



Working document in the series:  
*Strategies of education and training for disadvantaged groups*

# Building societal missions for universal pre-school and primary education

## The Pratham experience

Madhav Chavan

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**Madhav Chavan**



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**This monograph has been written by Madhav Chavan, one of the founders and trustees of Pratham-Mumbai Education Initiative and the current Programme Director of the Pratham Trust, under the leadership of Muriel Poisson, Assistant Programme Specialist, IIEP.**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This is an effort to describe broadly the brief history of Pratham, an organization born in Mumbai, India to universalize primary education in the city. Having written the account, I feel like someone who has tried to explain exciting poetry in dry prose. The feeling is more acute because the excitement and the pride of hundreds of young women, and a few men, who individually enrich the Pratham experience almost every day, is not reflected in this writing. There are other shortcomings too.

The creative work that has gone into the generation of teaching-learning materials, the experimentation with training techniques to suit the background of the instructors who become involved, and the impact of these efforts are not described. This aspect of Pratham deserves to be written about separately.

As one who has attempted to write a short history, my thanks must go to those who have created it. Pratham is not a faceless organization. If I could, I would write about every person who has taken the movement forward in some location of Mumbai or in another part of the world.

Farida Lambay is an ideal colleague. We have shared a trust for over a decade, without which the organization could not have been built. It would be too formal to thank her. But, the 'we' in the narrative always includes Farida. The 'Executive Group' shares a similar mutual trust and friendship, which goes well beyond work. The 'we' includes it too. If credit is deserved for this account, it is shared by Madhukar, Usha, Rukmini, Mitesh, Atul – members of the Executive Group – and the rest of my colleagues.

I am personally indebted to UNICEF and the Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (ICICI) Ltd for their financial support and the necessary freedom to develop Pratham.

This narration would not have been written had it not been for the keen interest shown by Mr Jacques Hallak, former Director of IIEP. His visit was also a part of the word-of-mouth propagation of Pratham via Mr R. Govinda of the NIEPA, India. Accompanied by his assistant, Ms Muriel Poisson, Mr Hallak visited us and, in his own style, absorbed the 'feeling' of Pratham in both offices and in the worst of slums. Such perceptive visitors add value to our work.

Ms Rukmini Banerji, my colleague and friend, deserves a heartfelt thanks for editing the manuscript in record time. As in everything we do, time was the limiting factor. If it reads well, it is thanks to her; if there are problems, they are of my creation.

Finally, a word about Mr N. Vaghul, Chairman of ICICI Ltd, and Chairperson of Pratham. We went to him to request him to lend his name to the organization. In return, he gave himself, without holding anything back. He became Pratham. What words can I use to thank Pratham?

Madhav Chavan  
23 October, 1999

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## **FOREWORD**

Among the first concerns retained by the IIEP in the framework of its 'observation' function, is the impact of the accelerated trend of urbanization on the organization and planning of education. In 1997, an international forum was held in Bordeaux, France, whose purpose was to *i*) compare experiences of different cities in sharing the responsibilities of planning, financing and managing their school systems; and *ii*) analyze the alternative approaches and strategies to address the educational and training needs of the disadvantaged children and youth living in urban settings.

Among the conclusions of the forum, it was recommended as a priority action for the IIEP, to pursue its programme to include more experiences of 'education in cities' of relevance to planners and policy-makers both at central and city levels.

The case study on Mumbai presented in this report responds to this priority.

Initiated in 1994, by UNICEF, the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai and several prominent individuals, Pratham is a public charitable trust. Its aim is to create a societal mission for achieving universal pre-primary and primary education in the city by the year 2000. Pratham's goal is simple: 'Every child must go to school regularly and learn well'. It therefore follows that all Pratham's efforts and initiatives are linked to the existing government school system and directed at improving access to schools, increasing attendance and raising achievement.

Over the past five years, Pratham has endeavoured to create an open platform for individuals, institutions and organizations interested in working with the government in achieving universalization in a

time-bound manner. The method followed in creating this city-wide platform is one of carefully building a triangular partnership between citizens, corporate sector, communities and the government. Every Pratham programme has three basic elements: it is linked to the municipal school system; it can be reproduced on a massive scale; it draws new people into its existing network.

Since its inception in 1994, Pratham's growth has been impressive. Today Pratham has a presence in every slum community in Mumbai. Its programmes include approximately 3,000 pre-school centres (covering 45,000 three- to five-year-old children), 700 'bridge courses' (covering over 8,000 out-of-school children between the ages of 6 and 12) and over 800 'balsakhis' (children's friend) working with over 40,000 children in municipal schools. The mechanism to create an 'education net' to enable every child to be in school and every child learning is in place. Pratham has become a large-scale community-based movement for universal primary education.

Five years ago, the founders of Pratham aspired to bring every child to school. Today this dream is shared by a large cross-section of the city's population, and the dream is close to being realized. How has this phenomenon happened? What are the key factors that have led to this success? If a mega-city like Mumbai, with over half of its population living in slums, can achieve this goal, what lessons can be learned from this experience? What are the challenges that lie ahead? This is an autobiography of the movement.

Written by Mr Madhav Chavan, one of the founders of Pratham, it traces the birth, evolution and growth of the organization, outlines its strengths, weaknesses and challenges. It describes how resources – human and financial – were and continue to be mobilized. The book, also, grapples with trying to understand what difference Pratham has made to slum communities and to the government school system and discusses whether change can be sustained.

Taking stock of the experiences of the past five years is important, as other cities in India are starting Pratham-inspired efforts to bring every child to school. Can the Pratham effort be replicated? At one level, this initiative has major implications for thinking about how universal primary education can be achieved in India. At a broader level, it raises questions and provides some answers for how communities can be mobilized to design their own development and bring about change.

On behalf of the IIEP, I wish to express my deep appreciation to the author, Mr Madhav Chavan, who combines a unique experience as a scientist, a teacher, an institutional developer, and a manager. In presenting his experience, he has highlighted the importance to be attached to the role of a community-based movement to universalize primary education and cover the specific needs of the poor.

I am convinced that this report will be found to be most valuable not only in India, but in a variety of different contexts in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Mr Chavan's contribution should be given due appreciation.

Jacques Hallak

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## **INTRODUCTION: PERSPECTIVE**

### **Briefly about Mumbai**

Mumbai is located on the western coast of India. The city was established by the British in the mid-seventeenth century when it was merely a group of seven islands. However, there is a longer recorded history going back to 1100 AD to what today makes central Mumbai. The coastal area just south-east of Mumbai goes back further and used to have trade links with Greece and Rome 2,000 years ago. The seven islands were joined over two centuries and reclamation of land goes on even today. But it is now largely recognized that there is very little scope for further reclamation of land.

This city started becoming home to the modern industry of India in the late nineteenth century and soon established itself as the industrial and financial centre of India. However, over the past two decades the textile industry, which formed the heart of Mumbai's economy and the means of livelihood for over a million people, has moved out in a painful socio-political process. While organized industry appears to have found a better environment elsewhere, the unorganized small-scale industry continues to flourish in Greater Mumbai. Ideas of making Mumbai a financial centre rather than an industrial centre are voiced every now and then, but this is hardly possible without dealing with its current problems. A whole new twin city called New Mumbai was planned to ease the pressure on Mumbai. The new city is growing fast beyond the north-eastern boundaries of Mumbai, but the pressure on Mumbai has hardly diminished.

**Mumbai is a north-south city serviced by three railways running practically from the southern tip to the north-western and north-eastern suburban ends. At the limits of Greater Mumbai start a**

continuum of townships which bring nearly half a million people to work in Mumbai. This includes thousands of schoolteachers too. The 'local' trains which start far beyond the municipal limits, are packed during peak hours and commuters are seen hanging outside the doors. Mumbai is also served by three-four main arterial roads running north-south. Recently, the government undertook construction of over 55 'fly-over' bridges to ease the traffic, but the fact that there are just too many cars (and increasing in numbers daily) and not even the minimum necessary road length is going to ensure traffic jams for a long time. The best traffic days in Mumbai are when either the buses, or taxis, or the trucks are on strike.

This has always been a cosmopolitan city. People of practically every major faith and speaking every Indian language reside here. Due to its long history there are ancient synagogues and churches in and around Mumbai. Christians make a sizeable minority. The Zorastrians (known in India as Parsee) have made Mumbai their home for centuries. Islamic people from different parts of India, speaking different languages, reside here and form about 15 per cent of the population. Although Marathi is the regional language of Mumbai, Hindi – the national language – is perhaps spoken more in its Mumbai version. The city is also influenced by English, which could arguably be the third language. A large number of people from Gujrat have lived in Mumbai for generations and the community continues to grow.

India adopted a principle of forming linguistic states in the post-independence period. The state of Maharashtra was carved out after a massive movement of the Marathi-speaking people in the late fifties and Mumbai became its capital. It was always a congested city, but it got worse, with increasing numbers of migrants from all over rural India coming to the city with every wave of industrialization or every wave of famine, especially in rural Maharashtra.

The slums of Mumbai are often settled in groups by people coming from a particular region. The older slums are registered by the state and municipal authorities and provide basic amenities such as electricity, water, and sanitation. The latter is the worst served and it is common for most slum-dwellers to use the street side for their morning ablutions. The more recently settled slum colonies have none of these amenities and are periodically demolished. The residents pick up the threads of their lives and rebuild the slums. The cycle continues until the slums are either rehabilitated elsewhere or are registered. The slums dot the city and the suburbs. It is common to have a slum colony next to a middle-income housing complex or along the walls of a high-rise building.

In the southern parts of the city, the seventies saw the establishment of pavement dwellings without any facilities at all. They continue today in a sub-human existence, ironically under legal protection of the right to housing. The older slums have grown to become little villages with their own little shops. Physicians run their dispensaries. In larger slums there may be nursing homes and little restaurants. Illicit liquor is available everywhere, as are gambling dens. The slum house is typically about 200 square feet in area, or less, with different corners serving for different use. Many shanties grow vertically as the household income increases and members of family grow. The transition from a non-registered slum to a registered slum is marked by brick walls in place of makeshift tin walls. The inside of a home is often very clean although the public areas are filthy. The child grows in this existence trying to balance its view of the world between school and home, between the ideal and the real.

## **The Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM)**

The MCGM has a body of 221 elected representatives who elect the Mayor and various committees for transport, roads, health, education etc. The Municipal Commissioner has been the chief executive, assisted by Additional Municipal Commissioners who are all drawn from the civil services known as the Indian Administrative Services. The city and suburbs are divided into 23 municipal administrative wards (shown by letters on the map in Appendix I - K(E) stands for K East ward, F(N) stands for F North ward etc.), which are governed by as many ward officers.

One of the biggest frustrations in planning anything in Mumbai is lack of a common coherent database. For example, the census data are collected from geographical divisions that do not overlap the state government administrative division which, in turn, have nothing in common with the municipal administrative divisions. Within the municipal administration, the administrative wards do not necessarily overlap the education administration divisions. Thus, matching any data becomes a frustrating exercise.

Primary education for school Grades I to IV is the responsibility of the MCGM. MCGM runs close to 1,250 schools of its own, housed in nearly 450 premises; in addition, it provides a 100 per cent grant to privately managed schools. In addition, there are unaided private schools which cater for the upper-income population in most cases. Secondary education is the responsibility of the state government. However, the MCGM schools do cater for Grades V to VII. There are only 51 municipal-run schools for Grades VIII to X in Mumbai; all others for the same grades are privately managed, either supported by state government grants or unaided by the government. The crossover from Standard VII in a municipal school to a private-aided school is difficult. Hence, it is common for parents to withdraw their

children from municipal schools well before Standard VII if they can get admission in a private school. This is more true of children who do better in their studies.

Of late, Indian-language private schools have been losing students to the new craze for English-medium schools. Also, municipal schools have been slowly closing down in southern and central Mumbai areas due to lack of students. This is partly due to the population shifting northwards and also due to a general trend away from government schools due to their poor image and towards private, English-medium schools.

The three-tier system of municipal, private-aided, and unaided schools has created a segregated system. The first is generally associated with the poor (who cannot even get admission in aided schools), and the third is generally associated with those who can spend (although there are newer unaided schools in poorer communities waiting to be given municipal aid). The second lies in between.

The population of Mumbai stands at 10 million, representing a 1/100th of India's total population. More than half of the population lives in slums, not because they are utterly poor, but because real estate costs are very high, there is insufficient affordable housing, and outdated rent laws make it difficult to rent out accommodation. The 1991 census figures indicated Mumbai to be 84 per cent literate. In slums that have been around for over a decade, the literacy percentage is rarely higher than 75 per cent.

## The Pratham Mumbai Education Initiative

The Pratham Mumbai Education Initiative was set up as a Public Charitable Trust in order to achieve universal primary education in Mumbai (Bombay), India, in December 1994. This was preceded by a number of exploratory activities led by the UNICEF office in Mumbai, which had come to the conclusion that a societal mission was needed to achieve the goal. The goal itself was not new. The Pratham Trust was expected to generate a societal mission to achieve it.

The aims and objects of the Trust merely described the aim cautiously as “work towards universalization of primary education, especially in the city of Bombay...”. This caution reflects the uncertainties at the time. There was no Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or an official paper signed between the Pratham Trust and any of the governmental agencies, which could tie them to a precisely defined set of goals within a defined deadline. Had the initiative failed to take off, it would probably have been quickly forgotten as just another attempt that did not work. The statement of objectives also stated “... creation of a model to demonstrate to the nation the feasibility of universalization of primary education.” These lines have come to the foreground over the last few months.

The brief history of Pratham needs to be examined and reflected upon, keeping in view the broad guidelines with which the organization has evolved over the last five years. In fact, each of these guidelines constitutes an objective in itself. These guidelines/ objectives/ conditions were (are):

1. *Universalization:* Achieving a broad goal of universal pre-school and primary education before the international target year 2000.
2. *Organizational methodology:* Generating a societal mission as a necessary means of achievement of the goal.

3. *Partnership with government:* Working in collaboration with the local self-government (Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai – MCGM) on a city-wide scale with a view to changing its current practices – mainly pedagogical, and managerial.
4. *Funds:* Raising resources from the city as far as possible.
5. *Expenditure:* Cost of all additional programmes needed to achieve the goal and sustain the changes should not exceed 1-2 per cent of the governmental expenditure on primary education in the city and suburbs (in 1999/2000 this budget is Rs.4.2 billion or US\$100 million).
6. *Sustaining change:* Creating conditions that will not only achieve the goal but also sustain the changes beyond the deadline.
7. *Ability to replicate:* The work to be done in Mumbai should serve as a large-scale model with elements of relevance which could be reproduced in other cities of India.

Each of these is interwoven with the others and has shaped every project designed by the Pratham team. While the conditions are taken seriously, at times a few of the conditions are given less importance so that others may get a greater play to take the work forward. By and large, there is a clear attempt to adhere to these broad guidelines.

The goal of universal primary education was broken down into sub-goals in a simple statement '*Every child in school, regularly, and learning by 2000*'. This statement has been recently adopted by MCGM as: '*Every school beautiful, every child in school, every child learning*'. Thus the sub-goals were:

- ensuring universal access/enrolment;
- ensuring 'regular' participation/attendance; and
- ensuring that 'every' child reached the prescribed levels of achievement.

These goals had already been agreed upon and quantified in detail in 1991 in a joint initiative of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (local self-government), the Government of Maharashtra – GOM (state government), and UNICEF. Pratham has never quantified these sub-goals separately. The objective was to help and enable the MCGM as a system to take these goals seriously and achieve them.

The most important feature of the formation of Pratham Trust was the methodology of Societal Mission chosen to achieve the goals. Instead of relying entirely on the governmental officers and teachers to achieve the goals, a triangular partnership, involving citizens, corporations, and the governmental machinery was envisaged. UNICEF had selected the mega-city of Mumbai because of its unique status as the industrial and financial capital of India, which could provide an example to the rest of the nation by universalizing primary education under its own steam.

The question is, how far has Pratham succeeded in achieving its main objective of universalization of primary education? How far has it succeeded in achieving the remaining six objectives or meeting the other six conditions? With one and a half years to go before the end of the deadline, what are the prospects of achieving the main goal? Is the system likely to change? If there is change, can this change be sustained?

This monograph will trace the developments in shaping the initiative since mid-1993, when the author became involved in it, and attempt to draw out lessons that may be of use to others. It will be structured according to the following lines:

- Chapter 1.      Introduction: perspective;
- Chapter 2.      Evolution and growth of the programmes;

- **Chapter 3.** Attempts at working with the municipal school system;
- **Chapter 4.** Issues of resource mobilization;
- **Chapter 5.** Impacting the system and sustainability;
- **Chapter 6.** Replicating Pratham;
- **Chapter 7.** Conclusion: the unfolding future.

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## **EVOLUTION AND GROWTH OF PROGRAMMES**

### **The beginning**

Unlike most large-scale programmes funded by the government or bilateral donor agencies, Pratham did not start with a detailed plan or proposal. No funds were guaranteed at its inception except for a basic seed funding of about Rs.600,000 per year for three years from the initiator – UNICEF. This fact is critically important in understanding the evolution of the programmes. The organization has had to balance its programmes according to its resources and has had to raise resources to support essential programmes.

The Trustees and those who led the day-to-day work were known in the social and development sector in Mumbai. However, in the initial stages, there was a great deal of scepticism about whether universalization of primary education could ever be achieved in this city of 12 million people. Our first priority was to establish the credibility of the team so that it could raise much-needed resources on a large scale.

In 1993, UNICEF commissioned a ‘Rapid Appraisal of the Status of Basic Education’ study for Mumbai. The study documented perceptions of parents, teachers and citizens about various factors responsible for drop-outs, irregular attendance, and non-enrolment. While the teachers and officials felt that parental disinterest, responsibilities at home, and difficult access to school were the prime reasons, interviews with over 4,000 slum-dwelling families told a different story. The parents clearly valued education and went to great lengths to admit the child and get her/him to school. The private schools (even government-aided ones providing education without tuition fees) were seen as more effective. The municipal schools were perceived to be good ‘for the poor’ (they had no choice)

but not effective. By and large, school was thought to be a boring, unattractive place with ineffective teaching-learning practices. Lack of pre-school education for children entering municipal schools, and absence of support systems to help in studies or with other problems was also believed to contribute to the poor status of primary education in the city.

In the months preceding the formation of the Trust in December 1993, UNICEF convened several meetings of interested NGOs. These could not produce a clear strategy to address the basic issues involved in universalization of primary education. At the same time, about 50 Committee of Resource Organizations for Literacy (CORO) functionaries tried out a project called 'Didi' (elder sister) in the summer of 1994 as these discussions went on. It was no surprise that children loved to have a person come to read out stories, play, and learn a bit even during school vacations. However, this programme, which clearly brought out the need for support systems, could not be continued in the absence of a structure for the Bombay Education Initiative, the precursor to Pratham launched by UNICEF. Other efforts to plan and try out similar programmes in other parts of the city did not bear fruit. It must be pointed out that taking up universalization of *pre-school* education at that time was not on anyone's mind.

Once the decision to form a separate Trust to own the Bombay Education Initiative was taken in December 1994, the question of what strategy to adopt became much more urgent. In the early meetings of the Trust, the paucity of data became painfully evident. How many children were out of school? Answers varied from 100,000 to 200,000. What was the status of schools? Answers varied from very bad to not too bad. Some Trustees felt that making the school more attractive and presentable was a key issue. The question of what it might cost to actually have all the children in school and learning could not be answered. Appointment of consultants to study

the issues and project costs based on various parameters was considered and discarded because of the time and the money involved, with no guarantees that the recommendation could ever be implemented. No one wanted another academic report. Action was needed, but no one was sure what was the best course of action and how it would be supported.

### **The school survey (January–March 1994)**

In late January 1994, it was decided that a survey of the status of schools should be conducted. While this was not likely to lead to any serious grass-roots work directly, we decided to go ahead since it provided an opportunity to reach every school in Mumbai, and to test our skills of city-wide mobilization in a short time. The office bearers of the Indian Medical Council, the Indian Association of Paediatrics, and the National Integrated Medical Association were approached in this respect. After the initial feeling of incredulity at being invited to do the job of a sanitary inspector had passed, the link with the well-being of children of the city was clearer. Subsequently, over 350 physicians took time out to visit nearly 900 municipal schools and inspect the premises meticulously. The actual survey was completed within a week. The entire process from initiation of the idea to the compilation of the report took a little over three months.

Predictably, it proved to be inconsequential and the findings or recommendations of this survey were never acted upon. However, the whole process proved extremely important as an entry point into the municipal system.

