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ASER Is Not Just A Survey, It Is An Experience!

When I got to know that I am going to Chhattisgarh for the ASER Survey, I was extremely thrilled and excited as I love to travel to different places to experience a deeper understanding of cultures. I still remember how proudly I told my family about being a part of ASER.

I along with my colleagues went through rigorous ASER training for four days and after that, I went for a pilot with the surveyors. If you oversee or conduct the survey, a huge responsibility falls on your shoulders as the insights are going to help reform the policies for school students. Hence, I could not take anything lightly. I remember the night before, I sat down with my roommate to revise all the rules just like my school exam days. During the training, I met and bonded with amazing trainers, volunteers, and colleagues from Pratham's other programs. Trust me, Pratham is insanely huge that you will always find new faces during events, conferences, and internal engagements amongst teams. One of the trainers, Saneet, explained everything in the classroom with ease. He interjected humor in his conversations which glued me coming to the training sessions and thoroughly paying attention.



The volunteers performed extraordinarily well in the pilot and the best part was to draw a map of the village. All of them gathered at the Panchayat office to discuss the nitty gritty and it was absolute fun to watch them figure out the correct map. I and the surveyors were anticipating conversing with 14-18 age group youth, however, the village had more youth below 14 and above 18 years of age. I had the notion that the people and youth would not be welcoming however, they treated us with warmth and respect. Some youth were shy to answer the questions, some were curious to know about the survey and some households did not have youth but they were kind enough to offer us chairs to rest.

The three days of the actual survey were immensely hectic and jovial. Each one of us walked in heat, and rain to survey the youth. In one of the villages, I had to cross a small forest to reach the other part of the village and it was an exciting adventure. It made me feel like I was in a movie! I interacted with school and anganwadi children and it was a heartwarming experience. They were curious to know my name and from where I belong. I introduced myself and I asked them their names. While leaving, all of them gathered and shouted 'Bye' with full energy and enthusiasm. It is these little moments that often make the work of survey and community engagement meaningful and memorable. Furthermore, in some households, I noticed a social norm that women follow is that they do not take their husband's name. Instead, they prefer to write them on their hands to communicate it to the other person.



The weather was tricky- on some days it was scorching hot and on some days it poured heavily. However, none of us stopped. The volunteers that I accompanied were so thoughtful that they carried extra food for me for lunch. It was a moving and touching gesture.

ASER is beyond a survey. It is a complete package to apprehend distinct villages, communities, and youth.

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