Hearing the Unheard

A Process of Learning, Challenging and Moving Forward

Labour Education Foundation
Home Based toy making workers at work in Shahdara, Lahore

Family of Home Based Bangle workers at work in Hyderabad
Hearing the Unheard

A Process of Learning, Challenging and Moving Forward

LEF Labour Education Foundation
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>★ Sincere efforts bear fruit</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Awareness through Cooperative</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Never suffer silently</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Informed women can build pressure for rights</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Refusing to live on 'others' decision</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Determined to win recognition</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Pleading workers' case through plays</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Networking for a change</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ No more a weak girl</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Learning self-help through Cooperative</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Cooperative reflects our emotions</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Empower women through education</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Education for a Change</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Open schools for giving women their voice</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ The leading light</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Overcoming physical weaknesses</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Waiting for education facility</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Education for employment</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Educate generations for progress</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Overcoming opposition to girls' education</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Couple joins literacy centre</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Education gives awareness of rights</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Ready to work but on equal basis</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Satiating childhood desire through daughter</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Awareness a tool to get one's rights</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Skilled hands support their families</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ From learning to teaching</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Literacy wins match</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Breaking shackles of tradition</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Where there is will there is a way</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Life is not bed of roses</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Vying for an educated family</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Teasing to ignorance</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Education reforms life</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Every age is suitable age for education</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Dream comes true</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Pass on what you learn</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ From kiln to a factory</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Earning respect through literacy</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Knowledge for a change</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>★ Knowledge is power</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword

Under the aegis of Democracy, Peace and Workers Rights, Adult Literacy Development Project, Adult Literacy Centers, Home Based Women Workers Cooperatives and Labour Community Organizations, the Labour Education Foundation observed the initiatives bringing a change and transformation in the lives of people, hence the idea of recording and publishing the stories reflecting the change, increase in consciousness and courage to face the challenges was envisaged.

The methodology adopted to compile these life stories was interviews with the partners and beneficiaries of the Labour Education Foundation projects, Adult Literacy Centers and Home-Based Women Workers. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to record situations, feelings and the level of change among the participants to the projects and awareness on social, economical and political issues. Another objective was to gauge the level of success against the described objectives of the projects for planning and designing the next ones.

The objective of this publication, along with documenting the achievements of the projects, is to highlight the fact that spaces and opportunities are available and there is a willingness amongst communities to change the realities around their lives, if given a chance. It is hoped that this publication will create awareness about workers right in the country.

Khalid Mehmood
Director
Labour Education Foundation
Introduction

This publication is based on outcome of different activities of LEF. The most promising initiatives were:

Home Based Women Workers Cooperatives - Labour Education Foundation, in collaboration with its partners, initiated seven Home Based Women Workers Cooperatives in 2006 in Karachi and Hyderabad. The Cooperatives were autonomous associations of women united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and political needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-managed enterprises. The objective was raising awareness among working women about their economical, social and political rights. Each cooperative had one meeting hall where members could arrange their meetings and trainings. Another room was specified for study circles, meetings and administrative business of the cooperative. Besides enhancing better earning opportunities, the cooperatives played an important role in bringing the issues of gender and customary discrimination, legal and political rights, national and international policies and its affect on the agenda of the workers.

The story of Ayesha from Karachi reveals the significant role the cooperatives played in her struggle for a better life as she says, "The information I got at the (Roshni) Cooperative's meetings and study circles made me so confident and courageous that during prolonged illness, and resultant unemployment, of my husband, I boldly faced the challenges that life threw in my way". Ayesha further says, "I worked inside as well as outside my home to meet our domestic needs. Besides, I searched out job opportunities for my husband and also consoled him not to lose his heart during testing times." The cooperative facilitated Ayesha in terms of raising awareness about the share of women in inheritance, ill-effects of fixing a meager amount as dower by misusing the name of Shariah, and importance of various clauses of nikahnama (marriage contract) usually crossed out while filling up the pro-forma.

Hanifa from Karachi admires the role of Cooperative by saying, “I have attended many Cooperative meetings, where we shared our problems and listened to each other's ideas.” Cooperative meetings
were an immense source to break the isolation of women, thus giving a sense of strength. Hanif asserts women should come out and fight for their rights as "sitting idle and fearful at home will not be helpful in solving any issue." By participating in Cooperative activities women learnt about their personal status and legal rights as Sajida reminds: "It is our right. If we are not considered as human beings, why should we remain confined in the marriage yoke". She, however, argues that a woman can take such a step only when she is informed and has some skill to earn her livelihood.

As home-based workers operate in isolation hence they have little opportunities to collaborate and share with others. Evidently Cooperatives provided women a space and an enabling environment where they could discuss, strategize and develop a sense of togetherness and solidarity. Yasmeen from Karachi highlights how she was able to earn better due to her affiliation with the Cooperative as she started getting work orders at reasonable rates paid on time. Due to information on different topics like gender issues, unionism, marriage contract, home-work convention, informal sector industry and skills in stitching work given at the Cooperative, she was confident enough to negotiate with the middlemen for increasing her wages. "We are all prepared to support each other in our mutual sorrows and happiness."

Considering the low literacy rate amongst workers, the partners adopted different techniques to disseminate message about workers rights. Amber and Rozina, both from Karachi, took up theatrical performances to underline problems and difficulties of informal sector workers, low wages, lack of social security, healthcare, lacunas, absence and non-implementation of labour laws.

Information dissemination, organization and collective struggle are important to claim and secure the rights of workers and Labour Education Foundation’s initiatives have become a medium for raising consciousness. The project saw workers organizing at different levels. Jamila along with other members have formed a committee for sharing and discussing alternatives for each other’s problems. "There were water, health and other issues in our area and we decided to form a committee to resolve the same at the local basis. This committee organized a camp for TB in our area."
Similarly, Rehana wishes to form a strong organization of labourers so that they can jointly work for building a world in which no one is a loser, where there is no war and tension, none is superior or inferior to other and everyone is getting one's due rights.

Community Kitchens - Labour Education Foundation introduced the concept of Community Kitchen in Cooperative for home-based women workers, where the workers could buy food at subsidized rates. The rationale behind the community kitchen was to provide relief to the workers so they could work with full attention to supplement their family income without cooking worries. A kitchen committee was elected in each cooperative by its members. The committee would meet regularly to discuss the issues of finance and management.

Women workers were appreciative of the initiative as it saved their time, provided them quality food at cheaper rates besides reducing their gas bills. According to Ayesha, the Cooperative helped her in managing her kitchen. It absolved her of the anxiety of cooking when the work would have exhausted her. "Now I get cheap but hygienic food from the Cooperative and spend the time thus saved in my business." Hanifa also appreciates the community kitchen as a great facility for home-based women workers. “Women can buy subsidized food from here and get some relief in terms of cooking anxieties.”

Sadia, while admiring the community kitchen facility, says the provision of meals at affordable prices has saved her time and smoothened work. Earlier, she had to start her work early in the morning and continue with it without a break so that time could be saved for cooking. This would exhaust her and cause aching in her limbs and arms. Now free from cooking obligation, she gives full time to stitching clothes booked through the Cooperative.

Adult Literacy Centers - Labour Education Foundation established adult literacy centers to provide workers with basic skills of reading and writing and most importantly to involve them in a discourse about social, legal, political and economic rights of citizens. Functioning of these centers was designed in close and active collaboration of respective communities by establishing Centers Management Committees consisting of parents and community
members to manage and run the centers.

Shaheen joined the School for Working Children when a branch was opened in her neighborhood. She says that reading and writing skill helped her in doing calculations, units and wages of her work. The education also enabled her brother to start his own business. Shaheen guided her brother in business and market negotiation and helped him in bookkeeping. The brother now goes to the market for seeking orders directly from the shopkeepers. She believes that education and skill trainings are necessary for women empowerment and their economic protection. Women must also be aware of their rights and the means to claim them.

