and address agricultural and water issues in remote regions.

I believe that my homeland, Tajikistan, which relies primarily on hydroelectric power, needs to diversify its renewable energy sources to be better prepared for different future scenarios. This need is underscored by the fact that Tajikistan is a largely mountainous region, making it susceptible to hazardous incidents.

As I examined the environmental challenges faced by my region, I began to realize that I can use my Economics background to tackle

environmental resource problems faced by remote areas. In my grandmother's village, I experienced how my relatives purchased water from water delivery trucks to fill their wells. As this water often remains stagnant for extended periods of time, it poses significant health risks. Similarly, the absence of sustainable irrigation systems decreases crop yield or at times can risk crop failure due to unavailability of water, further worsening local peoples' livelihood. I want to develop expertise and learn techniques that will help deal with these challenges.

I plan to explore the role of environmental resources in diverse economic contexts and identify ways for sustainable resource management to find optimal solutions to the issues that underprivileged communities face. Given my strong research interests in the complex and interconnected dynamics of economics and natural resources, I am confident that I will be able to make a positive impact at both the local and global levels as a future expert in the field of environmental economics.



“ I hope to have a transformative impact on education in my country by improving teacher training, assessment systems, and curriculum development. ”

Afshan Nasir | Pakistan

Master of Education

Aga Khan University - Institute for Educational Development
Pakistan

My Master of Education (M.Ed.) degree has enhanced my knowledge, skills, and confidence, enabling me to contribute meaningfully to the education sector in Gilgit-Baltistan. It has not only helped me secure a respected position in my field but has also served as a source of inspiration for my family and community. My role has allowed me to interact with educators and students, influencing teaching practices and promoting a culture of critical thinking and innovation.

After completing my MEd program, I became an Instructor at the College of Education for Women, Gilgit. For two years, I taught degree programs, mentoring and inspiring young female students by sharing knowledge and fostering their skills. Additionally, I had the privilege of presenting my research, conducted with students, at both a National Conference and the TESOL International Convention and English Language Expo 2023 held in Portland, Oregon, USA, in March 2023.

I am currently an English Language Subject Expert at the Board of Elementary Examination, Gilgit-Baltistan. My responsibilities include preparing Student Learning Outcomes-based documents, creating an

item bank, reviewing and developing examination papers for the entire region, and training public sector teachers. I am also actively involved in national-level projects, such as reviewing the Climate Change Curriculum and contributing to the Education Policy Framework 2024.

In ten years, I see myself as a leading educationist, dedicated to transforming the educational landscape of my region, with a particular focus on nurturing youth in public sector schools. To achieve this, I am actively pursuing opportunities for higher education and planning to undertake a PhD in Education from a prestigious international university. This advanced degree will enhance my expertise and professional skills, enabling me to make a more profound impact on the education system and empower future generations.

I hope to have a transformative impact on education in under-developed areas in my country, particularly by improving teacher training, assessment systems, and curriculum development. By focusing on equitable education opportunities, I aim to empower communities, reduce inequalities, and foster sustainable development.

OUR ALUMNAE

Where are they now?

“ I aim to rewrite the narrative that society has dictated for women. She can be a daughter, a wife, a lawyer, a doctor, or seamlessly carry multiple roles at once. The range of possibilities and their combinations is as vast as our imaginations. ”

Dessy Tampi | Indonesia
LLM, International Business Law
University of Lausanne
Switzerland



My journey is a testament to the power of resilience and the impact of determined role models. My mother, a single parent who sacrificed her own dreams to ensure my brother and I received the best education, served as my earliest source of inspiration. Despite being unable to complete her law degree due to societal expectations to marry and care for her family, my mother instilled in me the importance of education and the courage to pursue one's passions.

Determined to address the injustices I've witnessed, particularly regarding gender inequality, I chose to study law. My education equipped me with the tools to challenge societal norms and advocate for those who lack a voice. Today, as a partner at Avya Law Firm, I lead the Innovation & Technology Group, where I handle a variety of general business and complex litigation cases. My work includes representing clients from recent protests, epitomizing my dedication to fighting for those who cannot fight for themselves.

The pro-bono work I engage in, particularly in human rights, education, and environmental conservation, is what I find most rewarding.

I attribute my position at the firm, and my ability to champion these causes, to the education I received and the support of The Spark of Hope Foundation. This support was instrumental in my academic success and professional growth.

