

ANNUAL REPORT 2016

**Hope, dignity, commitment, engagement:
an Afghan story told by Afghans**



A message from Nai Qala

For the past 10 years the Nai Qala Association has helped create hope and opportunity in remote communities in Afghanistan. In these communities we saw not hopelessness and despair but dignity and determination. We believed in people's abilities and we worked together to build eight schools for over 9000 boys and girls and a clinic for a population of 20,000 in one of the most isolated regions of the country. These projects succeeded because we built trust with the people, because the people in turn had confidence in our ability to help them realize their aspirations, and because our partners and donors placed trust in us. It was like growing flowers in the desert.

Two main points make our work particularly special:

First, we are working in the very isolated rural regions where 80% of the Afghan population lives. If Afghanistan is to develop, we must focus on these regions which have traditionally been ignored. Because of extreme poverty, these regions account for 90% of Afghan migrants who seek better lives and opportunities elsewhere. Nai Qala is giving them hope, opportunities, dignity and a feeling that they are citizens of a nation with the right to education and to fulfil their ambitions.

Second, an Afghan woman leads the Nai Qala Association with a small local team working on quality projects with active engagement from local people. From the start of our projects in 2007, we fostered Afghan engagement and encouraged Afghans to have faith in their abilities to achieve their own results. We are convinced that change must come from Afghans themselves. We demonstrate this through the leadership of our President, a model of the important role of women in building the new Afghanistan. Our President negotiates all NQA projects, mainly with men. In a male-dominated society, this is an interesting challenge. To convince the men and obtain their respect, concrete results are needed. When Nai Qala starts a project, the villagers may have doubts about an association led by a woman. Once they see the achievements and benefits, they become more involved. We believe this process has a positive impact on how they view the role of women in Afghan society.

Our work is challenging and will remain so, but we get involved when the situation is difficult, not when it's easy. We are proud to share what we achieved in 2016 in partnership with local Afghan communities: men, women and their children.

Sincerely,

Nai Qala Association team

Vision

Nai Qala Association contributes to an educated, healthy and just Afghan society where women thrive and lead social and cultural change. We are convinced that education is crucial to ensuring better opportunities for Afghanistan's next generations at a time of deep transformation in the country's history, in particular in traditionally neglected rural regions.

Mission:

NQA's engagement is based on the determination to strengthen the dignity, self confidence and sense of initiative of the population and of women in particular. Improved access to education and health is a fundamental human right and crucial to move beyond poverty, exclusion, humiliation and discrimination.

Organization:

Non-for-profit organization is established in Switzerland and is formally registered with the Ministry of Economy in Afghanistan, focusing primarily on rural development projects in Afghanistan. Its Governing Board based in Switzerland, is composed of people with experience in management, in humanitarian work, as well as in the health and development fields.

The projects are assessed, implemented and supervised by Ms Taiba Rahim an Afghan, trained teacher. A dedicated team of Afghan staff, with specific skills, runs the organization's office in Kabul. It is the operational heart of our Association, which oversees daily activities.

Achievements:

Since 2007 we have built 9 schools and one clinic in the provinces of Bamyan and Ghazni. We are proud that our projects are being run by Afghans for Afghans. We show that when Afghans take responsibility, it leads to concrete results. All of our projects were finished within budget.

Main donors

The main donors to the projects include the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the US Embassy in Kabul, the Rotary Club (Nyon, Geneva), the OAK Foundation, Scintillae Foundation, Famille Firmenich, TABLE RONDE (Nyon – La côte), Paradise Foundation, Migros Foundation (Zurich), Sorooptimist International (Switzerland), The Tauro Trust, Domain imperial ladies section and schools in the Cantons of Vaud, Geneva and Valais, as well as hundreds of private donors.

Achievements of 2016

2016 was a year of review and consolidation for Nai Qala. We visited schools built between 2007 and 2015 to assess their state and up keeping. The schools visited were:

- Nai Qala, Sada and Gaowmourda in Ghazni province,
- the Nawur clinic in Ghazni province.
- Tagab Barg, Katawie, Safed Ghaow and Zeera Gag in Bamyán province,

These were very moving and extremely informative visits. It was with pride that we witnessed how well these schools have been maintained, well used and cared for. They are in excellent condition – a testimony to the value that the communities place on them.

