



Dr. Sangeeta Kamat, University of Massachusetts

Dr. Carol Anne Spreen, New York University

Indivar Jonnalagadda, Hyderabad Urban Lab

Profiting from the Poor

The Emergence of
Multinational Edu-Businesses
in Hyderabad, India

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As part of EI's Global Response (See <https://www.unite4education.org/about/a-global-response-to-education-commercialisation>) a number of scholars are working around the world to raise awareness about how and why education is being placed in the hands of corporations or "edupreneurs", instead of educators and governments. The authors of this report support EI's Global Response and are ready to participate fully in the campaign to roll back so-called low-fee private schools and

hidden costs to education in the global south where education and aid budgets are being plundered by privateers to increase their profits and simultaneously kill off any state-provided school systems.

It is hoped that this material will be useful for teachers, scholars, and education activists who are concerned by the rapid privatisation of education across the world. It is also hoped that it will be a useful tool, through its concrete data and insights, to mobilise public opinion and campaigns to raise concerns about privatisation. While considering any strategy for mobilisation against the privatisation of education, there is a need to better understand the stakes. There needs to be a shift away from an ideological battle towards constructive reform. This will only be possible if the demand is made through an alliance of teachers' unions, young college students concerned about education in their country, academics concerned about the quality of education and equality in general, and with the support of families among the poorest of the poor who will suffer most from the closure of government schools.

Biographies:

Sangeeta Kamat is a professor of International Education at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Her work focuses on globalisation, education, and inequality. She is currently working on a book on 'Globalization, Higher Education and Uneven Development' based on research in the Andhra and Telangana region. She is also working on issues of equity and inclusion in higher education with Pune University, and on 'Right to Education, Right to the City'. Dr. Kamat received her PhD in Comparative and International Education from the University of Pittsburgh.

Carol Anne Spreen is a professor of International Education at New York University and a Visiting Professor at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa. For the last 20 years, she has worked on issues of poverty, inequality, and human rights in education both domestically and internationally, and on equity based reform in the US, Southern Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Her current research focuses on teachers' lives and work, and the impact of privatisation and standardised testing on public education. Dr. Spreen received her PhD in Comparative and International Education from Teachers College, Columbia University.

Indivar Jonnalagadda is a research fellow at Hyderabad Urban Lab, an urban studies research and advocacy organisation in Hyderabad. Jonnalagadda's interest is in ethnographic approaches to inequality. In Autumn 2016, he will join the PhD programme in Anthropology and South Asian Studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Executive Summary

Over the last decade, education for the poor in the developing world has become an increasingly attractive market for global investors and multinational corporations. This movement, known as the Global Education Industry (GEI), is vested in setting up schools for profit. It presents private schools as the best alternative to public schooling and possibly the only alternative to universalising access to education in developing and emerging economies. Among developing countries, India is almost always underscored as an education market ripe with potential and profits.

This report about the GEI in India lays out the broad underpinnings of the corporate interests in for-profit education and how these efforts undermine public education as a fundamental human right. It provides a detailed understanding of how the commercialisation of education through scalable chains of schools and selling educational products and services unfolds on the ground in Hyderabad. This study of the expansive and growing private education sector in India revealed a complex well-networked assemblage of global actors that are invested in the business of education privatisation and who stand to make a considerable profit from it. Two actors that stand out as having launched the low-fee private schools (LFPS) 'movement' in India are James Tooley (professor of education policy at Newcastle University, UK) and the global corporation, Pearson. But there are a host of other actors and institutions including, for instance, the World Bank and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), think tanks and foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

and John Templeton Foundation¹, an assorted number of venture capitalists, big corporations and small-time consultants. This report critically assesses these multinational actors' claims to make schooling for the poor profitable while simultaneously promising quality education. It demonstrates that, despite expectations, the schools have not been profitable and they have also failed to deliver anything close to quality education. The authors also predict that a number of local school proprietors who have been active in this sector for decades may actually be forced out given the growing push towards international school chains (like Bridge International Academies) which offer economies of scale through standardisation and technology.

This report begins by tracing the evolution and trajectory of low-cost schooling and the expansion of the educational service industry with a focus on the education tech/digital learning sectors in Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Telangana, India, and particularly Hyderabad. The focus of the study was to understand:

How are locally run and owned schools being constituted into a market that is attractive for big capital. Who are the actors and what are the processes and practices that go into 'market making' for schooling for the poor?

What are the implications for the right to quality education when low-fee private schooling is presented as the best and only option for the poor? What are the implications for the teaching profession and public education as a whole?

¹ Some of the other players are the World Bank, Global Partnership for Education, the Global Business Coalition for Education, the Business Backs Education campaign, and the Centre for Educational Innovations. A more recent phenomenon over the last 10 years or so is homegrown private foundations in education with large endowments such as Azim Premji Foundation, the Naam Foundation, and the Naandi Foundation.

The findings are drawn from research interviews with school proprietors, teachers, teacher union leaders, technology industry entrepreneurs, journalists and government officials conducted in Hyderabad from September 2015–January 2016. Below is a summary of the salient issues related to the crisis in education in India and the emergent role of global capital in schooling for the poor, and lastly, proposed areas for wider public engagement and action.

Key findings of this research suggest

Private for-profit multinational corporations are making billions of dollars by charging poor families around the world to go to school. Governments are diverting significant funds and attention to what global corporations have posited as ‘the solutions’ to the crisis in education, loosening regulations or outright ignoring the many violations of laws and standards by multinational companies. Governments are guilty of inviting companies in to run large segments of the education sector (from pre-school through university level).

Government-funded schools have suffered from decades of disinvestment and neglect, creating a mass exodus of working poor and middle class from public schools and leaving the poorest and most vulnerable behind. User fees in education exacerbate inequality and lead to more social stratification. Importantly, this lack of government investment in education has opened the door to privatisation. The authors call on readers to critically examine the neoliberal discourse of ‘failing government schools’ that has been embraced to justify ‘low-fee private schools’ in India and instead look at the compounding factors that have led to the decimation of public education. This neglect has resulted in an ironic situation where the LFPS rely on a low-paid and over-

worked labour force of unqualified women as teachers, while the government schools have a roster of qualified and well-paid teachers with no students to teach. This situation in turn has been further used by pro-privatisation corporate reformers to justify the shutting down and neglect of public schools, particularly in impoverished neighborhoods.

Unique to Hyderabad is the existence of many small private schools in the predominantly Muslim area of Old City some that were started decades ago by local proprietors to serve the communities' needs. In the late 1990s, these schools were identified as sites of scalable markets of LFPS, first by James Tooley followed by a slew of global multinationals. Yet, despite the rapid growth in the private education market (70 per cent of schools in Hyderabad are private), efforts to scale-up and increase profitability of their 'home-grown' local LFPS have not been successful. This has been due, in part, to parents' financial constraints and lack of outside investment but also the Right to Education Act (RTE) of 2010.

Frustrated by the legal restrictions imposed by RTE and the slow growth in the LFPS market, global investors and multinational corporations have sought to create new markets in unregulated and high-demand areas such as early childhood education and coaching or tutoring centres. These sectors serve the aspirations of the working and middle classes who view access to private schools and university as the window to social mobility, and these sectors have proven to be highly profitable. In addition, large-scale international charter chains of low-fee schools (such as Bridge International Academies) are being introduced in the region by state government. This will undoubtedly decimate the existing local LFPS market and continue to undermine public schools and the RTE.

The location of a very strong information technology (IT) industry in Hyderabad offered the ideal conditions for the development of a vast edu-solutions industry that could provide products and services to both the private and public school sectors. This sector relies on standardisation (e.g. developing large-scale assessment systems, creating online curricula and training software); using untrained teachers at very low wages; and predatory product and school placement, along with aggressive marketing strategies. Instead of improving education, providing much-needed capital or investing in education for the poor, edu-solutions providers sell their products and services, offer high-interest loans, and advise local entrepreneurs on how to become more profitable and scale up. AP/Telangana are fast emerging as a laboratory for the GEI to incubate and develop commercially profitable education products and services that will be bought and sold outside India.

Within Hyderabad, an extensive network of multinational corporations, private foundations, consultants, non-government organisations (NGOs), and local entrepreneurs are building what they term an “educational ecosystem” to support the commercialisation of all aspects of education. Pearson, the world’s largest multinational education corporation, has been at the forefront in creating this ecosystem in Hyderabad. This report describes how this ‘ecosystem’ operates through spreading and advancing market ideology in education. This approach also incentivises government investment into the private sector through public-private partnerships and purchasing technology solutions for (not only curriculum and training materials but) data-based management and decision-making, assessment, monitoring, and accountability. The report also describes the building of market logic locally by teaching school proprietors to “think like an entrepreneur” through corporate training camps, overseas fellowships, crowd-sourcing ventures, and edupreneur meet-up events.

The GEI has also been influential in shaping education policy in India. To the edu-solutions providers, “results are important” – and their success lies in generating data to show that students are learning (and at a higher rate than their competitors, the public schools). To do this, they increasingly rely on the tech-solutions to create their own assessments, ratings systems, and other measures that show how well they are keeping up their market demands. The GEI is also increasingly involved in writing its own rules about school standards and regulations, determining and certifying teacher quality, and defining what learning should take place in schools.

Claims made by the advocates of LFPS of reaching the poor and providing quality education are unfounded. The authors found a general lack of external evidence to support the private providers’ claims of better quality and outcomes.

The privatisation of education (in all aspects) undermines the RTE Act 2010, further encouraging separate and unequal education for the poor. It also leads to teacher deprofessionalisation and exacerbates inequality across gender and class. This study highlights the urgent need for the revitalisation of and reinvestment in government schools, as well as greater support for teachers and professionalisation of teaching.

There is an equally urgent need to stop the rampant commercialisation of education and profit-seeking of multinational corporations. The growth and encroachment of the global private education industry must stop. This study should serve as a serious reminder of the reasons why schools should not be for sale and multinational corporations should not be permitted to make profits off of governments and poor communities. This is clearly explicated in the RTE legislation as well as international human rights law.

It is hoped that this report's findings and recommendations will be useful for government leaders, teachers, unionists, scholars and education activists who are concerned by the rapid privatisation in and of education in India and across the world. We hope these findings will be used to mobilise public opinion and advocacy to raise concerns about private schooling for the poor, especially as it relates to possibilities and protections in India's RTE Act. We encourage continued dialogue amongst advocates, and organised resistance to the GEI's damaging march across India and the rest of the world.

Introduction

While the privatisation of education is not a new phenomenon, the increasingly prominent role of profit-oriented private organisations in education across the globe is more recent. Now, more than ever before, a broader range of educational services are produced, exchanged, and consumed on a for-profit basis and through supra-national interactions.

This phenomenon is evident with services that go beyond traditional private schools and universities and include, to name a few, alternative forms of educational provision (including e-learning), test preparation services, edu-marketing, the provision of curriculum packages, private tutoring and other supplemental education services, certification services, teacher training, recruitment of university students, and school improvement services.

All these services — and the actors that provide them — constitute what we call the Global Education Industry (GEI).

In the article referenced above, Verger (2016) describes the broad category of economic actors that are increasingly involved in providing education and the production of educational goods and services. He refers to this phenomenon as the Global Education Industry (GEI) and outlines several features that are becoming commonplace in countries globally:

■ Chains of private schools (such as GEMS, ARK, Bridge International Academies, or the Omega Schools), which are contributing to the diversification of the private schooling sector that has been traditionally in hands of religious or NGO-based providers.

- Big education corporations and conglomerates, with companies such as Pearson, with IT/software companies, such as Microsoft, Intel, Hewlett Packard or Blackboard standing out.
- Consultancy firms, ranging from big transnational corporations such as Pricewaterhouse Coopers or McKinsey that have broad portfolios, and apply business logic to education, to a wide but dispersed constellation of individual consultants, some of which focus more exclusively on education.
- Philanthropic foundations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation or the Hewlett Foundation, which are formally autonomous from the corporate matrices, but are usually implicitly aligned with the business strategy of their funders and founders.
- Advocacy networks, which emerge when edu-businesses and other types of private corporations come together in a more or less formal or more or less stable way to advocate for educational changes, often in the public policy realm (Verger, 2016).

Rather than improving education, this new GEI standardises teaching and learning, undermines teacher knowledge and autonomy, and turns students into passive consumers rather than empowered learners. Privatisation of education also undermines the right to education, diverting much-needed government funding to the private sector instead of the better provisioning of public schools by improving facilities, resources, and support for schools and teachers². Through the GEI, multinational corporations are not only beginning to control the

² See reports from The United National Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) (2014). Global Section: the School Fee Abolition Initiative (SFAI). Retrieved at http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/247_712; The Right to Education Project (RTE) (2014). Privatisation in Education: Global Trends and Human Rights Impact; and. Oxfam International (2014). Working for the Many: Public Services Fight Inequality.

content of the curriculum and testing in countries, they also make decisions about who teaches and under what conditions, and have begun to replace qualified teachers with untrained (and underpaid) teachers³ using tablets or mobile-based scripted curricula. Despite all the evidence indicating that the application of market principles to the provision of education has a negative impact on students by deepening segregation and inequality, and undermining quality, many governments are complicit in what amounts to a de facto dismantling of public education (Spreen and Vally 2012; Right to Education, 2014; Härmä, 2009, 2011).

India is no exception to the world-wide trend of educational privatisation, the growth of private schools, and the rise in corporate involvement in public and private schools. Until the Nineties, some form of public schooling or schools run by charitable trusts and voluntary organisations were the norm. Today, India is an emerging market for the GEI: global corporations like Pearson, international chains like Bridge International Academies, corporate foundations like Dell and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and international consultants and venture capital firms encourage and invest in for-profit commercial ventures in the school sector especially targeted at low-income and working class communities that represents, for them, a vast untapped market.

In India, the decline of public education and the concomitant growth of private education can be traced to three main factors. First, the meagre education budget that does not match demand. India has the largest youth demographic in the world, with half the country's population of 1.2 billion under the age of 25, but the education budget hovers at around

³ Similar trends have been identified in other emerging economies such as the Philippines, Ghana and South Africa. See Riep (2015a, 2015b); Spreen and Vally (2014) for details of the GEI in these countries.

3.8 per cent of gross national product (GNP)⁴ (Government of India, 2016). Moreover, in 1968, the Indian state had committed to six per cent of GNP for its education budget, a target unfulfilled to this day (Tilak, 2009, 2006). A lack of political will to finance public education has legitimated the corporate sector “solution” to and involvement in education. Second, in 1991, the Indian state launched far-reaching reforms to liberalise, deregulate, and privatise the public sector, including social sectors such as health and education (Nayyar, 2008; Venkatnarayanan, 2015). As a result, state governments, in AP and elsewhere, divested themselves from government schools, shrinking the size of the sector and adversely impacting quality. Studies show that “the government’s reduced priority toward providing sufficient resources to elementary education has indirectly increased the privatization of schools at elementary level” (Venkatnarayanan, 2015).

Further, these reforms opened the door to closer integration with the global economy and expanded the service sector, especially in the information technology (IT) field that has intensified the demand for English language education. Government schools are required to teach in the native language⁵ of the student, especially at the primary level. However, in a context of changed aspirations and declining quality, government schools are perceived as an impediment to success in the new economy (Lukose, 2009; Jeffrey et al., 2008; Faust and Nagar, 2001). These economic, social

4 The 2016 union budget has allocated 4.9 per cent of GNP to education, but if one considers inflation and the GDP growth rate, the new budget is less than previous years. This does not meet the government’s own target of six per cent of GNP for education (Tilak, 2009, 2006).

5 India is divided into linguistic states, hence medium of instruction varies by state. In a cosmopolitan city like Mumbai, government schools offer instruction in as many as nine languages. In Telangana and AP, medium of instruction in government schools is either Urdu or Telugu, the two dominant language groups in the region, though there is legal provision to offer instruction in Marathi and Gujarati as well. We believe no other country offers such linguistic diversity in its school system and affirms the importance of ‘mother tongue’ education especially in the early years of schooling.

and political transformations of the last two decades have led to the proliferation of private (English-medium) schools in the country.

People's advocacy and pressure to fulfil international norms related to universal basic education led to the promulgation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act in 2010. However, the RTE Act permits private provision of education, albeit private providers are mandated to follow the same set of standards as laid down for public schools relating to, for instance, teacher qualifications, curricula, the teacher-pupil ratio, and prescribed norms for school facilities.

In the wave of school privatisation sweeping across the country, inequalities have been exacerbated. Many different types of schools have emerged that cater to different income households. At the top are elite international schools affiliated to the IB Board (International Baccalaureate), based in Geneva, Switzerland, or to the Indian General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) based in Cambridge, United Kingdom (UK). For the affluent classes, these provide pathways to undergraduate education in the United States (US) or UK. For professional and middle-class households, there are well-resourced private schools where admission is restricted and competitive. At the bottom end are low-fee private schools (LFPS), sometimes also known as 'budget' schools or 'affordable private schools'⁶ that cater to working class and poor households.