Reflecting on my time in Switzerland, I cherish the diverse cultural exchange and friendships formed with individuals from around the globe. These connections have inspired my dream of creating an expansive network of international lawyers to collaboratively tackle global legal challenges. My experience also broadened my perspective on environmental sustainability, particularly in waste management practices, which I hope to implement in my home country of Indonesia.

Equipped with my education and inspired by my mother's sacrifices, I am committed to returning the favor to those treated unjustly. I aspire to fulfill my mother's dream and continue to pave the way for women and marginalized communities, ensuring they not only dream, but also achieve. My story embodies the mission to redefine societal roles and champion equality and justice at every opportunity.



“ I envision myself leading efforts in international health, working to create equitable and sustainable healthcare systems worldwide. ”

Aamal Alshihawi | Syria

BSc, Public Health
Asian University for Women
Bangladesh

My education has been transformative, not only for me but also for my family and community. It has provided me with the knowledge and skills to pursue meaningful roles that align with my passions in public health and education. These opportunities have allowed me to support my family and serve as a mentor and inspiration to others in my community.

After earning my undergraduate degree in public health, I returned to Syria and continued my part-time role with the Dr. Myatt Academy of Learning. I also began volunteering with the Aga Khan Health Services as a Community Health Volunteer, where I supported initiatives to improve local health outcomes. Additionally, I completed an online internship with Klarity, a UK-based organization, as a startup health article writer. These experiences laid the foundation for my career, and I later secured a position with the Aga Khan Health Services Syria in the Health System Strengthening Department. Through these roles, I have been able to build valuable expertise in public health and contribute meaningfully to my community.

In my current role in Salamieh, Syria, I conduct regular public health situation analyses to monitor health indicators in the region, lead the development of capacity-building programs for health workers, and collaborate with local health authorities to design and implement effective health interventions.

As someone deeply committed to continuous learning, I am also taking an online course in Dietary Assessment to further enhance my expertise in public health and nutrition.

I want to lead efforts in international health, working to create equitable and sustainable healthcare systems worldwide. The impact I want to make revolves around improving health equity and access to quality care. I aim to develop sustainable programs that address key public health challenges, such as reducing preventable diseases, improving maternal and child health, and ensuring access to essential healthcare services, especially in underserved communities. I also want to help design evidence-based policies and innovative interventions that empower individuals and communities to lead healthier lives. My ultimate goal is to play a role in shaping a world where everyone, regardless of their location or circumstances, has the opportunity to live a healthy and fulfilling life.



Current scholars with **BIG** ambitions

“My mission to create a more sustainable and equitable world remains unwavering. I aim to enhance the effectiveness of women’s movements in addressing climate justice issues and amplifying the influence of marginalized women in political and governance processes. I strive to be a catalyst for positive change, starting from my home in Hunza and extending to the global stage.”

Nitasha | **Pakistan**

BSc, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Central Asia
Tajikistan

MSc, Sustainability, Tufts University
USA



“I believe that the constant development and adaptation of regulation is the key to continuing to advance in such important matters as gender equality, the protection of the environment, and the progress of innovation and artificial intelligence.”

Nadia Jara Astudillo | Chile

LLM, International Business Law, University of Lausanne
Switzerland

“With my medical degree, I hope to be able to give back to Lebanese and Palestinian communities and offer them safe and affordable high-quality healthcare.”

Zeina Chehadeh | Palestine

MD, American University of Beirut
Lebanon



“I want to create business opportunities for indigenous youth in my country, focusing on entrepreneurial necessities such as access to funding, accelerators, and incubators for business development.”

Yosumin Qurbonbekova | Tajikistan

Master of Public Affairs, Brown University
United States

“I want to tell the stories of the underrepresented so that the voices of marginalized people can be heard.”

Madina Salieva | Kyrgyz Republic

BA, Journalism and Mass Communication, American University of Central Asia
Kyrgyz Republic



LETTER FROM A SCHOLAR

Fostering inclusive education to create lasting positive change

Tahira Ali | Pakistan

Master of Education, Educational Leadership and Management
Aga Khan University - Institute for Educational Development
Pakistan



Dear Spark of Hope Foundation,

My journey highlights the transformative power of education and the unwavering support provided by The Spark of Hope Foundation.

This scholarship was my lifeline during a critical period, allowing me to pursue my dreams at AKU-IED. As a widow raising three beautiful daughters, my education became a vehicle not only for personal empowerment but also for inspiring my children to pursue their dreams.

