

Volunteers Push for Change in Attitudes, Help in Improving Quality of Education

Muzaffargarh Case Study

Usman Koria Village is situated on the south east side of Markaz Shah Jamal in district Muzaffargarh. This is a model village meaning all basic facilities are available here, such as roads, telephone network and schools. The villagers are mostly teachers, laborers and farmers.

In October 2011 ASER Team visited this village and in April 2012 returned to the village to share the results with the community. ASER Baithak was held in this area and all stake holders in the community such as teachers, parents and School Health & Nutrition Supervisor participated. ASER revealed that 84% girls of school going age are out of school in this village. The learning levels of this village were also very poor as only 50% of the children could read class 2 textbook level Urdu sentences, only 43% could read English text and 50% could do 2 digit divisions. The community was asked about why they thought the enrolment and learning levels were low in their village. Most of the community members were of the opinion that poor results were due to lack of interest of parents and teachers. Parents do not follow up on the progress of their children in schools and teachers do not engage parents in uplifting the education level of students. The general response of the community was that teachers were qualified but had no interest in taking classes and were mostly absent. The Head Teacher was also not too strict and the community SMC and parents never held the school authorities accountable for lack of interest in educating their children.

ASER Team through the Baithak discussion really tried to sensitize the community to take interest in their children. We made the parents realize that education was not only the responsibility of the teachers but parents were also equally responsible in making sure that there was quality learning taking place in their children's lives. ASER Team also reminded SMC members about their responsibilities and told them how they had to become vigilant in monitoring teacher absenteeism. Also, we told them that they had the power to initiate parent teacher meetings in schools so that parents are aware of their children's progress.

After much mobilization, the community admitted that they had been wrong in ignoring such valuable aspects of their children's lives and that in the future they would make sure that they are more aware of their children's progress at school. Even teachers felt ashamed and committed themselves to working seriously in the future. Interestingly, few volunteers who were Matric graduates, offered to help the community by becoming additional staff in schools. Community and school Head Teacher had no problem with this type of volunteerism as they saw how motivated these young women were in helping out in improving quality of education in schools.

Last time when the ASER visited Usman Koria, it was found that one of the volunteers Miss Zahida was regularly going to school. She was taking Chalo Parho Barho (CPB) classes and also ensuring that teachers were regularly coming to school. She and other volunteers were keeping the community motivated by spreading awareness regarding importance of education and also by facilitating the SMC in pushing for parent teacher meetings. We were also informed that the student enrollment had been increasing due to the education awareness through ASER

Baithak and also post-Baithak awareness conducted by the volunteers. The energetic volunteers have really started to make a difference as 'quality-education' is slowly becoming a catch phrase in Usman Koria now.

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