Sadia joined a school only to drop out due to shrinking family resources in the face of ever-increasing price hike and poverty graphs. But stories of struggle and fight back shared at the Home-based Project’s Regional Conference at Islamabad by representatives of various organizations inspired her enough and she penned a travelogue on the conference. She decided to restart her learning and increase her information base at every cost. She enthusiastically takes part in the study circles held at the Cooperative for self-enlightenment. Thus the whole booklet sheds light on observations, feelings, experiences and learning of people involved in different project activities extending a hope for better surroundings and circumstances.
Sincere efforts bear fruit

Three years ago the Labour Education Foundation started to work in the locality dwelled by a small immigrant community called Godhara belonging to Indian Gujarat.

Presently two female, one male centre and one skill development centre are being successfully run by an eight member Center Management Committee consisting of social activists, councilors, doctors and trade union activists. In the beginning, the response was slow. With the passage of time and due to community and workers oriented activities it started attracting a large number of cluster groups, especially youth and women workers belonging to informal sector—mainly textile.

Adult Literacy Project Karachi teacher Saira mobilized substantial grants from the local government during her term as a social activist and teacher. She actively monitored developmental work in the area, mobilized financial resources for special people. So far she has got admitted 15 learners of the Adult Literacy Project to the area's regular government and private-run schools. She is also active in getting addressed the problems faced by the people in her vicinity due to frequent power failures.

Saira also played an active role in clearing the locality of garbage and dirt, arranged proper dumping bags, monitored sewer cleansing, advocated for women issues, sought PAWLA support against women's exploitation, conducted numerous programmes for social awareness and arranged visits of PAWLA team to the area. Now she is working as a social mobilizer for Home-Based Women Workers project.
Awareness through Cooperative

The story of Ayesha of Karachi reveals how much Cooperative has been vital in creating awareness. “The information I got at the (Roshni) Cooperative's meetings and study circles made me so confident and courageous that during prolonged illness, and resultant unemployment, of my husband, I boldly faced the challenges that life threw in my way,” says 30-year-old semi-literate embroidery worker, with five children. "I worked inside as well as outside my home to meet our domestic needs. Besides, I searched out job opportunities for my husband and also consoled him not to lose heart during testing times."

This made Ayesha’s husband, so far reluctant to allow her join the Cooperative's activities outside their neighborhood, to realize the need and importance of the women education and their skills training. "He has developed so much trust in me and the Cooperative that he is not resisting even our daughter's move to follow my footsteps," says Ayesha, who is eager to improve her formal education. Her family traditions do not allow womenfolk to step out of their homes. But learning about the Roshni Cooperative for informal sector workers through a chance meeting with a social mobilizer, she got her husband's permission, though with much difficulty, for joining monthly meetings as well as study circles there.

The opportunity gave her awareness about the share of women in inheritance, ill-effects of fixing a meager amount as dower by misusing the name of Shariah, and importance of various clauses of nikahnama (marriage contract) usually crossed out while filling up the pro-forma. She decided that while marrying off her daughters, she would fight for the protective cover these articles offer to women. So that her little dolls could get the respect, rights and
protection that she herself has been failing to attain.

Her family was ignorant of the importance of girls' education. But the awareness she got at the study circle made her to discuss with her husband and successfully convinced him of the significance of schooling for their daughters. She has two daughters and as many sons and all are going to school now. "I'm more than happy at the role the Cooperative played in creating this awareness," Ayesha exclaims with joy.

The newfound information also helped her in economic activities. "I used to get work in piece meal from a middleman, who would give me just Rs. 20 for finishing knots of 100 headscarves. But learning at the Cooperative that direct contract would earn me better, I along with a few colleagues approached a contractor and thus doubled and tripled my income." After six months, they're getting Rs. 60 per 100 headscarves' knots. The Cooperative is also helping her in managing "her" kitchen. It has absolved her of the anxiety of cooking when the work would have exhausted her. "Now I get cheap but hygienic food from the Cooperative and spend the time thus saved in my business."

She and her daughter are also students of stitching classes at the Cooperative. The skill would enable Ayesha to support her family while staying back at home.

Never suffer silently

Awareness can transform life even at an age when generally people lost all hopes. That's what happened with Hanifa, 55, an asthma patient. Hailing from Bahawalpur, Punjab province, she settled in Karachi 30 years ago when she was divorced by her husband. At the

The United Nations Human Development Report 2004 estimated that when both paid employment and unpaid household tasks are accounted for, on average women work more than men. In rural areas of selected developing countries women performed an average of 20% more work than men, or an additional 102 minutes per day.
time she had five children, the eldest one (daughter) being seven years and the youngest one three months old. She was facing multiple social and economic difficulties when someone advised her to move to Karachi where she would get work easily. Along with her five children, she shifted to Karachi and started stitching clothes at home. However, the wages were too low making her work very hard to make both ends meet.

“I tried to provide education facilities to all of my children but could not. Although my eldest daughter is doing her post-graduation, I failed to support the studies of three other daughters due to financial constraints and domestic problems,” she says.

Hanifa says that under pressure from her family, she remarried. The second husband is her brother-in-law. She has a son from her second wedlock, which did not prove to be a good choice as her domestic circumstances worsened since. Her husband’s behavior is too rude and harsh towards his step-daughters.

In the meantime, she met a social mobilizer at Kiran Cooperative in New Karachi. Satisfied at the objectives of the Cooperative, opened for home-based women workers, she became its member.

Hanifa says at the Cooperative she learnt many things including conversation, self-confidence, delicacies of marriage contract form, C-177, women’s social, political and economic rights as the women would come there to share their problems and exchange views on various difficulties (children education, employment and price hike) of their lives. It gave her strength to fight against the worst conditions.

She asserts that women should come out and fight for their rights and secure themselves. “Sitting idle and fearful at home will not be helpful in solving any issue.” Leadership training and study circles
have infused a new life into her as she learnt about women rights and the way to fight for their rights through these programmes. “I have attended many Cooperative meetings where we share our problems and listen to each other’s ideas.” Cooperative meetings were a big source to break the isolation of women which gave them a sense of strength.

She actively participates in the “International Women’s Day” programme in the area. It encourages her not to suffer silently and rather raise voice against all injustices and fight for betterment of the womenfolk.

She appreciates the community kitchen, opened at the Cooperative, as a great facility for home-based women workers. “Women can buy subsidized food from here and get some relief in terms of cooking anxieties.” She suggests opening of more such centers for women workers.

The Home Work Convention was adopted by the General Assembly in 1996. It calls for national policies promoting equality of treatment between home workers and other wage earners, and it specifies the areas where such equality of treatment shall be promoted. These include:

- The right to establish or join organizations of their own choice and to participate in the activities of such organizations;
- Protection against discrimination in employment or occupation;
- Protection in the field of occupational safety and health: national laws and regulations on safety and health at work shall apply to home work and certain types of work or the use of certain substances may be prohibited in home work for reasons of safety and health;
- Remuneration;
- Statutory social security protection;
- Access to training;
- Minimum age for admission to employment or work, thereby preventing the use of child labour in home work; and finally:
- Maternity protection - a basic need for a category of workers where the great majority is women.
Informed women can build pressure for rights

Ill-information leads to exploitation by the powers of oppression. This is truer in a male-chauvinistic society. Yasmeen of Karachi, 30, is a home-based worker earning her livelihood through stitching of clothes. Her mother-in-law and other family members also do the same job. For a 12 to 16 hours per day work on an average, she was earning just Rs. 500 per week.

A vast majority of un-organized workers cannot get any legal privileges, if available, because they are not "workers" in the eyes of law. Women make over 60 percent of un-organized sector. The informal sector is growing rapidly as a result of opening up of national economy to market forces under pressure of the multi-national companies. The trend is visible in mining, bangle making, tannery, construction, ship-breaking, hotel, auto mechanic, textile, garments and dozens of other new sectors where the condition of workers is bleak as they get low wages with no fixed working hours, no job security or social cover, and no legal relief in case of dispute with the employer.

