

Beyond Corporate Social Responsibility: A Role for Corporate India in Rural Primary Education

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Abstract

With the bulk of India's population residing in rural areas, access to quality primary education in non-urban areas is vital to unlock the country's vast economic potential. Good primary education is likely to provide a solid foundation to the rural poor for acquiring higher education, professional skills and employment, thereby reducing poverty for them and enabling sustained economic growth for the country. Government schools, which comprise the majority of schools in rural India, have been unable to address the challenge due to inferior facilities, ineffective teaching and mismanagement. As a result, rural parents, who can afford to do so, are increasingly enrolling their children in private schools that have been opportunistically set up in relatively affluent rural areas. While such schools demonstrate better results than government schools, they are far from adequate in terms of quality and accessibility. We believe that there is a need to meet the twin challenges of quality and accessibility with more innovative methods which involve more than the traditional providers of education.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming more central to the societal expectations from commercial organizations, with the possibility that spending a certain percentage of corporate income on societal welfare is likely to have legislative sanction. However, with a few exceptions, CSR in India seems to lack focus and ownership towards socio-economic development initiatives such as rural education. We argue that more corporations should focus their CSR initiatives towards addressing the challenges of primary education in rural India. There is a critical need for good educational institutions, which have thus far confined themselves to urban areas, to establish primary schools in rural areas. However, several other challenges need to be addressed in order to facilitate the entry of such institutions into rural areas as well as to enable students to enrol and continue in schools. We believe that a consortium of educational institutions, non-government organizations (NGOs), and other affiliated organizations lead by the CSR wing of a prominent private sector organization working in partnership with government institutions may be able to address these requirements. We argue that a collaborative partnership that has commonality of purpose, well-defined accountabilities and outcome-based performance measures has the potential to yield an order of magnitude improvement in rural primary education.

Keywords

Rural education, socio economic development, public private partnership, corporate social responsibility

Introduction

As per the estimates of the census of 2011, about 83.3 crore of the 121 crore population of India, which is about 69 per cent, live in rural areas. The overall literacy rate in India is about 74 per cent, with rates in rural India at about 69 per cent relative to the 85 per cent in urban India. Further, literacy among rural women is about 59 per cent relative to about 80 per cent among urban women. The fact that India,

the world's ninth largest economy, ranks 134th among 182 countries in terms of human development (United Nations Human Development Report, 2011), puts the problem as well as the opportunity in perspective. While there is room for significant improvement in even the urban areas, there is an urgent need to address the challenge of education and literacy in the rural areas as it affects the lives of so many more people who have so much less chance of escaping the poverty trap.

According to government estimates, less than 1 per cent of the rural workforce is employed in an enterprise of any significance (Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2010). A key reason for this is that the rural workforce lacks proper education. Access to quality, primarily education, is likely to enable the acquisition of appropriate general or professional skills to obtain gainful employment in an enterprise or have sustainable self-employment. This may enable significant sections of the rural poor to pull out of poverty as well as support sustained economic growth for the nation (Muralidharan, 2012). The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2011 suggests that while significant strides have been made in the last few years, the inadequacies in the education infrastructure continue to hurt education levels, particularly in rural India. We believe that unless the situation is addressed soon the economic growth of the country, that has been largely restricted to urban areas and is yet to trickle down to the rural poor, will not be sustainable.

Several Indian companies have already been committed to high levels of social initiatives as part of their CSR, and Cappelli, Singh, Singh and Useem (2010) have distilled lessons for US corporations based on their study of some prominent Indian corporations. However, as suggested by Porter and Kramer (2002), many of the initiatives by Indian corporations may lack a sustainable focus. While many successful firms may feel compelled to give back to society or others may do it out of compassion, their initiatives may not achieve intended outcomes if they are viewed as philanthropy rather than a goal-oriented activity. They argue that firms need to develop a clearer understanding of how their initiatives create economic and social value and then participate in the process of selecting the best organizations in the field to provide grants, provide signals to other funding agencies, assist those receiving grants to improve performance, and advance the state of knowledge about the social sector being supported. Later, Porter and Kramer (2006) suggested that CSR activities can be aligned with the strategies of the organization rather than being used merely to portray an image of good corporate citizenship. Most recently, they argued for the 'creation of shared value' (Porter & Kramer, 2011), under the premise that there was a need for corporations to go beyond traditional CSR which was still largely philanthropy-oriented, to social interventions that create value both for the society and the corporation.

