

HELP FOR SELF-HELP: WEAVERS TAKE THEIR DESTINY INTO THEIR OWN HANDS

As in many other carpet production areas carpet production in Pakistan is to a great extent a home based industry. On the basis of an innovative project Label STEP has developed methods that support weavers to profit from the benefits of fair trade in their homes and help them to improve their situation on their own. Although the project is still in its pilot phase it already reaches 4000 people – most of them are women.

„Since decades I’m weaving carpet. I love the work as well as the wonderful patterns and colours of my carpets. Unfortunately, until now my salary has been very low. But since the weavers of my village have united in a committee three years ago I earn 40 percent more!” Safia is a weaver from Kamalia, a village in the district of Tobe Tek Sing, close to the megacity Lahore. Since the local support committee exists in Kamalia, many things have turned to the better for the carpet weavers: They receive higher salaries, have learned a lot about health and safety in their workplace as well as about their rights and possibilities. Since they have united, they are in a better position to negotiate better conditions with their employers.

IMPARTING KNOWLEDGE, STRENGTHENING WOMEN

The Label STEP Project is not only being conducted in Kamalia, but in 50 villages of the Punjab province. In every village a local support committee has been founded in which apart from carpet weavers and other representatives of the carpet industry also local authorities and politicians, teachers and village doctors are represented. Label STEP invites two members of each committee to workshops, where they are educated in human

rights, employment laws and children’s rights, receive information about safety and health in workplace and are sensitized about matters of environmental protection and learn about the Label STEP principles of fair carpet trade. Once back in their villages the workshop participants pass the acquired knowledge on to the whole community. In Pakistan carpets are mostly woven by women – consequently about 70 percent of the workshop participants are women.

GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE PILOT PHASE ALREADY

Although the project is still in its pilot phase, success is notable: Around 4000 carpet weavers in 50 villages are profiting: Hundreds have already achieved an increase of their salaries. Working conditions have been improved in numerous places and the awareness for secure workplaces has increased in all regions. Due to sharing a platform in many places it was possible to mobilize local resources, for example in the sectors of free health care or access to micro credits. Besides material improvements the strengthening of the weavers can be observed. Given the conditions of the strongly rural and conservative social structures the improvements for women are especially notable. Since they know more about their rights and possibilities and since they can act as a union, their situation has essentially improved. From all participating villages success stories similar to Safia’s one can be heard: Women are no longer entirely at their employers’ mercy but their new position of strength gives them the power to negotiate better salaries and conditions. Encouraged by this positive feedback Label STEP intends a continuation and expansion of this project to more carpet production regions.



SAFIA FROM KAMALIA NOW RECEIVES A 40% HIGHER SALARY



WORKSHOPS IMPART SPECIALISED KNOWLEDGE – MOSTLY TO WOMEN



MEETING OF THE LOCAL SUPPORT COMMITTEE FOR CARPET WEAVERS IN THE VILLAGE OF SAFDAR ABAD