Yasmeen stitched baby frocks and suits for which she was offered low wages. However, since her affiliation with the Cooperative, she is getting work orders at reasonable rates paid on time. On the basis of the information on social topics like gender, union, marriage contract, home work convention, informal sector industry and skills in stitching work given at the Cooperative, she can now confidently negotiate with middlemen for increasing her wages. The cooperative also gives them the strength to fight for their rights as it has become a platform where women sit together and talk of solutions of their problems. “We are all prepared to support each other in our mutual sorrows and happiness.”

Yasmeen says that study circles and training programmes have given the women awareness about their issues as well as the political problems. She suggests that by giving awareness to all women a pressure can be built on the authorities concerned to frame laws for home-based workers and their children. She thinks that if government supports them and provides facilities they are all ready
to move forward. These skills have developed her confidence and now she can work better for her children and willing to convey her skills to other women.

The same situation is facing home-based women workers who are victims of the worst form of exploitation. The government is reluctant to ratify ILO Convention for Home-Based Workers C-177 that guarantees right to these tens of millions of women workers.

Refusing to live on 'others' decision'

Gripped by centuries-old cultural traditions and unaware of their rights, a majority of women in our society are leading their lives on the dictates and whims of others. Yasmeen of Karachi is 45 years old and has seven daughters and one son. Her husband has been working as a driver in KMC for the past twenty years. His monthly income is not sufficient to meet domestic needs so Yasmeen has to stitch garments she gets from the Cooperative at reasonable rates.

She says she was suppressed by her family for having given birth to so many daughters. She lived on “others' decisions” before attending the activities of Cooperative in her area. She belongs to Hazara, where generally women have very little rights and they are not allowed to argue before their husbands or other male family members. She says if she had the right to decision she must have adopted family planning. She was happy to learn that an organization named the Women Cooperative was working for women's rights and to organize women workers. Joining the Cooperative, she took part in study circles about leadership training.
“I have got information about rights, society and life from the Cooperative. I want to educate my daughters and provide nutritious food to them also,” she says. Now she is convincing her husband that she would continue going to the Cooperative as she was learning new skills. She has also made her married daughter a member of the Cooperative. Three more women from her daughter's in-laws have joined the Cooperative. Community kitchen has reduced her gas bills and she is able to get subsidized food at much cheaper rates than the market.

Determined to win recognition

Some children are born with a silver spoon in their mouth. There are some who are considered to be yoke of labour since birth till death by the inequalities in-built in the capitalist system. Ambar, 32, from Karachi, is among these children. She is in the stitching business since the age of 15 when she used to help her mother in the job. Her woes are unchanged even after her marriage as she has to do embroidery work to supplement her family's earnings. Day long toiling would give her just Rs. 50 while her offspring would keep waiting when their mother would be free to serve them food. The Cooperative came as a godsend for her as she is now getting food from its community kitchen for her whole family at a subsidized rate besides sparing her cooking time for doing more work.

Before obtaining Cooperative's membership, she was shy of even talking with women. But proper environment and better education transformed her nature. The cooperative meetings, study circles and various training programmes have enabled her to overcome this weaknesses and emboldened her to engage men, if need be, for discussing various issues. She is courageous enough to speak her mind at public meetings too. She is so bold now that she is highlighting problems and difficulties of informal sector workers
about low wages, lack of social security, health care and implementation of labour laws through theatrical performances. She joined the Apna Theatre Group and performed in many episodes.

"I'm determined to practically support the Labour Education Foundation in the struggle of the informal sector workers for winning recognition for their work and making the government grant them their due rights." Cosmetics' training at the Cooperative has added to her skills and earnings as, besides stitching, she is now preparing and marketing cosmetic items in her neighbourhood.

Though not well-educated, regular participation in study circles and training courses has opened a world of new information enabling her to solve not only her own problems, but offer counseling to others about women workers issues. She tells them that united we can resolve these issues. This fundamental change came after the Cooperative membership, a good omen for her and her offspring's future.

Pleading workers' case through plays

Rozina, 18, is an embroidery worker and stitching expert. She was getting Rs. 90 as remuneration for a full day job when she joined the Roshni Cooperative Karachi and started attending its meetings and study circles. This exposure to information about exploitation by middlemen made her realize the importance and proper rates of her toiling. Then she renegotiated rates with the middleman and on failure of the talks directly approached the contractor. However, he too was not a good paymaster. Utilizing the awareness inferred through the activities at the Cooperative, she got orders direct from the market and is now charging Rs. 150 to Rs. 200 per shirt. Through this income she is supporting her father and meeting
expenses of her siblings’ education.

Her association with the Cooperative has also sensitized her about women rights and has given certain information about nikahnama (marriage contract) form and importance of its columns her parents were ignorant of. The information and training is not only helping her in solving her own problems but also of her close relatives.

Fond of acting, Rozina has found an opportunity in the LEF training for highlighting informal sector workers' problems through plays. These plays throw light on different social issues and are much appreciated by society.

Networking for a change

Clarity and conviction about one's rights can enable one to argue one's case effectively and break norms of patriarchal society. Saadia from Karachi is associated with textile-related cottage industry for the last four years. She is expert in cropping, cut-work, stitching and headscarf lacing. Her brother and elder sister are married. She along with her younger sister and mother worked at home to earn their livelihood for they were disallowed to step outside by her parents. But when she got information and awareness about different issues and rights and discussed them with her parents, they permitted her to participate in the study circles and meetings.

She passed 10th grade with good marks but her education became a casualty at the altar of shrinking family resources in the face of ever-increasing price hike and poverty graphs. Her passion for education was enlivened when she heard stories of struggles and endeavors at the Home-based Project's Regional Conference at Islamabad, where leaders from different countries and representatives of various organizations were the participants. Then she decided to restart her education process at every cost.
Saadia is desirous of fighting for women's social, economic and political rights. She is happy that Roshni Cooperative has changed mindset of home-based women workers, who had been under the delusion that once poor is always poor. Now she knows that the connivance of capitalists and governments is responsible for the increasing poverty graph. The ruling elite devises policies for achieving its interests at the cost of workers.

She penned a travelogue regarding Islamabad regional conference, quite a good work keeping in view her age, education and life experience. She enthusiastically takes part in the study circles held at the Cooperative for self-enlightenment. About the community kitchen facility at the Cooperative, Saadia says the provision of meals at affordable prices has saved her time and smoother her work. Earlier, she had to start her work early in the morning and continue doing it without a break so that time could be saved for cooking. This would exhaust her and cause aching in her limbs and arms. Now free from cooking obligations, she gives full time to stitching clothes booked through the Cooperative.

The wages offered through the Cooperative are comparatively better. She terms it a good step and stresses for devising a strategy to promote this policy so that other home-based working women may also benefit from it.

She wishes to assemble the womenfolk in a network that will help them solve their issues on their own and raise a voice for their rights. Participation in study circles and meetings developed the idea that there must be a women organization for their rights in the area.

No more a weak girl

People with sick mind can sicken others, especially the womenfolk who have little or no exposure to outside world and thus are more vulnerable to the negativity. Knowledge and awareness can transform the fair sex, make them confident and self-assured. Nabeela from Karachi is a poor and sensitive girl who once lacked confidence as she was not given importance in the family. Negative remarks of her relatives made her sick. Her condition deteriorated to the extent that she needed physical support when her mother
would take her to the doctor for treatment. The doctor believed that she was hypersensitive and depressed otherwise there was no problem with her. She was depressed only due to her family conditions, price hike and expenditures. He also told Nabeela that she would have to change her thoughts; otherwise medicines would fail to cure her.

Once her mother was carrying her to the clinic when she felt dizziness and fell to the ground. Neighbors gathered there. A social mobilizer and former councilor also reached there in the meantime and took Nabeela to Apna Cooperative. There she offered her water and consolation and told her mother about the Cooperative in detail.

