

# Right-to-Education Fails in Rural Areas

As the government gears up for a year-long campaign to spread awareness about the Right to Education, a report on teaching and learning in rural India finds that progress in learning ability of students has not been commensurate to the massive investment in primary education and increase in enrolment.

The study conducted by the ASER Centre, a network of civil society organisations led by Pratham, in collaboration with Unicef and Unesco, draws attention to gaps that need to be filled for effective roll out of universal elementary education. The study, conducted in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Rajasthan, focused on school organisations, teacher background, teacher capability for teaching, classroom processes and learning outcomes.

Highlighting the slow progress of students, the report said that while “children are expected to read simple words in standard I, less than 30% could read them in standard II and only 40% in standard III”. Even in high performing states, the report said, “Both standard II and standard IV children have difficulty writing simple words correctly”.

Similarly, talking about their ability to do maths, it said 75% of the sampled students were able to solve numerical one digit addition problem, a task they were supposed to do in standard I. It has suggested that systems must be put in place to track attendance, not just enrollment, and ensure regular reporting and monitoring of attendance.

Learning outcomes of students who attend school regularly had dramatically improved. The report stresses on the critical role of the teacher, especially as much as half the students in the rural areas come from home without effective learning support. In this context, it has recommended that teacher recruitment and training policies must assess teachers’ knowledge, but more importantly their ability to explain content to children, make information relevant to their lives and to use teaching learning materials and activities other than the textbook. It has also suggested “urgent revisions” in textbooks. These need to start from what children can do and be more realistic and age appropriate in what children are expected to learn, with clear learning goals.

This is especially important in light of the RTE objective of age-grade

mainstreaming for all children. The report is critical about classroom facilities, stating that most of the primary school classrooms are “not child-friendly at all” and suggested that indicators for child-friendly education be defined. It suggests that libraries, with take home books, should be monitored as part of RTE Act indicators (ET 29-10-11).