There are two main types of public schools: (a) schools fully funded by the government either at the state, central, or municipal level and (b) aided schools that receive government grants but are managed by charita-

6 This study found that these terms reflect a deeper level of market segmentation. 'Budget schools' (fees Rs. 1000+) appear to be more expensive than 'affordable schools' (Rs. 600-100), and affordable schools cost more than 'low-fee' schools (Rs. 200-600). Thus, within the 'affordable sector', there is further stratification and market differentiation. This report uses the term 'affordable private schools' (APS) to refer to all three types of schools, while low-fee private schools (LFPS) is used to refer to schools that are at the lowest end of the tuition scale.

ble trusts. In the public education sector too, privatisation is occurring through public-private partnerships (PPP), the private often representative of the corporate sector (Srivastava, 2010a, 2010b, 2008b). Estimates from private equity firms and rating agencies place the potential value of India's education market at US\$110 billion (Shinde, 2013; Chatterjee, 2010; IBEF, 2016). The pre-school market is valued at US\$2 billion with an annual growth rate of 40-45 per cent (Chatterjee, 2010). While accurate data on the number of LFPS is difficult to source, an estimated 1,300 of these exist in Hyderabad city alone (ASER, 2011).

Proponents of affordable private schools promote these as a cost-effective, profitable and economically viable way to universalise basic educational services, presenting it as a win-win formula for companies seeking a profit and for poor families wanting an education (Pearson, 2012a; Tooley, Dixon and Gomathi, 2007; Jain and Dholakia, 2009). However, an estimated 37 per cent of the country's population live below the poverty line and cannot afford even the LFPS that are the cheapest private schools available (Government of India, 2009; Tilak, 2009; Nambissan, 2012). On average, 30 per cent of household expenditure across different income categories is spent on private schooling, with the costs highest at the primary level (Tilak, 2009).

Studies also show that all types of inequalities in household expenditure on education – by gender, rural-urban, household expenditure quintiles, and even by type of education – are the highest in primary education. This indicates that primary education being offered by different types of private and public schools in the country, tends to accentuate inequalities (Tilak, 2009; Mehrotra, 2005). While the growth of private schools of all kinds has contributed to the declining quality of public education and has exacerbated educational inequality, the focus of this report is the LFPS sector that has attracted the attention of powerful agencies and actors that are investing to scale up and expand the sector globally.

The Global Education Industry in India

This study of the LFPS sector in India reveals a complex well-networked assemblage of global actors that are in the business of education privatisation and that stand to make a considerable profit from it. Two actors stand out as having launched the LFPS 'movement' in India. One is James Tooley from the University of Newcastle, UK, a leading advocate of LFPS in India, Asia, and Africa. Tooley is currently Chairman of, and investor in, Empathy Learning Systems Pvt. Ltd. in Hyderabad. His managing partner is Mohammed Anwar Khan who runs a chain of eight low-fee schools in the city called M.A. Ideal Schools. The second influential actor is the global corporation, Pearson that operates in the LFPS sector through its philanthropic venture, Pearson Affordable Learning Fund (PALF).

Pearson is the world's largest multinational education corporation with operations in 70 countries worldwide and an extensive business portfolio that positions it as the world's education service provider. As a member of several global policy forums in education such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the Global Business Coalition for Education that it helped found, Pearson is able to influence and shape policy that complement its interests and investments. Pearson is active in emerging economies through PALF, a venture capital investment fund that "makes significant minority equity investments in for-profit companies to meet the growing demand for affordable education across the developing world"⁷.

PALF has a significant investment in Omega Schools, a chain of LFPS in Ghana that Tooley co-founded and is Chairman of the Board, indicative of the aggregation of actors and interests in the GEI. Omega

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<https://www.affordable-learning.com>. Accessed on 5 May 2016.

Schools is regarded as a pioneer in the “pay as you go” model that has attracted many investors but is deeply problematic in terms of access and equity in education (Riep, 2015a).

In addition, there are a host of other actors and institutions including, for instance, the World Bank and DFID, IFC (the private investment arm of the World Bank), think tanks, and foundations such as the John Templeton Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, venture capitalists such as Gray Matters Capital, and private equity firms such as Kaizen Management.⁸ This study’s research in Hyderabad reveals PALF as a leader of the edu-business industry, in partnership with a diverse group of corporate foundations, investors, and entrepreneurs that suggests an emergent GEI in India.

This report critically assesses these multinational actors’ claims to make schooling for the poor profitable while simultaneously promising quality education. It shows that LFPS are accessible only to certain sections of the working class whose household incomes are above a certain level and not accessible for the very poor. This corroborates other studies that examine the socio-economic profile of families in LFPS to show that a significant proportion of rural and urban poor are unable to access LFPS (Goyal and Pandey, 2009; Härmä, 2011; Juneja, 2010). Second, these schools fail to meet universal norms of quality education (Chudgar and Quin, 2012; Singh, 2015; Kelly et al., 2016). They utilise the same cost-cutting approaches as elsewhere, such as “stan-

8 Some of the other players are the World Bank, Global Partnership for Education, Global Business Coalition for Education, the Business Backs Education campaign, and the Centre for Educational Innovations. A more recent phenomenon is the emergence of homegrown private foundations investing in education such as Azim Premji Foundation, Naam Foundation, Central Square Foundation, and the Naandi Foundation. These Indian foundations may have varying perspectives on the importance of public education and for-profit investments in education. See, for instance, Dhankar (2016).

standardized and replicable processes to achieve economies of scale and allow rapid development” and “leverage low-cost, high-impact technology” (Riep, 2015b). Third, the data on learning outcomes is mixed with few studies that are rigorous and well-designed and control for socio-economic differences between students that affect learning outcomes (Woodhead et al., 2012; Singh, 2015; Kingdon & Theopold, 2008).

Importantly, a significant part of the research that makes a case for private schooling as an optimal solution for the poor is authored by Tooley and his associates using data from schools in Hyderabad that are clients or affiliates of Tooley’s company, Empathy Learning Systems, and/or are commissioned by Pearson and other pro-market international firms and think tanks (Tooley, 1999, 2007; Tooley and Dixon, 2003; Tooley et al., 2007; Tooley et al., 2009; Tulloch et al., 2014).

A significant finding from this study is that efforts to scale up LFPS and generate higher revenues from these schools in Hyderabad have not been successful. The authors anticipate that multinational school chains (like Bridge International Academies [BIA]) which offer economies of scale through standardisation and technology, enabled by sizeable global investments, are likely to be the new model for the LFPS sector in India. As a result, a number of local school proprietors that have been active in this sector will probably lose out and eventually be forced to close, given the growing push of multinational school chains eager to exploit the Indian market. An important part of this project has been to understand the networks and logics of global investors and corporations that are active in the edu-business sector in Hyderabad. Hyderabad, famously referred to as the Silicon Valley of the East⁹, has made a name for itself as the destination of choice for the global IT economy. In 1997, the then Chief Minis-

9 HiTech city is an acronym for Hyderabad Information Technology Engineering and Consultancy.

ter of the state, Chandrababu Naidu, built HiTech city, a 'software park' to provide state-of-the-art facilities and cheap labour for the global IT and outsourcing economy. HiTech city has attracted leading software companies and multinational firms and has become a hub for both high-skilled labour such as software design and manufacturing and the relatively less-skilled business processing call centres (Biao, 2006; Upadhyay and Vasavi, 2008). Hyderabad is also known for its extensive network of for-profit post-secondary institutions that specialise in engineering and computer science, and that form the supply chain for HiTech city (Biao, 2006; Kamat, 2011; Kamat et al., 2004; Upadhyay and Vasavi, 2008). Global multinationals such as Google and Microsoft have their country headquarters in the city, making it an attractive destination for global edu-businesses looking for commercially viable technology based solutions in education.

Other parts of Hyderabad city are remarkably different from HiTech city and its surroundings. The rest of Hyderabad has poorly maintained infrastructure, inadequate housing, water supply and electricity, and poor sewage and sanitation services. The streets are dotted with signs that advertise 'coaching centres' for Math and Science, spoken English tutorials, and corporate colleges that promise entry into a career in HiTech city (Kamat, 2011). Hyderabad has a sizable Muslim population of 41 per cent, considerably higher than elsewhere in the country.¹⁰ Most of these are poor and concentrated in the southwest part of Hyderabad, in and around the 'Old City', where Tooley first discovered the LFPS that he promotes globally as the new model of schooling for the poor (Tooley, 2000, 2007).

¹⁰ The city was the capital of the princely state of Hyderabad ruled by Muslim nobility, the Nizams for over two centuries and was never under direct British colonial rule. After independence, it became the capital of the newly formed state of Andhra Pradesh that joined the Telangana region that had been under Nizam rule with the Andhra region that had been under British rule. In June 2014, after a long protracted struggle for statehood, Telangana became an independent state, separate from the state of Andhra Pradesh.

The distance from the 'Old City' to HiTech city is eleven miles but there is no comparison between them. For PALF and other edu-investors, the proximity to HiTech city is of strategic importance with its hundreds of thousands of computer engineers and software workers from which to recruit prospective entrepreneurs and professionals to build the edu-solutions market. A short distance away, the hundreds of LFPS in Old City serve as a ready laboratory for edu-corporations to pilot their technology based solutions. In an interview, PALF CEO Kate-lynn Donnelly confirmed that India is their "first market before they expand to other countries".¹¹

India will serve as the 'test market' for PALF before they scale to other developing countries. For her, India is the right market to test products for the low-income segment because "parents have shown a willingness to pay".¹² Within India, Hyderabad's importance is underscored. A loan officer interviewed by the authors at the Indian School Finance Corporation (ISFC) that gives loans to LFPS expressed a similar sentiment: "Hyderabad ... is a very welcoming market for innovations in education. So everything that we launch and develop, this is the right place for us to test and get its results and response." The large number of low-fee schools and nearby HiTech city makes Hyderabad the default choice for multinational corporations like Pearson to incubate and test "scalable profitable ventures"¹³ for the global expansion of for-profit education.

In India, the GEI is less interested in directly funding LFPS and instead seeks to create new markets in education services that are unregulated

11 Donnelly quoted in Moses (2013).

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

and virtually untapped, of which pre-school education and tutoring services for low-income youth are two important areas. Significantly, investment by global players in technology based education solutions (including curricula and classroom resources, assessment and testing systems, training for teachers and education industry leaders, and even virtual or online schooling) is evolving into the so-called 'edu-solutions industry'. This industry, with its links to multinational corporations and investors and use of technology, has immediate global scalability that can potentially redefine education in previously unimaginable ways. The serious question is: whose interests are served by edu-solutions providers?

Outline of the Report

This report is a presentation of the findings from research interviews with school proprietors, teachers, teacher union leaders, technology industry entrepreneurs, journalists, and government officials conducted in Hyderabad from September 2015–January 2016. It also included site visits to various technology companies and schools, and classroom observations in both government and private schools.

The report is divided into three sections. The first section: The Context of Low-fee Private Schools in Hyderabad provides a brief history of for-profit education and technology industries in Hyderabad and why the area offers fertile ground for global actors like James Tooley and Pearson to try out their business practices and experiment with new markets in education. The authors introduce India's unique blend of local school proprietors-cum-'edupreneurs', who are often from the communities they serve. Ultimately, these local actors have a different understanding about what "affordable" means to poor slum commu-

nities. This means they are unwilling to increase fees to generate higher profits and are reluctant to follow the aggressive expansion plans of corporate investors. The reluctance of local proprietors, along with increased government regulation due to the RTE Act, leads global actors to shift their interest from financing primary LFPS and going where the market is: in the unregulated sectors with high demand (primarily in early childhood education and private tutoring services) and to pursue the development of products and services of the edu-solutions industry. With a globally known IT services industry, Hyderabad is fast emerging as a laboratory for the GEI to develop rapidly scalable and profitable technology based solutions to market to government and private providers.

Part two of the report is titled: Educational Market Making and the Edu-Solutions Industry. It describes the landscape of the edu-solutions industry and the mechanisms used by global financiers, prime among them Pearson, to create new markets in India. This section describes how they operate through spreading and advancing market ideology in education by incentivising investment funds, providing corporate training camps on market modeling and large scale financing, and various crowd-sourcing and edupreneur meet-up exhibitions. The GEI refers to this as developing an “ecosystem” that facilitates networks and connections between investors, entrepreneurs, a relatively cheap tech-savvy labour force, and the LFPS, all in close proximity with one another. In this ‘ecosystem’, global actors coordinate and cooperate with one another to maximise their investment portfolio while deepening competition among local edupreneurs who rival with one another to develop the most marketable product or service.

In Hyderabad, PALF and other financiers also attempt to work through local private school federations to pressure the government to provide an amenable environment for their activities. Through private-public partnerships (PPPs), the government is encouraged to dismantle regu-

latory hurdles and implement policies that incentivise low-cost private schools, encourage the creation of new companies that offer products and services to schools, and foster NGO networks to act as service providers and intermediaries providing training, curricula, and data management and monitoring systems. This situation in turn has resulted in the establishment of a plethora of microfinance providers, impact investors, and development finance institutions enabling access to private capital (at high interest rates) for local private education providers.

The third section of the report, Right to Education and India's Constitutional Obligations, discusses the teaching and learning conditions in both public and private schools, issues of increasing inequalities based on gender discrimination and social exclusion, and the de-professionalisation of teachers as a result of privatisation. It argues that the growth of LFPS is directly related to the government's failure to meet its Constitutional responsibilities and its obligations under the RTE Act as well as its international obligations to provide free quality education as a fundamental human right. It is therefore an urgent priority that the governments of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh (AP) reinvest in public education and support government schools to deliver quality education. The report concludes with several recommendations. The Context of Low-fee private schools in Hyderabad

The Context of Low-fee private schools in Hyderabad

The low-cost private schools of Hyderabad came to global prominence through the work of James Tooley who “discovered” them while exploring the bylanes of Hyderabad’s Old City as a consultant to the World Bank in January 2000. The Old City is an area of 19 square miles with a population of just over 1 million, 25% of which live in slums.¹⁴ It is a majority Muslim area and is also predominantly working class and poor. Tooley’s writings caught the attention of a powerful group of international policy elites and influential private non-state actors (including Pearson) that began to promote privatisation and low-fee private schooling as “the poor’s best chance” (Tooley, 2000). The presence of over 1,000 LFPS in Hyderabad offered a rich opportunity for Tooley to start touting ‘budget schools’, ‘private schools for the poor’, ‘teaching shops’, or ‘affordable schools’ as the remedy to the poor quality and/or limited availability of state education provisioning in most developing countries. However, as the authors learned from this research, the local political economy of LFPS schools in Hyderabad posed challenges for scaling up and profitability and Tooley shifted his attention to other more profitable markets.

¹⁴ Data from the Slum Free City Plan of Action for Hyderabad (2010) Report prepared by NCPE Consultants, Hyderabad for the Government of Andhra Pradesh.

The exponential growth of LFPS in Old City, Hyderabad

As in other parts of the country, Hyderabad saw a massive growth of private schools in the 1990s. Today, 82 per cent of the school-going population in Hyderabad city is in private schools. While this number does not distinguish between LFPS and the numerous schools accessed by the middle class and affluent classes in the city, the number of private schools in the Old City indicates the exponential growth of LFPS in the city. The Old City is divided into three Mandals (an administrative unit within a district)

“Everywhere among the little stores and workshops were little private schools! I could see handwritten signs pointing to them even here on the edge of the slums. I was amazed, but also confused: Why had no one I worked with in India told me about them?” (Tooley, 2009).

- Charminar, Bahadurpura and Bandlaguda. Most of the private schools in the area are LFPS that serve low-income and working poor households. Table 1 below provides the actual numbers of private unaid-

ed schools in Old City and Figure 1 shows the percentage distribution of schools by management type in the Old City.

Mandal	Government schools	Aided Schools	Private Schools
Charminar	50	21	123
Bandlaguda	87	8	197
Bahadurpura	117	35	230

Table 1: Number of Schools by type in Old City Mandals (Source: Department of Education, Telangana, 2015)



Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Schools by Type in Old City (Source: Department of Education, Telangana, 2015)

Enrolment trends in Hyderabad city over the last ten years are striking, especially when compared to state-wide trends in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Hyderabad city has a disproportionately higher percentage of students enrolled in private schools that suggests that private schools are established in dense urban clusters rather than in under-served rural areas.¹⁵ (see Figure 2).

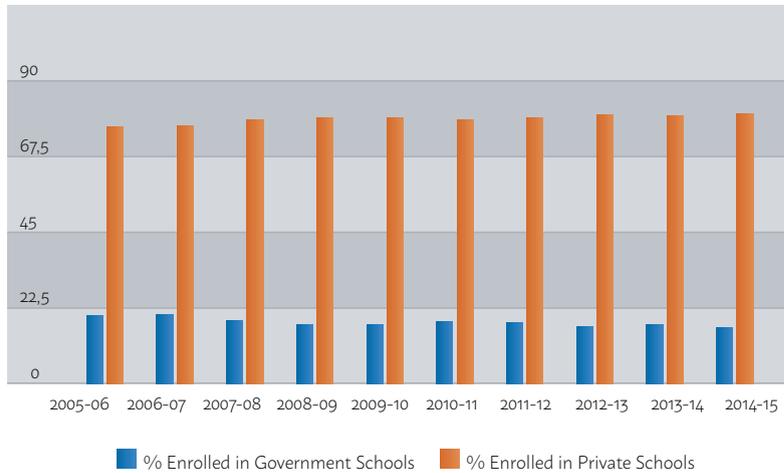


Figure 2: Percent Enrolment in Government and Private Schools in Hyderabad city

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See Riep (2015a) for similar findings about LFPS in Ghana.

