

ADB

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)

Wilima Wadhwa

ASER Centre/Pratham, India

8th International Skills Forum
27–29 August 2019
Asian Development Bank, Manila, Philippines



Session 8A: Student
Assessment in K-12
August 29, 2109

This is not an ADB material. The views expressed in this document are the views of the author/s and/or their organizations and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Asian Development Bank, or its Board of Governors, or the governments they represent. ADB does not guarantee the accuracy and/or completeness of the material's contents, and accepts no responsibility for any direct or indirect consequence of their use or reliance, whether wholly or partially. Please feel free to contact the authors directly should you have queries.



The challenge of measuring learning

Existing learning measurements (measures, methods and mechanisms) have evolved over time in developed country contexts based on their needs and capabilities.



But...are such models immediately appropriate, relevant or useful in current developing country contexts?

Purpose: Today learning measurements in developing countries have the huge responsibility of being “game-changers” and not simply play a monitoring role in the education system.

The new assessments in developing countries **MUST** lead to changes in mind-sets and in national priorities in order to move children’s **LEARNING** to the centre of the stage in educational thought, practice & decision-making.

Methods/measures/evidence should be able to help policymakers, practitioners and parents:

- Understand the need to look beyond schooling to learning
- Identify the challenges faced by children for learning
- Enable immediate action based on data at different levels



Usually focus is on schooling not learning.....

In many developing countries:

- There has been several decades of work on access and enrollment. Governments usually produce data on inputs and expenditures. Their focus has typically been on measuring and delivering inputs and infrastructure and not on outcomes.
- School enrollment levels are high and rising. Assumption is that schooling will lead to learning. Hence, not much work has been done on the issue of children's learning (either measurement or interventions for improving learning). Curiosity and capability are not well developed for understanding and improving learning.
- Large majority of parents of children currently in school are illiterate or have had very little education. They understand “schooling” but not “learning”.
- There is neither a tradition or culture of measurement especially of outcomes, nor is there a practice of looking at large scale evidence for informing policy, planning or implementation.



...But available evidence shows that basic learning levels are very poor



Being in school does not seem to translate automatically into learning:

- According to the 2018 ASER survey (Annual Status of Education Report) in India, a little less than half of all Grade 5 children cannot as yet read even at Grade 2 level. Basic math is much worse.
- Similar trends can be seen in evidence from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda (Uwezo), Nigeria (LEARNigeria), Mali (Beekunko), Senegal (Jangandoo), Mexico (MIA) and Pakistan (ASER Pakistan).
- Together these citizen led assessments now reach over 1 million children annually.



How are citizen led assessments different? (1)

Contextual factors & ground realities in developing countries

Where?

All children may not be enrolled in school. Many may attend unrecognized private schools or other kinds of schools. Daily attendance in school is variable.

What?

Basic learning outcomes are far below grade level for many children currently enrolled in school.

How?

Even after several years of schooling, many children may not have acquired foundational skills like reading. Without reading, a child cannot progress.

Why?

Parents of school-going children in developing countries may not have any/much education. They understand “schooling” but not “learning”. Need to de-mystify “learning” to take parents along.

Decisions & design elements in citizen led assessments

To reach all children we must go to the household. All children cannot be found in schools.

Focus on few basic skills for all rather than on subject wise grade level outcomes for each grade.

Children who cannot read cannot do written tests. Oral one-on-one individual assessment is the only option for a majority of primary school children.

Simplicity of tools useful in engaging wide range of people in understanding children’s learning.



How are citizen led assessments different? (2)

Contextual factors & ground realities in developing countries

Unit? Level?

In elementary education, the unit for planning, allocation and implementation is sub-regional. E.g., there are 600+ districts in India.

To make data useful, ASER estimates are generated at sub-regional levels (also state & national levels).

Scale?

To capture & sustain national attention and to represent all children, nation-wide coverage is needed.

In India, ASER is a national household survey that has been done every year. On an average ASER reaches 560 districts & 600,000 children annually.

When?

To bring about a significant change in national priorities and mindsets, frequent, timely and current assessments are needed.

In India, ASER has been done annually for 13 years. Data is available for the current school year. Report is always released like clockwork in mid January.

Who?

Improving schooling & learning is not just the responsibility of the government. Widespread & large scale engagement & participation by citizens is essential to change policy & practice.

In India, in every district, a local organization or institution conducts ASER. ~30,000 citizens participate each year.