In developing countries like India, given government constraints and inefficiencies, the role of large corporations in protecting citizenship-based social rights (Matten &

Crane, 2005) and in discharging public responsibilities that are not addressed by the government (Valente & Crane, 2010) have become very relevant. In such countries, firms need to consider going beyond the confines of traditional CSR, and beyond communities in which they operate in order to address large-scale socio-economic development needs. We acknowledge that several firms have made laudable efforts to enhance socio-economic development in rural communities. The range of CSR in India has covered employment, training, education, health care, provision of clean water, forest cover improvement and rehabilitation of the differently abled. However, CSR in India still seems to lack a core cause that (a) significantly enhances the nation's socio-economic development; (b) focuses the efforts of organizations; and (c) justifies other initiatives that support the core cause.

We are aware of only a handful of significant private sector initiatives that address rural primary education. This may be because primarily education is seen as disconnected from business or is considered a public good that ought to be provided by the government. We argue that if firms operating in India are serious about 'creating shared value' in India, rural primary education is an area that is ripe for their attention. It will raise literacy levels, which in turn will help improve several human development indices (Muralidharan, 2012), and also facilitate the sustained supply of trained employees to allow them to benefit for the demographic dividend (Karnani, 2007), and further create a large market for their offerings (Pralhad & Hammond, 2002). We believe that it is worthwhile for large corporations to consider rural primary school education as a core cause that needs to be addressed, and examine how they may be able to effectively work in partnership with other organizations and the government to significantly improve quality of education imparted and learning outcomes.

The rest of this article is organized as follows. First, relevant literature on the importance of rural primary education, issues with government rural schools and the emergence of private rural schools in India is discussed and reviewed. That is followed by an examination of why and how a consortium of organizations may, in partnership with the government, prove to be very effective. Following this, an outline framework for the partnership is proposed.

Primary Education in Rural India

Several studies (Chamarbagwala, 2008; Dutta, 2006; Haq & Haq, 1998; Shrivastava, 1988) explain why investments

in primary education yield the highest rate of returns in terms of economic productivity and the general well-being of the masses. A World Bank development report (World Bank, 1991) stated that increasing the average amount of education of the labour force by a year raises GDP by 9 per cent. However, the recent Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER), 2011 suggested that despite significant progress in the last few years on several dimensions, the state of primary education in the country is quite bad. The proportion of children in the age group of 6–14 years not enrolled in school in 2011 was 3.3 per cent, down from 6.6 per cent in 2006. However, performance levels had declined. The proportion of children in Standard V able to read a Standard II level text had dropped from 53.7 per cent in 2010 to 48.2 per cent in 2011, and the proportion of Standard III children able to solve a 2-digit subtraction problem with borrowing had dropped from 36.3 per cent in 2010 to 29.9 per cent in 2011. Similarly, among Standard V children, the ability to do the same task had dropped from 70.9 per cent in 2010 to 61.0 per cent in 2011. A noticeable trend was the rise in enrolment in private schools for primary education which had increased from 18.7 per cent in 2006 to 25.6 per cent in 2011. Reflecting the poor quality of education, about 20 to 25 per cent of all children attended paid tuition classes outside school with those going to government schools displaying a greater reliance on external tuitions.

Unfortunately, according to the ASER survey, rural primary education was doing worse than the rest of the country and is likely to threaten the ability of the country to obtain the benefits of the demographic dividend that is so often discussed. Table 1 shows that while about 2 per cent

of the children between 7 and 10 years were not in schools, the number rose to about 15 per cent for those in the age group of 15–16 years, which is quite alarming. Further, the report suggested that only about 70 per cent of the enrolled students attended school regularly and on average only about 85 per cent of the teachers were present on duty on a working day. It shows that about 25 per cent of the rural children attended privately run schools that seem to be able to retain the students even in the higher classes. While there may be a huge quality gap between private sector urban schools and rural schools (Zhang, Postlethwaite & Grisay, 2011), they seem to provide a better option than government-run schools in rural areas. The government-run schools seem to contribute entirely to the high dropout rates in the 15–16 years category, which is a good indicator of their poor performance relative to the privately run schools.