This opportunity catalyzed my growth, allowing me to explore the area of inclusive education—a field that would become pivotal in my career. Today, I am proud to lead the Mehnaz Fatima Foundation (MFF) in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, as its Chief Executive Officer.

My journey from being a teacher to becoming a Vice Principal, Principal, and now CEO, reflects the depth of impact my education has had.

MFF is unique in its dual focus—providing inclusive education and therapeutic services to children with special needs, distinguishing itself across the region and the nation.

The M.Ed. program endowed me with vital knowledge and leadership skills, dramatically enhancing my ability to effect positive change in the education sector. This educational foundation laid the groundwork for significant organizational advancements at MFF.

Looking forward, I aim to pursue a PhD at a respected international institution, to deepen my expertise and expand MFF's reach. My vision includes empowering children with special needs through tailored education and skill development, fostering their independence and societal contribution.

The Spark of Hope Foundation scholarship played an indispensable role in my educational journey. I express profound gratitude and hope for continued support to achieve my academic and professional goals. This would enable me to further MFF's mission and create lasting positive change in my community and region.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Fatimah Ahmad | Palestine

BS, Nursing, Lebanese American University

Lebanon



How has this scholarship helped you further your education?

Receiving the scholarship was more than just financial relief. It was a lifeline that made it possible to attend the Lebanese American University. The scholarship was a golden opportunity that allowed me to pursue my education, achieve my dreams, and reach my goal of becoming a healthcare professional.

How has your education helped you?

Completing my education and earning a degree provided me with the confidence and skills essential for pursuing opportunities that align with my goal of supporting my family. It has been instrumental in expanding my knowledge and capabilities, setting a foundation for a fulfilling career in the future.

Why did you choose to study nursing?

My passion for nursing was born from a childhood dream. I chose nursing for its humanitarian essence—embodying care, respect, and love for humanity.

What are you doing right now?

Before the war in Lebanon, I worked in a dispensary as a Registered Nurse. Since moving with my family to a safer area, I am actively looking for new employment opportunities. This period has provided me with a valuable opportunity to reflect on my career goals and seek out roles that will allow me to make a meaningful impact in healthcare.

Where do you see yourself in ten years?

I envision myself as a successful and empowering nurse in my community, having obtained my master's degree and continuing my education to stay up-to-date in the field. I aspire to take on a leadership role in healthcare, where I can mentor and inspire the next generation of nurses. I hope to implement innovative healthcare solutions and community outreach programs that address local health challenges.

What impact do you hope to make on your community, country and the world?

Leaving a positive impact is vital. As a nurse in my community, I aim to make a significant difference by helping people, saving lives, and providing support and hope. This positive influence will leave an enduring and meaningful impact on the community. My goal is to contribute to shaping a more resilient and accessible healthcare system, making a lasting impact both regionally and beyond.

INSTITUTIONS attended

BANGLADESH

Asian University for Women
BRAC University
MAG Osmania Medical College
Sylhet

BELGIUM

University of Antwerp

BENIN

African School of Economics

BULGARIA

American University in Bulgaria

CANADA

Algoma University
Brock University
Carleton University



Dalhousie University
McGill University
Ontario Tech University
Queen's University
Simon Fraser University
Toronto Metropolitan University
Trafalgar Castle School
Trent University
Université Laval
University of Alberta
University of British Columbia
University of Calgary
University of Toronto
University of Waterloo
York University

FINLAND

University of Helsinki

FRANCE

École des hautes études en
santé publique
Sciences Po
Sorbonne University

GERMANY

Technische Universität München

HUNGARY

Central European University

INDIA

Ahmedabad University
Alliance University
LEAD College of Management

ITALY

University of Trento

KAZAKHSTAN

KIMEP University

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

American University of
Central Asia



University of Central Asia
(Naryn campus)

LEBANON

American University of Beirut

Lebanese American University



University of Balamand

LIBERIA

Cuttington University
Monrovia Bible College
United Methodist University

NEPAL

Nepal Engineering College

NETHERLANDS

UWC Maastricht

NICARAGUA

Managua University Medical
College - UNAN Managua
UCAN Managua: Universidad
Cristiana Autónoma
de Nicaragua

PAKISTAN

Aga Khan University
Allama Iqbal Medical College
Ayub Medical College
Benazir Bhutto Medical College
Fatima Jinnah Medical University
GCU Lahore
Institute of Space Technology
Lahore University of
Management Sciences (LUMS)
National University of Science
and Technology (NUST)
Rawalpindi Medical College

