Part 3

PRIMARY EDUCATION AND TRANSITIONS

8

Achieving Quality Primary Education for the Poor Through State–NGO Partnerships

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Policy-makers and researchers around the world have come to recognize that, in the race to achieve universal primary education, improving *quality*[1]—in addition to *access*—is central to attaining any meaningful outcomes.[2] Beyond ensuring physical access to schools and working to increase enrollment rates—both fundamental steps towards achieving universal education—it has been demonstrated that achieving quality education plays a crucial role in increasing enrollment of the hardest to reach groups as well, as raising retention rates and the opportunity to continue forward in the education system.[3] India, with among the world's largest elementary school-aged population (6–14 years) of 210 million, is one of the front lines in the battle for universalization and, although major progress has been made in aggregate enrollment, significant obstacles remain in terms of improving quality. As succinctly stated by a senior World Bank educationist, India "is where Education for All, globally, is going to be won or lost."[4]

The goal of universalizing primary education, which was based on the goals of the Education for All (EFA) framework first established at Jomtien in 1990, dovetails well with India's own stated aspirations of free education for all elementary school-aged children, which was first articulated in the country's original 1950 Constitution. Although India's rhetoric has not been matched by the reality of its educational outcomes for the remaining part of the 20th century, recent groundbreaking changes to policy and government priorities have positively affected primary enrollment and access.[5] Many of these recent achievements have occurred with the creation of India's first national primary education program, the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) in 2001.[6]

Created to ensure universal enrollment by 2010, and in part spurred by the commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the SSA's programs and policies focus on children who are marginalized from accessing primary

education due to various socioeconomic inequalities.[7] Funded by a special national 2% tax levy as well as in small part by the World Bank and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, the goals of the SSA are buoyed by the largest educational budget in Indian history and have resulted in the rebuilding of the country's primary education institutions and the unparalleled commitment of the federal government to inducing change.[8] Indeed, the goal of universal enrollment is within grasp for many Indian states and has already been effectively achieved in several. According to the most recent survey data, 95.7% of rural children aged 6–14 are enrolled in school, which is the highest enrollment rate that India has ever achieved.[9]

Notwithstanding these successes, Indian education remains characterized by high levels of inequity that are inextricably linked to issues of education quality.[10] Enrollment figures often mask retention and dropout rates, which are key performance indicators of the education system. It has been estimated that India's retention rate—defined as the proportion of a cohort that entered the school system 5 years previously reaching grade 5—was 70.26% in 2006–2007, meaning that 30% of this cohort repeated a grade or dropped out of the system before finishing primary school.[11] Even more troubling is the claim by Kumar, the head of India's National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), that "these [types of] figures are in fact recognized as inaccurate and the ground reality is reported to be worse."[12] The overwhelming majority of children who are out-of-school, or who have dropped out of school, are from the most marginalized and poorest sections of society that are most in need of the benefits of education.[13]

Unfortunately, one of the major reasons why these children and their parents decide against attending school is the belief that the education available is of low quality and of little value compared to other activities such as working or taking care of the household.[14] In terms of learning outcomes, it appears as though these concerns are largely correct. A massive national-level survey conducted by the educational non-governmental organization (NGO) Pratham—known as the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)—indicates that, in 2008, only 67% of children in grade 3–5 could read grade 1 level text or higher in their own language, and that that only 55% of children in grade 3–5 could do subtraction or more (see Table 8.1).[15]

Despite a rhetorical commitment to quality, the majority of efforts in India to achieve universal education have centered overwhelmingly on enrolling children and not on providing meaningful education that would keep enrolled students in school and ensure that they learn while they are there.[16] The retention rates and learning outcomes exhibited by the Indian system have made clear for the SSA and other stakeholders the need for a more substantial focus on quality in primary education planning.[17] Correspondingly, within key international commitments to EFA such as the Dakar Declaration and the MDGs, securing high-quality education is increasingly seen as a highly valued objective since reducing poverty

Table 8.1 **Enrollment for Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and India Based on Pratham's National Survey Data (ASER 2008) for Ages 6–14 Based on School Type**[131]

	2008			
State	*Gov't*	*Private*	*Other*	*Total enrollment*
Himachal Pradesh	75.1	24.3	0.1	99.5
Uttar Pradesh	56.4	35.9	2.1	94.4
India	**71.9**	**22.5**	**1.3**	**95.7**

"Other" schools include *madrassas* and other informal school programs targeting children with disabilities and difficult-to-reach children (i.e., migrants). All figures are percentages based on representative samples (Himachal Pradesh, *n* = 9,003; Uttar Pradesh, *n* = 78,269; India, *n* = 51,0985)

and inequality, improving health and nutrition, and increasing social participation and empowerment, are all linked to the spread of quality education.[18]

As part of the international efforts addressing primary education there have increasingly been calls to expand governance and educational resources by fostering partnerships between governments and NGOs to address quality issues at the local level more effectively.[19] The following case study focuses on a state–NGO partnership between India's largest educational NGO, Pratham, and the governments of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Himachal Pradesh (HP) in Northern India. Pratham has created and implemented state-specific quality improvement programs in an effort to improve quality and raise the learning achievements of marginalized students in government schools.

Understanding the challenges that Pratham faces and assessing whether their programs have been successful in overcoming obstacles to quality improvement in each state's particular context offers important insight not only for education planning in India but also for similar efforts around the world. The central question of the study is: How successful have Pratham's programs and collaborative efforts with state governments been at improving education quality and delivering meaningful education in India? The unit of analysis will be *Nai Disha* and *Adhaar*, two of Pratham's collaborative programs with the state. *Adhaar* aimed to eradicate illiteracy and innumeracy among children at the lowest learning levels in HP and to improve the math and reading skills of children in grades 2–5. *Nai Disha* focused on increasing the reading, comprehension, and arithmetic learning levels of children in grade 1 and 2 across the state of UP, with a strong focus on the weakest students. Both programs were implemented with an innovative focus on highly engaging and participatory activities and continuous monitoring and assessment.

We argue that the success of these initiatives is in affecting education policy through advocacy, changing state behavior, and raising the consciousness of people and governments regarding vital education issues rather than the direct influence of the program's inputs. Fundamentally, given India's context, we also argue that an effective NGO–state partnership needs to recognize that the bulk of the responsibility of public good delivery must ultimately come from the government.

Background

NGO–STATE PARTNERSHIPS AND QUALITY EDUCATION

The partnership between Pratham and the state governments of UP and HP is reflective of the global trend since the 1990s of increasing NGO involvement in the development strategies of low- and middle-income countries. This strategy often involves NGO–state collaboration for the delivery of public services. It is estimated that there are over 1 million active nonprofit organizations operating in India, earning the country the reputation of being "the NGO capital of the world."[20] The rise in the number of NGOs in India has been attributed to several factors, including the state's failure as a development agency, the tensions caused by fiscal irresponsibility and increasing public debt, the retreat of the state from economic development in favor of market forces, and international linkages created by globalization.[21]

In the education sector specifically, "the general public today," according to one well-respected Indian educationist, "are [*sic*] systematically losing faith that they will get any public service called education in this country."[22] Non-governmental organizations, along with private schools, have emerged to fill the perceived gap in provision. Interestingly, much of the impetus for NGO involvement in India has come from the government itself, possibly as a way to compete with private provision.[23] One prominent researcher noted that there have been contradictory pressures on governments to, on the one hand, privatize or "NGO-ize" public services and, on the other hand, improve their own capabilities in service provision.[24]

Non-governmental organization involvement in public service delivery is subject to much debate. In India, the level of insulation of public institutions and their bureaucratic "inertia" combined with the sheer magnitude of the country's development problems are often cited as factors that curtail the impact of even the most well-funded and far-reaching NGOs.[25] Additionally, the massive monetary investment made by the central government in SSA can make the influence of education NGOs seem negligible. However, NGOs have been noted for introducing innovations, providing external inputs, and otherwise informing the education system in ways that governments cannot. Non-governmental

organizations are therefore seen as capable of filling gaps in service provision and strengthening moves toward reaching quality universal education.

PRATHAM'S PURPOSE AND ACTIVITY

Philosophy

The Indian educational NGO Pratham has made education quality and learning achievement central to its programming and partnerships with state governments. Pratham's philosophy is to be a supporter of the government rather than a critic, as it seeks to strengthen the capabilities of government schools and mobilize support for quality universal primary education.[26] In this vein, Pratham engages with existing structures and networks including the government, community members and organizations, and corporate and international donors. According to Pratham, "these partnerships intend to foster sustainability and ownership, inspire new ways of thinking about problems, and, most importantly, reach as many children with high-quality programs as possible."[27]

Pratham engages in a three-pronged strategy to influence how government schools operate. As shown in Figure 8.1, Pratham attempts to mobilize the state's SSA and the local community while itself directly engaging schools through training programs, monitoring, and material/pedagogical inputs.[28] This allows the government, through the SSA, and corporate and international donors through

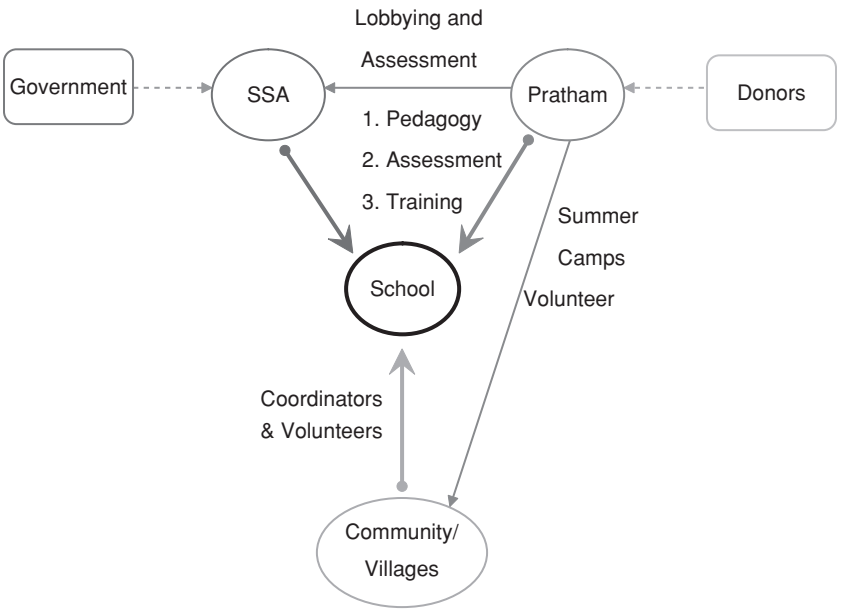

Figure 8.1 Pratham's three-pronged strategy to influence government.

