

Fatima Rasheed- Baldia Town



Fatima Rasheed, who lives in a semi-urban area of Baldia Town Karachi, is a single mother and the sole earner of her family. Raising 3 children on her own is a tough task, especially when there is no other means of support from extended family. Before the death of her husband, she used to work as a teacher in a secondary school but left because it was not enough to sustain the needs of her household. She started working as a home based worker, she was given per piece garments work. Initially, with that she was able to earn around Rs. 4000 per month.

In 2018, HomeNet had linked her with a vocational training Institute. She completed a short course in stitching from Pakistan Readymade Garments Technical Training Institute (PRGTII), that polished her stitching skills. She worked as an own account worker to gain some income. She charged Rs. 300 per dress

and was able to earn around Rs. 5000 to Rs. 6000 per month.

Since the onset of Corona, she does not have any work. She explained, *“everything was closed, people were in lockdown, no one was purchasing clothes so there was no work to stitch. On Eid (Muslim religious festival), people bought ready-made dresses online.”*

She told that women were psychologically disturbed as some of their husbands were laid off from work. Some companies were shut down while others were operational but wouldn't give salaries. The unavailability of work for women also led to a psychological toll on them. Most of them; including myself, are depressed, because even now when lockdown has been lifted up in Sindh we don't have enough work to fulfil our livelihoods. Besides this, the fear of catching the virus is prevalent among lower class people because we are relying on cloth mask for our safety. Since exigency of physical protective equipments (PPE) increased, the prices of masks also inflated. Lower class people like us couldn't afford us and thus, we made our own cloth masks.

There is also physical and financial pressure for some families as they can not afford medical expenses. Fatima informed few families in her area have children with disabilities or some have one or more house member with health issues. Even some women home based workers face health

issues like weak eyesight or sore eyes, joint pain, blood deficiency and calcium deficiency to name a few. In such scenario where prices for medicines should be reduced, people have to pay double price. She mentioned, *“I am a patient of fits and because in covid-19 I am unable to earn enough, I have to cut off my medicines at times in order to fulfill my household expenses. At times my health condition deteriorates but I cannot do anything else.”*

Expressing disappointment, Fatima shared that some organizations distributed ration to specific ethnicity, regardless whether they belonged to lower class or upper lower class. She pointed that, *“upper lower class is not as vulnerable as lower class people and yet they distributed rations based on particular ethnicity rather than ones’ destituteness.”*

She further shared that she is in her 40s and is mature enough to seek help from various organizations in order to look after her children. Whereas, there are some families where young daughters are sole earners and since their work is also affected by covid-19, they have no idea where to seek help. *“We are only relying on social welfare organizations to help us as we have lost all hope from government.”*

Fatima explained that community people are helping each other in this crises. Where one person gets work, she shares with other community members so all of them can earn a little bit and run their house. *“Currently I am working with a women in community who provides per piece embroidery work to community women. Although the rates are very low but something is better than nothing. Eid-ul-Azha is on its way, but we are getting very little work.”* She further mentioned that there is a lot of uniformity in her community people. If someone is deprived of ration, community people are benevolent enough to help them. They will contribute with whatever food they have to the needy person of the community. Giving a recent example, she shared a story of an impoverished family from her area, *“Just a week ago, there is a family of 5 people with 3 young children. The man of the household got jobless when covid-19 took place in Sindh. The woman of that household used to do some piece work but since there was no work, the family had no income since past 3 months. The month of May was Ramadan (Fasting month of Muslims), and perhaps the toughest for this family. Majority people of my area, who were of the indigent family, shared their food generously with them.”*

She also added that few organizations provided free counseling service but that is through call or online means. This a reliable option in pandemics, but this is not helpful for lower class people as some of them don’t possess a cellphone, let alone the internet facility.

Explaining about the government schemes to help people during pandemics, she mentioned, *“what schemes? All the contact numbers provided would not answer any calls. The only help some of us received was from some NGOs. For instance, HomeNet helped few women with cash relief program. Some women did receive ration provided by government but it happened with HomeNet’ referral.”*

Fatima suggested that instead of providing ration government should provide cash to daily earners like lower labor and home based workers because they earn on day to day basis and are the most affected segment of society, due to lockdown. The issue with ration distribution is they might end up providing ration that is not as per requirement of the family and products are of low quality. For instance, some women who received ration from government stated that there were no lentils, the rice were of extremely bad quality and the flour provided barely lasted for 15 days. So if cash is provided, people will purchase wisely, even in less cash, because they know they have to fulfil the food demand for a at least month. Thus, they might purchase basic useful food items according to their needs of the family including children.

Other than this, she pointed at fair distribution of money among the needy people. *“Not all lower class people are as destitute as others. Some of their husbands earn salary for the households. Although no one received bonus or overtime for their efforts but they have fixed incomes. It should be considered that no particular ethnicity or community should be given priority over another”*, she added. Government can ensure bias-free distribution either through union councils or handling the responsibility of cash relief to trustworthy organizations like HomeNet.