

ASER 2010 Countdown Begins...

The countdown to ASER 2010 has begun! It is that time of the year when ASER Centre is buzzing with enthusiasm and gusto. The preparations for ASER 2010 are in full swing. States in the North-East and Bihar have completed their respective state trainings and have entered the second phase, where training is conducted at the district level. These states will also be the first to conduct the actual survey. State level trainings are currently underway in several other States, and both training and data collection will be completed across the country by mid November.



Training in progress: Kohima, Nagaland



State Training: Ranchi, Jharkhand

A huge amount of planning and calculation goes into executing ASER, which reaches more than 15,000 villages, 300,000 households, and 700,000 children each year. Our USP is our ability to span the length and breadth of the country within an average of 100 days, from training to data collection, data entry, data analysis and release of the national report. Covering every rural district in the country, what makes ASER a truly people's effort is our collaboration with local partners such as NGOs and colleges in every district surveyed.

So overwhelming is the magnitude and expanse of this exercise, that the excitement and nervousness in the air is palpable. Spread across the country, the hundred-strong workforce of ASER Centre is running against time to successfully conduct ASER 2010. However, entering its sixth year, a sense of confidence and self-belief comes with having experienced and competent people on board, with an extreme sense of commitment to the cause.

As happens every year, the ASER season officially began with the National Workshop, held this year in Lucknow from August 18 to 22. Even though capacity building workshops are organised throughout the year, the National Workshop focused specifically on training ASER Regional Team (ART) members and ASER Associates (AAs) in the tools and procedures to be utilised in this year's ASER. It is the ART members and the AAs who will eventually conduct the State level trainings and coordinate the fieldwork, supported by ASER Centre's team in Delhi.

The National Workshop is held after extensive piloting of tools before finalising them. Every year we add a new element to our tools, and so piloting them is important. This year, a tool has been designed to test the critical thinking abilities of children in Std. 5 and above.



During the National Workshop in Lucknow, field visits were organised to 32 villages in order to provide hands-on experience

to our teams. This way, not only did they familiarise themselves with the survey tools and procedures, they brought back a Pandora's Box full of insights. For instance, so abysmal are the state of affairs on education in Uttar Pradesh, that a team discovered that children were barely able to spell the name 'Mayawati' in a village that is barely a few kilometers from the State capital. Another team met a head mistress, so dedicated that she couldn't stop herself from crying in despair over the fact that despite her best efforts, children were deserting her school for nearby private schools. The Lucknow workshop also hosted visitors from Tanzania and Uganda, representing UWEZO, the East African versions of ASER.

Soon ASER Centre will wear a deserted look, only to pass on the buzz to the rest of the country as ASER teams travel ceaselessly to every corner of the nation. Come December and the ASER office is full to bursting as everyone works through Sundays, holidays, and late into the night, making sure that the ASER 2010 can be released in mid January, as happens every year.