

NGO-Government partnerships and universal access to quality primary education in Northern India (Himachal Pradesh and Punjab)

Aneel Brar

What is the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in helping India achieve its educational goals?

Educational Equity: Global and National Strategies
May 2, 2009
McGill University



Research question:

What is the role of NGOs in providing primary education in a developing country such as India?



The quality imperative

The major flaw that has been identified within India's universalization strategy is that the push for expanding enrollment has been disjointed from improving educational quality.

Table 5. Ability of grade 3-5 children to read grade 1-level texts and do basic math as determined by Pratham through their annual ASER surveys (2006 and 2008).

State	Percentage of Children in - Grades 3 to 5 who can read level 1 text or more in their own language.		Percentage of Children in Grades 3 to 5 who can do subtraction or more.	
	2006	2008	2006	2008
Himachal Pradesh	74.1	84.3	72.1	77.6
Punjab	66.3	69.7	65.2	64.2
India	66.0	66.6	65.2	54.9

Source: ASER, 2007 (Pratham 2008); ASER, 2008 (Pratham, 2009a).

Table 2. Gross and net primary enrollment ratios for Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and India (grades 1 to 5).

State	GER		NER	
	2005-06	2006-07	2005-06	2006-07
Himachal Pradesh	107.43	104.54	84.84	83.79
Punjab	65.34	72.18	51.78	55.49
India	103.77	110.86	84.53	92.75

Source: For Punjab and India (Mehta, 2008); for Himachal Pradesh (Shukla, 2008)—all based on DISE data.

Methodology and Locations

- Qualitative case study based on 56 non-randomly selected interviews and field observations in 29 locations in the northern Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab
 - The interviews were with academics, policy makers, government officials, World Bank officials, parents, teachers, volunteer teachers, and Pratham workers
 - Field work was conducted over eight weeks from June to August, 2008
- Comparing Himachal Pradesh and Punjab for government involvement in education
- Incomparable aspects: the benefit of temporal differences for this study

Table 5. Comparable and unique elements observed in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh

	Punjab	Himachal Pradesh
Comparable elements observed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government involvement in education • Government cooperation/support with Pratham's in-school programs (ADHAAR retrospectively and <i>Parrho Punjab</i> currently) • Pratham training sessions (Master teacher trainings, Bhatinda, Punjab; secondary trainings and survey training, Hamirpur and Kangra, Himachal Pradesh) 	
Unique elements observed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large scale NGO program implementation • <i>Parrho Punjab</i> running <i>in situ</i> (Fatehgarh Sahib district) • Pratham Master teacher trainings (Bathinda) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pratham Summer Camps (Sirmaur and Solan districts) • ADHAAR in retrospect • Pratham culture (ethnography) • Pratham secondary trainings, survey trainings (Hamirpur, Kangra)

