

The final category to be decided in the sixth edition of the awards

## NGO Pratham takes the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in Development Cooperation for providing quality education to millions of disadvantaged children in India

- The jury underscored Pratham's ability to address children's varied baseline levels and needs in order to achieve effective learning both in and out of school
- The Pratham model has delivered quality education to tens of millions of disadvantaged children by coordinating voluntary and government efforts and evaluating the results

**Madrid, February 25, 2014.-** The BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in the Development Cooperation category goes in this sixth edition to the NGO Pratham, which over twenty years has catered successfully to the learning needs of tens of millions of disadvantaged children. In doing so, it has designed and implemented new methods that accelerate reading acquisition, using a grassroots approach in which pupils are grouped by actual levels and needs instead of age, while providing specific training to the teachers and volunteers recruited to its programs.

In the words of the jury's citation, "Pratham has expanded the scope of education in resource constrained areas, from simple access to schooling to children's actual learning. It has done so through two significant innovations: the creation of simple, accurate and reliable tools for communities to assess learning; and a process that uses scientific evidence to develop new cost-effective programs that drastically improve learning levels."

Each year, Pratham's programs reach three million children including one million reached directly in 20,000 municipalities (villages) and two million through government partnerships in 19 states. Another half a million are annually assessed by its Annual Status of Education Report. But in the view of director Madhav Chavan, providing education is just part of the story. For Pratham has equipped itself with innovative methodologies and strategies to get more people into the learning process, and a powerful voice whose influence on educational policy is felt not just in India but around the world, with particular resonance in Asian and African countries.

Its programs stand out for a grassroots approach that takes education into the community, the mobilization of volunteer trainers as well as government officials

and the material and human resources of the national education system, and, finally, the use of ongoing monitoring and evaluation. The result is a battery of high-impact interventions which have been replicated by other countries and in other key development sectors such as healthcare.

According to UNESCO's 2013/4 "Education for All" Global Monitoring Report, India is home to 37% of the world's illiterate adults, with a total of 287 million unable to read or write. Yet the same sub-continent ranks second worldwide by its numbers of scientists and engineers. Madhav Chavan elaborates on this seeming contradiction: "Ten percent of the Indian population receives a good education, and as we are the world's second most populous country, that means a lot of highly trained people. But without a robust primary education system that extends into every area, India cannot unite the human resources it needs to lift its economy. In India today there is an emerging economy that employs from 30% to 40% of the population, side by side with an underdeveloped economy that employs between 50% and 60%. This is a serious breach and also a store of future problems."

### **Twenty years' experience**

Pratham was established as a Public Charitable Trust in 1994 by the Commissioner of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, UNICEF and several of the country's prominent citizens. It started out providing pre-school education to the children of the Mumbai slums, where temples, offices and private homes were mobilized for use. Volunteers were recruited, trained, equipped with learning material, and encouraged to set up classes in any available space within the community. Soon this program, known as Pratham Balwadis, was being replicated in multiple locations.

A few years later, the organization created the Balshaki program aimed at remedial education of in-school children who lag behind in basic literacy numeracy. It started an urban bridge school program for out-of-school children, whom it sought to bring to a minimum learning level before mainstreaming them into schools. Between 1999 and 2001, Pratham expanded its operations to nineteen cities and began an outreach program dealing with child labor.

Pratham firmly believes in working with state and local governments to bring about change. Its volunteer programs aim to supplement and not supplant the work of teachers in the public school system, while its organization rests on a partnership between government, the corporate sector and citizens. In many cities, corporate leaders have taken the lead, the government has responded by opening its schools and sharing its facilities, and community volunteers, mostly young women from the slums, have helped implement the programs.

The organization's strategy ensures that its educational improvement activities reach even the country's remotest and most violence-stricken areas. The models applied are deliberately low-cost so that they can be deployed anywhere and scaled up to achieve maximum impact.

Pratham subjects its programs to close and continual assessment. An effort which led it to make two major changes in 2002-2003. The first was a delivery strategy

based on areas or *bastis*, whereby communities of approximately 250 to 300 households (about 250 children) are earmarked for intervention. This creates a situation where the only way a child can drop out is if he or she migrates elsewhere, avoiding the kind of scattergun approach that undermines efficiency. As we write, Pratham is working with about 300,000 children in 32 cities.

The second was the launch of Learn to Read program with an accelerated technique that can demonstrably boost the learning levels of 84% of children in less than 8 weeks. Classes were given by volunteers, making for a low-cost solution that is also replicable on a national scale.

Chavan says that one thing experience has taught him is that it is the simplest things that work best: "What doesn't work is to pursue multiple goals at the same time. It's important to concentrate on Reading, writing, and numeracy. When you achieve that critical goal, then you can move on to other things."

Another lesson was that trying to teach children of the same age but different levels is an obstacle to progress. Pratham accordingly groups them by their actual learning level so no child gets left behind. Asked about pupil motivation, Chavan responds without hesitation: "When children start to learn, they realize they are capable and can do better. And that is a very powerful motivation to stay in the program."

### **Evidence-based assessment**

India has long kept official school enrollment data, but has lacked reliable means to measure the quality of education. It was to fill this gap that Pratham published its first Annual Status of Education Report in 2004 (known as ASER or "impact" in Hindi-Urdu). As Chavan explains, "the government had just created a new tax to fund education, and we thought citizens deserved to know if their money was being used effectively and efficiently."

The report draws its material from surveys conducted by 30,000 volunteers between the months of October and November, evaluating about 600,000 children in 16,000 households nationwide. The results are presented the following January and provide an accurate, standardized assessment of the learning levels of the country's children. The first report, published in 2005, revealed that only 15% of children in primary grade 2 and 25% in grade 3 could read a grade 1 text, while only 17% and 32% of grade 2 and 3 pupils respectively were able to perform subtraction problems. And ASER 2006 only bore out these initial findings.