From the start of our work in 2007, we insisted on the importance of involving local communities in the preparation of our projects. We wanted local people to understand our motivation, support our approach and feel genuine ownership of the schools. These factors are critical for sustainability. Nai Qala has always paid great attention to finding a reputable and reliable construction company, and we were able to reach out to every member of the community to explain how we work. We believe that no one should feel excluded from the decision-making processes.

In our dialogue with the communities we constantly stressed the importance of their participation, their ownership and their responsibility – for instance in the maintenance of the buildings. We explained how hard it is to raise funds and we shared many stories about how the fundraising works. During our visits we were touched to find that people still remember these stories and that they understand that no one can take these schools for granted.

For us this is a powerful lesson – one that encourages us to continue with these messages of responsibility. Our visits showed that we have made a major change in communities that have traditionally felt excluded and isolated. Our philosophy is one of engagement. It is simple but often it is not applied. We can proudly say that it is at the heart of our achievement.

It is our great pleasure to share some of our many impressions gained during the review visits to these schools and the clinic built by Nai Qala Association in Ghazni and Bamyán provinces, Afghanistan.

Schools built by Nai Qala since 2007 and visited in 2016



Photo: Taiba, President of NQA (far right), discussing with the Sada School authorities, parents, and elders. The school is very well maintained. The community bought the carpet as a contribution to the school and is very proud to show that it kept its promise to preserve the school in good condition.

Despite the years of war, poverty and neglect, education is highly valued and sought after. We can see how much people value development projects such as ours. They deserve our support.



Sada school built in 2009 by NQA



Gowmourda school built in 2010 by NQA

Comments from an elder of Gowmourda community

“Since this school was our only hope and opportunity, we made sure to take care of it. This is a sign of hope for our children. We knew, and we know, that nobody else would have done this for us. So we will take care of it forever. In addition, this school was built by a woman from our region, who knows our problems, so we could not take it for granted. If we could not prove our ability to take care of it, how could we look you in the eyes? We knew that one day you would come back to see the school. Therefore, we always have this in our minds. We want to honour your big effort and support it by accepting responsibility for this school and keeping it in a good condition. We shall always make sure that our children come to school.”



Nai Qala school built in 2007 (freshly painted in May 2016 by the proud community as a sign of ownership and responsibility)



Zeera Gag school was built in 2015 (this image was taken in the summer of 2016).



Thanks to a properly constructed school building the students are able to study in a safe and conducive environment. In 2016, the students organized a drawing and poetry competition in the school grounds, showcasing their work, which give them a sense of pride and joy. Ten schools across the Panjab district took part in competitions in multiple school subjects, which Zeera Gag school won. This proves that a proper school environment motivates and encourages children to study.



Photo: Nawur clinic in 2016

NQA built the clinic at Nawur in 2011 and supported and ran it until 2015 when it was officially handed over to the state. Today the clinic is supported by the Organization for Research and Community Development (ORCD) in partnership with the Ministry of Public Health. We also visited our clinic in 2016. It is impressive to see how well the clinic is functioning; it has become part of Nawur's identity and life. It is well-maintained and has become a normal part of the community's life. According to a report by the ORCD and the Ministry, the clinic with its 7 staff (2 women and 5 men) continues to provide a good service for the Nawur community. In 2016 alone, a total of 8'377 women, men and children were treated in this center. Over 100 babies were born in the clinic and vaccination is continuing for women and children.

Most importantly, some 178 families are being helped with family planning. Attendance at the clinic was rather slow at the beginning, but it increased remarkably *over the last year* as the community gained trust in the services and valued the importance of basic family health as a community asset.

According to NQA's President, Taiba Rahim;

"It was a very emotional experience to see all our schools and clinic are standing very beautifully just like when they were built. It shows how strongly we believed in the potential of these projects. We made sure that the people would feel responsible for these schools and take care of its maintenance. Now, 9 years after they were built, it would be normal to find walls that have been spotted or scratched, but I was very positively surprised to see how carefully the community and students are taking care of their schools."

