NEQMAP-ACER Topical Case Study Series in Using Learning Assessment Data in Policy and Practice: Examples from Asia-Pacific

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Regional Launch Webinar

**Thursday, 21 October 2021
13:00 – 14:30hrs. BKK Time**

Topical Case Study #4: Citizen-led Assessments: A Model for Evidence-based Advocacy and Action to Improve Learning

Examples from India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh

garden. It was alone and lonely. One day a bird came and sat on it. The bird held a seed in its beak. It dropped the seed near the tree. A small plant grew

Soon

He lives on a tree.
He likes to jump.
He also likes bananas.

Word

both   step

cup

Letter

m   t   z

f   k

r

The core of the ASER model:
The assessment tool

Two core principles

1

We assess basic skills including reading and simple arithmetic

If children cannot read, they cannot move ahead—either in the school system or in life.

a b c

1 2 3

2

We assess children orally, one-on-one

Pen and paper assessments assume that a child can already read. We do not make that assumption.

Assessment tool features

- Assesses **foundational** reading, math – usually up to Grade 2 level
- **Simple** and **quick** to administer, easy to understand results
- Developed using a **common rubric** in each country
- Available/under development in **28 languages** across South Asia:
  - India (20), Pakistan (3), Nepal (1), Bangladesh (1), Afghanistan (2), Myanmar (1)
- Used for **assessment**, **advocacy**, as well as **classroom teaching-learning**

India:
Partnership with a State government to improve children's foundational learning

————— South Asia Hub —————

Suman Bhattacharjea, Director Research, ASER India

Background

- **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)** was designed to generate large-scale evidence of the acute problems with children's foundational skills that Pratham teams could see on the ground. It has been conducted every year since 2005 (except 2015)
  - Household survey of children's foundational reading and math
  - Representative sample of children from every state and rural district
  - More than half a million children assessed each year

- **Simplicity** of tools **makes communication about "learning" possible** with many different kinds of people: parents and community members, teachers and policy makers

- The same assessment tools are used with local volunteers (in communities) and with teachers (in schools) to help them understand what children can do and teach them accordingly -> **heart of the Teaching At the Right Level (TaRL) model**

Odu [read] Karnataka

- Over the years, Pratham has partnered with many different state governments for different lengths of time. **Collaboration with government of Karnataka began in 2016.**
  - Context: > 5 million students in ~60,000 primary schools, but 42% students in Grade 5 couldn't read at Grade 2 level
- TaRL model piloted with Grade 4 and 5 children in 3 districts, program christened 'Odu [read] Karnataka'. Pratham provided materials and training, **implementation was done by staff already within the education system**
- Selection and training of 500 Cluster Resource Persons, tasked with supervision and support to schools and children, was key to success. **CRPs were required to implement the program in classrooms themselves for 15 days** -> generated understanding and buy-in
- Measurement of outcomes showed that **the % of children reading at Grade 2 level almost doubled in just a few months** -> decision to scale up: +10 districts in 2017-18, +5 districts in 2018-19, reaching ~240,000 children in 11,000 schools

The results

Odu Karnataka: Improvements in reading outcomes from baseline to end-line, 2018-19
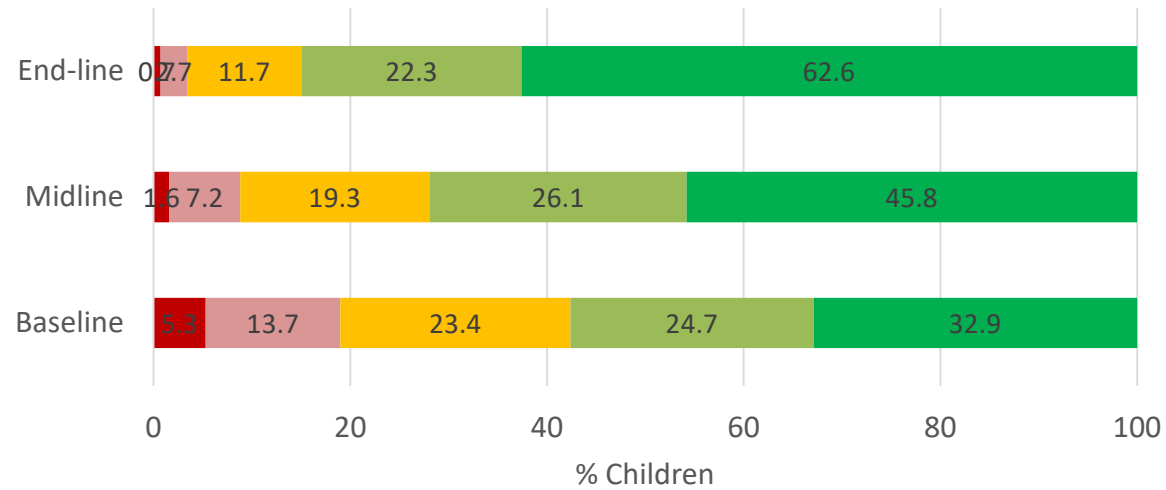
Stage	Cannot read even letters	Can read letters but not more	Can read simple words but not connected text	Can read grade 1 level text	Can read grade 2 level text or higher
End-line	0	2.7	11.7	22.3	62.6
Midline	1.6	7.2	19.3	26.1	45.8
Baseline	5.3	13.7	23.4	24.7	32.9