Impressed by Najma's conversation, Nabeela started regularly going to the Cooperative. She took admission to stitching classes as well as attended study circles on different subjects. This gave her confidence and she was now able to meet the people and discuss with them various issues on the basis of the information gleaned through different educational activities at the Cooperative. "The topics discussed at the study circles like democracy, women's legal and political rights, social issues are giving awareness about various issues to weak and helpless women like me. These things are absolutely new to and quite favorable for us", Nabeela says.

Community kitchen of the Cooperative is also offering cheap food to the members, which is a great facility for working women, she says. Nabeela and her mother both are members of the Cooperative and whenever they face any difficulty about legal issues, wage rates or others in their lives they discuss and share it with Najma and her team.

By attending the stitching classes, Nabeela is able to earn a reasonable amount through stitching clothes of the community
people. "I'm no more a weak girl now. I'm confident and spirited to change my own life as well as bringing a change in the lives of thousands of other working women like me".

Learning self-help through Cooperative

Without awareness and knowledge about what is happening around one is unable even to solve one's own problems. Once equipped with the weapons of knowledge one is able not only to overcome one's difficulties but also offer help and consolation to others. Jamila of Karachi, 45, is in the embroidery business for the last 35 years. A patient of blood pressure, she has five children. She earns Rs. 90 per day as the rate of return depends on design of the work. The payment is not usually made in time.

Getting orders is also a cumbersome job as the clients are from outside the neighborhood. Jamila says that as she is in the business from her early age, she had not learnt anything else except embroidery. The family would be in trouble when it was not the embroidery season.

In the meantime, she met social mobilizer and learnt about the Cooperative. Jamila soon became its member only to know that she is far behind the rest of the world. However, in the face of any problem she shares it with the social mobilizer for moral support and encouragement. Jamila says that monthly study circles at the Cooperative are very informative. When she married her daughter off, she was unaware of critical details and importance of nikahnama (marriage contract). Later, she learnt about it in the study circles how to fill the form adequately.

The awareness got at the Cooperative enabled them solve their problems on self-help basis. Jamila and other members have formed a committee in the neighborhood for sharing and solving each other's problems collectively. "There were water, health and
other issues in our area and we decided to form a committee to resolve these issues at local basis. This committee organized a camp for TB in our area”.

They used to get orders from middlemen who would not pay them according to their labour. Fully benefiting from the awareness they got from the study circles, Labour Education Foundation and Cooperative programmes, Jamila is able to successfully negotiate with the middlemen her wages according to her toiling.

Cooperative reflects our emotions

Rehana is a home-based worker belonging to Khairpur Mirus, Sindh. After intermediate, her education process was disconnected as she was married off. Her father was Station House Office in police department while she had five sisters and three brothers. She was the fourth child of the family.

Her father was desirous of their education and provided them all kinds of facilities. After marriage, Rehana had to re-start her life in a new way for she had been brought up in an urban environment but was married off to a village. “As in deciding about marriage self respect of parents and their decisions are considered more important than the consent of the girl going to marry”. She had to face many problems in the beginning. This change led to worse circumstances but thanks to the awareness and courage extended by Labour Education Foundation, she was prepared to fight against unfavourable situations. Her husband's love and care made the things easier. "I can remember even today how I was taunted by the in-laws that I can neither take care of the cattle nor can use firewood oven for preparing bread. Nor can I make dung cake." She said depressed she would think that neither they nor she was wrong. The problem was with the difference in the urban and rural environment. She
realizes that the parents should take all aspects in view while making decisions about their children's marriages.

Time was somehow passing when her husband suddenly told the family that he had resigned from his army post. The whole family was perplexed as her husband said that he must not be asked the reason behind this decision. "I'm unaware of the reason even today. It was a testing time." The family shifted from Bhakkar to Karachi for none can support any jobless for long. As Rehana's husband knew no technical skill, there was no question of any job for him even in a pro-poor city like Karachi. Notwithstanding her heartiest consolation, her husband became despair and confined himself to the four walls of the house.

This was beginning of her entry into the world of labour. She started doing embroidery to make both ends meet. When there would be no embroidery work, she would make paper bags for earning her family's livelihood. She had four children--two daughters and as many sons. Only the girls, who were elder, were sent to school for there were not enough resources to afford school fee of all the four. But when she started working both the boys also joined school. Often the couple would go hungry to save the food for their children. Due to tight economic conditions, sometimes she would fail to in time deposit school fees and thus would have to receive expulsion notices from the school administration. Then some friends would come to their rescue.

Meanwhile, she learnt of a middleman who offered cropping work the women could do at their respective homes. For the last four years she too is now doing this job. She, her husband and children work day and night to prepare five to six hundred pieces. The labour rate is Rs5 for cropping of one dozen pieces.

Labour Education Foundation is another source of consolation for Rehana. She says the institution is not only giving them awareness about their problems and the reasons behind these problems but also trains them how to claim their rights. She also applauds the Cooperative's services in getting a reasonable remuneration for their labour. It helped them talk directly with the factory men and negotiate their charges. Thus, she is now earning Rs. 18 to Rs. 24 per dozen for cropping. For Rehana another good aspect of the
Cooperative is its activities like seminars which provide working women an opportunity to speak their mind.

Rehana wishes to form a strong organization of laborers so that they can jointly work for building a world in which no one is a loser, no war and tension, none is superior to or inferior to other and everyone is getting one's due rights.

Empower women through education

Nature has gifted everyone an instinct to survive, to move forward and progress provided one is provided a chance. Shaheen of Mustafabad locality in Lahore has five brothers and four sisters. As her father was a poor hawker, he could not afford schooling expenses of his children. All the siblings started doing bridal embroidery work from their childhood to help support the family's earnings. If they could not find embroidery work, then they would seek other kinds of tasks like sewing of uppers of shoes and peeling of groundnuts. As Shaheen was fond of study, she joined the Unions' School for Working Children as soon as the Labour Education Foundation opened a branch in her neighborhood. Learning the skill of reading and writing helped her in doing calculations, units and wages, of their work. The education also enabled her brother to start his own business. She guided her brother in business and market negotiation and helped him in bookkeeping. He now goes to the market for getting orders directly from clients (shopkeepers).

The Unions' School not only helped her in business but also sensitized her about her rights and privileges. She was unaware of delicacies of practical life when Shaheen was married off by her parents. Her husband did not do any job. When she came to the parents' house for delivery of her first baby, he contracted second
marriage. As she was aware of her rights, thanks to the Unions School, she contacted the Foundation and filed a case to seek divorce and alimony. She is going to marry another man.

Shaheen regrets that though there are laws in the country but women's rights are far from protected due to lack of implementation. Neither the government nor communities devise policies for the help of women in trouble like her. She did not suffer much for she had learnt a skill in her childhood and could earn her living respectably. But all the women are not lucky enough and had to face difficulties in case of any eventuality in the parents' house or in the in-laws.

She believes that education and skills training are necessary for women empowerment and for providing them economic protection. And women must be aware of their rights and the means to claim them.

Education for a Change

Bearing domestic violence is the destiny of hundreds of thousands of women having neither economic nor social independence. The independence can be earned through education and awareness. When the Labour Education Foundation opened Unions Schools for Working Children in Mustafabad locality in

Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961 deals with: the registration of marriage, maintenance of the women after marriage, maintenance of children, dower, divorce and its process, dissolution of marriage, delegated right of divorce, khula & option of puberty and polygamy. It:

- Requires registration of all Muslim marriages and divorces
- Provides for children of predeceased parents to inherit from their grandparents
- Provides procedures for the exercise of the delegated right of divorce and court dissolution of marriage
- Allows women to approach the Union Council if they are not maintained adequately
- Allows for polygamy only with the prior permission of the arbitration council
- Overrules the traditional concept of Hilala and is declared necessary only if a third consecutive divorce of the same couple becomes effective
Lahore, Rubina doubted their designs. But when its staff during a
door-to-door survey told the people about the aims and objectives
as well as benefits of schooling, Rubina joined it. She was a good
embroider and found that school timing would not obstruct her
professional work. She was happy to join a school where there was
no concept of physical punishment by the teacher nor there were
any tuition fees. Learning Urdu and English languages infused a
new spirit in her. Then she did beautician course and later sewing
course from the same school.

