

ASER Survey Journey: Challenges, Discoveries, and Reflections

After a prolonged break, I seized the opportunity to engage in the ASER survey. Initially lacking enthusiasm due to the substantial time commitment, my perspective shifted during training as I grasped the survey's impactful nature and familiarized myself with ASER's toolkit. The collaboration with Chhattisgarh D.Ed college girls and us proved noteworthy. We even conducted a toolkit-based exam, fostering a connection reminiscent of our school days.



Upon entering the field, the pilot survey served as a revelation. Most faced reading and comprehension challenges, grappling with basics despite widespread mobile phone usage and connectivity issues. While education is often regarded as the key to development and a bright future, empowering individuals to achieve greatness and gain respect, the survey results painted a different picture, prompting concerns about the ground reality. The survey also highlighted the challenges male volunteers faced in engaging with village girls, mirroring incidents in one of the blocks during my verification visit.



Overcoming Unexpected Obstacles: A Grandmother's Opposition and a Hidden Truth

During monitoring of the survey, my both volunteers assured me that all houses and youths had been surveyed. However, a random visit to the village uncovered a discrepancy—a girl in a supposedly surveyed house the day before was nowhere to be found. The subsequent inquiry revealed a 17-year-old girl who had discontinued her studies. Her grandmother strongly opposed divulging this information, presenting an unexpected challenge. However, as the part of data collection, we couldn't miss out on surveying the her. However, her persistent interruptions made progress difficult, prompting me to delegate tasks to minimize disruptions. One team member engaged the grandmother in conversation, while the other took over the survey. What came to rescue was my unexpected talent for photography, as I took grandmother's photos to keep her engaged. Eventually, with a touch of warmth, she reluctantly allows us to continue with the survey.



Navigating Unanticipated Situations: A Chance Encounter During the Survey

While exploring the same village, I encountered a young man taking a bath. Inquiring about his participation in the previous day's survey, he replied negatively. His mother disclosed that he had fled upon seeing the surveyors.

While exploring the same village, I encountered a young man taking a bath. Inquiring about his participation in the previous day's survey, he responded negatively. His mother disclosed that he had fled upon seeing the surveyors. Patiently waiting for him to finish bathing, more children gathered around. To ensure survey completion, I assigned volunteers to continue while I engaged in games



with the children. As the games drew a crowd, two additional youths appeared, and we successfully surveyed them amid the lively atmosphere. During the survey, I observed the village children facing challenges in reading and understanding, emphasizing the need for additional support. Beyond education, there's a necessity for skill development, as no centers cater to it in the villages. Awareness needs enhancement. Participating in the survey brought me joy, and I witnessed positive changes.

It inspired me to evaluate my own home, particularly with my 17-year-old son, Manthan. While we often assess others, it's crucial to scrutinize our own family. Upon returning home, I used a toolkit to assess my son's abilities, yielding positive results and showcasing the success of this approach. It's not a direct comparison, but it underscored how convenience, awareness, and exposure are pivotal for positive outcomes.

This experience also reignited fond memories of a similar survey in 1998-1999, where I worked with Rukmini Madam, evoking a sense of nostalgia.



Author: Rani Sharma, Pratham