

Putting Skills to Good Use

UNESCO assistance helps impoverished women establish their own small enterprise

Muzaffarabad, Pakistan Administered State of Azad Jammu and Kashmir – August 2009, a thin winding mountain road leads to a one room quarter of Nighat Qadeer. The 25 year old, recently took the initiative to establish a small enterprise, and to provide livelihood opportunities to widows and orphans in her locality. “I shifted here after my marriage 2 years back,” Nighat says. “It pained me to see so many impoverished young widows and orphans sitting idly in their houses, I wanted to help them.” It was then that the idea of creating her own embroidery workshop came to her mind.

“Now, I’ve a good workforce, work is done at a much faster pace, plus I don’t have to worry about negotiating and selling my good in the local market”

In order to create a small home workshop, Nighat needed funding for the purchase of raw materials. She approached the Directorate of Social Welfare and Women Development (DSWWD) to seek help. “We liked her initiative and could see the impact it would have on the local households,” says Sarfraz Ahmed Abbassi, Deputy Director at DSWWD, “but assisting her through government funding would not have been of much help, the raw materials have an additional sales tax and then when the products are ready she has to wait until they are sold to earn back, creating a disruptive financial cycle for the workshop”.

UNESCO has been operational in the earthquake affected areas of Pakistan Administered Kashmir and North-West Frontier Province since November 2005. Aimed at supporting the government in reactivation of the education system in earthquake affected areas in a holistic manner, the interventions included strengthening of technical and vocational education as one of the five main areas for recovery and reconstruction. The project provided contextualized technical and vocational trainings to vulnerable youth and adults in the affected areas by helping rehabilitation of the Dar-ul-Falabs operated by the DSWWD with furniture, raw materials and equipment.



Muzaffarabad, PAK: Nighat shows traditional hand embroidered floral patterned bed spreads and calligraphic wall hangings.

DSWWD shared Nighat’s plan to help create a workshop for impoverished women of her area with UNESCO and used Rs. 15,000 provided by them as seed money and later as a revolving fund for Nighat’s workshop. Nighat used the fund to employ 11 women, purchase raw materials, and also hired a local widow Nasreen, to train another 11 girls in traditional embroidery. The embroidered goods prepared by the workshop are delivered to DSWWD at an agreed price. The income is then used to pay the workers and purchase further materials. DSWWD in turn, sells the items during exhibitions or festivals.



Muzaffarabad, PAK: Nighat (second from right) explains a new embroidery pattern to workers.

Nighat designs patterns for embroidery and provides each worker with the cloth and selected threads, to complete the task at home, making it more convenient for the workers and taking care of shortage of workspace. “It feels great to help the women in my area earn a decent living, while I also get so much work done,” says Nighat. “I had been preparing hand embroidered bedcovers and cushion covers all by myself, but it took a long time to complete each item and then I had to wait until they were sold, sometimes there was no profit at all,” she recalls, Now, I’ve good workforce, work is done at a much faster pace, plus I don’t have to worry about negotiating and selling my good in the local market.

Collecting threads and fabric from Nighat, Qismat jan a mother of 5, says she can now earn up to 2000 rupees (USD 24.5) per month. Although she had trained in embroidery work and stitching 4 years ago, family restrictions prevented her from working, "This is such a great help," says Qismat, "we can now earn right from our own home".