In the year 2000, she was married off on a decision of her parents.
But her in-laws would torture and would not give her enough food
to eat. When she fell ill, her mother brought her from her in-laws.
Rubina gave birth to a baby boy through C-section. But the infant
could not survive long. It enraged her in-laws and she was
divorced.

Confident enough of her abilities, she thought of doing her own
business. First she opened a sewing course centre. But it did no
prove to be a success. Then she joined a garments factory in
Raiwind. Her parents again married her off. But here too she had to
face torture of in-laws. She returned to her parents' home and gave
birth to a baby boy. He is now two years old. She has again find
employment in a readymade garment factory while her mother
looks after the toddler. She thinks she is obliged to the awareness
and education the Unions' School gave her and enabled her to
manage her life independently.

She is now able to calculate her wages, negotiate contract deals and
use cell phone. Even she settled her divorce on her own. For,
besides education, she had been told of herrights at the school.

Open schools for giving women their voice

How education works wonders is evident from the case of Sajjida
from Lahore. Having three sisters and no brother, she was illiterate.
But after attending the Union school, she can read and write. The
basic literacy course has given her confidence in her person. So
much so that she is determined to seek education facilities for other
folks to give them not only educational and economic but also
political awareness.
She operates frames for making uppers of shoes. For a frame of 24 pairs, she operates saw. One frame is accomplished in two days which earns her Rs. 50. The middleman underpays and when he is asked to raise the labour rate, he threatens to stop giving further work orders. He says he knows many girls ready to work at the present rate.

Sajida also runs a sewing centre and charges Rs. 150 per student. In deserving cases, the fee is negotiable. She wishes to run such a centre under government patronage so that she may get a reasonable amount as salary and the students are not burdened with payment of fee. But she regrets that the government seems disinterested in running any project beneficial to the poor. Study circles and union school provided her awareness about social issues and government responsibilities and interest in empowering poor people.

She was married in the year 2007 but due to certain economic circumstances, she got divorce. As she is earning for herself, nobody reacted on her act as generally is common in this society. "It is our right. If we are not considered as human beings, then why should we remain confined in the marriage yoke," she argues. However, she says that a woman can take such a step easily only when she is educated and has learnt some skill to earn her livelihood. She is a skilled sewing trainer but have not enough resources to run a center where she could transfer her skill to other girls. She requests that at least the Labour Education Foundation should open schools where poor and workers can get free education as well as political awareness. "This awareness has enabled me to raise a voice for my rights".
The leading light

There are precedents, though rare, that a person availed the first opportunity that came in his/her way and not only made his/her own future but also of the people around him/her. Humera of Lahore was illiterate because her family gave no importance to girls’ education. She became desirous of education when their house was hired by the Union School for working children and working boys and girls started studying there. Her parents did not allow her to join it for its being a "coeducation" institution. Like her sister and three brothers, she remained engaged in mongering iron and packing of various items.

She was in a spell of depression when a new facility in the name of study centre for women was opened in the rented portion of her house. This time she was allowed to join along with her mother. She worked hard and stood first in the exams held after one year study course. Humera then joined a regular school and has done graduation in 2009. At the centre, she also did beautician course while presently she is learning stitching of gents clothing.

She says that the opening of centre at her house has opened a door to education and employment for her family's girls this is like a new world for us. The girls who were earlier mongering iron, making dyes and parts of various machines are now lady health workers, nurses, factory workers and employees at various offices. If a woman gets opportunity of such a center, knows her rights, prepares herself to cope with circumstances there is nothing to stop her from moving ahead.
Overcoming physical weaknesses

God helps those who help themselves, goes the maxim. Yasmin of Lahore is a living example of this saying. She was a toddler when she fell prey to polio and her one arm and one leg were paralyzed. She was sent to school but depressed at remarks passed by her fellows at the school targeting her deformity she confined herself to the four walls of her house.

After the death of her father, she thought of doing something so that she would not become a burden on her poor brothers. She then opened a grocery shop in a portion of her house and began earning her livelihood. Then she learnt about the LEF study centre as she was neighbor of a study circle teacher. The teacher told her that in the study circle there is participatory and friendly teaching method and no one would tease her. She joined the centre and learnt basic mathematics for running her small business.

The encouragement given by the center's staff made her start her regular education notwithstanding her physical deficiency. Yasmin is now a sixth grade student and is bearing her own expenses, educational and others.

Waiting for education facility

Saba of Farrukhabad, located on the bank of Ravi River Lahore, works on a moulding machine for preparing plastic items. She was in the third grade of a regular school when she gave up studies as she could not understand what the teachers would teach her. As she could not even write her name or read any Urdu writing, the community people started making fun of her. Defensive she became afraid of stepping outside her home. The resultant inferiority complex made her stutter during talking. She would not
even appear before family guests.

Four years after she left the school, she came to know about the centre. She requested her mother to get her permission for joining it as it was located inside a home and was not a commercial entity. Saba's paternal uncle was against her education but her father stood by her saying he knew the teacher well therefore he would not debar her from joining the study centre. He rather went on to say that he would finance if Saba decided to go for higher studies.

Earlier she was afraid of stepping outside her house alone even for studying the Holy Quran. And even if she dared to leave her house, she could not tell anyone where she had come from and where she wanted to go. But, now she is a transformed girl, fully confident. For a few months' study at the centre has enabled her to read any paper written in Urdu. She is ready to study more if a centre is opened nearby her house as the earlier one has been closed. She believes that higher studies can change her life and she will be able at least to teach her younger siblings.

Education for employment

Shehzadi was 14 years old when the Labour Education Foundation opened Unions School for Working Children in her locality Kot Khadiim Hussain in Lahore. She as well as her cousins had to seek their parents' permission for taking admission to the facility. Eldest of the five sisters, Shehzadi had always seen her father ill and her mother bearing the burden of running the home. When she grew old enough, she began extending a helping hand to her mother in peeling groundnuts, the only labour opportunity available to home-based workers at that time. As they had no brother, or in other words a breadwinner, while their father was a patient of some chronic disease, there was no question of education
of girls, considered as a burden on the family. Their economic condition was so poor that they would grind red chilies to eat loaves throughout the year.

She studied in the adult literacy schools. Then she did beautician course from a private beauty parlor to support family earnings. She also learnt sewing of clothes and would do stitching in the evening to augment her income. Her father betrothed her and later married her off within a month. Her sisters were also married the same way. According to her, as poor girls are accepted into wedlock by laborers, so she was.

To supplement her husband's earnings, she joined a towel-making factory. The education she got in adult literacy center enabled her to read and write or do basic calculations, but she believes that its real benefit can be reaped only if the government creates employment opportunities for women. Or at least it should recognize informal sector workers and give them facilities like the formal sector labor.

Educate generations for progress

Kaneez, 45, belongs to Venice Housing Society area in Lahore. An absolute illiterate she joined the study centre for adults and is now able to read and sign her children's school diaries, teach and guide them in doing school's homework. She is obliged to her husband for the supportive role he played by allowing her to join the centre.

The learning at the study centre has changed her thinking about education as she is now determined to finance her children's higher education. She feels that without education she was incomplete. The basic knowledge acquired at the centre gives her the message that we cannot progress without educating our generations. Realizing importance of education, she utilizes all methods
including giving them living examples of difference between educated and illiterate persons for making her children too understand this reality.

