



As citizens of India, each one of us has the right to monitor the work of the government and we also have the responsibility to help make our society equitable, efficient, and effective. Every Indian man, woman and child deserves a vibrant democratic society based on Izzat, Imandari, and Insaaf. Every Indian wants India to be not only a literate but also an educated country. Every Indian child deserves an equal opportunity to build a good life.

Pratham appeals to individuals, organizations, institutions, and businesses to join an effort to create a citizens' Annual Status of Education Report for India.

What is ASER?

ASER or Annual Status of Education Report was launched in 2005.

One of India's major goals is the achievement of universal primary education – that is all children in 6-14 age should be in school and learning. The Government of India has launched a massive nation-wide program of universalising elementary education. Every Indian pays taxes to provide elementary education to the children of India and in addition also pays a 2% education cess on all central taxes. As citizens and well wishers of India, it is imperative that we “take stock” and assess how far we have come and how far we have to go. ASER 2005 was a citizens' assessment of the status of elementary education in rural India. ASER 2005 took a look at India's progress towards the goal of universal elementary education.

How was ASER 2005 done?

Facilitated by Pratham, executed by local groups in each district, funded by organizations and contributions from individual citizens, it is the largest, uniquely participative household survey on school education in India ever done by non-government organizations and local groups. ASER 2005 reached 332,971 children in 191,057 households cutting across 9521 villages in 509 districts in India. More than 20,000 volunteers from 776 local groups, NGOs, colleges and universities participated in this effort. The data collection was carried out between November 14 and December 20 2005. From start to finish, the entire effort took less than 100 days.

What did ASER 2005 achieve?

First, ASER found that 93.4% children in 6 to 14 age group are enrolled in school across India, while private schools provide education to 16.4% children. The news on basic learning – reading and arithmetic was not good. 35% of all children in the age group 7-14 could not read simple paragraphs at Standard I level and close to 52% could not read a short story at a Standard II level of difficulty. 50% of children enrolled in Standard II to V in government primary schools and 38% in private schools could not solve a two digit subtraction. Average teacher attendance in schools was about 75%, while average student attendance was about 71%. 75% schools had a mid-day meal scheme and in textbook availability was 85% for 5th standard students. 66% of primary schools had water, while only 42% had functioning toilets. In short, the while the positive is that children have access to schools and are going to schools, the negative point is that they are not at all learning well in schools.

Second, ASER created major national policy impact by bringing quality of school education to the forefront of government's planning and action. The national release, in Delhi by Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Dy., Chairman, Planning Commission,

was followed by vast number of meetings at state and district levels across the country with government officials and citizens' groups to discuss the ASER 2005 findings and debate the next steps. ASER is now an important policy input and is referred study in the Planning Commission's Approach Paper to the 11th Five Year Plan 2007-12.

Third, ASER created many levels of meetings and discussion in state governments and local administration. Several major states: Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh are focusing on remedial education on a large scale in this academic year; some have invited Pratham as collaborators in this effort. States like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are instituting state-wide quality improvement programs in primary school.

Fourth, ASER provoked immediate action from citizens' groups and non-governmental organizations to improve children's educational status in their state or district e.g., in Gujarat – alliances were formed across the state especially in tribal areas, in UP – Pehla Qadam Campaign – in which village volunteers were mobilized in 20 blocks to improve learning, in MP and Maharashtra - Akshar Mela and Akshar Jatra campaign involving 30,000 villages to improve learning, in Bihar – summer camps in collaboration with state government, UNICEF and Pratham – in 2 blocks in each of 37 districts – benefiting 300,000 girls and in West Bengal and Assam – libraries opened in 6 districts each.

Fifth, ASER generated widespread publicity on the issue of quality of learning. The Times of India, The Indian Express, Hindustan Times, The Economic Times, Business Standard, Deccan Herald, DNA, The Pioneer, OutlookIndia, Zee News, CNN-IBN etc have covered ASER and its implications in both news and in editorial pieces. Even internationally, reputed magazine like The Economist highlighted the larger importance of ASER in the developing world by saying that.. *'Governments and donors have been remarkably successful at getting children into schools. But what do they learn when they are there? Pratham's study in India is one of the few serious attempts to find out'*.

ASER 2006 – What is new?

ASER is an annual effort. It will go on until December 2010 – the deadline for achieving quality universal elementary education as declared by Government of India. ASER2006 will be carried out in October - December 2006. The attempt will be to cover all rural districts in the country. In addition, there will be an urban sample as well – plans are being drawn to cover urban areas with a million plus population. We will also be looking at the possibility of measuring Adult literacy. Operational Planning for ASER 2006 is currently underway.