

## Reducing Child Labor

A Pakistani organization is selling ergonomically correct weaving looms that let adults create the same intricate rugs that children now make.

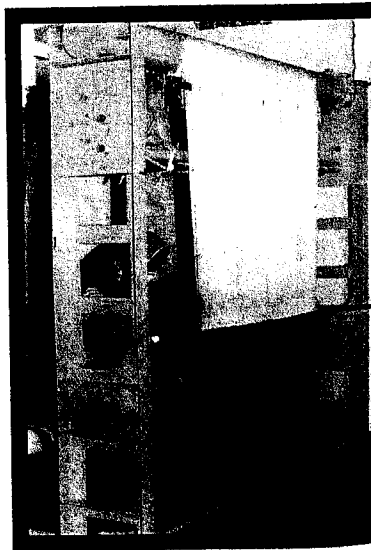
Centre for the Improvement of Working  
Conditions & Environment, Lahore, Pakistan  
[www.ciwce.org.pk](http://www.ciwce.org.pk)

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF ADAPTIVE EYE CARE LTD. (TOP), CIWCE (BOTTOM)

WEAVING IS A TRADITIONAL INDUSTRY IN MUCH of the developing world. To Westerners, weaving sometimes conjures up images of 19th-century sweatshops, of women or children working 12 hours a day or more on dangerous looms, perhaps even chained to their machines.

In countries like Nepal and Pakistan, those images aren't far from reality. Most of Pakistan's 300,000 weavers are women and children; all must squat on the floor over their looms, where their dexterity and small fingers are suited to the finely detailed work. Research by the Centre for the Improvement of Working Conditions & Environment (CIWCE) in the Pakistani province of Punjab estimates that more than 100,000 children ages 5 to 14 work as weavers. Their income is sometimes the only economic lifeline for poor families.

To reduce the demand for child labor, the centre has created a new, ergonomically sound loom on which adults can produce rugs as quickly and easily as children can. Unlike the traditional wood-plank loom, the portable steel pipe-framed loom allows workers to sit or stand while weaving, rather than having to crouch at ground level. It includes arm and footrests, with particular attention paid to lower-back



*With these ergonomically designed, upright steel looms, weaving is no longer a pain in adults' backs.*

support. The winding mechanism is driven by gears – eliminating the risk of facial injuries from the traditional chains, which can snap under strain.

A study of 30 looms found that after two years, children made up just 10 percent of the workers, down from 60 percent. Workers reported fewer health problems in all categories, including fatigue and chronic musculoskeletal pain. All had increased their productivity, and almost 60 percent of the home-based workers had improved their incomes as well.

The Punjab government in Pakistan is now planning two larger deployments. The first would subsidize 1,000 looms for families – identified by various NGOs – who either rely on children's work or are indebted to carpet manufacturers. Small installments from the families would ultimately repay 30 to 50 percent of the loom's cost. A second, much larger program would install 10 looms in each of 1,200 rural carpet factories. In this case, the factory owners would pay back the installation cost over a five-year period, although the economic implications and feasibility are still being worked out.

Financial support for the test of 30 looms was provided by the International Labour Organization (ILO), as part of a project to eliminate child labor in Pakistan's carpet industry. The Pakistani carpet manufacturers and exporters association supported the project, along with the U.S. Department of Labor, through the ILO.