- *Winning confidence of key officers:* The biggest problem in building collaboration between NGOs or volunteers and the government is the lack of trust between individuals on both sides. Building this trust was extremely important. Out of the 900 schools visited,

75 per cent were rated ‘good’ by the surveyors. Also, it was observed that schools in privately owned premises were in poor shape (these landlords receive poor rent and would rather have the school shift elsewhere).

- *Sensing a strong positive feeling among citizens:* Conversations with the doctors immediately following school visits revealed that most had never been to a municipal school and were actually thankful for the possibility of making this eye-opening visit. They felt that most of the schools had better ventilation and less crowding than in private schools. The status of urinals and toilets left much to be desired but they asked, “Why single out these schools when the status of public sanitation generally is much worse?”. These remarks and the result of the survey were a revelation. Hearing people take such a positive view in a general atmosphere of acrid cynicism and ‘government can do no right’ attitude was heartening. It was a telling comment on the possibility of building collaboration between the system and the people.

The scale of the operation, the speed, and the positive tone of the outcome clearly won the confidence of the Education Officer who, himself, suggested a programme that was to eventually open doors for the growth of Pratham.

### **Entry into the pre-school arena: The Vasantik Varga<sup>1</sup> – (April–May 1994)**

The College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, had undertaken a joint programme with the Municipal Corporation schools in the late seventies. This programme introduced the concept of social workers’ support to schools in order to improve enrolment, and prevent drop-outs. A part of the programme was to prepare children for formal classes through a month-long school readiness programme before

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1. *Vasantik Varga* is loosely translated as ‘Classes in Summer’ although the season *Vasant* falls in Spring before the monsoons. April-May vacations in India are known as ‘summer vacations’.

the children started attending schools. This preparatory programme was called Vasantik Varga. The trained social workers involved in this project were later absorbed by the municipal corporation as Community Development Officers (CDO). As years went by, the intensive nature of the programme was diluted. Earlier, each social worker worked with one school, but later one social worker was assigned 50-60 schools. The corporation, however, continued with the Vasantik Varga and expanded the scheme to about 250 classes.

The Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai has never supported an early-childhood education or pre-school programme. The Government of Maharashtra, too, has left out the urban areas in its policy to provide pre-school education in every village. Thus Vasantik Varga was the only programme available for any school-readiness. Of 100,000 children entering Grade 1 in the mid-1990s, about 5,000 children came through the Vasantik Varga programme. Between mid-March 1994 and the end of April, the Pratham team put in tremendous work to recruit 250 instructors from slum communities and succeeded in doubling the Vasantik Varga Programme in a matter of less than two months. UNICEF provided the funds and inputs for a short training programme.

It was while we were organizing this programme that we became familiar with the Balwadi Programme run by CDOs. The method was simple; local young women with at least a secondary school certificate were given some short training and space in a municipal school. The average age of Pratham balwadi instructors was 18-19 years when we started out. This has risen to about age 23 over the years. The women who worked as instructors in balwadis were either those who had just left school (or some education) and were not yet quite ready to get married (which happens to be a landmark) or those who had been married for some time and wanted to do something with their education and free time. They proved to be enthusiastic, energetic, more eager to do new things than the older women.

They recruited children and were allowed to charge nominal (Rs.5-10) fees, which they retained as their income. The number of children was limited only by the ability of the instructor concerned to recruit. In this model, the corporation did not contribute in cash or in kind, except for providing space and authorizing the instructor. Why could this model not be universalized? People strongly believed that there was not enough space in the city for this to happen.

This was the beginning of the Pratham balwadi model. It was clear that the need existed. One could see that the parents were happy to send their children and to pay fees. Hence, the space problem had to be solved. There was no real way to solve it except to ask, why worry about space? Slums of Mumbai have enough places of worship, social centres, offices of various local social organizations and political parties. If these were not available, someone's hut could be used. If huts were not available, one could use open spaces. Also, there was a need to limit the number of children and to simultaneously ensure that the instructor's lost income due to limited number of children was compensated.

### **Entry into slum communities and creation of a network: the Balwadi Programme (July 1994 – present)**

The need and demand for balwadis presented an opportunity to create a city-wide network of people who would carry the message of universal primary education to every slum of the city. The possibility that demonstration of a large-scale change might trigger participation of large numbers of more privileged citizens had to be explored. The first plan for such an initiative to launch a programme to universalize pre-school education was presented to the Board of Trustees in June 1994. The elements of this model were:

1. Low-cost model with high operational replication possibilities:
  - *Space should be provided by community.* Any space acceptable to parents would do. No compensation would be paid for allowing use of space.
  - *Instructors should come from circumstances similar to the children themselves.*
  - *Instructors would be allowed to charge fees in consultation with parents and retain the collection as their income* – Pratham would neither have a claim on the collection nor enquire about the quantum of collection (the fees vary from Rs.10 to Rs.20 depending upon location. Pratham activists note that 60-70 per cent of balwadis have good to reasonable fees collection – more than 70 per cent paying).
  - *No child should be turned away because of failure of parents to pay for whatever length of time* (this condition is misused in some communities but this often helps in creating the right atmosphere – besides it is seen by all as fair to the child. This sense of fairness probably provides a moral high ground and elevates the sense of self-worth among the instructors).
  - *Pratham would pay financial assistance of Rs.100 per month (about US\$3.0 in those days) to the instructor to cover non-payment of fees by about 10 children* (this assistance rose to Rs.150 after two years and then to Rs.200 (a little less than US\$5.0 in 1999) after the third year).
  - *If the number of children in the balwadi exceeds 25-30, the instructor may divide her class into two balwadis and receive financial assistance of Rs.100 for each class* (this helps to keep the class size small even though there are some attempts to divide a class into two sessions based on false information – these attempts are usually checked and corrected in a relatively short time).

- *Teaching-learning materials worth about Rs.500 would be provided to the instructors* (this quickly rose to a more realistic Rs.800 and then 1,000).
2. Working with local NGOs and institutions to meet training needs.
  3. Local fund-raising.
  4. Work to begin in six selected municipal wards (out of total 23) and then to spread to the entire Greater Mumbai in two stages. Selection of these wards was based on certain considerations in the following order of priority:
    - Knowledge of local communities and local contacts.
    - Severity of problems – the greater the problems, the higher the priority.
    - Accessibility to existing functionaries from their residences.

### **Organization of balwadis**

One of the major concerns early in the programme was how one would ensure that the balwadis were run regularly. Collection of fees by the instructor as a part of her income provided some guarantee. But one could not take that for granted. Soon after crossing the 200 mark, a system of appointing one supervisor for every 10 balwadis was instituted. Each supervisor was to be paid Rs.50 per balwadi for her work. This involved interacting with parents, helping the instructor in improving her functioning, and also helping Pratham functionaries in expanding the programme further.

In the first days of Pratham, one person was in charge of the programme in a whole ward (average population of 450,000). As the programme started growing, a need for sub-ward organizers was strongly felt. Some of the supervisors or balwadi instructors with

demonstrated leadership qualities were appointed 'Unit in-charge' by the person in charge of the ward. The Executive Group of Pratham had no role in these appointments. These were taken care of by the ward in-charges, using their judgement, which was rarely wrong. These unit in-charge persons started looking after a unit of about 30 balwadis and all the Pratham programmes in the geographical area covered by these balwadis.

By the end of 1998, the quantitative need for balwadis had been met in most areas and we could foresee that the supervisory layer was becoming redundant and the role of the unit in-charge had to change from one of a 'mobilizer' to a 'trainer-monitor-mobilizer'. Thus many of the supervisors found a place in other programmes of Pratham and the 'units in-charge' now form the Training Monitoring Group. This group will soon be registered and will take up a fee-based responsibility of training and monitoring the entire programme promoted by Pratham.

Long-term sustainability of the programme in the absence of a body such as Pratham, demanded that the balwadi instructors should have an organization which could access funding independent of Pratham. This would also be good from the point of view of decentralization. Hence, Pratham functionaries were encouraged to form Women's Circles (*Mahila Mandal*) and every balwadi instructor and supervisor was to be a member of the Circle. By 1997/98, a grant-in-aid system was in place between Pratham and these special *Mahila Mandals*. The instructors applied to the *Mahila Mandal* for assistance in running the balwadi. The *Mahila Mandal* put together a monthly request to Pratham for assistance and Pratham made payments after checking previous accounts and reports.

## **Working with NGOs and institutions for training**

During the first attempts to start balwadis, the Pratham team had no expertise in the area of early childhood education. Organizations such as Mobile Creches, Apnalaya, Shishu Vihar, Sadhana College, who had expertise in the field, were approached. It had been decided, in consultation with the UNICEF Programme Officer in Mumbai, that short training of about six full days, on the same pattern as used in the Integrated Child Development Scheme of the Government of India, would be sufficient to begin with. The duration was important since we envisaged training about 200 persons and setting up balwadis. A longer training programme running into months would be impractical, considering the need for several thousand balwadis to be set up within a couple of years. Some of the experts in the field were not happy with this decision and felt that quality was being compromised in a rush to start balwadis. However, a conscious decision was made to stick to the six-day programme. The teams from these organizations did an excellent job of working with the early volunteers in the programmes and the training programme was repeated the following year.

Within two years, already nearly 400 balwadis had started and bright instructors with promise as future peer trainers were spotted. The numbers of trainees were growing rapidly and the specialist teams from NGOs would clearly find it difficult to deal with the demand. The need to develop an internal training team which would work, keeping in view organizational needs of the larger Pratham goal, was on the horizon from the very beginning. A unit of over 45 people was developed: it enabled the training of all 600 instructors in 1997/98 and all 2,800 instructors in 1998/99.

Each balwadi instructor has thus gone through two phases of training, spread over 12 half-day sessions. In 1999/2000, nearly 3,500 in-

structors will go through either a pre-service or refresher/additional training programme. The logistics of this training put a strain on the teams, even if the content was inadequately delivered. Hence, the Training Unit has come up with a scheme for 'model balwadis'. They chose about one out of ten balwadis where the instructor was clearly extremely skilled, to create a model. The other instructors are encouraged to visit this balwadi to learn skills. Also, the model balwadi is given extra teaching-learning material, or the instructor prepares a lot more of her own material to demonstrate its use to her peers. The idea is to encourage other instructors to learn by seeing first and then trying in their own balwadi. In addition, the instructors meet every Saturday, in their own geographical cluster of about 30 balwadi, to talk about their experiences, plan the next week and to get help from their trainers or peers. We hope to increase the number of 'model' balwadis every year. This is in an effort to ensure that no balwadi remains below the optimum standard set by the 'model'.

NGOs and institutions often have their own priorities, notions, and standards, which are not useful at least in the period of rapid growth of a massive programme such as this. However, once the rapid-growth phase is over, they may have a role in improving the quality of established programmes. The training teams of Pratham, which consist of just one person with a Master's degree leading others who are not even graduates, have come up with their own curriculum and annual plan. In essence, they are creating their own institution. With some assistance in formal learning, they will be able to create a strong institution whose feet are firmly planted in local realities of the underprivileged. This is an area of growth and empowerment worth exploring.

**Box 1: Mamta<sup>2</sup> in a Balwadi**

***Mushtra Shamst, Pratham***

***20 January, 1999 :***

Mamta is a very tiny three-year-old girl with a very large problem. That of stepping into the larger world of 'school' (physically as small as her home). She is a newcomer at a 'balwadi', which is a pre-school centre located at Ramtekri in the 'F South' Ward of Mumbai city. She sobs broken-heartedly at the departure of her mother, who deposits her into the arms of the teacher. Every part of her fragile frame seems to be crying, 'Where is my mama?!!' While the warmth of 'mama' was there in teacher's arms, anguished Mamta has not found it yet. Shalini Shigwan, the teacher, is remarkably unperturbed. She patiently seats the bawling Mamta beside the other children on the mat. She puts a box of colourful beads in front of her, encouraging her to hold the lace and start working. But tears obliterate all else and Mamta refuses. Shalini leaves her and attends to the other children.

Gradually, Mamta's sobs subside. Suddenly, she sees the happy group of children playing with blocks. Tejas is cheering as their tower is built. He is clapping his hands with triumph. Mamta doesn't smile, but in a little while she is busy putting beads into her lace. The children wind up their 'free play' activities. This small intermission is enough to remind Mamta of her mother's absence. And sure enough, her face screws up as she starts crying again. But Shalini is busy getting the other excited children to hop, turn by turn, like frogs and rabbits. Mamta forgets to cry as she watches what fun the others are having! She shakes her head to say 'no' when asked if she would like a turn, but bends forward to catch a glimpse of every child as they romp around. This place seems to have the same joy she experiences at home! All the sniffing has given Mamta a runny nose. Teacher comes close to her and gets her to use her handkerchief to wipe up. This new lady does have some resemblance to her loving, caring mother, doesn't she?

2. Mamta is the word for affection or kindness (as one would treat one's own). In this case it is the name of the child too.

It is singsong time. Shalini has asked everyone to stand up in a circle. Insecurity plagues Mamta again. 'What is this unfamiliar activity, and where is my mama?!', she seems to say through her distraught eyes. But then one wonderful thing happens. Teacher has asked the children to hold hands to form a nice circle. And Mamta has found the soft security of another little girl's hand in her own! It's too good to be true. The good feeling inside is reflected in the smile on her face. When teacher asks all to drop hands and dance with her, Mamta quickly slips her hand back into her partner's hand and is happy to stand in the circle and observe. She has found a wee bit of mother's love in that palm.

Of course, snack time by now is a much-needed time for all! Teacher gently prods Mamta to try open her own tiffin box. The combination of success at doing so and the sight of the 'batata poha'<sup>3</sup> snack in her box have probably worked to bring the smile into her eyes. And when she wants water, she knows she can tell this nice teacher who cares for her needs. It is only a few minutes afterwards that this chit of a girl is prancing like a pixie. The world of 'school' is not so large and fearsome after all, is it?

Mamta is one of approximately 50,000 three to five year-olds attending 'balwadis' (pre-school centres) run by Mahila Mandals (women's groups) supported by Pratham. Her balwadi may not be placed in the best surroundings but it is very close to home. It may not have a lot of toys but she can play with others. The teacher may not be highly educated, but she has Mamta for each child – that is what counts in the tough world Mamta lives in.

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### 3. Fried puffed rice (*poha*) with potatoes (*batata*).

## **Value addition to the balwadi network: Health Programme for pre-school children**

A pilot was launched to assess the medical and nutritional status of 240 children attending baldawis. Medical inspection and height/weight measurements proved that about 15 per cent of children showed severe malnourishment, anemia was universal, and 90 per cent of the children had worms. The enthusiasm of the instructors and the parents regarding 'medicine' and health was remarkable. It appeared that the interest in balwadi was clearly heightened by the Health Programme and that it would do no harm to spread the programme to all the 3,000+ balwadis promoted by Pratham. Calculations showed that the cost per child would be about Rs.25 per year. This would represent less than a 5 per cent increase in the Balwadi budget of Rs.300 per child. We decided to go ahead with the programme and now about 48 people in different parts of the city help in conducting health camps. On any given day, there are 50 Pratham health camps in slum colonies all around the city. Each caters to children from three balwadis. The camps will be repeated in three cycles every three months so that children get three doses of deworming, vitamin A, and iron (30 tablets every quarter). The balwadi instructors measure height and weight (weighing machines have been bought by dozens and everyone wants to check their weight).

The significance of the addition of the Health Programme goes beyond the expected benefits to children. *First of all*, it shows that adding health to education strengthens education. One wonders if the same is applicable to the reverse, that is, adding education to health. Since education is a day-to-day activity, adding health, a periodic activity, changes little by way of workload and adds quality. However, if there is an ongoing health programme, adding education is not easy, since it demands higher time commitment and more resources. *Secondly*, the importance of a wide education network in

the community to act as a multiple-delivery mechanism becomes obvious. Already, there are ideas to create a system of para-medical workers from among the balwadi and other community functionaries associated with Pratham. *Thirdly*, as this network starts delivering more and more services, the community skills or 'human/social capital' are raised considerably and, with them, the enablement/empowerment possibilities of the community.

### **Leapfrogging into the twenty-first century: new dimensions**

#### **Computer-assisted learning**

The programme for computer-assisted learning was never really a part of our thinking. However, as the Pentium chip made its appearance and the 386 and 486 generation of computers became outdated, computers of the older generations became obsolete by the thousands in the USA and, later, in India. In early 1998, the MD and CEO of ICICI Ltd announced that computers being phased out of ICICI Ltd would be donated to Pratham to work out a project of 'leapfrogging into the twenty-first century' for the municipal schoolchildren. Later, a substantial grant was added by ICICI Ltd to ensure the setting up of computers, maintenance, and, most importantly, for generation of new software in Indian languages.

A total of 112 computers was received from ICICI Ltd, which were set up in 11 different municipal school buildings, one in each ward. Although our initial plan was to use them on a stand-alone basis, we found that using them in a Local Area Network (LAN) configuration would lead to multiple benefits. Hence more modern computers were added to be used as servers. The municipal corporation was very happy to approve the project, which sought to become financially self-sufficient by using the after-school hours for income generation. This way the staff employed could earn profits

through work undertaken after school hours and provide free service to the children during the day. This also ensured daily maintenance of the computers.

Between August 1998 and January 1999, 11 Computer-Assisted Learning Centres (CALC) were opened in as many schools and a total of 14,000 children from Grades III to VII used the centres on a twice-weekly basis to play educational games. Half of the team, charged with the responsibility of setting up and managing the centres, are women and everyone is under 24 years of age. Most come from working class or lower-middle-class families. Nearly half are slum-dwellers. Most could be earning more than the Rs.2,500 they get to run the computer centres. This team understood very well the skills of working with the children. The centres were never meant to work in tandem with the classroom. The objective was to expose the children to a new technology and develop the programme gradually. In the initial stages some very simple shareware games downloaded from the Internet were introduced in the centres. The games were DOS based and rather simple.

Computer-assisted learning has become a part of the school's weekly timetable. Children took to the computers in no time; it was difficult to send them back to their classes. They demanded to be allowed to play during recess and weekends. Computer games have also been instrumental in inducing out-of-school children to come to school.

One of the important aspects of the scheme to set up computer centres was to make them self-sufficient by using non-school hours for income generation. In the initial stages we tried to talk to professional computer-training institutes to see if they would be interested in leasing the premises part time. At the same time, several functionaries of Pratham felt that, given a chance, they could use the centres professionally and return revenue to Pratham. Attempts by a

couple of groups did not prove fruitful, partly because there was no one to devote full attention to making the scheme viable. Around February 1999, the group members who were running the computer centres got together and decided that they would launch a computer-literacy course of their own in Marathi, the regional language. They worked together and created a course manual and marketed their own course at Rs.150 per course, lasting one month (30 hours) per person. During the period of school vacations, the 11 centres gave certificates to 1,468 students (68 per cent women) in two batches at each centre. The course will be offered after school-hours during school working days. If 60 per cent of the capacity is utilized, the 11 centres will be self-sufficient, with some extra income to the youngsters.

#### **Computer information network for school administration (and for teachers)**

The municipal schoolteachers constantly complain about the paperwork they have to do and the time lost in doing this work. Schools do not have clerks. Most of the paperwork is repetitive. Also, it appears that different departments ask for the same information at different times in slightly different format. Thus, after our success at handling the CAL centres at relatively low cost, we talked to the Additional Commissioner and the Education Officer about setting up a computerized information cell. Between March to September 1999, we have now reached a point where data can be accessed from remote offices through a central server. Creating an electronic database was a huge task. Along the way a lot of information was corrected by the municipal staff. In August, a scheme to impart basic computer literacy and understanding of handling the database was announced for municipal Education Department officers. The enthusiasm for the classes was remarkable. This enthusiasm is also affecting positively the implementation of other programmes.

In 1998/99, the Additional Municipal Commissioner requested that Pratham should donate telephones to municipal schools. The recurring costs would be borne by the Education Department. The cost of providing 448 telephones was around Rs.1.3 million, but it has opened the opportunity to set up a school information network accessed by every school. We hope to achieve the setting up of this network by the end of academic year 2000/01.

The computer intervention has added a very strong new dimension to the Pratham programme. This dimension may well change the schools and their image in the eyes of the society.

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## **ATTEMPTS AT WORKING WITH THE MUNICIPAL SCHOOL SYSTEM**

The first attempt to work with schoolteachers was made in early 1995. On the one hand we were trying to set up balwadis and, on the other, an effort was made to work with teachers of Grades I and II, involving one-day workshops organized by the municipal corporation. At that time other NGOs were involved in training teachers in the teaching-learning of environmental studies. The work-sheets developed in this programme by 'Parisar Asha' (literally – Environment Hope) were appreciated by teachers and there was a demand for these. However, there were severe problems in timely delivery of the worksheets in later years, and the NGO stopped working with municipal schools after expiry of the contract.