Pratham, to have a top-down influence on the education system while community members, empowered by their involvement in Pratham's programs, can place pressure from the bottom-up. Every part of this overall strategy is meant to be flexible and adaptable to local contexts. Although this case study focuses on the NGO–state collaborative aspect of the Pratham's education initiative, much of its programming is effectively outside of the government system. For example, community programs such as summer camps, the recruiting of volunteer teachers, and the production of learning materials generally occur outside of state auspices even though they are meant to support the quality of government provision.

Pedagogy

The three pillars at the core of Pratham's strategy for improving education quality and outcomes are innovative pedagogy, training programs to implement this pedagogy, and vigorous evaluation programs to assess outcomes. Pratham believes that reducing dropouts is a function of improving learning levels. Pratham's pedagogy contains a strong ideological emphasis that places the child at the center of education and focuses on individual progression, especially among those children who exhibit the lowest levels of learning achievement.[29] This is done with accelerated reading and math learning techniques that, in theory, will enable students to move on to higher-level curriculum with greater ease and confidence.

This pedagogy was designed primarily to break down deeply entrenched barriers between the teacher and the student, pervasively found to be a principal determinant of poor instruction in government schools.[30] Thus, basic math and language learning units are based on highly energetic and participatory activities.[31] For language and literacy skills, Pratham developed a curriculum of game- and activity-based learning that utilized various inputs, such as flashcards with letters and words printed on them, *barakhadi*[32] posters, "story cards" containing both short and long texts, and colorful story books designed to engage children through questions, physical activity, and elaboration.[33] In addition, many activities require children to write answers on the chalkboard, wall, or ground. Arithmetic activities center on the use of simple yet engaging participatory tools such as straws and elastic bands and play money.[34] The inclusion of these participatory and "fun" activities has resulted in a unique pedagogy—dubbed "play-way"—that won Pratham the 2000 Global Development Network Award sponsored by the World Bank and the Government of Japan as one of the top three "most innovative development projects" for its ability to achieve quality enhancement.[35]

Training

Pratham's ability to operationalize its method and disseminate its vision of quality education was largely dependent on its teacher training sessions. Besides introducing Pratham's pedagogical innovations to the state's educators, the training sessions provided virtually the only opportunity for Pratham to convince teachers that the quality initiative was a worthwhile endeavor. This was vital for

instilling belief in the system and ensuring wide-scale implementation. Other than the logistics of organizing the intensive training sessions, the biggest hurdle to overcome for Pratham was the cynicism of teachers, many of whom would have seen countless, well-intentioned government and non-governmental programs come and go without substantial changes.[36]

Initial training sessions—referred to as "Master Teacher Trainer" sessions—were carried out in 4-day blocks followed by monthly 1- or 2-day "refresher" sessions for feedback and problem-solving.[37] Much of the training was devoted to how to conduct learning-level testing. Trainees were able to apply the methods they learned during "field trips" to local government schools, which allowed unforeseen problems or issues that arose in the learning environment to be directly addressed.

Importantly, subsequent levels of training down the cascading organizational structure (see Figure 8.2A and B) always involved less time, less field work, and an increased focus on motivating fatigued volunteers and teachers. A major concern regarding Pratham's training is the loss of information, technique, and ideology from one teacher to the next as the cascading training process progresses. One senior-level Pratham official contended that, as important as the pedagogical innovations and learning materials were, the main point of every training session

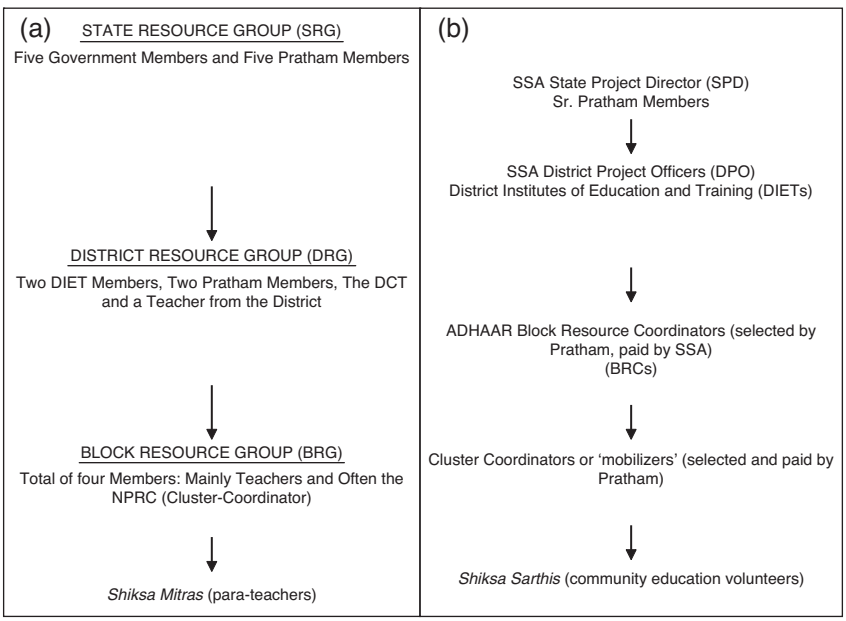

Figure 8.2 (A) Cascading resource group structure of *Nai Disha. (B)* Cascading organizational framework of *Adhaar*.

was to sensitize teachers and the community to the quality imperative and to make explicit the low learning achievement of their students. He asserted that if teachers are aware of the basics of Pratham's method and see how it corresponds to problem areas highlighted through testing, improvement will occur regardless of whether the full training regimen is passed on.

Evaluation and Assessment

A critical part of Pratham's training sessions involves teaching evaluation methods. Pratham's evaluation methods were designed as a means of assessing the program generally, but more importantly as a tool to situate each child in a specific learning level category.[38] These categories are meant to accurately reflect a child's stage of educational achievement, allowing the instructor to understand the educational needs of the child throughout the program.[39] Pratham's evaluation methods also serve a critical function in national assessments. Since 2005, Pratham has organized the yearly publication of the ASER, an ambitious national-level survey of India's primary education system that serves as a third-party check on data collected by the Indian government. The production of the ASER report has gained tremendous legitimacy and now garners considerable media coverage at its annual release.[40] Part of this legitimacy comes from its tacit acceptance by some government bureaucracies and support from large external donors such as Google.org, OxfamNovib, and UNICEF.[41]

Pratham has now implemented its quality education initiative in 21 out of 28 states in India, allowing it to work with and reach millions of children across the country.[42]

HIMACHAL PRADESH AND UTTAR PRADESH: GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT AND EDUCATION CHALLENGES

Although the educational systems in HP and UP experience similar difficulties that are typical of India, each is at the opposite end of the spectrum of relative success. For example, literacy rates in both states remain well below international standards. The most recent census data from 2001 indicates a male literacy rate of 70% in UP, compared to the national average of 76%, and an even lower female literacy rate of 43%, with a far more substantial gap from the national female average of 54%.[43] Male, female, and total adult literacy in HP stand at 86%, 68%, and 77%, respectively, which, although still objectively low and gender-inequitable, out-performs not only UP but the neighboring states of Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, and Haryana. Indeed, HP's literacy has consistently been at or near the top of the all-India rankings since 1981.[44] Furthermore, according to government statistics, HP has effectively achieved universal enrollment.[45] Although UP's enrollment in both government and private schools is at 94.4% (see Table 8.1), only 67% of those children regularly attended class, which partially accounts for

learning levels that are well below both HP and national averages. In 2006, the year that Pratham's programs were introduced in both states, only 51% of children in grades 3 to 5 in UP could read level 1 text or higher in their own language, compared to 74% in HP and 66% nationally. Furthermore, only 47% of children in these grades could perform subtraction or more in UP, compared to 72% for HP and 65% nationally.[46,47]

The two states also differ greatly on several indicators of educational quality. A 2005 survey of 3,700 schools in 20 major states indicated that, in UP, government school teachers were absent 26.3% of the time, above HP's absentee rate of 21.2% and the Indian average of 24.8%.[48] In terms of facilities, 16% of UP's schools do not have safe drinking water and 46.6% of schools do not have a useable washroom. Last, if all UP students enrolled in school were to be in attendance, pupil–teacher ratios would average 59.4:1.[49] HP, on the other hand, is frequently cited as an Indian success story and consistently does better than its counterparts not only in terms of education, but also in overall human development and economic growth, ranking among the top states in India in all three categories.[50] According to the 1999 PROBE survey, it is not uncommon to find perfectly functioning schools with single-grade classrooms, active teachers, sturdy infrastructure, and engaged students.[51]

In terms of socioeconomic environments, HP is largely a rural state that has a higher than average Scheduled Caste (SC) and, in a few districts, Scheduled Tribe (ST)[52] population, which are demographic characteristics that usually correlate with lower literacy and worse educational outcomes.[53] UP stands out as having one of the most unequal social, economic, and political environments in the country. Endemic levels of poverty, pervasive issues of caste, and some of the most extreme gender gaps in the world are all deeply ingrained within UP society.[54] Due to the enormity of its population—estimated at 186 million people as of 2007 and 30 times that of HP—changes in UP's education system can have a profound impact on the lives and futures of millions on a global scale.[55] If regarded as its own country, UP would be one of the world's most populated and underperforming; thus, in global efforts toward EFA, UP plays a significant role.

Results

In HP, Pratham piloted *Adhaar* in 2,104 schools in various locations between September and December 2006, before scaling up the following year to run in every government primary school (10,613 in total) across HP's 12 vastly different districts.[56] The average enrollment per school was 50, which meant that, in 2007, Pratham directly engaged over 500,000 students with its rapid learning techniques and materials.[57] This was the first time the state had directly partnered with an NGO on such a large scale.[58]

In UP, *Nai Disha* focused on increasing grade 1 and 2 students' learning levels in reading and comprehension as well as basic arithmetic skills. In its first year, *Nai Disha* ran from November 2006 to April 2007 in 20 of UP's 69 districts, directly engaging 45,000 schools, 55,000 instructors, and 1.17 million students from across the state.[59] In its second year (2007–2008), *Nai Disha* ran for 4 months in 20 additional districts, increasing the coverage of students by 865,000 for a total of over 2 million children in 40 diverse rural and urban districts.[60]

ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

To cover such vast areas and numbers of children in both states, Pratham implemented its programs using a top-down organizational structure that mirrored that of each state's SSA. This would generally include, from top to bottom, education secretariats and SSA directors at the state-level, district project officers (DPOs) and district institutes of education and training (DIETs),[61] block resource coordinators (BRCs), and cluster resource coordinators (CRCs), village education committees (VECs), and *panchayats* (village councils) at the local level.[62] Generally, within SSA's framework everything from policy implementation to fiscal disbursement for salaries and infrastructure costs channels down the structure until it is in the hands of VECs and *panchayats*.[63] Pratham's framework involved a collaborative effort between its own parallel structure and the SSA from the state level down to the district level, in HP, and the higher cluster level (i.e., groups of villages/communities and nearby schools) in UP. It was a depth of teamwork and cooperation that had never before been attempted between an NGO and the SSA for a quality initiative in either state.

