Education & Literacy trends in ASER Pakistan 2010 (Rural)
Creating Social Capital for a Democratic Pakistan

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Education For All remains a major challenge for Pakistan with both literacy and primary net enrolment rate (NER) at 57% and gender parity index (GPI) at 0.87 (PSLMs 208-09). Each year the Pakistan Social & Living Standard Measurement Survey conducts household surveys across the country to ascertain trends in key social indicators, revealing that Pakistan’s annual progress is at best, fragile. The National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) was established in 2002 as a statutory autonomous federal body, mandated to support human development efforts in Pakistan. NCHD seeks to create a literate and healthy nation, where government is empowered to provide basic education and health facilities to all.

NCHD is the lead organization for Literacy in Pakistan funded jointly by public and private resources, striving to Empower the People at the grassroots to become agents of social change. It has a wide coverage working in 134 out of 138 districts of Pakistan. NCHD has 7696 Community Based Feeder School 12,850 feeder teachers trained and deployed to government Schools. It has undertaken large home based surveys of 16.3 million households to gather information on children aged 0-9. Its targets include; enrollment of 8.2 million out-of-school children; increasing net enrollment ratio from 54% to 85% and reducing Dropout rate from 50%to20%(in Kacchi/Pakki or ECE/Grade 1); increasing literacy rate to 86% by 2015 through mobilization of 438603 volunteers in 30,000 villages. The focus is both on access and quality simultaneously through partnerships.

When NCHD was approached to partner in a unique citizen led rural household survey of children (3-16 year olds) and learning levels of 6-16 year olds through a new methodology, we naturally welcomed the opportunity to collaborate. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan (2010) is one of a kind. There were no frills attached and no formal ceremonies to sign MOUs. Frankly we at the NCHD did not quite know what we had really pitched for. There were lots of numbers to absorb. For example ASER 2010 would cover 30 districts, these would rise to 75 in 2011 and all 138 in 2012, repeated annually up to 2015. Will this really happen? Will this be any different? How will NCHD contribute, and what purpose will such a survey serve in terms of NCHD’s mandate, vision and mission? These were some of the questions that were bothering our entire team. The innovative methodology of ASER was adopted and adapted from the South Asian Region and it was also reassuring that this is a South-South initiative with similar surveys in three countries of East Africa, India and Pakistan. We welcomed the invitation by the South Asia Forum for Education Development (SAFED) and Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) for the ASER experience.

Targets of the EFA National Plan of Action 2001-2015:
- Achieving 50% enrolment for Early Childhood Education
- Achieving 100% Net Enrolment Rate (NER) Primary level
- Achieving 86% adult literacy rate for 10+ years

Early Childhood Education (ECE) Trends in ASER Pakistan 2010 (rural):
- According to the ASER Pakistan 2010 results, 44.7% children aged 3-5 are enrolled in schools (girls enrolment is 43%). The survey highlights that in rural areas almost 62% of the total ECE children are enrolled in government schools and 38% are attending private institutions. The perception in fact was just the reverse, that pre-school is mostly being delivered by non-state providers (NSPs).
PSLMs survey 2008-09 already indicated a rise in enrolment in Prep or Kachi 2.6 % in Pre-Primary enrolment (8.43 million) in 2008-09, over 2007-08 (8.22 million). It has been estimated that in 2009-10, it will further increase by 2.2 percent (Economic Survey 2009-10). Whilst our youngest group of children are entering schools vying for some sort of education experiences, are they getting the quality of attention they deserve? The National Education Policy 2009 has identified several policy actions, including clarity on age group and steps to ensure that once in schools they do not drop out.
- ECE age group shall be recognised as comprising 3 to 5 years.
- Provision of ECE shall be attached to primary schools which shall be provided with additional budget, teachers and assistants for this purpose.
- Promoting the revised ECE National Curriculum. .. and support material for ECE shall take account of the cultural diversity of particular areas. (pp. 26-27)
The ASER 2010 data confirms NCHD’s existing strategy committed to targeted support for ECE age group through feeder schools and provision of trained feeder teachers to under staffed government schools. What needs to be rigorously ensured is quality improvement through sustained teacher presence, ECE training in the National Curriculum and standards and conducive learning facilities to retain the maximum amount of children for transiting to Class 1 and beyond.

School Enrolment Trends in ASER Pakistan 2010 (rural)
The rural school enrolment for 6-16 year olds is 80% (70% enrolled in Class 1-5), comprising 40.5% girls and 59.5% boys. 70.9% are enrolled in government schools. This confirms that for a majority of people in Pakistan public sector is the only option. NSPs cater to 29.1% of the total enrolled in rural areas including 0.9% in madrassas and 0.7% in other types of schools. The challenge is to improve the quality of provision not just for those enrolled to persist but also to ensure additional enrolment to meet our UPE challenge by 2015. The data emerging for each district highlights the access issues sharply helping us focus our resources better. Whilst Gilgit reveals an enrolment of 93.7% (69.5% enrolment in private schools vs. 24.4% in government), rural trends in Sindh and Balochistan present a very bleak picture of 68% and 65% respectively. Girls enrolment is at a shocking low of 34% in both Sindh and Balochistan compared to 65-66% for boys!

