Unit 11

SOLA

Narrator: Most people would agree that education is a good thing and that everyone should have the right to be educated. In some countries, however, education may not be available to everyone, especially girls.

According to UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization—about 130 million girls around the world are not in school.

That's about the same number of people as the entire population of Mexico or Japan.

This is bad for those girls who cannot receive an education, of course. It is also bad for their current and future families. Studies show that if a girl has just one extra year of education, she can earn 20 percent more money when she is an adult. As a result, not educating girls can have a negative effect on society, too.

Fortunately, fearless educators are working hard to give girls the same educational opportunities that boys have. Shabana Basij-Rasikh is one of them.

Shabana: My name is Shabana Basij-Rasikh.

I'm the President and co-founder of SOLA, School of Leadership Afghanistan. It's the first girl's boarding school in Afghanistan. Their education has a real purpose, not just for them to have a good job, good income, but their education is also for them to serve their country, to be responsible global citizens.

If we educate a girl, we educate her family, her community, her society, and the world at large. An educated woman especially in developing worlds tend to spend more than 90% of their income back in their family. An educated woman will have fewer and healthier children. She will make sure that her children get educated.

My parents have always made it known to me and to my siblings that education is their number one priority for us. Six percent of women in Afghanistan have a college degree. To be a part of that small minority, I feel extremely lucky and privileged. But at the same time, how did I get to be so lucky? Maybe there was a reason. I realized that I needed to become an educator.

The way we have set up SOLA even within a year of being at SOLA, young girls go back home, they talk about how much English they have learned. They talk about the fact that they have learned how to ride bicycle. They talk about meeting amazing people who have come to the school and talked about their work.

They talk about the photography class they have taken or the filming class they have taken, or they talk about visiting some historic places in Afghanistan and all of this makes her a very different person in her household and that's why it's important.

The process of empowerment has to be initiated from within. We create a safe space for these girls to be able to grow into their confident selves.

Girl 1: If I can't be a doctor, I want to be a teacher of science.

Girl 2: I want to be an explorer. I want to be so many things, but it's really hard to decide.

Girl 3: I want to be doctor and a teacher.

Girl 4: I want to prove that girl can do everything.

Shabana: They all come here to learn to become the future leaders of Afghanistan. The solution to problems in Afghanistan have to come from Afghans. When you educate a girl, you educate her family, her community, her society and our world at large.

They discuss anything from politics to culture to education, to the differences and similarities between our cultures to conflict resolution and for them to get this opportunity at such a young age, to do this is phenomenal. They come from different linguistic backgrounds, different ethnicities, different experiences and yet at SOLA, they're given a common challenge and that's to speak English at all times.

Why is this so important? For a native English speaker, they may not think about this but English is the language of business. It's the language in which the most up to date discoveries is available. It's the language in which a wealth of information is available. And I want these young girls who come from all over Afghanistan, from some of the most remote parts of the country, to have access to this world directly so that they can then take this world to their home villages and spread it.

My students are very ambitious. They are extremely driven. They are smart. They understand what their education means not just for them but for their families.

They are the solution to some of the most challenging problems facing the world today.