The Education Officer agreed with our suggestion that strengthening of Grade I and II learning was important and issued instructions for his officers to organize one-day workshops for teachers in a few specific wards in April 1995. These wards had already been selected under a joint MCGM<sup>4</sup>-GOM<sup>5</sup>-UNICEF programme known as UPEFA (Urban Primary Education for All). Schools had been supplied with a considerable amount of teaching-learning aids and Parisar Asha had worked with the teachers. But, the programme as a whole had not made much progress due to various factors, which plague the system even today.

In our first encounter, the teachers bombarded us with some of their problems, which included complaints about lack of facilities from toilets to chairs, along with complaints about 'outsiders' coming and telling them what to do. There were many, especially the younger teachers, who were enthusiastic about doing something dif-

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4. MCGM: Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai.

5. GOM: Government of Maharashtra.

ferent. But, men, who made up a sizeable minority, and some of the more experienced teachers, clearly disliked our intervention. The officers had followed instructions in organizing the workshop, but were not involved. At least they were not providing leadership.

Although we learned a fair bit about teachers' reactions and problems, the workshops did not help in any real sense. In fact we decided that we should not hold workshops of teachers at all and should encourage the officers or talented teachers to lead the programme. Accordingly, a two-day workshop of officers to discuss the problems of introducing 'Joyful Education' was held in late 1995. This was attended by Superintendents and Beat Officers<sup>6</sup>.

### **Resource Centres**

Another workshop with only Superintendents (12 in all), and the Deputy Education Officers, in early 1996 resulted in the idea of starting Resource Centres. The idea was to create a place where teachers could gather and exchange ideas. The Centres would have a library of books and audiovisual materials. The Resource Centre would have to be led by the Superintendents. Accordingly, a circular naming various Superintendents in-charge of the Resource Centres was issued. Space was allocated for a Resource Centre in each municipal ward and we went about furnishing Resource Centres for which funds were available through corporate donations. However, the Superintendents did not come up with a training programme, or any kind of programme which could lead to improvement in the status of education.

Another six months later, an idea emerged that Beat Officers who showed initiative could be given charge of the Resource Centres. However, even this idea did not pick up steam. The Resource Centres do exist, but not for the intended purpose. Pratham uses them primarily

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6. Superintendents and Beat Officers are expected to provide academic leadership to teachers. Each Superintendent is in charge of 70-80 schools. Beat Officers supervise 14-16 schools each in one language medium.

to train community volunteers and to plan and execute ward-wise activities. Recently nine out of the 23 Resource Centres have been equipped with 10 personal computers, each for a programme of Computer-Assisted Learning for children in the school where these Centres are located. The same computers are now ready to work as information network nodes for officers and teachers alike. In other words, the Resource Centres may not be used for the original intended purpose, but they are certainly becoming a resource.

### **The Prerak Programme**

The Prerak<sup>7</sup> Programme in 1996/97 was the first attempt of Pratham to reach out to the school drop-outs. About 15 students of the College of Social Work Nirmala Niketan were placed with Pratham for their fieldwork assignment. In addition, some community volunteers were also inducted with a small payment of Rs.300 per person. These Preraks would procure, from class teachers, a list of chronically absent students, or students whose names were to be struck off the roster for non-attendance. The headteacher was authorized not to strike off the names of such children without referring them to the Community Development Officer (CDO)<sup>8</sup>. It was an impossible task for the CDO to try to find the whereabouts of each and every child and, often, many children remained on the roster although they never showed up.

The end result of the Prerak Programme, which was undertaken on a pilot scale, was an understanding of the status of the children so listed. The Preraks tried to identify every child on the list very meticulously. The percentage distribution of children who were irregular in Grade IV (aged 9-11) in a sample of 1,200 children, is as follows:

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7. Prerak = motivator.

8. See note on Vasantik Varga in this chapter for details on CDO.

1. Family has moved or child has gone to the village	41%
2. Address recorded in school is incorrect or insufficient <sup>9</sup>	22%
3. Joined another school (without informing the current one)	13%
4. Returned to school after minor counselling	07%
5. Sickness	04%
6. Working child	04%
7. Other reasons (not interested, afraid of teacher, etc.)	09%

The extremely low percentage of children citing work as a reason for leaving school up to the age of 10-11 is noteworthy. These children are the ones who live in relative security with their parents and have to be distinguished from those who live in Mumbai without parents in order to work. However, we do not see a very high percentage of 9-11 year-olds in this particular category.

The time spent in hunting for children who had moved out of the community, or whose addresses were incorrectly recorded, and their percentage in the number of chronically absent children, led to the conclusion that such lists in schools were of little or no use. In contrast, out of the 280 children who were located, nearly 90 returned to school with minimum effort. This led to the conclusion that the approach of bringing children back to school must be community based. In villages there is hardly any distinction between the two approaches. However, in an urban area with population of extremely high density, the catchment area of a school is not always clear and basing oneself in the community becomes important.

The need for a dynamic and accurate database was never felt more strongly. The question: 'How many children in Mumbai are out of school?', had never been answered. The Prerak experience started

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9. There are no house numbers in slums. Often a colony such as 'Siddharth Nagar' may have close to 3,000 dwellings and the address may merely say, 'Siddharth Nagar'.

indicating an answer: 'Not as many as we thought'. At the same time, we started thinking of how the Resource Centres might be used to create permanent, yet dynamic, databases. The Health Department of the municipal corporation has created a system of Health Posts, which consist of a dispensary with some skeletal staff and a number of Community Health Volunteers (CHVs). This system is expected to reach out to every slum household and is expected to keep track of every pregnancy, every birth, and every child up to the age of six years. A similar system of databases for children up to the age of 14 could be developed around each municipal school. This thought is now close to realization after three years.

### **Gammat Jatra**

Although, broadly speaking, the Resource Centres were not activated for the intended purpose, the officers' workshops were useful in motivating a few officers to take up new, interesting projects. In late 1996, a senior Superintendent and his Beat Officers held a 'Gammat Jatra' – a funfair of educational games designed by teachers. This funfair was organized at the Headquarters of the Education Department and 10 students from each class in schools were brought to visit the fair. The games were varied and children played a game and earned credits, which were 'cashed' for a candy at the end of the hall. There was an atmosphere of enthusiasm and novelty about the whole thing. The games were well thought out and there was potential to be tapped further.

We felt that doing one or two demonstrative programmes was not enough and suggested that the Gammat Jatra Programme could be conducted in every school on one day. August 16, 1996 was chosen to be the day. Although not every school was involved, over half of all 1,250 schools participated. Every school was given a budget of about Rs.500 from Pratham funds to purchase materials such as paper, glue, cardboard, paint and so on. In order to monitor the programme, a

number of volunteers were recruited. About 50 volunteers visited 600 schools located in 150 buildings. In addition, Pratham functionaries too made visits. The conclusion was that in 60 per cent of the schools, the teachers and children were very enthusiastic and, in many cases, parents also turned up to play or see the games. In most schools the teachers, as decided, were letting children handle the learning aids and games. In other schools the programme took on the form of an exhibition. The fear that they might have to compensate for torn materials was voiced. Some felt that the teaching-learning aids created with so much effort could not be handed over to the child.

The whole programme was organized by the schoolteachers themselves. The amount of Rs.300,000 spent on the programme was truly minuscule, considering that over 6,000 teachers were involved and over 200,000 children in the primary schools benefited from it. Many teachers and officers, enthused by the experience, suggested that this should not be a one-time activity. Actually playing games should become an integral part of the classroom. A Gammat Jatra education game play-hour could be included in the weekly school timetable. Saturday, the half working day, was thought to be the best day since many children tended to remain absent. The idea was that the lure of games may improve attendance on Saturdays.

Like many other ideas before this one, the school system did not follow it up and Pratham lacked the skilled manpower to work with every school in order to help the process forward.

### **Shatak Zhep<sup>10</sup> : the Mathematics Learning programme**

In early-mid 1996, the first certified educationist, with a Ph.D. in Education, joined Pratham to work on the setting up of Pratham's Research Unit. With the assistance of a couple of recent graduates,

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10. Shatak = century, Zhep = leap: The title of the programme was meant to reflect the leap in learning basic mathematics with numbers up to 100.

she studied the level of achievement of students in Grades III and IV in 20 municipal schools. The results showed that about 25 per cent of children had not achieved the literacy skills expected of a first-grader. In numeracy, nearly 35 per cent of children had not reached levels of a first-grader. Another observation was that very few, less than 10 per cent, appeared to have mastery over the expected skills, meaning that a good 55 per cent was still vulnerable to being non-numerate. A 'mathematics revolution' was thus needed – a massive burst of exposure to mathematics and numbers. We discussed the suggestion with the Additional Municipal Commissioner, who felt that skills of children even in Grade VII were extremely poor. He readily supported the idea.

Analysis of the working year of the school, during one of the earlier workshops, had shown that there were two time periods when the schools operated without interruption. The first is the 8-10 weeks in the beginning of the academic year – June until the end of August. After this there are interruptions due to festive seasons until the end of October/ mid-November. In the months of November and December there are the school 'cultural shows' which also continue on to inter-school levels, and so on. In December, most teachers 'use up' their casual leave and other accumulated leave which cannot be encashed. This leads to massive interruption of classes. Towards the middle of January, the schools get back to normalcy and there is another period of 8-10 weeks within which teachers aim to 'finish' the assigned curriculum. This pattern of running schools has a lot to do with the lack of learning in municipal schools.

It was therefore decided, in consultation with the Education Officer, the Deputy Education Officers, Superintendents and Beat Officers that a seven-week programme of concentrated learning of mathematics should be taken up. Two clock hours every day were to be devoted to this activity. It would start with the whole class learning to count/ recognize numbers from 1-10, 11-20 and graduating, step by step, to

more complicated work involving dealing with units and tens, decomposition of numbers, addition, subtraction etc.

In a letter to the entire teaching staff, the Additional Municipal Commissioner outlined the mathematics programme. Preparations for materials to be provided to over 4,000 classrooms were in full swing. Two weeks before the commencement of the programme, the Education Officer was suspended on charges of financial impropriety. The acting Education Officer followed the programme mechanically, but there was no leadership once again. Some of the Superintendents insisted that they would ensure success of the programme on their own and that Pratham should only help in compiling the weekly progress reports.

Did the programme have an impact? The overwhelming feeling among the teachers was that the programme was good for children in Grade II, since it really dealt with the basic operations of mathematics. The Grade II teachers appeared to use games and other materials well. However, in most cases, Grade III/IV teachers did not get involved in the programme. The Acting Education Officer retired before the programme was over and the whole activity was left rudderless in the transfer of power to another Acting Education Officer.

It was not until February 1998 that a regular Education Officer was once again appointed. However, by the time we could start working with him, he too transferred out on promotion in April 1998 and a new Education Officer took charge in June 1998. It was not until August 1998 that we could pick up the momentum of working with the system. Having considered the uncertainties we had faced for over one year, we made a conscious decision to develop programmes, which could work with the system or be independent of it. In both cases the programmes would have the potential of impacting the system. These programmes, the Remedial Study Classes and the Balsakhi Programme, are described in a later section.

## **Study Class Programme**

A review of the Shatak Zhep Programme clearly indicated that a significant proportion of children in each primary grade was still lagging behind academically. What could be done to help such children?

A pilot project was designed for working with Grades III and IV children who were behind academically. Each of the 60-odd Pratham organizers was assigned the task of working with about 20 children distributed in 60 different schools. Schools where the mathematics learning programme was not taken seriously by teachers were selected in order to have a demonstrative effect. The assignment of the task to Pratham organizers was deliberate. Often the organizers tended to be 'leaders' without sufficient insight into the teaching-learning process. But, they were also more capable of assimilating experiences than the instructors.

The experience of the study classes was very good, to say the least. The classes were held outside school hours in some cases, and during school hours in others. The methods used were the very same play-way methods that were promoted in the Shatak Zhep Programme. The first observation of every organizer-turned-instructor was that the children took time to trust them. But once they knew that the class was regular and the instructor was affectionate, a bond was created. This experience has been documented in detail in a Marathi publication called 'Anubhav'. The compilation highlights the variety of problems faced by the children: some without parents, others who wander all day because no one is at home, still others too stubborn to listen, some longing to be hugged, others more independent. This is the first written compilation of the daily experiences and is used for the training of new instructors.

### **Box 2: The book bond**

***Meera Tendolkar, Pratham***

***26 March, 1998: From Poibavdi Municipal School, Parel***

Today was the last day of the study classes. Children were very happy that I was going to give them story-books as a personal gift. I had also decided to give them each a post-card with my home address. Some children asked my home telephone number. Salma said, "I will drop a one-rupee coin and call you". To this Swati reacted, "But, is Bai available at home in the morning?.. Let us call her at night.. Isn't that right, Bai?" They saw no reason to wait for my answer to get into a detailed discussion about the logistics of a phone call. This somehow led to whether I would teach them again next year.

They loved the books. Swati wanted a certain big book, which gave information about different countries. I was pleased with myself that I had given them good books but I had not included that particular book because it cost Rs.21 and was a bit outside my budget. Perhaps I should have taken the children to the bookshop and let them choose a book each. Then again, I couldn't afford to do this for a variety of reasons. It didn't feel good not to be able to give them that freedom.

The school bell rang and the children ran for their prayers. They were waving and shouting until they entered their classes. I sensed emptiness. I had thought that once the classes were closed, I would be able to take care of a lot of pending work of the Materials and Production Unit of Pratham, which I manage. Somehow, I wasn't too eager to get back.

The day before our classes started last Diwali, I had met all the children and talked very nicely to them. I thought my sweet talk would ensure full attendance next day at 11 a.m. Wrong. I was sitting alone until noon. A boy, Amish, walked in at noon. Slowly a few others walked in with serious faces. I tried different ways to break the ice. First we introduced ourselves. The rule was to keep our teeth clenched as we told our names. Some found it funny and laughed nervously. Later I tried a bit of elementary *yoga*. The girls, even at that age, found it difficult (embarrassing) to lie down on the floor on their backs. Finally, after a lot of reassuring, they tried to relax. This followed by standing with shut eyes and trying to listen to various sounds around us. After they opened their eyes, the children enthusiastically told me about the sounds they had heard. Yet, the ice was not broken.

Finally, I started humming a song and going around the children. As I did so, I touched their heads and ran my fingers through their hair. This seemed to do the trick. Their expressions changed and they started laughing. I could read their faces. It was a beginning of a very trusting relationship.

Pre-tests had shown that many of these children could not read. I wrote their names on the blackboard. Only three or four could point out their own names. I decided not to use the blackboard and concentrated on sitting with them on the *chatai*<sup>11</sup> and helping them read or write. Soon I discovered that reading from books that have large print was particularly useful. They listened and followed my finger as it ran over each word. They started trying to read by themselves. Swati, Sunil, and Sandeep needed more assistance. I reverted to the blackboard again. I asked them to write on the blackboard whatever they knew. Some wrote a letter, some wrote numbers, some wrote words. This was followed by writing in the notebook. The most important learning experience for the children was that the teacher did not ignore them or scold them for not knowing something. They started asking for more writing exercises.

Our quest for literacy was not without some interesting events. Sunil Shendekar never sat on the *chatai*. I tried all possible methods. He stuck to, "I don't like to sit on a *chatai*." I gave up. His grandmother had come to meet me in the very beginning. "He is always wandering around. There is no one to look after him. His mother ran away when he was a baby. His father and uncle do not care. Please look after him ...". Sunil came to the class for a few days. Then he stopped coming. One day I went to the class in a taxi because I was running late and I saw Sunil riding a bike in front of the school gates. I got out and started chasing him. He tried to pedal the bike faster. I caught up with him. He must have been shocked as we both came down with the bike on the street. People gathered around wondering what the urchin may have done. I told them that the boy was not coming to school. The onlookers were highly amused. I told him to park his bike and come to the class. I walked ahead wondering if he would come. He did. With his school bag!

Sunita Tupe is an interesting child. Her sister Anita and Sunita came to the classes two weeks after commencement. No bath, wore dirty uniforms, dishevelled hair. I asked, "Didn't you have a bath?" They looked at each other and giggled. I used to hug Sunita and run my fingers through her oily hair. Soon she started showing progress in her studies. They read, '*Shishu Vachan*', in their plastic-covered shanty on the pavement. One day their father came to meet me. He looked bewildered, unsure of his feelings. "My daughters had never asked for anything until now. Yesterday, they were after me to buy some books...". It was a dreamlike experience, or maybe the world looked hazy because of the tears, which had welled up in my eyes.

11. *Chatai* is a mat. In older days these were hand made. Today plastic chatais are available and preferred for durability – though they do not have the soft, comfortable feel.

The study class programme began in November and lasted until March. Classes ran for two hours a day. Yet, children made remarkable progress. They did not reach Grade II level of achievement, but their confidence grew. In many cases, the municipal schoolteachers, who had earlier refused to believe that the children could progress, were frank enough to express their surprise and admiration. In other cases, the teachers withdrew the ones who had made quick progress and replaced them with other children. Although this created problems with recording of data, it also showed that there were many more children who needed help, and that the teachers were willing to co-operate.

Enthused by the success of this programme, Pratham scaled up the number of study classes to 300. The programme commenced in October 1998 and ended in February 1999. This time the organizers, who had taught earlier, became the trainers and classes were held in schools where teachers requested such classes. In each class, the percentage of children having mastery over competences such as recognition of numbers 1-10, 11-20 etc., rose by 20 to 30 per cent from original percentages of 70 per cent and 50 per cent. Skills of writing numbers, simple addition and subtraction increased by at least 40 per cent, where originally numbers were as low as 40 per cent to 25 per cent. Obviously, this is still not enough and children need much more support right from Grade I or even before.

The programme of remedial study classes has proven its need, if not its effectiveness. We feel that such programmes should be a part of the school system, until most parents are capable of supporting the child in studying basic numeracy and literacy skills.

## The Balsakhi Programme

In December of every year, municipal schoolteachers are preoccupied with 'using up' all their annual leave. This causes major disruption of classes. There are other times when teachers are seen doing clerical work while they ought to be engrossed with children. Out of a stipulated minimum of 180 working days of school, uninterrupted interaction with children probably happens over less than 120 days, in two big chunks of eight weeks each. The municipal schools do not have an office clerk. Reports, accounts, salary bills and other such things have to be taken to various offices. It is the teachers who have to spend time on non-academic work. The municipal corporation did adopt a policy, which stated that teachers should not have to go outside the school during school hours. In response to Pratham's suggestions, repetitive monthly reports were cut down to quarterly reports. Yet, problems do persist.

In November 1998, we first proposed the idea of a 'balsakhi'. At the time, the Balsakhi Programme was essentially a combination of a Prerak and a Remedial Study Class, with additional features. The Prerak and the Remedial Study Class volunteers were totally outside the system while the Balsakhi, in the first year of the programme, was assigned tasks by the headteacher. Her primary duty was to engage classes if a teacher was absent. If all teachers were present and engaged in classes, the balsakhi could teach children in Grades II/ III who were lagging behind. If neither work could be assigned, she could help in preparing teaching-learning aids. These policies were decided jointly by the Education Officer and the Executive Group of Pratham.

The programme was to be in place in time to help out the schools in December, when teachers are busy using up their leave. For the first time a condition was imposed, that a balsakhi might be appointed in a school only after the headteacher had requested such an appointment. Many were sceptical, but some put in the request.

Others waited for their officers to indicate whether to request or not to request. Gradually the numbers of balsakhis appointed grew to 1,130 in as many schools by February 1999. Word-of-mouth publicity worked in breaking down resistance or scepticism, as the balsakhis endeared themselves to the children and also worked under the guidance of headteachers (in an amazingly short period of time – two-three weeks – we were able to find over 1,000 young men and women who wanted to be ‘balsakhis’ or ‘balsakhas’).

The demand for balsakhis is more urgent in understaffed schools or schools which are overcrowded. In overcrowded schools, classes are held in corridors, on staircases, or more than one class is held in a big hall, making it difficult for the teacher to work with the children. It appears that the balsakhi was very useful in such schools. There has been no detailed study of how effective the Balsakhi Programme actually was. But, from the oral reports (most headteachers were reluctant to give written reports: some did give reports but with no quantitative parameters to judge the effectiveness of the programme), it seems that attendance of children rose due to the popularity of the balsakhi and due to the regular presence of a ‘teacher’ in the class.

In the new 1999/2000 school year, the Balsakhi Programme has been given a clearer and more focused role. The balsakhi (teacher’s helper or child’s friend) is linked to the school’s own plan of how to improve the quality of teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom so that achievement levels can rise. Schools must request balsakhis. In addition to the balsakhi, through a grant from the central government, Pratham will provide teaching-learning materials for all children who are in need of remedial education in the school. On the part of the schools, the new thrust at identifying children who need help to ‘catch up’, combined with a comprehensive plan to implement remedial education, should result in improved performance. Pratham’s assistance via the balsakhi and materials will hopefully act as a catalyst throughout the entire process.

