

# Organisation helps poor kids make sense of education

## The Azim Premji Foundation's Learning Guarantee Programme now runs in five states



One of the schools in Karnataka where the foundation's Learning Guarantee Programme is being run. BS PHOTO

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The Learning Guarantee Programme of the Azim Premji Foundation is into its fifth year and has the satisfaction of seeing it go mainstream in the launch state of Karnataka and adopted in four other states. This in itself is good news, but the most valuable gain may be the insights that the exercise has yielded on how to make elementary education to the poorest more meaningful. These will help evolve solutions and models for systemic changes that can be recommended.

The programme set out in 2002, in partnership with the government of Karnataka, to administer a new kind of tests to children attending elementary government schools in seven districts in north-east Karnataka, one of the most backward regions of the country.

The aim was to assess, not whether the children can repeat what they have learnt by heart, but whether they can understand what they are taught and use that understanding to solve problems.

Assessment was chosen as the entry point in the exercise to reform the education system because it was felt that the exam system creates the teaching system. Change in assessment will bring change in teaching and learning process. The proportion of schools which fail to meet all three criteria is still small at the end of the day but what is heartening is that the pedagogic skills which the system will then respond to and provide.

The Karnataka government,

after two years of the pilot, expanded the programme to all the districts. Early last year, based on the principles of the Learning Guarantee Programme, it initiated the Karnataka School Quality Assessment Organisation (KSQA-O) to assess all 45,000 schools in the state.

This year the organisation has conducted its second round of assessments.

The programme has now spread to Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Gujarat. It is in its second year in Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh. Uttarakhand is expanding the programme to more districts from the current academic year. Madhya Pradesh has extended the programme question papers to all the schools for their annual examinations currently on. In Rajasthan and Gujarat, the programme has been newly launched.



The aim of the programme is to assess whether the children can understand what they are taught and use that understanding to solve problems.

What has the foundation so far? It has analysed the performance of schools in Karnataka over the last three years and it has found that enrolment has doubled over the years and there has been fair improvement in both attendance and learning.

The proportion of schools which fail to meet all three criteria is still small at the end of the day but what is heartening is that the performance of the lowest quartile children has shown an improvement, say the programme leaders.

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