

## Thinking Differently about Teacher Education

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“Education is humanity’s best hope and most effective means in the quest to achieve sustainable development.” This powerful statement was made in 1997 in the UNESCO report, *Educating for a Sustainable Future*. The benefits of education to society, is no longer a debate. At the 2000 UN Millennium Summit, world leaders from rich and poor countries alike committed themselves – at the highest political level – to a set of eight time-bound targets that, when achieved, will end extreme poverty worldwide by 2015. These became known as the Millennium Development Goals.

### Millennium Development Goal #2: *Universal Education*.

In essence this means, “Every human being should have the opportunity to make a better life for themselves. Unfortunately, too many children in the world today grow up without this chance, because they are denied their basic right to even attend primary school. A sustainable end to world poverty as we know it, as well as the path to peace and security, require that citizens in every country are empowered to make positive choices and provide for themselves and their families.” According to Action Aid, universal primary education would cost about \$10 billion a year...half of what Americans spend on ice cream!

Teacher shortages are a very real problem. The EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010 estimates that a total of 10.3 million additional teachers will be needed worldwide by 2015. India will need the greatest inflow of new teachers in the world – *more than 2 million*.

### India: A Case Study

With a [population](#) of 1.17 billion and growing at 1.38%pa, India is the second most populous country in the world, after China. The world’s largest democracy also boasts of one of the ‘youngest’ populations in the world, with over 50% of its people below 25 years of age, and 65% of the people below 65 years of age. Not surprisingly therefore, India has the largest child population in the world, with at least 360million children of school-going age.

India ranks 105<sup>th</sup> in the list of Education For All (EFA) Development Index among 128 countries, even though there have been steady reductions in the number of out-of-school children since 2004. 3.4% of children aged 2-4 yrs are in pre-school (*cf.* 14.4% in the US). The Indian government estimates that 12.6 million children under the age of 14 are engaged in child labour. By any standard, the public education system has failed: while 361 million *should* be in school, only 219 million *are* in school. High drop out rates contribute much to this number – Grades 1-4: 16% (25m), Grades 5-8: 43% (39m) and Grades 9-12: 68% (78m).

### The Cost of Education

Private schooling is expensive and thus unaffordable by a large section of the Indian population, which considers itself lucky to afford one square meal a day. It comes as no shock therefore, that while only 90m children attend 75,000 private schools, 129m children attend 950,000 public schools. 800,000 of these public schools are in rural areas. [80 per cent](#) of rural schools do not have electricity compared to 32 per cent in urban areas.

## The fate of the girl child

With a [female literacy rate](#) of 47.8%, India is in fifth bottom position in the world (UNESCO). The education of girls is widely perceived as being of less value than that of boys, with traditional practices such as early marriage adding another layer of disadvantage. Further, inadequate sanitation facilities like the absence of even basic toilets are another deterrent. There is also an acute shortage of women teachers. Thus, being poor and being female is a double whammy, one that many girls do not recover from.

## Teacher absenteeism

Apart from a severe shortage in the supply of teachers, as well as properly trained teachers, teacher- absenteeism is also a big issue in rural India.

*“All children deserve a good-quality education but typically those who enter school carrying the weight of disadvantage receive the worst. They are often taught by poorly trained teachers, sometimes in a language they do not understand. They often lack textbooks – and when books are available, they frequently include material that depicts negative stereotypes. Governments can address these problems by creating an environment of non-discrimination and equal opportunity. Providing incentives for skilled teachers to work in areas characterized by high levels of marginalization is a starting point. Supporting intercultural and bilingual education can strengthen achievement among disadvantaged ethnic minorities. Ensuring that teachers and schools are equipped to support children with disabilities is also important for inclusive education. Channelling extra resources and pedagogical support to ‘failing’ schools can benefit areas of greatest need.”*

– EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2010

## A possible solution

The Government should partner with private educational institutions that operate on an online technology platform. A case in point is [Tecnológico de Monterrey](#)- a Mexican private educational institution founded in 1943. Currently, it has campuses distributed throughout the country, and academic centres in Mexico and other Latin American countries; it also has international offices in North America, Europe, and Asia. The Virtual University (Universidad Virtual) delivers most of the Institute's distance education courses, conferences and seminars. It broadcasts from either Monterrey or State of Mexico campuses to some 1430 reception sites across Latin America and has developed several social programmes in partnership with the World Bank Institute and The Nature Conservancy.

By this logic, India's primary teachers could be junior high school graduates delivering on an online curriculum! Outdated infrastructure and pedagogies can be replaced through ... third party provision of buildings, solar power, curriculum and ICT.

