

## FARHANA- Orangi Town-Karachi



Farhana, inhabitant of a shanty house in Orangi Town; famously known to be one of the world's largest slum areas in the vicinity of Karachi, is a single mother of a young daughter. Farhana's destitution led her into struggles at a tender age. Since a young age, she helped her mother into embroidery, purl work and cut work for which they received 200 rupees per maxi.

*"Grown up with an aloof personality and then restricted within the boundaries of my home, I lacked communication skills and was so shy to speak to any person",* shared Farhana. Through HomeNet Pakistan (HNP) trainings she gained confidence to communicate with people in her social surroundings. It was her lack of confidence that made her victim of wage exploitation.

Later, Farhana availed interest free loan from Akhuwat to expand her business skills and purchased raw materials for making bike covers (ragazines). These bike covers were taken to

manufacturing repository by her brother who worked there. She was paid Rs. 3 for taping 3 bikes' covers, and 3 pieces were made in 3 minutes. Involved in other skills, Farhana used to stitch Kurti (shirt), for which she was initially paid Rs. 10 per Kurti but now she gets Rs. 30 per Kurti, which is made in half an hour. Acting as an exemplary success for HomeNet, Farhana managed to earn Rs. 15000-16000 per month by 2019.

Farhana told, *"Onset of Covid-19 in Karachi has halted our works. In initial 3 months, we didn't have work at all."* Grappling with financial and health issues, it was mandatory for Farhana to find a permanent work to sustain her livelihood. She added, *"in the month of May, we got a little bit of work but we were paid way less than we usually are."* Covid-19 pandemics became a way to fuel the already existing exploitation. Farhana, along with her niece, started doing pearl work. Where before pandemics, she used to get Rs. 20 for a bunch, now she received Rs. 5 for a bunch. Working tirelessly for 2 days, they were able to receive Rs. 200 only.

Farhana used to earn good enough to support her household but now she barely makes Rs. 5000 per month. She told that families who live on rent are in very critical situation because priority

wise rent and utility expenses need to be paid first, whereas, ration is secondary. Most families are unable to pay their rents because of which they now owe a rent of 2 to 3 months. Farhana shared, *“A family lives nearby and their condition is so bad that rent of 3 months is due on them. Their landlord has given them time to either pay the rent or leave the house.”*

Informing about her community, Farhana shared, *“I have never seen such worse circumstances in my community”*. Many people from her community were either fired from their workplaces or not given salary of all 3 months. Most of the people are sole breadwinners of their families, thus, the consequences of such actions were dreadful for them. Farhana told, *“We found a woman unconscious in her house because of famine. She just had very little food which she gave to her children once a day and she fainted due to weakness. When I heard this, I collected money from community people and took her to a nearby hospital. With the remaining money, we contributed in her household ration.”* Praising about her community people she informed that they all are very generous and helpful towards each other. These people help each other financially, physical, emotionally and psychologically.

Farhana mentioned that she has seen some organizations distributing ration in Orangi town, but they only distributed to workers they somehow know. Besides this, she is well aware that a single or two organizations cannot help all people. She did contact few social welfare organizations to help people in her area, but to her disappointment, didn't get a positive response from them. She explained, *“We got a letter for our endorsement from HomeNet Pakistan to submit to an organization that claimed to distribute ration. We contacted them through call, as well as in person, and made sure we fulfill all requirements. After completing the whole procedure, we didn't get any reply from them.”* Karachi is the most populated city of Pakistan, thus, in general there are more people who need help as compared to welfare organizations providing such help.

Appreciating efforts of HomeNet Pakistan, she added, *“we are thankful to have organizations like HNP here. They provided few women from our area with Rs. 16000 cash relief, which is equivalent to minimum wage here. Being the leader of my group, I suggested names of the most needy women in my area. These women had no means of income at all.”*

Farhana explained that people in her community cannot afford masks as the prices have inflated since the onset of Covid-19. Nevertheless, they made their own masks with whatever raw materials they had. Besides this, she added, health and safety are common issues in lower class society, because people often work for 10 hours straight or are more mentally and physically stressed than others. Although health issues are not prevalent in all families, but at least one person in few families suffer one or more health issue like Diabetes, Cardiac or blood pressure. Along with this, majority home based workers face eyesight, joint pain and anemia. She suggested that government should take strict actions against people who are deliberately charging way more than actual price.

Furthermore, Farhana told that 20 families from her area received ration by government EHSAAAS program through referral of HomeNet Pakistan. She said, *“ration was fair but they should have*

*included lentils instead of other things because all community people here can rely on only flour and lentils for survival, we don't need superfluous or unnecessary food items."*

She suggested that ration should be fairly distributed in all areas. The inspection team should be hired to keep a check on fair distribution. She said such work is tiring and people receiving cash relief through government also had to go through a lot of hurdles. Inspection teams can contact union council or leaders of the area to help them in their work. Workers are willing to help them but they have taken the task in their own hands, because of which the entire EHSAAAS program is happening at a very slow pace.

Moreover, Farhana recommended that if providing ration is a tedious task for government, they can provide interest free loan. No one will misuse the money as they would know it has to be repaid. But having the money without interest will help workers in their works and micro-enterprise. Lastly, she added, schools in lower class area are taking advantage of the situation. Government needs to make sure that fees should be exempted for atleast destitute people, where there is absolute zero means of online educational system.