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**AZERBAIJAN**

# SUCCESS STORY

## Preserving Culture Through Enterprise

### Rug entrepreneur makes high-quality traditional Azeri rugs



Photo: ABAD/Yuliya Gureyeva

Dye expert Fazil Gahramanov prepares dyes at the Gadim Guba production facility in Guba, Azerbaijan.

***Entrepreneur Humay Mammadova wants to help Azerbaijan preserve its cultural and heritage while creating economic opportunities.***

Through the interwoven circles, triangles and rhomboids, the intricate patterns leapt from the rug. Humay Mammadova wanted to learn more about the history behind these patterns. She had been working with woven rugs for years, but her appreciation of their long history and her desire to preserve Azeri rug-making traditions only developed when she took over a carpet-making company called Gadim Guba in 2000.

Humay's first goal was to improve the rugs produced there, including quality of the wool and the dyes used to create each color. This search ultimately led Humay to purchase wool from Turkey and Iran, and hire a natural dye specialist. But wool from abroad was becoming more expensive and the quality was decreasing. Also, the dye specialist was having difficulty creating quality dyes from the local resources, which led to bleeding colors and lesser quality products.

Humay agreed to collaborate with a USAID-funded program which works to promote entrepreneurship in Azerbaijan. The program hired a local expert in natural dyes who has 15 years of experience in transforming local plants and insects into dyes. He agreed, for the first time, to share his trade secrets and explain exactly how to create natural dyes. He spent five weeks teaching Humay and her daughter the techniques for mass production of dyes and began identifying local sources for quality wool from the Gazakh region. This year Humay expects to purchase six tons of high quality local wool, two tons more than the previous year.

The wool and dyed yarns will be spun by 160 women in Humay's production facility in Guba. She has started to reach her first goal, to improve production quality. Her next goal is to revive the workshop, using new looms and training more than 20 new weaving specialists. By making rugs with traditional Azeri methods of dying and weaving, Humay hopes to help preserve Azeri culture while also creating economic opportunities. She is confident the investment will pay off as the demand for high-quality, natural, and traditionally made rugs is strong.

One pattern, a simple series of circles, is known to Azeris as a symbol of prosperity. As Humay looks at the symbol, she hopes it will have meaning for her company, her workers, and her people.

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