Nai Qala engagement and activity in 2016

Teacher training project: Building capacity to improve the quality of teaching and learning

Over the past 10 years, NQA has built schools in regions where children had never even seen a school building. We believe in strengthening their *dignity* by ensuring that children learn in conditions that are conducive to learning. As of 2016, we added a new dimension to our activities: we have initiated a teacher training program to improve the *quality* of education provided in the schools we have built. Dignity through quality learning facilities and quality education is essential for the 80% of Afghans who live in rural areas.

The objective of the teacher training project is to improve the quality of education and learning at schools in remote parts of Qara Bagh district in Ghazni province.

Qara Bagh is typical of many rural and marginalized areas of Afghanistan. The main livelihood is agriculture and people's economic status is generally extreme poverty because of unstable harvests and the lack of alternative employment. There are no proper roads to the area which is why this is one of the least developed parts of Afghanistan.

Our objective is to contribute to the long-term development of such areas. The people there should be able to feel that they are part of a country, a state and a nation. We cannot have educated children if the teaching they receive is poor. That is why NQA has committed itself to improving the knowledge and skills of teachers in the schools of rural Afghanistan.

To start the teacher training project in 2016, we hired three male university graduates with teaching skills. Remarkably, two of the teachers graduated from a Nai Qala school 6–7 years ago. After completing their university studies, they are now prepared to work to serve their community. The fact that they attended a Nai Qala school was one criterion for selecting them: they return to serve their people, which in turn is a source of inspiration for other students in the village.

With the expansion in education over the past 10 years, large numbers of students, as well as their teachers, have a great desire to study. However, obtaining good-quality education remains a challenge. Many seek to improve their education on their own initiative by taking additional courses in the big cities or by buying books that they can barely afford. The well-off are lucky in this respect, but very few rural Afghans have the financial means. Families have been known to spend a quarter of their income to send a son (but rarely a daughter) on an extra course. Most, however, simply accept the reality and give up education, which is one of the reasons for the high rate of illiteracy in Afghan society, particularly among girls. NQA therefore intends to take training to the teachers in their schools, in their villages.



Teacher trainer: a graduate of a Nai Qala school (far right) teaching in Nai Qala school

The 2016 pilot project in Qara Barg district focused on a remote catchment area of 32 villages (total population 10,000). The area has around 1550 school students (650 girls and 900 boys), and the NQA project targets 20 teachers and their students in four schools (three of them – in the villages of Gaomourda, Nai Qala and Sada – built thanks to NQA). The project ran for six months in 2016 and its impact is currently being reviewed.

Results of the project to date:

- The 20 teachers have received in-service training to update their teaching methods and their academic knowledge.
- Tutoring has been provided to over a 100 of the students in preparation for university entrance. Our original goal was to tutor 46 girls and 34 boys, but more students became interested and benefited from our project
- Extra study support – especially in mathematics, physics and chemistry – has been provided to some 420 students.
- The three trainers are funded by NQA and are assisted by a community-based support person.
- The training course has helped the community to save about USD 20,000 (the amount that would have been spent if all the children had been sent to a town for such a course would have been USD 200 a year for each child).
- A better standard of education means that more of our rural children, including girls, will have the chance to go to university.
- The project has given some local people with qualifications an opportunity to stay in their region rather than seek work elsewhere. This can be an inspiration to other villagers.

Miss Aqela, 12th grade in the Nai Qala School: (built by NQA in 2008 in Ghazni province)

“I was very stressed how to strengthen my scientific subjects to get ready for the exam for university; will I be able to attend the exam? I asked my parents if they could support me to go to a bigger town to get some additional study. But my parents could not support me financially.

By spring 2016, I heard that NQA is providing such a course in our village. It was hard to believe. I had the feeling that I am flying. Yet this truly happened. The course took place and since then my life has filled with hope and determination! I have tried to attend every single class this semester. The feeling of responsibility is rising inside me: I must take this chance and succeed.

My dream is to work in the health sector to help my village and community. Health is one of the biggest problems and a huge challenge.”

Miss Ramzeyya, 12th grade, Nai Qala School (built by NQA in 2008 in Ghazni province)

“The day when the course started, I could not believe it’s true. But days and weeks passed, and I realized this is useful for me. I learned a lot and it helped me to understand better. I learned what the scientific subject is for; I discovered the link to my real life. I even prepared for the exam to attend to university. I attended with full motivation, even though working on our land is our main living in our village.

