

The great equaliser

'Educate Girls' launches payment by result, which links funding to pre-determined goals



For Safeena Husain, founder and chief executive officer, Educate Girls, an NGO, it all boils down to one sentence: "education is a great equaliser". She should know; she has been working to eradicate gender inequality in India's education system, especially in Rajasthan, which has nine of the 26 worst gender gap districts in India for girls' education, where only one out of two women can read or write and, of every 100 girls, only one reaches Class XII. With a gender gap of close to 30 per cent, women are lagging behind their male counterparts in all spheres of life.

Committed to girls' empowerment through education in India, Husain started Educate Girls in 2005, to test a model that empowers the community to educate girls in 50 schools in Rajasthan under the aegis of the Rajasthan Education Initiative, with an initial grant funding from Qatar-based Educate A Child initiative. Realising the impact in 2007, the state granted Educate Girls approval to start a pilot programme in 500 government schools in Rajasthan's Pali district. In 2008, Jalore district was included in the programme,

expanding its reach to 5,000 schools, where the introduction of creative learning and teaching techniques increased learning by 25 per cent.

Anjali Bhati, a member of Educate Girls, was married at 19, became a mother and was widowed early. She got confidence from Educate Girls to finish Class XII and "go on and do my MA in literature to become a teacher". Sapna Rathod, another Educate Girls member, was initially scared to talk, but after going to school through Educate Girls, became confident and now wants to join the police.

With India's gross enrolment ratio for higher education at 15 per cent, as against Brazil's 34 per cent and China's 23 per cent, regional disparities make India's education system seem elitist, says a report, *Urgent need of NGOs in the education sector*, prepared by the Confederation of Indian Industry and Deloitte Centre for Leadership & Community, in 2013. And it will be these social, non-profit organisations that will enable India to achieve a gross enrolment ratio of 30 per cent CAGR by 2020. India's current GER of 3.09 per cent CAGR compares unfavourably to

Brazil's 13.39 per cent and China's 19.24 per cent. But many NGOs continue to depend on donations from corporates and individuals, which often, are not consistent.

The World Bank estimates that, if there is increased participation of women in India's economy, \$400 billion could be added to the GDP. This is a powerful argument for corporate India to put funds into girls' education and empowerment – considered one of the highest social return investments globally.

Husain, with degrees in economics from the London School of Economics and political science from the University of London, has found it easier to convince donors. A former executive director for Child Family Health International, San Francisco, she realised that, "if one wants such social work to attract more meaningful investment in this sector, then there has to be adequate transparency overall. All shareholders should know what was going on, what results have been achieved and what objectives are planned."

What was needed was an economic model, which could be presented to donors eager to invest in social welfare educational projects. With the new Companies Act 2013, making it mandatory for companies with profits over ₹5 crore to invest 2 per cent of their income in CSR, Husain feels it would make a huge difference and provide a big impetus for corporate funding to India's social sector. Her interesting model was payment by result, which has been winning acceptance by donor institutions.

"The new concept of payment by result or impact investing is gaining popularity, especially in education projects, allowing them to grow more quickly, because of the high returns," says H. Srivastav, associate professor, T.A. Pai Institute of Management.

Introduced by the UK's Department for International Development and the US's Agency for International Development, Educate Girls, in collaboration with CRISIL and the Eros Foundation, is gradually adopting the pay by results model, with US-based Instiglio providing the

framework to implement the model. An independent auditor will monitor and report.

Pay by results allows full or partial funding of large amounts, tied to achieving pre-determined goals, where investment is linked to pre-determined objectives, rather than mere activities. The NGO has the flexibility to experiment and improve their programmes. Funders are assured of a high social return on their investment, which the NGO has to deliver.

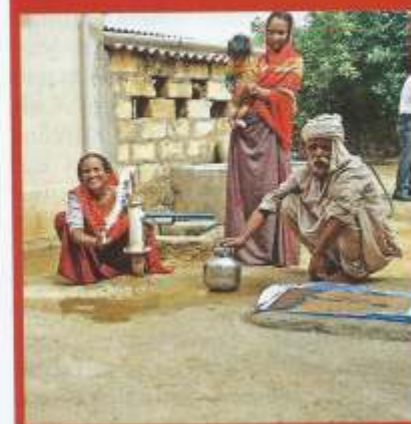
Educate Girls' follows a model that allows an investor to make a payment based on the ultimate improvement in learning, which the programme has achieved, rather than on how many participants have been enrolled. The NGO receives donor funding *after* it achieves a pre-described outcome.

Four-pronged approach

Her model is based on a four-pronged approach. At the base are school management committees, comprising local villagers and parents, who know the RTE Act and have the skills to conduct school assessment and training, to prepare and execute 'school improvement plans.' This, Pooja Bhatt, Asia lead, Accenture Development Partnerships, considers "the real power behind the school reforms".

The second is Team Balika; volunteers, trained to identify and solve problems around girls' enrolment, mentor young girls and local school committees and improve classroom, learning outcomes with creative learning techniques. These *Bal Sabhas* boost communication, leadership and problem-solving skills and also provide creative learning technique kits to teachers.

This model has seen Educate Girls expand from 500 schools in 2007, to 5,006 schools in 2013. In 2012-13, Educate Girls saw 21,516 girls enroll themselves back in school, 1,078 teachers get trained in creative learning techniques, with 3,674 school management committees overseeing the infrastructure of the school, like toilets, drinking water, etc. It also submitted 2,445 school improvement plans in



Educate Girls: improving lives

Rajasthan's Pali and Jalore districts, potentially impacting 266,926 students, of which 166,830 were girls. For 2014-15, Educate Girls' target is over 10,000 schools.

Educate Girls has attracted donors such as Dasra, Godrej Foundation, United Way Mumbai, India Marketplace, World Bank, Ekta Foundation and Letz Dream Foundation, as

well as international donors such as US Global Giving, The British Asian Trust, The Anthony Davis Foundation and Swiss-based LGT Venture Philanthropy. "Investors are attracted, mainly because the entire community is involved not only in improving education among girls, but also changing the feudal mindset and making this community economically progressive," says Alexander Mettle, fellow, LGT Venture Philosophy.

With additional funds up from ₹3.8 crore in 2011-12 to ₹4.06 crore in 2012-13, Educate Girls started the pay by result (PbR) model in July 2013 in Rajasthan's Sirohi district, where 22,257 girls have not been going to school. The model focuses on 541 primary schools and 384 upper primary schools, benefitting 416 villages and 164,000 students, of which 69,000 will be girls. This is to be followed by Bundi and Ajmer districts in 2015. As on date, companies such as Indian School of Business, Accenture, global consultant Booze & Co, Peocit Technologies and Wind Chimes Communications have come forward as partners, attracted by the economic viability and sustainability of the programme.

While Educate Girls will deliver all social services in this programme, such as providing the educational tools, training the teachers and forming school management committees, the donor will look at the social impact, because, "the RTE act is the backbone," says Husain. "What is needed is for the model to make universal education in India happen."

By 2016, all necessary systems to operate PbR programmes with potential partners will be in place for Educate Girls to operate on a pan India presence, starting with Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, before moving ahead. The goal is to reach 37,818 schools by 2018, impacting 1.6 million girl students. Not surprisingly, Sam Morgan, founder and chairman, Jasmine Social Investments, describes it "as the most cost-effective educational intervention in India".

◆ ROBIN ABREU