The prominent organizational feature of *Nai Disha* was resource groups comprised of a varying membership from the state and Pratham that were formed at all stages, save the cluster and village levels (see Figure 8.2A).[64] The responsibilities of each resource group were decided at the state level by a coordinator from the SSA and Pratham. For both the 2006–2007 year and the 2007–2008 year, the state resource group (SRG) was given the tasks of overall program design and implementation of *Nai Disha*, including goal setting, training, assessment, and analysis. The District Resource Group(DRG) was responsible for selecting and training the BRGs, ensuring timely and systematic evaluation, and facilitating academic support and guidance for all areas of the program.[65] Last, the BRGs were directly responsible for the training of the para-teachers *(shiksha mitras)* employed to teach grades 1 and 2, as well as for facilitating and leading monthly feedback meetings.[66] This organizational structure aimed to make *Nai Disha's* format easily replicable, efficient, and locally responsive.

In HP, the responsibility of implementation, goal-setting, and monitoring for *Adhaar* was bestowed directly on the SSA at the state and district levels, with constant interaction and support from Pratham members (see Figure 8.2B).

GOAL-SETTING, MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

The implementation of Pratham's in-school programs involved goal-setting, monitoring of the program, and learning-level assessment. For both *Adhaar* and *Nai Disha*, coordination and discussion at the state level established program objectives. Those at the state level believed that all goals set by the program needed to be easily understood by all persons involved.[67] Additionally, it was agreed that these goals should correspond to preexisting expectations of learning achievement for children in each state, based on the common curriculum, and, most importantly, that the goals would be realistic and motivating.[68] Therefore, *Adhaar* and *Nai Disha* did not seek to extend or expand the existing expectations and goals of basic education, but to support the learning levels and achievements of the earliest learners so that, as they progressed through the basic education system, they would have more of an opportunity to meet these expectations and goals.

Based on these understandings, it was mandated that, in the first year of *Adhaar*, teachers were to eradicate illiteracy and innumeracy among the weakest students and have all children in grades 2–5 functional, at the very least, at a grade 2 level in math and reading within a timeline of 3–4 months. These objectives were thought to be very achievable, given HP's relatively high performance in education. For UP, it was mandated that, by the end of *Nai Disha,* all children in grade 1 would be able to write simple words, read and write sentences, and complete basic addition and subtraction equations with numbers ranging from 1 to 20. For grade 2, it was mandated that all children would be able to read stories, write easy sentences, and perform basic addition and subtraction equations with numbers ranging from 1 to 100.[69] In *Nai Disha's* second year, these goals were narrowed slightly due to a decision to target the large numbers of children in the "nothing" levels.[70] To reflect these changes, the writing components for both standards were dropped.

A system of monitoring was implemented to ensure adherence, quality, and motivation throughout the program's duration. In both states, pedagogical and administrative personnel from the government and Pratham participated in monitoring. In the first year of *Nai Disha*, all Pratham members of the SRG conducted daily school visits for the duration of the campaign. They also met with DIET heads, district magistrates, and basic education officers within the visited districts.[71] Moreover, for the month of March during the program's first year, the entire SRG conducted school visits in every district and, based on these visits, formed district reports that were discussed and disseminated with district officials.[72] In both of *Nai Disha's* runs, the primary role of all members of each DRG was to conduct monitoring within the schools throughout the program's duration, to maintain and ensure the quality of operations.[73]

Another fundamental aspect of implementation centered on Pratham's system of evaluation and assessment. During all runs of *Adhaar* and *Nai Disha*, children's

learning levels were systematically tested across all districts to assess the cognitive impact of the quality initiative. Para-teachers or volunteers conducted a standardized baseline test before the learning modules of the program began and reported the results to the block and district levels.[74] A mid-term test was conducted in the same manner to monitor progress and ensure that teachers were aware of and actively engaged in tracking children's learning levels. A final test was conducted at the conclusion of the programs' run to assess their overall impact on children's learning levels.

Successes

PRATHAM'S INPUTS AS EFFECTIVE TOOLS FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Evaluation

Pratham's rigorous standardized evaluation and monitoring system was a crucial input for basic education in the participating districts. The majority of instructors interviewed in UP stated that, before the introduction of *Nai Disha*, they did not utilize a standard form of testing to evaluate their students.[75] When asked how they ascertained their students' learning levels and academic progress, many teachers commented that they were able to intuitively evaluate their students through daily classroom interaction.[76] A small number of instructors administered evaluation tests, but these tests were most often written by the teachers themselves and not standardized across districts, making their results incomparable and uninformative from a policy perspective.[77] Additionally, for the many students in HP and UP who cannot read and write, written tests have little utility. When questioned about the evaluation component of Pratham's initiatives, all instructors who were knowledgeable about the programs underscored the particular success of this input and stated that they had seen significant improvement in their students from the results of the baseline test.[78] Learning level assessment, as described by one instructor from *Nai Disha,* worked because it allowed "level-appropriate teaching based on assessment."[79] Similar statements were echoed independently by several other instructors in both states.

Nai Disha and *Adhaar* represented most teachers' first opportunity to concretely place their students in a defined progression of cognitive achievement and use these data to prescribe the suitable method of teaching to boost each student's learning levels. Teachers also began to feel accountable for the changes in levels from the baseline to final tests. Additionally, for the first time at the state level, the SSA had relevant learning achievement data available to track and compare the progress of entire districts and identify where best to concentrate future efforts.[80] The implementation of a standardized assessment program that was operational on a massive scale demonstrated for teachers and policy-makers the importance and utility of individual student learning level assessment and program monitoring.

Pedagogy

A second success from the programs was the effect of their pedagogy and associated learning materials on children's learning enhancement. One teacher noted that "the [old] resources are here, but [teaching] by story, by playing and singing, these techniques were not there. But now trying them, [the children] are now interested to learn, so the learning standards [have] improved. . . . "[81] According to another instructor, "earlier the teachers were teaching only the front row children [who] were paying attention and progressing, but with these techniques the children in the last row are even learning because they are paying attention and they are participating."[82] The importance of Pratham's learning materials in stoking such engagement cannot be understated, especially in UP where textbooks, reading books, flashcards, and posters had been almost nonexistent until the provision of basic workbooks in 2006 with aid from UNICEF.[83] Therefore, the generation of these materials at the local level for hundreds of thousands of children across the state represented an educational milestone. The learning materials also contributed to teachers buying into Pratham's method at master training sessions. Asked about the materials at one such training session, all senior government school teachers remarked on how they represented a vast improvement over what was previously available and would be valuable tools in helping underachieving children progress.

Training

The hands-on training for imparting Pratham's pedagogy was a third instrumental factor in the program's success. Pratham's innovative focus on training all members within the program was completely innovative. This widespread training ensured that the experiences found within schools would directly inform and impact policy-makers, teachers, coordinators, and volunteers participating in the program and sensitize all those involved in education provision to issues of quality. This was crucial since many key individuals running the program at the state level had never before stepped inside a classroom. Therefore, Pratham's inputs served the dual purpose of raising consciousness and providing the tools to address the issues that came to light through training and testing.

Impact on the Community

Finally, Pratham's education initiatives were successful in fostering community involvement and providing a sense of local ownership. Specifically, the participation of the lower levels of the organizational structure in the creation and dispersion of learning materials and in the implementation of the program created a greater sense of community involvement and teacher engagement.

Pratham's encouragement of teachers at the school level and DIET officials at the district level to be involved in the creation of learning materials was generally viewed as a pioneering accomplishment. *Nai Disha* was the first initiative of its kind in UP to provide space for active participation of those working most closely

with the program, and it led to the creation of reading materials for children in entire districts independent of the program's funding.[84,85]

For HP especially, it was evident from field visits that the responsibility for the success of the program was largely on the shoulders of locals. The point of interaction among volunteers, coordinators, and the children occurred at the lower levels of the organizational structure, and the efficacy of this interface was dependent on the commitment of those who filled these positions. This was apparent for both in-school programs and Pratham's summer camps, which were out-of-school programs run by volunteers.[86]

Young volunteers, most of whom were not formally trained to be educators, were the focal point of implementation in HP, and they used games, play money, field trips, and whatever else their imaginations could come up with to teach children math and reading skills. Of the visited sites, the attendance level, active engagement of students, use of Pratham's learning material, and resemblance of teaching activity to Pratham's "play-way" pedagogy tended to positively correlate with the skill, ingenuity, and level of engagement of the volunteer teacher. This in turn was highly dependent on the commitment of block coordinators and, especially, the mobilizers.[87] In the most successful district observed, the mobilizer spent at least 6 hours a day ensuring that things were running smoothly and traveling to as many sites as possible at great personal expense.

