

CASE STUDY OF VILLAGE KHAZANA DHERI OF DISRICT MARDAN.

Context:

Khazana Dheri is located in Mardan district, 25km Northeast of Mardan City. The village, having approximate population 5000 is linked to the Mardan city and adjacent areas by a Katcha (dirt) road and the main means of communication/access? presently available are through Datsun and Chanchi. The village population comprises primarily of Afridis, Yousafzais and Mohmands tribe.

Diagnosing the Problem:

ASER Team had planned a visit to the village to sensitize the community before the ASER Baithak. Here to our delight, we met residents who were genuinely concerned about the plight of education in their District. However, some were not very appreciative of the idea, and so we came face-to-face against biases against education that continue to plague our society. Mr Sikandar, a resident of Khazan Dheri informed us about a local notable named Razzaq who was strongly against women's education. He was an influential of the area, and it was primarily due to his efforts that many girls were not getting the benefits of education.

Time for ACTION!

It would have been very easy for the ASER team to disregard such elements and instead concentrate on putting up an ASER Baithak where only those genuinely interested in promoting education would have participated. But ASER more than anything is about taking on challenges at the grassroots; dispelling- myths, and mainstreaming those sections of the society who still hold prejudicial views against female education.

Therefore, the ASER team decided to meet Razzaq. For this purpose, the Head teacher of the village school, community elders including the local Imam of the village mosque and ASER team visited the house of Mr. Razzaq. We soon realized that Mr Razzaq had the aura of a very strong personality and a belief in his religious persona. However, he also seemed a reasonable man who was not averse to listening to anything he disagreed with, and so the ASER team engaged in a conversation with him about the benefits of Female Education. However, in the beginning he denied that he was against the very notion of female education. However, slowly he opened up, and started elaborating on why he is actually against female education. He said that education is only necessary for males and not females

as per Islam. However, the ASER team informed him of many instances in Islam in which the importance of education was clearly highlighted for women, and which was personified in the life of the Prophet (SAW). The ASER team quoted the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) who clearly said that seeking of education is obligatory for men and women. ASER Team informed him that it is very hopeful that he will play an instrumental part in increasing literacy rate of female education and so in a way perform his religious obligation.

Mr. Razaq had three daughters who were at the age of 5, 7 & 9 years. The Molvi and the Head Teacher of the village school insisted that charity begins from home, and therefore he should first enroll his daughters in school. After some impasse in which further deliberations took place about the importance of female education, ASER team was finally able to convince Mr Razaq on the importance of female Education. Not only that, but Mr Razzaq was so enthused by the idea that he decided to have his daughters enrolled on the spot. The head teacher instantly enrolled his daughters in the school and issued the books to all the three girls of the village.

Reflections & Reactions: The Impact of ASER

This was indeed a proud moment for the ASER team, as it had achieved the seemingly unachievable by setting aside the myths and age-old biases against female education. What the ASER team realized was that it was not impossible to make people realize the importance of education, all it required was sensible reasoning and an acute desire to bring a sustained change in the society. ASER for many is primarily about just data, but here the power of the data really came to the fore. It really showed that no impediment, no matter how strong is insurmountable. All it really needs is evidence that is easy to understand, ability to listen to others, and being receptive to new ideas.