% Children

- Cannot read even letters
- Can read letters but not more
- Can read simple words but not connected text
- Can read grade 1 level text
- Can read grade 2 level text or higher

Conclusions: From assessment to action

- At system level, the ASER learning assessment was central to enabling both **rapid, regular monitoring of outcomes**, as well as **quick targeting of resources** to schools where data showed that progress was not being made.

- For teachers and CRPs within the system, buy-in came from seeing with their own eyes that children who had been in school for several years could not read simple text. **At the level of individual actors, an invisible problem became visible and real**.

- These core elements – using the rapid ASER assessment to drive action both by individuals on the ground as well as at system level - have been **used by different stakeholders in a variety of locations**: teachers in schools, by volunteers in communities, and by Pratham teams themselves in thousands of locations across India and in other countries.

As children return to school after extended school closures, **attention to foundational skills is more important now than ever**. Evidence shows that this type of intervention is scalable, flexible, and effective.

PAKISTAN
Citizen and Government coming together for improving Quality

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Sehar Saeed, Deputy Director Research, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi

Background

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan is Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA)'s flagship program conceived and tested in 2010.

- **ASER Pakistan tools since then have been used orally, on mobile apps and cell phones.**
- **ASER Pakistan has the robust capability of being used widely during the current COVID-19 pandemic and its recovery pathways.**

The information is collected from all rural districts across Pakistan, and selected urban districts.

- **This generates comparison for learning and access between both urban and rural areas.**
- **ASER surveys collect information from one government and one private school of every village within the sample rendering data on both delivery systems.**

The information is disseminated through multiple channels, diverse traditional and new media. Thematic ASER report cards on gender, disability, political constituencies and learning with gender equity etc. have been a lively space for evidence-based advocacy.

- **ASER Pakistan unique dissemination strategy involving government counterparts, citizens, teachers, parents and village elders has played a vital role in empowering communities to contribute in shaping education systems.**

Innovations

- **The tool has been used to cover learning in political constituencies urging politicians to take actions for education.**
- ASER Pakistan boldly highlights the social justice and equity dimensions through wealth ranking, gender and more recently disability prevalence since 2016 using the WHO/UNICEF child functioning module (CFM).

- The tool has been used to cover learning in political constituencies urging politicians to take actions for education.
- **ASER Pakistan boldly highlights the social justice and equity dimensions through wealth ranking, gender and more recently disability prevalence since 2016 using the WHO/UNICEF child functioning module (CFM).**

- **All three learning tools (Urdu/Sindhi; English and Arithmetic) have been converted into disability friendly formats for hearing and vision impaired children in Pakistan Sign Language (PSL) and braille.**
- ASER has triggered several research and advocacy campaigns such as the Right to Education (Article 25-A) and the District Rankings by Alif-Ailaan / Sustainable Development Policy Institute-SDPI.

- ASER tools support and influence many diverse learning assessments at the School Education Department, Punjab (Learning & Numeracy Drive); The Citizens Foundation schools; in Prisons; low cost private schools, etc.
- **It is thus a benchmark data on children's foundational learning in sector plans and project design documents.**

