

# ASER 2012 and Right to Education

## *the gaps that cannot wait for children aged 5-16*

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When the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) was launched in Pakistan in 2009 as a citizen's accountability initiative, there was little hope that the Right to Education (RTE) would be made a fundamental constitutional right and ASER's alignment would be so perfectly matched with the RTE movement. In 2010 the 18th Amendment gifted the citizens of the country with article 25A in the 1973 Constitution, stating that; "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law".

Together with Article 25 "Equality of Citizens"<sup>1</sup>, Article 25A has doubly strengthened citizens' guarantees for children aged 5-16 to a fundamental right. The article clearly stipulates the State to be the main duty bearer for fulfilling this responsibility. The State according to Article 7 of the Constitution comprises both Federal and Provincial governments 'and such local authorities in Pakistan as are by law empowered to impose any tax or cess " (Constitution 1973) in the federation. It is the wider definition of the state that must be propelled when claiming fundamental rights, notwithstanding the abolition of the concurrent list and education becoming a devolved subject in Pakistan.

Each year, the ASER results are thus of vital importance for citizens and state to take stock of where we stand on several outcomes testifying for the RTE mandate. ASER 2012 was undertaken by 9000 educated citizens who volunteered for at least 5 to 8 days across 136 (out of 145) rural and 6 urban districts of Pakistan. This was the largest survey to date bringing hard facts to light for RTE. Compared to ASER 2011; the 2012 sample was as follows:

The survey is an oral one taken from each child of the age group 3-16 at the household level. At each village one government and one private school (if available) are visited to profile the sites where the children may possibly be learning.

The annual large scale national assessment completed in 16 weeks from survey to the report launch pioneered by South Asia (Pratham/India) and now practiced in 7 countries of Asia and Africa renders information on multiple indicators for children aged 3-16. These are:

- Net Enrolment Rate (NER) Early Childhood Education : 3-5 year olds (public and non-state)
- Net Enrolment Rate (NER) 5-16 year olds (public and non-state)
- Learning Assessments up to grade 2 level competencies 5-16 year olds by age, grade and also for out of school children
- Presence/attendance of both students and teachers on the day of the survey
- Multi-grade teaching
- Language of instruction in schools and language spoken at home and this year also what is preferred medium of instruction by the household/parents/guardians.
- Facilities in schools (state and non-state)
- Mothers/fathers' education up to primary level

The score card for RTE in Pakistan is indeed a matter of urgent reflection and action. After 32 months of Article 25A, only Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) has in place Free & Compulsory Education Act 2012 that awaits rules of business for implementation. All provinces have prepared draft laws/bills, sadly with limited or no public debate. The have serious concerns about resource constraints under the devolved set up and ambiguities on 'state responsibilities' to

bridge the access and learning gaps for ALL 5-16 year olds. Pakistan spends just about a dwindling 2% of its GDP on education, which cannot possibly match its RTE challenges.

Year	Districts Covered	Village	Households	Children 3- 16 years			Mothers	Schools		
				Female	Male	Total		Gov.	Pvt.	Total
2012	142	4,226	82,521	104,166	147,278	251,444	83,746	4,117	1,827	5,944
2011	87	2,599	49,793	60,240	86,634	146,874	51,654	2,464	1,178	3,642

<sup>1</sup> Equality of citizens:

1. All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.

2. There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex.

3. Nothing in this Article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the protection of women and children.

ASER 2012 highlights the following trends to spur national and global RTE action oriented debates for Pakistan.

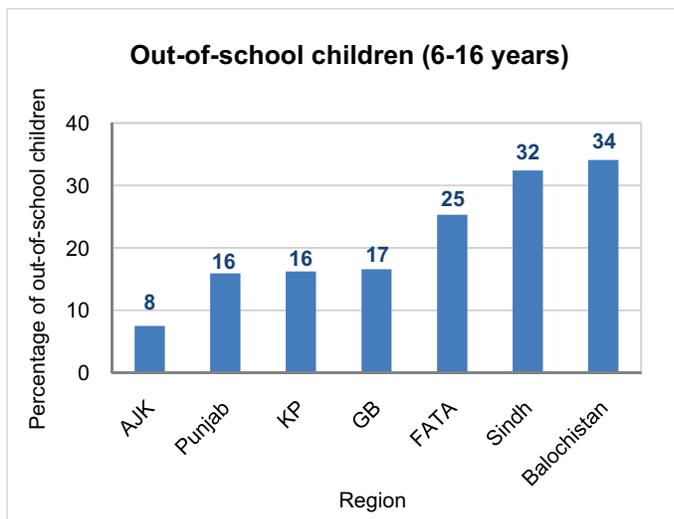
### Out of school children and ASER

23% of rural and 7% of urban children aged 6-16 are not in schools with girls lagging behind boys by one third in rural areas. As highlighted by the Global Monitoring Report 2012, Pakistan ranks as the second highest country for out of school children. ASER provides the entire range of the spectrum from provinces and districts with highest to the lowest enrolment and learning levels, to urge governments and other stakeholders to adopt aggressive and creative approaches if indeed 25A is to become a reality. This is the largest data set that is available annually to analyze access and quality indicators across households and income levels measuring fundamental rights on the inequality continuum. 59% children in urban areas and 24% in rural areas study in private schools clearly establishing that RTE has to be crafted as a collaborative compact across the two sectors with continuous state initiatives on ownership, financing, standards and management.