## The Bridge Course Programme

Pratham's goal of universalization of primary education cannot be achieved without a programme to enrol children in the 6-10 age group who are out of school. The exact number of out-of-school children was always a question mark. In the early days of 1994/95, we guessed that there were about 100,000 to 150,000 out-of-school children in this age group. This was based on some surveys of pavement dwellers and street children carried out by the students of the College of Social Work, and other NGOs working with street children. But these surveys were almost five years old at that time, and numbers had been extrapolated from other figures. However, we were getting a much clearer feel for numbers through the growing network of balwadis. Although no door-to-door survey was carried out, it appeared that the ratio of out-of-school children to in-school children was very small. Most children in slums, children who lived in a family, and who belonged to the 6-10-age-group were in school.

As the efforts to universalize pre-school education started reaching the more 'difficult' pockets<sup>12</sup> of population, the pattern of poor enrolment became clearer. There are about 30 pockets in the city and suburbs where access is difficult and this has resulted in concentration of high numbers of out-of-school children<sup>13</sup>. In the more settled communities, the out-of-school children are scattered

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12. Recently settled slums (less than five years old), pavements and settlements of certain specific socially backward communities have very poor access to schools. The recent slums are located away from urban facilities on recently reclaimed land near dumping grounds, high on hills, forest land. The demand for education in these slums varies from very high to not very much, depending upon various factors including social background, or need to legitimize residence. Income does affect the demand, but low income does not necessarily mean low demand for education.
  13. Available figures suggest that in most 'settled' slums, less than 10 per cent of the 6-10 age group is not enrolled in school. In unauthorized or very poor areas, these numbers could be as high as 30 to 40 per cent.

and the Prerak experience had shown that many of these rejoin school with some persuasion and others may need special assistance. In fact, municipal schoolteachers do carry out a door-to-door survey of children every year to enrol out-of-school children. The enthusiasm for the survey is higher in areas where municipal schools are closing down due to poor enrolment. However, high numbers of out-of-school children in certain areas such as Govandi, Chembur, and Mankhurd (M (East) ward) go together with extremely crowded schools, due to lack of facilities, and teachers are understandably not very eager to enrol more children.

The problems faced by out-of-school children in adjusting to a formal school environment are many. A nine-year-old is reluctant to sit with six-year-olds in Grade I, while the system has no alternative. A child who had dropped out of school and had enjoyed 'freedom' feels suffocated in a rote-learning class. Teachers are often not sensitive to the needs of these children or, even if they understand the need, they do not or cannot do anything about it.

Hence, we had always stated that unless the school system became sensitive to the needs of these children, there was no point in enrolling them. Every year the municipal schoolteachers' cumulative report shows enrolment of about 25,000 out-of-school children. The meaning is quite clear.

The MV Foundation in Andhra Pradesh has mastered the art of bringing out-of-school children into the formal school system. Its focus has been on difficult groups such as child labourers and bonded-labour children in rural areas steeped in feudalism. Its key academic contributions are the 'Bridge Course' and the 'Para teachers'. The former is a residential camp where out-of-school children are brought together for three to six months, depending upon the needs, and brought to a level where they can carry on in the formal school. The

Para teacher performs every role of a teacher, but is paid less and is now employed by the village Panchayat (or local self-government) supported by governmental funds. The latter need has arisen because of a huge gap in the demand and appointment of teachers by the government.

The MV Foundation has become a source of inspiration for Pratham. The two organizations work in different settings and with different sources of support (one essentially corporate supported, and the other through government, INGOs and bilateral agencies). But the history, the spirit, and the work ethic of the two organizations match very closely. Our efforts at working with out-of-school children are based on the MV Foundation experience. However, there was no possibility of holding residential camps, and perhaps there was no real need, either, for camps for children living in a given community with families. We had to develop an urban version of a Bridge Course. The idea at this time is rather simple. The Bridge Course works in *three stages*:

- Start an informal social group in the slum community and run the programme for two months with gradual introduction of literacy and numeracy skills. At the end of this stage most 6-7 year-olds are ready to enter Grade I of a municipal school.
- If space is available, move the class to a municipal school building with those who have not joined formal school and continue their learning to reach Grade II/III level skills (ages 8-10).
- Enrol children of different ages and preparedness into the formal school at appropriate times and help them stay.

The model is yet to be fully established, but the first batch of almost 2,000 children aged 6-7 years has already been enrolled in schools. The next stages will follow.

### **Box 3: Crossing the bridge – one step at a time**

#### ***Rukmini Banerji, Pratham***

*18 December, 1998: From Shahaji Raje Road Municipal School, Ville Parle (East)*

Kishore is reading a lesson from the Standard II Marathi textbook. He stumbles a little now and again as he encounters 'jodakshars', but then he reads on. His voice is low but confident. His bright eyes are brighter still with the thrill of being able to read fluently. Every few minutes he looks up to see if I am listening. Today, it is a week before Christmas. The 'bridge course' aimed at bringing one hundred children who had either dropped out or never been to school, started just after Diwali. Kishore was one of the older boys. He is probably around 12, but is already quite tall. In a few months, he will be taller than all the teachers.

During the first few days of the course, I told his class the story of 'Mohini and Bhasmasura'. Later, children acted out the story and Kishore masterfully played the role of Bhasmasura the demon. For a few days after that, he would refer to himself as Bhasmasura. At the time, he had trouble reading even simple words. Today he is moving through the textbook at a rapid pace. Although many words are still spelt incorrectly, he is eagerly writing an essay about himself. "How do you write 'cricket'", he asks Suvarna, his teacher, "I want to write 'I love cricket'". The correct spelling seems quite difficult, so he writes his own version of how 'cricket' should be spelt.

Thin and tall, Santosh is Kishore's friend. He is about the same age. Sitting cross-legged under the window, leaning against the wall in his classroom, he is completely absorbed in reading. Santosh has never been to school. Yet his reading is up to the Standard II level in a little under two months. He says that he wants to go to the big school now that he is studying well. No one from his family has ever been to school. The aim of the 'bridge course' is to prepare children so that they can enter a regular classroom in the municipal school in the next academic year, at their appropriate age and academic level. When the programme started, this dream seemed far-fetched. Today it seems quite possible. Santosh reads on – it is a story about a dog looking at his reflection in the stream. He stops from time to time to translate key words from Marathi into Hindi for me. He knows that I need help in Marathi.

The incredible 'miracle' of starting to read has happened to all children in Santosh and Kishore's group. Suddenly the world has changed. Earlier, alphabets seemed simply to be strung together; the boys sounded them out, painfully, one by one. Then, all these strings of alphabets together began to make sense. As you said them aloud, you could understand what the pattern meant. Now, there is no looking back. There are words and sentences everywhere. Children are reading constantly, completely self-propelled, and totally engrossed. In a few days, they have read a large portion of the Standard II textbook. The path before them is clear - Kishore and Santosh want to finish the Standard II book and move to Standard III material, then Standard IV and then ahead.

The experience of crossing the threshold to reading is intensely magical every time it happens. Kishore and Santosh realize that their life is changed forever. A whole new world has appeared in front of them, and they have the means to navigate through this wonderland. Suvarna is quietly very proud to have brought about this transformation. Now she only watches and listens and helps them when they stumble. Santosh still has his charming shy smile, but the light in his eyes is different. I leave

## **Working with out-of-school children**

At the end of 1997/1998 (March 1998) we had created a skeletal network of balwadis in each ward and some were approaching a near 100 per cent coverage of pre-school-age children thanks to the existing pre-school centres and those promoted by Pratham. Another six wards were to follow suit in 1998/99 and the rest of the city by the end of 1999 (as is happening now). Hence, in March 1998 some leading functionaries who had run into pockets of out-of-school children were given the go-ahead to start activities which could bring them together socially. The social interaction around games grew into a learning interaction in most cases.

Based on particular circumstances, Pratham organizers began to experiment with how to work with out-of-school children. In the Goregaon area (P (South) ward), children of casual workers at construction sites and other work sites were brought together by a young lady who told stories and who played with children. Inexpensive play equipment was provided to the group. She also carried a first-aid kit because children were often walking around with open wounds. Another pattern of functioning was adopted in the K (East) ward. It was noticed that children in several slum communities were not enrolled in schools. Three communities were picked for a pilot. Initially, a local young woman was selected to work with the children in their community.

The classes began much in the same way as in Goregaon during July and August 1998, but with a little more focus on the literacy-numeracy component. Response from the parents was lukewarm, 'Give it a try, but we don't think this will work...'. The attitudes started changing as children became enthusiastic about the class. In September we began considering how we might actually get the children to school.

It was decided that during the Diwali festival (vacations of 20 days), some of the classes in the Andheri/Jogeshwari area would move to a municipal school. The Education Department gave permission to keep some classrooms open for the children. This school has many classrooms unused, even for reasons other than lack of enrolment. Hence, we guessed that the classes could continue to be held in the school even after the vacation, provided the children could be transported regularly from their homes, which were distant.

A bus was organized to pick up children from three different locations. The instructors made sure that the children were rounded up to meet the bus on time. The children enjoyed their bus ride and going to a 'real' school. After the vacations, the then Chairperson of the Education Committee of the Municipal Corporation, along with the Education Officer, intervened personally to ensure that the vacant classrooms in the school were made available for the classes. Some of the municipal teachers could not reconcile themselves to the presence of 'these' children who looked different from the 'ordinary' children and behaved differently. The struggle continues. But, the children are happy and learning.

### **Future perspectives**

The results from the few Bridge Courses sent a wave of enthusiasm among the functionaries. By now, the Balwadi Programme had set into a sort of routine, in a manner of speaking, although at the grass roots every balwadi brought new and encouraging experiences. The basic technique of opening and running a balwadi programme had been established. Doing something new, different, is essential to keeping the collective creative juices flowing.

#### **Box 4: The 'Pied Piperess' of Appapada**

***Mitesh Thakkar, Pratham***

***7 January, 1999***

Every child awaits her. Parents are amazed by their children's anticipation of her. When she appears, she is in red with a garland of jasmine in her hair. And by the time she walks through the hutment, she has a raucous, joyous group of children prancing around her. Meet Sangeeta Terekar the *khelwadi* teacher.

This was my fourth day with Pratham, and with the intention of fully immersing myself in the proceedings, I followed Madhukar to visit the khelwadis in Goregaon. The Khelwadi Programme is an initiative to establish a rapport with migrant children; create in them an interest for school and education; and to act as a first step towards formal schooling. Most of these children come from communities of construction workers, beggars, rag pickers, nomadic tribes and such other mobile populations. In such circumstances, it was felt that before providing these children any formal learning, it was necessary to bring these children together under one roof, even if only to play together.

With Shekhar and Mrudula in charge, our entourage of six went to visit a couple of khelwadis. The first khelwadi we visited was in a small park at the outskirts of the Aarey Colony. Having seen the orderly structure of balwadis (at least in the ones I had been to), I was a bit surprised by the mayhem and disassociated game playing at this khelwadi. While different groups of children were busy playing games, there were some children standing by themselves in solemn mood despite the revelry around them. Though I wanted to believe in the fun and play as a humble beginning to formal learning, the thought of these children in school seemed to be a distant reality.

The next khelwadi we visited was in Appapada. It turned out that we were early and it was still another hour before the teacher came to play with the children. Being my reticent self and very aware of my linguistic limitations in Marathi, I kept quiet, in the background, and listened to Mrudula and Madhukar talk to some children and parents. Everyone knew of the teacher, and was openly appreciative of her and the khelwadi she ran. Some parents also talked about how they had approached some schools, but had been rejected by the schools because they did not have birth certificates for their children (by the way, every municipal school has to admit a child who seeks admission, irrespective of the lack of birth certificate or any documents).

While we were waiting, we were offered *chai* (tea) by Ramdas, a local resident. While sipping *chai* and chatting with Ramdas, we could hear the noise of the children build up at one end of the hutment. Children soon began darting out of their homes, shouting in joy at the sight of Sangeeta, their Khelwadi teacher. Sangeeta is from the same community as the children. She is around 20 years old and has studied to Grade XII. She has been working with Pratham for six months, both as a khelwadi and balwadi teacher (she runs two balwadis).

On seeing us, Sangeeta came by and spoke to us for a few seconds and then beckoned the children to an open space under a tree. Many of the children were well groomed and made-up for this regular afternoon sortie of theirs (quite contrary to the first khelwadi we had visited). Sangeeta was magical with the children. In her presence, *every* child truly became a child. The children were singing, laughing, screaming and jostling for attention, clowning with each other and losing themselves in the moment. I don't recall even one child who seemed left out or dejected (the ambiance was so very different from the first khelwadi). Every child wanted to be and was part of the '*khel*'.

As this was a special occasion because of our unannounced visit, Sangeeta and the children decided to act out a play they had put together. A number of children clamoured around Sangeeta wanting to act in the play. She chose four children and told us that they would act out the everyday dynamics of their families. One child played the father, another the mother and a couple of other children played themselves. The play began with a girl telling her mother about her ambitions in life and asking her mother to send her to school. But, the mother screamed at her daughter, refusing her demands. She questioned her daughter as to who would take care of the younger children while she was working. Also, the girl found no solace from her father, who was portrayed as a perpetual drunkard. The child who played the father surely knew how to act like a drunkard!

The play was reality and it was realization. With that play Sangeeta had already embarked the children on a path that most formal education systems fail even to envision. The path is to work with individuals (children and adults) to understand what reality is; question that reality; and then realize that reality need not be what it is.

By December we had already sized up the situation. The municipal corporation and the Education Officer were ready to take major steps. We decided that, although in a technical sense, the bridge course model was not established, we would go ahead with a programme of scaling it up city-wide. The first wave of bridge courses would start in some extremely difficult pockets in some of the wards including M (East), E ward, F (South) ward, P (South) ward, H (East) ward and so on. Nearly 290 community courses with nearly 5,500 children began in February–March 1999. Most of these moved to the nearest possible school in the Summer vacations (April–May). By June, about 2,000 out-of-school children, mostly six-seven year-olds, enrolled in municipal schools.

The crowded schools are resisting another 1,000 children, while solutions offered by Pratham to create additional space are not being implemented for one reason or another. Simultaneously, bridge courses are opening in slum communities across the city. The number had risen above 600 by September. In October–November some children who had migrated to their villages will return with their parents and we have to be ready for another wave of bridge courses.

The situation is very interesting at this point. We are quite sure that every out-of-school child in a family environment will be reached by the year 2000. It will then be time to reach out to the street children, children in juvenile homes, and the children of beggars. Of course, migration into the city, within the city, and out of it, is a fact of life. We think bridge courses will be needed for a long time to come so that a permanent mechanism is firmly in place to catch and support children who arrive newly into a community.

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## **ISSUES OF RESOURCE MOBILIZATION**

### **Human resources**

There has been strong opinion in India since the late seventies that unless there is mass mobilization to tackle illiteracy, the issue of education will not be solved. Yet, it appears that time and again, such efforts fall in the bureaucratic trap. Pratham is perhaps the very first attempt at large-scale mobilization without governmental funds and controls, but in collaboration with government. It is also the first mass-mobilization attempt for education in the urban environment.

Our short history can be looked upon as an effort to define a 'societal mission'. Included in the 'societal mission' are concepts such as partnership and empowerment. Many such terms have become a part of social-sector jargon, while the practice has hardly changed. The first reaction to any large-scale social-sector work to be undertaken, at least in India, is to 'network' NGOs. This has become a formula of sorts. In more general terms, the formula is to bring together existing resources and to give them a fresh agenda to work on. This was essentially the path followed by the Bombay Education Initiative for a year, in the days preceding the formation of Pratham in December 1993. The effort did not work for the simple reason that a new concept needs a new vehicle suited to its goal and its necessary organizational methodology.

The two members of the Pratham team, Farida Lambay and myself, who have developed the movement from 1993 onwards, had been a part of failed efforts to generate a Total Literacy Campaign in Mumbai in 1990/91. This failed attempt helped us to acquire a city-perspective as opposed to many who were uncomfortable with anything large in scale. But being used to the scale is not enough, because there were

people in the governmental sector who were used to taking decisions on a large scale, but who felt that a large-scale programme automatically meant bureaucratization and loss of creativity, quality, effectiveness, and so on. They would have been happy with the 'let us do whatever little we can' approach.

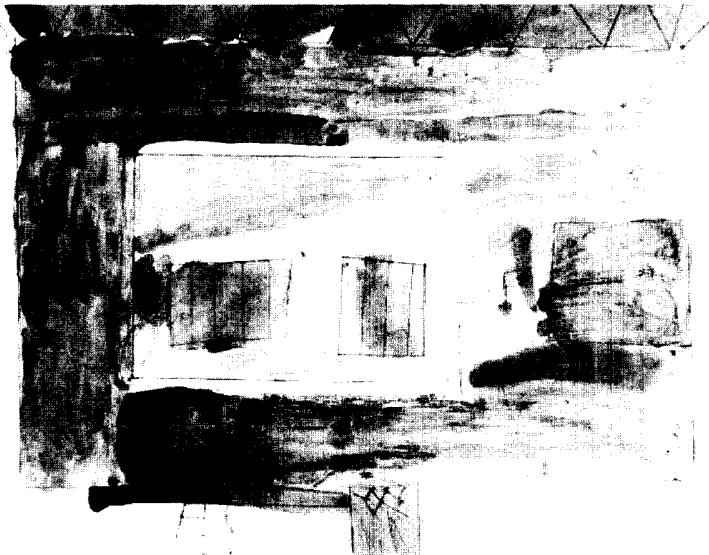
The existing human resources, including NGOs and academic institutions, are too caught up in their own spheres of activity and influence. It is nearly impossible for them to change priorities and devote required time to a new mission. Thus, the challenge of a societal mission lies in generation of fresh resources. As will be seen, these resources exist as individuals scattered everywhere, but who gravitate to the mission to work in a new formation. The other successful example of mass mobilization for literacy in (rural) India was under the National Literacy Mission banner. In all probability, it was the gravitation of individuals to the mass-mobilization effort that powered that movement too.

### **Creating a gravitational field**

The spiral movement of water towards the sink outlet after the plug is removed, provides an illustration of our current understanding of how gravity works. Until the outlet is closed there is stagnation. Once it is opened, a spiral movement starts nearest to the centre and spreads outward as water flows through and a gradient is created from the centre, extending towards the edges of the sink.

Imagine society to be a stagnant pool. This pool has people who may be interested in doing many things but may not find the right outlet. They may be attracted towards different outlets selectively. The popular choice of outlets is different at different times for different people or strata of the society. It is a matter of creating the right outlets to attract the right people. Over the last few years, a

Building societal missions for universal pre-school and primary education  
The Pratham experience



Child's drawing from Rafi Nagar School, Shivaji Nagar, M-East ward, Mumbai (January 2000)

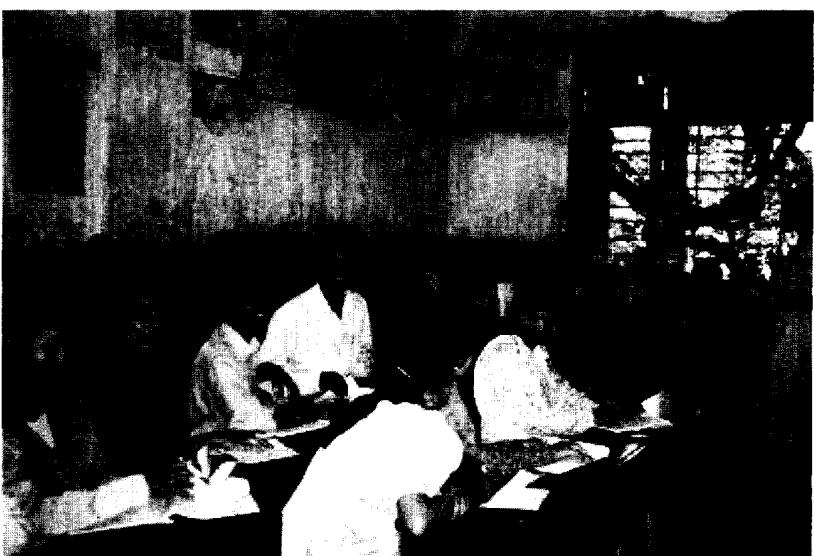


Children from balwadis and bridge courses in Umarkhadi, M-East ward, waiting for their health check-up

**Building societal missions for universal pre-school and primary education  
The Pratham experience**



**Children in a balwadi in a Buddhist temple, P.L. Lokhande Marg, M-West ward, Mumbai (November 1998)**



**Training for Pratham trainer-monitors being conducted in Poibaudi municipal schools, Parel, Mumbai (May 1999)**

growing number of Indian people living all over the world are reaching the conclusion that problems of basic education have to be solved urgently. Education is generally a strong attraction, and an outlet, whose presence if felt nearby, becomes a strong centre of gravity. Various people are bound to gravitate towards it, provided there are no logistical, organizational or ideological obstacles in their way. Also, if the outlet is large enough it can affect a large sink, a small pore will merely create a tiny whirl.

