



Children learning basic education. It is said that more than 70% of the students receiving non-formal education are girls and women.

## Joy of “Reading and Writing” for All

**P**overty and limited access to basic education: In Pakistan, children are unable to attend school for various reasons. Japan has continued to support those who do not have a chance to learn, and the results of such efforts have come into bloom little by little.



“My book” which is used as an educational material. One can learn how to read with fun, as if they keep a journal.

### FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NO ACCESS TO SCHOOL EDUCATION

In Punjab, the most populous province of Pakistan, something is now attracting the attention of especially women. That is “My Book,” in which a user can write down things such as one’s own name, birthday, and family. It is fun to “write down” and “record” something. It is only recently that many people found this joy of writing.

“Education for all children”. The message of Malala Yousafzai, a 17-year-old girl who is the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate, gave inspiration and touched the hearts of people all over the world. Following Nigeria, Pakistan has the world’s second highest number of children out of school. About 50% of the population cannot read and write. Malala continued to attend school in such environment.

“It will take time until everyone has access to school education in an environment where people are unable to pay school uniform and understanding about education is insufficient. Therefore, the movement to enrich ‘non-formal education’ that enables people to obtain qualification equivalent to that of school education and to be literate, which is necessary in people’s lives, has grown,” said Project Advisor Chiho Ohashi, who has been working on educational support in this area for many years. The Literacy and Non Formal Basic Education Department (LNFBED) of Punjab has aimed to improve the literacy rate through “Non-Formal Basic Education” which is for children aged 5-14 who are out of school and “Literacy” which is for adults aged 15-35 who had no chance

to receive educational opportunities.

Thanks also to the effort of local people, non-formal education has shown signs of spreading little by little. However, there is much room for improvement in terms of the quality of education, since many teachers are unqualified and their teaching know-how is insufficient. Therefore, Japan has cooperated for these ten years in the areas including preparation of teaching materials and training for the staff of the LNFBED.

What Ohashi has kept in mind is the “initiative of the people who work at the site.” Based on her belief that things would not go well without a sense of participation among the people who work at the site, she decided to involve the people who can consider from the viewpoint of the local people, from the early stage of decision making on learning items in the process of creating a textbook. “I had a hard time finding an eligible person. There were also many people who opposed this new effort.”

Moreover, when the project actually began, things did not proceed smoothly. “Traditional teaching methods in Pakistan is rather promoting memorization. Using Japanese interactive materials as a reference, I tried to show how to develop teaching-learning materials which are easy to understand and practical.” Literacy mobilizers and officers used to be passive, not proactive to meet the needs of learners; however, inspired by new methods, they started to communicate with other departments including Health and Hygiene Department and Agriculture Department and prepare lessons that can give practical knowledge that would be useful in the participants’ lives.

### LIVES CHANGED THROUGH LEARNING

Gradually, changes emerged on the side of learners. One of such fields is a brick kiln where socially excluded poor people work. The lives of the children who could not attend school as they had to work in the factory as assistants have changed so that now they learn at a non-formal primary school near the factory in the morning and work as assistants in the afternoon. Since the hours of lessons can be arranged according to the situation of each household, parents started to show understanding even though they used to worry about reduction of the children’s working hours.

By having a chance to learn, children can do more by themselves. “I saw parents who boasted to



Project Adviser Ohashi (left) supporting a class at a non-formal primary school in Okara district.

their neighbors how their child happily can read electricity bills now. It has also been a big change that children’s attitude towards their elders improved and they now take care of their health and hygiene,” said Ohashi. They started to have big future dreams of becoming a professional such as a doctor and a teacher, and the expressions of the children are very lively as they look into their future.

This year, a curriculum of non-formal education which was created through Japanese cooperation was officially approved in Punjab province. The new form of education, which is securely taking root, is planned to be developed nationwide. “First of all, we need to encourage local governments to begin with the improvement of infrastructure such as school buildings,” said Yoshitaka Inagaki of JICA Pakistan Office. The severe reality that it is difficult for the students to continue into secondary schools after finishing their primary school education, as there is no secondary school nearby, is also an issue. Furthermore, it is also required to create a system that connects school education to job opportunities. “I would like to promote these initiatives so that Pakistan will be a country where anyone can develop the ability to create a new path on one’s own,” Inagaki said.

In Pakistan, the joy of reading and writing has started to light up the future. They are moving forward step by step towards creation of a society in which all children can receive education.



**Left:** In a classroom for adults, they also teach life skills such as sewing and home kitchen gardening which would generate income. **Right:** A brick kiln in which many people work in Punjab province. The job is low-paying and hard work; however, people are being vitalized as they gained a chance to receive education.