Half of India’s 1.2 billion people are below the age of 25, and quality education services are needed to realize the potential of this enormous group. Enrollment rates in the country are high, but challenges and large disparities in service quality and student performance remain, especially within the public sector. As a result, private sector solutions are becoming popular alternatives or supplements to government school delivery.

CEI has identified more than 120 innovative models, from the public and private sector that are increasing access to quality education for the poor in India. By showcasing common characteristics and themes observed across these programs, this Database at a Glance can offer insight into India’s current innovation landscape.
COMMON THEMES ACROSS PROGRAMS

This database at a glance highlights common approaches and characteristics across documented India models.

Student Support

More than half of the programs working in India within the CEI database are focused directly on supporting students. These programs range from offering direct support such as tutoring, mentorship and extra-curricular activities, to preparing learning materials, using educational technology, and student assessment mechanisms.

In Karnataka, Dream a Dream provides one-on-one mentoring for students age 14-18 with vulnerable backgrounds, helping them transition into adulthood and acting as a positive role model to help inform their decisions on academics, careers, and personal engagements.

Over 25 percent of CEI-profiled India programs are responding to India’s education needs through a focus on education delivery. The most common forms of delivery are school chains or after-school centers.

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Back 2 Basics (B2B) aims to address the learning gaps of students in government schools so that they are ready to enter secondary school. The program provides after-school tutoring, small group remediation, and develops tailored learning modules with mind mapping, memory enhancement, or other learning skills techniques.

Delivery

Over 25 percent of CEI-profiled India programs are responding to India’s education needs through a focus on education delivery. The most common forms of delivery are school chains or after-school centers.

Beautiful Tree Trust (BTT), for instance, runs a chain of low-cost private schools serving over 3,000 students from nursery to grade 10 in the urban informal settlements of Hyderabad. While BTT is non-profit, it has a for-profit arm, Empathy Learning Systems (ELS) that develops and
delivers BTT’s curriculum to its schools, as well as providing curricula and services to schools not run by BTT.

The Agastya Mobile Science Labs demonstrate another innovative approach to education delivery. Trained Agastya instructors drive their mini-van science labs to visit schools in several Indian states with more than one hundred experiments designed to provide students with a hands-on learning experience that local teachers are unable to provide.

School Support

Other programs are working specifically to support schools in India trying to improve learning outcomes. Teacher training or curriculum designs are the most common form of support seen in the CEI network.

An example of an organization investing in improvements for teachers can be seen in STIR Education. The project uses recognition, certification, and networking to bring together teachers to change the system from within. The organization also documents and trains teachers in micro-innovations; these are relatively small classroom techniques that can positively impact a teacher’s effectiveness.

Sikshana uses teacher training as a part of a whole-school approach and focuses on strengthening the environment in government schools. In addition to training teachers on innovative and engaging pedagogical methods, they regularly provide Total Quality Management (TQT) training to help ensure effective management plans are crafted and followed. Another key facet of Sikshana is the school mentor system, where a mentor visits a school three times a month to provide support and guidance to children, staff, and community members.

Transformative Mathematics Programme (TMP) and Transformative Mathematics Puppet Shows (TMPS) trains teachers to adopt a “transformative learning” approach to pedagogy, and adjust the curriculum to include exploration and experimentation with the goal of enabling children to develop independent and creative critical thinking skills.

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Learn more at educationinnovations.org/topics
Skills for Work

Almost one fifth of CEI’s profiled India programs focus on delivering skills training to prepare Indian youth entering the workforce. India’s economy is growing at a much faster rate than its pool of skilled workers and new government policy aims to train 500 million people by 2022, to do so, they rely heavily on the private actors to deliver relevant services.

Empower Pragati, a for-profit entity, seeks to create sustainable livelihoods for the urban and rural poor, and specifically targets marginalized communities such as minority groups, persons with disability, unemployed youth, migrant communities as well as underprivileged women and children. After market-mapping, Empower Pragati writes curriculum and runs skills training programs based on high-demand sectors of the labor market. These trainings can range from formal sector skills like Internet and communications technology (ICT) and effective English communication, to sector-specific trainings in hospitality or food service. Empower Pragati also works with its corporate and business partners to help place students after they complete training.

Rural Yellow Times is another skills development program operating in rural India, which seeks to bridge the gap between supply and demand by first reaching out to out-of-school children through district engagement programs or mobile vans, enrolling them in relevant training programs, and finally, helping to place them in jobs after graduation.

Public-Private Partnerships

Another increasingly common characteristic of education innovation in India is the growing role of public-private partnerships. In 2009, the government passed the Right to Education Act making primary school education free and compulsory. One provision of this policy though, reserves a quarter of the spaces in private schools for students from the most disadvantaged families and the tuition fees are covered by the government.

In response to this government mandate, the ARK Education Program is piloting an education voucher scheme in the poorest areas of Delhi to encourage families to claim their entitlement. The program uses a variety of outreach strategies to inform as many families as possible. One example of this thorough engagement strategy is ARK’s use of picture guides to inform parents that are illiterate of their children’s schooling options.
Many skills for work programs in India, including those highlighted above, are funded by the government’s National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC), but implemented by non-state organizations. With the increasing focus on technical and vocational skills in India, Lend-a-Hand India has created a 2-3 year long Introduction to Basic Technology course that trains students in basic engineering, the environment, agriculture, and home and health science. The program was designed to give students the experience to make educated choices about their future career paths. Based on the success of the course, the government of Maharashtra has incorporated the course into state curriculum.

Out-of-School Children

Despite high enrollment rates, many children do not complete primary school or the full course of formal education due to cultural practices, economic, and household needs. Programs across the country are responding to the needs of these out-of-school children with a variety of innovative strategies.

For example, Barefoot College Night Schools, in operation since 1975, provide fundamental academic skills with a strong focus on local cultural knowledge and history in the evenings, after children have completed their other responsibilities.
The Pehchan Project runs bridging programs called “Pehchanshalas” for girls ages 9-14 in 70 rural communities in Jaipur. The programs, lasting 2 to 3 years, provide quality elementary education and upon completion, the Pehchan Project assists them in reintegrating into an appropriate grade level within the formal education system.

Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) offers informal education, health, and nutrition support to child laborers and the children of laborers thereby facilitating their reintegration into the mainstream education system. The activity-based program runs for 4 hours a day to develop communication, language, and cognitive abilities. The program also seeks to inform parents of the value of education and push the government to offer opportunities that support children with untraditional schedules.

Photo courtesy of Project Fuel