



Read about India Pratham

Time to measure and review:

Measuring work done and evaluating performance is an essential part of any successful effort. Pratham released ASER2008, fourth of its kind, on January 13, 2009. This report annually measures the changes in the status of education in India. In the following month, experts and representatives of different international agencies visited twelve districts spread over six states of India in order to understand and review Pratham's Read India program.

ASER2008 received more widespread publicity than any other report over the last four years. This largely is a result of the approaching elections. ASER2008 reviews progress in education over the last four years. Clearly, major strides have been made in bringing down the proportion of out of school children. However, barring exceptions of Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Chattisgarh no other state has shown big jumps in learning improvement. Some others like Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Orissa have shown steady improvement

over the last two years. However, until the learning levels in big populous states of UP, and Bihar in the North, Gujarat and Rajasthan in the West, and Assam in the North East improve, India's overall status in education will show little improvement.

This brings us to the review of the Read India program. The first observation is that the Read India program has worked wherever the local state government and Pratham volunteers worked together with the state government making strong efforts. Where one of the two active ingredients was missing the results were small or we did not get statewide improvement. An independent randomized evaluation of a Pratham program in Bihar by Jb-PAL indicated that the children taught by volunteers made major progress but the problem was that the volunteers failed to reach a large number of village children. Better targeting, and wider reach is needed. Perhaps one village per volunteer is not enough and the volunteers need to be better trained.

We have taken corrective steps to improve the situation. A massive training program to make Pratham personnel more knowledgeable has been launched. Rural and urban programs are being reorganized to learn from the evaluations and the review. The renewed efforts will be evaluated again in April to see what works, and we will fine tune our efforts to bring more success.



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The global economic downturn is a worrying phenomenon that is also affecting the not-for-profit or charitable sector. Just as the momentum is building up we have to brace ourselves for fewer rupees and dollars in support of our work. This means, not only do we have to be better skilled but we should achieve more with even lesser amounts. Challenges are many and hence also opportunities. That makes this adventure to make India a literate and educated country even more exciting.

We are happy that you are with us in this adventure and hope you will ask us more about what you want to know. And, we also hope that many will write back to tell us how you like the newsletter and how we could make it better.

We will visit you again in May.

Madhavan Chavan

1. Annual Status of Education Report.
2. Jameel Abdul Lateef Poverty Action Lab, a group of expert economists at MIT, Harvard, and other universities.

In Focus

Read India is reviewed!

Suman Bhattacharjea

Dr. Bhattacharjea has extensive experience in the fields of education, gender, and women's rights. She has worked with government, private, non government and international organizations in several countries, including India, U.S.A., Pakistan and Mexico. She works as Director, Research with the ASER Centre, New Delhi.

On February 20 of this year sighs of relief echoed all across the Pratham network. After an exhausting, exacting, and often exasperating four months of preparation, the Joint Review Mission, or JRM as it came to be known, was finally over.

This was Pratham's first ever experience of an external review of a major program. Between February 9 and 19, 2009, representatives from eight external organizations (Hewlett Foundation, Gates Foundation, Novib, World Bank, DfID, Oxfam, Children's Investment Fund Foundation, National Science Foundation) along with representatives from Pratham USA, NCERT and five state governments, came together to review the progress and impact of Pratham's Read India program and to make recommendations for the

future. The Review marked the midpoint of the Hewlett-Gates Foundation's three year, \$9 million grant to Pratham for Read India.

Preparations had begun way back in November, when Pratham teams in 15 Read India states wrote a detailed review of the what, why, when and how of their state program, based on a format

rewritten, edited, and fleshed out still further; supporting evidence was compiled; and logistical arrangements were endlessly made and remade. Countless emails, phone calls, and discussions later, over a thousand pages of documentation were ready for distribution.

