

Shabana Basij- Rasikh

Co-founder and President

The School of Leadership, Afghanistan (SOLA)



Shabana is Co-founder and President of SOLA, a nonprofit organisation that helps exceptional young Afghan women access education worldwide and jobs back home. SOLA, the first and perhaps the only, girls' boarding school in Afghanistan, is poised to become the first internationally accredited girls' school in the country with 340 students from Afghanistan and the region.

Born and raised in Kabul, Shabana finished high school in the U.S. through the State Department's Youth Exchange Studies program. She went on to attend Middlebury College, graduating in International Studies and Women & Gender Studies in 2011.

In college, she founded HELA, a non-profit to empower Afghan women through education. She also raised funds across the U.S. to build a high school for girls in her ancestral village, and wells in the outskirts of Kabul. Shabana was selected as one of Glamour Magazine's Top 10 College Women in 2010, and received the Vermont Campus Compact 2011 award for outstanding public service. In 2011–12 Shabana was the National Gender Mainstreaming Advisor at the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in Kabul.

Shabana co-founded SOLA in 2008 with four students. Today, 32 students aged 11 to 19 representing all major ethnic groups, religious sects and tribes, and 14 out of 34 Afghan provinces attend SOLA's preparatory program in Kabul. 36 SOLA scholars attend boarding schools, colleges and graduate programs in the U.S. and around the world, including Bates, Loomis Chaffee, Middlebury, Mt. Holyoke, Northfield Mt. Hermon, and Smith. The value of the combined directly awarded scholarships is estimated at \$6.3 million.

SOLA's mission is to provide these future leaders of Afghanistan with global educational opportunities so that they can return to develop Afghan solutions to Afghan problems.