The same report also demonstrated the poor infrastructure available to rural schools. Table 2 indicates that only about 74 per cent schools had a proper building, and even less had a playground, less than 75 per cent schools had drinking water available, and less than 50 per cent had usable toilet facilities, with those having usable toilets for girls being less than 45 per cent. The availability of teaching and learning material, usable library facilities, and facilities for the provision of midday meals also need significant improvement.

In nations where the quality of rural school education is poor, investments in higher education become ineffective, since they do not contribute to rural development (Jain, 2005). Primary school education provides the foundation for rational and social skills needed for future academic

Table 1. Attendance in Rural Schools in India in 2011 (Percentage of Children in Different Types of Schools)

Age Group	Government Schools	Private Schools	Other	Not in Schools	Total
Age: 6–14 All	69.9	25.6	1.1	3.3	100
Age: 7–16 All	68.0	25.7	1.0	5.3	100
Age: 7–10 All	71.5	25.3	1.3	1.9	100
Age: 7–10 Boys	69.3	27.8	1.2	1.8	100
Age: 7–10 Girls	74.1	22.5	1.4	2.1	100
Age: 11–14 All	68.7	25.6	0.9	4.8	100
Age: 11–14 Boys	66.8	28.0	0.9	4.4	100
Age: 11–14 Girls	70.8	23.1	0.9	5.2	100
Age: 15–16 All	57.0	27.0	0.8	15.3	100
Age: 15–16 Boys	56.8	27.9	0.7	14.6	100
Age: 15–16 Girls	57.2	25.9	0.8	16.1	100

Source: ASER (2011, p. 65).

Table 2. Rural Schools that meet Right to Education (RTE) Norms (Percentage of Schools Meeting Select RTE Norms on Facilities)

	RTE Norm	2010 (%)	2011 (%)
Building	Office/Store/Office-cum-store	74.0	74.1
	Playground	62.0	62.6
	Boundary wall	50.9	54.1
Drinking Water	No facility for drinking water	17.0	16.6
	Facility but no drinking water	10.3	9.9
	Drinking water available	72.7	73.5
Toilet	No toilet facility	10.9	12.2
	Facility but toilet not usable	41.8	38.8
	Toilet usable	47.2	49.1
Girls' Toilet	Percentage of schools with no separate girls toilets	31.2	22.6
	Percentage of girls' toilet that were locked	18.7	15.0
	Percentage of girls' toilets not usable	17.2	18.7
	Percentage of girls' toilets usable	32.9	43.8
Teaching and Learning Material	Teaching and learning material in Standard II	80.7	82.1
	Teaching and learning material in Standard IV	76.4	78.2
Library	No library	37.5	28.6
	Library but no books being used by children	24.6	20.1
	Library being used by children	37.9	42.3
Mid-day Meals	Kitchen shed for midday meal	82.1	83.7
	Mid-day meal served	84.4	87.4

Source: ASER (2011, p. 71).

and workplace success. Hence, there is an urgent need to build a strong, scalable foundation of good quality rural education.

Government Schools in Rural Areas

As shown in Table 1, about 70 per cent of students in the 6–14 years age group in rural areas attend government-run schools. However, studies suggest that they may not be getting the education that is required. Among 11 comparative countries surveyed by UNESCO, the three from Asia, i.e., India, the Philippines and Sri Lanka had among the worst scores with respect to student–teacher ratios, years of staff education and infrastructure facilities in rural schools (Zhang *et al.*, 2011). With regard to learning outcomes, Indian and Indonesian students were at the bottom of the table, among primary school students from 73 countries assessed (Walker, 2011). Clearly, the educational foundation being provided to most of India's children, particularly in rural parts, is weak. Muralidharan and Sundararaman

(2011), based on their study of government-run rural primary schools in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, suggested that performance-based pay for teachers may lead to significant improvements in performance of children in rural schools. However, the extent of corruption in India's public education system (National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 2011), while deeply disheartening, is also an indicator of why increased government funding to government-owned programmes may not address the problem.

