

ASER 2022 kicks off in Assam!

Photo Essay by Suman Bhattacharjea

The State Level Training, or SLT, is the intensive 5-day training workshop that kicks off the ASER survey in each state. District Institutes of Education and Training, or DIETs, have been ASER partners in many states, in some cases for many years. In Assam, ASER has had a state-wide partnership with the DIETs since 2014. For ASER 2022, as many as 60 of the 80 participants in Assam's SLT came from 23 DIETs across the state. Here are some glimpses...



In every state where DIETs partner with ASER, DIET staff support the entire survey rollout. It is less common to find DIET faculty actually participating in the intensive SLT sessions that last for long hours each day, but Assam's DIETs were an exception. As many as 27 faculty members and even a few DIET principals participated in Day 1 classroom sessions, and many of them (those pictured above) even went to the field to pilot the ASER 2022 tools and formats on Day 2 of the training. Shri Praneswar Goswami and I were the only two grey-haired participants in the entire group! A Senior Lecturer in the Kamrup DIET and a long time ASER supporter, I had met Shri Goswami before when he travelled to Delhi for the release of ASER 2019.



The group I was with went for the pilot to a village that bordered the airport, so close that one could almost reach up and touch the planes as they came in to land. The Sarpanch lives in a neighbouring village so we began the process by meeting a village elder and telling him about what we were doing there. This was Shri Gauri Kanta Nath, a retired teacher who has lived here with his family for many years and has written two books about the impact of the airport on his village.



Mayzul Alom Hussain, lecturer in the Cachar DIET, and I were in the same group for the pilot. During the school visit we snuck out from the team's meeting with the head teacher to chat with students in Std 3, 4, and 5 who were sitting together in one classroom. The school has only 1 teacher in addition to the head teacher. Amazingly, there was 100% attendance on this day, perhaps because a medical team had come to the school.



This close to Guwahati city, many children in the village were going to private schools and enrollment in the government school was low. When we began the household survey we found few kids because those in private schools had not yet returned home. This boy was one we had met and chatted with in school, but no amount of trying persuaded him to join us for the assessment!

The ASER Master Trainers in my group were quite diverse. Three of them were from DIETs: Chombit Borah from Jorhat, Ranjit Das from Golaghat, and Bishal Chetri from Dima Hasao. A fourth, Kunal Swargiary, was from Udalguri college. The fifth member of our group was our field team leader, Intaz Ahmed, who was from neither a DIET nor a college. Long years ago Intaz had worked with Pratham, and he now runs his own business in Guwahati. But every year during ASER season he leaves his "real" work to support ASER, and he has done this for every ASER since 2009! Here is Intaz (centre) along with Bishal (left) and Chombit (right), setting off to recheck another group's survey data on Day 4 of the training. Sadly I had already left and could not join them.



Of course, none of this would have been possible without the incredible hard work and dedication of the ASER Assam team. Trishna, Tapashi, Pranab, and Kripendra did an absolutely outstanding job of organising the SLT and I'm sure will do the same for the rest of the process as well. I didn't manage a photo of all of them together but here are Trishna, Tapashi, and Pranab getting ready for a session. They invited me to speak to and motivate the group at the beginning of the SLT, but with so much energy and dedication in this group they certainly didn't need any help!