Locations

Punjab

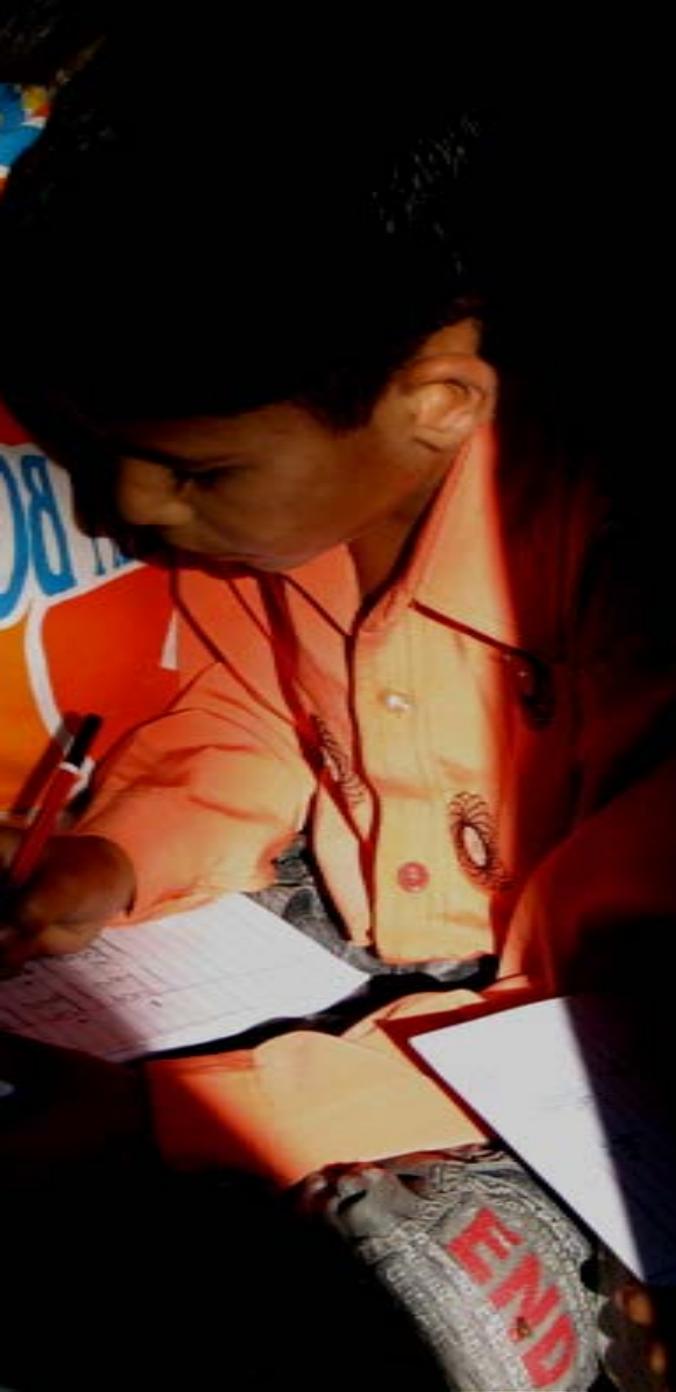


- Educationally poor
- Known to have poor quality government schools
- 55% of the population goes to government schools—mostly poor

Himachal Pradesh



- Educational success
- Consistently high literacy and enrolment
- 80% of the population goes to government schools

A man in an orange shirt is shown from the chest up, looking down and writing in a notebook. He is wearing a lanyard around his neck. The background is dark and out of focus.

Pratham's activity—improving quality & injecting innovation

- **Data collection:** ASER
- **Lobbying:** National & international support
- **Research:** development of original learning materials; testing tools; rapid learning pedagogical method
- **Implementing Teaching Techniques:** in schools (ADHAAR and *Paro Punjab*); in communities
- **Teacher Training**

Classroom and Summer Camps



- Variability in the effectiveness of Summer Camps

- AADHAR

- Meeting the needs of HP—
need higher level programs
- Things get political
- AADHAR plus



- *Paro Punjab*

- Good use of Pratham materials
- Hard to determine other things

The experience of Pratham suggests that there are three main ingredients that can lead to a positive role for NGOs in education:

First, the success of a large-scale, NGO-led education project depends on existing conditions. In other words, NGO success is constrained by the extent to which the government has already provided the necessities of education including qualified teachers and proper infrastructure (adequate buildings, functioning toilets, and running water). Success also depends on the local government being accountable for its education policies, being open to outside innovation, and exhibiting policy stability especially through successive elections.

Second, the NGO itself must have significant capacity. It must have significant financial and human resources to perform a number of functions including data gathering, teacher training, teaching, researching, lobbying and management. Crucial to the human side of successful NGOs is their ability to mobilize many talented people at all levels of the operation.

Third, there must be local ownership of the program. Without genuine local ties any large NGO program will not be as effective as it could be and any successful outcomes will likely disappear when the program ends or the NGO ceases to exist. Grassroots connections are also what give NGOs that are otherwise unaccountable to the people they serve a measure of legitimacy.

Underlying conclusion

Any successful integration of NGOs in the delivery of primary education in a country as large and heterogeneous as India requires a synergistic relationship with the government. In other words, it is argued that the government is the only entity with the power, resources and legitimacy to be the primary force for change and the delivery of quality education—NGOs ultimately have a limited, albeit important role.

According to R. Govinda “the general public today are systematically losing faith that they will get any public service called education in this country.” Indeed, despite all the research, legislation, money and rhetoric devoted to the topic “the current system is something which really gives you a sort of a false feeling that things are happening...” when in fact “...fifty percent of children are dropping out”—a statistic that has not significantly changed over the last fifteen years (Govinda, R., personal communication). Indeed, Govinda sums it up best when he says that although primary education in India is progressing on some fronts, still “there is a crisis of trust and faith with the delivery system...” and there is yet a long, long way to go.

India

*“If Education for All
doesn't happen in India, it
doesn't happen period.”*

-Sam Carlson, World Bank