The goal, to ensure good education for every child in the city, represents a major channel in an objective sense. Adding subjective elements of programmes, plans and operational practices makes the channel more effective and the pull stronger.

Through the creation of balwadis, Pratham has generated many small outlets at the slum-community level. Later, other activities have been added. The movement started at the local level is creating a city-level gravitational pull to which many people on the higher ladders of society have been gravitating in increasing numbers. Their movement in turn is leading to other pulls.

### **Designing gravitational motion**

The analogy of the sink has its limitations, but it is a graphic way of explaining the many 'coincidences' of people joining, and resources adding up, without our proactive solicitation. Initially they seemed like pure accidents. But as more and more such coincidences occurred and their frequency rose, we hypothesized that a statistical process related to a large number of events was at work. This could be the quiet spread of the word about Pratham from person to person. The coincidences seemed to arise out of an objective motion arising out of some designed characteristics of Pratham and out of certain objective factors, such as a general environment favourable to giving priority to basic education.

The first important element of Pratham design is its Board of Trustees, which brings together eminent people from business, administration, and the social or voluntary sector. The Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, the Government of Maharashtra, and UNICEF are all represented. This gives it the character of an open platform, rather than a closed NGO. As Pratham grew, we have made it a point to invite representatives of donors as permanent invitees to the Trust. This design sends off signals to each of the sectors.

Pratham is designed to be a triangular (or polyangular) partnership involving the corporate, the governmental, and the voluntary sectors. The Trust is the interface where all three meet, but mostly it is the voluntary sector that interfaces with the other two sectors independently.

On a more practical plane, the challenge of generating a societal mission cannot be met unless one is willing to trust the initiative and creativity of hundreds and thousands of people. In order to promote this initiative it is necessary to design some activities which can be centrally defined in broad terms, while the details can be filled in locally. In due course, local initiatives will start defining their own activities. A system of checks and balances has to be created which are transparently fair, at least within its own framework. The system must discourage any temptations, but one must also understand that people new to power, even if small, will be tempted. The individual initiative goes hand in hand with individual aspirations and even ambitions. Balancing the collective spirit with individual initiative holds the key.

Another major factor of design is that a person or organization wishing to help, collaborate, or join must feel that the organization will readily accept him or her. Hence, our question to anyone who approaches is, 'What would you like to do? What can we do together?'. This is why Pratham has been able to create partnerships easily with several organizations in India and abroad. New ideas are quickly

absorbed and space is created in the organization for new work and new people. Very often we go out and raise resources so that new ideas can be supported. It is because of this that the word spreads and more people want to join this open platform and the organization grows in size and in its abilities.

Cost effectiveness of the programmes is another design factor that attracts people. Some important practices are followed in administration. For example: The Executive Group does not earn its living out of donations. Administrative expenses and fund-raising expenses of the Trust are met through untied donations from ICICI Ltd Pratham does not own or rent premises, even for offices. It owns no vehicles. Institutionalization was deliberately resisted until today, when circumstances demand it. In the interest of transparency, in addition to its accountability to the Trustees, the Executive Group reports its financial decisions to an independent body of eminent individuals from reputed management and accounting companies. Any visitor is welcome to visit the field programme any time. Donors are encouraged to visit the projects where their funds are applied. Such practices build trust, which is in short supply in the developing world.

The final design factor is the deadline of the year 2000 to achieve the goal of universalization. The NGO sector is preoccupied with process and the government declares deadlines, but does not design work to stick to them. There is major merit in imposing a deadline and chasing it. If we say that we have to achieve something within a deadline, all resources must be mustered to meet the deadline. The corporate world identifies with this thought, so does the ordinary individual who is waiting for the day when what is planned or promised, will be delivered on time, be it simply the arrival of a train. Pratham has shown that in the social sector, deadlines can be met, provided the people are made aware of them and are put in charge to achieve them. This does not mean that processes are not important, but one cannot endlessly wait for processes to take their course, one

must catalyze processes and make them happen faster. The pace and the process must be balanced. They must create an optimum possible end-result within a time frame.

### **Mobilizing human resources at the ground level**

In early 1994, we started with no more than seven to eight young people. Most were slum dwellers averaging 20 years of age and had just about completed their 12th-grade education. They had some experience of working for adult literacy in the slums. Their mind was set on the 'education for all' agenda, partly because they had not worked on anything else. This team was trusted with large responsibilities, which experienced persons would hesitate to accept. They went into the communities in different parts of Mumbai, which they were not familiar with, armed with a sense of complete trust and backing from us. They were clear about what they could do, could not do, and why. For example, in setting up the balwadi: there would be no rent paid for premises, the instructor would collect fees, they could recruit local instructors as they saw fit etc. Initially they were unsure if it would work. But, after a while they learned the art of negotiating on their own (no training sessions were held), and one success led to another. In fact, we had to hold them back for a lack of funds in the early years. More importantly, they could all form a second line of leadership, which could in turn develop other leaders and so on.

It may be noted here that community-based organizations (CBOs) too are reluctant to change their priorities (if they have any) in the same way that the NGOs are reluctant at the city or sub-city level. The established CBOs can and do co-operate, but people who have a distorted sense of power largely dominate them. They are used to occasional activity, especially celebration of this or that, or are preoccupied with getting this aid or that donation for distribution, or something or other free. Unattached individuals who are not caught up in this are the ones who are attracted to a fresh agenda

presented by Pratham and they become a part of it if they can carry out a sustained activity. Most often CBO office bearers and functionaries do not involve themselves in Pratham.

One of the reasons for the fast growth of Pratham is that the responsibility and the authority to recruit instructors, or to promote some of them to the next higher (supervisory) level, lies with the Resource Centre Organizer, who may consult her/his colleagues at the 'ward' level. Dynamics of recruitment are interesting. A discussion with instructors brings out the links of how each one came to know of the programme. It is often through another instructor or through a relation of another instructor or activist. Many are related to one another. It is informal, word-of-mouth publicity.

In 1998/99 the Bridge Course and Balsakhi Programme needed instructors with a higher-education qualification. In particular, the Balsakhi Programme, which operates in schools, started attracting young women with higher-educational background, although the income was not substantially larger. This recruitment too happened by word of mouth from community to community. Mobilization of over 1,500 people for training as bridge course and balsakhi instructors was achieved in less than a month in 1999 because of the scores of points at which the word spread throughout local communities.

It is noteworthy that among the first eight Pratham community organizers, in charge of a 'ward' or a major function each, six were men. Today, the Extended Executive Group, which looks after the city programme has 16 persons, out of which only three are men, and out of the 25 Resource Centre Organizers who are each in charge of a 'ward' or equivalent area, 23 are women. This is a result of the vertical growth of women functionaries, as is also the constant influx of young women into the programme. In a sense, Pratham is a women's organization and has the potential to address their issues at a later stage.

Recent surveys conducted by students suggest that acquisition of a sense of self-worth is the prime reason why the instructors are in the Pratham programme. Visitors also sense this feeling. In some areas where collection of fees is a problem, instructors do complain about poor income, but we have deliberated and discarded the choice of giving them more financial assistance. We feel it will cause further problems if some instructors receive more monetary assistance from the organization than others. This is a tough area, and navigation is difficult.

Training linked to earning opportunities is another factor that encourages the potential instructors to join Pratham. Many institutions run training programmes for ECE instructors. These run for one or two years in the premises of the institution. At the end of it, the trained person has to look for employment on her own. In the case of Pratham, training is held not too far away from home and the instructor knows which children will join her balwadi and where it will run. More recently, a system of short, beginning-of-the-year training, followed by training/sharing every Saturday for a small group in a geographical region, has been instituted.

We find that a very small number of instructors (around 2%) leave the programme because they feel that the income is poor. The number is small, perhaps, because those who join are very clear about what they will get by way of financial assistance, teaching-learning materials, and training. Most training programmes also include a session about how Pratham raises money, how much is raised and how it is utilized, although it is also our experience that most find large numbers difficult to comprehend. Those who expect to make a living out of this work often do not join as instructors unless they are sure of the additional income from fees.

People working in the organization have always been encouraged to move on to higher-paying opportunities, even in the middle of

hectic activity. No one is held back. In fact only two of the original seven people who started Pratham work are in the organization today and they are performing functions other than the ones they had started out with. Others have moved on. Many others who joined along the way also have left for other jobs. One person cannot hope to stay in the same position of responsibility beyond two years or so. There is too much pressure from below, from people who have grown and want to do things their way.

The movement is upward or outward above the level of the instructor. This opens up opportunities for people from below to grow. Everyone is aware that what they have is not permanent employment and they understand that it cannot be a permanent employment. Many who started off as balwadi instructors have moved vertically in the organization. Others have joined newer programmes such as Bridge Courses, or Balsakhi, which pay Rs.800 and Rs.500 respectively, although there is no additional income from fees. In short, the Balwadi Programme network has become the main human resource generator for Pratham at the ground level.

### **Mobilizing human resources at the 'middle' and at the 'top'**

The recruitment of instructors is done proactively. In contrast, we do not put out 'vacancy' signs for any of the higher-level work. There are no 'posts' in Pratham to be filled. Conditions of educational qualifications or relevant experience seem totally out of place in this organization. But, in the past six years, whenever people have gravitated towards us they have been encouraged to see the programme as it runs, and to talk to as many people as possible, before they make up their mind. Making up one's mind involves developing some idea of what they would like to do. This may be a totally new programme or a function in the existing set-up (see *Table 1*).

**Table 1. Numbers of people working on Pratham programmes as on 30 September, 1999.**

Category	Total number	Balwadi	Balwadi Health	Balsakhi	Bridge Course	Computer centres	Info Cell	Account material	Programme admin.	Trust admin.
Executive Group	7								5	2
Extended Executive Group	18	1	3	1	1	1	1	2	6	2
Trainer-Monitor	220	91	10	30	47	3	8	1	30	
Master Teacher	49				24	25				
Mobilizer or Assistant	75	26	20					4	25	
Instructor	4 210	2 800		710	700					
Total	4 579	2 918	33	741	772	29	9	7	66	4

The middle-level functionaries of Pratham who head the 'ward'-level organization were initially drawn from the old source of the CORO organization and from the graduates of the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan. Of late, these ward-level Resource Centre Organizer positions have been taken by people who have grown from below, while the recruits from the College or CORO have moved on to higher responsibilities or have found other jobs. People who started out as Resource Centre Organizers, today head 'divisions' or 'zones' consisting of several wards. Although this is a key group of functionaries that runs the organization on a day-to-day basis, this group does not appear to influence a large cross-section of society to join the movement. In contrast, people who join Pratham at a higher level invariably influence a large number of people. It is almost

tempting to say that they end up influencing their specific sectors. In many ways, the dynamics of their joining are basically the same as the dynamics at the grass roots – people talking to other people – and generating more interest. However, their presence in Pratham creates a larger gravitational field.

A crucial contribution from some Pratham officers was their identity as 'daughters of the soil'. Most well-known NGOs working in Mumbai are dominated by English-speaking individuals. Although local Marathi- or Hindi-speaking functionaries work in these organizations, there is a certain 'outsider' look about them. Pratham, too, was somewhat like these NGOs until organizers came from the Marathi heartland of the working and lower-middle class in Mumbai. Their lives in the 'chawls', consisting of one- or two-room units with shared toilets, is representative of this class struggling for its existence in an urban centre that is fast changing into a 'westernized' mega-city. The issue of 'outsider' culture is a sensitive one in the socio-political life of Mumbai. Both the grass-root leftists and the religious fundamentalist groups look upon these with suspicion.

The Executive Group has 3 men (50%), Extended EC group has 3 men (18%), Trainer-Monitor Group has 15 men (8%). The rest of the programmes have a much lower percentage of men. All Balwadi and Bridge Course instructors are women.

## **Financial resources**

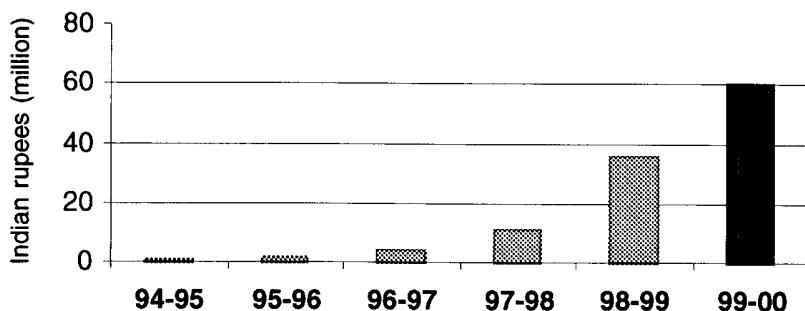
Generation of human resources is intrinsically linked with Pratham's fund-raising strategy. The appeal for money is not based on efforts to bring out latent guilt or a sense of pity in the donor. It is based on a very person-to-person message that can be trusted. The first time that a brochure was developed primarily for the purpose of fund-raising was as late as May 1999. It was titled 'I believe in Pratham' and names of numerous young professionals working for various corporates featured on the front page alongside a smiling blow-up of a little girl from a bridge course. The brochure was accompanied by a letter of appeal to industrialists signed by four stalwarts of the Indian business community.

This campaign was undertaken jointly by a 'Table' of Round Table India (a service club of under-40 male achievers, which has its origins in the United Kingdom) in Mumbai and Pratham. The Round Tablers all over India (1,200 branches) have identified education as the field of their service to the community. After the first visit of Pratham, Round Tablers suggested another with more of their friends and finally concluded that they wanted to help us. Until now they had helped other NGOs on their own strength, chiefly by way of building schools. The societal mission aspect combined with simple efficient, effective models of reaching out to the poorer children appealed to them. The Round Tablers' individual contacts combined with the appeal from leaders of the corporate world is a combination that can only be described as a societal movement and not an NGO appeal for funds. The success of this campaign has now led the Pratham-Round Table partnership to take the initiative to as many urban centres of India as possible.

Pratham has come a long way in its ability to raise funds (see *Figure 1*). From a resource-poor organization, which struggled for money in the early years, it is poised to become a resource-rich

organization, which can help in promoting other initiatives by providing technical and financial support.

**Figure 1. Total funds raised, 1994–2000**



### The early years

'How much will getting every child in school cost?', was one of the first questions we had to face and one that has no precise answer. We merely said that whatever resources necessary to achieve the objective had to be raised. At the same time, we told ourselves that whatever programmes we designed should not cost, at the peak of activity, more than 1-2 per cent of the education budget of the municipal corporation. The municipal corporation budget for elementary education was about Rs.3 billion in 1994/95. The figure of 1-2 per cent was thought of for no reason except that it would make economic sense for the municipal corporation to eventually agree to spend a little more or accommodate the expense by cutting some of its waste. Thus we were expecting to spend about Rs. 30 million to 60 million at the peak of our programme. Today we have reached that peak and the projected expenditure stands at about Rs.47 million. Also, we have been able to convince the Government of India to contribute about one-third of this amount in 1999/2000. Just as we had anticipated, the low per-child cost is a convincing argument in our favour.

The question of how the activities will be sustained in the longer run has been hanging over Pratham from the day the programme was first thought of. Total self-sustainability when dealing with economically weaker sections is near impossible. While we believe strongly that it is the responsibility of the government to provide for this critical educational service to all children, it is unlikely that the government will take up a programme for universal pre-school education on its own. One possible way for the government to own responsibility would be by way of funding voluntary groups to run the balwadis on a grant-in-aid basis. However, the governmental agencies had to be convinced that in a city such as Mumbai, universalization in its barest sense was possible at a relatively low cost.

In 1994/95 it was too early to approach corporates, who are reluctant to fund untested activities. So, we decided to approach local foundations initially for funds. In principle, UNICEF had agreed to support the balwadi effort. It was agreed that we would use some of the UNICEF funds to start the work and use success to leverage more funds from other sources.

The Bombay Community Public Trust (BCPT) was the only Trust that understood the significance of the work being undertaken and decided to support this venture to start 200 balwadis. The amount of support was Rs.400,000 but its worth was easily ten times that because once the model was established, finding more supporters was relatively easy. Many programmes of the voluntary sector need this kind of 'venture funding'. There is a need for more 'social entrepreneurs' with ideas and people with vision in charge of funding resources. The Chief Minister of Maharashtra too donated Rs.500,000 from the Chief Minister's fund and provided us an office space free of cost in the business district of Mumbai in the Y.B. Chavan Trust Centre, which he heads. This was further critical support that helped us push the programme forward faster.

In the next eight months, by March 1995, the Balwadi programme had clearly borne out our convictions of its feasibility. With this accomplishment, we started presenting a model of funding the city-wide programme. There are 23 municipal wards in Mumbai. So, we calculated that if 23 big corporates could support one ward each, the needs of the programme could be met. This support by the big corporates would serve as an umbrella which could encourage local businesses or, in general, smaller businesses and individuals to support the programme once it was city-wide. This strategy could not be implemented at that time because we could not inspire confidence in major donors all at once. Pratham needed a champion in the business community to speak on its behalf. The Chairman of ICICI Ltd. became the Chairperson of Pratham and the company played a key role in mobilizing resources for the programme in the corporate sector.

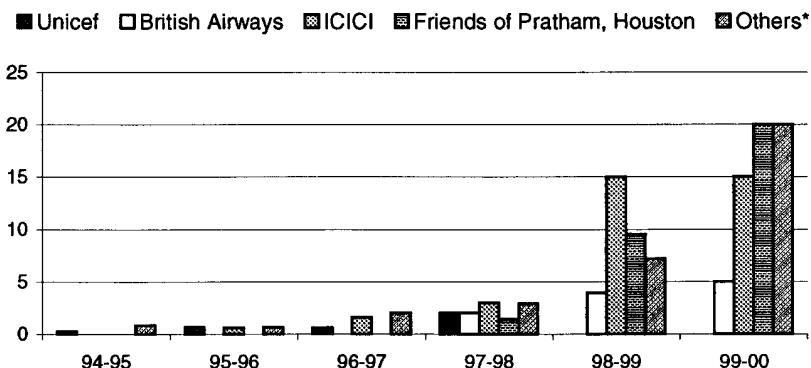
### **The later years**

The key to success in raising funds, has been activation or excitation of key individuals in the particular organization. In fact where insiders have not taken an active interest in Pratham, either no funds have been given or the commitment has dwindled after the writing of a couple of cheques.

Raising funds from Mumbai corporates was to be a key element of Pratham. We had not made an effort to meet multinationals for support. Instead we had thought mostly in terms of Indian corporates based in Mumbai. However, an opportunity arose when British Airways, with its funds raised through the 'Change for Good' programme<sup>14</sup> was trying to identify projects to support. Relatively brief discussions in mid-1997, facilitated by UNICEF, led to a donation of Rs.12.4 million, which was deposited with UNICEF's Mumbai office to be disbursed in three equal instalments of Rs.5 million each over three years.

14. British Airways, and now its partners in the One-World alliance in association with UNICEF, appeal to passengers to drop the currency change that may not be useful in the destination country. This programme has been immensely successful in raising funds for children worldwide.

**Figure 2. Major donors and their share in Rs. million  
(Numbers for 1999/2000 are projected)**



\*Others: This category includes individual donors, and corporate donors who donate smaller amounts ranging from Rs.1.5 million to Rs.6,000 or less.

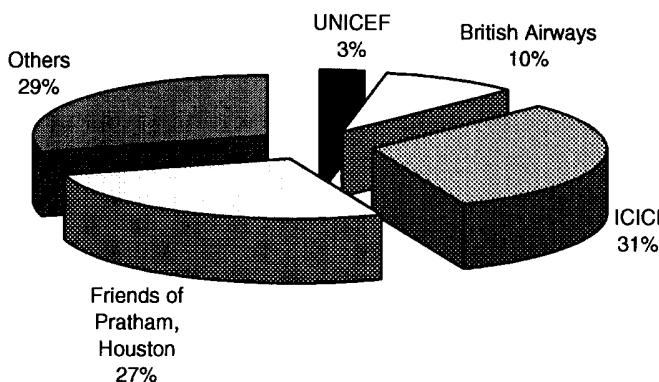
The above *Figure 2* shows that after 1997/98, the UNICEF contribution continues only by way of transfer of donations from British Airways. The last instalment from the British Airways funds will be exhausted in October 2000. The chart also shows a growing contribution from Friends of Pratham, Houston, who are poised to become the single largest donors of Pratham.