Enrolment patterns in the two states also show a significant increase in private school enrolment from 2005-2015, with a relatively higher proportion in Telangana, in part owing to the concentration of private schools in the capital region (see Figures 3 and 4).

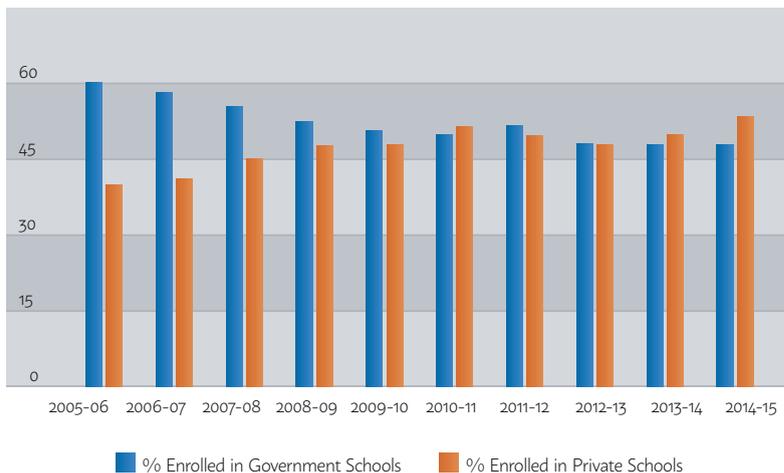


Figure 3: Percent Enrolment in Government and Private Schools in Telangana state
 Percent Enrolment in Government and Private Schools in the state of Andhra Pradesh

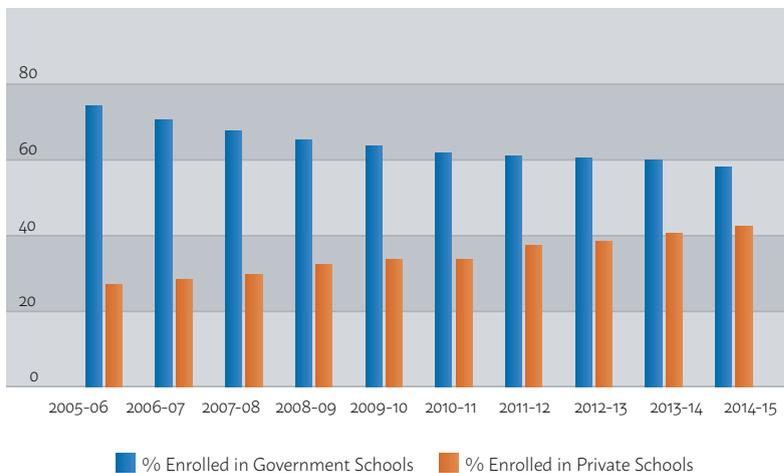


Figure 4: Percent Enrolment in Government and Private Schools in the state of Andhra Pradesh

Further, enrolment data for Rangareddy district, a peri-urban area that borders the metropolitan city of Hyderabad also shows a sharp increase in private school enrolment (see Figure 5).¹⁶ This once again indicates that private schools tend to cluster in areas of high urban growth. Similar observations have been made about rural-urban disparities in the spread of private schools that are constitutive of the inequalities of privatisation (De et al., 2002; Härmä, 2009, 2011; Kingdon, 1996; Mehrotra and Panchamukhi, 2006; Srivastava, 2008a; Streuli et al., 2011).

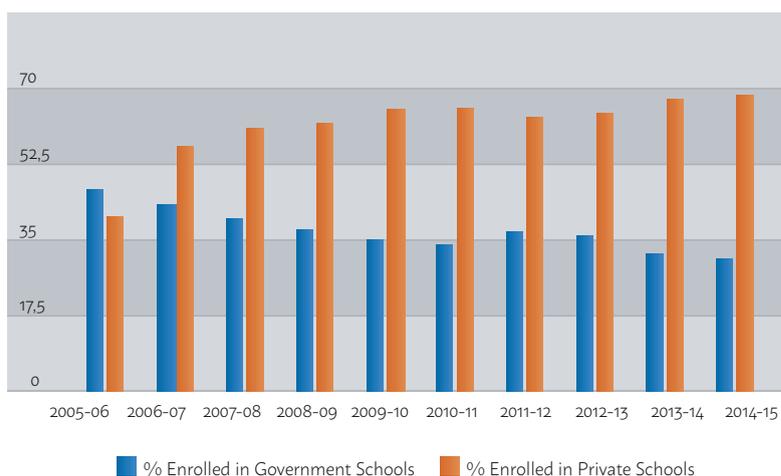


Figure 5: Percent Enrolment in Government and Private Schools in Rangareddy District

As the authors followed Tooley's trail in the Old City, it was discovered that the planned restructuring of LFPS to make them attractive for global capital was met with reluctance due to the locally embedded nature of these schools. This proved to be an obstacle to the exclusively profit-seeking motives of large multinational corporations. The cor-

¹⁶ See Appendix 1 for raw data on enrolment trends for Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad and Rangareddy.

porations realised that they could not alter the business model of the existing low-fee schools, and therefore opportunistically changed their strategy by creating an ancillary market of new products and services for the education sector that could be sold to both public and private schools. The authors found that the multinational corporations had no direct investment in the schools themselves, but rather were making investments in developing a profitable 'edu-solutions' market (see Section 2 for a more detailed discussion of the edu-solutions market). Tooley's initial role in the LFPS market is explored below, along with the failure to scale up and realise his ambitions to restructure it into a profitable industry for international finance capital.

Tooley, M.A. *Ideal Schools and the limits of profitability*

“I want to see private schools emerge and then the state just move aside from education” (Tooley, 2009).

In his book, “The Beautiful Tree”, whose byline is “how the world’s poorest people are educating themselves”, Tooley describes the “grassroots privatisation” of education as an act of self-determination. Tooley’s position is unambiguous: the state is irrelevant and ineffective, and should be forced out of the education sector. Removing the state from education means delinking education from the public good and placing it in the service of the market and individual interest. He saw this “grassroots privatisation” as a ready market in need of restructuring and rationalising to make it a far more profitable enterprise than it was. Fazlur Rahman Khurram, the head of one of the earliest private school federations in the city, described Tooley’s influence in constructing a new discourse about LFPS that has gained wide currency today:

This Professor James Tooley came to Hyderabad. Have you heard of him? ... He came to our other branch at Diwan Devdi. ... We met and we worked together for two to three years. We went to all the schools in and around Hyderabad - many hundreds of schools! And then he presented this idea of ‘affordable private schools’. He said that actually the government expense on each child is about Rps30,000 a year, and affordable schools charge only 6-15,000 a year.

There are some schools which are more expensive. But mostly in Hyderabad, especially in the Old City, 90-95 per cent of schools are 'affordable private schools'. And he gave this term. Then he said this is all over the world. He used to say 'education industry'. He invited me to England for a talk, there they were talking only about the education industry. (Interview with Fazlur Rahman Khurram, Head of School, 4 November 2015)

Despite Tooley's vision of well-funded and resourced chains of 'private schools for the poor', most LFPS are located in rented substandard residential buildings and in neighborhoods with significant space constraints. They do not have playgrounds, libraries, or science labs. They utilise the same cost-cutting approaches such as standardised and replicable teaching and learning materials to "achieve economies of scale and allow rapid development" and leverage low-cost, high-impact technology using mobile phones and tablets to deliver content. They do not offer quality education or fulfil the minimum norms of the RTE legislation (See also Chudgar and Quin, 2012; Singh, 2015; Kelly et al., 2016; Woodhead et al., 2013; Kingdon & Theopold, 2008).

A second claim that LFPS advocates make is that these schools provide affordable schooling for the poor. However, as in other studies, the authors found that the LFPS in Hyderabad do not serve the very poor and marginalised (Government of India, 2009; Tilak, 2009; Nambissan, 2012). The monthly fee for LFPS schools are in the range of Rs. 250-1000 (US\$6-US\$20). This report's research shows that parents who are able to send their children to LFPS are the working poor with steady incomes such as rickshaw drivers or domestic workers. Monthly incomes in these households are about US\$300 (Rs. 18,000-20,000) and parents spend about 20-30 per cent of that income per child on school fees. These schools cater to a certain stratum of the 'urban poor' with relatively steady incomes. They remain unaffordable to the households dependent on daily wages, recent migrants, and generally to female-headed households in the community.

Today, Tooley's global influence has grown significantly.¹⁷ He is Chairman of, and investor in, Empathy Learning Systems Pvt. Ltd. in India, and of Omega Schools (a chain of LFPS) in Ghana, in which Pearson's Affordable Learning Fund has extensively invested. Empathy Learning Systems (ELS) is the for-profit company that is linked to a chain of LFPS known as, M.A. Ideal Schools, run by a native of Hyderabad, Mohammed Anwar Khan. ELS works with about 35 schools to provide teacher training, and supplies worksheets, lesson plans and other materials (for example, phonics lessons to teach English), and offers student assessments for English, mathematics, and science.

Like most local school proprietors-cum-edupreneurs, Mohammed Anwar Khan started as a private tutor after completing his B.Com in 1986. Khan started M.A. Ideal School in a small room and eventually built it up incrementally through to high school today. He explains:

Actually, in 1986, when I moved to this area, I found that there was no private school. There was one, but they were charging about 100 rupees at that time. I saw that there were a lot of children playing on the streets and I found that they were not going to school because there was no government school nearby. So I started private tuition, for those who are going to school, elder students, in the evening. No fee, but just friendly. First, I started with one intermediate boy and one school boy. After three months, they appeared in the examination and they passed. And they said, 'Sir, why don't you teach my cousins?' So they sent their cousins, 7th standard and so on.

¹⁷ Tooley is also the founding President of the Education Fund set up by the Singapore-based private equity firm, Orient Global. This fund invests in private education services and commissioned research on LFPS primarily in India and Ghana, but also other emerging economies.

Then slowly, parents came and told me, 'Sir why don't you start a school? There is no school here'. I said, 'I don't have any idea of how to run a school', but still I saw that, yes, this is the way I can help the people, this community. So I started a school in just two to three rooms, by charging 10 rupees per month. (Interview with Mohammed Anwar, Director of MA Ideal School, 26 November 2015).

Today M.A. Ideal serves approximately 4,000 children (about 500 students per school) in the Muslim-majority working class neighborhoods of the city from which he runs several schools. Khan rents residential buildings and makes improvements on the buildings using high interest loans (of about 24 per cent). Even with several schools, Khan says he does not make much profit, but enough to pay his bills and support his family in their middle class lifestyle. The reported student-teacher ratio at M.A. Ideal is 31 to one (however, most of the classrooms visited by the authors had more than 40 students). The main school in Kishanbagh has been in operation for 25 years and charges about Rs. 200-250 per student each month, which Khan said is a 'break-even' model. According to Khan, due to his frugality and cost saving, the school was able to "give better quality and charge 50 per cent less". The annual expense per student is estimated at Rs. 3,500 (US\$53) and, due to legal restrictions, schools have a constrained operational sustainability of 116 per cent.

Khan follows a model similar to other affordable private schools that are "independently funded through comparatively lower tuition fees (relative to elite or higher-fee private schools), financially sustained through direct payments from poor or relatively disadvantaged households (though not necessarily the poorest or most disadvantaged) and independently managed and owned by a single owner or team, usually comprising family members" (Srivastava, 2013). It is a family business, with his college-going daughters lending a helping hand when needed.

In their partnership over the years, Tooley suggested to Khan that if he wanted to make a bigger profit and expand M.A. Ideal, he would need to charge more and change his budget model. Accordingly, he recommended Rs. 600 rupees per month tuition as the tipping point for scaling up and expanding the franchise. Khan explained that he rejected this amount (which was triple the Rs. 200 that he was then charging), saying it was beyond the affordability of the majority of parents who

Bridge International Academies (BIA) runs more than 460 low-cost private schools, serving nearly 100,000 students, in Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria and, soon, India and Liberia (which are both in the process of inviting BIA to run large sectors of their primary schools. Next year Bridge will implement its model to try to turn around currently failing public primary schools in partnership with these governments of both countries).

BIA, operating so-called 'low-fee', for-profit schools in Uganda and Kenya, is financially supported by Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Tom Vander Ark (formerly of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), now head of LearnCapital and Pearson Ltd. It is also supported by the World Bank and DFID-UK.

Hedge fund manager Whitney Tilson, one of the leaders of the "global education reform" movement¹ wrote a blog titled The Remarkable Bridge International Academies where he explained, "In 1989, I discovered Teach for America (and helped Wendy Kopp start it) before anyone had ever heard of it. In 1999, I discovered KIPP (and joined David Levin's board shortly thereafter) before almost anyone had ever heard of it. This week, I discovered Bridge International Academies, which nobody has heard of – but which I confidently predict will be as big and impactful as both of these incredible organizations."

¹ In addition to founding Democrats for Education Reform, which supports charter schools and high-stakes testing in America, Tilson helped to create Teach for America and sits on the board of a Knowledge Is Power Program school (which is a large charter chain in the US).

Bridge's business model, which includes fee-charging schools run by unqualified teachers delivering a scripted standardised curriculum, has faced heavy criticism. Also attracting significant criticism is the Liberian Government's announcement to outsource its primary schools to Bridge.

Although it promotes 'affordable' education to some of the world's poorest children, Bridge forces families to pay for inadequate scripted lessons read from tablets. Many children are left to learn in questionable environments, such as classrooms lacking proper materials, including desks and chairs.

"Step into any classroom at Bridge and the chances are that the teacher will be uttering exactly the same words that are being uttered in every single Bridge school. A handbook instructs the teacher to look up from the e-book every five seconds, to wait eight seconds for children to answer, and instead of asking the teacher to explain a mathematical concept, the lesson plan takes them through it step by step. All I have to do is deliver," said Mary Juma, a Bridge teacher. Before the first academy opened, BIA purchased tablets wholesale and modified them with their own software. The goal was to not only provide teachers with detailed instructions but also to monitor their performance. Teachers must check in via their tablets when they arrive and run their lessons almost verbatim from the tablet's lesson scripts. Back at BIA's Nairobi offices and Massachusetts-based headquarters, all the data is compiled and analysed. With their company issued smartphones, the Academy Managers (the 'principals' at the schools, so to speak) are in constant contact with the headquarters. Their phones also moonlight as a modem for the tablets, syncing various data including: lesson plans, tardiness and test scores. Whenever teachers arrive late to school, miss a class, or even take too long to scroll through a specific lesson, it is all tracked by Bridge's "Master Teachers"—the moniker given to members of the company's analytic team—in nearly real time. (Ross, 2014)

were mostly informal sector workers already spending 20 per cent or more of their income to school fees. Furthermore, if parents had two or more children (as most do), this share of their income increased ex-

ponentially. According to Khan, this would place too high a burden on many families, who “even at the present rate are unable to pay each month in a timely manner”. He further explained that a full 30-40 per cent of the student fees are not paid at the end of the year - a cost he simply has to absorb if he does not want to be punitive and suspend the child. He and others interviewed for this report echoed the idea that barring a child from attending school due to lack of fee payment troubles them, and presents an ethical conflict for them.

Importantly, and specific to the Indian context, all the LFPS providers met by the authors come from and live in the community their schools are in, are well-known in the community and generally have earned the respect and gratitude of the parents whose children they teach. It was especially clear the LFPS providers in Old City see themselves as serving a specific constituency - poor Muslims working in the informal economy whose monthly income would be a minimum of Rs. 18,000-20,000. They also acknowledged that the poorest families in their neighborhoods (those below the poverty line) cannot access their schools (that is, families that earn less than Rs. 15,000 per month). As national poverty data shows, these families constitute a sizable proportion of the population (Government of India, 2009).

Due to their histories and social connections with the communities they serve, the LFPS providers in Hyderabad are keen to distinguish themselves from the large international chains that had a completely different business model and “cared only about making money” and not for the students. While they claim to be providing better services than government schools, they also thought it was the government’s responsibility to provide a quality education, especially to the poor. Several of the LFPS providers were nostalgic about their own time as students when they received their education from ‘good’ government and aided schools in the city.

As the LFPS market has evolved in Hyderabad, most local LFPS have yet to realise the 25 per cent profitability or expand as rapidly as Tooley predicted. Though there were talks of directly funding these schools to help them scale up, it appears the funding did not materialise. Potential investors were confronted with the reality that accounting practices were poorly managed, there was no proper book-keeping, and the flow of money was not entirely legal so there was no way to streamline the accounting process and have everyone follow the same system. Rather than take on the risk and provide financial support to these local proprietors, investors and advisors began to argue instead for market deregulation. And they attempted to change the rules and suggest policy changes that would loosen legal restrictions and school operating requirements. However (as discussed in Section 3), India's RTE Act has set out to establish a clear regulatory framework, under which all private education providers are supposedly obliged to report regularly to designated public authorities on their financial operations, in line with prescriptive regulations, covering matters such as school infrastructure regulations, fees and salaries.

They must also declare, in a fully transparent manner, that they are not engaged in for-profit education as recommended by the Special Rapporteur on the right to education (Government of India, 2010). In an interview with BBC, Tooley lamented government intervention: "For the business of education, the regulatory environment always matters. India is not conducive (to) for-profit education, and that is why we are focusing on Africa now where it is much easier to do business in education" (BBC, The Education Business, 2014).

