

Putting Language First

An educational Success story from Rajasthan, India

In a dusty corner of Rajasthan, in rural Bharatpur district live the Meo community. Literacy rates for women in this part of the country used to be just 20% and those of the Meo Muslim women were negligible. The only education available to Meo women was traditional Din-e-Taleem (or religious education in the mosque). They were not 'eligible' for general education.

After so many years of grinding poverty and social discrimination an NGO called Lok Jumbish became involved. The ignorance of the local government was put aside and a fresh start made. Lok Jumbish suggested a simple solution: education was offered in the Urdu medium rather than in Hindi, which no one here spoke. Urdu is a language related to Islam in this part of India.

This is a story of empowering girls to make better future decisions. Of empowering communities to control their own lives better. The greatest achievement was getting the support of the community. By conversing with Islamic leaders in the area over several months everyone's problems and issues were dealt with. People began live with each other rather than living in ignorance. Before the project started, literacy rates for girls were 11%. After 4 years they are now 57% and rising. Numerous girls often said they wanted to go to school, and now that dream is being fulfilled! Their life opportunities are now limitless.

Lok Jumbish introduced school mapping and house surveys to define the status of children's education. Registering students prevented dropouts and absenteeism dramatically decreased. Communities became involved at the grass-roots level. Education committees are now better managed and know what each school needs. The NGO even went as far as to even introduce groups for adolescent girls and teachers to help feminize the education system.