Partnering for Education: Opening the Door for NGO Collaboration

The innovative structure of the partnership upon which the programs were based was another central achievement, according to those who worked on the initiatives. The blending of the state's and Pratham's particular resources and areas of expertise, and the wider net of civic and government ownership cast through their partnership, created a relatively effective and efficient partnership that could serve as a model for other Indian states.[88] Moreover, the feasibility and success of the SSA's integration of Pratham's initiatives set the precedent for greater collaboration in the future.[89]

The division of labor and resources and the shared vision and goals for the program were continually noted as key features that appealed to the HP and UP governments.[90] Pratham's offer to share the program's costs was an especially important draw for the UP government.[91] When asked about how private collaborations like *Nai Disha* affected the SSA, one of the top SRG coordinators from the SSA commented, "Other NGOs and other partners always take interest in money, so we can't [collaborate with them]. But Pratham is different from other NGOs because they're funded from other sources . . . they have a lot of material to teach us, and they have given free-of-cost consultancy with us."[92] Another draw for both states was Pratham's educational expertise, its pedagogical inputs, and its human resources. As a top-level SSA official noted, "Pratham is a leading organization in the area of education, so it was easier to work with them because they had an expertise in education . . . and with them it was easier to carry out the studies and

the development of the program or the modules, then the training of the teachers and then the monitoring and supervision also."[93]

Pratham members echoed these sentiments, as the benefits of working with the SSA were seen as equally attractive and integral to the programs' functioning. In particular, the cascading structure of the SSA's organizational, human, and financial resources was a massive incentive for the implementation of such comprehensive, large-scale programs, as was the support and interest of the leadership in the SSA at the time.[94]

Based on the strength of the initial partnership between Pratham and each state's SSA, the opportunities for further collaboration and the desire of the state to seek out innovative partnerships grew. Both states reinstated their partnership with Pratham for a follow-up year after the pilot year and implemented a series of additional projects. The mutual capacity-building, motivation, and collaboration undergirding the initial Pratham–state collaboration led to scaling-up of the program over time and, in HP, to the introduction of Pratham-led pilot projects in English language instruction, quality initiatives for higher-level children (called *Adhaar* plus), and the creation and testing of newer teaching games and learning materials.[95]

In sum, *Nai Disha* and *Adhaar* could not have been undertaken by either Pratham or the SSA exclusively. The structural, fiscal, and human resources and expertise provided by the Pratham–SSA partnership fundamentally enabled the acceptance and implementation of the programs and lent largely to their successes and expansion.

Challenges

TOP-HEAVY RELIANCE AND THE PARADOX OF STRONG LEADERSHIP

Although the Pratham–SSA collaboration is seen as a success in terms of inputs and innovations, changing perceptions, fostering community involvement, and opening the door for effective NGO partnerships, some aspects of the programs impeded success. Specifically, both *Adhaar* and *Nai Disha* exhibited signs of unsustainability and incomplete implementation. These and other failures were directly related to the mixed effects of strong, top-down leadership and the cascading implementation structure used in both states. Paradoxically, although strong leadership was essential for getting both programs up and running, the top-down structure of implementation led to a relationship in which the top levels relied on the often insufficiently prepared and ill-supported lower levels to carry out the program. At the same time, the lower levels required unsustainable pressure and support from top levels to remain effective.

Key individuals from Pratham and the SSA, motivated by a commitment and belief in their ability to change the fundamental tenets of primary education,

worked tirelessly to push for the acceptance of the programs and to make sure that they ran as smoothly as possible. Interviews and observations with those involved in the initial implementation from both the government and Pratham revealed the depth of commitment and personal sacrifice. For example, to get the governments of UP and HP to buy into the initiatives, Pratham workers would often relocate from New Delhi to government centers in UP and HP, to maintain a constant dialogue with local offices.[96] Interviews with Pratham workers and government officials revealed that two senior SSA bureaucrats in UP and one in HP played a fundamental role in the initial acceptance and implementation of the programs due to their dedication to increasing education quality. It was universally acknowledged that the programs would not have been implemented without these individuals, and their transfers away from education posts to other offices in the government, as well as the relocation of Pratham staff to other projects and areas, contributed greatly to declines in the programs' efficiency.

Following these changes in leadership there would inevitably be a period during which commitment to implementation of policies, guidelines, and monitoring procedures relaxed as pressure and motivation waned. With changes in personnel during *Nai Disha's* second year, the role of the SRG was lessened as they no longer traveled across districts to ensure its proper implementation as they had in the first year.[97] This resulted in critical gaps in program implementation. Most notably, the external monitoring of *Nai Disha*, which was mandated to be carried out solely by the DRGs in 2007–2008, was not followed in many of the districts simply due to a lack of commitment.[98] Not surprisingly, Pratham's own evaluations found that the implementation of *Nai Disha* was not as thorough and successful as it was in its initial year.[99]

PIECEMEAL IMPLEMENTATION AND THE ABSENCE OF LASTING IMPACTS

The central and most striking limitations of *Nai Disha* were the inconsistent implementation of the program and the absence of lasting pedagogical and curricular impacts at the school level. The fact that any improvements in learning levels occurred with *Nai Disha* despite the incomplete implementation of the program is a testament to Pratham's emphasis on sensitizing teachers to the quality imperative, more so than implanting pedagogical techniques.

In almost all the schools visited in UP, very few instructors seemed to have understood and implemented the program wholly according to the main principles and framework outlined. In all but two of the schools visited, *Nai Disha* had been implemented in both 2006–2007 and 2007–2008. With the experience of running the program for 2 consecutive years, instructors should have had the opportunity to become familiar with the pedagogy and curriculum, assuming there was little teacher turnover. However, observations and interviews conducted with instructors during school visits clearly illustrated the inconsistent

and often incorrect implementation of *Nai Disha*. In almost all of the schools visited, upon first entering the classroom no "teaching" was occurring at all. Teachers were usually seated at a desk merely managing children who were left to work independently in notebooks, which many children did not even have.

Although most *Shiksa Mitras* were able to speak about the program in detail, they were often failing to use the central aspects of Pratham's philosophy in their teaching.[100] In fact, none of the schools visited in UP was utilizing interactive game-based education techniques or a child-centered pedagogy in the classroom at the time of observation. In many schools, posters, flashcards, *tilis*, and bundles were kept in separate rooms not in use, or locked up in cupboards or closets.[101] One *Shiksa Mitra* commented that she kept the flashcards that she had made by hand at home because the children ripped them up and made them "messy" by using them.[102] In the vast majority of schools in which a demonstration of teaching activity was given, the extent of interaction between the child and the teacher consisted of the teacher pointing to a poster or a flashcard and asking the children to call out the number, letter, or word in unison.[103] In the exceptional instances of schools that encouraged physical movement of children, in accordance with Pratham's "play-way" methodology, only three or four children were participating in an activity—usually picking up a flashcard, or writing a correct answer on the chalk board—while the majority of the class sat and watched.[104] Consequently, many children were unable to see what was occurring and remained completely inactive in the learning process.

In several schools, instructors explained that when implementing the program only children of the lowest learning levels were engaged while children considered competent were left to work on their own in notebooks or utilized to monitor the other children.[105] In a school that gave a particularly good demonstration of a *Nai Disha* activity, instructors raced to put up posters and pull out implements that had been locked away and out of use before the classroom was entered for casual observation.[106] In another school, instructors proudly showed off an entire classroom that had been decorated with posters, streamers, paintings, and flashcards to be used strictly for *Nai Disha* activities for students of all ages throughout the school year. However, during the school visit, the model room remained empty, and traditional management style and instructor-based teaching continued in the other classrooms.[107] Therefore, even in schools that understood how to use the implements and techniques of *Nai Disha* and that claimed to value their benefit, the motivation to carry on these practices when not being watched or instructed was not apparent.

Importantly, in 14 of the 25 schools visited, grades 1 and 2 were taught in the same class using the same activities.[108] In many of these schools, and the overwhelming majority of schools visited in the urban districts, grades 1–5 were in the same classroom, meaning that learning environments contained children ranging from 6 to 12 years of age. Such situations were antithetical to Pratham's notion of grouping children according to abilities and focusing the intervention accordingly.

Instructors noted that these situations were not ideal or by choice, but necessary due to the incredibly high pupil–teacher ratios within the school and the dearth of facilities in which to conduct separate classes. A *Shiksa Mitra* instructing both grades 1 and 2 in the same class candidly acknowledged that the use of multigrade teaching negatively affected the children's learning rates, but was resigned to the notion that "nothing [could] be done."[109] The helplessness in the *Shiksa Mitra's* tone is reflective of the structural obstacles that exist in UP, which are a challenge to *Nai Disha* rather than an outcome of the program, and the inability of any input—government or NGO—to fully overcome them.

THE POLITICS OF NGO INVOLVEMENT

Another challenge that the programs faced was the contentious nature of Indian politics. The Indian political system creates little incentive for politicians to enact policies and programs that require long-term investment and planning since results occur too late for incumbents to benefit from them.[110] There is more incentive for newcomers to scrap those programs associated with previous office holders—regardless of their efficacy—in an attempt to gain recognition for their own initiatives. Short terms in bureaucratic posts can also cause discontinuity and inconsistency as programs and policies tend to end when individuals most concerned with their proper implementation are no longer involved.[111]

The vicissitudes that result from this dynamic were present in both HP and UP. Immediately after the pilot years of both programs, state-level elections installed new governments. In UP, two head SSA officials were relocated within the government at approximately the same time, and HP's SSA state director was transferred after only 9 months in office. These changes occurred even though the transferred officials were responsible for bringing in the respective programs and, in the case of HP, would have rather stayed to see the programs through.[112] Even though interviews with most state-level officials indicated a high level of regard for the partnership with Pratham, opposition politicians did not continue their predecessors' programs.

State-Level Politics

In HP, the debates regarding Pratham's presence revolved around three issues. First, it was questioned whether an NGO should be so heavily involved in the delivery of education; second, the use of public SSA funds to support Pratham's initiatives was strongly criticized; and third, state officials questioned whether Pratham was actually serving the needs of primary-level children.

The question of NGO involvement in the delivery of education has both normative and practical dimensions. Normatively, many state-level bureaucrats were concerned that education should be the sole responsibility of the state. Despite the state's undeniably poor performance in providing quality education and the successes that some NGOs have had, the belief that the role of NGOs should be

minimal led many state officials interviewed to advocate for the devolution of the partnership with Pratham and the rapid absorption of the programs into state structures. According to one senior education official in HP, "you cannot go with NGOs for a long time. Naturally [the] state has to take responsibility somewhere today or tomorrow."[113] The official further emphasized that "there must be strength within the system to move on [from the partnership]."

Pratham's interventions were also becoming a political liability. The perception was different in UP, where the state benefited greatly from Pratham's resources, than in HP, where the state's education resources were used to fund a large portion of *Adhaar's* management structure. Whereas Pratham utilized the entire SSA education infrastructure to manage *Nai Disha*, *Adhaar* selected 118 of their own BRCs and paid them with SSA funds. Since HP already had employees at the block level serving a similar function for the SSA, questions arose among government critics regarding the necessity of paying Pratham's coordinators. Additionally, Pratham's motive for using public money was questioned since it was known that the organization was well-resourced. Current SSA officials expressed concern regarding the transparency and accountability of the organization's use of public funds.[114]

State officials also questioned the applicability of Pratham's pedagogical method to the needs of HP's primary-level students. There was concern that higher-level children's learning achievement would suffer from the program's focus on the lowest-level students. According to one senior teacher in the Shimla district of HP, the implementation of *Adhaar* resulted in the completion of only 80% of the curriculum for higher-level children compared to previous years. This was a problem for grade 5 students, who would have to write year-end exams to move on to secondary school. The teacher noted that this issue was reflected in the opinion of parents, who expressed great satisfaction with *Adhaar* if their children were in lower grades, but tended to be dissatisfied if their child was at a higher level. These concerns prompted state-level SSA officials to attempt to expand the scope of *Adhaar* to include quality improvement measures for higher-level children in a program known as "*Adhaar* Plus."[115] Although Pratham claimed to be developing measures to address these concerns, state officials consistently expressed the opinion that the development and implementation of *Adhaar* Plus should be a government-only endeavor. As one education official noted, "earlier we were taking the help of the NGO, this year we may or may not take [their help], because [the] NGO may not be involved, but *Adhaar* will go [on nonetheless]."

