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CURRENT AFFAIRS

Date: 19 January 2024

ASER 2023

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THIS ARTICLE COVERS 'DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS' AND THE TOPIC DETAILS OF 'ASER 2023.' THIS TOPIC IS RELEVANT IN THE "GOVERNANCE" SECTION OF THE UPSC CSE EXAM.

UPSC MAINS GS2 SYLLABUS: ISSUES RELATING TO EDUCATION AND HEALTH

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023, themed 'Beyond Basics', was recently issued. It was based on a study conducted in 28 districts across 26 states, with a total of 34,745 youngsters aged 14 to 18.

ABOUT ANNUAL STATUS OF EDUCATION REPORT

- ASER is a comprehensive survey conducted annually in India by Pratham, a non-profit organization. It provides a detailed understanding of the educational landscape, focusing on learning outcomes and infrastructure at the grassroots level. ASER primarily focuses on rural areas, covering children aged 3 to 16.
- The report uses rigorous methodology, including extensive fieldwork, to gather data on various aspects of education. It emphasizes assessing foundational skills like reading and arithmetic at the grassroots level, providing insights into children's learning levels.
- ASER findings often reveal disparities in learning outcomes among different states and regions. The report serves as a tool for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to identify areas needing attention and allocate resources.
- It also includes information on school infrastructure, teacher attendance, and other factors influencing the learning environment. ASER has played a pivotal role in creating awareness about the state of education in India and promoting reforms.

FINDINGS OF THE ASER 2023

- **Status of Youth Activities**
Across all enrolment groups, more females than boys were conducting home labour on a daily basis. Overall, the gap is almost 20 percentage points. The majority of youth engage in non-household activities, whether male and female, labour on family farms. It was observed that more males (40.3%) than females (28%) had worked outside of the home for more than 15 days. Approximately 30% of youth labour for their parents.
- **ASPIRATIONS**

According to the poll, the two most popular options among teenage boys/young men in the sample are army (13.8%) and police (13.6%).

- **ENROLLMENT GAP**

In general, 86.8% of 14-18-year-olds have been enrolled in a school or college. Although the gender discrepancies in enrollment are minimal, there are significant differences by age. The rate of unenrolled children is 3.9% for 14-year-olds and 32.6% for 18-year-olds.

- **STREAM SELECTION**

The majority of individuals in this age bracket choose to study Arts/Humanities. More than half of Class XI or higher students are enrolled in the Arts/Humanities stream (55.7%), whereas girls are less likely than males to be enrolled in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) stream (28.1%).

- **EVALUATION OF BASIC SKILLS AND LITERACY LEVELS**

Approximately 25% of this age group is unable to read a standard II-level text proficiently in their regional language. Across enrollment groups, girls (76%) outperform males (70.9%) when reading a Std II level text in the participant's regional language.

- **ENGLISH READING SKILLS**

Approximately 57.3% are capable of reading English sentences. Almost three-quarters (73.5%) of people who are proficient in English can comprehend what the sentences imply.

- **DIVISION PROBLEMS**

More than half of 14-18-year-olds struggled with division (3-digit by 1-digit) problems, with just 43.3% able to solve them correctly. In 2017, 39.5% of kids could solve a basic (grade 3-4 level) division problem, but by 2023, this proportion had increased to 43.3%.

- **USE OF SMARTPHONES**

Around 89% of individuals polled owned a smartphone in their home, and 92% showed that they understood how to use one, indicating a trend that has gained traction in the epidemic years and beyond. Males, on the other hand, were more than twice as likely as females to acquire a smartphone, implying that they spent considerably longer using the device for a broader range of functions.

PARAMETERS	INDIA
Youth aged 14-18 enrolled in some formal education institutions	86.8%
Youth enrolled in vocational training or other courses	5.6%
Engaged in some work (other than household work) for at least 15 days in the month to the survey	33.7%
Read at least a Std II level text in the ASER reading test	73.6%
Out of those who could read at least a Std I level text, % that could read text on a medicine packet and answer at least 3 out of 4 related questions	65.1%
Could do at least division in the ASER arithmetic test	43.3%
Could read at least sentences in the ASER English test.	57.3%
Could do the tasks of everyday calculations	48.4%
% of youth surveyed with Smartphone at home	89.0%
% of youth surveyed being able to use Smartphone	92.1%
Of those who can use a smartphone, % who have their own smartphone	31.1% (43.7% Male; 19.8%)
Smartphone user who used it for some education related activity in the reference week	66.1%

RECOMMENDATIONS BY ASER REPORT

- **VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**
Policymakers should reimagine vocational education as the NEP envisions, making it truly aspirational.
- **TAPPING DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND**
The ASER research provides valuable insights into how a country might use education to harness its demographic dividend, as it emphasises an age group that is essential for unlocking the demographic dividend.
- **DEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL CAPABILITIES**
According to the research, there is a change from a curriculum-centered approach to one that focuses on the individual learner. ASER advises altering pedagogical practices to alleviate student stress. The usage of digital and other educational capacities by youth could provide cues to policymakers in adopting NEPs.
- **USING TECHNOLOGY**
Growing use of technology provides an opportunity to extend education, and construct classrooms which are flexible with time and schedules. However, planners will need to discover ways to encourage children and parents to use digital devices for learning.
- **INTEGRATION WITH ANGANWADI**
According to the research, there is an urgent need for integration between the Anganwadi and school systems to guarantee overall learning development.

CONCLUSION

The recently published ASER study focuses on the concerns and challenges that the rural education sector faces. It argued that in order to enjoy the demographic dividend, India must implement judicious reforms to its technical and vocational education and training institutions.

PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q1) Consider the following statements regarding ASER report:

- 1) ASER primarily focuses on higher education
- 2) Pratham is responsible for conducting the ASER survey in India
- 3) Learning outcomes at the grassroots level is the primarily focus of ASER'S assessment

How many statements given above is/are correct?

- a) One statement
- b) Two statement
- c) Three statement
- d) None

ANSWER: B

Q2) In the context of UN Sustainable Development Goals

- 1) SDG 4 – Quality Education
- 2) SDG 5 – Zero Hunger
- 3) SDG 10 – No Poverty

4) SDG 8 – Reduce Inequality

which of the following pairs are correctly matched

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) 3 and 4
- d) 1, 2 and 3

ANSWER : A

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

- Q1) Analyze the role of education in achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 in India. Discuss the challenges and potential strategies for ensuring inclusive and quality education for all, as outlined in the SDGs.**
- Q2) Discuss the potential socio-economic implications of the ASER findings on learning outcomes. How can the information from the report be utilized to address educational disparities and enhance opportunities for all children in India?**

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