### The quality compass and RTE

The good news is that whilst overall learning levels show an improvement compared to ASER 2011 results, but barring Urdu/Sindhi/Pashto where 51% of children in Grade 5 can cope with Grade 2 level competencies, in English and Arithmetic 52% and 56% children respectively in Grade 5 are still unable to deal with basic Grade 2 level skills. This must be corroborated with facts from area school facilities which reveal the following. In public sector schools (rural) 50% of Grade 2 children are in a multi-grade situation sharing a teacher and space with more than one grade. Whilst the teachers and students' attendance has improved from 2011, on an average 13% of teachers and 18% of students are absent on any given day (Sindh 40% absent!). Interestingly the private school teachers' presence is at similar or lesser levels! It is a matter of routine across Pakistani schools that learning takes place amidst great linguistic disconnections; where the language of instruction may have nothing to do with home language versus aspirations of households of medium of instruction for their children. It is in such surreal dissonance that learning is negotiated across Pakistani classrooms. ASER recorded 41 home languages but the language of instruction available are only 4; Sindhi, Urdu, Pashto and English! Textbooks, teacher training, national curriculum and examination systems continue to operate in monolingual domains in a rich multi-lingual society. In Pakistan the National Curriculum 2006/7 and the National Education Policy (NEP 2009) or Sector Plans are sadly only available primarily in English!

Primary schools where bulk of the children are enrolled continue to suffer the most neglect in public sector emaciated facilities; ASER 2012 records barely 2.3 classrooms per



primary school; 50% usable toilets; 61% useable water, 31% playgrounds and 62% boundary walls.

### The journey from pre-primary to primary and post-primary schooling

The RTE covers pre-primary, primary and post primary age groups; the RTE ICT Act 2012 and the draft laws have adopted a positively inclusive approach. ASER 2012 records that of 3-5 year olds (rural), 37% are enrolled in a pre-primary facility compared to 55% in urban districts with the highest numbers enrolled at age 5. However, at age 4, 68% (rural) and 41% (urban) are not attending any pre-school program. Global research (ARNEC 2012, Lancet 2011, 2007, Levin et al. 2008, Heckman & Masterov 2004) urges to invest in pre-primary for higher returns at primary and post primary levels translated into higher economic growth. The age group of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) classically targets 0-8 years or 3-8 years overlapping with the primary age group for sustainable learning gains beyond pre-school. The NEP 2009 has fully integrated ECE into primary schools with many good practices and strategies documented on ECE in Pakistan (SEF 2009, AKF 2011, TRC 2002, 2007, Dept. of Schools Punjab 2012).

### The quality nexus

ASER is about a powerful connection between quality and sustainable access; the two are inextricably linked for all service delivery planners and implementers. The results are a wakeup call for multiple stakeholders engaged in making 25A a reality, reaching 2015 milestones and providing inputs to the post 2015 global development goalposts. The hopes from all political parties are immense as campaigns mount for 25A, including the 'one million signatures campaign', 'We are Malala', 'Education First's Save Malala & Girls Education', 'Its my right make it right', and many more. It is not sufficient to have sound manifestoes on education for Pakistan but more importantly the five to six actionable steps that ASER 2013-

2015 will track each year as an accountability tool for politicians, state and the justice system. The divides across urban and rural areas as well as across provinces and within provinces are growing which need to be bridged with conviction and measurable actions. Punjab in ASER 2012 clearly stands out as an example of taking action with sustained political will as well as system and province wide reform; can other provinces do the same?

### **ASER - unpacking governance for a fundamental right**

Each year at the ASER launches nationwide, parliamentarians and experts lament about the clichéd "governance challenges" that continue to plague the Pakistani education landscape. ASER report cards precisely and simply unpack 'governance' completely, indicator by indicator across diverse and specific geographies to demystify the term for the State and citizens alike. Each year ASER comes calling to ensure that ALL children of Pakistan can be provided their RTE as guaranteed under Articles 25A and 25 with enabling resources for education by the State (all levels), decent nation-wide/province-wide standards/norms and systems with clearly defined decision making jurisdictions.