Local-Level Politics

According to the former SSA official most responsible for bringing in *Adhaar*, there was relatively little resistance to a partnership with Pratham at the policy level; rather, "the resistance came when we started going to the school."[116] Although the majority of opinions regarding *Adhaar* were positive, interviews revealed a critical number of teachers who perceived the program to be an indictment against their abilities and viewed the influx of enthusiastic volunteers

as a threat to job security. These teachers perceived Pratham to be an organization that was "coming from outside, evaluating them and then presenting a bad picture about them."[117] According to the former SSA official, "there was some component of jealousy . . . some kind of a feeling that they [*Shiksha Sarthis*] are giving [better] results [while] these teachers are being paid so high [*sic*] and are not giving results."[118]

It is important to contextualize this tension. For government school teachers in HP, the privileges of being a public servant are excellent and include pension and health care benefits, decent monthly wages with regular pay increases, and the security of permanent employment that is not subject to performance assessments or attendance.[119] Public service employment is extremely difficult to achieve and thus highly coveted. As a consequence, HP has an abundance of qualified teachers, many of whom are unemployed and volunteered as *Shiksha Sarthis* in the hope that a permanent government school position would follow. Volunteers were consequently seen as trying to impinge on the territory of established teachers. However, the negative opinion of teachers typically waned upon seeing the successes of Pratham's inputs, and only a small number continued to hold an overall negative view of the program.

ACCURACY OF ASSESSMENTS

The final challenge to the programs came with the assessment procedure. As mentioned, interviews with instructors and other stakeholders suggest that quantifiable learning-level assessments were one of the most important achievements of the collaboration. However, the method in which the data were collected and the resulting assessments leave some of the purported achievements open to question.

Learning-level assessments were conducted by teachers, and the data were verified by the DRG or SRG. In such circumstances, teachers and administrators, threatened by the failure of the program, may feel motivated to produce data indicating success and may teach to the tests rather than to the needs of the child. This is a serious concern in terms of the reliability of the data, especially in UP, a state known for endemic corruption and falsification of official data.[120] Although steps were taken to mitigate falsification through selective blind testing verification and cross-verification, these concerns were still acknowledged by various participants at the top level of *Nai Disha's* framework. One DIET official in UP suggested that they felt assured that "seventy-five to eighty percent of the data is correct and perfect," yet acknowledged that it was likely that the remaining data could be flawed.[121] The standard belief of participants at all levels of the program seemed to be that, although falsification was a possibility, it could be controlled through the verification procedures. However, because the external random monitoring mandated to be conducted by all DRGs was not undertaken in the 20 new districts for the 2007–2008 run of the program, that year's data are further subject to questioning.

Table 8.2A **Pratham Baseline and Final Learning-Level Results for Grade 1 Children in the First and Second Years of *Nai Disha* (Reading)**[132]

	Grade 1					
	Original 20 districts Pilot year (2006–2007)		*Original 20 districts Second year (2007–2008)*		*20 new districts Second year (2007–2008)*	
Reading levels	*Baseline*	*Final*	*Baseline*	*Final*	*Baseline*	*Final*
Paragraph + stories	1.2	8.8	Incl. data	Incl. data	0.0	0.0
Sentences	1.9	13.7	Incl. data	Incl. data	1.4	13.5
Words (for second year words and above)	7.5	27.4	13.7	53.1	5.6	28.2
Letters	31.7	41.2	32.5	38.8	29.1	41.4
Nothing	**57.8**	**8.8**	**53.8**	**8.1**	**63.9**	**16.9**
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total tested (millions)	1.29	1.26	1.23	1.26	0.86	0.81

Table 8.2B: Pratham Baseline and final Learning-Level Results for Grade 1 Children in the First and Second Years of ***Nai Disha*** *(Arithmetic)*[133]

	Grade I					
	Original 20 districts Pilot year (2006–2007)		*Original 20 districts Second year (2007–2008)*		*20 new districts Second year (2007–2008)*	
Arithmetic levels	*Baseline*	*Final*	*Baseline*	*Final*	*Baseline*	*Final*
Addition and subtraction	3.4	24.3	3.1	23.6	2.8	18.4
Number recognition (21–100)	12.4	30.4	12.4	31.8	1.9	14.6
Number recognition (1–20)	22.9	35.7	28.1	36.9	36.1	55.0
Nothing	**61.3**	**9.1**	**56.4**	**7.7**	**59.2**	**12.0**
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total tested (millions)	1.29	1.26	1.23	1.26	0.86	0.82

Some stakeholders also expressed concern about the validity of statistical results in measuring learning achievement. In both years that *Nai Disha* ran, the overwhelming majority of the gains in learning-level achievements involved the movement of children from the "nothing" levels to a level one or two categories higher (see Tables 8.3A and B).[122] Children in grades 1 and 2 have received very little, if any, formal education. Therefore, a "nothing-level" child being able to recognize letters or numbers, or read simple words and perform basic calculations during his or her first year of school, may simply be due to his or her introduction into even the most basic of school environments.

After submersion in 4 months of regimented learning enhancement activities, combined with a strict focus on the improvement of learning levels, it is reasonable to expect quality initiatives like *Nai Disha* and *Adhaar* to produce results in early learners that exceed the recognition of letters or numbers. However, a state such as UP that consistently showcases abysmal learning achievements may well offer support for the programs' general success even when progress occurs at lower levels. Yet, available statistics from the program are not able to reliably illustrate that the increases in the lowest learning levels were actually due to the implementation of the initiatives, either through a control study or through a post-program assessment of children to see if the results had long-term effects.

Despite these concerns, the overwhelming feeling among the majority of stakeholders familiar with *Nai Disha* and UP's education system is one of optimism and success regarding the collaboration. One high-level Pratham member noted that "in a state like UP where there's no reading material, where a child in UP, millions of children, only gets one desk which they will use for the entire length of their primary education, where textbooks never reach [classrooms] on time . . . any progress is a huge."[123] Again, the reflections of a former high-ranking SSA bureaucrat deeply involved at the time of the inception of *Nai Disha* demonstrate an awareness of the assessment weaknesses, but also the sense of optimism brought in by Pratham:

> Whether it [the positive results] was showing up because this was a set of people [i.e., children] who had never had any input, [and] suddenly they got an input; whether it will sustain or whether the baselines were credible, these are some of the issues, which we did raise with Pratham and perhaps they looked into that as well. But, it seemed to be working and . . . there was excitement in the system at something new and worthwhile being done.[124,125,126]

Discussion

Pratham's collaborative initiatives have less to do with the efficacy of inputs and challenges of implementation than with affecting ideas on primary education

Table 8.3A **Pratham Baseline and Final Learning-Level Results for Grade 2 Children in the First and Second Years of *Nai Disha* (reading).**[134]

	Grade II					
	Original 20 districts Pilot year (2006–2007)		*Original 20 districts Second year (2007–2008)*		*20 new districts Second year (2007–2008)*	
Reading levels	*Baseline*	*Final*	*Baseline*	*Final*	*Baseline*	*Final*
Paragraph + stories	6.5	25.2	Incl. data	Incl. data	6.8	32.4
Sentences	6.9	18.1	Incl. data	Incl. data	0.0	0.0
Words (for second year Words and Above)	13.8	25.6	42.3	75.5	13.5	30.3
Letters	34.5	26.5	36.9	22.0	36.1	28.8
Nothing	**38.3**	**4.6**	**20.9**	**2.6**	**43.6**	**8.6**
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total tested (millions)	1.19	1.26	1.27	1.30	0.89	0.84

Table 8.3B **Pratham Baseline and Final Learning-Level Results for Grade 2 Children in the First and Second Years of *Nai Disha* (Arithmetic)**[135]

	Grade II					
	Original 20 districts Pilot year (2006–2007)		*Original 20 districts Second year (2007–2008)*		*20 New Districts Second year (2007–2008)*	
Arithmetic levels	*Baseline*	*Final*	*Baseline*	*Final*	*Baseline*	*Final*
Addition and subtraction	13.5	42.1	19.2	44.4	13.0	35.8
Number recognition (21–100)	18.1	27.0	25.7	29.7	6.5	18.7
Number recognition (1–20)	26.7	25.7	34.0	23.3	44.2	39.2
Nothing	**41.6**	**4.8**	**21.0**	**2.6**	**36.3**	**6.3**
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total tested (millions)	1.19	1.17	1.27	1.29	0.89	0.85

among community members, educators, and government officials. In the case of India, and especially UP, the truest test of the collaboration's success is not whether the programs were implemented perfectly, but whether consciousness building and policy changes, including recognition of the importance of quality in education, are resilient against institutional inertia and politics over time. This case suggests that NGO–state collaboration can provide an important tool for creating awareness to achieve goals and may provide resources to fill gaps in policy-making and provision.