Dissemination strategy
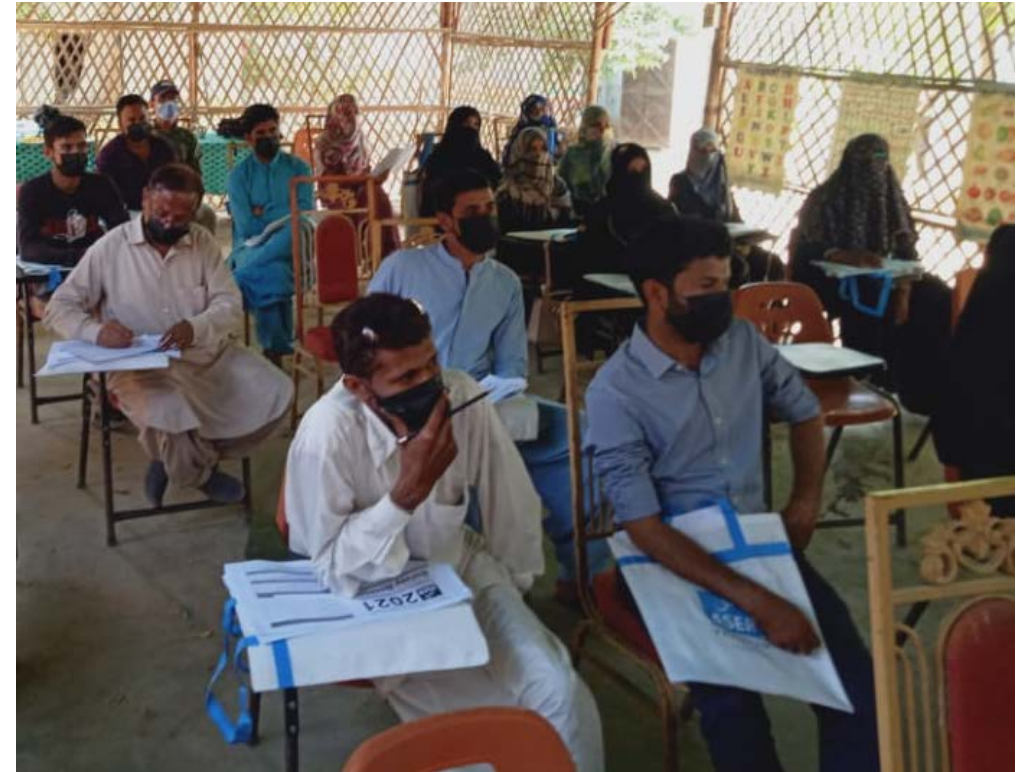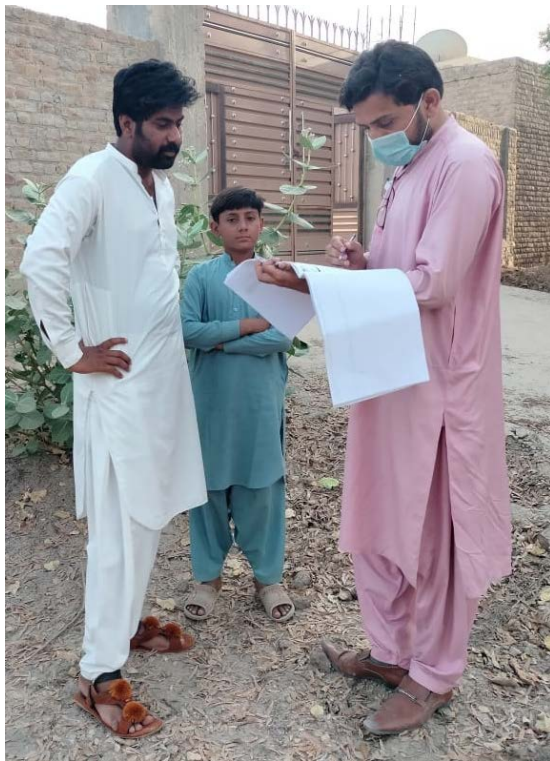
A STORY OF PARTNERSHIPS AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Communicating ASER: The Advocacy Model

Village
- Village baithak (Community gatherings)
- Mobilize citizens.
- Targets teachers, parents, government field officers.

District
- District Seminar /launch based on ASER findings
- Civil society coalitions for Education Development
- Demand for quality education generated through advocacy & action poster s
- District Report Cards

Provincial / State
- Provincial Seminar/launch
- Departmental briefings based on ASER data
- Policy seminars/dialogues – thematic e.g. OOSC /Gender

National
- National Launch on ASER Findings
- Briefing to Research institution, CSO's, universities, media houses and many more

Media Partners:
- Newspaper
- TV- campaigns *Social Media*
  - Face book
  - Twitter
- Policy booklets
- Friends of ASER
- Presentations
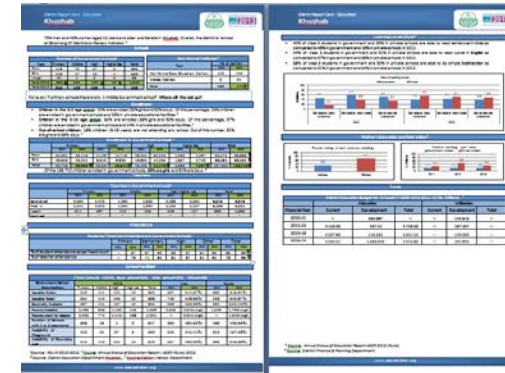- Media Kits