POLAND

UITM - University of Information,
Technology and Management
WSB University

SWITZERLAND

University of Bern
University of Geneva
University of Lausanne/EPFL



TAJIKISTAN

University of Central Asia
(Khorog campus)

TURKEY

University of Ankara Yıldırım
Beyazıt

UK

Coventry University
LSE
University of Birmingham
University of Bristol
University of Sussex

USA

Brown University
Mount Holyoke College
University of California (LA, SB)
Tufts University
Wartburg College
Yale University

*Photo credits (from left): Brenna MacKay;
Henry Myerberg; Lebanese American
University; Vincent Fillon*

Dr. Timothy O'Connor
President
American University of Central Asia
Kyrgyz Republic



COLLABORATION WITH AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ASIA

Tell us a bit about the American University of Central Asia.

The American University of Central Asia (AUCA) was established in 1993 and aims to cultivate future leaders who will facilitate democratic change in Central Asia. Embracing an international, multidisciplinary approach, AUCA is rooted in the American liberal arts tradition and was the first institution in the area to provide U.S.-accredited liberal arts degrees in partnership with Bard College, USA. AUCA also works with universities and organizations globally to enhance its academic offerings, student and faculty mobility opportunities, and collaborative research.

How did the collaboration start and what does it entail?

Since 2017, AUCA has collaborated with the Spark of Hope Foundation (SoHF) to provide financial assistance to outstanding undergraduate female students from low-income families demonstrating high academic performance. This partnership has enabled many deserving students at AUCA to receive crucial financial support for their education.

What is the focus in terms of students and programmes?

AUCA aims to foster critical thinking and student-centered learning within the liberal arts tradition, offering innovative, interdisciplinary curricula, research opportunities, and civic engagement. It strives to educate a new generation of leaders in an environment that values intellectual inquiry and academic freedom. AUCA offers a diverse range of 15 undergraduate and 10 graduate degree programs and

is committed to improving the quality of its faculty, students, and research-oriented curriculum.

How are students selected for the SoHF scholarship?

Students chosen for this scholarship program are selected based on the requirements and criteria set by the Spark of Hope Foundation. Then SoHF reviews their applications, conducts interviews and selects the final list of grant candidates.

How does this partnership help students at the American University of Central Asia?

Thanks to the financial support provided, SoHF scholars at AUCA have the opportunity to access high-quality education, inspiring them to enhance their academic achievements and advance in their professional careers. Furthermore, a significant number of AUCA students, particularly women, depend on financial aid since many families struggle to afford educational expenses.