Given the apparent stalemate between foreign financiers such as PALF, Tooley, and the LFPS providers in Hyderabad, it is anticipated that there will be renewed efforts to develop a viable business model on a scale (perhaps like that of BIA – see insert) that will be investment wor-

thy for global corporations such as Pearson and for other edu-business investors. Such school franchises are becoming increasingly common in the higher-income range, but BIA represents a new model of school chains that uses a one-size-fits-all technology based system targeted at low-income populations. It is also one in which investors leverage collective purchasing power through commercial connections to high-profile investors, gradually attracting a broader range of finance providers. PALF has been very active in this sector and its investment within the international for-profit school chain sector has grown considerably in the last five years, generating global ideas about content, the role of teachers, and instructional approaches through international links and networks (Junemann and Ball, 2015).

While the early LFPS market in Hyderabad demonstrated that there is a demand and a potential market for for-profit schools for the poor, Tooley was perhaps too quick to conclude that the sector could be easily consolidated and scaled up for large-scale profitability. The entrepreneurs of Old City have a much more modest conception of their business that is at odds with the ambitions of global financiers.

However, BIA's model of standardised technology based teaching, curriculum and assessment approaches, and its potential to scale up rapidly offers a more attractive option for investors looking for bigger yields from this sector. The Chief Minister of the new state of AP, Chandrababu Naidu, has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with BIA to partner with the state to deliver pre-primary and primary education. The BIA headquarters will be in Vijaywada, until the new capital of AP is ready in three years (Business Standard, 2015). Though it is too early to determine what the outcome will be, interviews for this report revealed that the government has become increasingly interested in what BIA has to offer and may well partner with BIA in a PPP (and not a LFPS chain as expected given the difficulties

of establishing a brand in Hyderabad's low-fee sector). One obstacle to this partnership might be the increased scrutiny of BIA by the international community. In June 2016, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) expressed concerns about the "funding of low-fee, private and informal schools run by for-profit business enterprises" through development aid as it could have been contributing to the violation of children's rights in recipient countries (The Global Initiative, 2016). The CRC recommended that the donor governments (such as the UK) "refrain from funding for-profit private schools" and "prioritise free and quality primary education in public schools". The report noted, for example, that the UK has been spending millions of pounds in the last number of years to fund commercial private schools in developing countries and, particularly, public funding has been channeled through the DFID to BIA (Riep, 2015). Bridge will be an important commercial and private education provider to monitor in the coming years in India and elsewhere.

Market Making, Edu-Solutions and Venture Capital

This section details how private sector market making in India has unfolded. Going beyond merely mapping the financial ties of global capital, the section includes case studies of local actors and institutions in India, along with a discussion of how global patterns such as the rise of financialisation, branding, and philanthropic influence have changed the educational landscape. The authors then lay out some of the strategic approaches that are being deployed specifically in Hyderabad by multinational market makers, as well as the local networks created to build new education products and services and what is increasingly referred to as the 'educational ecosystem'.

Three distinct but inter-related aspects of the global education industry that have contributed to scaling up the privatisation and commercialisation of education in India are highlighted: 1) Multinational Market Making, and the rise of non-state actors (corporations and philanthropic organisations) in education and policymaking, and the growing interest in PPPs between these actors and government; 2) Pearson, PALF and the Edu-Solutions Industry, specifically how the multinational's business ventures have been funded in part by the growing trend of 'social enterprise industry' (including tax incentives for corporations in India), which has encouraged the emergence of a number of IT and data-solutions providers for schools and other educational institutes; and 3) Building an Ecosystem for School Privatisation which reveals the heterogeneity of actors (funders, incubators, think tanks, solution providers, consultants, rating agencies and con-

nectors) and the diversity of market-based initiatives (from providing loans, consulting, supporting the growth of APS and tutoring franchises, writing policy briefs and reports, developing technology/software, creating assessment and rating systems, running conferences and workshops) involved in the private sector education industry, particular to Hyderabad.

Multinational market making in India

The Government in India's expenditure of about three to four per cent of its GDP on education (a relatively low percent compared to similar countries given India's much higher rates of economic growth and level of political stability)¹⁸ offers vast, untapped opportunities for non-state actors to get involved in the education sector. The involvement of non-state actors through PPPs has enabled the government to shift their financial resources away from public sectors like education and channel it through the private sector. Low levels of funding for education have compounded the need for new strategies and have also led to widespread public discontent about the government's disengagement and lack of political will to support public education.

As one of the largest emerging economies, India receives limited formal overseas development assistance (ODA). Instead, it is seen as an 'untapped' market where private sector interests have been fuelled by pressures from a burgeoning middle and elite expatriate class, particularly in relation to the education sector. This has led to the implemen-

¹⁸ UNESCO's Incheon Framework for Action recommends that governments spend "at least 4-6% of GDP" and "at least 15%-20% of public expenditure on education", with a recognition that developing countries "need to reach or exceed the upper end of these benchmarks if they are to achieve the targets". (UNESCO, 2015)

tation of voucher schemes and the expansion of privatisation in and of education. These multinational investors intend to build major international education markets with limited risk and limited investment. They do this through the support of the government and philanthropic foundations as well as with the support of eager local edupreneurs. As a result, there are many different actors in the financing and marketing of the private education industry in India.

Corporate Philanthropy and Foundations

Instead of receiving funds through ODA, domestic philanthropic and private foundation activity in India identified education as the most popular donor target. Much of this philanthropic engagement has been in conjunction with other non-state private actors or through PPPs, particularly in relation to efforts aimed at universalising education beyond basic levels (Fengler and Kharas, 2010; Srivastava & Oh, 2010). Srivastava (2016) provides an extensive overview of several foundations and corporate philanthropy in education operating across India. She noted significant differences among them with, for example, organisations like the Azim Premji Foundation, a relatively new player, alongside older more established organisations like the Sir Ratan Tata Trust. In addition, domestic foundations were operating alongside international ones (e.g. Hewlett, MasterCard) with different regulatory and reporting requirements. Some operate as funders seeing a return on their investments, while others operate in the traditional mode of a charitable trust.

Corporate philanthropic-type activities have also been spurred by the new Companies Act 2013 which mandates corporate expenditures of two per cent on corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities for companies above a certain income threshold (Section 135, Gol, 2013). Accord-

ing to Ernst & Young, the CSR covers about 2,500 companies and has generated US\$2 billion in funds (Kordant Philanthropy Advisors, 2013). There are numerous other international actors with significant interest in promoting private sector approaches in education. For instance, data from the US-based Foundation Center reveals that India ranked sixth in receiving grants from the top 1,000 US private foundations, having attracted over US\$831million between 2001 and 2011. The big picture setting within which the growing 'philanthro-capitalism' that is emerging can be traced through the links and connections between corporations, venture capitalists, private foundations and, increasingly, governments. Extending on Ball (2008) and Olmedo's (2013) conceptualization of 'philanthropic governance', Srivastava (2016, p8) suggests:

The primacy of market-based solutions in education espoused by the new global philanthropy (e.g. competition, choice and narrowly defined assessment metrics) and the simultaneous use of complex multi-stakeholder partnerships and PPPs, open up and create formal and non-formal spaces for constellations of philanthropic and other non-state private actors. These fundamentally alter education governance by surreptitiously embedding forms of privatization in education systems, though this may not be the intention of all actors involved.

This hugely profitable market of edu-solutions funding through philanthropic governance has been well documented elsewhere (see, for instance, Ball, 2008; Junemann and Ball, 2015; Olmedo, 2013; Hogan, Sellars and Lingard, 2015; Verger 2016), but to briefly reiterate, the worldwide spending on education currently tops \$4 trillion, a figure that is expected to rise dramatically. For example, the mobile education market is ripe for expansion in India, particularly in rural or urban slum areas where access to reliable internet service or computers is limited. This market is predicted to be worth \$75 billion worldwide by 2020. The market for devices like tablets is set to be worth \$32 billion.

Companies poised to benefit from these opportunities - content and assessment corporations like Pearson, firms like mobile networks, and companies that provide the toolkits, like tablets - have been focusing on these products for years, with the Indian tech industry a key developer and recipient (Cave and Rowell, 2016). Multinational technology giants are positioned to exploit these opportunities. These tech giants provide the same services that a national government would: data management, assessment systems, curricula, teacher training, online courses, and virtual schools. Early adopters receive benefits and incentives to use these inter-linking products on a trial basis at a lower cost. As these products become institutionalised in the management and governance of schools (e.g. school accreditation and certification requirements), the prices for products and services move to a market basis. Among the global tech giants are Microsoft, Google, and, more recently, News Corp's Amplify. Importantly, these multinational corporations are not merely benignly selling products and services to open markets; they are also actively engaged in lobbying for policies that benefit their bottom line, with considerable money and effort invested that is scaled to the market sector.

India's (Global) Education Policy Entrepreneurs

These new globally networked corporations and philanthropic foundations are increasingly governing education policy. Through hiring and promoting "policy entrepreneurs", they create policies to serve their interests with tremendous financial and political leverage, and use their bargaining power to set the rules (see Robertson, 2008). According to Nambissan and Ball (2010), policy entrepreneurs are 'deeply embedded' in the infrastructure of neoliberal organisations internationally and locally with access to transnational advocacy networks with large financial resources. These social links form powerful and influential ties - for example, Pearson's chief education adviser, Sir Michael Barber, was a former top aide to former UK prime minister Tony Blair and

“an old friend of Tooley from when they taught in Zimbabwe together years ago” (Srivastava, 2014). What has emerged are new categories for understanding policy change within these market-making institutions. There is an historical/traditional understanding of how policies and decisions are made by the state in relation to education systems. But this assumption does not hold for these new relationships between, for instance, local entrepreneurs, corporate philanthropists and global business executives, or the ways ideas and educational solutions are generated within and across global multilateral and financial institutions, rather than educational planners and ministries.

As outlined below, Hyderabad’s new pro-privatisation education policy networks are “facilitated by international and multilateral agency discourse and a broader discourse of the knowledge economy and the ‘global Silicon Valley’, often valorised as pathways to ‘quick’ economic development” (Srivastava, 2014, p.9; see also Bao, 2009; Kamat et al., 2004). This ideology is based on the ‘magic of the market’ and increasingly influences the current global policy landscape (driven primarily by US and UK companies and interests). In the education sector, this has led to the prioritisation of narrow technical solutions for education, including decontextualised and impetuous policy borrowing as well as the transfer of a limited set of policy options. This ideology is fostered through powerful rhetoric and promises, and the opportunity to participate in leadership development institutes and crowd sourcing/fundraising events. As part of this discourse, local school proprietors are renamed: instead of being the school head or teacher, they are ‘edupreneurs’ creating knowledge solutions, developing educational ecosystems, offering customised/personalised or individualised learning environments, advocates of parental choice/vouchers, or pioneers uncovering hidden markets.

Pearson, PALF and Edu-Solutions Industry

Pearson Plc, the largest multinational education corporation in the world, has become an increasingly influential, yet unaccountable, actor, partner, entrepreneur, and enabler of processes connected to a growing market for LFPS. In 2012, Pearson established the Pearson Affordable Learning Fund (PALF) for the purposes of making private equity investments into for-profit education companies that provide 'affordable' education services in developing countries. (An excellent detailed overview and historical analysis of Pearson and PALF is provided by Riep, 2015b). The long-term objective of PALF is to "help provide millions of the poorest children in the world with a quality education, in a profitable and sustainable manner". However, while PALF is advertised as an altruistic venture intended to universalise access to basic education for the world's poor, critical observers have questioned the nature and intent of PALF (Junemann and Ball, 2015; Olmedo, 2013; Hogan, Sellars and Lingard, 2015; Verger, 2016).

The PALF investment within the international for-profit school chain sector has grown considerably in the last five years, generating global ideas about content, the role of teachers, and instructional approaches through international links and networks (Junemann and Ball, 2015). In a single year, Pearson took a stake in Omega Schools, allowing it to expand throughout Ghana from 40 schools and 20,000 students in 2013 to a predicted 100 schools with 50,000 students in 2014 (Wilby, 2013). eAdvance, a company that manages the first South African blended learning low-fee school chain (Spark schools) are another PALF-backed for-profit chain of private schools in Johannesburg (although their annual school fees place them within the middle-fee school bracket) (Junemann and Ball, 2015). Interestingly, the inspiration for Spark schools came from Tooley, as a result of a series of stakeholder visits between South Africa and India where Tooley had been urging private education for the poor over the previous decade.

In recent years, PALF has invested in 10 companies spanning five countries, and allocated its first fund of US\$15 million, with plans to invest a further US\$50 million in edu-solutions companies in the next few years. According to their website, these companies are on “an upward trajectory toward growth, profitability and better learning outcomes”. And with the new technicist emphasis on “social efficiency measures”, PALF’s investment arm has also capitalised on developing new market products and software for measuring accountability and learning outcomes, which they “apply rigorously to every investment”.¹⁹ PALF has also recently cultivated more major international supporters and donors such as Save the Children and large impact investors like Omidyar Network. The Michael and Susan Dell Foundation have also recently co-invested with PALF.

Internationally, Pearson’s attempts at “multinational market making” have been built around establishing networks for mobilising business, corporate and philanthropic actors to harness funds and push governments towards pro-privatisation policy changes. In India, DFID, the World Bank, the GPE, the Global Business Coalition for Education, the Business Backs Education campaign, and the Center for Educational Innovations are among the examples of international development partners that have influenced the government and local organisations to develop and promote new education markets and pro-privatisation policies. These so-called development partners are also increasingly seen as a source of funds for the Indian government, as it seeks to raise additional revenue for education. They often provide guaranteed funds or work with local banks to build lending capacity, so they are given considerable leeway and support.

¹⁹<https://www.affordable-learning.com/annual-letter-2015.html>

As described previously, one of the foundational organisations central to the establishment of LFPS and its subsequent expansion into the edu-solutions market has been Empathy Learning Systems (ELS). ELS, a for-profit company, was started by James Tooley and Muhammed Anwar of the M.A. Ideal Schools in 2000.

ELS was initially a for-profit teacher-training centre focusing on Math and English instruction to support the expansion of M.A. Ideal, and ELS would link teacher training needs to IT software. Today, ELS provides training and curriculum solutions such as new teaching methods (phonics), database management and other technologies to schools for a small fee with a “small profit margin”. ELS is a different kind of entity compared to the other PALF-funded initiatives: their intention was to set up an organisation to consult mainly APS-type schools on the products and services they should invest in to improve their education services.

Among those products and services aimed at schools in India are home-grown brands such as Next Education, as well as international brands set up by large global venture capitalists, such as Gray Matters (described in more detail below). Another extension of non-state actors in the education sector exhibiting great success has been the market for private coaching classes for competitive exams. In addition, education tech solutions providers have developed teaching and learning aids, digital expertise, and training services and offer e-learning tools targeting both students and teachers. This has also generated a huge market for vocational education, spoken English, and other courses, as well as a range of non-formal education services. These ventures have been funded in part by the growing trend of ‘social enterprise industry’ (including

tax incentives for corporations) in India, which has encouraged the emergence of a number of IT and data-solutions providers for schools and other educational institutes.

PALF was established to expand Pearson’s private equity investments into for-profit education companies that could provide education services in the growing markets in developing countries. According to

Junemann and Ball (2015, p.15-16), PALF uses three different types of investment approaches: 1) venture capital, which focuses on financial sustainability, financial metrics, profit maximisation, scalability based on standardisation and competitive market returns; 2) impact investing, which involves long-term investments in products and services that claim to demonstrate improved learning outcomes; and 3) emerging markets investing, which focuses on creating and developing an enterprise and market-oriented ecosystem in regions that are under-served. All of these approaches were amply evident throughout the authors' research in the Hyderabad education context (see Figures 6 and 7 for an illustration of the PALF network and investments).

The authors' research in India shows that when the LFPs in Hyderabad were not generating the level of revenue and profits as expected, PALF expeditiously changed course to invest in numerous other education markets, including for example, a Delhi-based coaching institute, the Avanti Coaching Centre (renamed Avanti Learning Solutions when PALF invested in 2013) and Sudiksha, pre-K schools, known as nursery schools in India. These new sectors were ripe for-profit markets because they are unregulated segments of the education sector and seen as virtually untapped markets.²⁰ Figure 6 below depicts the actors interviewed related to PALF and illustrates the inter-relationships of this expanded network.

²⁰ Avanti prepares students for competitive college entrance exams through tutoring and volunteer coaching and Sudiksha's preschools are a virtually unknown market with the potential of serving nearly 800 million children in India.

