Title of Project: Economic Empowerment of Vulnerable Afghan Women
Country of project implementation: Afghanistan
Sponsoring Institution: International House
Designated Project Leader: Basbibi Kakar

Section I:
A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project

Goal 1. This project was established to reach internally displaced women and returnees in rural communities in Nangarhar, Afghanistan to receive market relevant vocational training based on current market demand.

Goal 2. The project will allow women to network with their fellow participants and be introduced to different businesses in the region. Women participants will be empowered and liberated in their communities to be part of the peace building process in their societies. Beneficiaries will receive numeracy and literacy training during the three months and each participant will receive a sewing machine upon their graduation.

c. No other fundraising efforts contributed to our project. My team and I originally were planned to receive the funding for the summer of 2020, but my project plans were delayed because of the rising numbers of people getting Covid in Afghanistan and in the United States. I have already started my work in Afghanistan using all covid safety protocols and bought sanitary products and masks for everyone involved in the project using my personal funds.

d. In the male dominated country, Afghanistan, the situation for women and girls remains rigid and conservative. There are lots of restrictions imposed on women’s movements. In my personal experience, I wasn’t born and raised in a family who restricted me from anything that a boy could do and this gave me the freedom to choose and do what I selected for myself. I saw first-hand that women and girls have limited opportunities and that too are hampered by the rigid social norms unfavorable for women and girls. Women and girls continue to go through different forms of violence including physical, psychological and emotional abuse. Observing this situation from a distance, made me realize what can be done to resolve at least part of such issues.

The only resources that helped me and my family, were the skills and education we had. I believe in the power of skills, education and societal support of organizations who can lift people’s lives from worst to better. I chose this project to provide opportunities to other fellow Afghan women so they can also have skills, education and support that can help them get out of the poverty trap and get independent through vocational training of sewing and literacy.

e. Women are agents of change. When they are powerless, those societies and nations are powerless. Empowering women is empowering societies and nations because through them we as humans last. The issue my project is responding to exists because women cannot equally reach employment, education and any opportunity women and men have around the world. Afghanistan is a very poor country. The effects of international democratic failures threw the country into economic chaos and trapped people into poverty, displacement, hunger, and humanitarian crisis. Only 47% population who are males work and most of the times are killed because of security reasons. Women are wedded in young age, and poverty doesn’t allow them to continue their education. Middle school dropout rates are high and less than 10% of 53% women population in Afghanistan is educated. To bring economic stability in the country, Afghans need to have majority women participants sharing economic and political platforms with men. Afghanistan is in humanitarian crisis right now, and according to NPR, more than a million kids will die of hunger in Afghanistan since the international supporters left Afghanistan in Chaos. These problems have increased when the Taliban took over in mid-august.
f. I chose Nangarhar, Afghanistan because I lived there, and I know what type of societal and local life women live every single day. Most of the times there aren’t resources and opportunities provided to these local communities. I believe vocational and educational trainings can pave ways for peace and stability of different societies and communities in Nangarhar.

g. When we started the project, security situation wasn’t very good, but we knew we could pull this project together by the help of other Afghan women. We tried to deliver our services to people so girls and women IDPs and returnees can benefit from it in the future. It was difficult for trainees to travel to the vocational institute because there were 30 participants. We divided them into two groups of 15 and trained them. The trainees continued to come for the training despite of all hardships they had to go through especially, in the Taliban times.

h. Yes, the security situation was very difficult for women and girls. When the Taliban took over, we put an end to the project for a few weeks. After a month of stopping the project, we restarted to complete trainings using minimal resources we had and distributed the sewing machines to all trainees as a gift to start their careers.

i. Their first problem was getting permission from the families because of the security reasons. We spoke with women in different communities, and they were able to find a way to speak with their family members in order to give them permission to attend the training. Then there was the issue of transportation to attend the training. Since all the participants were very excited to come and join the training, we provided and paid for their transportation expenses. We had to select women on their circumstances because there were more than 30 women who showed up for trainings and were excited to continue.

j. Peace is the absence of insecurity. It is the state when people have mental and spiritual freedom without restriction, regardless of gender or skin color.

k. My project was and is designed to bring long term and short-term peace by bringing women together, to empower them so they can pave ways for peace and stability of the country and take active part in development.

l. I always thought people in developing countries might give up on things easily and might not be working harder but I learned that it isn’t true. The more you work, the less compensation you get in the developing countries depending on per capita GDP. People work harder and longer hours to complete a task but are paid less because of how much government can afford to run the economy. In this vocational training, everyone had eyes on the prize for example, after their full training every trainee was going to get a machine as a gift for the start of their career. The trainees had an incentive to spend three-to-five hours almost everyday to learn skills and be able to use the machines to make their careers.

m. The most important thing I learned from this experience is when the women and girls were so excited to come to join the classes despite of the security situation even after we restarted our project in September 2021. I can say that women in the Afghan society don’t give up, they are persistent to what they must achieve even if they have scarce resources and less security.

I believe in the empowerment of women and believe its worth while to start again and again if we must. Majority women at grassroots can and will bring change and peace. If women are empowered, in their societies and communities, they won’t only thrive but will grow seeds of peace which will in turn change the generations of Afghanistan.
Section II: Four Photographs