Dining for Women and Rubia

SUSTAINED GRANT February 2013-15

Sewing Lasting Threads of Change

Second Interim Progress Report

Sewing Lasting Threads of Change

Reporting Period: April 1, 2014 – March 30, 2015
Program Title:  Sewing Lasting Threads of Change

Location:  Farah Province, Afghanistan

Grant Amount:  $47030 ($15000/year plus $2030)

Featured Program:  November 2013 and 2014

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Recap briefly what outcomes the program was designed to achieve.

The Threads of Change (ToC) curriculum is a blend of health, hygiene, literacy, civic education, human rights and empowerment designed to achieve these long-term outcomes:

- Growth in women’s political and community leadership
- Expanded bargaining power for women within their households
- Increased respect for human rights, including women’s rights
- Improved health and hygiene (higher vaccination rates, fewer infections)
- Increased enrollment of girls in school
- Higher rates of female literacy
- Economic empowerment of Afghan women.

Has funding changed for this program? For example, have you received unexpected funding from another source?

Rubia is grateful to have received an unexpected $2,030 from Dining for Women in July of 2014. We used most of this for designing and pilot-testing a “cloth book” that would both reinforce the ToC lessons and enable the women to practice their embroidery skills.

In the past trainers have distributed photocopies of ToC training materials, but they are not durable. When the paper gets wet or torn the images are lost. Our solution to this problem is a book made of durable cloth pages the women can embroider like a traditional sampler. Ongoing stitching of the ToC lessons reinforces the women’s newly acquired knowledge. Each participant will receive her own book, equipping her to bring the lessons home to her family. The book’s circulation in the women’s domestic sphere will widen the reach of its essential messages.

Is your organization or program situation different than presented in the approved proposal?
In July 2014, Rubia opened a new program in post-conflict Mali where we are empowering women and youth through the sale of traditional bogolan (mudcloth) textiles. Our geographic expansion beyond Afghanistan is reflected in our revised mission statement:

“to reduce poverty and create economic opportunities that empower women through cooperative business training, education, and the sale of their heritage handwork; and to promote literacy, health and hygiene education for families in Afghanistan, the United States, Mali and other marginalized communities around the world.”

What challenges are you facing as you move forward with this project? How are you approaching these challenges?

Security: Our biggest challenge has been keeping participants and trainers safe as they travel to and from ToC classes. Not only are we concerned about the risk of the Taliban, but the recent presence of ISIS in Farah heightened our security concerns in 2014.

Afghans working with aid organizations are in danger of being kidnapped or killed by the Taliban or ISIS. In response, we were cautious about where and when the classes took place. We departed from the original work plan by selecting only one village in Anardara rather than two and by choosing the remaining three villages from Farah City, a safer and more secure district. Furthermore, the District Governor gave us regular security updates that guided our selection of the class dates-- thus minimizing the risk of threats.

Conservative Cultural Norms: Conservative cultural norms in Farah province presented a challenge to enrollment of girls and women in the ToC training program. The very act of girls going out in public to attend school contradicts the traditional practice of purdah, in which women over the age of 12 cannot leave their homes without a male relative. In response, our trainers oriented local government officials and community elders in July, 2014, before the program began, about ToC objectives. Sharing copies of the ToC
materials in advance assuaged concerns that our lessons would violate the Afghan constitution and prevailing social norms. Following the orientation there was less opposition from conservative community members to female participation in the training.

**Have you revised your original objectives since the project began? If so, why? What are your new objectives?**

We designed and tested a “cloth book” to implement an added objective of creating a curricular tool that would enable the women to consolidate their understanding of the ToC lessons after the formal training was completed.

*Haji Mir Ahmad* from Nawde village walks with his 11-year-old daughter to school. His older daughters married young; but after attending *Threads of Change* training, he recognizes the value of girls’ secondary school education.

**What progress have you made toward achieving your objectives?**

**Project Objective** (from January 4, 2012 proposal): *The objective is to educate and empower 500 Afghan women and girls in Farah Province with Rubia’s *Threads of Change* curriculum. Two hundred men will also participate in the training, in order to learn the life lessons embedded in ToC and to ensure ToC and women’s rights are accepted by the community.*

**Impact of DfW Funding to Date** (1 year grant in 2011, plus Sustaining Grant 2013-5): Since 2011, Dining for Women has generously supported Rubia’s *Threads of Change* training program. To date, 1200 women have empowered themselves with skills, knowledge and income, 450 in Nangrahar and 750 in Farah province.

**Impact of DfW Funding in 2013:** The first year of Dining for Women funding enabled 250 community members (200 women and 50 men) to participate in the *ToC* training program promoting family health and hygiene, human rights, women’s rights to education and voting and ending child marriage and domestic violence. In 2013, the 200 women trained in Farah put into practice the new knowledge they gained from ToC of their political rights by registering to vote and participating in village-level *shuras* (councils).