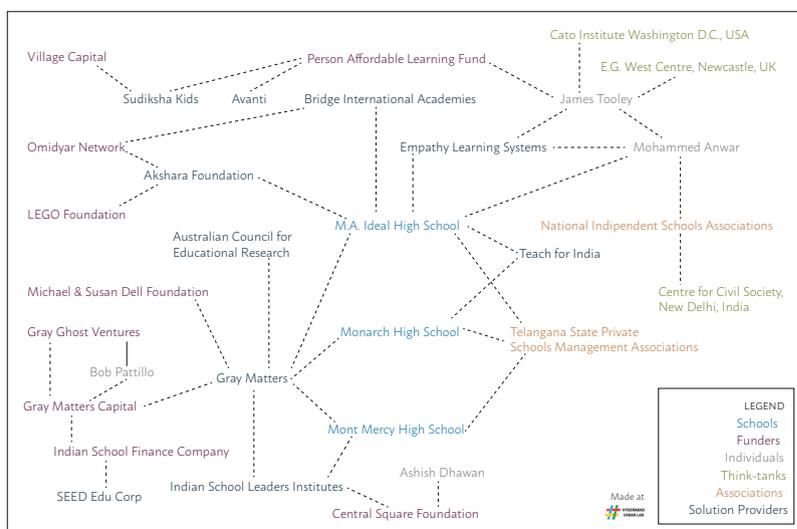


Figure 6: PALF - Networks

PALF's other investments are in edu-solutions providers such as Mumbai-based Zaya Learning Labs, a service provider delivering blended learning experiences to both government and private schools. According to Junemann and Ball (2015, p.22):

Zaya Labs flagship product is the LabKit, which comprises “low- cost tablets, a projector, curated digital content and ClassCloud, an adaptive learning platform that can store and deliver digital content in both online and offline environments”.(32) Key to Zaya's scalability is the LabKit – a one-off purchase that includes tablets pre-loaded with curriculum content, a classroom projector, a WiFi router, and a classroom management tool for the teacher to track student progress.

This combination – of ease and low cost – is critical when working within the Indian school market, where there are often infrastructure and connectivity challenges. Zaya's LabKit solution includes ClassCloud, an adaptive learning platform that can store and deliver digital content in both online and offline environments.

PALF's website describes Zaya as having:

...developed an affordable blended learning model for the Indian market. Unlike traditional classroom settings, where a teacher delivers core content to students, the company has created a blended learning model where students divide their time between content engagement via tablets, time with a teacher, and peer-to-peer group work (PALF website) (as cited by Junemann and Ball, 2015, p. 22).

Based on creating technology solutions, the edu-solutions model involves the incorporation of technology into education, in a variety of ways (e.g. training, curricula, assessment, monitoring) that allow scaling up, which is essential to making profits. Zaya, MyPedia, Esolutions, SEED, Experifun, Avanti, and other edu-businesses in this study are part of the edu-solutions ecosystem. Much of these edu-solutions are based in the digital education industry and are touted as teaching children IT skills and assisting teachers with new modes of learning. For example, MyPedia is an integrated learning solution for Grades 1-5 launched by Pearson to “transform education delivery in school classrooms across India”. MyPedia claims to help teachers to “teach better as it connects students with active textbooks, practice workbook, digital resources and assessment reports”. Echoing the jargon used by advocates of virtual learning in the US who promote personalised learning and virtual schools, promotional materials for MyPedia further suggest that it “ensures that every class is facilitated according to a scientific process of teaching and learning to enable all kinds of learners to be active participants in their own learning instead of being passive recipients of information”, where “teams of experts work round the year to equip teachers to lead this new way of learning within classrooms”. It also claims to actively measure and track the “development of cognitive skills in learners” through continuous assessment and monitoring systems.

Another PALF-affiliated edu-solutions provider is Experifun which provides “low-cost, interactive science learning products”, called Caboodle, aimed at improving science learning at the 6-10 grade level. Experifun’s inClass is a curriculum-based suite of innovative science gadgets and products designed to bring interactive and exploratory learning to classrooms “without needing any infrastructure or additional set up”. To date, it has developed a patent-ready product and was recently selected for the Indian Entrepreneurs 2014 Award.

Another very prominent PALF-sponsored company in the edu-solutions service sector in India is Avanti Learning Solutions (see <http://avanti.in/>). Avanti is a provider of college entrance exam preparation for students of low-income families through an approach based on peer-to-peer learning and self-study, and the use of pre-recorded test practice videos and volunteer mentoring, focusing on the highly competitive career paths of engineering and medicine. This science education company enrolls about 600 students in nine learning centres and four schools across India annually. In 2014, Avanti tested over 10,000 students (for a fee of about US\$100 per test) to fill 300 spots in their programme – an acceptance rate of .03 percent. Students who are accepted spend up to 20 hours a week at a centre for a two-year period and are charged US\$20 per month for services. Aspirational Indian families see this as a ticket out of poverty and typically pay considerable sums for the education of their children to ensure higher test scores that provide access to an engineering college. However, the stakes are increasingly high and the anxiety over failure after making this big investment is considerable. In 2015, in Kota, Rajasthan, a town known as a hub for coaching centres, 30 students who paid for tutoring services committed suicide due to the intense pressure to get a high rank in the competitive exam (Goswami, 2016; Indian Express, 2016).

Of additional concern is understanding how the shift towards digital education and volunteer tutoring is indicative of the for-profit sector’s con-

comitant reduction of cost and rejection of teachers as the primary mode of instruction. According to their website, Avanti focuses on “teaching students how to learn from books and their peers – resources that are more abundant, accessible and consistent in quality”. Rather than pay teachers or instructors, Avanti students are “taught” by the largest volunteer organisation in India – over 300 student volunteers from India’s top schools who, for over a two-year period, give advice to students as they prepare for college.

Sudiksha is a network of low-fee pre-schools started in Hyderabad, with plans for expansion to other parts of the country. Sudiksha now owns and manages 21 pre-schools in and around Hyderabad and has about 100 staff members. The pre-schools are operated in underprivileged urban neighbourhoods where they claim there is a shortfall of education provision (although this study’s research showed that many of the schools were within a few blocks of public and free pre-school programmes and there were a plethora of for-profit/fee-based pre-schools in the surrounding neighborhoods).

Their target audience is the working parents of urban, poor, children aged two to six years old but not, as the school proprietor, Naveen Kumar notes, the “poorest of the poor. We did some research and found there was a market for skilled workers or vendors – those who earn about 8,000 rupees a month. We wanted to be self-sustaining, so we must be able to charge 500-600 rupees per month”.

To set up a Sudiksha pre-school franchise costs Rs. 70,000-80,000. The cost per child is Rs. 6000-7000 which supports a ratio of 50 children, one head teacher, two classroom teachers, and one cleaner and/or staff. Parents can pay monthly but get a discount if they pay annually in advance. The franchise agreement means the school head gets to keep 10 per cent of profits. Kumar explained: “I’m not a manager or a teacher, I am an entrepreneur ... we starting by setting up a few schools to show the im-

pact”. Then they brought the model to social investors and crowd-funding sourcing sites like “Innovent”.

Gray Matters Capital (GMC) is a private operating foundation founded by American Venture Capital investor Bob Pattillo, based in Georgia, US. GMC actively invests in and creates initiatives with local tech and business industry partners to build replicable and profitable business models in the private education market. GMCaspien Advisors collaborated to launch the ISFC in Hyderabad as a first step in addressing the education needs of low-income families in India. ISFC's aim is to channel capital to investment-ready private school managers in the form of market-rate, medium-term loans to enable schools to expand their delivery capabilities and building infrastructure. GMC is an active equity investor in the School Ratings Program, Inkling Incubator and IDEX Accelerator.

Gray Ghost Ventures (GGV), a subsidiary of GMC, is an impact-investing firm dedicated to providing “market-based solutions to entrepreneurs who are addressing the needs of low-income communities in emerging markets”. According to their website, ISFC's aim is to “channel capital to investment-ready private school managers in the form of market-rate, medium-term loans in

Sudiksha launches the schools at a relatively low cost to the organisation and provides some furniture, toys, games, learning aids, library books, and a computer to each school. The schools are seemingly run efficiently but are often in inappropriate facilities like purchased homes and appear overcrowded with classes occurring in cramped small rooms with sometimes more than 30 children. Schools are managed through monthly training programmes and field visits by the Sudiksha directors. According to Kumar, the methodology used in the classrooms is drawn from Montessori and Waldorf schools, and includes a strong element of ‘hands-on’ learning. However, given what the authors’ observations, children mostly remained in their classrooms where there was little room to move at all and limited classroom supplies. At full capacity, schools state that they can accommodate 70 children.

order to enable schools to expand their delivery capabilities and building infrastructure". In interviews for this report, school heads and other educational entrepreneurs spoke about the educational ecosystem that GMC is building, with partner organisations mentioning the "learning ecosystem". Similarly, GMC staff interviewed for this report spoke of "more critical thinking", "assessment-driven accountability", "linking knowledge solution providers", "impact investing" and "results-based financing", all terms that were also littered throughout the website and promotional materials.

Although the extent and role of all these different agencies and organisations is still emerging in India, they anchor a web of institutions that provides a perfect terrain for capital investment as well as the cultivation of a discourse of privatisation that provides channels through which investment resources can flow. Together, these non-state actors and organisations form a complex network, with money, resources, personal connections, and ideas that flow out of and through various nodes. Locally in Hyderabad, there is evidence of what Verger (2016) describes as:

... the rise of entire trade associations dedicated to optimizing opportunities for investors looking to capitalize on the education sector. As with other industry sectors that are being globalized, education is increasingly populated by actors and firms motivated by profit (the so-called edu-businesses), interactions and operations happening at a global scale, competitive dynamics between edu-businesses (but also between edu-businesses and conventional public providers), access to financial capital markets as a way to support the activities of the industry (and its territorial expansion); mergers and acquisitions between corporations, and so on.

These influential local actors with their ties to global capital have been instrumental in driving specific ideas and arguments about the market and the role of education. They are able to reach and persuade the broader public to support privatization efforts, including those within the public education sector to school-owners and teachers at the grassroots right up through senior-level bureaucrats in government.

Building an Ecosystem for School Privatisation

As stated previously, the edu-solutions industry is based on creating technology based products and services. These include e-learning, test preparation services, edu-marketing, the provision of curriculum packages, private tutoring and other supplemental education services, certification services, teacher training, recruitment of university students, and school improvement services. It is argued that these services and tools will allow the scaling up and expansion of the LFPS market for more profitability. To industry leaders like Endeava, this market has been

described as an independent “education ecosystem”²¹ (Tulloch, Kramer and Overby, Endeava Working Paper, 2014). The Endeava Working Paper outlines priority areas for the market makers (businesses, governments and NGOs): providing access to finance, creating an enabling environment, and enhancing quality. Figure 8 (although not exhaustive) reveals the heterogeneity of actors (funders, incubators, think tanks, solution providers, consultants, rating agencies and connectors) and the diversity of market-based initiatives (from providing loans, consulting, supporting the growth of APS and tutoring franchises, writing policy briefs and reports, developing technology/software, creating assessment and rating systems, running conferences and workshops) involved in private sector education industry particular to Hyderabad. The initiatives are further elaborated on below and are based on site visits and interviews with organisations directly in Hyderabad.

21 Endeava is an edu-solutions company based in Berlin. Its website says it “stands for ‘enterprise solutions for development ... and our endeavour to make poverty a thing of the past and preserve ecosystems for the future, by inspiring and enabling truly sustainable and inclusive businesses”. They are funded by and work with private corporations, development agencies and universities. See <http://www.endeava.org/expertises/education>.

Type of Organisation	What they do?	For whom?	Examples
Funders	Venture capital, loans	Organisations of all kinds providing services to schools or other edu-businesses. Funding is also supposed to be available for schools, but this has only been received by a franchise of pre-primary schools	Pearson Affordable Learning Fund, USA Kaizen Foundation, Delhi Gray Matters Capital, USA Central Square Foundation, Delhi Indian School Finance Company (ISFC) [loans only. Funded by Gray Matters Capital]
Incubators	Venture capital, consultancy	Edu-businesses of all kinds	Village Capital Villgro
Think tanks	Craft arguments, publish reports, provide ideological support	Edu-businesses of all kinds, associations of school owners	Centre for Civil Society, New Delhi Poverty Action Lab, MIT
Solution providers	Generate licensed content, produce technologies to communicate the content	Schools	Next Education Zaya Learning Labs Edurite Educomp (Pearson) SEED Edu Corp
Solution consultants	Recommend products and services to schools	Schools	Empathy Learning Systems
Rating Agency	Assessment of schools, teachers, students and comparison with other assessed units	Schools	Gray Matters
Connectors	Conferences, symposia, workshops	School leaders, edu-businesses of all kinds	Indian School Leaders Initiative (sponsored by Central Square Foundation, Delhi)

Figure 7: The Educational Ecosystem: Actors in the Financing of EduSolutions

The Indian School Finance Company (ISFC) is a non-banking finance company that lends to educational institutions and entrepreneurs managing such institutions. ISFC lends exclusively to the low-cost private school sector and has a portfolio of 550 schools in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka states (with about 350 in Hyderabad), with additional plans to broaden its footprint across India. The minimum loan is US\$2,000 and the maximum is US\$160,000. ISFC charges interest rates of between 21-26 per cent fixed for three to five years. The twin goals of the company are to assist with the creation of capacity building through social infrastructure, thereby enabling students to enjoy access to quality education and, secondly, to promote financial inclusion by focusing on schools serving urban low-income segments.

According to their website¹, ISFC's aim is to "channel capital to investment-ready private school managers in the form of market-rate, medium-term loans in order to enable schools to expand their delivery capabilities and building infrastructure". As previously explained in relation to M.A. Ideal schools, the loans are provided to local proprietors so they can enhance their delivery capability by improving infrastructure facilities. Projects may include: construction of additional floors or wings within existing school premises; setting up computer labs, facilities, and science laboratories; adding basic amenities; providing finance for implementation of new teaching methodologies like digital classrooms, and experiential learning; and other activities which lead to a qualitative and quantitative improvement in educational delivery.

¹ See <http://www.grayghostventures.com/about/initiatives/indianschoolfinancecompany.html#tabSection>

Financing and Selling the Educational Ecosystem

The Hyderabad headquarters of Gray Matters Capital (GMC) is located in the leafy affluent neighborhood of Banjara Hills where several corporate offices were set up alongside upscale apartment buildings and large residential houses. The authors' visit to the office of Gray Matters incidentally also led to the offices of three other edu-solutions organisations (housed on separate floors in the same building): Independent Schools Leadership Initiative (ISLI), Indian School Finance Company (ISFC), and the Society for Education and Entrepreneurship Development (SEED). This spatial agglomeration is symbolic of the interconnections between these firms: though fulfilling separate roles in the education 'market making', they are interconnected and collaborate with one another, mutually reinforcing and consolidating market encroachment in the school sector. There are also formal connections between these distinct entities. For example, Gray Matters and ISFC are "sister concerns" with their parent company being Gray Ghost, a venture capital firm based in Atlanta, Georgia, US. GMC was instrumental in establishing the ISFC, the first and only loan institution in the world to provide loans exclusively for the low-cost private school sector.

When local edupreneurs need access to capital, microfinance providers, impact investors, and development finance institutions step in. In order to ensure their investments will make a return, these lenders couple their loans, debt and equity investments with training and/or requirements to measure their impact (e.g. assessment and rating systems). Staff from all three offices appeared to know one another well and reported joint meetings, events and even regular lunches together.

The GMC website highlights six common approaches and priorities across LFPS models and early childhood development (ECD) programmes that focus on: 1) Targeting underserved or marginalised populations with "subsidies to improve access to education"; 2) Enhancing

schools' financial sustainability through revenue-generating strategies and access to affordable capital; 3) Strengthening schools' management capacity with business and operational support; 4) Lowering the cost of services through standardised, replicable processes and technologies; 5) Providing supplemental customised offerings to improve the quality of teaching and learning; 6) Regulating and measuring the standards of low-cost private school providers.

In order to “serve low-income communities in developing nations through for-profit investment in operating companies, ecosystem development and capacity building”, GMC (working alongside ISFC) built a School Rating system for LFPS, with report cards, and ‘scholarship tests’ where parents pay a test fee so their children can compete for a limited number of scholarships. This generated a parent-funded testing and data-generating system for the private school industry to gather information that not only measures and tracks learning outcomes, but can bolster the case for the private school industry itself. The trick is that only those who are the most motivated and those who can pay (e.g. those who tend to perform better on standardised tests) can participate – creating a selection bias.

According to GMC's website, the School Ratings Programme (SRP) was developed in partnership with the Australian Council for Education Research as a tool to conduct “comprehensive 360 degree assessments” of LFPS cross India as a “way to help the educational ecosystem stakeholders understand gaps, develop school improvement solutions and monitor progress”. It is designed to connect services, curricula, and technology providers to the schools with a built-in incentive system to buy more products and services. For example, schools that meet the outcomes targets are awarded the “Gold Certificate”; those that do not meet these targets are put under advisement and are sold packages of school improvement plans, linked to other knowledge solution pro-

viders, and monitored by the SRP for a six to 12-month period. When asked how they got schools to sign up and pay for a private, unaccredited rating and ranking system, Gray Ghost executives explained, “It was difficult at first, schools were worried about getting a bad rating. But we offered scholarships for students who excelled so when a number of children enrolled, their schools began participating”. Within two years of development, the SRP was converted to a for-profit venture for GGV in order to scale up and expand these testing and rating services to private schools across India.

This approach of tying investments to “clear measures of success that ensure programmes stay focused on outcomes” is also known as Results Based Financing (RBF), which has become the buzzword in the education ecosystem in Hyderabad. According to the Gray Ghost Ventures website:

The reality that true, meaningful investment is more than financial is a driving principle behind the multitude of investments made at Gray Ghost Ventures. “Impact Investing” pairs financial returns with positive social impact, investing catalytic capital in innovations that have an impact on unserved communities. By investing in early stage businesses that seek scale and replicability while embedding social impact in their business plans, Gray Ghost has improved the quality of life for millions in low-income communities in developing countries.