JRM participants varied in prior exposure to India, to Pratham, and to Read India. Over

the course of two days in Delhi they were briefed on Read India at the national level and on the history and current status of the program in each of the six states selected for visits (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh). They then split up into teams, each of which spent nearly a week visiting a particular state, where they observed schools and classes and interacted with a variety of stakeholders.



designed by the Hewlett Foundation. During December, each state was visited by an "internal review" team of two Pratham people from elsewhere in the country in order to help strengthen the state report. In January, preparations in the six states selected for visits by the JRM teams reached fever pitch as reports were

States were selected such that the Review team was able to observe how Read India has evolved under a wide variety of conditions. Thus, teams visited Punjab (strong state government support and an intervention primarily through the school system) and Andhra Pradesh (no state

government support and an intervention primarily through community volunteers); Chhattisgarh (Read India running in all schools in all districts) and Maharashtra (a community-based program in 16 districts, a school-based program in 2, and no intervention in the rest). The Review team looked not only at the program within each visited state, but also at two specific thematic areas across states: government partnerships and program management; and pedagogy, materials, training, and assessment.

Returning to Delhi, the teams' reports were written up in less than two days. On the last day JRM participants discussed their preliminary conclusions and recommendations with key Pratham staff and other invited guests. Despite the very limited time available in which to digest

and analyze a program as large and complex as Read India, the final day's presentations generated rich insights, thoughtful comments, and spirited discussions as well as heated disagreements. Participants were appreciative of the openness with which Pratham allowed them full access to all facets of the Read India program and of the intensive preparations which went into ensuring that the review went off smoothly.

The final Review reports will no doubt provide plenty of food for thought for all concerned once these are made available a couple of weeks from now. Meanwhile, all of Pratham can enjoy a brief respite from the dreaded "J" word.



JRM preparations- Some moments.....

Well over 700 emails flew up and down the Pratham network in the months leading up to the JRM. Here are some snippets.

Dana Schimdt Nov 25

Wanted to check-in to see if you've made any progress on the Review documents I sent a week ago. As per the schedule, we hope to send this out to folks next Monday.

Madhav Chavan Nov 28

Has ANYONE sent their report in??

Usha Rane Dec 1

MH, MP and CH sent the reports to me. I have asked them to make certain changes. By tomorrow you will get the reports.

Usha Rane Dec 15

Uttarakhand will be too cold. Madhav has asked me to give a message to you to carry lots of woollen clothes.

Suman Bhattacharya Jan 8

Hope things calm down soon... eventually... some day... before next year??!!

Madhav Chavan Jan 10

How is the road from Aurangabad to Nandurbar? How long does it take from Aurangabad to Dhule and Dhule to Nandurbar? Where will the team stay in Nandurbar for overnight stay? Tell me how you will arrange travel.

Dana Schmidt Jan 30

Because the preparation materials for the state visit are rather large, we are making them available on our FTP site.

Pratham News

ASER 2008 released

ASER 2008 was released by Mr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia at the Triveni Auditorium on January 13 2009. According to the findings, the learning levels in basic reading writing show no change in most of the country although Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have made considerable progress. Bihar has made consistent progress in bringing more children into school. The report also shows that more than 77% children of Std V in Madhya Pradesh can solve a division sum, while in Kerala the same percentage is 43.7 %. Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh lead the nation in reading ability with over 60% children in Std III able to read at least a Std I text and over 70% children in Std V able to read at least a Std II text. Following the national release, state level releases were held over January and February. In Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, the report was released by the respective Chief Ministers.

Pratham UK briefs parliamentarians about the status of education in India

On 21st January, Pratham UK hosted a parliamentary reception at the House of Commons to brief parliamentarians about education and literacy in India. Minister for International Development, Mike Foster MP attended as chief guest. A key note address was given by Mike Foster MP who stressed the importance of supporting education initiatives in India and remarked at Pratham's ability to help teach basic reading, writing and math skills on a mass scale. Dr. Rukmini Banerji, Programme Director, provided a historical perspective about Pratham and outlined it's future initiatives. Her speech highlighted Pratham's strength in

mobilising volunteers at the district and village level. She also emphasised that Pratham works with the government, both at the state and district level to ensure that teaching is being done effectively in the schools.



Mrs. Lambay selected as member of the state commission on protection of Child Rights in Maharashtra

Mrs. Farida Lambay, Co-founder and member of the senior leadership team of Pratham is now a part of the Maharashtra State Commission on Protection of Child Rights. The commission will review provisions under various laws for protection of rights of children and implement them effectively in Maharashtra. Mrs Lambay is also a part of several other policy making bodies such as the State Committee for Education for SSA. She is a member of the National Advisory Council on Child Labour and as well as member of the State Security Council which was formed under the Chairmanship of the Chief Minister of Maharashtra after the 26/11 attacks.