**Impact of DfW Funding in 2014:** The weekly awareness sessions starting in August, 2014, targeted 200 community members in the districts of Farah City and Anardara. Of these, there were 150 women and 50 men ranging in age from 14-60, as follows:
• 100 female adults ages between 30 to 60 years
• 50 male adults ages between 30 to 60 years
• 50 female youth ages between 14 to 29 years

While the majority of the beneficiaries were not literate, secondary school students and schoolteachers also attended.

2013 female voter registration and participation in shuras and community development councils demonstrated the impact of ToC in the political arena. Building on these results, the women voted in the presidential election of 2014, mirroring the ToC image of women casting their ballots. (See photo above of embroidered lesson, “Women Can Vote.”)

However, in 2014 the rise in Taliban influence in Farah province threatened recent gains in women’s status. Backsliding may occur if community organizations working there do not sustain their commitment to the rights of girls and women. With this in mind, in the second year of the ToC project we chose to focus on four rights-centered messages:

1. *Girls have the right to attend school.* Education of girls empowers them to be independent, earn an income and gain recognition in the family and society.

2. *Importance of male relatives’ engagement in girls’ education.*

3. *No Child Marriage.* While the tradition is for the majority of families to marry off their daughters under age 16, the legal age of marriage is 17.

4. *No Violence against women.* Violence against women is a violation of both women’s human rights and the Afghan constitution.

The lessons represented by the images above reflect Rubia’s commitment to maintain momentum behind the achievement of girls and women’s rights in Afghanistan after the Americans have left.

Increase in Girls’ Enrollment in School-One indicator of the impact of the training is that more families have been sending their daughters to school. The 2013 ToC training motivated the women to try to persuade their husbands that their daughters have the right to go to school. But we realized that if only mothers believed in their daughters’ right to education, their husbands could pull their girls out of school at any time. In 2014 the impact of ToC on girls enrollment was even more direct. After engaging in the training themselves, the fathers enrolled their daughters in school. Participation of men—the primary household decision makers—in classes on the rights of women and girls makes the impact of the ToC training more sustainable.
For example, Haji Mir Ahmad, a farmer and influential community member from Nawde village and one of our beneficiaries, enrolled his 11-year old daughter in school after attending ToC sessions for three months. Of his eight children, three are girls. He was brave enough to share that two daughters were married at an early age. He told our trainer that he would make sure his enrolled daughter completed high school and even went to University.

But not all fathers were as open as Mr. Ahmad. See “Blog-like Summary of Impact” below for a more representative Farah province father.

Do you anticipate any difficulties in completing your project in the timeframe outlined in your proposal?

The timetable has been delayed by several months for security and logistical reasons since the project began in June, 2013. The final phase of training will begin in July or August of 2015. We would like to request that Dining for Women give us approval to complete the project in the spring of 2016, rather than at the end of 2015.

2015 Expense Breakdown-We spent the grant as follows: $6,300 on Threads of Change (ToC) trainers and monitoring staff; $3730 on transportation for trainers and trainees and $5070 on curriculum materials and training costs; and $1930 on design and pilot-testing of the cloth book.

Message to Supporters: Dining for Women chapter members, many many thanks for your support. Your generosity is making a significant difference in the lives of Afghan women and girls like Fatima from Farah City—be sure to read her story below.
Blog-style Summary of Impact: Fatima’s Education

Trainer Parveen Tofan is pictured here with the ToC image “Girls have the right to go to school.”

In 2014, 15 year-old Fatima was attending grade eight in sub-district 1 of Farah City. One day in October, her father asked her to stay at home and not to go to school anymore. He believed that she was a young lady now and it was time to sit at home and wait until someone asks for her hand in marriage. Fatima, who loved her school and classmates, argued with her father; but he refused to listen.

Fatima was also enrolled in the ToC training, taught by Parveen Tofan. Out of respect for Parveen, her father, Qader Khan, allowed his wife and daughter to attend the sessions. Disappointed in her father, Fatima discussed the issue with Parveen who immediately met with him. Qader Khan shared his concern that if Fatima continues in school, she might have fewer marriage proposals. Parveen asked him if a female member of his family were ill, would he take her to a male or a female doctor? Mr. Qader replied of course he would take her to a female doctor. In return Parveen asked him if there is no female teacher, where the female doctor will come from? Despite Parveen’s efforts, he was not convinced to send his daughter to school. Parveen thanked him for listening to her and asked him to attend the ToC training for men in his village. He had high respect for Parveen and he agreed to try it. These sessions gave him the chance to discuss girls’ education with other men, some of who were supportive of the idea. Parveen met with him again many times at his home and continued to explain how important is it for his daughter to at least graduate from the 12th grade. Parveen remained respectful of the father’s opinion while persuading him to change. The experienced trainer’s patient, step-by-step approach worked. After two months of continuous efforts from Parveen, Fatima’s father agreed to let her finish high school. This decision was a huge step for her father. Threads of Change catalyzed this transformation in his attitude toward her education and age of marriage.