Overcoming opposition to girls' education

They say when there is will there is a way. Zobia and Fozia, both sisters, have proven this adage with the passion for learning. They live in Ideal Garden housing society in Lahore and belong to a very poor family of a washer-man. Meager resources of the family did not allow the sisters to join a formal school, while their brother was also against girls' education as they were also illiterate. When the school for working people was opened in their close-by locality, they somehow made their mother to permit them join the educational facility.

They studied at the facility for a year, though their brother at times showed his anger on their education. He would argue that their education would in no way benefit the family as after marriage the girls had to move to their respective husband's houses. Moreover, he failed to understand that what benefit his sisters could get from education when they were grown-up.

Despite such obstacles, the two sisters would work with their father and brother in washing and ironing clothes but would daily find some time for their education. They wish to continue their studies but are not finding time for the purpose these days due to work overload.

Couple joins literacy centre

Shazia Akbar and her husband Nasir Akbar live in Youhannabad, Lahore. As they married on their own against the will of their respective families, they moved to a separate house away from their relatives. They are living on their own for the last eight years
or so. They both were illiterate. Neither of the two had ever attended any formal school even for a single day. Then someone told Shazia about the literacy centre for adults. She discussed with her husband her desire to join it. Nasir agreed but asked that how she would manage the house and their three children. For the first responsibility of parents is to send their children to school instead of themselves joining a literacy course.

However, Shazia insisted on and convinced Nasir about her education and joined the centre. On her persuasion, her husband too began to study there. The couple would come together in the evening for attending classes. In case they would fail to join a class, they would contact the teacher at some other time and learn the missing lesson. Their persistence and hard work is now paying them.

Realizing importance of education, the couple has decided to send their children to school at all costs. Both of them are all praise about the teaching methodology (participatory and friendly) adopted at the adult education centre. They appreciate the idea of making people of all ages sit together and study without any hesitation and feelings of being older or younger to anyone.

Education gives awareness of rights

Shamim had been married at the age of 14. She gave birth to six children. Her husband died when her children were quite young. Her husband and his brother both were daily-wagers. They both had jointly purchased a six-marla plot for building their house but after the death of her husband, her brother-in-law occupied the land without giving her children any share.

The widow did not lose her heart and moved to a rented house in a suburban area of Lahore and started working for a commercial concern in the business of manufacturing chiks (a kind of blinders).
From the savings of her livelihood, Shamim purchased a three-marla piece of land in the same neighborhood and after building a mud-house there she shifted to it from her rented house. She made cones of thread for blanket manufacturing on her spinning-wheel. She also peeled groundnuts to earn livelihood for her orphan children. She would get just Rs. 2.50 for peeling five kilos of groundnuts. According to her, she and her children could peel 10-kg groundnuts from morning till 11 pm. Then she started making paper bags besides supplementing her incoming through needlework.

As every age is learning age, she joined the Labour Education Foundation’s adult literacy centre and learnt reading and writing. She says that through the education, she came to know about the social, economic, political and devolution rights of women as a mother, wife, sister and daughter but most importantly as human being. She also learnt that girls could claim their share in parents’ property. Thus after her parents’ death, she got her share in inheritance from her brothers. As she had already purchased three-marla pieces of land for each of her son, she sold the inherited property and used the money thus got for purchasing a plot for her daughter to build her house.

Shamim’s second daughter was well-off and she refused to get her share. Shamim, who is no more alive now, would say that “both boys and girls are born by women and so there should be no difference in their rights and responsibilities”.

In the OECD countries surveyed, on average women performed 5% more work than men, 120 minutes per day. At the UN's Pan Pacific Southeast Asia Women's Association 21st International Conference in 2001 it was stated that "in the world as a whole, women comprise 51% of the population, do 66% of the work, receive 10% of the income and own less than one percent of the property".
Ready to work but on equal basis

Afshan belonging to Lahore, 18, had six brothers and sisters. Her father runs a canteen in a private school. But instead of supporting his family from the earnings, he spends all his income on drinking liquor. One of her brother works on a welding shop and earns Rs. 5,000 per month. The amount, which is also not a permanent source, is too meager to meet the domestic expenses. The family lives in a small 225 square foot house.

Afshan cuts betel nuts to supplement the family income. A man of Bhaati area supplies betel nuts at her home and pays Rs. 5 per kg for cutting them into small pieces. Cutting of one kg of betel nut takes an hour and Afshan can cut a maximum of 10 kg of them daily. With the help of her sister she manages to prepare 20 kg of the supply. She says whenever they talk of raising the rate of wages the man argues that he has to bear extra expenses for delivering and then collecting the supplies at their house far from his shop. Besides, his margin of profit is also not very high.

Afshan was very fond of studying and becoming a teacher. But her domestic circumstances did not allow her to attend a school. She was fortunate enough to spot Labour Education Foundation’s study circle centre and join it for learning how to read and write. She is now able to use her cell phone and writing letters. As the place selected for the centre is a school, she accompanies her teacher to any of the classrooms and in a way satiates her desire of becoming a teacher.

She has been betrothed to a boy who does not work. Afshan is planning to tell him that their wedding will take place only when he will start doing some job. "I've spent my whole life under the shadow of deprivations. I want to suffer no more. We'll work together but on equal basis" is the message of Afshan for her fiancé.
Satiating childhood desire through daughter

Bashiran is a resident of Farrukhabad, Shahdara, Lahore. She has been blessed with three children—two of them are now married. Her husband runs a pushcart eatery. Her maternal uncle was a schoolteacher and she was impressed by his job and wanted to join the same line. But the family had no traditions of girls' education. She was fond of reading since her childhood but instead had to do domestic chores along with other women members of the family. Somehow she read Sufi poet Mian Muhammad Baakhsh's work with the help of a lady teacher in the neighborhood and her grandfather.

There was no school in her native village located in Fort Abbas tehsil of Bahawalnagar district. Later a school was established there. However, by that time she had grown up so her paternal uncles opposed her admission to it. As they say that passion knows no bounds, she found a way to fulfill her desire, though partially. When she would go to fetch water from a well close to the village mosque, she would put the pitchers aside and learn some Punjabi poetic works of Sufis from the maulvi.

By the time she was married and at her in-laws she could not find time to further her studies. Deprived of education opportunities, Bashiran then focused on the education of her offspring. Years passed by when her daughter got educated and opened a study circle on behalf of the Labour Education Foundation at their home. This reminded Bashiran of her childhood longing and she decided to restart her studies. The neighboring women tried to become a wet blanket but failed to discourage her.

Even when her daughter changed the venue of the study circle, she did not give up and sewed a bag for her books and started joining classes at the new venue. She would enthusiastically do her
homework. The day she learnt writing her name, she consumed the whole copybook writing it again and again. She is now able to count cash, do calculations and read postal addresses and, for sure, letters. She remembers the days when telephone facility was not common as of today and she had to repeatedly request some literate person to write a letter if she had to inform her relatives about any event. The person would write one thing and forget the other.

Bashiran is desirous of furthering her studies provided an educational facility like the study circle is available to her. Had there been such a facility available earlier, she would have studied more and earlier and would have accomplished her tasks in a better way, she thinks.

Awareness a tool to get one's rights

Saima is one of those persons who have taken full advantage of what Labour Education Foundation offered at its Adult Literacy Centre. A member of the Bangles Union, Hyderabad, she and her both illiterate parents supported an extended family of ten. Four of her seven siblings did not attend any school. However, Saima attended the (Adult Literacy Development Project) Workers School in Hyderabad.

Her family was employed in the bangle industry, main industry of Hyderabad. These bangles are exported to Middle East, Europe and Western states. Middlemen of the area hire workers for making bundles (360 bangles in one bundle) of the bangles. They exploit women in terms of not paying them fair wages and paying less than the work done.

