

ANNUAL STATUS OF EDUCATION REPORT (RURAL) 2008 PRESS RELEASE

New Delhi, January 13, 2009. Four years since the UPA Government levied a 2% education cess on all Central taxes; the learning levels in **basic** reading and arithmetic for children in elementary school show no change in most of the country. Exceptions are Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh where substantial progress in basic learning levels is seen. Bihar has made consistent progress in bringing more children into school. Most other states also have lowered the numbers of not-in-school children although India seems to be struggling with the last mile problem.

These are the major findings of the fourth Annual Status of Education Report-ASER2008 released by Mr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia in Delhi today at the Triveni Auditorium.

ASER was first released in January 2006. This annual exercise mobilizes over 20,000 volunteers to visit over 700,000 children in 330,000 households spread over 16,000 sampled villages in all states of India.

This year's report shows that more than 77% children in Std V in Madhya Pradesh can solve a division sum (this is the highest level arithmetic task in ASER). In Kerala the comparable figure is 43.7 %.

Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh lead the nation in reading ability with over 60% children in Std III able to read at least a Std I text and over 70% children in Std V able to read at least a Std II text.

Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have shown a big jump in learning of basic reading and arithmetic since ASER2007 published last January. This is the first time any state has shown major improvement in basic arithmetic learning.

Bihar's performance in bringing more children into schools has been consistent over the last four years bringing the proportion of out of school children down from 13% in 2005 to 5.7% in 2008. However, the percentage of children not in school has gone up by 1.7 percentage points in UP and 0.6 percentage points in Rajasthan between 2007 and 2008. This increase has nullified the gains made by all other states resulting in the national percentage of children not-in-school remaining steady between 2007 and 2008.

Karnataka and Orissa are among other states where some progress in reading ability has been observed. However, most other states are showing little or no improvement.

ASER asked children to tell time and found that nationally only 61% children in Std V could tell time correctly from a clock.

ASER 2008 notes that the proportion of children going to private schools has gone up from 16.4% in 2005 to 22.5% in 2008. The greatest increase is seen in UP, Rajasthan, and Karnataka. Half of all school going children in Kerala and Goa go to private schools. (According to DISE, 95% of private schools in Kerala and 70% of private schools in Goa are government aided.) Between 32% to 42% of all school going children In Nagaland, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan go to private schools. (DISE data indicates that in these states private schools are mostly unaided).

ASER 2008 also collected information on household characteristics. The findings indicate that 48.3% all rural households have phones while 46.7% households have televisions. The proportion of rural households that neither have a TV nor a phone is 39.1%.

The Union Government released close to Rs. 35,000 crores to the states between 2004-05 and 2006-07. Out of which nearly 60% funds went to Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

Speaking at the function, Dr. Madhav Chavan, who heads Pratham, the organization that facilitates ASER nationwide suggested that it is time to ask for resignations if learning levels of children in government schools do not improve.

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A copy of the report can be downloaded from www.asercentre.org