

## The road to education

*By Shipra Baduni*

In rural India, education for girls is still a daily struggle. Their dreams are often shown a red light long before they can take flight. Community norms and existing conditions decide their fate, often acting as barriers to their education. Lack of water, lack of roads, lack of transportation, and a looming sense of danger for girls' safety is the reality in the majority of rural villages in India.

In Kalsada, a small village in Alwar, Rajasthan, a strong male bias existed where boys were raised to think they could do almost anything. This freedom and inherent bias was a bane for the girls of the village. The boys remained uninterested in education, and they made sure no girl was able to access school. They created an ongoing nuisance for the girls and they destroyed school property. They stood outside school property and eve teased (harassed) the girls passing by. This alarmed the girls' parents, and the only solution they could think of was to not send their daughters to school. Even when Sehgal Foundation began renovation work on the village school, the boys caused trouble and tried to wreck the property. They broke windows and drew obscenities on the walls of the school.



Ripped from their right to education, the girls felt devastated. They decided to see what they could do to save their education. They felt empowered through their

life skills and governance training (provided by Sehgal Foundation) that taught them about their rights and gave them the confidence and skills to be able to fight for them. They approached their digital literacy and life skills education instructor and asked him for help. The girls went along with the instructor to speak with the sarpanch. The sarpanch had been aware of the issue but had not bothered to intervene.

Upon hearing the girls speak so passionately about their desire for education and the threat they felt, the sarpanch decided it was time to take action. He called a community meeting, and he and the girls talked about the issue with those present. As a result, a decision was made that any boy who was seen either destroying school property or eve teasing any girl would be required to pay a fine of 500 rupees, and strict action would be taken against them.

This action caused the girls to feel more secure about their education. Parents who had kept their daughters from school due to safety issues agreed to allow their girls to go back to school and to take the digital literacy classes organized by Sehgal Foundation. By taking action, the empowered girls of the village saved their education.

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