

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

# **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2023: Beyond Basics) was released in New Delhi, 17 January 2024**

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 'Beyond Basics' was released in New Delhi today. The report was released by representatives of the ASER 2023 district partner organisations. ASER 2023 'Beyond Basics' puts the spotlight on youth aged 14 to 18 years in rural India, an age group that was also the focus of ASER 2017.

ASER is a nationwide citizen-led household survey that provides a snapshot of the status of children's schooling and learning in rural India. First implemented in 2005, the 'basic' ASER survey was conducted annually until 2014 and switched to an alternate-year cycle in 2016. The 'basic' ASER collects information about enrollment in pre-school and school for children in the age group of 3 to 16, and assesses children aged 5 to 16 one-on-one to understand their foundational reading and arithmetic abilities. In the intervening years, ASER dives deeper into different aspects of children's schooling and learning in rural India. The 2023 survey explored the following domains:

- **Activity:** What activities are India's youth currently engaged in?
- **Ability:** Do they have basic and applied reading and math abilities?
- **Digital awareness and skills:** Do they have access to smartphones? What do they use smartphones for, and can they do simple tasks on their smartphones?

The ASER 2023 'Beyond Basics' survey was conducted in 28 districts across 26 states, reaching a total of 34,745 youth in the age group 14-18 years. One rural district was surveyed in each major state, with the exception of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, where two rural districts were surveyed.

### **ASER 2023: Main findings**

Key findings are summarised below. However, there are considerable differences across districts which can be seen in the individual district pages in the report.

#### **Activity**

- Overall, 86.8% of 14-18-year-olds are enrolled in an educational institution.

There are small gender gaps in enrollment, but notable differences are visible by age. The percentage of youth not enrolled is 3.9% for 14-year-old youth and is 32.6% for 18-year-olds.

- Most of the young people in this age group were enrolled in the Arts/Humanities stream. In Std XI or higher, more than half are enrolled in the Arts/Humanities stream (55.7%). Females are less likely to be enrolled in the STEM stream (28.1%) than males (36.3%).
- Only 5.6% of surveyed youth report taking vocational training or other related courses currently.

Youth at the college level are the most likely to be taking vocational training (16.2%). Most youth are taking short duration courses (of 6 months or less).

- A higher percentage of males (40.3%) than females (28%) report doing work other than household work for at least 15 days during the preceding month.

Among both males and females, most youth who are working in activities other than household work tend to be working on family farms.

#### **Ability**

Surveyed youth were given five types of tasks. Data on four of these are outlined below: basic reading, math and English abilities; application of basic skills to everyday calculations; reading

and understanding written instructions; and financial calculations that need to be done in real life. Youths' performance on digital tasks is summarised in a separate section on digital awareness and aptitude.

#### Foundational skills for youth in the age group of 14-18.

- About 25% of this age group still cannot read a Std II level text fluently in their regional language.
- More than half struggle with division (3-digit by 1-digit) problems. Only 43.3% of 14-18-year-olds are able to do such problems correctly. This skill is usually expected in Std III/IV.
- A little over half can read sentences in English (57.3%). Of those who can read sentences in English, almost three quarters can tell their meanings (73.5%).
- Across enrollment categories, females (76%) do better than males (70.9%) in reading a Std II level text in their regional language. In contrast, males do better than their female counterparts in arithmetic and English reading.

#### Everyday calculations

In their daily life, people are expected to do many tasks requiring the application of numeracy. ASER 2023 explored a variety of such common calculations relevant to the daily life of youth.

- Nearly 85% of surveyed youth can measure length using a scale when the starting point is 0 cm. This proportion drops sharply to 39% when the starting point is moved. Overall, close to 50% youth can do other common calculations.

#### Reading and understanding written instructions – daily life applications

Youth were shown a picture of an O.R.S. packet and asked some questions regarding the information given on it. This task was administered only to those youth who could read at least a Std I level text on the basic ASER reading assessment.

- Among youth who can read a Std I level text or more, about two thirds can answer at least 3 out of 4 questions based on the packet.

#### Financial calculations

Youth who could do at least subtraction on the ASER arithmetic test were asked to do some commonplace financial calculations.

- Of the youth who can do subtraction or more, over 60% are able to do the budget management task, about 37% can apply a discount, but only about 10% can calculate repayment.

The overall patterns in the “ability” domain indicate that having basic foundational skills like reading and arithmetic are very helpful for activities like everyday calculations and understanding instructions. However, females perform worse than males on almost all tasks.

### **Digital awareness and skills**

The exploration of digital connectivity and skills in ASER 2023 included self-reported questions capturing youths' access to and usage of digital devices, and an assessment of their digital skills – actually doing a set of tasks in front of the survey team using an available smartphone.

### Digital access (Self-reported)

- Close to 90% of all youth have a smartphone in the household and know how to use it. Of those who can use a smartphone, males (43.7%) are more than twice as likely to have their own smartphone than females (19.8%).
- Females are less likely to know how to use a smartphone or computer as compared to males.

### Communication and online safety (Self-reported)

- Almost all youth (90.5%) report having used social media in the reference week, with a slightly higher proportion of males (93.4%) than females (87.8%) reporting doing so.
- Of all youth who used social media, only about half are familiar with the online safety settings that were included in the survey. Males are more likely to know about these settings than females.

### Education and learning (Self-reported)

- Among youth who can use a smartphone, two thirds report having used it for some education related activity during the reference week, such as watching online videos related to studies, solving doubts, or exchanging notes.
- A quarter of youth who are not currently enrolled also report doing education related activities on their smartphone during the reference week.

### Services and entertainment (Self-reported)

- Slightly over a quarter of all youth report having used a smartphone to access online services such as making online payments, filling a form, paying a bill or booking a ticket.
- Close to 80% of the youth report having used their smartphone to do an entertainment related activity, such as watching a movie or listening to music, during the reference week.

### Digital tasks (done on a smartphone in the presence of the survey team)

Surveyed youth were asked to bring a smartphone with good connectivity – their own, a family member's, or a neighbour's – for the assessment of digital skills.

During the survey, slightly more than two thirds of youth could bring a smartphone to do these tasks. Males were more likely to be able to bring a smartphone (72.9%) than females (62%).

Of youth who could bring a smartphone, about 80% can find a specific video on YouTube and among these, nearly 90% can share it with a friend. 70% youth can browse the internet to find the answer to a question and about two thirds can set an alarm for a specific time. A little over a third can use Google Maps to find the time taken to travel between two points.

- Across all tasks, males outperform females.
- Performance on digital tasks improves with education level.
- The ability to do digital tasks increases with basic reading proficiency.

### **For more information contact:**

Ranajit Bhattacharyya

email: [ranajit@asercentre.org](mailto:ranajit@asercentre.org)

mobile 9971137677