One-year schooling at the Adult Literacy Project facility for workers trained Saima in basic mathematics and now middlemen and contractors could not cheat her in counting of bundles of bangles and payment of wages. Aware of the tactics the middlemen employ to cheat the innocent women workers, she successfully launched a campaign against exploitation of women by contractors in her area to save workers from further exploitation.
Skilled hands support their families

Yousuf Goth, Gadap Town, is a suburban area in north of Karachi. At least 95 percent of its population comprises working class. Far away from downtown the area is facing a lot of problems like lack of public transport, environmental degradation, and shortage of quality water. Womenfolk here are bold as well as hard workers. Asifa, 24, is married with two children. Her husband was working in a garments factory earning only Rs. 5,000 per month to support a family of eight, parents, wife, two children and one sister.

Asifa was enrolled at the Adult Literacy Project centre in April 2007. But the centre offered more than schooling and awareness. And that was skills training to students to make them earning hands and help their family incomes. So she did a stitching course at the skill development centre and now is known as a master in stitching in her area. She has opened a mini tailoring shop at her house and is earning a respectable livelihood amounting to Rs. 250 to Rs. 400 daily. Additional income by her job improved the economic conditions of the family. Now she has got enrolled her two children in formal schools and is paying rent of her house.

From learning to teaching

Khudija of Chaudhry Park, Wandala Dihal Shah, Lahore, has six sisters and three brothers. An illiterate she helps his family in sorting out silver and metal from plastic of computers his brother would bring from Hall Road, a market of used computers. Unable to do even basic calculations, she joined a study circle at the nearby Cooperative and learnt basic mathematics, reading and writing for six months. "Now I can read and write receipts," she proudly says, adding, "I note down the articles separated from the computer junk, their weight and prices."

Now she has joined another organization’s cooperative to teach what she had learnt at the centre run by Labour Education
National and International Commitments of Pakistan regarding Human Rights

- Articles of the Constitution of Pakistan
- Convention on the Rights of the Child 1996
- International Conference on Population and Development 1994
- Beijing Declaration and Platform For Action
- National Plan of Action for Women, 1998
- National Policy for the Development and Empowerment of Women, 2002
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948
- Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- Millennium Development Goals, 2000
- SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children

Foundation. She is determined to further her studies provided the study circles are re-opened.

About the trade unionism, she says that as her father does not allow her to work at places far from home, she cannot take part in trade union activities notwithstanding their benefits. However, she urged the government to sanction the same perks for home-based workers that are given to factory workers. Complaining of high costs of healthcare services, she also regrets the indifference shown towards women's health.

Literacy wins match

"I was quite illiterate when I joined the centre. One-year study there turned out to be a stroke of luck for me as it earned me a good match," says Naheed from Lahore who makes lids of small boxes.
She is among the certain cases in which education helps one in a way neither expected nor imagined by one. Talking of her earlier shyness, she says she would start trembling when she had to talk with somebody. But the story of George Dawson

The story of an American, who started learning reading and writing at the age of 98. He became very famous because of his interest in education and two universities awarded him honorary degrees and a university renamed itself after him.

In her adult literacy course book gave her a new confidence. She is now able to discuss business with the contractor, give and take consignments after proper calculation and counting. Earlier, the task was to be done by her mother. She can also use cell phone and communicate with others about any problem she or her family may be facing.

She is now confident enough to take family's ailing children to nearby clinics, and go shopping. She understands demands of the new era: both the spouses have to work to run their home. Therefore, she is determined to carry on with her job even after her marriage.

Breaking shackles of traditions

Samina lives close to Baba Sanglawala in Venue Housing Society, Lahore. The 18-year-old belongs to a Pathan family, which does not allow a girl to step out of her home what to talk of her joining an educational institution. But she managed to break open all these shackles.

She talked to her father about her desire of getting education and won him over, though with much difficulty. Her brothers are yet against this step of hers as they still believe that girls must not step out of their respective homes. "However, I won confidence of my father, who picks and drops me at the Union School".
Samina is disallowed to leave her home barring her school visits. But she is willing to continue her studies and is taking lessons from her teacher at home. She is also trying to convince her family for taking admission into a regular school.

Where there is will there is a way

Salma of Ideal Gardens in Lahore is a special person. A problem in her legs by birth coupled with ignorance of her family of the importance of education deprived her of the right to education. Seeing school-going children she would think of her chance to get education. But as she had grown-up, she saw no school that would accept her as a student.

Learning of the centre, she immediately joined it though she was facing too much difficulty in reaching the classroom. As she could not walk, her friends would lift her to and from the centre. The practice continued for a year and now she is proud of being a literate person. She is able to read utility bills and look after family's correspondence. “As none else is educated in my family, I am considered as the most wise and the best member,” says she.

She is willing to continue her studies provided study circle-like schools are operating in the area.

Life is not bed of roses
(The interviewee has passed away)

Belonging to Jhang district, Rasheeda, 55, has three brothers and two sisters. Her father had fits and would disappear from home for months. In the meantime, her mother would work to earn some livelihood for the six children. But it was not enough to afford their education expenses. Rasheeda would help her mother at handloom. She also learnt stitching while watching a tailor working in her neighborhood.
She was married to a man who worked in a tractor workshop. When he was sacked from job, his family asked him to shift to a separate house. A neighbor offered her husband a job in plastic toys making factory in Shahdara, Lahore. So they moved to Lahore in a one-room rented house. But his earnings were too low so she too started working to make a living. She had one son and five daughters and they all got education up to grade 8.

She would sew frocks of dolls and prepare raw material for gol gappas (a light refreshment). Facing difficulties in calculations while negotiating with the contractors due to her being illiterate, she joined an education centre in the area and learnt basic reading and writing. The education gave her awareness about her rights and the exploitative methods of contractor. She is now more confident in her business deals.

Vying for an educated family

Akram of Lahore neither knows how old is he nor he has his national identity card. Married and father of a daughter, he also has five brothers and one sister. He started to earn livelihood when boys of his age would play in streets. He did not remember for how many years he is in the present employment. However, he recalls that first he was offered Rs. 55 as daily wages while now he is earning Rs. 300 per day in an auto parts factory. He works under a contractor who earns Rs. 1,450 daily with his and another boy's help but pays them Rs. 300 and Rs. 70 daily respectively. Reprimand and censure is a daily routine in this job. If any worker is hurt in the line of duty, he is just given first aid. But if the injured prefers to retire home for a better treatment, he faces deduction from his wages.

Akram could not study due to domestic problems. When he learnt about Labour Education Foundation's child labour schools, he
sought admission to it. As the school did not have any experience of having a pretty old man like him as student, he was first denied admission. However, he did not lose heart and continued to daily visit the school, convincing the staff to allow him join other students. He worked hard and became a promising student of the school. The start of literacy education centre project proved to be a godsend for him. He immediately joined it and improved standard of his education.

Earlier, he had conservative thoughts. He believed that men should earn and women should remain confined to the four walls of the house and do domestic chores. But the social and political awareness he got through his education has made him realize that both men and women should work to contribute in the family as well as national progress. Women work equally to men but are not acknowledged. Women should participate in all fields of life and struggle to protect their rights. As his wife is not literate, he wishes to get her educated provided the Labour Education Foundation again opened a school for the purpose. He, however, is determined to at least educate his only daughter.

Teasing to ignorance

Amir of Vindala Diyal Shah, Lahore, stutters while speaking. When he got admission in a regular school in his childhood, other children as well as teachers made fun of him. Their teasing attitude disheartened him and giving up studies he started working with his father in making shoe brushes.

When he learnt about the Union's School for Working Children, he immediately joined it for the environment here he found was very conducive and encouraging which helped him in learning reading and writing. It was responsibility of the teacher to find out illiterate working children and they surveyed from 12 pm to 3 pm. School timing for female students was 3-5 pm and male students 6-8 pm.
The one-and-half year education here also gave him awareness about his person as well as the world around him. Now he owns his own business. He collects brush hair and wood from Peshawar and supplies them to women workers at their homes for fixing the hair in the wood pieces. The women are paid Rs. 25 per dozen for small brushes and Rs. 50 per dozen for bigger ones. Usually a woman fixes hair in three dozen big brushes and five to six dozen small brushes daily.

