Pratham

Organization Overview

Key Info

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About the Organization

Pratham is an innovative learning organization created to improve the quality of education in
India. As one of the largest non-governmental organizations in the country, Pratham focuses on high-quality, low-cost, and replicable interventions to address gaps in the education system.

Established in 1995 to provide education to children in the slums of Mumbai, Pratham has grown both in scope and geographical coverage. Pratham means “first” in Sanskrit. True to its name, it is the first major organization to achieve lasting, large-scale success in India’s educational landscape.

Pratham works in collaboration with the government, local communities, parents, teachers, volunteers, and civil society members. They seek not only reach as many children as possible, but also to create a replicable model for state governments.

Pratham’s strategies reconfigure teaching methodologies, break down traditional tactics, and challenge the rote learning mechanisms used in Indian schools.

In its early years Pratham developed innovative teaching-learning methods, materials, and measurement techniques. In 2005, they pioneered a nationwide school survey that has had a major impact on national and international policy discussions.

Impact

- Among Grade 3-5 children attending Pratham’s 2016-2017 Learning Camps, the percentage of children able to read at a Grade 1 level increased from 24% at the start of Camp to 81% by the end.

- In Karnataka state specifically, the percentage of Grade 4-5 children able to read a Grade 2 level increased from 39% at baseline to 75% at the end of Pratham’s intervention. In 2017-2018, Pratham’s partnership with the state expanded from 3 to 13 districts.

- The Indian central government’s policy for learning outcomes now mirrors the Teach at the Right Level (TaRL) method, which has driven traffic to Pratham as a key government partner.


- Other countries, such as Zambia, have started to pilot and scale aspects of Pratham’s model.

Path to Scale
Demonstration and Policy Reform
States and school districts adopt literacy and numeracy targets, make teaching and learning tools available, support parent and volunteer engagement.

Social Entrepreneur

Dr. Madhav Chavan taught chemistry at the University of Houston and the University of Mumbai before joining India’s National Literacy Mission in the slums of Mumbai in 1989. He co-founded Pratham with Ms. Farida Lambay in 1995 in response to UNICEF’s challenge to universalize elementary school education by creating a societal mission that brought together business, government and civil society members. In 2004 Dr. Chavan was invited to become a member of the first cohort of the government’s National Advisory Council, chaired by Mrs. Sonia Gandhi. Dr. Chavan has brought to Pratham his vision of low-cost, high-impact and large-scale solutions to India’s education problems, an intense focus on measurement and results, and a willingness to partner with key stakeholders, especially the government, to achieve social change through universal education.

In addition to the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship, Dr. Chavan was awarded the WISE Prize, known as the Nobel for work done in education in 2012. He has also been recognized as an Asia Game Changer by Asia Society. Most recently, he received the Teachers College, Columbia University’s Medal for Distinguished Service.

Dr. Chavan stepped down from his role as CEO of Pratham in 2015 but continues to be a full time member of the board, while also looking after the vocational training and digital learning innovations wings of the organization. Dr. Rukmini Banerji took over as CEO in July 2015.

Equilibrium Overview

Current Equilibrium
In the current equilibrium, India has practically achieved universal enrollment in schools with 97% of children aged 6-14 enrolled. However, like the rest of the developing world, India children are still not learning effectively. More than 50% of children reach grade 5 not able to read or do basic arithmetic even at Grade 2 level (ASER 2016). [i] The last ten years of data has demonstrated three things about the current state of Indian education. First, at every grade level, basic learning levels are unacceptably low.[ii] Second, over time learning levels seem to be stagnant. If anything, there are some indications of a declining trend, implying that later cohorts are doing worse than earlier counterparts.[iii] Third, learning trajectories over time are relatively flat. This suggests that if children do not acquire fundamental skills in the primary school years, it is unlikely that they will pick them up later. All of this leads to the simple fact that basic reading and arithmetic skills are essential for moving ahead meaningfully through the school system or indeed through life. Within India, the scale of the challenge remains enormous, with census 2011 figures indicating that for each single year age group, there are roughly 25
milllion children. At least half of them are several grade levels behind where they are expected to be. [i] Facilitated by Pratham, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is a massive nationally representative household survey of children’s basic reading and arithmetic that has been carried out in India almost every year since 2005. To access ASER reports from 2005 to 2017, visit www.asercentre.org. [ii] ASER 2016 found that only about 48% of government school children in Grade 5 can read Grade 2 level text, while about 26% of them can do basic division. [iii] Other data sources are also finding evidence of a decline in learning levels. For example: Young Lives project in Andhra Pradesh and preliminary results from the latest India Human Development Survey.