ASER 2018 – Scope & Scale

Annual Status of Education Report



Facilitated by PRATHAM



Reach:

- 596 rural districts
- 17,730 villages visited
- 354,944 households reached
- 546,527 children surveyed

Cost: ~1.3 million USD in 2018

Time Frame:

- August: Kick off
- Sept-Oct-Nov: Field work
- Mid Jan: Report released

People involved:

- 550+ district level organizations
- 1,000+ master trainers
- 30,000+ volunteers

ASER national survey in India has been done every year - 2005 to 2016 (except 2015) & 2018

Sampling:

- 30 randomly selected villages in each district
- 20 randomly selected households per village
- All children age 3 to 16 in the household

Citizen led assessments in the 6 other countries in Africa & Asia have similar patterns of scope & scale.



ASER reading tool

Grade II level text

राजू नाम का एक लड़का था। उसकी एक बड़ी बहन व एक छोटा भाई था। उसका भाई गाँव के पास के विद्यालय में पढ़ने जाता। वह खूब मेहनत करता था। उसकी बहन बहुत अच्छी खिलाड़ी थी। उसे लंबी दौड़ लगाना अच्छा लगता था। वे तीनों रोज़ साथ-साथ मौज-मस्ती करते थे।

Grade I level text

रानी नदी किनारे रहती है।
नदी में बहुत मछलियाँ हैं।
रानी उनको दाना देती है।
वे सब मज़े से दाना खाती हैं।

Letters

म र ड
ह च
ल ब न
क य

Common words

गाना खुश
मौसी
पैर झोला
किला
आग मोर

Reading is a basic foundational skill. Without learning to read, a child cannot progress meaningfully through the education system.

ASER 2018: All India rural % Children enrolled in different grades who can at least read Grade II level text

Grade	%
III	27.2
V	50.3
VIII	72.8

After 5 years of schooling only half the children can read. Not much has changed since 2005.

- This tool is in Hindi. 19 similar regional language tools are developed and used in ASER every year.
- Each child is assessed one on one/individually.
- The highest level that the child can read is recorded.
- Other citizen led assessments in Africa & Asia have similar tools for assessing reading and arithmetic.



ASER math tool

Grade IV level:
Division

$$4 \overline{) 659}$$

Number recognition –
double digits

91

86

24

79

Grade II level:
Subtraction

$$\begin{array}{r} 92 \\ - 48 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 71 \\ - 35 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

Number recognition –
single digit

8

4

2

9

ASER assesses children for foundational arithmetic skills that they are expected to learn during elementary education.

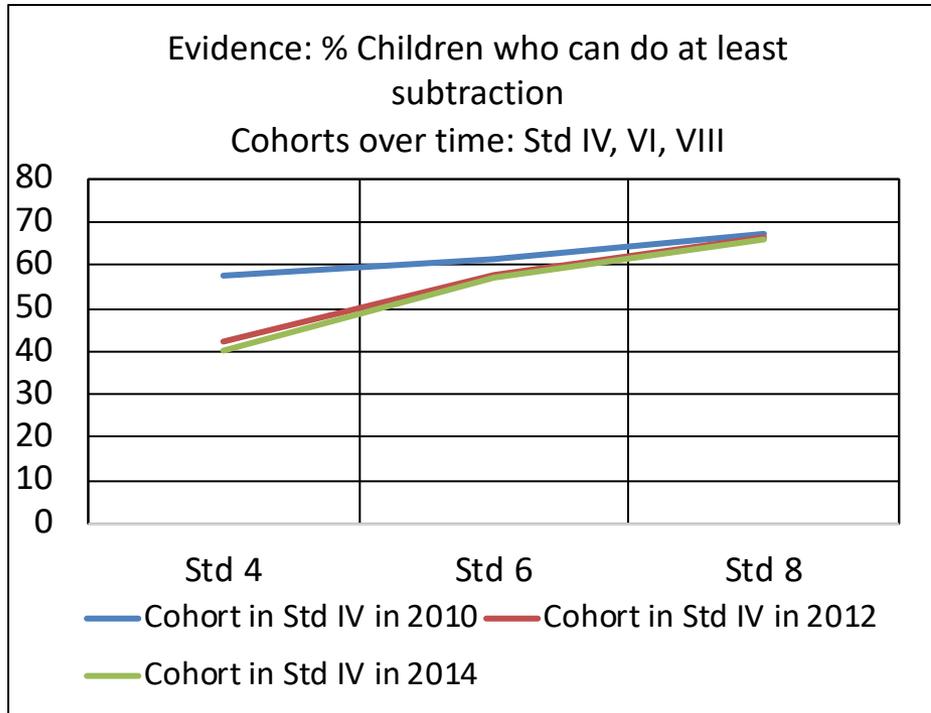
**ASER 2018: All India rural
% Children enrolled in
different grades
who can do at least
subtraction**

Grade	%
III	28.1
V	52.3
VIII	66

Children's ability to do basic arithmetic has been declining since 2005. Slight improvement is being seen in 2016 and also in 2018.