Pratham Council for Vulnerable Children (PCVC) holds the Red Dust Event

February 2009 saw the successful completion of a year long partnership between PCVC and Red Dust. Red Dust, an

Australian charity works with the indigenous Australian communities to improve the health and well being of disadvantaged youth. PCVC partnered with Red dust in Feb 2008 to deliver the Lifestyle Education program to the children of the Mumbai shelter homes. The program uses a combination of sports and music to impart information on a healthy lifestyle. Over 350 children have been covered as part of the program.

From Feb 23-25, Red Dust and Pratham conducted a program in Mumbai where a 16 member role model team along with the Pratham staff delivered the program which included sports, music and classroom activities. On Feb 26, Red Dust and Pratham celebrated the Vodafone Global Foundation Day. Over 1200 children who are a part of Pratham's programs in Mumbai attended the event. Role models such as Vinod Kambli, former Australian batsman Allan Border also participated in the event. A group of 25 children from the shelter homes in Mumbai were selected to be a part of the 2 day music program where they had to compose and sing their own song. A video of the song can be seen on

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjptqHwrGuM>



Feature

ARE OUR CHILDREN LEARNING? Key Findings of ASER 2008

Meghna Mittal

Meghna Mittal works at Pratham and is a part of the Program Review and Management team. She holds a Bachelors Degree from The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.

ASER 2008 brings a few key facts to light, some point to the strides made by Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) in the battle to universalize education. Some others indicate the continued gaps in the Indian education system and a battle against illiteracy which is just starting.

The drive by the SSA for universal enrollment seems to have been successful as the number of children enrolled in school has been steadily increasing over the past few years and ASER 2008 indicates that in rural India 95.7% of children in the 6-14 age group are enrolled in some kind of school. All states have seen significant increases in enrollment levels, the largest increase being in Bihar, where from 2006 to 2008, there has been a 7.1% point increase in the number of children going to school. Rajasthan and Orissa have also shown

improvements in enrollment rates over the past two years, but remain problematic with the highest percentage (7.1% and 7.2%) of children not enrolled in school. Most of the increase in enrollment rates can be attributed to the efforts made by the SSA, which include construction of schools, mid-day meal programs,

recruitment of teachers, provision of textbooks and many more actions. ASER 2008 also indicates that there continues to remain a difference in enrollment rates between girls and boys, and in the 11-14 age group 7.3% of girls remained out of school in 2008, while nationally there are 6.3% of children out of school in this age group.



Although this drive for universal enrollment is targeted at children in the 6-14 age group, it has had an impact on enrollment rates for children under six as well. 56.6% of all 5 year-olds are enrolled in schools rather than being enrolled in a pre-school. In some states like Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Tamil Nadu the proportion of five year olds going to school has increased by 16-20 percentage points over the last three years.

Are the Children Learning Well?

Just because children are going to school one would assume that means that children are learning, however ASER 2008 indicates that this is not true. Only 66.6% of children in Std III-V, can read a Std I

level text and only 54.9% of them can do subtraction or more. However, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh have shown dramatic improvements in learning levels. In Chattisgarh, the percentage of children in Std III and IV who can read a Std. I level text has increased by 41% points and 26% points respectively from 2007 to 2008 and those who can do subtraction and more jumped by 44% points and 33% points respectively over the same time period. Madhya Pradesh also shows large improvements in learning levels where in Std. III and IV, the percentage of children who can read a level 1 text rose from 67% in 2007 to 81% in 2008 and from 86% to 95% across the same period. Those children in Std. 3 and 4 who can do subtraction and more rose by 11% points and 10% points respectively. While Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh saw these huge improvements

in learning levels, some states like Bihar, Gujarat and Haryana saw deterioration in learning levels from 2007 to 2008. This then begs the question, as to why some states saw improvements while some did not. While ASER 2008 doesn't have the answer, we can only hope that we see the same improvements across the remaining states over the coming years.