The Managing Director (MD) of Vinmar International, who always had a desire to create an outfit that would channel donations from Indians abroad through a reliable system, decided that he would donate Rs.1.4 million every year to Pratham for the next three years. He suggested some ways that we could report to him and said that if his experience was better than what he had seen of other NGOs, he could give more. Within one year he decided that he would introduce Pratham to his business colleagues and friends in Houston and raise \$250,000 for Pratham. The MD of ICICI Ltd offered to match up to Rs.10 million whatever the Friends of Pratham in Houston raised. On 6 June, 1998, the MD of Vinmar International organized a dinner event and threw a challenge to his friends that he would personally

donate \$125,000 if they could pledge an equal amount. Needless to say, the challenge was met happily.

The Friends of Pratham in Houston are likely to be the single largest donors of Pratham in 1999/2000 (see *Figure 3*). Their donations come from several small donors. For example, over 80 individuals contributed to raise \$125,000 that evening. Some went as high as \$10,000.

**Figure 3. Percentage contribution from 1994/1995 to 1999/2000**



There are many people of Indian origin in the USA who wish to contribute to good causes in India. Many do. But, there is a large number of people who do not. Supporters of Pratham in the USA have been inspired by the Houston group. Pratham USA has been set up, which will channel funds for Pratham and Pratham-like initiatives in India. The Indian community abroad has very high personal incomes. More importantly, hundreds are in key positions in multinationals who have business interest in India. The potential for raising funds to catalyze citizens' initiatives is tremendous, provided it is linked with credible activity promoted by credible people through transparent practices.

It is noteworthy that ‘others’ contribute a healthy 29 per cent of total donations to Pratham. This contribution is on the rise. The number of small donors (up to Rs.100,000 contribution) contributing to Pratham has reached about 160, while the number of middle-range donors (up to Rs.2 million) has remained at eight to ten over the years. Increase in both these numbers and their percentage contribution will give increased ‘societal mission’ character to Pratham even if their percentage contribution may be small.

### **Organization and management**

It was clear to us from the very beginning, when there were just ten of us struggling to build Pratham, that in a few years we would have to manage an organization of several thousand part-time or full-time persons. In order to grow fast, it was important that decision-making about setting up of activities was decentralized. But, this decentralized decision-making was around certain non-negotiable centrally decided common criteria. We did not chart out the entire course of the management/organizational structures, but responded to the needs as the numbers increased.

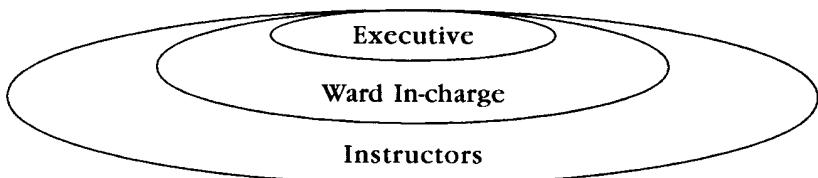
For example, the basic model of balwadi revolved around non-negotiables such as the financial assistance to the instructor and no payment for space. The rest, including the qualification of the instructor, was left entirely to the local organizer and the community. The option of providing teaching-learning materials was central and depended heavily upon the available cash. For a guide to expenditure patterns, see *Table 2* below.

**Table 2. Expenditure patterns**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Cost in Rs. per Balwadi for 10 months (average 18 children)</b>	<b>Cost in Rs. per Balsakhi for 10 months (average 40 children)</b>	<b>Cost in Rs. per Bridge Course for 6 months (average 20 children)</b>
Financial assistance to Instructor	2 500	5 000	4 800
Teaching-Learning material	1 000	2 000	4 000
Training cost	1 200	1 200	1 200
Matching funds for saving group	250		
Functions, etc.	250		
Assistance for follow-up	800		
<b>Total</b>	<b>6 000</b>	<b>8 200</b>	<b>10 000</b>

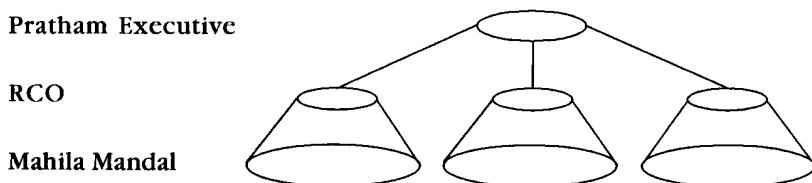
The organizational structure of Pratham (see *Figure 4*) has undergone several changes in keeping with quantitative growth. There are three components of the management/organizational structure and they have been modified in three different stages. The first component is the top, consisting of the Trustees and the Executive body. The second is the middle management responsible for the execution of the day-to-day activities. The third one consists of instructors who provide direct service to the child. In the first two years, when the units of activity were under 400, distributed mainly in three municipal wards, the three components were closer to each other and it was a basically flat system with the Executive slightly elevated above the rest.

**Figure 4. Organizational structure of Pratham**



We organized the instructors into **Mahila Mandals** (Women's Circles/ Organizations) so that the Pratham Trust could provide a 'grant' to these organizations to execute the Balwadi Programme. One Mahila Mandal was set up per ward. The idea was two-fold. In the longer run the Mahila Mandals would be able to access governmental or other funds directly. Also, the grant mechanism would simplify operations of payment to large numbers of individuals. So, the above structure quickly changed into the following. As the number of activities increased rapidly the flat discs grew into taller cones with 'supervisors' (one for ten balwadis), 'unit in-charge' (one per three or four supervisors), and the Ward In-charge was renamed Resource Centre Organizer (RCO) (see *Figure 5*). This was the beginning of separation of the three layers.

**Figure 5. Pratham/Mahila Mandal structure**



The concept of a Unit in-charge arose out of simple needs of financial management. It also made sense to create smaller self-sufficient groups of activity units. The model itself locks in certain amounts to be spent on specific parts of each activity. In 1997/99, for example,

out of an annual per-balwadi budget of Rs.4,500, the expenditure of Rs.3,800 was locked in as: Rs.2,000 Assistance to instructor, Rs.1,000 for teaching-learning materials, Rs.500 to be paid over 10 months to the supervisor, and Rs.300 covered the cost of training. The remaining Rs.700 (free money) had to be used to pay the organizer and meet incidental expenses such as local functions, meetings etc.

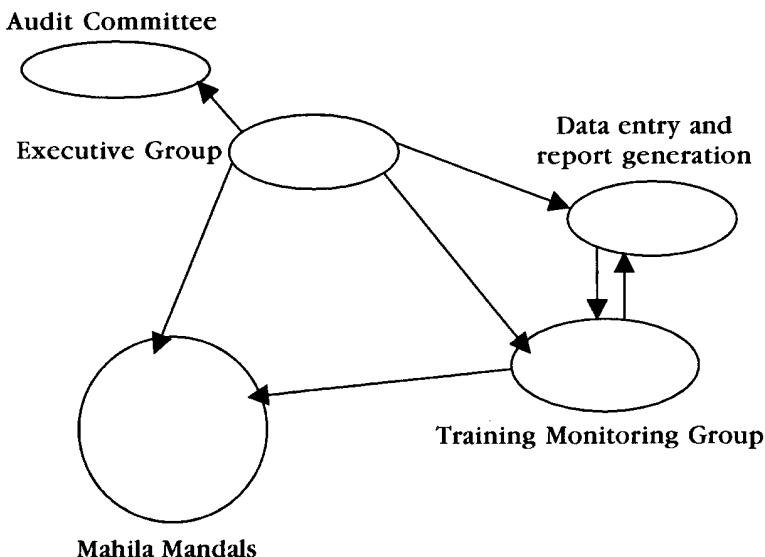
The 'free money' component helped in creating the decentralized group structure as the programme grew. It turned out that if about 30 balwadis were brought together in a unit, the total free money available would amount to about Rs.21,000. A local organizer or 'Unit in-charge' could be paid Rs.1,500 per month and Rs.3,000 would remain to meet other expenses at Rs.300 per month. Thus after 1996/97, all but about 6 per cent of the entire balwadi budget was 'locked in'.

This locking in of finances was a check against financial chaos and, because of it, we never faced a serious problem in accounting for the money spent. There were two areas where corrupt practices were possible. One was in the distribution and use of some of the teaching-learning materials, and the other was creation of false records of activities or under-payment to the instructor. There have been a couple of cases where people in a position of local control have tried to take advantage. However, these were noticed or reported quickly due to internal monitoring and the units in question were reorganized. By the end of 1998/99, with over 4,000 units of activity expected, we needed to improve on our monitoring mechanism. There were too many layers in the organization. We needed clear separation of accountabilities.

A new structure has now been implemented (see *Figure 6*). This is basically a triangle of accountability. Pratham Executive Group has had to create a basic policy framework and ensure that funds are supplied. The people in charge of programmes such as balwadi, balsakhi,

etc. and the persons in-charge of Zones (comprising of three-four wards each) plus a few others with special functions such as data entry and accounting, are now part of a group known as the Training and Monitoring Group, which has organized itself into four separate organizations which are contracted the work for training and monitoring all the instructors. The Mahila Mandals are given grants sufficient to pay their members who teach. An Audit Committee consisting of a senior Trustee and some independent members working with two members of the Executive Group has been created to audit accounts on a quarterly basis. The increasing budgetary provision demands better accounting and monitoring. Ordinarily this would mean tighter controls and loss of flexibility.

**Figure 6. New structure: 'triangle of accountability'**



We introduced a payment coupon system in June 1999 as the basic instrument of monitoring. This new system is already yielding the desired discipline, coupled with retention of flexibility. The coupons are to be completed by the instructor and submitted to her Mahila Mandal accountant, who checks that all the necessary information has been entered into the coupon, pays the instructor, and sends the coupons for data entry to the nearby Computer Assisted Learning Centre run by Pratham. The coupon is to be signed by about 10 parents, indicating that they are aware of the information such as enrolment and attendance of children for the previous month. It also has a space for the grading of the instructor's performance by the person responsible for training and monitoring.

The middle-management layers are now hired by the Training Monitoring groups to conduct training and monitoring of a certain number of balwadi, bridge course, or balsakhi activities. Members of the Executive Group or their other representatives can visit project sites at random. It has been made known that entering false data and condoning entry of false data will lead to cancellation of contractual arrangements. This policy is slowly being understood by everyone. In most places parents had not understood why they should be signing the coupon. The meaning of accountability is being explained painstakingly. The process is a laborious one and it will take a long time for it to become effective. However, the fact that information to be filed has to be seen by many people is itself a check against totally false records.

One of the consequences of the coupon system is that many trainer-monitors have taken a hard look at the numbers of children actually enrolled in the balwadi. In the very early days, the average number of children in the balwadis supported by Pratham was about 23. Normally, similar balwadis run by some other NGOs or CBOs and also schools have easily over 40-50 children and the instructor has an assistant.

We had followed a simple policy that if the enrolment exceeded about 30, the instructor could hold two sessions of the balwadi at separate times and they would be treated as two separate balwadis in terms of payments and materials. This incentive has clearly worked in bringing down the class size. We even allowed justification of a separate balwadi for 8-10 children if the organizer felt that it was necessary. However, with the coupon system, people are taking a harder look at the situation and in some places the balwadis are reorganized to merge two into one.

Looking at the attendance data filed by instructors presents an interesting problem of attitude. For example, there are balwadis where attendance is reported to be very high and there are those who show about 20 per cent children attending irregularly, 30 per cent average, and 50 per cent regular. The knee-jerk reaction is to go after those which show poorer attendance and try to improve them. However, a point has been raised that it is the ones reporting high attendance that need to be monitored first. This may give some idea of why children attend with greater regularity in one balwadi, while in another the regularity is poorer. This is an important cultural message to a mass organization which exists under constantly corrupting influences.

Creating management practices<sup>15</sup> which allow people to trust each other, while also not letting anyone take advantage of the situation, poses a major challenge in large-scale work. Perfection is nearly impossible and one must be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water.

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15. There are other organizational /management issues associated with the collaborative interface between Pratham and the Municipal Corporation. These are discussed in the chapter on impacting the system.

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## **IMPACTING THE SYSTEM AND SUSTAINABILITY**

For us, the question of impact and sustainability has changed dramatically over the last two years. Initially we were asked, 'Are you bringing about change?' 'How will you ensure that changes which you bring about will be sustained after you withdraw?'. We thought creating programmes which require only a marginal increase in the budget, would serve to soften any resistance to change due to fear of high costs. But, the programmes could be run at low cost *and* effectively, precisely because a flexible voluntary body was running them. Hence, it was not only a matter of commitment of extra funds by the corporation, but also of running them in a manner such that the enthusiasm and the flexibility was retained. Could this happen 'after we withdrew'? This is the real question.

Over the past two years, we have progressively added programmes and concepts to create a permanent mechanism for enrolling out-of-school children in school and for improving the attainment levels of the children in school. From these efforts, two strategic policies have emerged and have been accepted by the municipal corporation:

### *New conception of a school*

Urban areas, especially mega-cities like Mumbai, face a number of challenges in their efforts to universalize primary education. Searching for better livelihoods, people move between the village and the city as well as from one part of the city to another. Such movement often means that children's schooling is interrupted; children may drop out or fall behind in studies. In many families, today's children are the first generation to go to school, and parents do not know how best to support children's education.

The Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai has accepted that the definition of 'school' needs to be expanded to meet the special needs of urban children. In addition to regular, formal classes, the new conception of 'school' must include bridge courses (programmes designed to bring children currently out of school into the school system through the school year) as well as remedial education. These supporting activities are an essential and integral part of the regular school, whether or not they are conducted on the school premises.

*Concept of Education Post*

To make the task of universalizing education more manageable, Greater Mumbai has been organized into 450 Education Posts (Shikshan Kendra). Each Education Post (EP) is a geographical area around a municipal school building. The average population of an Education Post region is approximately 20,000.

All educational activities for children between the ages of 3 to 14 in this Education Post are linked to municipal schools. The EP is expected to have a database of all children in the particular geographic area and will become a tool for monitoring the status of enrolment in all educational activities. These include pre-school classes (balwadis), formal school classes (municipal, aided, and unaided) bridge courses (for children currently out of school), remedial learning classes, as well as non-formal education classes. A team of Pratham people in each Education Post is working with citizens, local organizations and municipal schools to get every child into school.

These two policy changes are very new at this time. Not only the municipal system, but also a large number of Pratham functionaries have to understand and internalize these outwardly simple initiatives.

Clearly, the extension of the school, for the first time, seeks to fill the huge gap between school and home for a child. Citizens other than the parents provide this bridge. It is argued by some that the parent-teacher associations should be activated. It is no exaggeration to say that parents, even educated, well-to-do parents, are afraid of the teacher. Parents are afraid of complaining about a teacher for fear that the child will be mistreated. The fear is so strong that individual grievances of the child, such as humiliation, beating, are suppressed at her or his request until they take on unmanageable proportions. There is clearly a need for a third party, the citizen, to play the bridge in more than one way.

Of course, trouble begins when one starts asking, 'Who is this citizen? How is he to be identified?'. Elections almost never seem to serve the purpose, unless the electorate is conscious of what is expected of its representative and is strong enough to demand it. In any case, there is a mechanism of the school improvement committee, which is headed by the local elected representative, but one which does not function. Hence, a rather simple solution was devised. Those who can help the school to improve can become a part of the Education Advisory Committee (EAC)<sup>16</sup>. It should work for the academic improvement of the school and also act as an interface (although not a grievance redressal body) between the parent and the teacher. The network of bridge courses and balsakhi becomes an extension of the citizen into the school.

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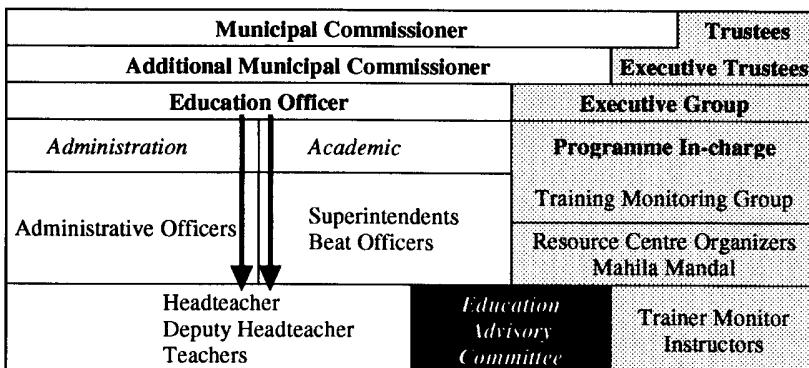
16. The Education Advisory Committee is an interface created at the school level in order to facilitate the participation of parents and other citizens who want to help the school. Every school has formed a Committee and each school committee has a representative of Pratham in it besides other helpful citizens and NGO/CBO representatives. The EAC initiative has not gone beyond the creation of these bodies as yet. A lot of work needs to go into the EACs, which will become the real 'managers of education' at the Education Post. The Pratham team is currently focusing on making some perceptible progress at the grass roots and in classrooms so that the 'right' people in various communities can be attracted to the EACs.

The entire Pratham functioning with the municipal system revolves around being helpful. This is the role of the upright citizen which has to be developed. If such a network of citizens, who help selflessly, is created (and it is being created), why should it withdraw? In fact, this citizen, assisted by Pratham, or any other body, becomes an indispensable part of the modified system. This alone can help in useful, effective decentralization of the governmental system.

So the question, 'What ... after you withdraw?', is no more relevant to our thinking. It is now a matter of modifying the system and creating permanent mechanisms so that citizens can help. This means thousands of citizens must be engaged in helping the expanded school, and the Education Post. The Education Advisory Committee is an instrument created to meet that end. The Pratham goal should be to strengthen the EACs with programme-based work and to support them for a long time to come.

### **Managing the interface with the municipal corporation**

Working in collaboration with the municipal corporation is an essential part of the 'societal mission – triangular partnership' of Pratham (see *Figure 7*). As narrated in the chapter on 'Attempts at working with the municipal school system', winning the trust and confidence of officers and teachers takes a lot of effort. Also, the natural tendency among non-governmental people is to look down upon the municipal staff and undermine their potential. It is important to remember that activation of the individual is also the key to better governmental functioning. One cannot treat the government as a monolith and hope to affect it.

**Figure 7. Interface with the municipal corporation**

The main reason for the poor status of education or of the social sector in India is because policies and programmes determined at the top are either not implemented or not implemented properly. The delivery mechanism is very poor. It is relatively easy to make the government take a radical decision, but such actions do not necessarily lead to seriousness in implementation. However, unless a policy framework is created at the level of the Municipal Commissioner, it is difficult to work with the rest of the system to bring about a change. Thus, Pratham has consciously developed interfaces with the municipal machinery from the top to the school level so that a decision made at the top can be communicated through the official as well as the non-governmental channel.

It is the process of communication from the top to bottom that offers the greatest problem. Even ordinary administrative instructions are confused by the time the chain of 'Chinese whispers' ends at the teacher – this happens in all large systems, including Pratham's own. The concept of Pratham, that of a partnership of citizens and government and their needs, is very complex for the teachers to

understand or accept, especially in an environment full of cynicism and inertia. There are some inherent problems of communicating detailed instruction. Therefore the best method in large systems may be to communicate a broad policy frame, ask the grass roots to come up with a working plan, and react to some critical features of the working plan if necessary. The other big hurdle in the bureaucratic system is refusal to accept that there is a problem. Unlike in the more advanced nations, the government does not make public a 'status of education' report, where the status and the efforts to improve upon it are enumerated. Perhaps that will be the next stage for the Municipal Corporation to reach.

The top of the bureaucratic ladder, especially the Municipal Commissioner and the Additional Commissioner (who are members of the national civil service – Indian Administrative Services – on a two-year posting) are willing to accept the problem. The fact that each new Commissioner who inherits the problems is not involved in day-to-day functioning, and cannot be directly blamed for the situation, is perhaps partly the reason for their frank admissions. However, the Education Officer, who is a day-to-day executive, finds it a little more difficult to go on record about weaknesses or failures of a system. The officers and the teachers down the ladder, however, are blamed directly for the status of education, without considering the problems created by the system as a whole. Thus frank admission and analysis of the problem in the lower rungs becomes the first hurdle to cross.

During discussions with municipal officers in 1995/96, the question of what percentage of school-going children have not achieved even basic literacy came up and the highest percentage anyone quoted did not exceed 20 per cent and most felt it was more like 10 per cent. Most Education Department officials insisted that these low achievers were mainly those children who did not attend school regularly.

In 1998/99 the municipal corporation took up the slogan of 'Every school beautiful, every child in school, and every child learning'. While Pratham took up the responsibility of getting every child to school, the corporation was responsible for the other two – Pratham would merely help.

