Munara Omuralieva

Hidden Shero — Profile No. 23

From Rural Schools in Kyrgyzstan to the International Olympiad in Greece: Education Without Geographical Boundaries

Education · Development of Rural Schools · Financial Literacy · Teacher Training · Youth Support

Munara Omuralieva is an education specialist, former lecturer, educational project coordinator and co-founder of the public association Bilimland.

Her journey began in the village of At-Bashy and continued through international educational programmes, university teaching and projects aimed at narrowing the gap between urban and rural schools in Kyrgyzstan.

Today, Munara helps schoolchildren learn economics and financial literacy, organises the national rounds of the Economics Olympiad, and develops training programmes for teachers and graduates of rural Kyrgyz-language schools.

Her story began in the village of At-Bashy

In 2002, Munara graduated from Kazybek School in the village of At-Bashy.

Even during her school years, she dreamed of seeing the world, receiving a quality education and one day using her knowledge for the benefit of Kyrgyzstan.

Growing up in a small village helped her understand how strongly a child's birthplace can influence their access to information, educational programmes and career opportunities.

This experience later became the foundation of her work with rural schools.

FLEX showed her that where you come from does not limit your dreams

In 2003, Munara graduated from the international FLEX programme.

Participating in the programme broadened her understanding of the world and gave her confidence that a student from a small community could study abroad, participate in international projects and build their own educational path.

Munara experienced firsthand how important a single opportunity, offered at the right time, can be.

Today, she strives to create similar opportunities for other children.

Education led her to study politics

In 2007, Munara graduated from the American University of Central Asia (AUCA), specialising in International and Comparative Politics.

She then continued her education at Central European University in Hungary, where she obtained a master's degree in Political Science.

During her teaching career, she was also a fellow of the HESP/Academic Fellowship Program in Budapest from 2008 to 2012.

Her international education provided academic knowledge, experience of interacting with people from different countries, and an understanding of how educational institutions can influence the development of society.

Thirteen years teaching at AUCA

After returning to Kyrgyzstan, Munara taught for thirteen years in the Department of International and Comparative Politics at the American University of Central Asia.

She taught courses on Central Asian politics, comparative politics, international relations, federal systems, and national and ethnic politics.

For Munara, teaching was never simply about passing on theoretical knowledge.

She wanted to teach students to ask questions, analyse information, make independent decisions and recognise a wider range of opportunities available to them.

University experience helped her recognise the importance of school education

Working with university students, Munara observed how strongly school education influences a young person's future.

Confidence, academic skills, language proficiency and the ability to work with information begin developing long before students enter university.

Over time, Munara therefore decided to work not only with university students but also with schoolchildren and teachers.

She focused particular attention on rural and Kyrgyz-language schools, where access to additional educational resources is often limited.

Developing financial literacy among schoolchildren since 2023

In 2023, Munara began working at the Institute of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Central Asia (UCA).

She became the coordinator of the Economics Olympiad and an economic literacy project.

The programme helps schoolchildren understand the role of economics and finance in everyday life, develop analytical thinking and learn to make informed decisions.

Participation is open to students in grades 9–11 from different regions of Kyrgyzstan.

Making the Olympiad accessible to students across the country

Munara organises the Olympiad, works with schools, teachers and partners, coordinates the selection rounds and supports finalists.

Thanks to the online format of the first round, children from communities throughout the country can participate.

In 2026, the first stage of the Olympiad brought together 12,128 students from 450 schools across Kyrgyzstan. The previous year, 4,836 students from 300 schools participated.

The number of participants more than doubled in just one year.

Behind the numbers are new opportunities

For Munara, the 12,128 participants represent more than simply the scale of the project.

They represent thousands of schoolchildren who have been able to test their knowledge, discover economics and explore a new direction for their future education.

It is especially important that students from state, private, urban and rural schools participate in the same educational process.

In 2026, 241 students achieved the maximum score in the first round. More than half of them attended state schools.

Five finalists represent Kyrgyzstan

Following the national selection process, five schoolchildren are given the opportunity to represent Kyrgyzstan at the international stage of the Olympiad.

Munara supports the team throughout their preparation and international travel.

For many participants, this is their first experience of competing academically abroad, meeting peers from other countries and experiencing an international educational environment.

In 2026, the final round took place in Ancient Olympia, Greece, bringing together 147 students from 63 countries, according to the book.

Kyrgyzstan wins a bronze medal

Five finalists represented Kyrgyzstan at the 2026 Economics Olympiad.

One team member, Sandro Kvachadze, received a bronze medal.

During the awards ceremony, Munara was recognised for her contribution to developing the Olympiad and expanding access to economic education for young people in Kyrgyzstan.

For her, the international result is important not only as an individual student's achievement. It demonstrates that schoolchildren from Kyrgyzstan can compete successfully at the international level when provided with quality preparation and support.

Bilimland was established in 2024

Since 2024, Munara has been a co-founder of the public association Bilimland.

She contributes to developing ideas and supports projects from their initial concept through to practical implementation.

The organisation's primary focus is the development of education in rural areas.

The team pays particular attention to the Talas region and Kyrgyz-language schools.

