



## NEW JOB SKILLS LEAD TO FINANCIAL STABILITY AND DIGNITY IN PAKISTAN

Learning to read, write, and sew clothes helps a woman support her family.

BY SHIZA MALIK | SPRING 2019

Last year, 24-year-old Rubina Naz would often cry herself to sleep. Her youngest daughter was diagnosed with epilepsy and requires 6,000 rupees (\$43) worth of treatment every 15 days. Her husband, who works as a salesman at a neighborhood shop in Punjab, makes only \$50 a month.

Naz, who married at 13, never attended school or learned a vocational skill. “I felt so helpless at my inability to support my family,” she says.

The opportunity to learn sewing at a vocational skills training center near their home in Tibba came as a ray of hope. When Naz found out the center—established by Oxfam and its local partner Human Development Foundation (HDF)—also offered

literacy and numeracy classes for adults, she decided to enroll. But her husband and his family—whose house they live in—didn’t approve. “Our family is very conservative. Women are not allowed to step outside the home,” Naz says.

Finally, her persistence paid off: she convinced her husband to let her take classes. She recalls waking up at the crack of dawn to cook, clean, and send her children to school before her 9 a.m. class. “I had to complete all the work before I left so my in-laws had no reason to object. But they still taunted me for trying to learn at this age,” she says.

The vocational skills training center was set up by Oxfam and HDF as part of Oxfam’s

**// All my life I wished for a day when I didn’t have to ask anyone for money. There is dignity in financial independence, in never having to beg for money. //**

—RUBINA NAZ

Girls Education program to help mothers supplement their income so they can support their children's schooling. The center offers basic literacy and numeracy classes as well as tailoring and beautician courses. Naz completed both her courses six months ago and can now do basic arithmetic, read fluently in Urdu, and write a little. She also mastered cutting and stitching clothes.

### MAKING AND MANAGING MONEY

Naz couldn't afford to buy her own sewing machine, so she borrowed one from a relative and began stitching clothes for friends and neighbors. Her ability to create trendy cuts in clothing, such as the fashionable "tulip shalwar" (an asymmetrically cut style of pants), helped her business expand quickly and she began making \$71 in a month. Her work picked up even more at the end of the holy month of Ramadan, a traditional time to give gifts for the Eid holiday.

"During Eid, I got so many orders I made \$89. I was so happy to be earning. I had never even handled money before," she says.

Naz says before she started working, her husband never trusted her with money. "I would beg him to hand me even five or 10 rupees, but he would never give me any. He even bought the groceries himself," she says. But now, Naz says he hands her most of his salary and lets her manage the household expenses.



ABOVE: Rubina Naz learned to read, write, and manage money at a vocational skills training center established by Oxfam and its local partner, the Human Development Foundation. *Khaula Jamil/Oxfam*

With her additional income, Naz can pay for her daughter's medication. And she has enrolled two of her three children in a private school, which she says provides a better education than the nearby government school. Now that she can read and write, she can also check her children's test scores and ensure they are finishing their homework.

But the biggest change for her is her increased self-confidence. "All my life I wished for a day when I didn't have to ask anyone for money," she says.

"There is dignity in financial independence, in never having to beg for money."



PHOTO: KHAULA JAMIL/OXFAM

## DO ONE MORE THING TODAY

Check out this story about Tooba Sharif: She got a scholarship from Oxfam's Girls Education program and is now thriving in middle school: [oxfamamerica.org/WLTscholarship](https://oxfamamerica.org/WLTscholarship).



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