Citizens Involved in Research & Advocacy

Policy Briefs

Posters

District Report Cards

**ASER Baithaks
(Community Gatherings)**

Videos: Politicians Knocking on the Door for Education

Media Coverage

Nepal:
A partnership model for local governments and youth to improve learning

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Rajib Timalsina, Director, ASER Nepal

Citizen-Led Assessments:
The ASER NEPAL experience

- In 2016, a team led by me mobilized 65 young volunteers to gather data from 30 rural villages of Parsa district.
- In 2017, mobilized 193 young volunteers to gather data from 119 schools and 3820 households in 13 wards of Budanilkantha local government unit.

The motivation for the partnership model between ASER Nepal & Local Govt.
- Local relevance and ownership –mobilizing & upskilling local youth to implement the assessment under the patronage of the local government;
- A way to fulfil a campaign pledge to provide local youth with skills that would increase their employability.
- The approach of assessing children in the home: Opportunity to demonstrate that government taking action to improve education.
- Local youths having skills of learning assessment rather than an outsider doing it.

Results and Lessons

One assessor said to an ASER trainer,

"I was shocked that the children who live in a house I pass every day on my way to college can't even recognize the letters of the alphabet. I thought everyone who went to school could do that. How is this possible? What can I do about it?"

• Generating large-scale awareness for issues of education in the community;
• Gathering evidence on children's learning levels to develop strategies & policies
• To keep the youth assessors engaged to respond to the findings at local government levels for an extended period of time was not a tenable solution for our team.
• However, this sustained engagement would be necessary to foster accountability at the grassroots level.

Lessons from Nepal case

- CLAs show preliminary promise as a multifaceted tool that can address a range of challenges in a decentralized political system.

- The central govt has data often inaccessible to local governments.
- The access to data is one important disconnect between the global pledge (SDGs) and local (implementing partners on the ground). CLAs can be a cheap and effective way to bridge this gap.

- "The idea of skilling local youth and gathering comprehensive data to looking for opportunities for political visibility" clearly outweighs gathering data as a motivator for the local political leaders.

- This understanding can assist in designing CLA that will sustain the engagement of local government.

Conclusion

- Altogether, the positive experiences of the municipal level ASER have led to the conclusion that the ASER Nepal partnership model is a successful strategy to tackle education issues at both the local government and grassroots levels.

- In the Nepali context, socially active youth and young people who study in the capital have credibility in their local neighborhoods, and hence can make a difference.

- I found that citizen-led assessments are clearly effective at generating interest and creating motivation in social issues, however I was not able to track citizen assessors for long enough to attribute how much "real action" is triggered by it.