Private Schools in Rural India

Based on a number of cited case studies (De *et al.*, 2000), in the vast majority of Indian states, across urban and rural areas, there is deep and widespread dissatisfaction with government schools. This has led to greater enrolment in and significant growth of private schools in rural areas. According to the ASER survey in 2010, nearly 47 per cent of Indian villages had a private school, versus 28 per cent

in 2003. The PROBE survey (National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 2011) reported that while the overall increase in enrolment was half a percentage point in 2010 versus 2009, there was a big increase in enrolments in private schools—from 21.8 per cent of all school-going children in 2009 to 24.3 per cent in 2010. ASER 2011 data suggested that private school enrolment for the age group of 6–14 years increased from 18.7 per cent in 2006 to 25.6 per cent in 2011 in rural India. Studies (Kingdon & Muzammil, 2001) have revealed that teacher attendance is much better in private schools; there are fewer holidays in a school year; the language of instruction is mainly English, fluency in which improves future career prospects for students and there is greater accountability and discipline. Therefore, it is not surprising that parents who can afford to send their children to private rural schools are doing so.

Private schools that are unaided by the government have the ability to be flexible with curriculum and teaching methods in order to improve learning experience and outcomes. For instance, one of the key issues with government schools that cater to underprivileged communities as pointed out by Pratiche (Pratiche, 2009) is curriculum overload in early primary schools, excessive homework and inability of children to therefore cope, especially since their parents are unlikely to be educated themselves. Unaided private schools are also not bound by government salary stipulations for teachers and the 49 per cent caste-based employment reservation policy. A nationally representative survey of rural private schools in India (Muralidharan & Kremer, 2007) found that private school teacher salaries were typically one-fifth the salary of regular government school teachers. This enabled private schools to hire more teachers, have lower pupil teacher ratios, and reduce multi-grade teaching. Private school teachers were 2–8 percentage points less absent than teachers in government schools and 6–9 percentage points more likely to be engaged in teaching activity at any given point in time. They were more likely to hold a college degree than government school teachers, but were however much less likely to have a formal teacher training certificate.

Results from several comparative studies indicate that private schools may lead to better learning outcomes than government schools. An ASER study showed that after controlling child, household and location characteristics, while there was no significant differential in local language reading ability between private and government rural primary schools, there was a significant (41 per cent) advantage in English reading ability for private school students. An earlier study (Muralidharan & Kremer, 2007) found

that children in rural private schools had higher attendance rates and superior test score performance as compared to children attending government schools, after controlling for characteristics such as family, village, extra tuition and school facilities. Similarly, Goyal (2009) found that after adjusting for other influences, 12–13 per cent of the positive performance of students enrolled in private schools may be attributed to the ‘true private school effect’. Further, Johnson and Bowles (2010) concluded that despite some biases in the selection of students in private schools, the education levels in private schools were better than in the government-run schools. Based on a study of schools located in slums in Hyderabad, Toole, Dixon and Gomath (2007) concluded that on a range of indicators, including pupil–teacher ratio, teaching activity, teacher absenteeism, and classroom and school inputs, privately run schools were superior to government schools.

While the current trend of increasing numbers of, and enrolment in, rural private schools is a positive sign, it may not be the answer to India’s problems in rural primary school education. In most locations, private rural schools do not fill a ‘demand gap’ created by the absence of a government-run school; rather, they are found in locations where public schools already exist (Muralidharan & Kremer, 2007). Hence, instead of meeting unmet demand by increasing supply, private schools meet ‘differentiated’ demand by providing better options than government-owned schools. They focus on attracting children from higher income groups or from advantaged social groups. Hence, one may contend that the growth of such private rural schooling is iniquitous. Finally, there may be room for significant improvement with regard to the quality of education imparted. As per the ASER 2011 survey, only 44 per cent of rural private school children in standards I to V could read simple English, as compared with a corresponding 27 per cent in government schools, which is no cause for celebration. Further, Nambisan and Ball (2010) believe that a complex global network of organizations advocating neo-liberalism is supporting private schools, which is actually harmful for inclusive growth. Recognizing some of the downsides of private schools in rural India that may be run for the profit motive and be potentially non-inclusive, we argue that there is a greater need for initiatives similar to the Azim Premji Foundation’s commitment to set up 1,300 good quality schools, free of cost to students, in areas that are currently underserved by existing schools (Chhappia & Ullas, 2011) in order to bridge the gap.

We believe that encouraging the setting up of reputed private school institutions in underserved rural areas and

extending access to poor students with government support will better address the challenge. For instance, the government could provide student vouchers to the local community, whose value is inversely proportional to the economic status of the student's family. Such vouchers could also enable students to choose between government and private rural schools where they coexist. Direct government aid may also be provided to private schools that are set up in areas not served by government schools. A key issue with government subsidies or aid to private schools is that it is currently contingent on conformance to government stipulations regarding curriculum, employment practices, facilities and fee structures. Such constraints effectively make private aided schools very similar to government schools, private management notwithstanding. Such aid-related restrictions are considered to be a major stumbling block in improving learning outcomes for the disadvantaged (Fennell, 2007).

