



## Program Fact Sheet

November 2010

**Program:** Rubia

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**Website:** [www.rubiahandwork.org](http://www.rubiahandwork.org)

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**Mission:** Rubia's mission is to develop economic opportunities through craft heritage, to support education and to promote health and well-being for Afghan women and their families.

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**Where Rubia Works:** DFW's funds will allow Rubia to develop their "Threads of Change" in the rural Nangarhar region, located in eastern Afghanistan. The program will be implemented in multiple villages throughout the province.



**About the Region:** According to the 2009 Human Development Report, Afghanistan is listed as the world's second least developed country.<sup>1</sup>

In the Nangarhar region, where an **estimated 31-43 percent live below the poverty line** (the amount of money required to meet basic needs, such as food and housing<sup>2</sup>), much of the population relies on farming as a primary source of income. Partly due to lack of available water, farmers living in remote areas illicitly cultivate opium poppies, Afghanistan's sixth most commonly grown crop.



Nangarhar

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## History of Afghanistan

**Ancient History:** Afghanistan has perhaps the oldest history in the world: archeological evidence indicates that farmers and herdsmen resided in the area in 50,000 BCE. In 330 BCE, **Alexander the Great invaded the region and created many great cities, most of them named Alexandria. In these early years, most inhabitants celebrated Buddhism.** The Islamic conquest of 642 CE brought about a progressive culture which promoted religious tolerance, education, and gender equality. The area remained under Islamic control until the 19th century, when Britain laid claims to the region as an extension of its British India. It wasn't until 1919 that Afghanistan won its complete freedom.



**Kabul**

**Modern History:** When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, the U.S. backed local Afghan commanders (*mujaheddin*) by supplying money and weapons. But after the Soviets retreated, the *mujaheddin* tore the country apart with their new weapons. The civil wars of 1992-1996 caused even further damage, forcing millions of Afghans into exile. Throughout the ensuing period of unrest, the Taliban took over and quickly enforced their fundamentalist way of life upon the country.



**In 2007, Afghanistan marketed 8,200 tons of opium, or 93% of the world's opiates supply.**<sup>5</sup>

When Osama bin Ladin took refuge in the hills of Tora Bora after 9/11, the U.S. began a bombing campaign to push the Taliban out of the country. Although the United States succeeded in setting up a shaky democratic government, the Taliban continue to resist U.S. occupation and the establishment of a new government. Ethnic tension, attacks by the Taliban, and government corruption cause widespread violence and poverty throughout the country. The West has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the eradication of narcotics, yet poppy cultivation still continues, partly because it is a guaranteed money-maker even for the desperately poor.<sup>4</sup>

**“Public beatings and executions; forced prayer; extreme repression of women; the banning of music, film and representational art; the destruction of the 1,500-year-old Buddhas of Bamian: all of these made the Taliban international pariahs.”<sup>3</sup>**

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**About Rubia:** Named for a red root used to dye yarn, Rubia is “creating new traditions in textiles by translating the heritage and skills of Afghan women into sustainable livelihoods.” A New Hampshire-based nonprofit organization, Rubia helps women replace opium farming with an alternative source of income.

- **Rubia has initiated several educational and practical skills courses throughout Afghanistan**, including a home-based education for men and women in the Darrai Noor province.
- **Rubia uses the *Sewing Confidence* curriculum**, which was originally used in the U.S. to provide Burundian refugee women with the educational and economical skills to fulfill their needs.
- **Currently, *Sewing Confidence* not only provides assistance for women in Afghanistan**, but it is also open to women of *all* ethnic backgrounds in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

**History of Rubia:** Rubia was born out of the urgent need to create livelihoods among Afghan refugees in Pakistan. In 2000, Rubia began



*Heart Sachets made by the craftswomen*

with an embroidery project with a handful of refugees, but, when the initiative quickly expanded to nearly 100 participants, Rubia added a literacy program and built an elementary school for Afghan children. In the summer of 2003, refugees began to return to Afghanistan. In response, Rubia established an income generation project along with basic literacy classes in Darrai Noor, in eastern Afghanistan. **Throughout the years, Rubia has transformed into an organization based on much more than handwork production: while empowering Afghan women**

**through a multi-levelled approach, it also seeks community building and education.** After all, as one Rubia representative wrote: “Handwork is one means to livelihood. Education is the goal that will transform their futures.”