As a part of this initiative, the Education Department decided that children in each class were to be classified into three groups: Prateeksha ('waiting' – a name for the group that lags behind), Prerana ('inspiration' – needs a little push), and Prabhutva ('mastery'). Each Beat Officer was made responsible for seeing to it that the lists were prepared and plans were drawn to ensure remedial learning for children in the Prateeksha group. Pratham announced the Balsakhi Programme to help out in this effort. The Balsakhi Programme has two main components or inputs into the existing system. The first is in the form of effort or time (through a teacher's helper or balsakhi), to work intensively with 'prateeksha' children under the guidance of the headteacher. The second input is resources (teaching-learning materials for children who are lagging behind). Through a Government of India grant, Pratham is willing to spend Rs.50 per child on teaching-learning materials.

Headteachers of all 1,254 municipal primary schools were invited to an exhibition of the kinds of materials that could be supplied. These included cardboard, paper, gum, scissors, sketch pens and such other material to prepare teaching-learning materials, on the one hand, and samples of worksheets, books, and magazines Pratham has prepared for the individual use of children. We also offered to print any new work-sheets or books that the teachers might write. An order form was supplied to the headteachers. They had to enter the number of children on the Prateeksha list in all the classes in their schools and multiply by Rs.50 to come up with their budget. The supplies and their rates were given in a table. By mixing and matching their

needs they could come up with the supplies they could 'buy'. This exercise proved useful. First, the teachers saw that the problem of supplies was being sorted out. Secondly , the numbers they reported gave us an idea of the percentage of children in this 'poor attainment' category. Thirdly, their shopping lists gave us an insight into their thinking. A committee of a senior Superintendent and some Beat Officers with proven abilities was appointed by the Education Officer to look into the execution of the programme. They came up with the criteria for the classification, which could also be the criteria for monitoring progress.

Earlier efforts to promote municipal officers' initiatives had not fully succeeded. There was much hesitation. However, it appears that the group that has come together in 1999 will make considerable progress. The prime reason for this is the continuous delegation of responsibility and powers by the Education Officer. Also, the individuals in the group itself are motivated. Some of them were anti-Pratham in the beginning and some had reservations. However, they had to work with the Pratham team. There were many heated discussions and efforts which seemed like 'barking up the wrong tree' but after one particularly heated argument, the barriers seem to have broken down. Both teams are quite serious about the work and the municipal team has developed an appreciation of the spirit and skills of the Pratham team. This gelling is important.

It is interesting to note that the apparent resistance to the Balsakhi programme is greater from Marathi-language schools. Marathi is the regional language in Mumbai, which is the capital of the State of Maharashtra. Marathi schools account for 40 per cent of all enrolment in all schools. Traditionally the Marathi schools have been better administered and equipped due to a variety of reasons. This certainly has political and social overtones. However, it is also partly a matter of available choice of human resources from a linguistic-minority

community which is separated from its mainstream in another region. Also, by and large, Maharashtra is a socially less-backward state even where the poorest of the poor rural migrants are concerned. However, the children who go to the other language schools come from relatively socially backward regional and minority groups as compared to the Marathi children.

The Marathi Beat Officers feel that they can handle their affairs, while the others are happy to get help and feel free to ask for it in the new policy framework. It can be said that the officers in other language media feel weaker than the Marathi school officers. However, the number of children in the Prateeksha lists appears to average around 30-35 per cent regardless of their linguistic background. The Beat Officers led by some of the more effective Marathi officers have now created a classification of pre-Prateeksha which means a child unable even to recognize alphabets in Grades II, III or IV.

There is opposition to such listing and segregation of the children, especially from those who are not directly responsible for bringing about change. It is an issue difficult to decide. The numbers are so large that integrating the Prateeksha children with the Prabhatva children (as is the situation today) leads to a multi-grade situation, with multi-level teaching/learning complications in each grade. The teachers are not equipped to handle this. In many cases the class size exceeds 50-60 and the situation gets tougher. The separation allows each group to follow its own pace. The presence of a balsakhi should help in giving the Prateeksha children due attention. In fact, any humiliation of the separation could be countered by quick learning of skills, combined with growing confidence to cope with the segregation. When faced with difficult choices on a mass scale, blind adherence to theoretically correct stands, with no regard to practicality, often does not help. The effort should be to move towards a situation where correct theoretical positions are practically feasible.

The introduction of the Balsakhi Programme has led to agitation. The apparent resistance to appointing a young, less-educated person to help the teacher is being met by declaring that there is no compulsion to appoint this person, but academic progress must be achieved. Also, regardless of whether a balsakhi is actually appointed in the school or not, the schools will get the promised teaching-learning materials at the rate of Rs.50 per child and, in return, they will provide lists of children in the programme and submit monitoring reports as required. Pratham will appoint the balsakhi to work in the community with parents and children if the school does not see the need to have her in the classroom. Thus the situation puts positive pressure for qualitative change on all implementers from various sides, unlike in a bureaucratic set-up.

More and more Beat Officers have started inviting Pratham representatives to explain the policy, right from its origins to the intended results, directly to the teachers. This is a positive sign. There is a long way to go, but the activity at the interface indicates some life. Creation of these interfaces at various points is paying a dividend after more than three years. The effort may fail yet again, but the interface will remain and get stronger, finally to yield a modified system which has citizens complementing the old system at each point, to create a new structure.

In the end, it is our objective to activate the schoolteachers to work with initiative and with a greater sensitivity to the children. This cannot happen through training programmes and motivational talks. As everywhere else, the individual has to be attracted and challenged to do something new. This dynamic has been gradually progressing in the municipal system and it will undoubtedly pick up momentum in the coming months.

## The information initiative

The activation of an individual to do something outside his or her normal field of work is perhaps much easier than his/her activation to change his/her own work environment. The resistance to outside interference (more generously called intervention) is quite justified when occasional visitors to the field start telling the person on the job how to do his work. Larger concepts such as 'citizens' rights and responsibilities' do not sell too well in the face of hard practical realities. There is, however, less resistance to an 'outsider' providing relief. The Balsakhi Programme should provide much-needed assistance to the teachers, but this relief is directly related to the classroom and resistance to it is understandable on one plane. The information initiative, on the other hand, is pure relief and its popularity will grow by leaps and bounds, especially since India is wildly enthusiastic for information technology, and everyone wants to be a part of this new revolution.

The idea of the information cell arose out of teachers' complaints about repetitive work. The creation of a database and the computer-literacy training of officers to use this database has created an interesting situation. There is a general air of enthusiasm about it. Younger officers are making the most of the opportunity and the older ones are trying to keep pace. It must be a boost to the self-image to say that 'I work on a computer'. The goodwill and the enthusiasm generated through the information initiative is bound to spill over into the other fields to foster better relations.

Soon the information system will be available online to most officers and their work will be reduced considerably. The Pratham team is now limited only by funds to take the information initiative to a point where closed-circuit conferences will make travelling from one end of the city to the other a thing of the past. The information network being developed will hold a key to the decentralization and local management process that has already started.

## Achievements

To put the exercise in perspective, it is necessary to broadly list the achievements of Pratham over the past six years and assess if achievement of the original goal is within sight.

### *1. Universalization*

- Near universalization of pre-school education (3-5 year-olds) by December 1999 through about 3,000 pre-school community centres serving over 55,000 children is in sight. There are many other organizations providing pre-school education. Pratham has filled the gaps, especially in slum areas where there was no provision.
- Enrolment of over 10,000 out-of-school children (aged 6-10) in sight by end of 1999 (over 12,000 brought into enrolment preparatory programme; over 1,500 children already enrolled in formal schools).

### *2. Organizational methodology*

A network of over 5,000 highly motivated young people – mostly slum-dwelling women – reaching every corner of Mumbai has been created. This network provides daily service to children in slums and in municipal schools. It also provides an organizational infrastructure needed to affect the status of education in every community and every school. In addition to the participation of slum-dwellers, young professionals and executives have started taking an active interest.

### *3. Partnership with government*

- The Municipal bureaucracy at all levels has largely accepted Pratham for its genuine intentions and abilities. Pratham functionaries, at all levels, are generally treated with respect, if

not warmth (of course other extremes too exist). Response to workable solutions at city-scale is very positive.

- Pratham has won the trust of a large number of teachers (but it has not yet been able to motivate them to take initiative). There are also fairly large numbers who are against the presence of Pratham. It is at least a case of 'you can love us, you can hate us, but you cannot ignore us'.
- Partnership with the Government of India is being worked out to promote Pratham.

#### *4. Funds*

- The effort is almost entirely based on corporate and individual support. In the first year of Pratham, no corporate donation was recorded. Today there are over 30 corporate donors and numbers are increasing. In 1999/2000 Pratham will raise (and spend) rupees equivalent to US\$1.1 million for the Mumbai project alone.
- Corporate bodies are willing to support initiatives based on the Societal Mission model in other cities.
- People of Indian origin residing abroad, especially in the USA, are getting involved in fund raising. Pratham USA has been set up at the initiative of some Indians abroad.
- More than the quantity of funds, the process of fund raising is indicative of true partnerships.

#### *5. Expenditure*

The projected expenditure of all Pratham projects in 1999/2000 is Rs.46 million. This is about 1.1 per cent of the municipal education budget of Rs.4.12 billion and is helping to create basic conditions of universal primary education in Mumbai as a supplement to the 100-times-higher municipal expenditure.

## ***6. Sustaining change***

- The pre-school education centres set up by Pratham can be sustained financially through recurring donations, or through the creation of a corpus<sup>17</sup> for a number of years to come.
- The Government of India has approved a proposal to support part of the Pratham programme related to children in the age group 6-10 years.
- The municipal system has changed in specific ways: first, today there is acceptance of the widespread need for remedial education, and plans are being implemented to help children who are lagging behind academically. Second, the system acknowledges that it needs help to build support in the community. Third, there is an overall openness to citizens who want to participate (via mechanisms like the Education Advisory Committees).

## ***7. Replicating the experience***

- In spite of the fact that Pratham has not actively gone about setting up branches, similar initiatives have been started in three other cities and seven distinct geographical regions, consisting of about 600 villages.
- The people who have taken initiative in other cities feel that replication is possible – that is the real test.

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17. Corpus is a body of funds which is set aside and is not involved in day-to-day financial activity. Many voluntary agencies set up a corpus fund so that their day-to-day administrative expenses can be taken care of out of the interest. Many donor organizations fund activities from the interest on their corpus.

## **Weaknesses**

Instead of using the term 'failures' we are using 'weaknesses' because there is still time to strengthen activities in key areas so as to achieve the desired goals.

### *1. Universalization*

- Efforts to move the Municipal Corporation to open satellite schools, or to provide transportation where access is difficult or hazardous, have not yielded results, yet.
- The high-risk group of street children and beggars remains untouched by Pratham. However, numbers of such children in the target group of 3-10 years are relatively small. Work has to be done in co-ordination with other NGOs. Different systems are needed to bring these children into the education net.
- The issue of regularity of participation/attendance and improvement in achievement is being addressed through programmes conducted by Pratham-supported functionaries, but the school system has yet to take initiative in that direction.
- Significant change in learning levels in schools is not visible. This responsibility does not lie directly with Pratham, but with municipal schools. It is true that Pratham has not yet been able to catalyze any major change in the teaching-learning process in the classroom. However, there are indications that the system will move by integrating Pratham-supported programmes with its own initiatives.

### *2. Organizational methodology*

- Institutional resources such as city colleges and universities have not joined the movement in any large-scale way. The College of Social Work, Nirmala Nikketan, is an exception.

- Efforts are under way to decentralize Pratham's structure, but there is not enough capacity among Pratham functionaries to run programmes totally independently. More skilled people are needed at sub-city levels. Capacity-building initiatives are being organized.
- Everyone involved in the programme has developed a strong identification with 'Pratham' and is unable to think in terms of a new, more localized, decentralized smaller identity for their group. (This is partly a strength, but turns into a weakness at other times).
- The Pratham group is innovative and creative, but much larger numbers of skilled, creative people are needed for the programme at various locations. Although Pratham has highly educated and experienced persons at the helm, the average education of Pratham workers is around the secondary school-certificate level.

### *3. Partnership with government*

- The leadership in the Municipal Corporation keeps on changing. This results in loss of momentum and the system loses faith in any new initiative.
- The political wings of the local self-government and the state government have yet to involve themselves. Six months ago, the Mayor and the Chief of the Education Committee, both elected representatives, were participating energetically, but both have quit their posts due to political dynamics.

### *4. Funds*

Although corporate bodies are supporting Pratham wholeheartedly, there is no permanent mechanism of support. We had avoided this sort of permanence in the early stages. However, as the growth phase ends, a more permanent arrangement for funds is needed.

### *5. Expenditure*

There is no apparent weakness. Expenditure is controlled and is at the barest minimum level.

### *6. Sustaining change*

- Government is nowhere near accepting long-term responsibility of sustaining – or financially supporting – the projects started by Pratham, even if they are successful.
- The Pratham Executive team, which has brought the programme to the current level, will change. A programme to create new strong leaders is needed.

### *7. Replicating the experience*

- The tendency among people to imitate is very high. Those who wish to replicate Pratham in other places are looking for formulae. If indeed Pratham presents a desirable model, a clear understanding of the essential processes which went into its development have to be understood. The model has not been subjected to sufficient scrutiny, except by the Pratham team itself.
- The culture of Mumbai is quite different from that in Delhi or Calcutta. While citizens' missions/societal missions are possible in every city, the Pratham model will have to be understood by those who wish to replicate it.

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## **REPLICATING PRATHAM: CHAIN-REACTION? VIRUS? OR DNA?**

Often the growth pattern of mass-mobilization is compared with a chain-reaction. In the early days of the National Literacy Mission of India, the term 'critical mass' of activists was used as an important requirement of the eventual mobilization. Recently, a thoughtful friend wondered if Pratham was like a virus, which is in the air everywhere and anyone, or someone particularly vulnerable to its attack, could be affected by it. Both these descriptions may describe the growth of Pratham, but that description would be insufficient without introducing a DNA analogy.

The thought that Pratham should be replicated elsewhere was first mooted by people outside Mumbai, around mid-1997, and not by any of us. In fact, at that time we were thinking in terms of a much reduced, low-key role for Pratham after 2000, although the projects were expected to continue. The perception of the continued role as a 'citizen' dawned later, as time went on. Now it is clear that the replication of Pratham includes not only running balwadis, bridge courses, and balsakhis, but also generating the kind of resources and organization that will modify the education system to ensure universalization of primary education on its own. It also requires building an organization which is different from usual NGO organizations. The body has to be built along with the programmes or activities.

The first thought about replicating Pratham came in early 1997, from the MD of Vinmar International and his donor friends in Houston, who were supporters of Pratham in Mumbai. But considering the composition of the Indians residing in the USA, they felt that it would be much easier to raise funds for Pratham if it was not restricted to Mumbai. There were several problems associated

with this at the time. Our finances were not sufficient even to sustain the Mumbai programmes. Secondly, we did not know any group or individual elsewhere interested in the kind of work we were doing. It was difficult to think of sending anyone from Pratham to set up a programme elsewhere because of the shortage of human and financial resources. More importantly, the thought of opening chapters or branches of Pratham was not a comfortable one. But, it set us thinking. If Pratham is to be replicated, *how* would it happen? Of course, the answer was rather simple. If people elsewhere were activated, they would build their own societal mission. Where do you find such people? How do you find them? Or, would they find us?

### **First steps outside Mumbai**

Until June 1997, Pratham had little or no contact with groups working with children, or on the subject of education, either in Mumbai or elsewhere in the country or in the world.

The minority government of the United Front introduced the 83rd Amendment to the Constitution of India to make education a fundamental right in mid-1997. Our attention was drawn to a small notice on the last page of the Times of India by one of our young activists. We had just about 15 days to react. Seven days were over by the time we received a copy of the Bill. However, we got together some bright young lawyers and discussed the matter with the Legal Assistance Cell of the Yashwantrao Chavan Centre. Together we sent out our critique of the Bill and suggested changes. There were clearly some flaws in the Bill. But, the fact that the government had moved such a Bill was much more important. Hence, we decided to give publicity to the Bill as much as we could.

The Bill was made available on the Internet and we requested people to sign in its support. In a matter of a week, before the deadline,

over 8,000 individuals living in India and abroad visited the website and expressed their support and excitement about the proposed amendment. This led to a relatively large number of people knowing about Pratham for the first time. Printouts of the comments on the website were submitted to the Rajya Sabha Secretariat. Evidently, the Ministry was pleased with our initiative, since this was the first time such a large number of people from the more well-to-do sections had written in support of education as a fundamental right; a right that has nothing to do directly with children in their families. The support surprised us too and we became very aware of the presence and potential of a large motivated segment among young professionals within the country and outside. This would be an important support base for replication of Pratham elsewhere in the country.

We would like to think that our suggestions (along with those of some others) regarding the Bill played an important part in shaping the subsequent recommendations of the Parliamentary Committee for Human Resources Development, which will undoubtedly result in an appropriately modified Bill. The Bill has survived, although the Lok Sabha (the lower house of Parliament) has been dissolved twice since then.

The 83rd Amendment introduced us to many important grass-roots organizations nationwide. With support from Child Relief and You (CRY), National Foundation for India (NFI) and UNICEF, we organized a two-day conference in Delhi on the fundamental right to education. Several important politicians spoke at this forum, as did the representatives of the press, the judiciary and eminent individuals from public life. Members of different ground-level organizations also spoke about their stand regarding the amendment. The conference did help to bring visibility for Pratham outside of Mumbai.

The introduction to CRY and the M. Venkatarangaiya Foundation (which fights against child labour in India and puts those children back into school) led to a move to set up the National Alliance for the Fundamental Right to Education in early 1998. The Alliance is a platform with no formal structure. Although we initiated it, the ideas of the Alliance partners on how it would work did not gel for a long time. The partners worked individually in their regions to take the issue forward, but no impact was made together at the national level. Over the past six months or so some individuals have started reorganizing the efforts.

### **Essential ingredients of Pratham-like initiatives**

In thinking about the similarities across the different Pratham-inspired efforts around the country, some essential elements can be distinguished:

1. A 'leader' who promotes the vision of universal primary education with missionary zeal. Creating a 'societal mission' is an integral part of the vision, as is the partnership between the government, the corporate sector and citizens. A leader can be an individual, group, or an organization. The Leader may change from phase to phase but he/they must have wide appeal in the upper segments of the society. In Mumbai, UNICEF was the first Leader and later the leadership was taken over by ICICI.
2. Captains and/or coaches – individuals or a group of individuals who can deal with a range of people starting from the top of society to the rock bottom with relative ease. The Captains are the ones who strategize, plan, organize, and manage. The Coaches work with people and train them, sometimes formally, but mostly by working together with them. They do creative work, and are responsible for creative chaos in the organization. Very often the

Captain and the Coach are the same person, or they may have to switch places. The Executive Group of Pratham in Mumbai and some people in the Training Monitoring Groups of Pratham fall in this category.

3. Lieutenants – These are the people who mobilize, train, and organize the troops at the grass roots. The hurdle in their growing to become Captains in a cosmopolitan city could be their formal education and the class barrier. However, experienced Lieutenants from a larger city can easily become Captains in a smaller-sized city dominated by regional cultures.

The compartments between Leaders and Captains/coaches or Captains and Lieutenants cannot be watertight. It is possible that a person plays two roles during a particular phase. It is a combination of these three that helps create a mission. But then, this is not something extraordinary. What makes it extraordinary is the attitude with which they work, the message they give out.

The thing that differentiates these Leaders, Coaches, and Lieutenants from other people from backgrounds similar to them is perhaps their instant response to the idea. They do not have to be persuaded. They are self-motivated. They understand and internalize the idea on their own. Any person who needs to be persuaded, is not the 'right' person to start with. This rule of thumb works.

It is extremely important to start with the right person. This person has to be trusted and given the freedom to take risks. Faith in people's capacity to grow is often a self-fulfilling prophecy. More often than not, once you believe that a certain person can do a task, they too begin to believe in it, and the task is done.

## **Analysis of developments in two cities**

### *Baroda, Gujarat*

The Baroda Programme did not start with balwadis. Instead a combination of bridge course and balsakhi was created. A functionary of the Urban Community Development Programme of the Baroda Municipal Corporation introduced Lekha to a slum community and a few young women agreed to work. A training programme was organized. However, at the end of the programme, most of the women who were trained decided not to work, for one reason or another. But, a few days later, one of the women turned up with a group of another 20 young women from the same communities and they took up the work. In June-July 1999, 450 out-of-school children were enrolled in the schools after a two-month preparatory bridge course exposure. The local school teachers were happy with this development because enrolment had dropped. The Baroda Municipal Education Board has now officially recognized this work and the programme is moving forward.