- Finally, in asking if citizen-led assessments do result in increased citizen scrutiny and thus increased accountability I found our evidence to be insufficient to answer the question.
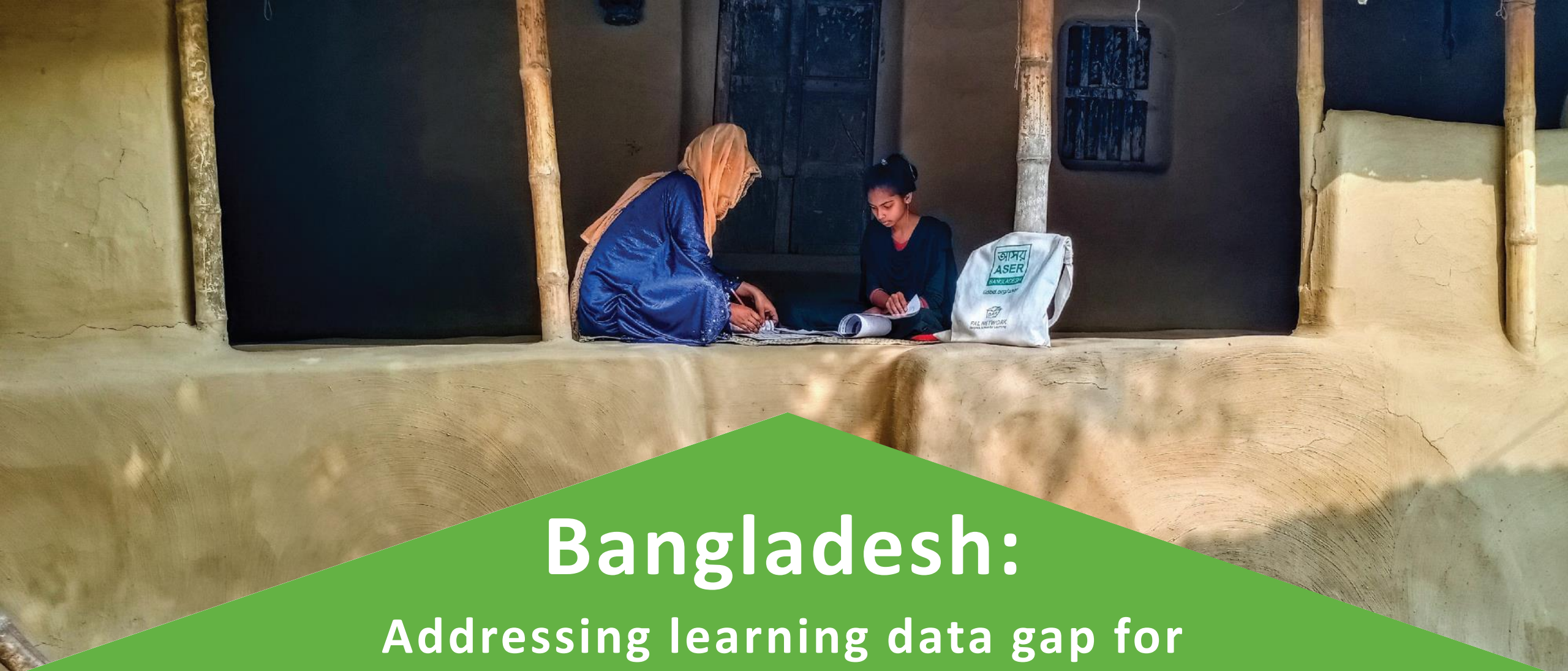
Bangladesh:
Addressing learning data gap for making policy public

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Syeed Ahamed, Head of ASER Bangladesh / CEO, Institute of Informatics and Development

Citizen-Led Assessments:
The ASER Bangladesh experience

- In 2014, an education campaign was undertaken in a collaboration between IID and BRAC emphasizing the gap of accessible and useful learning outcomes data for education policy evaluation and advocacy.

- In 2014, IID took up the ASER tool and contextualized it in alignment with the minimum proficiency levels for reading and mathematics in the National Curriculum of Bangladesh and conducted a small-scale pilot assessment in Gaibandha.

- In 2015, IID in partnership with ActionAid Bangladesh conducted the Citizens' Report on Primary Education study focused on examining the provision of quality education from an education rights-based perspective.

- One of the powerful tools to bring government together with citizens and CSOs has been IID's flagship initiative where citizens and politicians can regularly engage in the process of "making policy public" – the Policy Breakfast, which started gaining traction in 2015. Along with the successful Policy Breakfast, IID has pioneered other advocacy initiatives such as Hello MP, Youth Manifesto and Policy Conclave.

Results and Lessons

- CLA was considered a viable tool to fill the data gap on children's learning outcomes.

- ASER Bangladesh has built its capability on CLAs through training support from ASER Centre and conducting small-scale pilots.

- To date, ASER Bangladesh has implemented five pilot assessments to sharpen its capacity on implementing CLA in Bangladesh.

- With the government increasingly receptive to objective and external evaluation, particularly to conducting and using CLA data for monitoring purposes, ASER Bangladesh has the potential to contribute to Bangladesh's education monitoring system.

ASER Bangladesh,

- Has proven to be an essential tool for citizens, CSOs, and policy makers alike to strongly advocate for quality education.

- Closes an important data gap to inform education policy by providing representative data on foundational reading and mathematics skills of children and young adults, including vulnerable and out-of-school populations.

- Has become a reliable, scalable and cost-effective tool and assessment systems in place is essential for governments to monitor learning progress, and to interpret change over time.

- A potential contributor in Bangladesh's education monitoring system.

Conclusion

- Overall, the ASER Bangladesh partnership model has shown to be an effective method for addressing education challenges at both the local government and community levels.

- Scopes where partnerships between government and non-government actors can play a vital role in bridging this social and economic learning gap, ASER Bangladesh could be utilized as a tool of policy advocacy.

- Therefore, ASER Bangladesh plays a key role in maximizing impact on education policy and decision-making through effective and effecient assessments.

PAL NETWORK
People's Action for Learning

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