**The Project:** Rubia’s “Threads of Change” program will provide a practical education to Afghan women living in the rural province of Nangrahar. In a region economically-dependent on poppy farming and the export of opium, Threads of Change provides women an alternative and more stable source of income.

#### Statistics

- Only 24% of the population in Nangarhar has access to safe drinking water.<sup>1</sup>
- 87% of Afghan women are illiterate.<sup>5</sup>
- 88% of the Nangarhar region is rural.<sup>1</sup>
- 34% have access to electricity in Nangarhar.<sup>1</sup>
- 1 in 3 Afghan women experience physical, psychological, or sexual violence.<sup>5</sup>
- 65% have access to health facilities (1 hour or less by foot) in Nangarhar.<sup>1</sup>
- 70-80 percent of women face forced marriages.<sup>5</sup>
- The average life expectancy is 44.<sup>5</sup>
- 70% of Afghan girls have no access to education.<sup>5</sup>

**The program’s curriculum, which will include literacy, health, human rights, civics, and handwork, will help to improve the health and status of women by teaching them to make and sell needlework.** Threads of Change’s pro-democratic curriculum also seeks to arm its students with a better understanding of their rights under the government and Islam, while providing them with basic health and hygiene education and conflict-resolution techniques. Leaders will be trained in a central location (Jalalabad, the capital of the Nangarhar province), but Rubia’s Threads of Change programs will become available to women in multiple locations throughout the poverty-stricken region. Current leaders will look among their students for emerging leaders, who will be trained and mentored to continue the program.

**DFW’s contribution will fund much of the development and implementation of Threads of Change, which will impact more than 600 women.**



*“Rubia prides itself on working within the family context, respectful of Afghan culture and values. In rural Darrai Noor local tradition dictates that women’s faces not be seen in public. Proudly, Rubia women show off their embroideries, wearing the traditional chadri or burqa.” -rubiahandwork.org*

**Why Rubia is Unique:** “Above all, we respect and function within the cultural norms and day-to-day realities of Afghan family life,” writes a Rubia representative. While many nongovernmental organizations avoid this rural area because of its lack of security, **Rubia is able to approach even the most marginalized women because of its willingness to work inside the pre-established social system.** For example, while Afghan patriarchy may prohibit women from obtaining an education, society typically supports the learning of new skills which will help the family economically. The curriculum pleases the husbands and fathers by bringing in more money, yet it empowers women through creativity, literacy, health education, and civic awareness.

**About the Craftswomen:** Rubia works within the family context. The craftswomen work between their domestic chores, and are paid by the piece as they finish their work. Their signed work is marketed throughout Afghanistan and the U.S., through direct sales at shows and fairs. **For many, their stitched signatures represent their newfound literacy.** Rubia provides the craftswomen training and high quality materials, and the women are aware that they are preserving the rich cultural tradition of their mothers and grandmothers. Working for Rubia typically has been an Afghan woman’s first opportunity to earn her own income.

**Project Budget:** DFW funds will support the development and establishment of Threads for Change, nearly or completely in its entirety. Rubia, who DFW is funding for the first time, has requested \$23,150, which will support a year’s worth of work in Afghanistan. *100% of money raised by DFW will go toward the Threads of Change Program.*

Expense	Amount/year	Notes
Curriculum	\$6,200	Includes printing, templates, and design layouts
Activities (to implement curriculum for women in 4 locations in Nargarhar)	\$12,350	includes payment for local trainers (\$150/month), transportation, and communication
Overhead and unforeseen costs	\$4,600	for Rubia’s Kabul office expenses related to project development, implementation, and reporting.

**Total Expenses: \$23,150**

**Sources**

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