If a student was absent, the NQA representative went to find the parents to encourage them to let their children profit from the course. This we have never experienced before. These remote communities always felt left abandoned.

This led the community to take the course very seriously. The parents felt important that a representative of the course had taken the trouble to meet with them and talk about their girl or boy. This behavior gave a feeling of pride and importance to those modest people who thought that they had no importance or worth. I feel so good that sometimes I think it’s a dream.”

Building capacity at institutional level

2016 has also been a year for developing NQA's own capacity. In a country where professional skills are limited, NQA as an organization needs to improve its own skills.

We provided some important courses on management, finance, human resources, office management and organizational skills for our staff and teachers. The president also attended two courses: the "Future Leaders Programme" at Oxford University (United Kingdom), and the "Modern Management for Non Profit Organizations at the Geneva University (Switzerland). We also coordinated with some well-established organizations in Afghanistan with expertise in hygiene, human rights, gender equality and other issues. They guided us in teaching students with learning difficulties and in approaching parents to make them aware of the need for gender equality. The communities we work with often do not take women's health and education seriously.

While the main goal of our teachers is to teach the children, we also want to seize the opportunity to help communities understand the concept of human rights, or why it's important to encourage girls' education. We want our teachers to discuss issues such as education, health and equality with village elders and others. It takes time for people to accept new ideas, but they have shown a surprising interest so far.

One of the partnerships we are very proud of is with the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee in the fields of hygiene and anatomy. As we have always indicated in our reports, Afghanistan remains one of the countries where female mortality is very high.

We have hired three young ladies from the Nai Qala region (former Nai Qala school students) who are committed to repay NQA for providing a school where they could study and graduate successfully. Today they are ready to serve their communities and are following further courses organized by NQA to prepare them to provide advice and support to local women.

NQA staff with male and female trainers attending a training session on human rights by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. The course was much appreciated.

As Fatima, 20 years old, one of our female trainers (in the orange scarf), commented: *"Today I learned what the rights of all human beings are, what my rights are, and how we can avoid discrimination. I am grateful for such a session where I learned these important values."*



Training session in the NQA office in Kabul, Afghanistan

Let us together give these children an opportunity to explore their talent, prove their capacity by becoming a teacher, a doctor, an engineer or any other job that would help to improve the situation in Afghanistan. These should be opportunities for life, not just for the short term.



Students are aged from 6 to 18, and travel from 15 minutes to 3 hours to reach the school.



Conclusion: looking to the future

In 2016 NQA focused on evaluation and planning. We had an independent external evaluation of our work, and our five-year strategic plan will be ready in early 2017.

We are extremely grateful to the thousands of individual and institutional donors who supported us through the past 10 years. We are really blessed. They stood by us and dared to believe that we could make impossible things possible. I want especially to express my very special thanks to the OAK Foundation, who not only supported our projects but saw the potential in NQA. OAK made an exceptional contribution to encourage and support our capacity-building efforts. It is a vital partnership that will allow us to work in a professional way and make our activities more sustainable.

So far we have focused on building schools and clinics and have seen an encouraging impact on the people of remote rural regions. This should be expanded. In parallel, however, we evaluated new approaches and we see the teacher training program as the most promising.

The international community has brought to Afghanistan many people with sophisticated skills and high-level qualifications. Yet, due to security concerns, most have not been to the rural areas where most Afghans live. They have not seen that most Afghan children have little chance of a decent education. I dream of a day when the boys and girls of Afghanistan can be as skilled and as educated as their counterparts in the west. But it cannot happen unless the communities understand how important it is for their boys – and girls – to have schools with qualified teachers.

We have to build from the ground up, and to do that we need to believe in the people. NQA has learned that it is better to work with people who are committed to improving their community and who are motivated to stay there, even if the region is currently not very advanced.

I believe in helping these communities to invest in their own future. For this to happen, it is important to train teachers who know the region and want to be part its future, themselves becoming agents for change in their community.

NQA is very proud to be part of the change that is happening in Afghanistan – a society where millions of young people are enrolling in schools as a way of moving forward to a better future. They will be tomorrow's engaged citizens and leaders – to whom NQA is dedicated.