We operate under the belief that financial success comes from the ability to impact the lives of many, which is why we have committed an excess of \$125 million USD to investments in a range of businesses that seek to alleviate poverty, provide affordable education, promote human rights and even aim to improve the environment. As a pioneer in the “Impact Investing” sector, Gray Ghost Ventures has helped such a valuable movement continue to gain momentum.²²

Yet, if the financial risk to service providers is too great, or contracts require reporting against pre-defined inputs, Impact Bonds are recommended: leveraging pre-financing from local investors that assume some or all of the outcomes risk and are compensated if projects are successful.

Valuing and paying for education outcomes, on the other hand, creates space for innovation and encourages constant improvement. Over time, this revenue stream for effective models can create a market of new providers and investment to improve global education.

Rather than offer direct financing, GGV established an Outcomes Fund for Education – “as a centre of funding and expertise around commissioning, contracting and evaluating RBF programmes in education” – which they hope will have a “game-changing effect on global education outcomes”. Working with other private sector lobbyists, GGV staff claim that “more donor and government funding for outcomes-based approaches would enable the skills of private sector providers and investors to be harnessed to innovate, adapt and scale effective programmes to the benefit of children and young people across the world”.

22 See website for more details: <http://www.grayghostventures.com/about/initiatives/graymatterscapital.html>

In reality, there is relatively little investment or risk for global education financiers. Instead, they direct school proprietors and start up edu-solutions providers to seek microfinancing or impact bonds. However, most small-scale education technology developers and school proprietors point out that microcredit interest rates are very high (on average 25 per cent) and often have short repayment periods - usually within a few months. Based on interviews for this report with several school owners, it appears that ISFC is the only actual source of direct funding for schools. A few proprietors said they had taken out ISFC loans to construct new buildings or classrooms. They also confirmed that the high interest rates made borrowing prohibitive.

Thinking like an edupreneur

Management training and entrepreneurship events are just some of the ways to help create local edupreneurs. PALF has tapped into this and expanded the edu-solutions market through investor hook-up events and entrepreneur fairs. In April 2015, it hosted a series of education and entrepreneurship events in Bangalore, Mumbai, and Delhi. The Affordable Learning Summits aimed to catalyse India's LFPS movement through services and products by connecting entrepreneurs to investors and mentors. These events attracted over 30 education ventures, 70 entrepreneurs, 20 expert mentors, and countless stakeholders, all with the intention of "collaborating to design and support scalable solutions to critical education challenges facing India". The events included an Edtech ideator in Bangalore, an Edupreneurs Forum and Pitch Fest in Mumbai, and an Investor Demo Day in Delhi.²³ One of the primary aims was to reignite interest in the APS market and try again to bring India's burgeoning middle class and tech industry into

²³ To see which companies participated, read Pearson's blog post covering the Affordable Learning Summits or visit their website: <https://www.affordable-learning.com/programs.html>

the privatisation movement. The Affordable Learning Summit website explained how this was part of a cultural and political mission: “While intending to spur a local sample of ambitious ventures into action, we subsequently unveiled the need for a far deeper-seated call to action on a cultural scale.”

This report found several areas of multinational engagement in terms of building social entrepreneurship and the marketing/management skills of local edupreneurs in India. The authors interviewed Naveen Kumar, Director of Sudiksha, who was awarded Edupreneurs India 2013 Award sponsored by PALF. In 2009, Kumar participated in a “Career Launcher” workshop (sponsored by another ed-tech solutions company). Over the next two years, he met with several friends in foundations who introduced him to social investors from incubator funds (e.g. Acumen Fund and Aavishkaar), to develop his proposal for what he termed “a sustainable profit-oriented business model” in early childhood education.

The edu-solutions providers host a range of events where they bring in local school proprietors to participate in multiple-day exhibition-style forums to share ideas with possible investors. Kumar describes one event, “Intelicap”, as “full of education investors from the USA ... who were mostly interested in big investments with 500-1,000 schools that yield big profits” and local proprietors like Kumar who are just starting out. Kumar described these events as “playing hide and seek” with investors, trying to establish who was who, being introduced to the right people and pitching one’s idea to a potential investor. At one of these investor events, Kumar met someone from the Eleos Foundation (in Santa Barbara, California, US) who agreed to invest US\$50,000 in Sudiksha. Eleos brought Kumar to California for two months as a Fellow to undertake leadership training and meet with other investors who would eventually become mentors, and he also received a US\$10,000 bonus for his Sudiksha business plan.

Another such event, “Inklings”, is described by the GMC website as “an intellectual capital incubator” to foster “ideas that are created or uncovered by GMC to create or replicate initiatives that advance education and employment in emerging markets, with an initial focus on India”.²⁴ Their portfolio of investment and capital management services include Village Capital, First Light Ventures, ISFC, and Sanabel Microfinance Network.

In 2014, Kumar entered the PALF entrepreneurs’ competition, where Pearson chooses 17-18 companies to compete through a peer-ranking system in three-day workshops over several months with US\$75,000 awarded to the winner. After a few rounds, Kumar declined to participate. “Ultimately I didn’t want to take it. It was a new fund and they hadn’t invested in anything yet. Knowing Pearson, they are very ‘venture capital’ – they just didn’t understand our business model we were asking for US\$200,000 – from a variety of investors – and Pearson was willing to put up US\$50,000. Gray Ghost was also interested but they are an unreasonable institution and for their investments they want specific things.”

Enterprising Schools, another initiative of GMC, sponsored an investment challenge grant, focused on increasing the access of low-cost and appropriate learning tools for affordable private schools in India and worldwide. The submissions are compiled into a catalogue of existing tools that provide “inspirational concepts to entrepreneurs” who are encouraged to “take them forward and build businesses to provide affordable private schools with much-needed tools and materials”. Interested schools are encouraged to seek loans to finance these initiatives, and loans are contingent upon using the School Ratings system. They can also get advice on school improvement plans at a discounted rate.

24 See website on impact ventures: <http://www.grayghostventures.com/about/initiatives/impactventures.html#tabSection>

The IDEX Accelerator (also sponsored by GMC) is a six-month field training and professional fellowship programme for aspiring social enterprise practitioners. IDEX's mission is to develop a "knowledgeable and experienced pipeline of human capital for the social enterprise sector". Candidates are chosen from a pool of individuals from a wide range of sectors, professional and academic backgrounds. Participants are matched and placed in pairs in social enterprises across India and provide critical strategic, management and programme support aimed at building, scaling or sustaining the organisation's impact. Many of these social entrepreneurs are young innovators in the tech industry hoping to give back to their country and community through expanding educational access, primarily through LFPS.

In terms of its efforts in building edupreneurs who in turn create or expand the edu-solutions market, Gray Matters also gives out awards to Inspiring School Leaders to build its brand name and legitimacy among school leaders. In fact, all of the School Heads interviewed for this report had attended or been awarded an Inspiring Leaders event or recognition, and these awards were proudly displayed on or above their desks.

On the other hand, some of these new entrant education service providers that are supported by GMC are turning away from the 'opportunity' of low-cost private schools, and instead starting their own higher fee-charging schools. This is not to say that the low-fee market is dwindling, but there is a definite trend towards gradually adapting a wider range of services to sell to the low-cost private schools.

In sum, the most significant aspect of this complex network and growing private sector involvement in education has been tracing the flow of arguments, ideas, and resources that bolsters the "emergence of education markets as a solution", a trend that fuelled the growth of this massive for-profit global education service industry. The logic behind

private sector involvement in education, particularly in developmental states like India, is based on the notion that edu-businesses are the solution to the education deficit amongst the world's poor, underscoring the expectation that more resources are needed to finance education, particularly the construction of schools to accommodate more school places, hire additional teachers, and meet increases in recurrent expenses. The policy solution for these "market makers" is to relax regulations and limitations on the private sector actors operating in education in order to supplement public sector resources and/or step in where according to them, governments could not deliver services. In India, for example, private schools are subsidised to provide 25 per cent of their seats for free. However, the assertion that the private sector would step in to serve the most high-need areas is misleading. Some reports suggest that private schools have been placed (in a predatory way based on their ability to generate a 'market') in areas where relatively better public schools and infrastructure already exist - and not in the most high-need and underserved areas. There are also considerable questions about the quality of services provided and whether and to whom these companies and businesses are accountable. This will be discussed in more detail in terms of the right to education and who is responsible for providing, monitoring, and ensuring a quality education).

Ensuring the Right to Education and India's Constitutional Obligations

Governmental obligation and the State's diminishing role in Education

Privatisation signifies “a transfer of financing management, service delivery and ownership of education facilities and other assets, from public to private or non-governmental hands.”²⁵ The authors' definition of privatisation also includes for-profit and non-state provision of education (such as religious, NGO or community schools) without direct 'transfer' by states. Increasingly, these non-state actors are fulfilling the immediate education needs of marginalised communities in the absence of government provision. This form of de facto privatisation where the government abdicates its obligation to provide education for all, including to learners in difficult circumstances, should be called into question.

25 Global Campaign for Education & RESULTS Educational Fund. (2012). Making it Right: Ending the Crisis in Girls Education.

As this report has previously described, privatisation occurs when public sector activities related to education are outsourced to the private sector, but it also occurs 'in' education, including how it operates like a competitive market, with choice, marketing, managers, branding, and data on student performance as proxies of quality. This report has also previously warned about the many and complex ways that the business world has influenced government thinking about education with its data points, competitive units, performance targets, outputs, and performance management rhetoric.

Privatisation necessarily implies that states are no longer solely responsible for the primary provision of education, and allow at least part of this role to be fulfilled by non-state actors. However, under international human rights frameworks (and most Constitutional laws), states are the sole duty bearer when it comes to respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the right to education, and they must ensure that there is no retrogression when it comes to the advancement of this right.²⁶ General Comment No 13 is especially helpful and, in it, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights highlights that: "Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights." In addition, it notes that the state has "principal responsibility for the direct provision of education in most circumstances" and "State parties have an enhanced obligation to fulfill regarding the right to education." With regard to private education, it refers to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that, "Given the principles of non-discrimination, equal opportunity and effective participation in society for all, the state has an obligation to ensure that the liberty set out in article 13 does not lead to extreme disparities of educational opportunity for some groups in society."²⁷

²⁶ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment 13, The right to education (Twenty-first session, 1999) UN Doc E/C12/1999/10 par.48.

²⁷ Ibid. para 30.

These obligations are critical and underscore the point that the negative consequences that are borne when education is privatised cannot be adequately addressed by regulation of private actors alone.

General Comment 13 also outlines the “essential features” of the right to education, which include availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. Each of these features must be understood from a substantive equality perspective: in order for girls, women, and other marginalised or excluded groups to realise their right to education, education must be made fully available and accessible to them, and it must be acceptable and adaptable from the standpoint of furthering equality (particularly gender equality). Privatisation of education can affect all of these essential features.

As discussed previously, privatisation is also increasingly promoted by multinational corporations and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) as a requirement for receiving international aid.²⁸ According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education (Kishore Singh), this trend is proving to have a significant impact on the right to education:

*In many parts of the world, inequalities in opportunities for education will be exacerbated by the growth of unregulated private providers of education with wealth or economic status become the most important criterion to assess a quality education.*²⁹

There is growing evidence that privatisation in and of education has a range of detrimental effects on the right to education, specifically on the most marginalised populations and with respect to women and girls.

28 Save the Children (2005). Achieving Gender Parity Millennium Development Goal, Policy Briefing. See also Bretton Woods Project (2014). Going, going, gone?: World Bank's funding for public education. 9 May 2014.

29 UN Doc. a/68/294 para 26. See also The Right to Education Project (RTE) (2014). Privatisation in Education: Global Trends and Human Rights Impact.

The Bretton Woods Project recently highlighted the World Bank's increased backing of private education as reinforcing inequalities:

First, the World Bank relies heavily on market-based approaches to improve educational efficiency, which are not consistently designed to ensure that vulnerable groups, including girls, are benefitting from education investments. By promoting privatisation and decentralisation as core strategies to expand education, the Bank risks exacerbating gender inequities in accessing education in situations where girls' expressed demand for education is low.

Secondly, the inconsistent application of gender safeguards, decreasing number of projects with gender objectives and insufficient use of demand-side support for girls' education in countries where gender disparities remain severe. Finally, the Bank's new education strategy poses new challenges to the integration of gender in Bank supported projects, and will further complicate efforts to ensure that girls from the most deprived backgrounds are not left behind.³⁰

As alluded to earlier, the PPPs being put forward in India by international corporations and donor agencies do not show evidence of an awareness of community perceptions around gendered norms or the treatment of marginalised/excluded groups, regarding the outcomes of schooling. Thus, they are not well-placed to make an impact on inequality. In addition to less access, concern has been raised that privatisation can lead to greater discrimination and that "marginalized groups fail to enjoy the bulk of the positive impacts and also bear the disproportionate burden of the negative impacts of privatization of education" (RTE, 2014)

³⁰ Bretton Woods Project (2014). Going, going, gone? World Bank's funding for public education. 9 May 2014 available online at: www.brettonwoodsproject.org/2014/05/world-banks-funding-public-education-going-going-gone/

RTE in India

Since its independence, India has made great strides in increasing the number of years children attend school through national policies – the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) – to universalise primary education (UPE).³¹ The country's Constitutional commitment to ensure free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years has ensured that provision of universal elementary education has been a salient feature of national policy since independence. This resolve has been spelled out emphatically in the National Policy of Education and the Programme of Action 1992 (Government of India 1992). This programme emphasises universal access and enrolment, universal retention of children up to 14 years of age, and a substantial improvement in the quality of education to enable all children to achieve. Furthermore, it aimed to revive Sanskrit and other classical languages for contemporary use.

Programmes have since been set up to assist with reading, school support, student support, unified teacher training, and to revitalise the other primary education programmes. The latter involves providing children with access to primary education, reading and writing materials, reducing the gender gap, and expanding educational opportunities to disadvantaged social groups. India has about 688,000 primary schools and 110,000 secondary schools. According to statistics, two-thirds of school-age children in India are enrolled in school (ASER, 2011) but the figures are deceptive as many do not attend schools regularly. At least half of all students from rural areas drop out before complet-

³¹ Evolving into the Right to Education Act, SSA began in 2001 and was the government's flagship programme for achieving UPE. In 2009, the programme was codified by the 86th amendment to the Constitution of India which made free and compulsory education a fundamental right for children aged six to 14 years old.

ing school. The government has rolled out several plans to increase the percentage of students enrolled in primary education. Government plans such as the SSA, District Primary Education Program (DPEP), Operation Blackboard, Mid-Day Meal have mostly been successful. These schemes have attempted to provide primary schools with the necessary equipment and instructional material to facilitate quality education, including increasing teacher salaries and additional funds for teachers in schools.

Several government policies and targeted funding increases have accounted for raising educational attainment (Bapna and Sharma, 2015). However, the government has not been the only contributor to the increased enrolment rates. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2014, even in rural areas, 29 per cent of enrolments in the six to 14 age group have been in private schools. At the secondary level, 60 per cent of institutions are private (ASER, 2014) and the proportion of Indian children attending private and semi-private institutions grows every year. The rise in participation in LFPS is due to a confluence of factors including: a growing middle class, the government's inability to keep up with the educational demands of a mushrooming youth population, and a lack of faith in the quality of government schools (Kelly et al. 2016; Desai et al., 2009; Srivastava, 2008; James and Woodhead, 2014). Noting these trends, the Indian government is increasingly relying on private infrastructure to help provide educational opportunities, particularly for its poorest communities (Government of India, 2013).

Following a slew of national-level programmes under SSA and massive schemes such as the 'mid-day meal' scheme, the central government finally codified the RTE Act into the law and constitution in April 2010. The hope was that RTE Act would finally mandate the state to fulfil its constitutional obligation and provide education to the poorest

and/or most remote families, and guarantee the right to education for children up to the age of 14. The enactment of this legislation, which is ostensibly the most decisive step taken by the Indian government towards universal education, had a peculiar effect on the low-cost private schools in Hyderabad and other Indian cities. A significant accomplishment of the legislation is that it prescribes criteria that represent accepted notions of 'quality education'. Adherence to these norms and quality standards are now a legal prerequisite for any school in the country to be 'recognised' by the government. Some of these norms pertain to the availability of a playground, a library, the minimum acceptable size of a classroom, the pupil-teacher ratio, drinking water, functioning toilets, separate toilets for female students, and fire-safety provisions. The low-cost private schools in rented buildings in Hyderabad's Old City (as in other Indian cities) are found to be lacking with regards to a number of these parameters. With the introduction of the RTE Act, literally overnight, a large number of recognised private schools – low cost and otherwise – that have existed for decades found that they were in violation of the minimum norms laid out in the RTE Act. The state governments of Andhra Pradesh and Telengana were in a position to exert significant pressure and threatened to close down many private schools.

When RTE came up, things are going very strict. So if you want to really run a school, if you want to start a school, you have to follow all the RTE norms. At present, no state government has funds to implement 100 per cent RTE; that's the reason they are keeping quiet. Sometimes they are forcing us, sometimes they are keeping quiet ... at the moment they have no option. I'm not following RTE; if I follow RTE, I have to close down the school. Ninety-nine per cent of schools will close down.

