



Giving Factory Workers a Voice

Overview

Around the world, thousands of employees work in vulnerable and even illegal conditions, without the means to change their environment. But change is possible. We can protect and support workers and eliminate human rights abuses in supply chains. In this session, you will hear from the remarkable Nasreen Sheikh, an ex-child labourer who was working 16 hour days at the age of 12.

Today she owns her own handicrafts business in Nepal, employing 35 women and training hundreds more, working to change employment conditions in supply chains and unleash opportunities for more workers.

Nasreen Sheikh, Founder at Local Women's Handicrafts

Session Highlights

Comes from village with no cars, no electricity, no hospital.

Was a child labourer and woman who escaped forced marriage.

Became sick with pneumonia at 3 or 4 and nearly died. Recovered with local herbs.

Witnessed a woman being murdered by her husband at four or five years old. Also witnessed women committing suicide instead of continuing with their life. When she was seven or six years old, witnessed forced marriage of her 16 years old.

Was around 12 years old when became curious about different cities and the world because of a cousin/brother.

Her first time in a city felt like coming out of a cave. She was shocked at seeing women going to school and going to work alone.

Working 12 to 15 hours a day in a sweatshop at the age of 12.

If orders were cancelled or delayed, no payment or little payment.

Often had to splash cold water in her eyes to keep her awake.

13 years old when saw a student going to school. Met a teacher who educated her. Through his education I started to know the world I was a part of. The first time I walked into a department store, that's when I realised how disconnected we were. People just buying clothes with the money, it was heartbreaking for me to see how hard it is and how disconnected we all are.

At around 18 her parents started asking her to get married. But when she was 15 she opened her own store, Local Women's Handicraft. Was very lucky that a woman came from Canada one day and said "Who makes all these clothes?" So she came to my workshop and took all our stories and asked if she could give it to a friend. She told her later that our story was published in Forbes magazine.

Became the first woman of her village who ever escaped forced marriage. In 2015 built a learning centre. Working with women who have experienced social stigma, and been through a lot of difficulties.

About her factory: We have six or seven skills and we allow the women to choose which they'd like to learn.

Only in Nepal 1.6 million child labourers exist, in the world over 160m

Why does this still exist? Why are we so disconnected? Where are the NGOs?

Local and the international buyers need to be connected.

If all those buyers had been responsible, they would have seen me working in those conditions.

You many include as many highlights as necessary!

Quotes

- How can we all start to feel a connection? How can we answer who makes your clothes, who makes your shoes...if we ask these questions we can connect people.
- The truth is, we are based in a world of consumerism. And the truth is how can we ask the questions of where what we are buying is from.
- I became the first woman of my village who ever escaped forced marriage. In 2015 I built a learning centre. Working with women who have experienced social stigma, and been through a lot of difficulties.