Education reforms life

Waris, belonging to Lahore is a married worker blessed with a son. He works in hinge-making factory as a daily-wager at the rate of Rs. 180 per day, while he does stitching of clothes as a part time job. He has studied at the Union’s School for Working Children for two years and has appeared in its exams. It was the first school in his neighborhood and its timing was suitable for workers like him.

He sees education beneficial both in professional as well as social life. He says earlier he could neither count how many pieces of hinges he had made in a day nor could calculate his wages. Literacy is needed especially in tailoring job for the tailor has to write sizes of neckline, waist, length of shirts, trousers, etc.

He sees need for a study circle in his area on a long-term basis, because there are yet many people there who are illiterate. The education facility should be up to 10th or at least 8th grade.

Waris says illiterate person repents in every field, while education reforms one’s life. He is determined to have just two children and providing them as much education facilities as he can. A small family, he believes, is easy to educate and train.
Every age is suitable age for education

They say love knows no bounds. Love can be for any person, thing, place or cause and it can strike one at any time and in any age. Similar is the case of Baba Jagga, 60, who belongs to Youhannabad, a Christians' neighborhood in Lahore. He developed yearning for education at an age when one's grand children start going to school. He has studied for one year at the study circle. He says that earlier he along with other oldies would play cards for the whole day in his street. When he would see some children carrying books and going somewhere at an odd time, he would wonder where they were heading for studying and who their teacher was.

When he questioned a couple of children about the education facility and its staff, the teacher running the study circle called on him and briefed him about the objectives and other details of the education facility. The teacher agreed to accept Baba Jagga as his pupil when the latter expressed his earnest desire to study at this age. That's how the oldie started his literacy course.

After one-year study Baba Jagga is able to sign his pension papers. Now he can talk in Urdu, Pakistan's national language, too. None of his offspring is literate. However, he is stressing on the education of his grandchildren. He would often lecture them about the importance of education.

Dream comes true

Pervaiz, 19, of Wanki Wasi village, Hyderabad district, works in agriculture farms of a local feudal as a daily wager. Because of poverty he could not get formal education. When Labour Education Foundation opened an Adult Literacy Project centre in his village, he immediately got admission, sparing some time daily
from his routine in the evening to attend the school.

After a year of education, he is able to read, write and understand his syllabus books. He can also do simple mathematics. He is able to count grain bags and their weight in kilograms as well. He is interested to learn English and Urdu while Sindhi is his mother tongue. His parents are happy to see their son as a literate person. All praise for the Labour Education Foundation's work in the community, he says the education facility has fulfilled his needs and helped his dream to become a literate man.

Pass on what you learn

Juma, 53, is in the business of making cushions and blankets. His mini shop is located in Zia Colony, Karachi, where he works for the whole day. He has joined the Adult Literacy Project centre one and half year ago and is presently in the advanced class of the centre. Now he is able to manage his business accounts on his own. Earlier, he would use the services of a fellow shopkeeper for the purpose. He is familiar with basic concepts of English and Urdu language but gives more time to mathematics for learning accounting. He enthusiastically says that he is able to use digital calculators.

He has been blessed with five children. Three of them go to a local religious seminary. He wants to send his children to formal schools but there is none in the vicinity. He says that he teaches his offspring at home what he learns at the centre.

Obliged to the Labour Education Foundation for the community and educational work, he vows to pass on the education to his neighbors and relatives as he believes that education is the main tool for developing a society.

From kiln to a factory

Twenty-two years old Zulfikar is a resident of Youhannabad locality in Lahore. Born to a kiln-worker, he followed the family tradition. He along with his siblings would work the whole day to run their home. When he learnt about the study circle, he started taking a couple of hours break twice a week to join it. "Within two years, I have learnt so much, I could not have even imagined of," says Zulfikar.
The education gave him awareness about the exploitation at the hands of the kiln owner. He squared himself with the kiln owner and left the job. For he thought that neither he could earn enough for his family nor make any progress in this field. Now he works in a factory and earns a reasonable living. He was married while he was a member of the study circle. His new job is paying him enough to discharge his added responsibilities.

He had surprised his friends by signing his wedding deed instead of stamping it with his thumb impression. Before being a literate person, he could not express himself in front of any stranger. But, when he was interviewed for the factory job, he himself was pleasantly shocked to feel the confidence in his response to various queries. "A kiln worker can improve himself only through the education like the one he was given at the study circle".

Earning respect through literacy

Fayyaz, 28, is a resident of village Wanki Wasi, 20 km from Hyderabad. A shepherd earning his livelihood by tending cattle of the areas' farmers, he could not attend any formal school due to absolute poverty. An absolute illiterate he could not even properly hold pencil in his fingers to write with.

He got admission in the Adult Literacy Centre in December 2008 and is continuing his studies there. In less than a year, he is now able to read and write. He can also read Sindhi newspapers. Fayyaz joins the centre daily in the evening after grazing livestock in fields. Desirous of being able to talk in English, he is keen in learning the basics of the language. He has also got one of his three children admitted to a private English-medium school. Unfortunately, his absolute poverty is restraining admission of his other two kids to the school, while the state-run education facility is too far from the village and thus no question of their joining it.

He sees a lot of positive changes in his life after becoming a literate person. He is satisfied to be able to discuss the information he gets by reading Sindhi newspapers at a local tea-stall. His friends and villagers also respect him more for he happily reads them news from the paper.
Knowledge for a change

In Azam Basti, Karachi, a Community Based Organisation named Ittehad Welfare Organisation in collaboration with the Labour Education Foundation is working for the poor people of the area mostly populated by minorities Christians and Hindus. Labour Education Foundation is working in the locality since 2003. While no government school has so far been established there. Adult Literacy Project helped the community pass out many learners.

Iqbal Masih is distinguished among the dozens of learners who passed out from the centre. A machine operator in Korangi Industrial area, he did basic and advanced courses in two years 2006-07.

On the basis of the knowledge he acquired at the centre he was promoted as supervisor of the factory and started earning Rs. 13,000 per month. He is obliged to the centre which played a pivotal role in making him a competent person of the factory and thus enabling him to get a good, sound financial status in community.

Knowledge is power

Kashmir Colony is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic area of Jamsheed town in Karachi. Hindus, Muslims and Christians are living there since decades as the Adult Literacy Project teaching staff is trying to harmonise these communities.

Thanks to the efforts of the Adult Literacy Project, 10 male learners got admission in formal schools. One of the learners, Shiraz Masih, got admission in the 8th grade of Future Bright Grammar School located in the same locality. Other learners got admission in different other schools. Adult Literacy Project's former learner Shiraz is now teaching others and delivering his services to the community of the
Kashmir Colony as he got respect in his family and in community of the area.

Shiraz achieved many successes in the school. He is a good sportsman in football and cricket as well. He won the school trophy and was declared the best player of the school. He got all the successes he dreamed of. He wants to become a social activist and do community work.
Home Based workers at work in New Karachi

Adult Literacy learner at work in her home in Shahdara, Lahore
**Labour Education Foundation**

**Introduction**

Labour Education Foundation is an independent, voluntary, Non-Government Organization registered under Societies Act, 1860, with vision to empowering working class to protect its social, economic and political rights.

**Vision**

A democratic, progressive, just, peaceful and developed society in which working class, women and youth are empowered enough to claim and protect their social, economic and political rights.

**Mission**

Grooming conscious, informed and gender-sensitized workers, women and youth groups to challenge the status-quo and be part of the movements for ensuring gender equality, constitutional and legal rights, eradicate poverty, secure livelihood options and a violence free democratic society.

**Objectives**

- To facilitate workers by developing a strong and effective Trade Union Movement
- To help develop and organize trade unions/ social outfits
- To educate workers for strengthening trade unions
- To fight against oppression of women
- To strengthen anti-nukes and peace movement
- To promote democratic values and norms
- To extend legal aid to political, social & labour activists