If I close down schools, there is no way to accommodate the students. In Hyderabad, 68 per cent of students are going to private schools. So they don't have buildings to accommodate them. So it's a big question for them only. If they close schools, to construct new buildings, they don't have funds. So that's the main loophole from the government.” (Interview with Mohammed Anwar, 26 November 2015)

However, the continued romanticism toward LFPS as a solution for meeting the educational needs of India's poor indicates a radical shift in the provision of education as a fundamental right enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Despite the fact that the country's RTE legislation obligates the state to provide “free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14”, through efforts described throughout this report, the government has continued to rescind its constitutional duty to provide quality education for all citizens, turning the responsibility over to private actors. LFPS have also become a death knell for the common school proposal that progressive educators in India have advocated for as a solution to the highly unequal and stratified education system. A common school system was first proposed in 1966 by the Kothari Commission appointed by the Government of India to provide guidelines for the development of the education sector in keeping with the Indian constitution of a secular democratic and egalitarian society. The common school proposal of the Kothari Commission has been a rallying point for the AIFRTE (All-India Federation for the Right to Education), an umbrella group of teachers, activists and education NGOs around the country who advocate for a common school system (Thapliyal, 2014). They point to the common school system that was established early on in the U.S. and in Europe that allowed for significant gains in equity and quality of schooling and argue that this is perhaps the only way forward to stem the tide of privatization and rising inequalities in India (Thapliyal, 2014).

Srivastava's analysis of India's Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Five-Year Development Plans reveal that the broader macro-planning process successively facilitated private sector involvement in education and a decreased role for the state in education financing, management, and regulation (Srivastava, 2010a; Srivastava et al., 2013). According to Srivastava, "we may take the scaling-up of the low-fee private sector through the more palatable partnership discourse as one example of the duplicity of a strengthened commitment to market based strategies, privatization in particular, in an era of 'free and compulsory education for all'" (2014, p. 7). It is in this context of public education as the education for the poor that the movement toward privatising education and accompanying discourses must be interpreted and understood.

Scaling-up the low-fee private sector to meet the demands of universal education is also tacitly enabled by the national government, most recently under the guise of PPPs. India, Pakistan, and Uganda have all recently instituted PPP arrangements for non-state actors (including corporate and international actors) to take over the management, operation, and establishment of schools. These arrangements fuel the scaling-up of the low-fee private sector by design, not default (Srivastava, 2014). In this way, PPPs act as a veil to cloak the underlying efforts of private actors (with governmental consent) to privatise the education sector, despite the compulsion under the RTE Act and Education for All (EFA) to universalise access to and improve free public education.

Added to this PPP phenomenon are pro-market researchers and edu-business investors such as "Tooley and his associates who continue to shape public opinion against government schools through their refereed published research which is generally more technical in tone and when closely read, reveals important nuances in results on relative achievement in low-fee and state schools, concerns with equity, and education corruption at the highest levels" (Srivastava, 2014, critiquing the

work of Dixon et al., 2013; Tooley and Dixon, 2005b; Tooley et al., 2010). Additional studies also challenge the assertions of better quality in private provisioning of education (e.g. Akaguri, 2011; Chudgar and Quin, 2012; Fennell and Malik, 2012; Härmä, 2009; Srivastava, 2007, 2008a).

The backstory to the miraculous growth in the low-fee private market is the nearly decade-long state neglect and disregard for the public school sector causing irreparable damage and closing off the possibility of growth and dynamism in this sector. The Oxfam Education Report suggests that the “inadequacies of public education systems have driven many poor households into private systems” (Watkins, 2000). This may be because of “inadequate public investment” (p.6), or parents who may seek English-medium schools, unavailable in government primary schools (De et al., 2002b, p.141). In a few pithy sentences, Azam Khan, a social worker with a local NGO in the Old City, lays bare the deeply entrenched corruption and neglect that has led to the demise of public schools, being acutely aware that the political class stands to profit from the privatisation that ensues:

Since the past few years, there has been a not-so-subtle shift by the governments and reduced funds to government schools and the education sector. They are relying more on PPP. Even in schools. Here it's being done in a slightly different way. They are willing to shut down schools, but not willing to open up new schools.

They are expecting private people to set up schools. Which is also being supported by most of the schools which already have a presence. Even if they don't have a presence... What we are realising is that most of the higher education is controlled by politicians, they have their fingers in that pie. And now that has spread even to the schooling system.

Impact on Girls and Women

More than a decade ago, Save the Children reported that “Private schools often charge high fees, isolating children, especially girls, from poor families, from school. The privatization of public services is also often undertaken without adequate consideration of issues of equitable access, affordability, coverage, quality and effects on public sector provision for the poor.”³²

According to the Right to Education Discussion Forum’s written submission to Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), “Education must be seen in a wider social context in which gender inequality is too often a pervasive reality permeating not only the educational sphere, but also manifesting itself as gender-based violence, inequality in the workplace and within labor markets, denial of political and civil rights, and the marginalization in terms of productive resources.”³³ Under the CEDAW Convention, State parties are obligated to improve the de facto position of women and girls through concrete and effective policies and programmes, rectifying prevailing patterns of gender inequality and the persistence of gender-based stereotypes, including through the use of temporary measures. In particular, the CEDAW Committee’s General Recommendation 28 (at para 13) highlights:

32 Save the Children (2005). Achieving the Gender Parity Millennium Development Goal. Policy Briefing.

33 Right to Education Discussion Forum (2014). Privatisation and its Impact on the Right to Education for Women and Girls. written submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 7 July 2014.

Article 2 is not limited to the prohibition of discrimination against women caused directly or indirectly by state parties ... it also imposes a due diligence obligation on States parties to prevent discrimination by private actors. In some cases, a private actor's acts or omission of acts may be attributed to the State under international law ... States are obligated to ensure that private actors do not engage in discrimination against women as defined in the Convention ... the appropriate measure ensures that States parties are obliged to take include the regulation of the activities of private actors with regard to education, employment and health policies and practices, working conditions and work standards, and other areas in which private actors provide services.³⁴

As the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) has highlighted, free schooling may be the "single most important policy measure" to ensuring that girls (as well as boys) are able to access education.³⁵ While girls' enrolment rates have risen from 45 per cent to 68 per cent (Government of India, 2013), national rates mask the plight of the most marginalised and disadvantaged in terms of household income, religion, caste, or location, all of which are still barriers to education.

Because labour markets are heavily influenced by patterns of gender inequality, parents often conclude it is better to educate their boys as they are better able to access enhanced employment opportunities in the future. The Right to Education Project similarly warns that privatisation of education exacerbates preferences of boys over girls in

³⁴ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation 28, the Core Obligations of State Parties under Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (Forty-seventh session, 2005) UN Doc.

³⁵ The United National Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) (2014). Global Section: the School Fee Abolition Initiative (SFAI). Retrieved at http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/247_712

education.³⁶ An Oxfam case study of education in India estimated that fees charged in LFPS could cost up to half of a family's income to send all their children to low-fee private schools. Hence, poor families – precisely those targeted by LFPS – are at a massive disincentive to educate girls. Study participants in India indicated that “the poorest families must make hard choices about scarce resources and often choose to invest in private education for the sons over daughters”; thus, “to be a girl significantly reduces the chances of attending a LFPS”.³⁷

While the World Bank and others have lauded the positive effects of PPPs in education and LFPS³⁸, international education researchers and civil society groups have raised concerns, especially from the standpoint of girls' education.³⁹ For example, Oxfam International has highlighted:

*In recent years, donors have also increased support to 'low fee private education', in other words private schools that charge fees to families – in the poorest countries. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) has invested in low-fee schools ... user fees for girls ... have a disproportionate impact on women and girls, excluding them from education...*⁴⁰

36 The Right to Education Project (RTE) (2014). Privatisation in Education: Global Trends and Human Rights Impact.

37 Härmä, J. (2010). School choice for the poor? The limits of marketization of primary education in rural India. Create Pathways to Access, Research Monograph No. 23, January 2010. Available online at: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED508748.pdf>

38 See for example: World Bank (2009). The Role and Impact of Public-Private Partnerships in Education.

39 Critiques of WB and RTE – Spreen and Vally 2010; Klees, 2015; Lewin, 2007)

40 Oxfam International (2014). Working for the Many: Public Services Fight Inequality.

As illustrated previously in this report, privatisation of education disproportionately affects the poorest and most vulnerable. In India, young women from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular still face challenges in their effort to realise their right to quality education, even when issues of access are resolved (Kelly et al., 2016; Tiwari and Ghadially, 2009; Sedwal and Kamat, 2008). In many ways, educational experiences of girls in private schools differ in terms of access to sanitation and exposure to teacher and peer violence (Kelly et al., 2016). The role of the state in monitoring private institutions to redress peer and teacher gender-related violence has been weak; if and where it exists, it has been susceptible to corruption (Day Ashly et al., 2014).

Lack of transparency with respect to the actions of private schools makes it more difficult to hold them accountable. For example, in India, private schools vary in quality and price and many low-fee unaided private schools are 'not recognised' by the government. According to Kingdon and Theopold (2008), recognition is arbitrary:

Government 'recognition' is an official stamp of approval and for this a private school is required to fulfill a number of conditions, though hardly any private schools that get 'recognition' actually fulfill all the conditions of recognition' (p.183).

Lack of transparency and oversight is also reflected in some private providers not having adequate facilities including safe, clean and separate toilets and other facilities for girls and boys, and not using gender-sensitive teaching and learning materials. In order to reduce costs, proprietors lease school facilities rather than owning them, which means most do not meet state regulations and RTE Act requirements. Due to the inadequate facilities and inability to meet other requirements, many of these schools have yet to be recognised and are trying to organise under umbrella organisations such as the National Independent Schools Association (NISA)⁴¹ to advocate for deregulation or exemptions from these regulations or requirements.

Education researchers have long argued that the role of LFPS in reaching the underserved is overstated (Woodhead et al., 2013; Kelly et al., 2016) and that the increasing role of the private sector will increase inequality (Colclough, 1996). Kelly et al. (2016) cite several recent research studies in India that suggest that the dramatic rise in LFPS is indeed exacerbating gender and class-based inequalities within and outside of families, forcing many into debt, while the poorest of the poor remain excluded from the system (Härmä, 2009, 2011; Azam and Kingdon, 2013; Goyal and Pandey, 2009; Singh and Bangay, 2014; Woodhead et al., 2013). Other researchers are beginning to challenge

⁴¹ At this time, facing the antagonism of the state, a large number of low-cost private schools, both unrecognised and recognised, united under a national platform known as the National Independent Schools Association (NISA) to resist the closing down of unrecognised schools and lobby for concessions regarding the new regulations. The NISA was assembled by Mohammed Anwar, correspondent of the M.A. Ideal Schools in Hyderabad, and was supported by pro-market think tanks such as the Centre for Civil Society in New Delhi. Faced with a strong lobby, the government relented and a number of erstwhile LFS schools were then granted recognition in spite of non-adherence to norms. Of course, this political negotiation is not purely rhetorical, there is very likely a system of bribes that has been put into place, by which the private schools periodically safeguard their interests and the government earns some revenue. This legitimate, but messy relationship has resulted in a strained relationship between governments and LFPS.

the assertions of the global education industry providers or the validity of their claims of producing better learning outcomes (Chudgar and Quin, 2012; Singh, 2015). In relation to Andhra Pradesh, Singh (2015) in particular found “no evidence of a significant private school effect” on student outcomes in urban areas and Kingdon and Theopold (2008) challenged the ability of researchers to control for factors affecting school choice, such as difference in intrinsic ability and motivation between the students in public versus private schools.

These issues highlight the problems of inadequate state regulation and oversight of, and enforcement against, private education providers and institutions which is exacerbated by the lack of transparency in many private educational institutions and the government's policies supporting these models. The government is fully embracing a more active private sector through PPP, as outlined in the recent national five-year plan:

Private providers (including NGOs and non-profits) can play an important role in elementary education. Their legitimate role in expanding elementary education need to be recognized and a flexible approach need to be adopted to encourage them to invest in the sector.⁴² (p.64)

Most of the growth of secondary schools in the private sector in the last two decades has occurred among unaided schools (25 per cent of schools). About 60 per cent of schools are now aided or unaided. It is essential therefore that the private sector's capabilities and potential are tapped through innovative public-private partnerships...(p.68)

These problems are not only a consequence of weak rule of law or inadequate government resources, as can be seen above where government plans and laws clearly stipulate the promotion of private education.

42

Government of India (2013) Five year Plans

Minority and marginalised populations

There is also evidence that LFPS and other forms of privatisation are particularly exclusionary when it comes to children from minority and other marginalised backgrounds. Social gradients along traditional lines of caste and place shift and exacerbate the level and types of education achieved by groups. Very clearly, it is the poorest of the poor households and their children, who are excluded from low-cost private schools and included in an education system which is being persistently hollowed out. Many of these households belong to historically disadvantaged castes and tribes. Many of them belong to minority religious communities. Thus, the losses are not just for households or individuals but for these groups at large, and their access to capital in various forms. In addition, even outside the group that is called the poorest of the poor, there is a general preference among families to send male children to the private school and female children to the free government school. Both these tendencies together ensure the gross reproduction of inequality along the axes of caste and gender in particular, but with several wider ramifications for society at large.

Kelly et al. (2016, p.182) found “caste to be the most significant predictor of school type, demonstrating consistent associations with the type of school attended across different schooling levels”. More specifically, they found “those from traditionally marginalized groups (e.g those identified as coming from a particular tribe) were ten times more likely to attend government schools” than those from the general caste, and those whose mothers had no education were also more likely to attend government schools. They also found an association with parental occupation and private school enrolment, specifically that students whose “fathers had regular salaried employment were more likely to be enrolled in private schools” which points to an “underlying social hierarchy beyond income level” that plays a role in LFPS enrolment. James

and Woodhead (2014) also found that caregivers select schools based on what they deem appropriate for their class. This social selection based on class interests (even if aspirational) leads to increased hierarchies, inequality, and social exclusion. Other disadvantaged groups, e.g. children with disabilities or those who speak minority languages, are also likely to be excluded or discriminated against in LFPS.

The cost of private education also has a negative impact on the enjoyment of other rights, and may affect a family's ability to meet other needs related to health, food, housing, etc. These effects undoubtedly affect women and girls more negatively, as they are likely to suffer disproportionately when resources are scarce. Kelly et al. (2016, p.184) found girls who attended LFPS paid "ten times the fees at the secondary level as those in government schools" and attending private schooling had other significant implications, such as losing out on "educational incentive schemes including free school supplies and meals, and secondary scholarships and stipends".

Teacher Salaries and Working Conditions

Lack of accountability of private schools and their staff is also a problem. There is growing alarm that the LFPS is eroding the employment protections and training requirements for teachers (Azam and Kingdon, 2013). Classrooms and overall facilities of the 12 schools visited in the Old City for this report were extremely crowded with about 40 students in a 12x12 foot room with little or no ventilation. Most buildings were not built to house several hundred (and often up to 1,000 students) so toilets were inadequate, compounding the heavy odours in the hot, airless and overcrowded classrooms. Minimising costs and maximising efficiency means that, to keep enrolment at target rates,

every space was used for classrooms, leaving no space for laboratories, gyms or libraries. Teachers met and had lunch in small and cramped staff rooms (if available).

The key parameter that set low-cost private schools apart from other types of schools is their practice of hiring untrained teachers. This practice allowed the schools to keep fees low and hire a larger number of teachers. Teacher salaries are about US\$54 per month with no pension or benefits. According to law (and to proponents of LFPS), schools spend about 55 per cent of their expenses on teachers. Only 14 per cent of teachers have post-graduate qualifications and rote learning is prevalent. One of the most distinguishing characteristics is big differences in teachers' wages between government and low-cost private schools (less than one-quarter of public schools teachers' salaries).⁴³

The thing is, the teachers we appointed from the community, they are not much qualified. 10+2 maximum. Very rarely we can get trained teachers. Whoever we get, we have to train them. So the thing is, we are ready to train them, but within a year they might move to another place. Due to marriage proposals or maybe they migrate from here to other places. So again we lose teachers and again appoint them and we invest money on training the new teachers. (Interview with Mohammed Anwar, 26 November 2015)

⁴³ Availability of teachers in schools is an important variable for quality education. In 2011, there were about 6.7 million teachers engaged in teaching in schools imparting elementary education in the country. All the schools in the country now have an average of three or more teachers. The percentage of teachers in Government schools was 64.13 per cent in 2011-12 as compared to 65.55 in 2010-11, making the total of teachers in Government schools over 430,000. The percentage of teachers in government-aided schools is 8.06, showing a decline since 2006-07, when it was 11.25 per cent. The total number of private teachers in India is above 200,000 while the total number of teachers in madrasas is over 180,000. The total number of primary school teachers is over 250,000 (Center for Education Innovations, 2015. Results for Development Report. Retrieved at: educationinnovations.org)

Some interviewees for this report pointed to the positive effects of “providing many young women from slum communities and lower middle-class backgrounds with pocket change” or a source of income with which they could supplement the household income. However, this report argues that the negative effect to the provision of quality education is the fact that schools are staffed with poorly trained and unqualified teachers. This is also a violation of national and international labour laws, particularly the UNESCO regulations governing the status of teachers (UNESCO/ILO Guidelines, 2008).⁴⁴

The education and training of teachers, both initially during teacher preparation and with ongoing professional development, are essential for the provision of quality education. Teachers are considered one of the most, if not the most, important stakeholder in improving quality of education (Buchanan, 2012). Globally recognised reports, like those from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), have also supported this sentiment, emphasising the importance of teacher qualifications and skill levels as an indicator of quality in schools (OECD, 2012; OECD, 2011). In addition, India adopted the Sustainable Development Goals and agreed to the related Education 2030 agenda and the Framework for Action that translates the education goal and target into concrete strategies for implementation. This report acknowledges the important role of teachers in education and commits to “ensure that teachers and educators are empowered, adequately recruited, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems (UNESCO 2015). The McKinsey Report (Mourshed et al., 2010), one of the most well-known reports studying the important impact of teachers, states clearly that teacher effectiveness is the strongest con-

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<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001604/160495e.pdf>

tributor to student performance. The report also suggested teachers should have a positive, active role in education reform, on both the national and community level. Additional reports noted that countries that improved the quality of their teachers by increasing professional standards, increasing salaries to make the profession more attractive for new entrants, and offering incentives for teachers to engage in in-service training programmes significantly improved their Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) performance between 2002 and 2012 (Education International, 2013).