New Equilibrium

In the new equilibrium, government policies and funding will be focused on learning outcomes at all levels. Governments will be informed by credible assessments that transparently outline the areas of need. These policies will flow down to the state level, and all government schools will implement teaching approaches that account for students’ measured level of learning, set goals for improving learning outcomes and hold schools accountable for the progress of their students. This new equilibrium will ensure that the millions of children graduating from Indian government schools will be equipped with a viable education.

Innovation

Pratham’s mission is to improve the quality of education in India. The organization focuses on developing and deploying high-quality, low-cost, replicable interventions that address gaps in the Indian education system, from pre-school to vocational training. Pratham’s flagship initiative is its Read India program, which works to improve the reading, writing and basic arithmetic skills of children (ages 6-14). The core innovation of this program is Pratham’s CAMaL (Combined Activities for Maximized Learning) approach (also referred to as Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)), which is an evidence-based solution to bridge the gap between current and expected learning levels of children. Approach: CaMAL or TaRL re-orient the instruction to the level and pace of the student, rather than a focus on teaching to complete the curriculum. It focuses on children in grades 3-5, with a special focus on those who cannot read grade 2 level text or do basic math. As part of the process, children are assessed using a simple tool and then grouped according to level rather than grade. Each group is taught starting from its current competency level, and level-appropriate learning activities and materials are used. Throughout the entire process, children’s progress is assessed using simple measurements of their ability to read do basic math. The activities are organised in ascending levels of competency for students to move up through. The combination of competencies, directions of learning and classroom dynamics together constitute a whole learning experience for students to achieve specified learning outcomes. Implementation: TaRL is implemented in two ways, the first is directly by Pratham staff through Learning Camps, which are intense short-bursts of learning activities (for 6-10 days at a stretch) that are repeated several times in the same school/village over the course of year. The second model is through the government school system, wherein the same TaRL approach is incorporated into the school day, and government teachers utilize the methods and materials after being trained by government and/or Pratham staff. Other flagship initiatives include: Annual Status of Education Report
(ASER): Developed by Pratham in 2005, ASER is the only annual measurement of children’s literacy and numeracy skills conducted at scale in India today. The 2016 edition of the survey was carried out in 17,473 villages, covering 350,232 households and 562,305 children in the age group of 3-16. ASER has focused the National and State governments’ attention on learning outcomes and helped drive policy shifts. Further, the ASER model has spread organically over time to other countries. Currently 14 countries across 3 continents have adapted the ASER model for use in their own contexts.

Early Years Program: Pratham’s Early Years Program focuses on five developmental categories for pre-school, Grade 1 and Grade 2 students: physical, social and emotional, cognitive, language, and pre-math. Pratham works both directly in this space as well as through large-scale partnerships with the government ICDS (children aged 3-5 years) and education systems (children in grades 1 & 2) across the country.

Second Chance Program: Pratham’s Second Chance program focuses on providing school drop-outs, especially women, another chance at education. Over a period of one year, the program helps develop foundational academic skills of students, build confidence and life skills, support learning for the board examinations and help those who appear for the exams to succeed. Every year, the program enables over 4,000 school drop-outs to restart their learning journey, contributing not only to a better academic future, but to a better life for themselves and those around them.

Pratham Institute: Pratham Institute, the vocational training arm of Pratham, works across the country to provide individuals with employability skills needed to address India’s growing need for skilled manpower. It aims to help young people from economically backward communities access jobs and livelihood opportunities in the organized sector. Pratham Institute also spreads awareness, about vocational training and skilling, offers entrepreneurship opportunities, empowers thousands of young people with hands-on skills and places them in their first jobs. Over the years, Pratham Institute has helped nearly 100,000 youth across the country in improving their general employability skills and more than 50,000 youth in industry-specific trades.

PraDigi: In August 2017, Pratham launched its latest initiative - PraDigi. As part of this unique digital initiative, an app has been launched on the Google play store with learning content in 11 Indian Languages. In addition to the app, Pratham has also created videos for children. Pratham has now begun to share all these free resources widely across the country and encourage governments, organizations, institutions and NGOs to help schools, communities and families use digital content. At the time of writing, nearly 12,000 tablets have been distributed in about 21 states across the country - where they are being used in approximately 7,000 villages and urban areas. Unlike most other digital educational initiatives that are usually in schools, PraDigi is implemented in homes and communities, with mothers often being encouraged to be the custodians of tablets.

Ambition for Change

Every underprivileged child in India between the ages of 6 and 14 experiences love of learning and receives a quality education.