A local leader who accepts ownership is yet to emerge. A Captain/Coach happened through several meetings and the *right* individual emerged. Some suitable Lieutenants have emerged in association and they are going to other communities to mobilize more people. Now the pattern is set. The word is spreading. Gravitation has begun. The DNA has started building a Pratham-like body from basic ingredients in the society through programme evolution. The Baroda body will not be a clone of Mumbai, but it will have similarities. What is more important is that it will soon have a life of its own, independent of the Mumbai group. They have a different identity, called Ekta Education Initiative of Baroda. But, this identity will be weak until a local Leader makes it her/his own.

*Delhi*

In February, 1999 a meeting of several NGOs and other individuals was called to talk about the idea of a Mission in Delhi. The discussions about a Citizens' Mission and how to set it up were prolonged beyond expectations. Unlike the Mumbai model, the officials seem to have a more key role in the mission and established NGOs will probably play a bigger role. This means that Sunischay – as the Citizens' Mission is to be called – will have a different character.

While the discussions about the official setting up of the Citizens' Mission were taking their course, some young professionals decided that they wanted to get started as Pratham, Delhi. Some 20-odd balwadis were thus set up in the period of a month. Clearly, money would not be a problem, and by early October 1999, over 120 balwadis had opened in six different areas of Delhi. Plans are being prepared to work with the local schools.

The question is, how is this mobilization going to synchronize with the existing Primary Education Enhancement Project (PEEP), supported by UNICEF through Australian assistance? The programme has been around for two years and has some plans. Also, Sunischay, the Citizens' Mission of Delhi, is also getting started with the Chief Minister at its head. The Pratham team is quite clear that its efforts in the Delhi slums can supplement Sunischay efforts, or even merge with it, if the conditions are right. But, for now, the network is expanding at a fast pace and hopes to involve over 1,000 people by mid-2000.

## **Inspiration of work in rural areas of Maharashtra**

With some excellent grass-roots work of a couple of experienced young activists from Pratham, who were only too happy to move into clean air, balsakhi and balwadi work was established in over 75 villages. The work has entered its second year now.

A group of young people, mostly dalits (former untouchables), who worked with me in a public sanitation project have been maintaining pay-and-use toilets in Mumbai. They had released four of their colleagues to start educational activities in a tribal region in the Thane district adjoining Mumbai. The group received no external assistance for its pilot work in five villages in its first year (1997/98). It was sustained through the income from the pay-and-use toilets. Last year, it spread to over 80 villages, working in two groups, and setting up remedial classes and balwadis. The task is to set up local youth groups to take care of the educational needs.

Our efforts to develop a Maharashtra chapter of the National Alliance for the Fundamental Right to Education brought us together with Green Earth Consultants, who work with various NGOs to develop, assess, and evaluate projects. We decided that they could take on the responsibility of reaching NGOs in Maharashtra to build rural models of universalization of primary education. About 140 NGOs, small and large, were contacted in regional meetings. The process led to the setting up of five regional co-ordination offices in five corners of the state.

Among the five NGOs co-ordinating the work, each has a different style and hence the progress of work is uneven. In Solapur district, the local NGO officer worked out a partnership with the Chief Executive Officer of the District government. Together, the voluntary network and the government declared that every child in the Karmala block (196 villages) was enrolled in school. Village-level meetings,

followed by assignment of local responsibilities, preceded the achievement. They are now trying to put together a more difficult programme of improvement in achievement standards. The work in other regions has no such spectacular claim, but it is growing. It is quite apparent that the process of expansion is creating a team which is self-motivated and can generate its own resources in its own way.

As a conclusion, there appear to be three distinct phases of replication of Pratham. First is the conceptual 'infection' of some individual(s) at the top as a part of the 'gravitation' model discussed earlier. Second is the identification of critical grass-roots functionaries and passing on a broad vision to them. These two, together, make the DNA code. The third phase is the growth and linked resource generation associated with it. There could be a fourth one, which is unfolding in Mumbai. But, it is too early to write about it.

The DNA thus appears to be the key to building a new life, a new person. Unlike the chair reaction or the virus analogy, the DNA analogy emphasizes creation of a new body of people in other locations which grows to develop similar, but not identical, characteristics. In replicating an experiment there is a temptation to open 'branches' or 'franchises', to use a more recent Western term. However, Pratham relies on finding the right persons or group of persons who can internalize the finer points of a mega-organization and set about building it from practically nothing. This person or group carries the DNA code of the new body to be built and shapes its growth accordingly. It is not a mechanical growth but something much more organic, rooted in local realities and relations. Nevertheless, it carries essential programmatic and attitudinal elements from Pratham.

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## **CONCLUSION: THE UNFOLDING FUTURE**

We started out honestly thinking that Pratham was not going to be a 'permanent' organization. The organization was born to accomplish a task within a given deadline and it would cease to exist, or at most continue in a much diminished role, with different people manning it. If we modified the system to meet the needs of maintaining universal primary education, we would not be needed as individuals. Perhaps, if the modified system worked well, even a diminished role for Pratham would not be needed. But, success, even if not 100 per cent, in an uncharted territory has created its own course. Although in starting the aims and objects of the Pratham Trust we did write, "..to create a model of universalization of primary education to demonstrate to the nation..", it must have been too far a thought to ask, "who will propagate this model?". Had we thought clearly about this, we would have known that Pratham would change, and enlarge if we were successful. In a way it is good that we did not think of it, because we could focus on the day-to-day performance, rather than a distant idea which depended on it.

Clearly, our work in Mumbai is not finished. But, there is little doubt that we will be able to create a permanent, even if skeletal, mechanism, to ensure by mid-2000 or earlier that no child (3-10 year-olds) in a family environment stays out of the education net. But there is a need for qualitative strengthening. The concept of Resource Centres has been left undeveloped, mainly due to lack of initiative on the part of the Municipal Corporation. Under the new circumstances there is reason to believe that the municipal system will be interested in developing the idea to its potential. This will be critical for qualitative improvement of municipal schools and their decentralized functioning.

Mumbai is becoming a resource to other initiatives, especially in terms of mobilization and organization of 'societal missions' elsewhere. The municipal education system in Mumbai is far better than in other cities, thanks to some policy foundations laid in the early sixties. At least some of these could serve as a model to others.

The Government of India is on the verge of tabling the modified 83rd amendment to the Constitution to make it obligatory for the government to provide education for every child between the ages of 6 and 14 as her/his fundamental right. The Supreme Court had already stated in 1993 that education 'up to the age of 14' is a fundamental right. In this sense the amendment of the Constitution may appear redundant to some. However, an Act of Parliament to make education a fundamental right has necessary consequences in terms of financial allocations and creation of a will of the people.

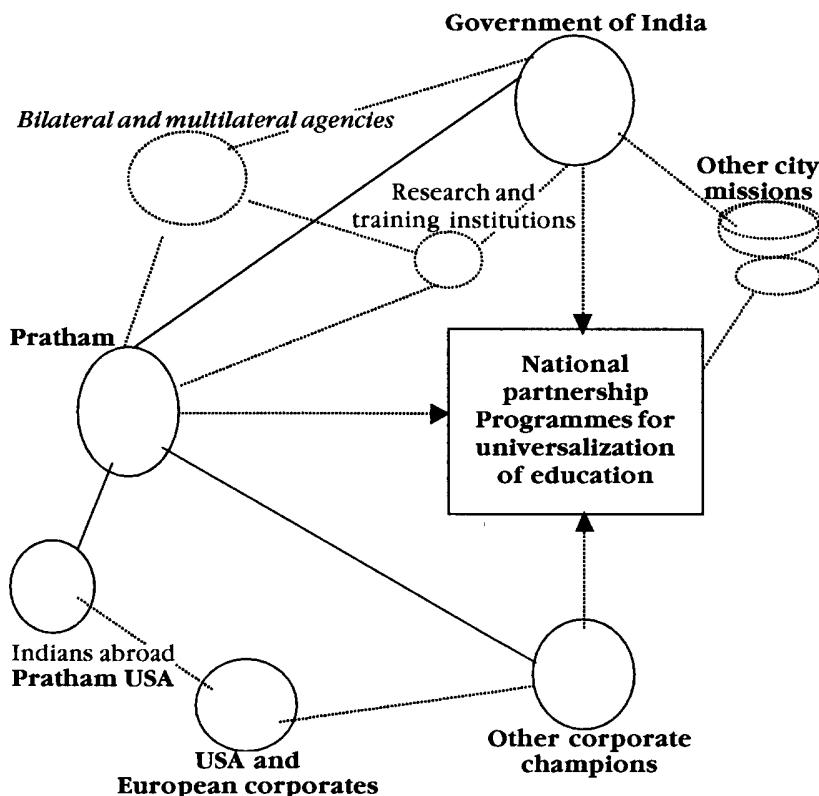
The realization of this fundamental right has not been possible mainly because the delivery mechanism is ineffective. Productivity of the expenditure on education is poor. Creation of an effective delivery mechanism is important nationwide. The government is already considering a policy-framework to promote and facilitate non-governmental initiatives to meet the challenges. It all boils down to the creation of a new system of delivery.

We are aware that Pratham represents a fraction of what is needed. However, it is our belief that this is an important fraction that points out the direction in which changes should occur. Pratham's demonstrated model of a tripartite partnership is likely to become more and more important to create a new democratic practice for a more productive social sector.

As described in the previous pages, the year 2000 will be one of major transition for Pratham. The fact that people and institutions outside Pratham are driving this transition is important. This is not a case of self-promotion. The fact that the Ministry of Human Resources

Development, Government of India, sees a reason to promote Pratham as a best-practice example, provides grounds for the formation of a partnership network on a nationwide scale. In the USA, friends of Pratham are setting up a Pratham USA charity. Thus a new network of partnership is emerging to achieve a singular objective of 'every child in school, and learning'.

**Figure 8. Emerging Partnership\* Scenario I**



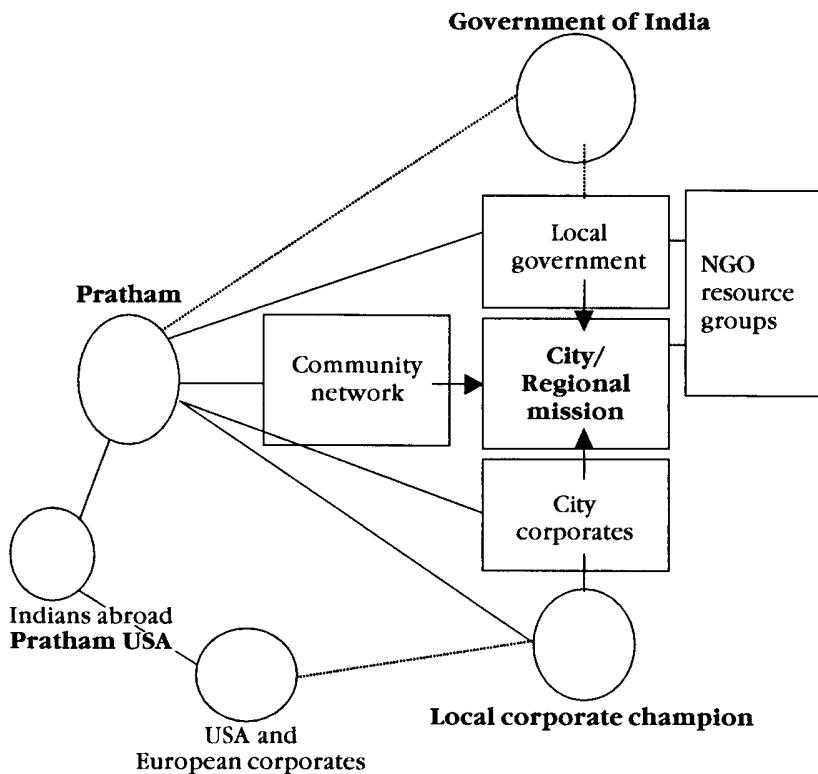
\*Although Pratham as a concept includes all the partners, 'Pratham' indicates the existing legal entity. Participation of the Government of India is subject to its decision.

In the above *Figure 8* the linkages that have been created are shown by solid lines and those that are possible are shown in dashed lines. The national programmes box essentially consists of basic policy and programmatic initiatives. It also could contain concepts such as an India Education Fund and/or Non-banking Financial Institution(s) to support capital needs of the education sector on a low-profit basis.

The above partnership scenario will give rise to a new practice only if the government is willing to truly join in a partnership and play the facilitator rather than the dispenser and controller. If the government does not change many of its operating mechanisms, there will be no difference. In a sense this scenario is a blow-up of the Mumbai partnership, where the government corner is occupied by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai and the corporate champion corner is occupied by ICICI Ltd.

The above partnership cannot stay only at the level of funds and policy. It should be linked directly with programmes to be implemented at the ground level. This means that the Government of India may have to create government-to-government partnerships and the national corporate champions will need to work with local corporates to secure their involvement. Pratham will need to be involved in working with the community network and the corporates at the local level. Once this template is put in place, the mission will follow its local growth pattern. Within some time, it should be possible for the City Mission to sustain itself, at least in the middle to large-sized cities.

**Figure 9. Emerging partnership Scenario II**



The above-structured template (*Figure 9*) is being set up in Pune, a city 150 km from Mumbai, from the very first day, with the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) as the Corporate Champion. In other cities, the template may come together in bits and pieces as the DNA of Pratham does its job.

## **Next five years**

In 1994 we had set ourselves a goal. As we huddle together for discussions about what we are going to do next, we must ask ourselves, what will Pratham achieve over the next five years? Setting the goal and going after its achievement is one of the basic elements of Pratham. The goals in Mumbai and goals in other cities have to be separated.

### **1. Goals in Mumbai:**

- Creation of a permanent education net to cover every high-risk child in the city, or entering the city by 2002. This will involve street children, and others.
- Ensuring that teaching-learning, training, and monitoring mechanisms are developed within the municipal system to raise average learning levels in municipal schools to reach the goals, set by the Government of Maharashtra and the Municipal Corporation, by 2003.
- Universalization of elementary education (children aged 6-14) by 2005.

### **2. Goals in other urban areas: Universalization of primary education in every major city of India by 2005.**

Dreaming up a goal of universalization of primary education in every major city in India does have a certain absurdity about it, when the dreamers have no real power or authority to help them realize the dream. But, that is the beauty of a societal mission. It begins with a dream. It is powered by the will of individual citizens who take their role of the masters in a democracy seriously, and it is achieved through application of skills and resources which are brought together by other like-minded citizens from various sectors and regions.

As we said about universalization of primary education in January 1994, in what seemed like an equally absurd situation:

*It must be done.*

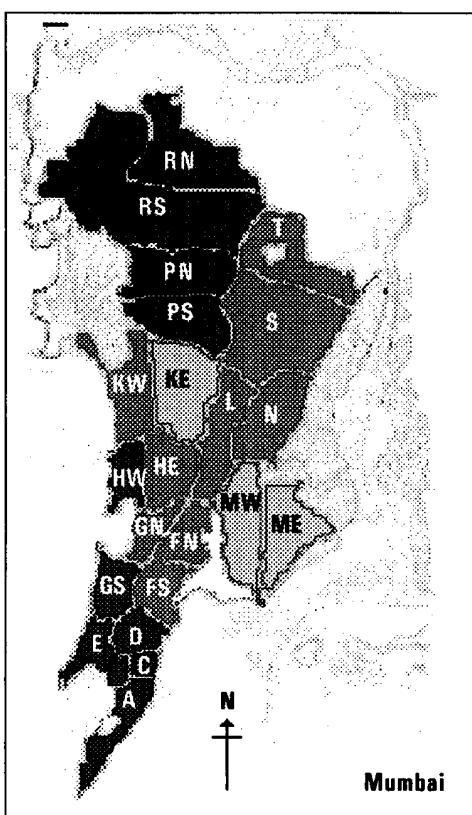
*It can be done.*

*It shall be done.*

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## **APPENDIX I: Mumbai wards, with work started in 1994/1996/1997**

The entire city of Mumbai has been divided into 448 Education Posts (EP). Each EP is generally a geographic region surrounding a municipal school building. On average, an EP will have a population of 20,000 people. The Pratham movement covers all education posts. The local Pratham team has information about every slum community in these education posts. In particularly congested slum pockets with severe problems of access to schools, a door-to-door survey has been conducted and bridge courses have been started wherever necessary.



**Work started in 1994**

**Work started in 1996**

**Work started in 1997**

R(North) ward: Borivali.

Thane city is to the North of  
T ward: Mulund.

K(East) ward: Andheri region-  
airport located here.

M(E) Chembur, Govandi: most  
difficult areas with dense slum  
colonies. 25% of all Pratham  
projects in this area.

F and G wards: Central Mumbai  
including old textile mills area  
and Dharavi slums.

A ward: Business district of  
Churchgate, Nariman Point.

## **APPENDIX II: Summary of Pratham programmes**

Over the past six years Pratham has focused on the 3-10 year age-group and arrived at three programme divisions. These are:

*For 3-5 year-olds:*

- the Balwadi Programme, (bal = child, wadi = home, a word for an early-childhood education centre).

*For 6-10 year-olds:*

- the bridge courses for school readiness of drop-outs and unenrolled children,
- the balsakhi (children's friend) programme consisting of:
  - remedial learning for children who lag behind and hence are potential drop-outs,
  - supporting children enrolled through bridge courses.

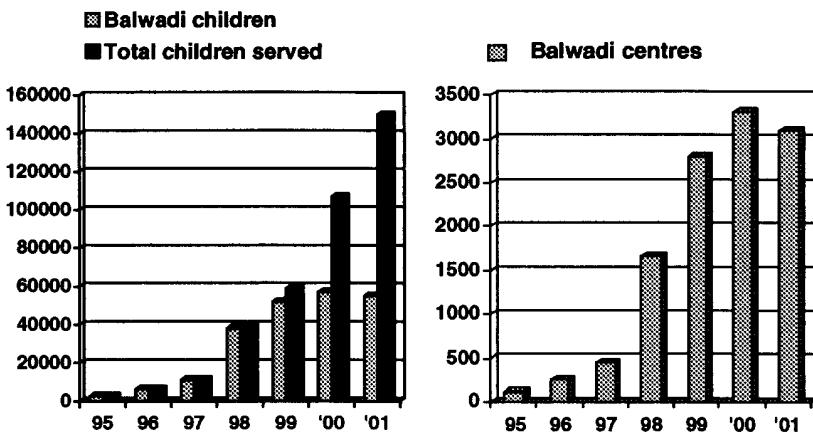
In addition, a programme for computer-assisted learning for municipal schoolchildren and a computer information network for school administration (data and MIS) has been developed.

At the time of writing, the programme involves 2,900 balwadis catering to about 53,000 3-5 year-old children; 600 bridge courses serving 9,000 out-of-school 6-10/12 year old children; and 560 balsakhis. On average, each balsakhi deals with about 40 children. Over 22,000 children who have not attained basic literacy and numeracy skills (Grades II-IV) are currently being handled by balsakhis.

By mid-December 1999, Pratham will have a city-wide mechanism in place, to bring into the education net, any child who lives in a family environment. The education net consists of a balwadi, or a bridge course/ NFE class or a school. This net will be expanded over the next year to cover street children and other high-risk groups.

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### APPENDIX III: Summary of Balwadi centres



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## **The book**

Initiated in 1994, by UNICEF, the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai and several prominent individuals, Pratham is a public charitable trust. Its aim is to create a societal mission for achieving universal pre-primary and primary education in the city by the year 2000. Pratham's goal is simple: 'Every child must go to school regularly and learn well'. It therefore follows that all Pratham's efforts and initiatives are linked to the existing government school system and directed at improving access to schools, increasing attendance and raising achievement.

Since its inception in 1994, Pratham's growth has been impressive. Today Pratham has a presence in every slum community in Mumbai. How has this phenomenon happened? What are the key factors that have led to this success? If a mega-city like Mumbai, with over half of its population living in slums, can achieve this goal, what lessons can be learned from this experience? What are the challenges that lie ahead? This is a biography of the movement.

It traces the birth, evolution and growth of the organization, outlines its strengths, weaknesses and challenges. It describes how resources – human and financial – were and continue to be mobilized. The book, also, grapples with trying to understand what difference Pratham has made to slum communities and to the government school system and discusses whether change can be sustained.

## **The author**

*Originally a faculty member in Chemistry at the University of Mumbai in India, Madhav Chavan has been involved in a variety of innovative, large-scale projects in urban community development, literacy and education in the past 10 years. He is one of the founders and trustees of the Pratham-Mumbai Education Initiative, established in 1993, and is currently the Programme Director of the Pratham Trust.*

**Building societal missions  
for universal pre-school  
and primary education**

**The Pratham experience**



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Working document