THE DEBATE REGARDING THE USE OF NGOS IN PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY IN INDIA

Pratham is an exceptionally well-funded and resourced NGO with tremendous experience operating over vast areas and serving millions of children in hundreds of thousands of schools. Despite this scale and reach, there are questions as to whether India's problems can be addressed, even remotely, by non-governmental collaboration. Reflecting on this point, a prominent educationist, who happened to be a member of Pratham's board of governors at the time of interview, noted that:

> You can create a parallel mechanism [of education provision], it will work differently for a few years, then . . . after two-three years [when] the novelty has gone [*sic*], then they [the NGO providers] will also start behaving the same way as the larger system. Because the inertia is so heavy you cannot really stay afloat. . . If we don't really change that I don't think the social sectors in general will change. . . . [On the other hand NGOs can] contribute in terms of new ideas [and] new thinking. Pratham has been able to really bring in some new vibrancy in the field, in making people do things and then show things and demonstrate the possibility that . . . if you work you can really make children learn.[127]

Several government officials in HP considered Pratham's programs successful because they brought in innovation and an infusion of energy and enthusiasm that would continue to inform future policy directions, whether the collaboration and programs persisted or not. Pratham's original philosophy, seeking short-term engagement until the government is capable of providing quality education on its own, is an implicit recognition that lasting change will occur only if the state is willing to make the necessary changes on its own accord. As pithily stated by one educationist, "transformation can come only when the state . . . realizes that they have to transform."[128] If NGO–state collaborations are founded on this premise, it is possible that a group like Pratham can increase accountability and impact policy directions as it did in UP, with the infusion of new pedagogical techniques, and in HP, where *Adhaar* led directly to the development of *Adhaar* Plus and the English

pilot programs. According to a top-level SSA official in HP, "it was actually a result of this Pratham experiment . . . that we broadened this whole scope and started to focus on real quality issues."[129] Indeed, as a testament to such thinking, following the rise of quality initiatives across the state and largely under NGO auspices, as of 2008, a percentage of SSA funds are now earmarked solely for quality initiatives.[130]

Besides the government's philosophical openness to external input, it must also be emphasized that what was accomplished by Pratham's programs could only occur because of actual government enablement in monetary and infrastructural support. As much as private provision is increasing in India, the bulk of the responsibility of primary school provision rests with the state, which chooses the direction that primary education policy takes as well as who will have a seat at the table. Crucially, even if NGOs were to one day rival the state in fiscal strength and capacity in delivery of services, and this fiscal and resource base was to be sustainable on a long-term basis, it will still never be able to replace the state in one crucial function: accountability through democratic processes, and by extension, legitimacy. Even a massive NGO such as Pratham has no mechanism for direct accountability to the hundreds of millions of impoverished people it seeks to help. This normative side of the NGO equation is critical, and it must also be acknowledged when engaging in a dialogue concerning the future and impacts of NGO-based service provision in the realm of education.

CONSCIOUSNESS BUILDING AND CONTEXTUALIZING SUCCESS

Pratham brought profound changes in ideas and policy to the educational landscape through its collaborative programs. This is especially clear in UP, where *Nai Disha* brought unprecedented distribution of learning materials to millions of children, a committed focus from the top levels of the state to educational equity, and a standardized method of assessment to evaluate learning outcomes. Based on the wide range of interviews conducted with government officials and in schools, it is clear that Pratham's activities will likely influence policy and public demand well beyond the termination of these particular programs.

Changing fundamental perceptions about education and equity within a system of actors is tightly tied to consciousness-building, which involves sensitizing stakeholders to previously unconsidered problems or issues and giving them the tools to deal with these problems, thereby instilling a sense of empowerment among teachers and policy-makers. Such consciousness-building has been a central mandate within all of Pratham's programming. By situating the bulk of their programs outside of the government education system while being able to work within it, and by utilizing local youth as volunteers, Pratham was able to empower communities with the knowledge and tools to educate themselves and to create pressure for the government to prioritize educational equity and quality. In UP, where the education system has been characterized by extreme inertia and inequity for decades, creating this type of excitement, empowerment, and recognition

is monumental for the shape and aims of future education initiatives. Fundamentally, Pratham has planted the seeds to effect changes in government policy. Even during field visits to HP when Pratham's MOU with the government had not been renewed and the NGO's presence was minimal, interviews with state SSA officials revealed that the focused and engaged pedagogy, constant monitoring and evaluation, and passion and enthusiasm for change that Pratham had brought to the table were still observable among those working on *Adhaar* Plus and the English pilot projects.

There are, perhaps, few places facing as many obstacles toward widespread educational equity as India. The observed problems of implementation, the questions regarding some learning-level assessments, and the variable commitment on behalf of the government may legitimately be deemed problems. However, in India, and especially in regions such as UP, despite these obstacles the successes of the program that were seen can be considered a large triumph in moving quality education forward. Importantly, although this case study illustrates that NGOs may not be panaceas for leading and implementing widespread policy change in education quality, they can and do play a large role in spurring, implementing, and building support for programs and can meaningfully influence long-term policy changes. This case study offers critical lessons for countries undergoing similar moves toward educational equity, and offers hope for those facing especially monumental obstacles.

NOTES

1. Some of the major indicators of quality include sufficient levels of teacher competence and training, adequate facilities within the school such as classrooms and usable washrooms, manageable teacher–pupil ratios, inclusive education creating an equitable environment for all children, an active and child-centered pedagogy, the achievement of a standard level of cognitive learning skills, and a curriculum that is locally meaningful and relevant. Ramachandran, V. (2003). Backward and forward linkages that strengthen primary education. In V. Ramachandran (Ed.), *Getting children back to school: Case studies in primary education* (pp. 1–16). New Delhi: Sage Publications.
2. UNESCO. (2008). *Education for all global monitoring report 2009: Overcoming inequality: Why governance matters.* Paris: Oxford University Press; Bruns, B., Mingat, A., & Rakotomalala, R. (2003). *Achieving universal primary education for every child by 2015: A chance for every child.* Washington, DC: World Bank; Ramachandran. (2003). Backward and forward linkages.
3. The majority of children who have never been to school or have dropped out of school are usually those who are marginalized due to various socioeconomic inequalities such as gender inequality, poverty, and ethnicity. Therefore, children marginalized by these inequalities from basic education are often termed as "hard to reach." UNESCO. (2008). *Education for all global monitoring report 2009*, p. 17; Yadav, M. S., Bharadwaj, M., Sedwal, M., & Gaur, N. (2002). Learning conditions and learner achievement in primary schools: A review. In R. Govinda (Ed.), *India education report: A profile of basic education* (pp. 167–188). New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
4. Carlson, S. (World Bank Educationist, 2008). Interview with Aneel Brar and Ebony Bertorelli, August 8, 2008.
5. Govinda, R. (2002). Providing education for all in India: An overview. In R. Govinda (Ed.), *India education report: A profile of basic education* (pp. 1–20). New Delhi: Oxford University

Press; Kingdon, G. (2007). The progress of school education in India. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy, 23*(2), 168–195.

6. Kingdon. (2007). The progress of school education, pp. 188–189.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid. Also see: World Bank. (2008). *Implementation completion and results report on a credit in the amount of SDR 334.9 million to the Republic of India for an elementary education project (Sarva Shikha Abhiyan).* New Delhi: World Bank; World Bank. (2008). *Project appraisal document on a proposed credit in the amount of SDR 364.4 million to the Republic of India for a second elementary education project (SSA II).* New Delhi: World Bank.
9. According to the most recent data with complete national coverage, India's net enrollment ratio (NER) increased from 84.53 in 2005–2006 to 92.75% in 2006–2007. India's gross enrollment ratio (GER) for elementary grades (I to V) increased from 103.77% to 110.86%. Gross enrollment ratio (GER) is a nation's total enrollment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the official age group corresponding to this level of education. Net enrolment ratio (NER) is the ratio of the number of children of official school age (as defined by the national education system) who are enrolled in school to the total population of children of official school age—in this case grades 1 to 5 and ages 6 to 11. Note: 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 are the first and latest years with complete data coverage. It is projected that India will have 7,208,000 out-of-school children in 2015. See Mehta, A. (2008). *Elementary education in India analytical report 2006–07: Progress towards UEE.* New Delhi: National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA); UNESCO. (2008). *Education for all global monitoring report 2009,* pp. 62–66.
10. Ramachandran. (2003). Backward and forward linkages; Kumar, K. (2004). Quality of education at the beginning of the 21st century: Lessons from India (Background Paper). *Education for all global monitoring report: The quality imperative*. New Delhi: UNESCO.
11. Mehta. (2004). *Elementary education in India*, pp. 107–111; World Bank. (2008). *Implementation completion and results (Sarva Shikha Abhiyan)*, p. A-34.
12. Kumar, K. (2004). Educational quality and the new economic regime. In A. Vaugier-Chatterjee (Ed.), *Education and democracy in India* (pp. 113–127). New Delhi: Manohar.
13. Govinda. (2002). Providing education for all, pp. 1–20; Drèze, J., & Sen, A. (2002). *India: Development and participation.* New York: Oxford University Press.
14. Drèze & Sen. (2002). *India: Development and participation*; Drèze, J., & Gazdar, H. (1996). Uttar Pradesh: The burden of inertia. In J. Drèze, & A. Sen (Eds.), *Indian development: Selected regional perspectives* (pp. 33–108). New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Lieten, G. K. (2000). Children, work and education-I: General parameters. *Economic and Political Weekly, 35*(24), 2037–2043; UNESCO. (2008). *Education for all global monitoring report 2009*.
15. Pratham. (2009). *ASER 2008—Annual status of education report.* Mumbai: Pratham Resource Center.
16. Ibid.
17. World Bank. (2008). *Project appraisal document on a proposed credit (SSAII)*.
18. UNESCO. (2008). *Education for all global monitoring report 2009*; Drèze & Sen. (2002). *India: Development and participation*.
19. Draxler, A. (2008). *New partnerships for EFA: Building on experience.* Paris: UNESCO-IIEP; Ikekeonwu, C., Randell, S., & Touwen, A. (2007). *Civil society partnerships and development policies: Emerging trends.* Paris: UNESCO; UNESCO. (2008). *Education for all global monitoring report 2009*.
20. See Brown, L., et al. (2000). *Globalization, NGOs and multi-sectoral relations* (Working Paper no. 1). Cambridge, MA: The Hauser Center for Non-profit Organizations/The Kennedy School of Government; Kudva, N. (2005). Strong states, strong NGOs. In R. Ray, & M. F. Katzenstein (Eds.), *Social movements in India: Poverty, power, and politics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield; Ikekeonwu, C., et al. (2007). *Civil society partnerships and development*. Paris: UNESCO Forum.
21. Behar, A., & Prakash, A. (2004). India: Expanding and contracting democratic space. In M. Alagappa (Ed.), *Civil society and political change in Asia*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University

Press; Zaidi, S. A. (1999). NGO failure and the need to bring back the state. *Journal of International Development 11*, 259–271.

