



PRESS RELEASE

ASER Centre releases Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2011

New Delhi, 16 January 2012:

The Annual Status of Education Report, ASER 2011 was released in New Delhi today by the Honourable Minister of Human Resource Development, Shri Kapil Sibal.

This was followed by a panel discussion chaired by Minister of State for Human Resource development, Dr D Purandeswari. The panelists included Shri Hussain Dalwai- Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, Dr Madhav Chavan, President and CEO, Pratham Education Foundation and Dr Rukmini Banerji, Director Aser Centre.

Completing its 7th year, ASER is the largest annual survey of children in rural India. Facilitated by Pratham, ASER is undertaken by local organizations and concerned citizens. ASER 2011 reached 558 districts, 16,017 villages, 327,372 households and 633,465 children.

Every year, ASER finds out whether children in rural India go to school, whether they can read simple text and whether they can do basic arithmetic. Eighteen months after the Right to Education Act came into effect, ASER 2011 also included a visit to more than 14,000 government schools to assess progress towards compliance with those norms and standards specified in the Right to Education Act that are easy to measure.

ASER 2011: Key findings

■ Very high enrollment figures for rural India

- ❖ 96.7% of all 6-14 year olds in rural India are enrolled in school. This number has held steady since 2010.
- ❖ States that had a high proportion (over 10%) of 11-14 year old girls out of school in 2006 have made significant progress. For example Bihar out of school numbers have dropped from 17.6% in 2006 to 4.3% in 2011. Rajasthan shows a decline from 18.9% in 2006 to 8.9% in 2011. Uttar Pradesh has shown the least progress with 11.1% 2006 and 9.7% in 2011.
- ❖ Substantial numbers of five year old children are enrolled in school. The All India figure stands at 57.8% for 2011. This proportion varies across states, ranging from 87.1% in Nagaland to 18.8% in Karnataka.

Recommendations: India has made impressive progress in enrollment. Now is the time to turn from inputs and access and focus on the challenge of how to improve quality.

■ Private school enrollment is rising in most states

- ❖ Nationally, private school enrollment has risen year after year for the 6-14 age group, increasing from 18.7% in 2006 to 25.6% in 2011. These increases are visible in all states except Bihar.
- ❖ In states like Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Manipur and Meghalaya there has been an increase of over 10 percentage points in private school enrollment in the last five years.
- ❖ According to ASER 2011 data, between 30 to 50% of children in rural areas of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh are enrolled in private schools.

Conclusion: Increasingly, parents are choosing to send children to private schools. There is a possible conflict between parental choice and RTE norms. How can this conflict be resolved?

■ Basic reading levels showing decline in many states

- ❖ Nationally, reading levels are estimated to have declined in many states across North India. The All India figure for the proportion of children in Std V able to read a Std 2 level text has dropped from 53.7% in 2010 to 48.2% in 2011. Such declines are not visible in the southern states.

- ❖ In a few states there is good news. In Gujarat, Punjab and Tamil Nadu the numbers for 2011 are better than for 2010. Several states in the north-eastern region of India also show positive change. Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh numbers remain unchanged from last year.

Recommendations: Reading is a key fundamental requirement for accessing and acquiring knowledge. It is essential for progress in school and in everyday life. Reading instruction has to be an important part of the early years/grades in school. Along with reading skills we need to build and strengthen children's ability to understand, communicate, express themselves and think critically.

The unsatisfactory levels of basic reading ability suggested by ASER and other studies including PISA, point to an urgent need to focus on basic learning outcomes. Each state should define realistic, measurable outcomes in reading and understanding that can be understood by teachers and parents. RTE states that children's progress has to be communicated to parents. We need to start doing that. Textbook content needs to be reviewed. Are textbooks too difficult for young children? Is the pace of the textbook moving too quickly? Are we equipping teachers adequately for teaching reading?

■ Arithmetic levels also show a decline across most states

- ❖ Basic arithmetic levels estimated in ASER 2011 show a decline. For example, nationally, the proportion of Std III children able to solve a 2 digit subtraction problem with borrowing has dropped from 36.3% in 2010 to 29.9% in 2011. Among Std V children, the ability to do similar subtraction problems has dropped from 70.9% in 2010 to 61.0% in 2011.
- ❖ This decline is visible in almost every state; only Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu show improvements from 2010 to 2011. Several states in the north-eastern region of India also show positive change. There is no change in arithmetic levels in Gujarat.