Other Concerns

There are major infrastructure related issues that inhibit reputed private school institutions to set up in rural areas. Nearly 30 per cent of Indian villages do not have a road that connects them to the outside world, and one out of every six villages does not have electricity, with the latter ratio expected to worsen over time (Subramaniam, 2008). The chances of a private school being established in such villages are slim and hence in the current environment, large swathes of rural India are and will continue to be left untouched by private schools. The fact is that premier school institutions in India have very little rural footprint. Most of the rural private schools are run by low-cost operators, who recruit locally and offer instruction in English as their primary source of differentiation with government schools. Therefore, unless well-regarded school chains and franchises such as Delhi Public School (DPS) and Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) substantially increase their operations in rural India, it is unlikely that there will be a quantum improvement in quality of education over government schools. It is encouraging though to note that the likes of DPS and DAV have set up a few rural and town schools.

Additional important requirements include boosting household incomes, residential electricity, clean water, community awareness and local administration support. Chamarbagwala (2008) found that poorer households that rely on the income of 10–14 year olds do not benefit from rural education. Hence, in addition to providing access to

schools, household incomes need to be increased to reduce dependence on income of children. Enhancing parental awareness of the importance of continued education will achieve little if they are so strapped for income that their children have to work in the fields to supplement income. Children from homes lacking electricity may be forced to spend time collecting firewood during the day versus attending school or revising lessons. Waterborne diseases like typhoid, cholera and diarrhoea can cause long periods of absenteeism among children. When parents fall sick, children do not get adequate care and attention, which negatively impacts learning and household incomes also suffer due to loss of productivity. Similar findings were supported by Snehalatha and Reddy (2009).

A Suggestion: Private Sector Firm Led Consortium

We believe that it will be a tall order for a private educational institution on its own to address all the challenges of meeting the primary education needs in rural India. However, passing the buck to the government on these will merely maintain the status quo. Private firms need to take up the challenge of leading the rural education drive as part of their CSR activities. Gupta and Kumar (2009) suggested a model for participation of multiple stakeholders in the provision of primary education. We argue that a consortium of organizations, led by the CSR wing of a prominent private firm, which is unified by a common objective of rural development via education, may, in collaboration with the government, prove effective. We suggest that the consortium may comprise the following organizations:

1. Lead organizations, with a strong track record of CSR in rural areas (such as the Tata Group), to take ownership, bring in the right organizations into the consortium, and secure funding and support from the government
2. Quality educational institutions that have run schools in villages or small towns such as DAV and Indus World School
3. Non-conventional providers of electricity to rural homes and institutions such as Tata BP Solar and Selco Solar
4. Organizations such as Water Health International that provide low-cost, safe drinking water to rural areas
5. NGOs with experience in rural school education such as Pratham and Pratichi, to foster community

awareness and support and provide inputs towards effective teaching and curriculum

6. Rural finance and employment organizations such as Grameen Foundation and Self Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA) to help improve household incomes

The educational institutions involved may be required to recognize and address the difficulties that children from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds have in terms of learning. Therefore, teachers may need to learn to teach and explain in the local language where necessary; curriculum may be required to be adapted in order to maximize school learning and minimize home tasks and expectations may initially have to be lowered with regard to academic performance of students. The Vidyasthali school (www.vidyasthali.com), set up in a village near Lucknow, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, provides a model that is worthy of emulation.

In order to succeed, it is important for the consortium to partner with the government. The government is the de facto provider of infrastructure such as roads, electricity, water and drainage. Government support may range from approval for the provision of land to construction of buildings and operation of schools. The private sector schools may also require funding from the government to make them financially viable, while maintaining autonomy in areas such as curriculum, employment procedures and facilities. Currently, the government does permit interventions in the public education system by allowing and supporting non-state programmes. The Azim Premji Foundation's work to strengthen existing education provision, the work of the

NGO Pratham in improving performance of preschool learning for the disadvantaged, and the efforts to introduce computer-aided learning in rural schools in Odisha (Mohapatra & Acharya, 2011) are examples of such interventions. However, when the government provides financial aid to private sector owned schools, it does not permit autonomy in education provision which we believe is an impediment. We argue that conventional public-private partnerships in education, such as those described in the World Bank Study (Patrinos *et al.*, 2009) that involve both public financing and private provisioning or vice-versa are unlikely to be effective in the Indian context.

