

Reflections from India and East Africa

The journey of ASER from India to Pakistan

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Several years ago, seven intrepid travelers from India were at the Wagah border between India and Pakistan. On the India side, we had been doing ASER for a few years and interest in ASER type of work was increasing in other countries as well. Pakistan too was trying to understand what ASER could do. At the Wagah border, there is a long stretch of paved road between India and Pakistan. This section is a "no man's land". All Indians have seen this stretch in movies and heard about it from stories but actually being there is quite an emotional experience. Walking from India toward Pakistan, we were all thinking about our two countries - our joint histories and geographies, legacies and futures. As we walked, each of us lost in our own thoughts, we could see the gate and the check post looming up ahead on the Pakistan side. There under the high and lofty gate were the tall military personnel and also vaguely we could see two other people holding something. As we came nearer and nearer, we could

see the scene clearly. Standing all by themselves below the impressive gateway were Baela and a young man holding a banner which said "Welcome to Pakistan from the ASER Pakistan team to the ASER India team." I will never forget this moment - it was like we were coming home and were being welcomed by our own family.

We have all come a long way since then. We have learned a lot from our experiences and we continue to learn. Many of our problems are similar and so many of our solutions too can be shared. Our congratulations from India to the large and growing ASER family in Pakistan. Like you, we believe that it is only when ordinary people get together confront a problem and get their hands dirty in finding solutions that the big problems confronting our countries will begin to disappear. There will be a day, hopefully soon, when every child in India and Pakistan will be in school and learning well.

Why Effective Communication is Key

Sara Ruto

Uwezo at Twaweza - East Africa.

The citizen led assessment of basic literacy and numeracy are now well grounded in India, Pakistan, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Mali and Senegal. A common thread uniting all seven initiatives is the recognition of the power of communication. Since inception in 2009, Uwezo in East Africa has sought to communicate the assessment results in ways that connect with the citizens, informs them and urges their agency to act. Our organizational theory of change supports the idea that when findings are communicated creatively and in ways that make meaning to citizens, they will understand the implications of the findings and decide to act. When this happens they will exert pressure and momentum will build over time and result in a tipping point that creates national conversation about the measure of education in East Africa. Our creation of a citizen movement who care about raising the quality of learning is almost hinged on effective and powerful communication. Uwezo communication is based on the following five tenets which are articulated as follows:

1. Every citizen has the right to know. We are compelled to present materials in ways that are understandable, simple, attractive and have reach.
2. All contact is communication. We plan and weave communication in all activities, before, during and after the national assessment.

3. Communication is of scale. Mass media is exploited for its massive reach. To delimited the effects of the 'spray and pray' we collect data on popular radio presenters and popular radio stations thereby allowing us to target a specific audience group.
4. Communication is interactive. Uwezo communication is designed to be 2-way. Citizens often reach back via telephone or SMS.
5. Repetition is used for effect. Given that messages that are remembered have a higher possibility of imploring action, we repeat the same message in different forms and formats, and in accessible languages.

The investment in communication has yielded fast returns, as today, our initiatives, across the continents are known for their focus on learning. We congratulate ASER Pakistan for the 2012 release. It offers a critical communication moment.