Impact of ASER: Policy



Data shows: Learning levels are low. Learning trajectories are flat over time & each subsequent cohort doing worse than previous cohort.

Every year with ASER, there is:

- Widespread media coverage
- Public debate in many forums/levels
- Questions in Parliament

Policy change: National & State

2008: Allocations by central government for district annual work plans in elementary education for “learning enhancement” programs.

2011: 12th Five Year Plan stressed:

- Measuring learning in schools
- Improvement of basic skills

2017: Amendment in the Right to Education Act (2009) recommends preparation and tracking achievement of class-wise, subject-wise learning outcomes for elementary education.

2013 onwards: Several states have conducted state level assessments (some have ASER like tools). Many states are implementing remedial programs and learning improvement interventions.



Example from India: Impact of ASER on practice

Evidence : ASER 2018 data for state of Bihar for Grades 3, 4 and 5

Std	Not even letter	Letter	Word	Std I level text	Std II level text	Total
III	24.0	26.6	15.2	10.7	23.5	100
IV	16.1	23.4	14.0	13.2	33.3	100
V	12.7	17.7	12.5	15.9	41.3	100



Acknowledgement/Awareness: State government sees the problem & decides to act.
Assessment: ASER tool used by schools to assess children in Grade 3, 4 & 5.

कहानी

रामपुर में एक मैदान था। वहाँ कुछ नहीं उगता था। वहाँ कोई खेलने नहीं जाता था। एक दिन कुछ लोग आए। उन्होंने गाँव के लोगों को बुलाया। सबने मिलकर तय किया कि यहाँ बगीचा बनाया जाए। खाद मंगाकर हर तरह के पौधे लगाए गए। सही समय पर पानी दिया गया। आज वहाँ एक सुंदर बगीचा है। इसलिए वहाँ सभी खेलने जाते हैं।

अनुच्छेद

रूपा बाहर खेल रही थी। खेलते-खेलते रात हो गई। रूपा अपने घर चली गई। वह खाना खाकर सो गई।

द	क	च
ल	ब	
ह	थ	त
म	ख	

नाक	तोता
कूड़ा	
खुश	मैना
मौका	सेब
पीला	
झोला	दिन

Action: Learning improvement program – Teaching at the Right Level

- Children grouped by level rather than by grade in each school.
- Teachers allocated to group rather than grade.
- Instruction in each group using appropriate methods & materials for two hours a day during school day.
- Quick progress in basic reading & maths.

Similar state wide programs in several states. JPAL evaluations of effectiveness of such programs conducted.



Impact of ASER: International

- ASER like initiatives are being done in 12 other countries – Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda (Uwezo), Nigeria (LEARNigeria), Mali (Beekunko), Senegal (Jangandoo), Mexico (MIA), Pakistan (ASER Pakistan), Mozambique (TPC), Bangladesh (IID/BRAC), Nepal (ASER Nepal) and Nicaragua (VIdA).
- These are collectively referred to as Citizen Led Assessments.
- Together these citizen led assessments now reach more than 1 million children annually.
- Similar trends in learning can be seen in these other countries as well.

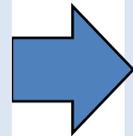




Concluding thoughts

Learning assessment data for developing countries needs to be relevant and appropriate in order to make learning the focus of the conversation and for providing evidence that is **actionable** for improving children's learning.

In order to identify and implement actions to improve children's learning, we need to **assess where children are today** and build from there, rather than assess where we think they ought to be.



- Where are children?
Many are not regularly in school
- Where are they relative to the curriculum?
Many are several grade levels behind
- Where are they with respect to foundational skills?
Many have not acquired basic skills even after several years in school. If a child cannot read, pen-paper tests will not work.

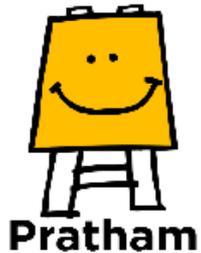
Evidence should be relatively straightforward to generate & to comprehend. Only then can it lend itself to action. Data needs to be **easily understood by those who must act** – whether it is policy makers, teachers or parents. Start simple. Tools & interventions can evolve over time as children make progress and as capability in the country rises.



8th International Skills Forum Future of Skills and Jobs in the Age of Digital Disruptions

27-29 August 2019 • Asian Development Bank, Manila, Philippines

ADB



ASER Centre / Pratham India
www.asercentre.org / www.pratham.org

Wilima Wadhwa: wilima.wadhwa@asercentre.org

