Press Release

National Launch of a Citizen’s Report on Learning Levels of Children (3-16) in Rural Pakistan

Bushra Gauhar MNA (ANP) along with the citizens –volunteers of Pakistan launched the “Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan 2008” an aptly named citizen led rural survey to create an IMPACT about learning levels of children aged 3-16 years for numeracy and literacy up to grade II. The outspoken ANP representative of the National Assembly, appreciated the timely efforts of civil society, “reinforcing facts that are the living reality of our schools and communities. She aptly stated that ‘the survey also highlights our principled stand that quality education is the fundamental responsibility of the state which cannot be leased out through public private partnerships. The report findings reveal that we are clearly in trouble in basic competencies as defined by the National Curriculum 2006 in terms of basic reading and numeracy up to grade II level’.

The panelists at the launch included “ Mr. Aurangzeb Rehman– Joint Education Adviser Policy & Planning Wing; Mr. Jamil Bajwa National Coordinator, NEAS; Ms. Zehra Arshad, National Coordinator, Pakistan Coalition of Education; Mr. Mukhtar Ahmed, Executive Director, CPDI and Ms. Sakhshi Kapoor, a Representative from Pratham/ASER Centre India. All of them lauded the organized citizen led response to a silent emergency in education and committed to support all future activities of ASER Pakistan. Several volunteers who participated in the 2008 survey shared their positive experience of the powerful tool and the welcome received when they knocked on doors to test children’s learning levels. They underscored that their experience revealed that people and parents care about their children’s learning, valuing learning not for economics only but more importantly as a vital social value.

Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) - Center for Education and Consciousness, has been working in Education sector since 2000, with a sector wide approach to improve the quality of education in Pakistan. ITA’s hosts the secretariat of the South Asia Forum For Education Development (SAFED: www.safedafed.org). SAFED is an educational forum for Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Burma. SAFED or white is the color of Peace. 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 across South Asia.
SAFED and its 10 alliance partners along with Pakistan including the Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE) have carried out a household based survey through 220 volunteers in 11 districts of Pakistan (ICT, Punjab and Sindh) in 2008/2009 to measure the learning level of 3-16 years old students. ASER 2008 survey covered 6,520 households in 326 villages of rural Pakistan testing a total of 16,737 children (3-16 years). This data has been compiled as a consolidated report ASER Pakistan 2008 to share with the Government, Civil Society Organizations, bilateral and multilateral agencies and other stakeholders working in the education sector.

The key learning's of ASER Pakistan 2008 Rural include:

- 85% of children in schools
- 76.5% of Children in government schools
- 47.1% of children who can do para level grade 1 reading
- 43.2% of children who can do subtraction or grade 1 competency
- 77.7% of teachers absent
- 67% of toilet facilities in place and 33% in USE
- 15% of children out of schools
- 21.8% of children in private schools
- 31.9% of children who can do story level grade 2 reading
- 25.5% of children who can do division (3 digits/by 1) – grade 2
- 74.45% of children absent
- 74% of water facilities in place and 26% in USE
- 54.6% out of school children are girls
- 46% enrolment in rural private schools is girls

Technical support for ASER Pakistan has been mobilized by SAFED from Pratham and ASER Centre India since 2008 both on-site and off-site. Three representatives from India were present at the launch. Their presence was made possible by the Pakistan High Commission’s gracious gesture committed to ‘promoting education without borders’. The same is reciprocated for border crossings of the Pakistan teams since 2006 by the Indian High Commission in Pakistan. ASER Pakistan is now a part of a wider South- South movement in citizen led surveys working for evidence based demand initiatives from below, working in India; East Africa/West Africa and Pakistan.

In 2010 ASER Pakistan will cover 30-50 districts and in 2011 ASER Pakistan is poised to cover all rural districts of Pakistan.

Sardar Aseff Ahmed Ali, Federal Minister to Education, who could not attend the ceremony sent a profound message of support. He congratulated the ASER Pakistan Team from SAFED and welcomed the ASER initiative by the civil society partners.

ASER Pakistan 2008 is a complementary household based survey in rural areas meant to assess learning level competencies for children aged 3 to 16 years in any type of school, non-formal program and also out of school. We
thank our partners who have launched this powerful tool and wish them the very best for ensuring a consistent annual ASER survey from 2010 — 2015. It will track progress and challenges faced by children in the above age group in their learning and also learning environments. It is heartening to know that experts and concerned citizens, who are the friends of education in Pakistan, are keen to extend their services so that the citizens living in our rural areas are able to access and understand what their children learn and what they ought to achieve. We at the Ministry of Education, sincerely hope that ASER Pakistan under the South Asia Forum For Education Development (SAFED) will in times to come extend to urban areas and continue to provide us nuanced information about the public and private sector so that as partners we can radically improve our interventions for Quality Education for All in Pakistan”.

ASER Pakistan 2008 is just the beginning. ASER will be repeated every year in 100 days from beginning of the survey in October to the Report Launch in January, from 2010 to 2015 with the support of Government, Civil Society, and other stakeholders. This calendar will help inform the public planning and budgetary processes.

The launch was aptly kicked off with the recitation of surat Asr .. “in the name of time”

This is not a project of NGOs, nor only of the Government. This is a MOVEMENT mode citizens’ response which requires initiative and commitment of each youth and citizen of the entire country to make it their business of what our children are learning, how and where are they learning, ensuring that we all and especially the Government may take suitable timely actions to fulfill fundamental commitments to quality education for all its citizens.

Baela R Jamil, coordinator SAFED/ASER Pakistan gave a call for ACTION to all present. "We are committed to undertaking ASER Pakistan for the next five years 2010-2015 in a campaign/movement mode with support from concerned citizens across the country (CSOs/Media/Academics, Students, Govt/etc.) as volunteers. ASER Pakistan is a powerful barometer of what OUR CHILDREN ARE LEARNING and how they can do better with ALL PARTNERS FOR EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN!"