It was the sobering results of these reports that led Pratham to launch its Read India campaign in January 2007, aimed at helping all Indian children aged 6 to 14 to learn to read, write, and do basic arithmetic.

The campaign rolled out in 350 of India's 600 districts across 19 states, with the aid of thousands of volunteers and public schools. In 2008, the year of a drive organized with some state government, it reached 33 million of the country's 350 million children, thanks to the mobilization of over 350,000 volunteers and the training of 400,000 teachers and government officials. In most states where Read

India was implemented in partnership with governments, there was a significant improvement in children's learning levels.

With time, Pratham has expanded both geographically and in terms of the work it undertakes. A vocational training program seeks to help students find employment. The Pratham Institute for Literacy, Education and Vocational Training offers training to young people who may have been forced to leave school for family or financial reasons. To date, 12,000 students have taken part in its hospitality, construction, automotive and dependent care courses, while other modules focus on the essential skills needed to start a business or to find work in services ranging from retail to banking and insurance. Pratham Infotech, finally, has as its mission to help bridge the digital divide and facilitate take-up of information technologies in education.

Major challenges remain. The ASER 2013 report shows that although between 95% and 98% of children aged 7 to 14 are enrolled in school education; fewer than half of primary grade 5 children in rural India are capable of reading a grade 2 text. Only 40% of grade 3 pupils can read a simple paragraph without difficulty and fewer than 25% can solve problems involving simple subtraction. In primary grade 5, only a fourth of the sample can perform three digits by one digit division. And the proportion of children in grades 1 to 3 in government primary schools who can recognize the letters of the alphabet barely reaches 40%.

### **The BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Awards**

The BBVA Foundation promotes funds and disseminates world-class scientific research and artistic creation, in the conviction that science, culture and knowledge in its broadest sense hold the key to a better future for people. The Foundation designs and implements its programs in partnership with leading scientific and cultural organizations in Spain and abroad, seeking to identify and prioritize those projects with the power to move forward the frontiers of the known world.

The BBVA Foundation established its Frontiers of Knowledge Awards in 2008 to recognize the authors of outstanding contributions and radical advances in a broad range of scientific and technological areas congruent with the knowledge map of the late 20th and 21st centuries, and others that address central challenges, such as climate change and development cooperation, deserving of greater visibility and recognition. Their **eight categories** include classical areas like *Basic Sciences (Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics)* and *Biomedicine*, and other, more recent areas characteristic of our time, ranging from *Information and Communication Technologies*, *Ecology and Conservation Biology*, *Climate Change* and *Economics, Finance and Management* to *Development Cooperation* and the innovative creative realm that is *Contemporary Music*.

The **juries** in each category are made up of leading international experts in their respective fields, whose involvement endorses the rigor of the awards and has indeed been instrumental in consolidating their prestige. The BBVA Foundation is aided in the organization of the awards by the **Spanish National Research Council (CSIC)**, the country's premier multidisciplinary research organization. As well as

proposing each jury chair, the CSIC is responsible for appointing the Technical Evaluation Committees that undertake an initial assessment of candidates and draw up a reasoned shortlist for the consideration of the juries.

In the Development Cooperation category, Committee members were Pedro A. Serena, a professor in the Department of Theory and Simulation of Materials at the Instituto de Ciencias de Materiales de Madrid (ICMM); Carlos García-Izquierdo, coordinator of the Council's Agricultural Sciences Area and Research Professor in the Centro de Edafología y Biología Aplicada del Segura (CEBAS-CSIC); and Francisco A. Tomás Barberán, coordinator of Food Science and Technology Area and Research Professor in the Group on Quality, Safety and Bioactivity of Plant Foods at the Centro de Edafología y Biología Aplicada del Segura (CEBAS-CSIC).

## International jury

The jury in this category was chaired by **Pedro Alonso**, Director of the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal) and the Barcelona Center for International Health Research (CRESIB), with **José García Montalvo**, Professor of Economics at Pompeu Fabra University and Research Professor at the Valencian Institute of Economic Research (Ivie), acting as secretary. Remaining members were **Vicente Larraga**, Research Professor in the Center for Biological Research of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC); **Norman Loayza**, Lead Economist in the Development Research Group of the World Bank in Washington (United States); and **Francisco Pérez**, Professor of Economic Analysis at the University of Valencia and Research Director of the Valencian Institute of Economic Research (Ivie).

## Previous laureates

Last year's winner in this category was the **Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative (DNDi)** for "developing and delivering new, effective and affordable treatments for poverty related diseases including Chagas disease, sleeping sickness, malaria and leishmaniasis affecting the world's most vulnerable populations." The award in the fourth edition went to **Ciro de Quadros** for "leading the efforts to eliminate polio and measles from the western hemisphere and being one of the most important scientists in the eradication of smallpox around the world," in the words of the award citation. Preceding them were the **International Rice Research Institute (IRRI)** (The Philippines) for helping to "reduce poverty and hunger in the world by means of rice research and farmer training," and the **Development Research Institute (DRI)** at New York University (United States) for "its contribution to the analysis of foreign aid provision, and its challenge to the conventional wisdom in development assistance." Finally, the inaugural award went to the **Poverty Action Lab at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)** (United States) for "promoting the use of scientific methods to assess the effectiveness of development assistance funding."

Fundación **BBVA**

---

For more information, contact the BBVA Foundation Communication Department (+34 91 374 5210 / +34 91 537 3769, [comunicacion@fbbva.es](mailto:comunicacion@fbbva.es)) or visit [www.fbbva.es](http://www.fbbva.es)