Empowering Afghan Women Through Embroidery
Afghanistan
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Ia. The Davis Project for Peace – Empowering Afghan Women Through Embroidery – was designed to diminish the dependency of women on men, create a sense of self-worth for targeted beneficiaries, and, in doing so, alleviate the underlying causes of domestic violence against Afghan women. The short-run core objective of this project was to make these women stand on their own feet, take their children away from the hard labor work on streets and send them to school. Ib. The project has provided all necessary materials, such as wooden embroidery hoops, plain cloth, scissors, thread, and needles.

Ic. At the onset of the training, each trainee, including three trainers, received these materials where each trainer was responsible to train six participants, which totaled 18 beneficiaries in addition to three trainers. I started recruiting trainees on 1 June. Taking into consideration the alacrity, and acuity in learning embroidery potential project participants, I was especially careful to select the neediest and those with more children. A majority of the participants came from Charqala, a very impoverished area adjacent to Taimani, where the actual project took place. Thirteen participants were married, including the two widows. Participants had an average number of four children each. One trainee had as many as nine children. The project directly impacted 21 families, which totals 80 individuals. More importantly, Empowering Afghan Women Through Embroidery has sent to school 21 children, who would have otherwise worked on the dangerous streets of Kabul as child labors to find livelihood for their families.

After consultation with the trainers and taking into account the keenness of the beneficiaries, the project was divided into three phases. First, over a period of about two weeks, the participants were familiarized with the basic art of embroidery; both theoretical and practical work, including different designs, were discussed and taught. Over this time, the goal was to practice and teach various designs of embroidery, which were most desired in the market. In this phase, some in-depth market research on the embroidered cloth and clothiers also took place. The second phase lasted one month. All participants were given plain cloths with the woven designs that they had practised in phase one. They undertook embroidery, often independently with some oversight by the trainers. For most participants, the result was better than expected. Except for one trainee who still struggles but is making some progress, all have moved to the third phase of the project successfully. The third phase includes embroidering independently in its entirety. In this phase, the now-trained trainees are professional and experienced seamstresses who are given plain cloths with specific designs to embroider at their own time and pace. They must meet the deadline to produce embroidered products. The trainers will check the quality of the embroidery and pack items before they are supplied to the contracted trader in the market.

There were several types of products produced during the course of this project, shirts, pirahan (Afghan national costume), and pacha (embroidery around the cuff of female trousers). Thanks to the special skills of one of the trainers, the project participants also learned chinai-dosi (or ancient Chinese embroidery style) which is very common and highly demanded. Unlike the traditional Afghan embroidered shirt, chinai-dosi has embroidery with colorful threads designed not just around the neck and on the chest of the shirt, but also around the cuff and waist.

I had planned to provide a sewing machine for each seamstress upon completion of the training. However, many of the women were far more in need of cash than a machine, which it turned out they could borrow from family or neighbors. The trainers agreed to help them sew their garments. In the short-run, the direct impact of my project was to reduce poverty and make these women financially independent and able to send their children to school. There are two widows who lost their husbands who are now the sole breadwinners in the household. Each has three children. They are now professional seamstresses with income generated through Empowering Afghan Women Through Embroidery. Gul Jan, a woman with 5 children whose husband recently lost his job and has heart disease, wept when she received the income in exchange for the embroidered work she diligently produced. She remarked that she urgently needed the money to provide basic necessities for her children and most importantly take her husband to the doctor.
Now, upon completion of the embroidery work, the participants bring their products to the trainers for scissoring and sewing. The trainers also function as the contact point to wash, iron, and pack the products into plastic bags and take them to the clothier where the seller and I have made an agreement. The trainers—contact point—keep approximately 10 percent benefit aside, which will be used to expand and sustain the project. As this circulation continues, I plan to turn the project into a non-profit micro-credit organization. Currently, I am working on developing a website for the project and am writing a template for the shirts, some of which I have brought for sale and fund-raising to Colby.

IIa. My project contributes directly toward peace and the reduction of violence in the troubled Afghanistan where promotion of peace is imminently desired by a vast majority of ordinary Afghans. Peace is the cessation of violence, social disturbance, and war that would otherwise make development impossible in a society. The generation of income by the mothers prevents children from working on the dangerous streets of Kabul and they will instead attend schools and create an educated generation of Afghans. In the short-run, these children will not be subject to child labor and easy targets for riots, violence, child soldiers, and terrorist recruitment. In the long run, their education will cause flourish the human resources of Afghanistan who would contribute greatly toward building a peaceful country. These children define the future of their country. An educated generation of Afghans takes Afghanistan in a peaceful direction where they will co-exist peacefully rather than hate each other.

Nekpai is a mountainous area located in Baghlan province in northern Afghanistan. The main product in Baghlan is rice. But since Nekpai is a mountainous area, its inhabitants cultivate wheat to survive. Most households are, therefore, penurious. Drought has terribly affected the area for the past two years. Seema used to live there. Her family had little cultivable land. They decided to migrate to Kabul for survival. They settled in one of the poorest areas where rent is less expensive. It is a quasi-slum area, which has narrow ponds used as sewage that flows in the midst of the streets. The houses are built without a municipality plan and often have no electricity, running water, canalization, or sewage system. Seema’s husband looked for a job in Kabul. As he was illiterate and uneducated, he could not get an office job. After almost two months of searching for a job, he talked to a friend about being unemployed. His friend introduced him to labor working with cranes used for loading and unloading containers and other materials. One unfortunate day, while Abdul Karim was trying to hook the crane cable to the corner of the container, a cable broke and injured Abdul Karim. His co-workers took him to the hospital, but after almost 36 hours of internal bleeding, Abdul Karim left Seema a widow and his three daughters orphans. Seema had been a housewife her entire life with no social or outside work experience. After Karim’s death, she suddenly was the sole breadwinner at home with grave responsibilities including house rent, her children’s education, clothing, food, and medicine. To support the family, Seema had to be outside the house to find a job. Seema enrolled in a few nearby Employment Offices. I had posted some announcements at these offices for the Empowering Afghan Women Through Embroidery. Thanks to the Empowering Afghan Women Through Embroidery, Seema now is a skilled seamstress. Seema, who received a sewing machine, is now capable earning some income to support her family, provide for their education, food, clothing, medicine, and house rent. Seema’s oldest daughter, who is seven can now attend school at grade one as her mother now can support the family. By August 25, Seema and 17 other participants were trained embroiders with a job and income, no longer depending their families for support.

I do not think that my vision of peace has changed. However, it is a vision of peace for a troubled and often violent area. Peace might have a different meaning for me in another place and context. I remain committed to improving the lives of families in Afghanistan and committed to the idea that enable women to support and educate their children is the best way to approach peace for this region of the world.

“My mission is to alleviate poverty and promote gender equality, so that women, children, and families will have opportunities that make them less vulnerable to violence and the influence of insurgents that prey upon the destitute. Most importantly, this project will instigate future efforts to develop Afghanistan’s human resources. The security of both the region and the world will benefit.”