

“Gypsy Parents Convinced to Enroll Children in School, ASER persuades”

Case Study - Mianwali

According to the ASER 2011, Mianwali has 9.7% children out of school. Of this, 3.7% are dropouts and 6% have never been enrolled. A large number of gypsy families occupy many of the villages in the outskirts of Mianwali and it could be so that their children are part of the never enrolled figure. One such village is Tarikhel which is 15km from main Mianwali city. This village is heavily populated by gypsy families. Most of these families are either involved in daily labor work or collecting of wood. The children of these families were usually seen wandering about, picking garbage and playing in and around their make-shift homes. And their quantity was quite substantial which could not be ignored by passersby. We, the ASER Team always wondered that these children also had the same right to education as any other child living in this district. One day we paid them a visit and asked them and their parents about the children's education. We were shocked to find out that from 60 odd children only one boy was enrolled in Ghazali Education Trust School in class two and none of the others were studying in any type of formal education institution. Upon inquiring, we were told that for the parents education held no meaning and there no productive outcome of education for them or their children. They said that their children knew Islam & Namaz and recited the Holy Quran twice a day, and this was enough for them. Elder children spoke for themselves and said that we have no need to study formal education.

Perturbed by what we had heard, we decided that we had to change this thinking of the parents and had to make them realize the importance of education, especially for girls. We called a small baitakh in the village and made sure that gypsy families were part of it. In that baitakh we explained the importance of education, the future benefits of it for the children. We also tried to explain to the families that with better education children will be able to help parents in setting up or expanding small businesses which will have greater economic outcomes than what they have now. And in the near future young children could help in their parents businesses as they could help in doing simple calculations.

During the proceedings of the baitakh, another alarming and unexpected thing surfaced. We were told that the village schools discriminated against gypsy children and past efforts to enroll gypsy children have resulted in embarrassment for the parents. Sardar, Khan Abu Bakar Khan said families face problems when they go for admission to the Principals and the administration does not take their requests seriously, saying why would a gypsy family want to send its child to school. Troubled by this finding we told the gypsy families that ASER team will facilitate them in whatever is required to get their children admitted to a school and we also said that this news will also be shared with the EDO Education so that they intimate all principals and teachers not to discriminate against any child which comes for admission.

After the baitakh many families got convinced about the importance of education and were happy that ASER team will help them in facilitating their children's admissions. A few days after the baitakh we revisited Tarikhel and five families were ready to send their child to school. We took the parents and children to Govt. Primary School Tarikhel for admission and there we met to Principal and asked him to admit these children. Today Sher Khan can't wait for his new class to begin; Abdul Haq is admitted in class 2; Zareenullah is happy to see his new books and Zohaib Khan is happy his sister Zareen Khan will both be in the same class.