Recommendations: 2012 is the year of mathematics. We need to build broad consensus across states on the achievement of basic math literacy. Here too, measurable and realistic learning goals need to be agreed upon. These need to be communicated widely and the government must report on progress towards these goals. Basics of number knowledge and operations as well as the ability to critically think and solve problems need to be built in the early grades.

The data on reading and arithmetic point to the fact that most children are two to three years behind where they are expected to be. Large scale corrective action to build these basic skills is urgently needed. As we move into the 12th Plan period and into a new year for the SSA annual work planning cycle, learning outcomes must move to centre stage.

RTE refers to a "completion" certificate after 8 years of schooling. At the completion of Std VIII, a non-textbook dependent basic skills testing certification process can be instituted. Anyone completing eight years of schooling should be eligible to take the certification process. Children can appear as many times as they want. This may help in creating a national standard.

Main findings from school visits:

■ Children's attendance has declined

- ❖ At the All India level, children's attendance shows a decline from 73.4% in 2007 to 70.9% in 2011 in rural primary schools.
- ❖ In some states, children's attendance shows a sharp decline over time: for example in primary schools of Bihar, average attendance of children was 59.0% in 2007 and 50.0% in 2011. In Madhya Pradesh this figure has fallen from 67.0% in 2007 to 54.5% in 2011 and in Uttar Pradesh from 64.4% (2007) to 57.3% (2011).

Recommendations: It is well known that attendance in school is an essential precondition for good educational outcomes. It is time that attendance, instead of enrollment, is used as the measure of who is in school.

■ More than half of all Std 2 and Std 4 classes are sit together with another class

- ❖ During the school visit, ASER focuses on Std 2 and Std 4 and observes whether children in these classes are sitting together with children from other classes.
- ❖ Nationally, for rural government primary schools, data suggests that over half of all classes visited are multigrade. For example, all India Std 2 was sitting with one or more other classes in 58.3% of Std 2 classes in primary schools were sitting with another class. This figure is 53% for Std 4.

Recommendations: There are real challenges in Indian classrooms. These include diverse age groups, wide variations in ability and multiple classes sitting together. Teachers need to be equipped in a practical way to be able to teach effectively under these circumstances. RTE provides new opportunities for teacher training. These realities need to be taken into account when we prepare and support teachers.

❖ Schools get their grants, but not on time

Between FY 2008-9 and FY 2010-11 the flow of SSA grants to schools improved significantly. However, this improvement occurred largely between FY 2008-9 and 2009-10. In fact a marginal decrease in the proportion of schools receiving grants is observed between FY 2009-10 and 2010-11. The data suggest that schools tend to get their grants during the second half of the fiscal year.

Main findings: Tracking RTE Indicators

■ Not much change in compliance on Pupil-teacher ratio and Classroom-teacher ratio

- ❖ At the All India level, there has been a marginal improvement in the proportion of schools complying with RTE norms on pupil-teacher ratio, from 38.9% in 2010 to 40.7% in 2011. In 2011, Kerala stands out with 94.1% of schools in compliance, and in Jammu & Kashmir, Nagaland and Manipur, more than 80% schools are in compliance with these norms.
- ❖ At the All India level, there has been a marginal decline in the proportion of schools with at least one classroom per teacher, from 76.2% in 2010 to 74.3% in 2011. In Mizoram, 94.8% of schools comply with the teacher-classroom norms and in Punjab, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra more than 80% of schools are in compliance.

■ No major changes in buildings, playgrounds, boundary walls or drinking water

- ❖ All India figures for 2011 show no significant improvement in the proportion of schools with an office cum store. This figure remains at 74%. Similarly, for the country as a whole, about 62% of visited schools had a playground, both in 2010 and in 2011. However, there has been an increase in the proportion of all schools that have a boundary wall, from 50.9% in 2010 to 54.1% in 2011.
- ❖ Nationally, the proportion of schools with no provision for drinking water remained almost the same – 17.0% in 2010 and 16.6% in 2011. The proportion of schools with a useable drinking water facility has remained steady at about 73%. Kerala has the best record with 93.8% schools that have a useable drinking water facility.

■ Better provision of girls' toilets

- ❖ The proportion of schools where there was no separate girls' toilet has declined from 31.2% in 2010 to 22.6% in 2011. Also, there has been a substantial improvement in the proportion of schools that have separate girls' toilets that are useable. This figure has risen nationally from 32.9% in 2010 to 43.8% in 2011.

■ More libraries in schools, and more children using them

- ❖ The proportion of schools without libraries has declined from 37.5% in 2010 to 28.6% in 2011. Children were seen using the library in more schools as well – up from 37.9% in 2010 to 42.3% in 2011.