A pilot consortium scheme could be the way forward. The partnership may be governed as per the outlined framework depicted in Table 3. To begin with, the partnership may build and operate a small number of new schools in a rural district area that is underserved by existing schools. The government could classify these pilot schools as 'experimental' and hence unconstrained by the stipulations that other private aided schools must follow. Pilot results and evaluations may provide the basis for expanding the programme as well as for significant changes to government education policy. Establishing the full private sector consortium is not a prerequisite for commencing the pilot. Initial school locations may be chosen in communities where several important prerequisites such as roads, electricity and drinking water supply are in place. Such a choice of initial locations is likely to improve the probability of initial success. Early success is likely to build momentum and goodwill and strengthen the partnership in preparation for more complex challenges ahead. The

Table 3. Outline Framework for a Consortium

The Government Provides/Permits	The Private Sector Provides	The Partnership Agrees
Land, buildings, infrastructure	Professional school set up, efficiency of operations	Capacity and infrastructure requirements
Reduction of unnecessary costs such as uniforms, playgrounds, libraries	No discrimination with regard to admissions	Objectives and performance metrics
Flexibility in curriculum, employment practices, facilities, method of instruction	Teaching and curriculum that maximize classroom learning and minimize homework	Programmes, roles, responsibilities and accountabilities
Long-term timeframes for evaluating learning outcome improvement	Outcome-based accountability to government	Quality assurance, review, approval and escalation mechanisms
Local district political and administrative support	Consortium with expertise in education as well as other requirements for success	Commitment towards community improvements that enable and sustain benefits
Funding and subsidies to cover capital and operating costs	Consortium contribution towards programme costs (for example 2 per cent of annual profits)	Required capital and operating costs, contingency funding and their provision

experience gained from the pilot scheme may be used to build consortia that are fine-tuned to the needs of rural education.

To be clear, the above does not suggest that existing government schools should be ignored. With primary schools available within 1 km of 92 per cent of rural habitations (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 2012), it is worth examining how other forms of consortia can significantly improve quality and capacity of existing schools. There are pertinent examples of public-private partnerships in Pakistan (Farah & Rizvi, 2007) to enhance infrastructure, utilization and teaching quality of government schools, with a gradual devolution of ownership and financial responsibility to the private sector. A major public-private partnership-based improvement programme for existing schools requires well-considered change management to deal with upheavals to existing staff and students, local authorities, and community. New school-based (pilot) partnerships are likely to be simpler to structure, execute and evaluate and hence should be attempted first. Existing school improvement-based partnerships may follow based on learning and results from the new school programmes.

Conclusions

Good quality primary rural education holds the key to unlocking India's vast socio-economic potential, by providing the bulk of its population with the foundation to acquire professional skills. While capacity gaps remain, the government has done a reasonable job in enabling primary school access to over 90 per cent of rural habitations. The real problem is the poor quality of education being imparted as measured in terms of basic reading and arithmetic ability. Inadequate facilities, teacher absenteeism, mismanagement, inflexible curriculum and teaching methods are all contributory factors. There has been rapid growth of private rural schools, run by low-cost operators that have rather opportunistically established themselves. The increased enrolment in such schools despite a lack of significant differentiation with government schools is a pointer to the failure of the public education system as well as to the opportunity that exists for the private sector to make a real difference. Socially responsible organizations should consider taking on larger-scale role in primary rural education by bringing reputed educational institutions to rural areas.

Such institutions have thus far largely confined themselves to urban areas and townships. There are several important prerequisites for such institutions to address the educational needs of the most deprived communities. Apart from government funding, these include road connectivity, electricity, clean water, community awareness, local administrative support and enhancement of community incomes. We believe that relying on the government to address all of these issues will merely amount to reinforcing the status quo. A private firm led consortium of private school institutions and NGOs, with the requisite expertise, working in partnership with the government may prove effective in doing so. An important consideration is for the government to provide aid and support while allowing flexibility in areas such as curriculum, methods of instruction and human resource policies. A collaborative partnership with commonality of purpose, well-defined accountabilities and outcome-based measures of success has the potential to yield an order of magnitude improvement in learning outcomes.

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