While SSA has made strides to tackle the issue of enrollment in India, this is not a battle completely won, with 4.3% children still out of school and efforts have to be made to reach universal enrollment. While the focus in the past has been on enrollment, the focus needs to be widened to include efforts to increase learning levels of children, which is a battle that is not only far from being won, but also one that will be much harder to win. ■

Key Findings of ASER 2008

- The percentage of children not in school is dropping. Nationally, the proportion of 6-14 year olds not in school is 4.3%.
- All India proportion of 11-14 year old girls who are out of school remains steady at 7.3% over 2007 and 2008.
- 24.8% of an average Std I class in India has children under 6 years of age
- In Rajasthan, J&K, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana over 70% of 5 year-olds are in school.
- Reading levels in Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have shown a dramatic improvement. These states have also made remarkable progress in improving math skills over the last year.
- Nationally only 66.6% of children in Std III-IV can read a level I text or more, and 54.9% can do subtraction or more.

In Conversation

An interview with Dana Schmidt

Dana Schmidt works for the Hewlett Foundation in the area of Quality Education in Developing Countries. She has visited several Read India classes across India.

You have visited several rural locations across India. What have been your lasting impressions about the people and India in general and the status of the primary education system in particular?

I have been fortunate to have had a far reaching tour of the education system in India through my site visits with Pratham.

Everywhere I have gone, I have been amazed by the energy and enthusiasm of the students in schools. There is also a lot of talent out there, waiting to be nurtured. Just this past February I visited a school in rural Chhattisgarh. I don't really speak any Hindi (beyond being able to ask children their names), so I couldn't read with the students. But since we all knew the language of numbers, I wrote some multiplication problems on the board for the students to do in their exercise books. One of the boys sitting in the front row came up to show me his work. I noticed that he had several more complicated math problems written in his notebook, so I gave him a few more challenging questions. He proceeded to calculate very

quickly in his head and answer the problems on the spot! As my Pratham colleagues spoke more with this third grader, it became clear that he was clever at more than just math.

This 8 year old boy in Chhattisgarh clearly had a special talent, but he is not alone. Indeed, in rural India there are classrooms upon classrooms teeming with students who are full of potential and eager to be nurtured. When I am in schools in rural India and I stop to think about all the talent that lies out there, I am alternately inspired and depressed. Inspired by what could be, and depressed by the current state of affairs, in which many children are not being nurtured.

What were the important factors of Read India that contributed to the decision of the Hewlett foundation to support the program?

I work for the Quality Education in Developing Countries initiative at the Hewlett Foundation. As the name of our initiative suggests, we are interested in improving the quality of education that students in India and sub-Saharan Africa receive. More specifically, we make grants to organizations that are working to ensure that students learn how to read, write, calculate, and think critically. While improving enrolment is important, seeing children go to school is not enough. Pratham has been one of the first organizations to really tackle the challenge of learning head on. Not only that, but they are doing so for millions of children across the country. This is critical, because ultimately we care about learning for not just a few children, but for all children. The Read India grant was one of the first grants given by the Quality Education in Developing Countries initiative (and remains the largest grant we have given) because Pratham is working on precisely the right issue (student learning) at a scale that we think has the potential to bring about large scale change in the education sector. Furthermore, we are impressed by Pratham's commitment to continual improvement – through creating new innovations; expanding reach to cover all children; tracking and evaluating whether what they are doing is successful.

After one and a half years of supporting Read India, what is your assessment?

The high energy and commitment of all of the Pratham staff working on Read India is unmatched compared to other parts of the world. Everyone is 100% dedicated to the goal of ensuring every child is in school and learning well. As a result, Read India has managed tremendous coverage and uptake by volunteers and state governments. It seems as though Read India has also managed to catalyze the system to think more about student learning. This is an incredible contribution to the sector, and if it sustains over the long term could be a “game changing” effect.

While the campaign mode seems to have had a positive impact, it is still a question as to how long it can be sustained, and what Pratham's longer-term role can be in contributing to more gains in student learning. Furthermore, while Read India seems to have achieved a lot in terms of putting the focus on learning, it has been less successful at fundamentally changing teacher practice in the classroom. This is a challenging thing to do, and something that will take time.

Do you think that a model like Read India can be replicated in other developing countries?

