

ANNUAL STATUS OF EDUCATION REPORT (RURAL) 2008 PRESS RELEASE

New Delhi, January 13, 2009. Four years since the UPA Government levied a 2% education cess on all Central taxes; the learning levels in basic reading writing show no change in most of the country although Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have made considerable progress. Bihar has made consistent progress in bringing more children into school. Most other states also have lowered the numbers of not-in-school children although India seems to be struggling with the last mile problems.

These are the major findings of the fourth Annual Status of Education Report-ASER2008 released by Mr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia in Delhi today at the Triveni Auditorium.

ASER was first released in January 2006 and this annual exercise since then mobilizes over 20,000 volunteers to visit over 700,000 children in 330,000 households spread over 16,000 sampled villages in all states of India.

The report shows that more than 77% children of Std V in Madhya Pradesh can solve a division sum, while in Kerala the same percentage is 43.7 %. Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh lead the nation in reading ability with over 60% children in Std III able to read at least a Std I text and over 70% children in Std V able to read at least a Std II text. Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have shown a big jump in learning of basic reading and arithmetic since ASER2007 published last January.

This is the first time any states have shown improvement in basic arithmetic learning.

Bihar's performance in bringing more children into schools has been consistent over the last four years bringing the number of out of school children down from 13% in 2005 to 5.7% in 2008. However, the proportion of children not in school has gone up by 1.7 percentage point in UP and 0.6 percentage points in Rajasthan between 2007 and 2008. This increase has nullified the gains made by all other states resulting in the national percentage of children not-in-school remaining steady between 2007 and 2008.

Karnataka and Orissa are among other states where some progress in reading ability has been observed. However, most other states are showing little or no improvement.

ASER asked children to tell time and found that only 61% children in Std V could tell time correctly from a clock.

The Government of India introduced the Right to Education Bill in the Rajya Sabha in the Winter session of 2008. This Bill specifically says that parents whose children go to private schools shall not have a claim on the government for their education expenses. ASER notes that the proportion of children going to private schools has gone up by nearly 6 percentage points since 2005 with the greatest increase in UP, Rajasthan, and Karnataka, which amounts to about 8-10 percent more children opting for private schools since 2005. In 2008, 22.5% children go to private schools. Most private schools in Goa and in Kerala, where over 50% children go to private schools, are government aided. However, in UP, Haryana, Rajasthan were 35.9%, 40.3% and 32.7% children go to private schools, most schools are not government aided. These proportions are growing.

Other interesting findings of the survey, which included a look at household characteristics is that 48.3% rural households have phones while 46.7% households have televisions. The proportion of rural households that neither have a TV nor a phone is 39.1%.

The Union Government released close to Rs. 35,000 cr to the states between 2004-05 and 2006-07. Out of which nearly 60% funds went to Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

Speaking at the function, Dr. Madhav Chavan, who heads Pratham, the organization that facilitates ASER nationwide suggested that it is time to ask for resignations if learning levels of children in government schools does not improve.

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A copy of the report can be downloaded from www.asercentre.org