22. Senior educationist, National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA). Interview with Aneel Brar and Ebony Bertorelli, June 27, 2008.
23. For example, space for NGO activity has been included in India's recent 5-year economic plans and explicit endorsement of NGO-state collaboration has been integrated into the government's public service strategies, including that of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). See Planning Commission. (1985). *The seventh five year plan 1985–90*. New Delhi: Planning Commission. Additionally, in 2005 Uttar Pradesh's (UP) SSA created a formal mechanism whereby NGOs could apply for funding or state collaboration for education projects in an effort to widen the avenues available to enhance primary education. With their proposal for *Nai Disha*, Pratham was one of the first NGOs to take advantage of this mechanism and to initiate an in-depth collaborative effort with the state. Similarly, in Himachal Pradesh (HP), Pratham represented that state's first major NGO collaboration for education and was the product of the government's own desire—or at least the desire of the state's top SSA officials at the time—to harness the potential benefit of involving an external actor.
24. Director (former), National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT). Interview with Aneel Brar and Ebony Bertorelli, June 26, 2008.
25. This opinion was reflected in interviews with government officials involved in primary education as well as with local educationists during field work. Also see: Drèze & Gazdar. (1996). Uttar Pradesh: The burden of inertia; Kapur, D., & Mehta, P. B. (Eds.). (2005). *Public institutions in India: Performance and design*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Zaidi, S. A. (1999). NGO failure.
26. Pratham Delhi Education Initiative. (2008). *Annual report 2006–07*. New Delhi: Pratham Delhi Education Initiative; Pratham. (2009). *ASER 2008*.
27. Banerji, R., Chavan, M., & Rane, U. (2005). Learning to read. *Changing English, 12*, 186. (Note: the authors of the above article include Pratham's founders.)
28. Pratham employee in Punjab. Interview with Aneel Brar, August 10, 2008.
29. Pratham. (2007). *Nai Disha: A new direction*. Report submitted to the Government of Uttar Pradesh (GOUP), September, 2007.
30. Ibid.
31. Pratham, through their extensive field experience, surmised that many Indian children simply did not gain the basic foundations of reading and math in the early grades. According to Pratham, early grade instruction often leaves children unprepared and unable to handle higher-level curriculum thereby encouraging many to simply stop attending classes. In situations where children do complete grade IV or V it had been found that many were still unable to read or do simple arithmetic. Banerji et al. (2005). Learning to read.
32. The innovations of Pratham's pedagogy are based on extensive field experience, classroom "experiments" in which they would test new methods, and the work of Dr. A. K Jalaluddin, who studied the efficacy of using a traditional *barakhadi* chart of consonants and vowels to teach nonreaders how to read. Banerji et al. (2005). Learning to read.
33. Ibid.
34. Activities included "*Tili* Bundle" games, in which individual straws or *tilis* were used to represent units of one and ten *tilis* tied with an elastic band into a bundle were used to represent a single unit of ten. Using activities based around *tilis* and bundles, the curriculum required children to physically engage in counting, addition, subtraction, and place value exercises, as well as shouting out answers, counting out loud, and volunteering to answer questions. Additionally, like the reading comprehension units, arithmetic activities also involved the use of number flashcards, number charts and posters.
35. Pratham. (2009). *History*. Retrieved from http://www.pratham.org/M-13-2-History.aspx
36. The vast majority of teachers interviewed on their first day of "Master Teacher" training expressed doubt regarding Pratham's motivations and methods, and they would actively challenge the trainers, who were often younger, less experienced and, indeed, not formally trained as primary-level educators. A total of 20 of the 80 teachers were interviewed throughout the training session.

37. Pratham. (2007). *Nai Disha*; Pratham. (2008). *Nai Disha: Phase II.* Report submitted to the GOUP, September, 2008.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. See Pratham. (2009). *ASER 2008*, for examples.
41. Ibid. ASER's legitimacy and strength as a lobbying tool is largely bolstered by the participation of Mr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, the former Deputy Chairman of India's Planning Commission—the Government of India's institution that formulates its 5-year economic plans—in the annual ASER release event. According to Sam Carlson, "when you have the chairmen of the national Planning Commission launching the release of Pratham's Annual Survey of education, ASER, that's political acumen, but it's also credibility." (Personal communication).
42. Pratham. (2009). *History*.
43. Registrar General & Census Commissioner. (2001). *Census of India*. New Delhi: Government of India. Retrieved from http://www.censusindia.gov.in/
44. De, A., Noronha, C., & Samson, M. (2002). Primary education in Himachal Pradesh: Examining a success story. In R. Govinda (Ed.), *India education report* (pp. 297–311). New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Government of Himachal Pradesh. (2002). *Himachal Pradesh human development report 2002.* Shimla, Himachal Pradesh: Himachal Pradesh Government.
45. Only one of Himachal's 12 districts, the extremely remote and isolated Lahaul and Spiti, has a GER lower than 100% according to government data. NUEPA. (2008). *Elementary education in India: Where do we stand? District report cards 2006–07*. New Delhi: NUEPA; Pratham. (2008). *Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2007.* Mumbai: Pratham Resource Center; Pratham. (2009). *ASER 2008*.
46. Pratham. (2009). *History*.
47. Pratham. (2009). *ASER 2008*.
48. For example, of all the schools visited in Jean Dreze and Haris Gazdar's 1997 study, not a single one was found to be actively engaged in teaching activities at the time of observation; Drèze & Gazdar. (1996). Uttar Pradesh: The burden of inertia.
49. Ibid. Additionally, most surveys and studies are conducted in rural areas, yet, in urban areas of UP teacher shortages are documented as being far more severe. As of 2008, research in major urban centers of UP indicate common pupil–teacher ratios of 100:1. Brid, Smitin, et al. (2008, March). *Challenges for schools and society: Pratham experiences in urban Uttar Pradesh* (Preliminary Draft). New Delhi: Pratham Resource Center.
50. De et al. (2007). Primary education in Himachal Pradesh; World Bank. (2007). *Himachal Pradesh: Accelerating development and sustaining success in a hill state.* New Delhi: World Bank.
51. PROBE Team, The (1999). *Public Report on Basic Education in India.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
52. The social groups that experience the most socioeconomic inequity in India are Scheduled Castes (SCs) or *Dalits*, traditionally known as "untouchables," and Scheduled Tribes (ST), otherwise known as *Adivasis* or "original inhabitants," who constitute 16% and 8% of the population, respectively; Deshpande, A. (2005). Affirmative Action in India and the United States. In *World development report 2006: Equity & development-Background papers*. New York: The World Bank and Oxford University Press.
53. De et al. (2007). Primary education in Himachal Pradesh.
54. Drèze & Gazdar. (1996). Uttar Pradesh: The burden of inertia; Rathor, A. (2004). *Slum dwellers: Curse on development*. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons; Lerche, J., & Jeffery, R. (2003). Uttar Pradesh: Into the twenty-first century. In J. Lerche, & R. Jeffery (Eds.), *Social and political change in Uttar Pradesh: European perspectives* (pp. 17–53). New Delhi: Manohar; McDougall, L. (2000). Gender gap in literacy in Uttar Pradesh: Questions for decentralized educational planning. *Economic and Political Weekly,* 35(19), 1649–1658.
55. Mehrotra, N. (2008). *Uttar Pradesh: Midterm assessment of EFA goals.* Working Paper for the Government of UP, Revised Draft, February, 2008.
56. McGinnis, L. (2008). *Himachal Pradesh–it can be done: Success with Adhaar.* Draft report for Pratham.

57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. In its first year, the 20 districts slated for *Nai Disha's* implementation were chosen by the state government and Pratham solely based on the desire to achieve a geographical spread across the state. Out of the districts that were chosen, there was a clear representation of designated urban centers, including the districts of Varanasi, Lucknow, and Agra, which are home to three of the largest metropolises in UP, as well as a large representation of designated rural regions. Pratham. (2007). *Nai Disha*.
60. In the second year of the program, the expansion of *Nai Disha* to another 20 districts was conducted based on further criteria, such as the selection of districts that had exhibited poor learning levels as indicated by the previous year's ASER report, districts that would again ensure an even-handed geographical representation, and last, districts that were both large and small to ensure further balance.
61. DIETs are local, government-run teacher training institutes.
62. *Panchayats* are locally elected bodies designated with responsibilities for education in rural areas.
63. Notably, although the SSA utilizes this structure of decentralization across India, UP is even more decentralized in areas of fiscal disbursement. Distinctly within UP, the SSA at the state level channels funds directly to the village level through a body called the Village Education Committee (VEC), whereas, in other areas, funds move through the decentralizing system described above.
64. Pratham. (2007). *Nai Disha*.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.; McGinnis. (2008). *Himachal Pradesh*.
68. Pratham. (2007). *Nai Disha*.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.; Pratham. (2008). *Nai Disha: Phase II*.
75. School observation dates in UP ran from July 15 to August 5, 2008, and were conducted by Ebony Bertorelli.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. In two cases instructors knew about the program but could not comment on the program's success because they stated they had nothing to compare *Nai Disha* to, as they had only been teaching as long as the program had been running. However, when asked their general thoughts on the program, they both commented that they enjoyed the pedagogy and curriculum of *Nai Disha* and found it very useful in the classroom. Shiksa Mitra (Rural district of Varnasi, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 22, 2008; Shiksa Mitra (Urban district of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 16, 2008.
79. Shiksa Mitra (Rural district of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 19, 2008.
80. Senior professional, SSA (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 18, 2008; Senior Professional, SSA (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, August 1, 2008.
81. Shiksa Mitra (Rural district of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 22, 2008.
82. Ibid.
83. Former SSA official (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 15, 2008.
84. Pratham. (2007). *Nai Disha*; Anonymous, Former SSA (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 15, 2008.