We have funded an external evaluation of Read India – currently being conducted by the Poverty Action Lab out of the Institute for Financial Management and

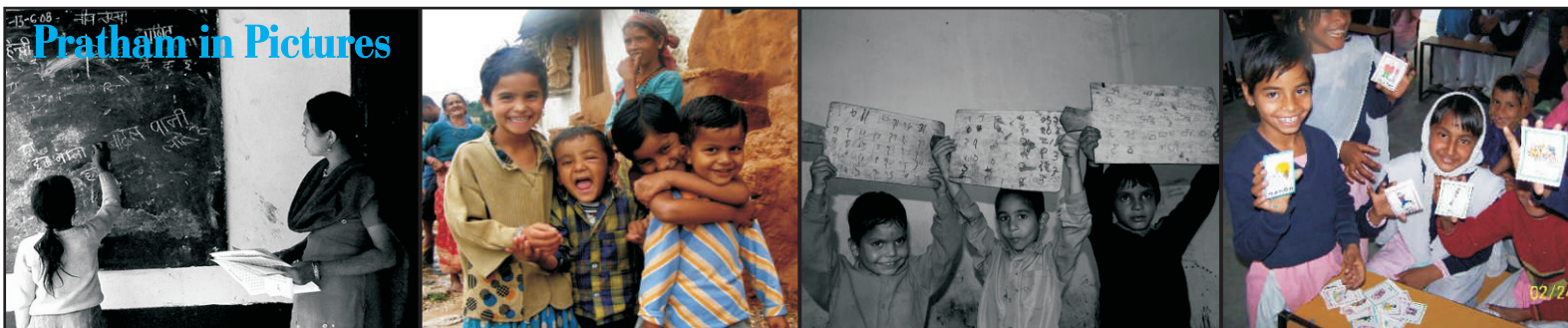
Research in Chennai – because we are committed to learning about the impact of Read India in order to inform work elsewhere. In other words, it is our hope that what we learn from Read India will inform work in other developing countries.

From what we have seen so far in our work in East and West Africa, there are organizations that have already begun to tackle issues around how to teach reading and maths more effectively. Developing these methods and simple materials like the ones Pratham has used should be relatively easy to replicate. However, what's harder to replicate is the volunteerism, high energy, and massive coverage that Read India has achieved. We think these aspects have played a large role in helping Read India achieve its success thus far, and may be the very aspects that are the most difficult to replicate elsewhere.

What are the key challenges facing the education sector in general and in particular from a funding point of view?

The key challenge remains how to help ensure that students are learning, and I think a key to addressing that challenge is ensuring that teachers are equipped with the skills and motivation they need to help make this happen. Our key challenge from a funding point of view is how to use our limited resources to stimulate the government sector – which will always invest the most money in education – to tackle these issues effectively.

Pratham in Pictures



Against All Odds

When opportunity meets willingness

For most convicts, a life of dignity and respect after their release from prison is a dream that is seldom fulfilled. However, in S.H. Mistry's case life gave him a second chance.

A prisoner in Ratnagiri jail for 12 years, Mistry became a part of the jail's computer literacy program initiated by Pratham PACE (Pratham Arora Centre for Education) program. After gaining proficiency in the basic module created by PACE comprising of MS Office, Desktop Publishing and basic written and spoken English, he requested for advanced programs where he learnt

Photoshop, Image-Maker and Movie Maker.

Post his release, he started a small business

in his home town of Ahmedabad along with his daughter who is a computer professional and is busy building up his clientele. A very optimistic Mistry says "I make a few thousand rupees each month now. But business is picking up and by April my income should cross Rs.25,000 a month"

The Jail Program under Pratham's PACE program currently runs in 4 prisons across Maharashtra specifically for convicts and under trials. Observing the programs success in the first year itself, the government has granted permission to start classes in 15 more jails over the coming months.



Mistry during the PACE program.

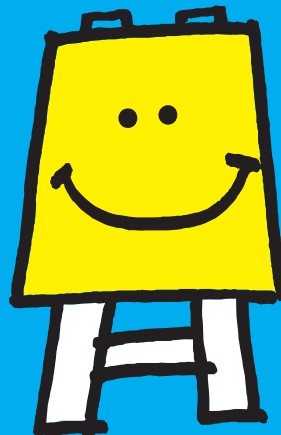


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We welcome your comments, suggestion and questions about this newsletter or about any of the stories covered here. Please contact us at info@pratham.org



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