Sincerely,
Taiba Rahim
President

Nai-Qala Association – January 2016

www.nai-qala.org

Annex: personal testimony:

Nai Qala invited freelance photographer Ms. Haris Coussidis to join one of the review visits. This is her testimony:

It was a real privilege when Taiba asked me to join her in Afghanistan in December 2016 to discuss further our collaboration to photo document the work of Nai Qala and the communities it supports. Though I know Iran, Pakistan and Tajikistan well, this was my first trip to Afghanistan, an opportunity to not only see firsthand the work Nai Qala does, but to better understand a part of the country so rich in cultural identity alongside its volatile history. Most importantly the trip offered me the chance to meet with the communities who both manage and benefit from the schools built in some of the poorest, most remote areas of the country. They show a different image of Afghanistan, a project that displays local resilience and positive outcomes, images and stories absent in the mainstream media.

This was an important trip for Taiba as well. This was the first time an ‘outsider’ accompanied her on one of her trips and she was able to showcase the schools and the communities she has invested in over the last ten years.

We had limited time to travel and many hours on the road across mountainous terrain and in some parts with limited infrastructure, yet we got a real understanding of the isolation and the difficulties people face to access basic services, as well as scarce job opportunities. Nights were spent at the houses of community members in the village we were visiting, with many people from the neighboring villages joining us at the community gatherings. Some had walked more than three hours through the Afghan winter (-15 C) when they knew Taiba was visiting as this was the only opportunity they got to discuss and have some control of their children’s future.

The people I met, though poor, are very determined and proactive to ensure their children go to school and finish their education. They know this is the only way they might have an opportunity for a better future, and a life beyond poverty. The fact that someone has invested in them was a huge encouragement, particularly for young girls. I was struck by the determination of these young girls and boys to further their studies (teachers, doctors, midwives, vets) and return to their villages to give back to the communities that are supporting them. Just the fact these kids walk up to three hours each way every day to school, made me realise just how important this is to them; whilst still carrying out their chores and responsibilities at home in support of their families.

The key strength of Nai Qala that struck me is how the communities are engaged and included in the projects. Taiba wanted this from the outset – for communities to be part of the process, to identify the needs for facilities and be proud and responsible in maintaining the school grounds. The relationships she has built over the years are through her sheer determination and unwavering positive attitude, but it is equally the authority in her approach that people have an immense respect for her.

The main indicators of the success of Nai Qala to me are the continuity of investment over time and the inclusion of the communities in the projects. The pride and resilience of these

communities, who despite being the poorest and most discriminated against in Afghanistan, have the highest literacy rate in the country. This is a population in whom investments count and Taiba's engaging but tough love earns respect and is a sign of being greeted as an Afghan woman.