The work begins with supporting teachers

Munara believes that sustainable improvements in education are impossible without teachers' professional development.

A single lesson may help an individual student, but a well-trained teacher passes on knowledge to dozens of children every year.

For this reason, Bilimland trains teachers in modern methods of preparing students for the National Scholarship Test (ORT), helps improve subject knowledge and establishes a systematic approach to preparing school graduates.

Teachers gain tools they can continue to use after the project has ended.

The project reached 48 rural schools

From November 2025 to April 2026, a project focused on teacher professional development and preparing graduates for the ORT reached 48 rural Kyrgyz-language schools in the Talas region.

A total of 120 mathematics and Kyrgyz-language teachers received training.

Following this, 40 teachers from 20 schools conducted intensive preparation sessions for graduating students.

The project was implemented by the University of Central Asia's Institute of Public Policy and Administration, Bilimland and UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education, with financial support from Altyn Alliance.

The results became measurable

Following the 2026 National Scholarship Test, the proportion of graduates in the Talas region taking the examination increased from 69.1% to 75.2%.

The regional average score rose from 126.1 to 127.6.

The number of students achieving more than 200 points increased from 20 to 63.

More than half of the participating schools improved their average results. In several schools, scores increased by more than 20 points.

Behind every score is a collective effort

Munara sees the statistics as confirmation that systematic support for rural schools produces results.

Behind every score are the efforts of the student, the knowledge of the teacher and the support of the family.

Positive progress does not mean every problem has been solved. It demonstrates that investing in teachers and providing consistent preparation for students can help narrow the educational gap.

For Munara, this provides a reason to continue and expand the work.

Kyrgyz-language schools should have equal opportunities

Developing Kyrgyz-language education is a particular priority for Munara.

She believes that a child attending a rural school should have the same opportunities to receive a quality education and enter a leading university as a student from a major city.

Achieving this requires more than delivering new teaching materials or organising a single event.

It requires creating a sustainable educational environment: supporting teachers, providing access to modern teaching methods and professional communities, and developing students' motivation and confidence.

Investing in the foundations of future success

The impact of educational projects is not always immediately visible.

After receiving training, a teacher begins using new methods, prepares students more effectively and shares their experience with colleagues.

Several years later, those students enter universities, pursue new careers and become agents of change themselves.

The contribution of someone who once helped train that teacher can no longer be separated from the results that follow.

Munara considers this type of long-term work essential to educational development.

Much of her work takes place behind the scenes

The public sees the Olympiad, its finalists and the examination results.

Behind these achievements are identifying problems, developing solutions, negotiating with partners, coordinating schools, preparing materials and supporting participants.

The work also involves answering questions from teachers and parents, resolving organisational difficulties and overseeing every stage.

This everyday work rarely appears in photographs or news stories, yet without it, educational projects could not achieve their results.

Regional projects receive less attention

Initiatives implemented in Bishkek and other major cities are more likely to attract public attention.

Work with rural schools, particularly Kyrgyz-language schools, remains less visible.

Yet it is precisely in these regions that shortages of qualified teachers, modern teaching materials and opportunities for professional development are often most strongly felt.

Munara consciously directs her experience and resources towards places where access to these opportunities remains limited.

Family remains her greatest source of support

Munara is a wife and mother of three children.

Her family has taught her to be more patient, organised and attentive to the needs of others.

She believes that women should not have to choose between family life and professional fulfilment.

It is possible to be a loving mother and wife, develop professionally and create projects that benefit society.

Bringing international experience back to her country

Munara speaks three languages fluently and continues to learn.

Her FLEX experience, education at AUCA and Central European University, thirteen years of teaching and participation in international programmes have all become resources for her work in Kyrgyzstan.

She uses this knowledge not only for her own professional development.

She shares it with teachers, schoolchildren and educational communities that need new opportunities.

The contribution of Munara Omuralieva

Munara's contribution includes:

- Thirteen years of teaching at the American University of Central Asia.
- Developing economic and financial literacy among schoolchildren in Kyrgyzstan.
- Bringing 12,128 students from 450 schools into the Economics Olympiad in 2026.
- Supporting five finalists representing Kyrgyzstan at the international round in Greece.
- A bronze medal won by a Kyrgyzstan school student at the international Economics Olympiad.
- Co-founding the Bilimland public association.
- Reaching 48 rural Kyrgyz-language schools in the Talas region.
- Providing professional training for 120 teachers.
- Increasing the number of students scoring above 200 points on the ORT from 20 to 63.
- Working to narrow the gap between urban and rural education.
- Creating opportunities for children regardless of where they were born.

The story continues

Munara continues to develop the Economics Olympiad, financial literacy projects and programmes supporting rural schools.

Her long-term goal is to gradually narrow the gap in educational opportunities between children living in major cities and those in remote communities across Kyrgyzstan.

She wants rural teachers to have access to modern teaching methods and professional networks, and students to have the knowledge, support and opportunities to build the futures they choose.

Munara's story began in the village of At-Bashy.

Today, she works to ensure that every child's story in Kyrgyzstan can also begin with a big dream, regardless of where they were born.

Credit to BeWoman Asia for the original Hidden Shero book.

The translation of Munara's profile exceprt has been provided by AI