

Community shuns taboos & fights to make a safe passage to Girls Schools, ASER facilitates

Case Study Chiniot

Moza Nitharkay is a village in Bhowana Tehsil of district Chiniot. Here the ASER 2011 survey revealed that the female enrolment was extremely low. Only 50% girls of school going age were enrolled in this village despite availability of a splendid community girls' primary school built by the Norwegian Government and other Government Schools. ASER Team, through pre-baithak and baithak sessions, found several reasons for the high number of out of school females. Firstly, the villagers deemed girls' education a menace. For them sending girls to school was a taboo and many families were against sending their daughters to schools. Secondly, we found that the main passage to go to school was partially closed and girls & teachers had to take a longer and an unsecure route to get to the Girls Primary School. The passage was blocked because the land which connected the passage to the school was sold to someone called Mr. Malik, who didn't allow any trespassers on his property.

ASER team took the initiative to resolve these issues. The Village Numberdar, two influential community members and ASER Team along with almost 100 community members and parents were invited to discuss the problem and find possible solutions. During the baithaks we tried to reason with the parents to send their children to school and to shun all taboos away. We explicitly explained how important it was for the community to have educated females who in future become educated and responsible mothers. The village Numberdar, Imam Shaib also facilitated us and endorsed girls' education. After spreading awareness and sensitizing the community about the importance of girls' education the next challenge to solve the passage issue was taken up. Mr. Chaudhary Iqbal, a landlord of the village and Numberdar. They promised to take this matter into consideration and demanded community backup. Mr. Ghulam Mustaf Mohsin, an owner of a private school and Mr. Arshad, a youth community member, volunteered to represent and work on behalf of the community in order to take this matter forward in a systematic way. ASER Team was happy that the community had been mobilized enough to take the matter into its own hands. ASER provided facilitation that was required at all steps.

A few days later when ASER Team revisited the village, it was found out that the process of devising a suitable route to the school was underway. After several negotiations, Mr. Chaudhary Iqbal had finally convinced Mr. Malik to exchange the land that he owned adjacent to the school with a land that Mr. Chaudhary owned. Once Mr. Chaudhary owns land next to the school, he would provide a safe passage for the girls and teachers. Now, the legal proceedings are in progress. Furthermore, as far as enrollment was concerned we saw that there had been an increase in girls' enrollment in the Government and Norwegian built schools.

ASER initiated a debate which led to provision of better education conditions for girls, a sense of responsibility among community was created and change of mindset of community – to send girls to school – was achieved. We hope that this awareness and demand for better education conditions for children is continued till every child has access to free and quality education.