



## SADAF PARVEEN- A STORY OF RESILIENCE DURING COVID-19

### *Empowered Leaders, Empower Communities*

It is said that empowered women empower community. Sadaf Parveen from Baldia Town, Karachi is an excellent example of it. Sadaf has evolved and groomed as a home base leader and as a micro entrepreneur during past three years. When she was linked with HomeNet Pakistan, she could barely talk, let alone negotiate for her right as an informal sector worker. She and her group of women were organized under the leadership program of HomeNet Pakistan. Through the benefits of organizing, Sadaf and her groups were organized in to a business development group in Musharraf Colony, Baldia.

After taking numerous capacity development sessions, she learned about organizing, communication, negotiation, leadership strategies, business development etc. These strategies pushed her to put her demands forward and not only know her rights but exercise her rights. Where she was frowned upon by her in laws to work as a woman for family income, now they celebrate her achievements.



Initially, starting as piece rate home base worker, working for different contractors; it was in the beginning of year 2020 when Sadaf decided to invest for a business, in partnership with her contractor. Little did she know that the year of 2020 will be filled with obstacles and losses. Sadaf received order of 1000 bridal dresses for her business for export to Saudia Arabia. She, along with her group members started preparing the bridal dresses. By the time the order of 1000 bridal dresses was completed, the order got cancelled due to the onset of Covid-19 and lock downs in international and domestic markets. Her partner didn't take any advance payment for the order due to which both partners were left with 1000 pieces in hand with no buyer available. This was not only financial set back, but also depressing and stressing as Sadaf and her group members were not getting any piece rate work as well. Thus, it became difficult for her to fulfill family expenses, let alone the financial burden of paying to her workers for the embroidery work. In the month of March and April, Pakistan was in complete lockdown, therefore,





she had absolutely zero income in those months. Sadaf was earning 15k to 20k during pre-covid situation, the income dropped to absolute zero during the pandemic and lockdown. This led to financial, emotional and psychological distress.

The month of May 2020, was the holy month of Ramadan. Towards the end of Ramadan, Muslims celebrate Eid as a religious festival. Sadaf, who was facing financial crisis due to covid-19 didn't let her spirits down and she decided to take full advantage of this month. She took some dresses to sell in the market. She came back successfully and decided to launch her hand made dresses and other dresses for sale during Eid season. Her cousin supported her in this initiative. He provided her with local dress form whole sale market, dummies and hangers to display cloths at her boutique. She informed as many people as she could regarding her new venture. Word of mouth and strong contacts helped her and she was



able to sell all the clothes. Not only this, she was able to sell the bridal dresses where she invested in the hope to export to Saudia Arabia. These dresses were sold locally. She was able to reach equilibrium through her sales, where she had no profit and no loss.

The biggest challenge that Sadaf had to encounter due to covid-19 was of her irregular income. Sadaf shared that in pre-covid situation, she was earning good enough to save money through monthly saving (committees). The pandemic halted her income and burdened her financially and she was not able to contribute and save during the months. She was only surviving on her husband' income for household expenses. She informed that just before the onset of Covid-19 she completed work for a contractor, but didn't receive payment as the contractor exploited her for submitting work late. Her workers would ask for money and she didn't receive payment from her contractor. Food is a basic survival need. As workers had no work and no income, they also faced shortage of rations. HNP provided contact of many local organizations that claimed to provide ration but to our disappointment they didn't attend calls from workers. Sadaf stated she called on all the numbers and only one organization responded. They provided ration to 8 workers only. Sadaf told that looking at her surrounding, she saw some workers who were more destitute than herself, thus, she helped to get ration for them and didn't receive ration for herself. Later HNP linked Sadaf with government





EHSAAS program and 24 workers from her group, including herself, received the ration successfully.

Sadaf shared that her learnings of online digital literacy by HomeNet Pakistan trainings were very useful. However, she was a bit scared to switch to online platforms initially as she had no idea of using the platforms and secondly had no sense and expectations about whether it will work successfully. Lack of internet accessibility of internet and weak connections in her area along with disruptive electricity issues she wasn't willing to take risk of investing money in internet packages. Sadaf after going through all the challenges and overcoming with strong leadership qualities is now convinced that online platforms are better alternatives for women home base workers especially during and after Covid . She is grateful to HomeNet Pakistan for linking her up with advance online platforms where she is able to learn and use the learnings in enhancing her business skills . Considering the Covid situation, where every entrepreneur is switching to online means, it will be a useful resource and learning experience for workers.