85. School observation dates in UP ran from July 15 to August 5, 2008, and were conducted by Ebony Bertorelli.
86. Summer camps are another modality used by Pratham to affect student learning. They are run by volunteers outside of schools in local communities. Because of the extreme variation in seasonal weather in HP, government schools operate according to two distinct school years. "Summer-closing" schools in low-lying districts run through the winter, when temperatures are mild, whereas "winter-closing" schools in mountainous, high-altitude regions run through the summer to avoid the extreme conditions of winter. Summer camps were, therefore, observed in the southern districts of Sirmaur and Solan, HP. The goals of the summer camps in HP were to either (a) continue the improvement of learning levels that began with the initial *Adhaar* year, or (b) serve as a bridge program to promote out-of-school children to enroll with confidence in the coming school year. In the same vein, the summer camps were meant to prevent laggard children from dropping out by instilling a sense of excitement about learning and mitigating any fear of returning to regular classes.
87. Mobilizers have responsibilities that range from recruiting and training volunteers to monitoring and acting as the medium through which the complaints and concerns of volunteers were voiced to higher-levels in the scheme. Observation of the summer camps revealed that logistics, such as recruiting and gaining local support for the camps, rather than pedagogy and training, was the greatest challenge for the mobilizers who were responsible for up to 20 dispersed villages in a given area.
88. Indeed, the state of Punjab agreed to partner with Pratham based on the successes of *Adhaar* in HP.
89. As stated in this chapter, the scale and character of the collaboration between Pratham and the SSA was unprecedented in the state, and to facilitate this collaboration a new policy was created in the SSA to create an application process for NGOs to collaborate with the state and even to appeal for funds for this collaboration. This transparent and easily accessible process is now used by NGOs across UP to initiate formal collaboration.
90. Senior Professional, SSA (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 18, 2008; Senior Professional, SSA (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, August 1, 2008; Former SSA official (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 15, 2008; Former SSA official (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, August 6, 2008; DIET member (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, August 1, 2008.
91. Ibid.
92. Senior Professional, SSA (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, August 1, 2008.
93. Senior Professional, SSA (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 18, 2008.
94. Project Director, Pratham (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 19, 2008; Volunteer Teacher, Pratham (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, August 6, 2008; Volunteer Teacher, Pratham (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 13, 2008.
95. English pilot projects were developed by Pratham and implemented in the district of Solan under the auspices of the SSA district project officer and the local DIET. Newer teaching methods and materials included the use of play money in transaction games and a number jumping game reminiscent of "hop-scotch."
96. Describing these initial stages of interaction, a prominent member of the leadership team of Pratham states, "We realized that it took a lot of advocacy to get the government to accept that something like [*Nai Disha*] is needed. You regularly visit people, you talk to them, we have to say, you know learning is important . . . Of course there were larger level influences that Rukmini and Madhav [executive members of Pratham], did at their own level but, yes, on our level we regularly kept in touch for them to realize this is serious organization, this is an organization which can carry off [a program like Nai Disha]." Volunteer Teacher, Pratham (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, August 6, 2008.

97. Pratham. (2007). *Nai Disha*.
98. Ibid.
99. Pratham. (2008). *Nai Disha: Phase II*.
100. There were instances where instructors who were present during implementation simply did not remember the program or suggested that they had heard of it but that it was never brought into the school. There were also instances where instructors had knowledge of *Nai Disha* but their understanding of the program's philosophy was incomplete or incorrect. For example, during a school visit, when asked to explain the program of *Nai Disha*, an instructor initially described the program as purely math-based. It was only when questioned further concerning a literacy component that the instructor recalled that there were reading activities using flashcards and posters. These situations, however, were quite rare. Shiksa Mitra (Rural District of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 19, 2008.
101. School observation dates in UP ran from July 15 to August 5, 2008, and were conducted by Ebony Bertorelli.
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid.
104. Ibid.
105. Ibid.
106. Observation A (Rural district of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh). Observation conducted by Ebony Bertorelli, July 22, 2008.
107. Observation B (Rural district of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh). Observation conducted by Ebony Bertorelli, July 22, 2008.
108. Barring the two schools visited in the district of Basti, one school in urban Lucknow in which no teachers arrived to run the school for the day, and a secondary school that was shared with a primary school in the same building.
109. Shiksa Mitra (Rural district of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 18, 2008.
110. Mehta, P. B. (2003). *The burden of democracy*. New Delhi: Penguin.
111. World Bank. (2007). *Himachal Pradesh: Accelerating development*; World Bank. (2004). *Resuming Punjab's prosperity: The opportunities and challenges ahead.* New Delhi: World Bank.
112. Former SSA official (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, July 15, 2008; Former SSA official (New Delhi). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, August 6, 2008; Former SSA State Project Director (Himachal Pradesh). Interview with Aneel Brar, July 21, 2008.
113. Current SSA state-level officer (Himachal Pradesh). Interview with Aneel Brar, July 23, 2008.
114. Ibid.
115. Within "*Adhaar* plus," quality improvement measures brought in by Pratham were to be adapted to the needs of higher-level children, including the implementation of English-language instruction. Ibid.
116. Former SSA State Project Director (Himachal Pradesh). Interview with Aneel Brar, July 21, 2008.
117. Ibid.
118. Ibid.
119. World Bank. (2008). *Secondary education in India: Universalizing opportunity.* New Delhi: World Bank.
120. The issue of falsification of data within UP was a major concern of most SSA and Pratham officials interviewed.
121. DIET member (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, August 1, 2008.
122. Pratham. (2007). *Nai Disha*.
123. Rural Team member, Pratham (Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, August 6, 2008.
124. Former SSA official (New Delhi). Interview with Ebony Bertorelli, August 6, 2008.
125. Pratham. (2007). *Nai Disha*; Pratham. (2008). *Nai Disha: Phase II*.
126. Ibid.
127. Pratham. (2009). *ASER 2008*.

128. Pratham. (2007). *Nai Disha*; Pratham. (2008). *Nai Disha: Phase II*.
129. Ibid.
130. Ibid.
131. Ibid.

Appendix 1: Methodology

CASE SELECTION

This case study is a qualitative empirical inquiry based on 114 non–randomly selected interviews and field observations in 29 locations in the Himachal Pradesh (HP), Punjab, and New Delhi, and 29 school visits in Uttar Pradesh (UP).[1] The field work was conducted over 8 weeks from June to August, 2008 (See Appendix 2 for a list of locations). Semi-structured informal and formal interviews were conducted with leading academics, policy-makers, government officials, World Bank officials, parents, teachers, volunteer teachers, and Pratham workers, and other NGO actors.

Our purpose with this case study was to look at the northern Indian experience with NGO–state collaboration in primary education and attempt to infer some lessons that can be generalized to a broader context. Pratham was targeted as an organization of interest for a case study on quality education because of its scale, its focus on quality education, and the unique public–private framework upon which many of its programs are based.

Documents and state-level statistics were obtained from the SSA and DIET. School-level statistics were collected from the teachers themselves, including attendance rates, enrollment rates, Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribal (ST), and Other Backwards Caste (OBC) enrollment rates, female–male ratios, and learning achievement outcomes. Quantitative educational data evaluations and reports were also obtained from local NGOs.

Due to assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, and to prevent censure and penalization of those interviewed, the names of the respondents were not used throughout this case study, but they are referred to by the organization of which they are a part, as well as by their level of authority in that organization. Observations consisted of unannounced visits to schools and communities accompanied by a translator, and involved the observation of classes, teaching methods, and facilities of the school; conducting formal and informal conversations with teachers, parents, community members; and data collection from within the schools. Translators used in UP were volunteers of Pratham fluent in Hindi and English. To maintain transparency, objectivity, and accuracy in translation, several criteria were applied. In all but two cases, volunteers utilized were not part of the *Nai Disha* program, and no volunteer utilized was taken to an area in which he or she had any involvement or were known by any members of the community or school. Moreover, translators at no time signified they were part of Pratham and introduced themselves as independent researchers. Last, interviews were recorded,

and thus verifiable records were created to ensure direct translation from Hindi or Punjabi. All but two school and village interviews in HP were conducted with a translator who was external to Pratham. The remaining school and village interviews were translated by a state-level Pratham official whose position was unknown to the interviewee. Interviews with government and SSA officials, as well as those in New Delhi and Punjab, were all done in English and did not require a translator.

SELECTING THE DISTRICTS

For UP, the schools and communities observed were located within the districts of Lucknow, Rae Barelli, Basti, Varanasi, and Agra. These districts were chosen against several selection criteria. The first was to ensure a geographic spread across the state, to prevent the influence of a regional bias. Moreover, districts visited and the schools visited within them were also selected to ensure a mix of large- and medium-sized metropolitan areas, as well as semi-rural and rural areas to avoid the influence of either an urban or a rural bias. Beyond these criteria, the districts and schools chosen were largely random. However, a small number of schools in two districts were specifically selected because data from *Nai Disha* indicated that they had performed extremely well, in terms of implementation as well as learning achievement outcomes. Last, the district of Basti was specifically selected due to outstanding circumstances, in which the district magistrate independently requested the implementation of *Nai Disha* throughout the district in an attempt to increase the quality of schools, based on the reputation of both Pratham and the program in particular.

Some of Pratham's activities in HP were observed while embedded with Pratham. These included visits to schools in Shimla, to summer camps in Sirmaur, and to training sessions in Kangra and Hamirpur. All other program observations in HP and Punjab were done independently and with an unattached local translator. Additionally, since not all of HP's 12 districts have the same school year, some southern regions were running Pratham's summer camps and were selected because of timing.

Appendix 2: List of Interviewees

One hundred fourteen interviews were conducted for this study. All interviews were anonymous and therefore, to conserve space, the interviewees are listed according to their geographic location and the role of the interviewee.

Himachal Pradesh

- 1 College Director, Hamirpur District
- 1 Pratham volunteer, Sirmaur District
- 1 Pratham coordinator, Kangra District
- 1 Government school teacher, Shimla District
- 4 Government or SSA officials (current and former)
- 14 Volunteer teachers, Sirmaur District
- 3 Volunteer teachers, Solan District

Punjab

- 7 Government School Teachers, Bathinda District

Delhi

- 6 Academics, researchers and policy-makers
- 1 Former SSA official
- 3 Pratham officials
- 2 World Bank Officials

Uttar Pradesh

- 1 Academic, Lucknow District
- 1 DIET official, Basti District
- 1 DIET official, Lucknow District
- 6 Government or SSA officials (current and former)
- 3 Government school teachers, Agra District
- 4 Government school teachers, Basti District
- 9 Government school teachers, Lucknow District
- 2 Government school teachers, Rae Barelli District
- 5 Government school teachers, Varanasi District
- 2 Parents of students, Lucknow District

- 3 Parents of students, Basti District
- 3 Pratham workers, Lucknow District
- 2 Volunteer teachers, Agra District
- 2 Volunteer teachers, Basti District
- 2 Volunteer teachers, Rae Barelli District
- 17 Volunteer teachers, Lucknow District
- 8 Volunteer teachers, Varanasi District

Appendix 3: Glossary of Terms

Adhaar. Pratham/State collaborative quality education program in Himachal Pradesh

Barakhadi. Chart of consonants and vowels

BRC. Block Resource Coordinators (BRCs)

CRC. Cluster Resource Coordinators (CRCs)

DIET. District Institutes of Education and Training

DPO. District Project Officers

HP. Himachal Pradesh

Nai Disha. Pratham–state collaborative quality education program in Uttar Pradesh

NGO. Non-governmental organization

Panchayats. Local, village-level governing council

Shiksha Mitras. Government-hired para-teacher (nonpermanent teacher status)

Shiksha Sarthis. Pratham-recruited volunteer

SRG. State Resource Group

SSA. *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*

UP. Uttar Pradesh

VEC. Village Education Committees (VECs)