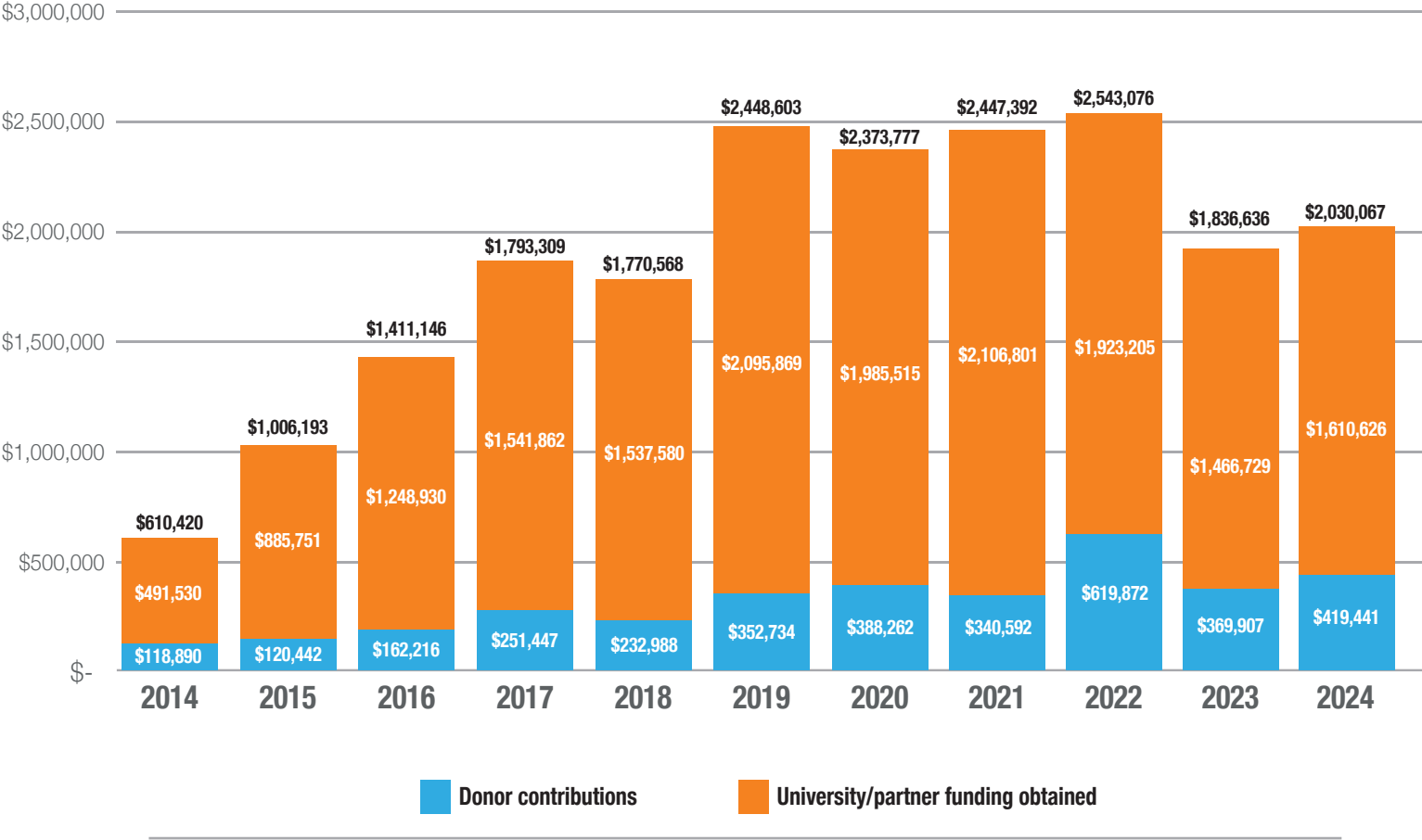
What are your post-graduation expectations of students?

We aim for the SoHF scholarship recipients to emerge as young leaders and equal collaborators with men in both decision-making roles and professional settings. We also aspire for these women to make a significant contribution to society by applying the skills, knowledge, and experiences they acquire at the American University of Central Asia throughout their academic journeys.

REVENUES and COSTS

Our annual revenues, raised through donor contributions and grants, are allocated primarily to scholarships to help support our students. This generous donor support helps secure five-fold funding from university and partner collaborations.

Our program management, evaluation, marketing, and reporting costs amounted to only 9% of total funding in 2024. The Foundation's Board of Directors, partnerships and volunteers help us maintain this efficiency.



BECOME A BENEFACTOR

EMPOWER THE NEXT GENERATION OF WOMEN LEADERS

SILVER BENEFACTOR

\$250/month or \$3,000/year for four years provides a half scholarship

GOLD BENEFACTOR

\$500/month or \$6,000/year for four years provides a full scholarship

PLATINUM BENEFACTOR

An exclusive group of top donors contributing \$10,000/year for four years

Your contribution will help young women from remote areas and conflict zones to become tomorrow's leaders

- Take advantage of convenient, affordable, and tax-smart ways to make a strategic donation, including gifts of stocks and securities, annuities, and bequests.
- Donations are multiplied 5x by participating universities and other partners.
- All donations are tax deductible.

Visit our website (thesparkofhope.org) today and help these bright women break the cycle of poverty through education

From our Benefactors

Empowering women through education means giving them a chance to change the world. Knowing that my contributions may help break barriers, create future leaders and transform communities across the globe makes my support an easy choice and a passionate one. It's not just about giving—I see my support as an investment in a brighter, more equitable future. As a person whose educational achievement was enabled by many scholarships and grants, I in turn am honored to be a small part of SoHF scholars' journeys.

Yasmin Rajan, MD
Vancouver, BC

It is a privilege to support The Spark of Hope Foundation and the young women in the Global South who face financial impediments to obtaining a university education. It is heartening to read about the scholars who have now graduated and are making a difference not only in their own lives but also of those in their families and community. I look forward to reading more success stories of young women who have been empowered by the Spark of Hope Foundation.

Saleem Dedhar
Vancouver, BC

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ASIA

Naryn, Kyrgyz Republic

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