



CASE STUDY

Weaving Hope for Afghan Widows

Group unites women to produce and sell distinctive wool carpets



Photo: USAID/Afghanistan

Widows in the Adraskan District of western Afghanistan voted to form an association to produce and market traditional wool carpets in a USAID-funded project.

“When I finish a carpet,” said Sara, age 17 and one of the association’s youngest widows, “I will sell it and solve my economic problems and help my father.” Sara also supports two young daughters.

Challenge

Years of drought depleted livestock and impoverished many families in Herat Province, in Western Afghanistan near the Iranian border. Poppy smuggling is a common source of income for some, but many men have lost their lives in this dangerous and illegal enterprise. Due to these deaths, the Adraskan District has more widows than any other district in the province. Most of these widows are unable to earn enough to provide for themselves and their children, or even to purchase basic materials for making carpets, for which Herat is well-known.

Initiative

USAID funded a project in the historically Islamic community of Mir Ali in Adraskan District to reinvigorate the traditional wool carpet weaving economy. Thirty-three widows worked with female staff members trained in association development and small business marketing, and formed a carpet making association. The project focused on widows as they were the most vulnerable group in the community and had the greatest need for assistance.

Results

The association held several meetings, and voted to provide each member with a loom and other carpet making tools. The widows enthusiastically began the task of producing traditional wool carpets for the local market, and have already met initial success. In fact, during a recent carpet exhibition in Kabul, the association was able to sell many carpets at profitable prices. The second stage of the association’s activities is focused on improved marketing of the carpets. The association is now searching for better marketing opportunities in places such as the province’s capital, Herat.