Out of School Children (OOSC) Trends in ASER Pakistan 2010 (rural)
Data on the out of school children (OOSC) is rich in the report. 55% children for ECE years are out of school, with ratio of girls being 48.8%. For other age groups 6-16 years OOSC are 20%, of which 50% are girls. The cumulative drop out for 6-16 years is 68% whereas 32% have never enrolled in schools. Whilst the access challenges are obvious, the learning levels data brings into sharp relief possibilities for making good gains for both literacy and universal primary enrolment. Data on learning levels for OOSC in: own language, English and Arithmetic reveals that a substantive number of children with promising scores.

Table: 1 Out of School Children (OOSC) Performance on Learning Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OOSC Group 6-16 yrs</th>
<th>Urdu/Sindhi</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Arithmetic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20% Out of School Children (drop outs and never enrolled)</td>
<td>24% can read story level text</td>
<td>36% able to read words</td>
<td>31% can do subtraction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34% sentence level</td>
<td>20% can read sentence</td>
<td>18% able to do division</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

OOSC is a critical target group for NCHD working across the country. The compelling data on learning levels for groups that one does not associate learning gains with is most refreshing and offers tremendous promise. This reality must be taken seriously by the government and all its partners backed by resources and opportunities. It suggests that if a targeted approach is adopted we can make good progress in Pakistan on access and equity targets for the most excluded. Unfortunately, in spite of declaring 2011 as the Year of Literacy and NCHD being declared as the lead agency for “Pakistan Girls Education Initiative (PGEI) under the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI)”, the budgets are often negligible both at the federal and more so at the provincial levels. This is in spite of the policy action under the NEP 2009 for a 4% budget allocation for literacy and non-formal (NEP 2009, p. 31). A more innovative strategy for ‘catch up’ programs needs to be crafted as a result of this valuable survey in the aftermath of the 2010 flood and NCHD will take up this task actively in the coming weeks and months.

Mothers’ Literacy Trends in ASER Pakistan 2010 (rural)
Mothers literacy was gauged for 54% of the 19,915 mothers surveyed in ASER 2010. Whilst in Sindh 41% mothers agreed to be tested, in Balochistan the figure was only 27% and Punjab stood at 69%. Only 32% could read a simple paragraph in their own language. Balochistan recorded 17% literacy for mothers and Punjab was double that at 34%! It has been repeatedly argued in many studies including that of Aslam’s piece in this report that it is mother’s education that is strongly associated with strong learning outcomes for children.

NCHD successfully extended the National Literacy Year (NLY) from 2010 to 2011 due to the devastating floods in 2010, and we need to aggressively implement initiatives for mothers that are life skills oriented functional literacy programs through our well modeled Adult Literacy Centres (ALCs) and Community Learning Centres (CLCs) for age groups 11-45. The OOSC and mothers are critical target groups for NCHD and its partners supported strongly through the NEP 2009 and 15 policy actions for Literacy and Non-Formal in Pakistan (Ibid. pp. 30-31).
There are many stories narrated by several ASER volunteers of the enthusiasm that mothers displayed in some districts for not just measuring their children's but their own learning levels too! In one household of Punjab ASER Pakistan team witnessed multiple wives competing for the mothers' literacy test, raising the bar on attributes of a 'good mother'. Does ASER Pakistan 2010-2015 represent a form of social capital, generating citizen led evidence for informing policy and mobilizing local communities for gender empowerment, elevating education as negotiator for social, economic and political place in rural societies?

Ms. Fehmida Mirza, Speaker of the National Assembly in her welcome address at the PGEI-UNGEI launch on December 9, 2010 urged aptly for ‘... effective alliances of committed partners at the international, federal and provincial levels, in order to create enabling educational environment, where girls, as well as boys, can flourish and unleash their untapped potential. She said that the world development models have shown that by educating their women, nations have succeeded in minimizing the maternal and infant mortality risks, improved the community health structures, created employments, enhanced economic returns and transformed human settlements into peaceful, self-respecting and progressive societies’.

ASER Pakistan 2010 has provided us with rich data driven access to 20,000 communities in 32 districts of the country to create an enabling education environment for focused gender initiatives to achieve wider social justice without discrimination. It will certainly help us with early implementation of Article 25-A in the Constitution through the 18th amendment, which guarantees the right of free and compulsory education to every child-both girls as well as boys- of the age of five to sixteen years. Education and literacy is the critical Lynch pin of successful sustainable democratic societies, underpinned by the EFA targets and the Millennium Development Goals- NCHD remains a committed partner in Pakistan to meet this challenge.