

ASER Pakistan

1. Notes on ASER Pakistan

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan 2008 has been undertaken under the umbrella of the South Asia Forum for Education Development (SAFED).

SAFED

The South Asia Forum for Education Development (SAFED) is an education forum for Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Burma. SAFED in Urdu means white, the color of PEACE. Education and learning is a powerful platform, to recognize and celebrate diversity across and within borders. SAFED is a forum to foster policy dialogues between public sector, civil society organizations and private sector working jointly for learning solutions to reduce poverty through Quality Education for All.

SAFED, managed by the Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) - centre for education and consciousness, was proposed at the Alliance for Education Development (AfED)'s conference, "Local governance Texts and Contexts: Perspectives from South Asia" held in February 2006 in Lahore. It was officially launched on February 2, 2006, fully endorsed by the 200 participants and the Minister of Education, Government of Punjab, present at the Conference as the Chief Guest.

Objectives:

- To research and implement best practices in education through regional partnerships.
- To promote regional partnerships for learning and policy solutions.
- To generate a world class body of knowledge for sharing and quality decision making across the region.

Areas of Focus:

- II Policy and Curriculum Reforms
- II Quality: Teaching and Support Systems; Assessing Learning Levels
- II Up scaling Girls' Education
- II Education for Sustainable Development
- II Human rights, Peace and Citizenship Education
- II Education in Emergencies

The above will be embedded in gender, partnerships and linkages across basic and higher education.

Membership to SAFED

Membership is open to individuals and institutions in the public and private sectors. SAFED invites memberships to a South Asian alliance to radically improve education and learning possibilities for the region. Details at www.safedafed.org or email at safedafed@gmail.com for further queries.

"Given the sheer force of the contemporary phase of globalization, South Asians cannot afford to lose sight of the role they need to play not just on the global stage but in the regional and inter regional areas of economy, culture and politics. Without denying the difficulties presented by the current configuration of political forces in their respective countries, educationists in South Asia should take heed to Tagore's and Iqbal's call for an enlightened world view based on an education which inculcates pride not arrogance, understanding not ignorance, compassion not inhumanity."

Ayesha Jalal – Professor of History, Tufts University-2006

ASER Pakistan: Preparedness and Processes

Setting the Scene for ASER Implementation in Pakistan

In August 2006 and June 2007 two teams from the Pakistan chapter of SAFED visited India to meet with Pratham, a well known non-governmental organization, for exploring what works in promoting quality education across the borders. The SAFED teams took part in training sessions for ASER in Rajasthan and Delhi and also participated in the field testing of ASER methodology and tools. The possibilities for ASER Pakistan were discussed threadbare with Pratham and a strategy for its replication in Pakistan was made with specific adaptations.

ASER Pakistan seeks to extend the concept of an Education Watch through a replicable, predictable annual measurement and mobilization exercise, informing the public about where we stand on children's learning levels between the ages of 3-16 years.

Unfortunately when it comes to the quality data, there are challenges of low reliability. ASER provides ground for evidence based discourse on the status of education and creates space for policy recommendations based on data collected by grassroots and national organizations alike working as partners of SAFED. This is a citizens' led initiative to inform the public and all stakeholders across public and non-state sectors including households and children about the current condition of what children know in basic literacy and numeracy up to grade II level. The information in ASER helps mobilize society to take action, because children matter and their learning matters. These children are our future nation-builders. Early learning and quality education is important for sustainable, long-term development of societies.

Technical input from ASER India

In August 2008 a group of ASER master trainers from Pratham and ASER Centre, India, led by Dr. Rukmini Banerjee and Dr. Wilima Wadhwa, visited Pakistan to conduct a training workshop for potential ASER surveyors, titled "ASER Pakistan: A National Initiative for Quality Education." SAFED (with ITA as its secretariat www.safedafed.org), hosted the event in collaboration with the Institute of Education and Research (IER) University of Punjab, the Children's Global Network, Pakistan and Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE).

The 5-day workshop attended by 55 self financed participants from the length and breadth of Pakistan was a huge success. Not only the quality of information and knowledge imparted by the ASER India was superb, but also the hands on practice of the survey. This included mapping, selection of households, testing the tools, communication skills in 6 villages of Sheikhpura District as well as reporting results and compiling district report cards.

One of the most important part of the workshop was the suggestion and modification round. Adapting a regional tool to local contexts, the structure of the education sector, both public and private etc. was critical. The presence of the Indian team during this discussion was strategic to fulfill local requirements for the survey while keeping intact the core parameters and philosophy of ASER.



ASER India – their Experience and Powerful Advocacy for Change Generating the Spirit of Voluntarism: Participation & Commitments

ASER Pakistan has been a mirror image of its Indian counterpart in terms of its cost-sharing approach and collaboration with civil society organizations, universities, colleges, research students, school teachers and international NGOs.

The workshops as well as the ASER surveys in respective districts were organized by our honorable partners and most expenses were also borne by them. It would have been impossible for SAFED to have launched such a survey at its own expense. Without the help of our partners and the commitment of the volunteers involved, this survey could not have taken place.

It can be safely stated that the vision of generating voluntarism on such a scale was made possible after the example set by the annual ASER India survey series since 2005. People from all walks of life participated in the surveying all over the country. These people included students, academics, media, NGO workers, retired personnel from the respective survey target area/district.

Even before the surveys had begun in Pakistan, men and women were ready to go into areas that were earmarked as no-go areas in interior Sindh. Some of these areas posed more problems than any seen by ASER India teams during their survey, but our partners went in and retrieved information as well as they could. This undertaking is yet another milestone for what citizens can achieve when they are motivated for the greater good of their communities- equipping themselves appropriately with information for demanding and organizing better services in education.

Although ASER Pakistan 2008 was planned for 30 -40 districts, but due to emergencies of earthquake/floods in Balochistan and intensification of conflict in NWFP and FATA two major provinces could not participate. NWFP partners tried to attempt the survey until March 2009, but the progressive deterioration and expansion of conflict left no choice but to abandon the survey.

The 11 district rural ASER Pakistan 2008 in many ways may be treated as Phase I or a pilot phase.

ASER Pakistan 2008 symbolizes growing communities of practice spread across India East Africa and Pakistan!