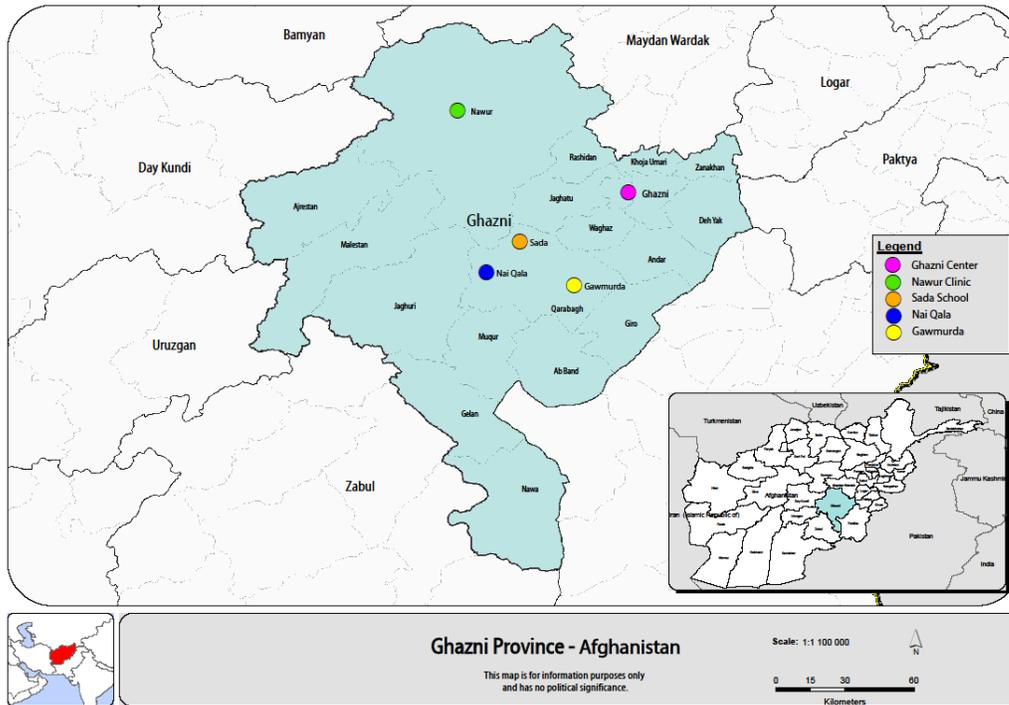


"After three hours of driving through mountainous road, covered in snow and mud, we arrived at the Safed Ghaow School in Waras district (which was built in 2013 by NQA). Upon hearing that Taiba was visiting, some villagers living nearby came to meet her. Her last visit was in 2013 for the school's opening ceremony and they were all very touched that she returned. These three girls rushed to talk with Taiba about their favourite subjects at school, their aspirations, as well as the need for notebooks, an expensive commodity that parents cannot afford.

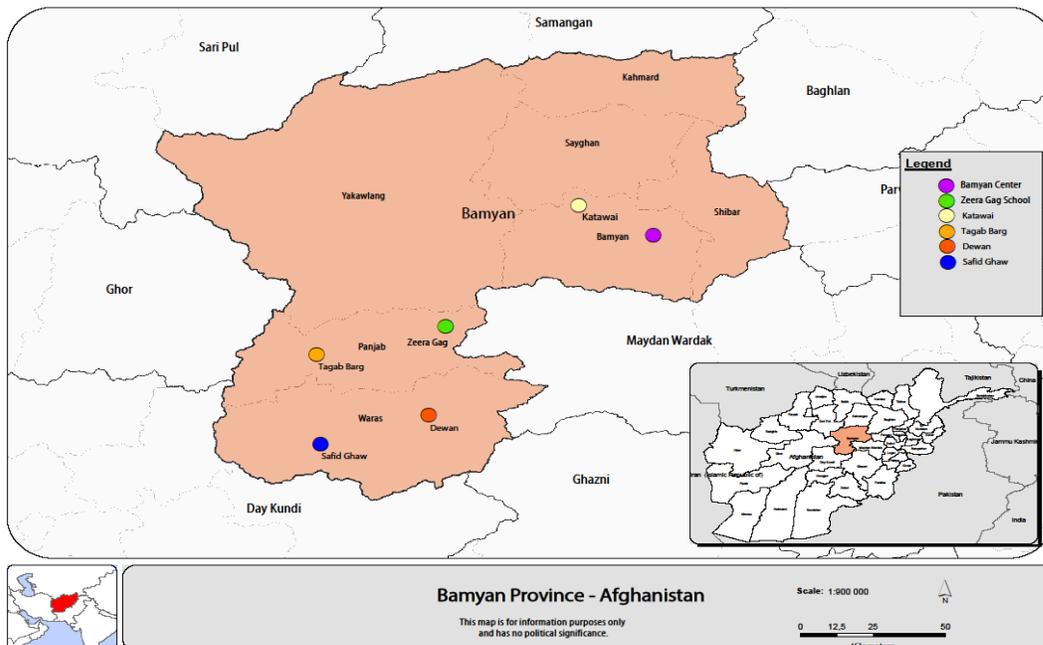
Arriving here I understood the impact a school has for the wider community. These communities are extremely isolated and life is very challenging, in particular over the winter months. The majority of the people have never left their villages and only have small agricultural land to live on. But they are happy someone has invested in them and their children, as no other organization has been to their village due to the difficulty to reach them. They take great pride in having a school that houses 250 students (both girls and boys), which children walk up to three hours to reach, and pride in maintaining it as this is a link to the better future for their children."

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Map of Ghazni province where showing school and clinic projects



Map of Bamyan province where showing the school projects by NQA