Similar to Ball's research on PALF, this report found that "qualified and unionised teachers are regarded with suspicion ... as 'part of the problem' – as unreliable, lazy and often absent (see page 19 and footnote 40)...The point that is less often made is that wage costs are the major component of educational costs for many providers and by employing unqualified or non-unionised teachers, or by replacing teachers with volunteers, 'savings' can be made" (Junemann and Ball, 2015). Yet research by Kelly et al. (2016) found there to be little difference between public and private teachers in terms of absenteeism.

In spite of repeated criticism, proponents of the low-cost private schools refuse to directly address the issue of teacher professionalisation (Sarangapani and Winch, 2010). School owners, however, are more frank about their compulsions, they justify the wages they pay to teachers by saying that they pay what other schools are paying. Thus, the blame for the low wages paid to teachers in low-cost private schools is placed on the market. This is not entirely without reason.

The Central Pay Commission has rightfully raised the salaries of teachers in order to keep their wages at par with those of other public servants at a similar rank. Teachers are also required to carry out a number of other public services, including enumeration for the Census of India. Also according to the RTE Act, it is estimated that the total number of

additional teachers needed to meet the prescribed pupil-teacher ratio in public schools in the country was approximately 1.2 million, so even in government schools there has been increasing reliance on untrained under-paid para-teachers. For low-cost private schools too, this pool of untrained individuals is the only available supply of teachers. It has not been within the scope of this study to trace the origins of this tactic of underpaying teachers to cut down costs, but it is very likely to be a tactic going back even to non-low-cost private schools which could cut costs on teacher salaries.

When asked about how keeping down costs in effect meant mainly paying teachers very low wages, Khan explained that “most teachers are young women from this community who are happy to get out of the house and have a little pocket change to supplement their family income”. This poses a problem in terms of recognising teaching as a profession deserving of real investment in training and support for teachers at the school level.

Due to lack of resources for training and high turnover, schools like M.A. Ideal have increasingly turned to Teach For India (TFI) Fellows, who hail predominantly from the English-speaking urban elite, to implement new instructional techniques. For instance, M.A. Ideal currently has eight TFA teachers who earn Rs. 25,000-30,000/month (compared with the local LFPS teachers who are paid Rs. 7,000-8,000/month). The school has a six-year contract to hire TFI teachers and the TFI Foundation pays the difference. In interviews for this report, several TFI teachers at LFPS confirmed that their positions are better paid than local private school teachers, and that they are subsidised by the national TFI organisation.

There are several aspects of this market-driven practice that research and politics must continue to engage with. Although some have a sympathetic stance towards the low-cost private schools for running

community based schools and providing some source of income for unemployed young women, it is certainly the case that the feminisation of the teaching profession in India has legitimated such an under-valuation of the teaching profession. The gender dynamic is acutely noticeable, with most proprietors being men and all of the teaching staff being young women.

In analysing these market forces, the rhetoric of 'providing quality education for the poor' is deconstructed to expose the predatory and socially regulated transactions that constitute the market in particular ways with particular effects. Thus, the precarious and vulnerable positioning of casualised and low-waged work for a predominantly female teaching force as a 'benefit to women in a developmental state' ought instead be read as constituting gender discrimination. In both cases, female private school teachers are expected to only supplement the household income and their tenure is seen to be temporary because of possible migration after marriage or resignation following pregnancy or childbirth. As a result, LFPS are plagued with constant teacher turnover, and demands and measures for quality underscore the need for more training and support in content and teaching methods for this revolving door of teachers. (But not to worry, the edu-solutions market has already invested heavily in online teacher training so young women can now spend their weekends and evenings being training and tested – without pay for their time – in order to meet their employers demands!) Secondly, it is deeply worrying that in the literature that promotes low-cost private schools, not only is the low wage of untrained teachers unproblematically excused, but it is also indicated as the solution to make school expenditure more efficient and make the goal of universal education financially feasible (Jain and Dholakia, 2009).⁴⁵

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For more information see blog post by Susan Robertson on Panama Papers, Pub-

Even when women do run schools, they are still at the mercy (and hierarchy) of the market. For example, in Sudiksha pre-schools, rather than calling them teachers or school heads, edupreneurs have re-conceptualised school staff as “women entrepreneurs” who rent and run the schools. According to their promotional materials, they recruit local women to run branches under an “incentivised profit sharing scheme”. Women entrepreneurs local to the community are found and lead the school’s growth. This provides accountability and investment within the local community and has been successful in attracting lower middle class women with some English education with an aptitude for business.

Additionally, Sudiksha shares 10 per cent of its profits with its women entrepreneurs apart from their salary. Sudiksha Director, Kumar explained, “We wanted to identify women from 25-35 years old who want to do something – like start a preschool”. These women are usually educated, married and unemployed women who “left their careers for families, but once their kids go to school, they are looking for something to do.” They use a franchise approach and explain to the women, “We will invest in the school, but you will manage the school, recruit the children and bring in the money. We will support the training and provide the curriculum.”

He explained their voluntary approach to starting and running a school: “It is not a salary that we pay them but it’s being responsible for something.” He added: “They want to come out of the house” and Sudiksha want people with “good values, support and respect”.⁴⁶ Sudik-

lic Education and Democracy at <https://www.unite4education.org/uncategorized/the-panama-papers-public-education-and-democracy/>.

⁴⁶ The reproduction of caste prejudice and discrimination needs special attention to understand whether women and men from middle castes - i.e. small business families - are

sha “invests in the female entrepreneurs”, sending them to coaching, English and computer classes, and helps them negotiate with owners on renting the school buildings.

Such an argument for efficiency that erases the dignity of the teaching profession, and makes financial feasibility the determining parameter for education policy, undermines the very basic principles upon which the quality of education can be judged. In that sense, the academic proponents of low-cost private schools have a questionable argument.

Limits to Technology in Teaching and Learning

Elementary education forms the foundation for all levels of learning and development. It empowers and equips individuals with analytical capabilities, instills confidence, and fortifies them with determination to achieve goal-setting competencies. It therefore plays a pivotal role in improving the socio-economic condition of the nation. For any country to grow, it is imperative that it has in place a strong elementary school-driven education system.

India has made great strides, increasing the primary education attendance rate and expanding literacy to approximately three-quarters of the population. Its improved education system is often cited as one of the main contributors to the economic rise of the country.

However, as this study documented, larger changes in the understanding of the purpose of education and measures of “quality” education are being ushered in by new stakeholders such as for-profit funding

entering this sector as a remunerative family run business opportunity. Words such as “good values”, “decent”, and “respect” are often subtle references to a person’s caste background.

agencies, new technologies, and new methods to measure performance. The new metrics for “quality” education are designed as data solutions, detailed reports with numbers and comparative charts, for each student, teacher, and class. It is a wholesale import of the corporate logic of conflating “quality” with performance and growth. There are no considerations for democratic or social justice-oriented goals of education including social cohesion, ability to work collaboratively, creativity, or anything besides English, Mathematics and Logical reasoning. This reduction of the student, class, and also school, to a time series of test-based data basically seeks to promote quality through a sense of competition (e.g. being awarded a gold star). This model of corporate management and rating systems, and its growing uptake by low-cost private schools, is an articulation of the hegemony exercised by corporate culture. The extensions of this culture are not difficult to discern. Schools hire teachers for short periods on contract, and teachers are put through perpetual monitoring and training. The teacher’s job is reduced to scripted lessons with a set of discrete and standardised tasks, which circumscribes the possibilities for teachers to engage with students in meaningful ways.

A global report by the OECD suggests education systems that have invested heavily in computers have seen “no noticeable improvement” in their results for reading, maths, and science in the PISA tests.⁴⁷ The report argues that more technology without better teaching often produces poor results. The OECD’s education director, Andreas Schleicher, noted: “If you look at the best-performing education systems, such as those in East Asia, they’ve been very cautious about using technology in their classroom.” This warning should have particular resonance

47 <http://www.oecd.org/education/new-approach-needed-to-deliver-on-technologies-potential-in-schools.htm>

with the government and particularly with edu-solutions providers in India that are basing their entire market and reforming education largely on computer-driven teaching and learning through tablets and software, removing qualified teachers from the equation. Importantly, referring to PISA results, Schleicher noted: “Those students who use tablets and computers very often tend to do worse than those who use them moderately.”

Online learning is not a new or revolutionary idea, as advocated by corporate education reformers who tout the virtues of bringing the world to the poor through e-learning. This report suggests that technology can be advantageous and should be used to help enhance students' learning abilities, but not to replace the authority of the teacher or their role in the classroom. This study shows that, in its current state, the emphasis of edu-solutions providers undermines teacher knowledge and autonomy and makes students passive consumers rather than empowered learners. Their for-profit interests not only control the content of the curriculum and tests, they extract teachers and replace them with tablet or mobile-based scripted curriculum.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the context of the many challenges that confront public education systems globally, the increasing commercialisation and privatisation in and of education represent the greatest threat to education as a public good and to equality in education access and outcomes. (Education International's Global Response Against the Commercialisation of Education, 2015)

Privatisation in and of education runs counter to the goal of human rights-based inclusive education. Already marginalised and vulnerable groups, including women and girls, are more disadvantaged by private education provision because they are the least likely to pay for services and because the monetisation of access reinforces a pro-male bias.⁴⁸ Privatisation leads to a hierarchical, multi-tiered and unequal educational system with marginalised and vulnerable groups (particularly girls) at the bottom, which reinforces rather than remedies entrenched patterns of inequality and exclusion.

This study of the private education sector in India revealed a complex well-networked assemblage of global actors that are invested in the business of education privatisation and stand to make a considerable profit from it. Two actors identified as having launched the LFPS 'move-

⁴⁸ Right to Education Discussion Forum (2014). Privatisation and its Impact on the Right to Education for Women and Girls. Written submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 7 July 2014.

ment' in India are James Tooley and the global corporation, Pearson. But there are a host of other actors and institutions including, for instance, the World Bank and DFID, think tanks and foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Templeton⁴⁹, an assorted number of venture capitalists, big corporations and small time consultants. These multinational actors' claims to make schooling for the poor profitable while simultaneously promising quality education have been critically assessed. It has been demonstrated that the schools have been unprofitable despite the expectations of companies, and they have also failed to deliver anything close to quality education. The study also surmises that a number of local school proprietors who have been active in this sector will actually eventually be forced out given the growing push towards multinational school chains and the recent agreement with BIA which offer economies of scale through standardisation and technology.

Moreover, the professional autonomy and rights of teachers, as well as the local control of communities over their schools, has most certainly been undercut by the shift in authority to private, corporate, and global actors. Similarly, it is reasonable to question whether the shift in accountability structures away from democratic modes to corporate/consumer arrangements reshapes the orientation of education as a public good. That is, corporations are legally accountable primarily to their stockholders and must work first and foremost to create returns for those investors, which are not necessarily aligned with those of the customers, i.e. the students, their families, or their communities.

⁴⁹ Some of the other players are World Bank, Global Partnership for Education, the Global Business Coalition for Education, the Business Backs Education campaign, and the Centre for Educational Innovations. A more recent phenomenon over the last 10 years or so is home-grown private foundations in education with large endowments such as APF, Naam Foundation, and Naandi Foundation.

Education can and should play an essential role in reducing stereotypes and addressing structural and systemic inequality. It is the foundation on which poor, marginalised or vulnerable groups are able to realise their rights and aspirations. However, not all forms of schooling encourage inclusion and anti-discrimination. The evidence suggests that any system that increasingly relies on private provision to fulfil the right to education creates a cycle wherein the poorest and most marginalised have diminishing access to quality education.⁵⁰ To redress this structural discrimination, states must provide quality accessible, free public schooling so parents are not forced to choose between their daughters or sons, or whether and how to feed their families. Rather than attempting to transfer or deflect their responsibility to fulfil the right to education through privatisation, states must take the opposite approach and meet their obligations to fulfil and provide a free quality education that is available and accessible to all.

{Postscript} As this report goes to press, the government is beginning to recognise the crisis and is highlighting the need to improve public education. The Indian Express newspaper has made reference to the Economic Survey for 2015-16 tabled in Parliament and quoted Finance Minister Arun Jaitley who suggested: “There is a need to improve the quality of education provided in schools to arrest and reverse the decline in enrolment in government schools and improve the educational outcomes in both public and private schools.”⁵¹ However, the challenge is to leverage this call in the region’s newly formed states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana that are seeking to cut costs and trim their educational budget responsibilities. Contrary to government calls for

50 Ibid. p 11

51 <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/060516/telangana-government-says-4-000-schools-ready-to-close-down.html>

reinvestment and expansion in education, the Deccan Chronicle has reported that Telengana State government is under Supreme Court review for attempting to close 400 public schools in 2016 due to their under-enrolment and plans to close 4,000 schools in coming years are being investigated by a court-appointed expert panel. This is being met with fierce resistance from a newly formed Save Education Committee comprising teachers, community members, and local activists.⁵²

In light of the crisis situation around privatisation and commercialisation of education, and the increasing pressures from corporate entities in the education sector in Hyderabad, the authors make the following recommendations:

That governments, politicians and international organisations

Reclaim the public education sector by reaffirming the transformative and empowering role of education in fostering social values of human rights and gender equity. The state has the primary responsibility in ensuring to right to education, therefore the state party should take all necessary measures to strengthen and support its public education sector. The state should increase budgetary allocations to primary education and take all necessary measures to improve the access to and quality of primary education for all without hidden costs, particularly for children from marginalised and excluded groups, including girls.

Recognise that the state has not dedicated sufficient resources to finance school facilities and qualified teachers, to ensure effective enjoyment of the right to free primary education for all. The authors are also concerned that inadequacies in the public schooling system have

52 <http://www.thehansindia.com/posts/index/Telangana/2015-05-19/Move-to-shut-down-govt-schools-opposed/151853> and <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/Education-body-opposes-Telangana-govts-move-to-close-down-4000-govt-schools/articleshow/47351028.cms>

led to the proliferation of privatisation and so-called “low-cost private schools” which has increased segregation and discriminatory access to education, particularly for disadvantaged and marginalised children. The budget allocated to education must be increased. The infrastructure of the educational system must be rehabilitated, including building additional schools and ensuring that all schools are adequately equipped. The state must also address the lack of qualified teaching professionals and ensure that teachers are adequately qualified. To do so, the government must expand and improve both pre-service and in-service teacher training, and provide adequate salaries for qualified teachers paid in a timely manner.

Acknowledge that it is the fundamental obligation of the state to provide access to quality free education for all, especially girls. The government has the primary responsibility for guaranteeing and regulating education and should reiterate the importance of public investment in education. It must recognise that user fees actively entrench inequalities that are profoundly socio-cultural and economic in nature, and deepen gender and other gaps. The phenomenon of school fees normalise debt and entrench the human capital approach to education wherein parents seek to maximise the returns on their investment (which invariably leads to educating boys over girls).

Recognise that privatisation in and of education raises serious concerns in relation to equity and equality of outcomes and the government has a fundamental obligation to undertake its due diligence responsibility to ensure private actors are accountable and do not indulge in discrimination. And it must be recognised that the negative consequences to marginalised and excluded groups when education is privatised cannot be addressed through regulation of private actors alone. In this regard, this report recommends that the government take into consideration the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur on the right to

education (A/HRC/29/30) to establish and enforce a comprehensive framework of regulations for private education providers.

Stop the purchase of standardised teaching and school management systems by municipalities from private companies, and particularly profit-driven multinational corporations. Establish a comprehensive regulatory framework for and regularly monitor private education providers, to ensure that they comply with quality standards, regularly report on their financial operations to relevant authorities, including on school fees and salaries, and that they do not engage in for-profit education. It must be ensured that PPPs do not impede access to quality education for all children and it must be guaranteed that private providers do not serve private interests or entail any form of commercialisation of education.

It is hoped that findings and recommendations from this report will be useful for government leaders, teachers, unionists, scholars and education activists who are concerned by the rapid privatisation in and of education in India and across the world. The authors hope this report will be used to mobilise public opinion and advocacy to raise concerns about private schooling for the poor, especially as it relates to possibilities and protections in India's RTE Act. They encourage continued dialogue amongst advocates and organised resistance to the GEI's damaging march across the globe.

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