

Public - Private Partnership for the cause of Equitable Quality
Education
Government of Karnataka, Bangalore
February 25, 2009

Honourable Chief Minister, Education Minister, Officers of the Government of Karnataka, distinguished guests and friends; it is my privilege to be with you on this occasion of Government of Karnataka's launch of Public-Private Partnership program. This is yet another evidence of Government of Karnataka's seriousness to improve the quality of Elementary Education in the state.

World over, civil society organisations and corporates play a critical role in development of the society. In our country, the Tatas demonstrated how business can play a vital role in the development of the country as far back as the early 1900's. In Wipro, we recognized the need to contribute to society in 1972, when we stated, as one of our beliefs, "there is a social purpose in being in business".

The government, both at the central and state level, which has a constitutional responsibility of ensuring quality education for all, has taken several steps to establish schools in most villages across the country. The Government of Karnataka, for the past 10 years, has an impressive track record in ensuring that almost 95% of our children are in school. We now need to ensure that the enrolled children not only remain in the school but also enjoy learning in school. This is possible only if we dramatically improve the quality of education in our schools.

The government has shown genuine interest in improving quality through its recent initiatives such as Karnataka School Quality Assessment Organisation, systematic management development of its education functionaries and school academic improvement plan. Organisations such as the Akshara Foundation, Akshayapatra, Adama Chetana, NIAS, Azim Premji Foundation and many others are contributing to the government's effort to significantly impact quality of education. However, there is tremendous need for many more from civil society and the corporate sector to join in this effort.

Our own experience in partnering with the government through Azim Premji Foundation has been very positive. There are many good officers within the government who are open to change and to partnership with the private sector.

The government faces several critical challenges:

1. **Political Will:** Firstly, it is important that there be political will. Today's launch is a sign of political readiness on the part of the Government of Karnataka. There is an urgent need for political masters at all levels to accept that quality education is fundamental to

the development and growth of our society. Quality education will not happen if we are not politically determined to achieve it. It is necessary that every elected political representative ensures quality infrastructure - school building with functioning toilets and drinking water, qualified and motivated teachers in the appropriate teacher-pupil ratio, and active community involvement in the education process.

2. **Accountability at Every Level:** There must be accountability at every level of the education process. Accountability is ensuring that all children
 - Enroll and remain in school for the entire school cycle
 - Attain the expected competencies
 - Every rupee that we spend on education is spent effectively and efficiently

To my mind there is no greater crime against society than squandering away funds meant for our children's growth and development. Children are the future of our country. A large nation of educated, empowered people can be a tower house of strength, but a large nation of uneducated, poorly skilled people will be a weak nation and fertile ground for discord and self destruction.

This is where China is miles ahead of us, with its high literacy rates and its pursuit of achievement in every field.

The assessment of competencies of children, through the Azim Premji Foundation's Learning Guarantee Program, has shown that barely in 10% of government schools do majority of our children achieve expected learning competencies. This picture has to change. The education department must take the responsibility for achieving this. The education structure, both teaching and administration, must receive all necessary support, encouragement and follow up to achieve this end.

3. **Financial Commitment:** The extent of education budget required to provide good education has long been much debated. To me, such debate is irrelevant. Providing quality education to the next generation is our prime responsibility for the future of our country. We have to provide for the necessary budgets to ensure that every school has the prescribed infrastructure, qualified teachers in the right ratio, professionally trained education functionaries and school leaders. We cannot compromise on this at any cost. It has been amply demonstrated that every country that invests in high quality education recovers the costs manifold through economic growth and development of the country. Even if this means that the budget for education extends to 10% or more of the GDP, so be it, provided the budget goes towards the prescribed purpose and is not frittered away. I cannot emphasize this last point more strongly.
4. **Developing Vision, Competence and Motivation:** The principals, teachers and the education administrators are the most important "Change Agents" who can help achieve the goals of education. It is imperative that all these participants in the education process have, or are, developed to acquire a broad vision of education and child development, and the requisite skills and motivation to fulfill this most important responsibility. There is also a pressing need to professionalize the education system, to

make it transparent (and answerable to the community), in such crucial areas as the appointment of personnel, their training and development, postings and transfers, etc.

5. **Tenure of key Government officers:** One of the serious limitations we have experienced while working with the government is the uncertain tenure of the key Government officers. An Education Secretary or a Commissioner or SSA Director can effectively influence quality of education in the state, and needs to have an assured posting of specific timeframe. Madhya Pradesh Government retained two very competent leaders in the education department for 10 years, which was a critical contributor in raising the literacy in the state by 15 percentage points in 10 years. My sincere request to the government is to identify the people most competent and passionate about education to lead the department, and allow them to hold the position as long as possible. Discontinuity of critical leaders can significantly retard the development process.
6. **Government must actively leverage Civil Society Organizations, Corporates, NGO's and other agencies in the private sector who have experience/expertise in this area:** Currently the involvement/participation of the private organisations is subject to change depending on the whims of individual leaders in the Education Department. In the last 8-9 years, the Education Department in Karnataka had outstanding and committed individuals who strove for productive partnerships.

I feel that there should be a legal frame work for such public-private collaborations to ensure their continuity, irrespective of changes in government.

In a country such as ours - with over 13 lakh schools, 55 lakh teachers, 20 crore children, several languages, diverse cultures and over 70 percent people below poverty line, achieving quality education is an extremely challenging task and it becomes imperative for the three critical stakeholders - the government, civil society organizations and the corporate sector, to work together in unison to face this challenge.

All stakeholders have their strengths and limitations. We need to focus on the strengths and leverage them to make quality universal education for all a reality, and quickly.

To my corporate sector colleagues, who are interested in the education and empowerment of our nation, may I make the following points:

- 1) **Contributing To Quality Education Is In Your Own Interest:** The kind of people you employ will be only as good as our education system is. Therefore if you contribute to education and in people development, right at the initial phase of primary education, it makes sound business sense.
- 2) **Let The Government Benefit With Your Strengths:** Many of you have experience and expertise of managing large projects professionally. Let the government benefit

from your expertise and from the concepts of good performance, high quality, motivation and result orientation that moves the corporate world.

- 3) Enrich The Government Budgets:** Contribute financially to areas where the government does not have budgets or where the existing norms are inadequate. For instance, training and professional development of employees costs much more than the current government norms of Rs. 70/- or Rs. 100/- per day, which is grossly inadequate. There may be other areas where government budgets can be similarly supplemented for specific projects.
- 4) Develop Skills In Your Team Members Interested In Contributing To Education:** Merely looking at Corporate Social Responsibility activities as brand building does not automatically help in building your brand. For that, you must create value; and you cannot create value, unless you invest in the people that are engaged in your Corporate Social Responsibility activities. The government needs to address its responsibilities in the core areas of school infrastructure, appointment of qualified and motivated teachers, promoting major education campaigns, etc. Private agencies can lend support on softer issues – such as quality initiatives, research, training and development.
- 5) Prepare Yourself For A Long Haul:** Development issues are complex and interlinked. You may not see results over a short period. Illustratively, you may have done an excellent job of training education administrators or teachers, but it will take some time for the actual impact in the classroom and on the child to be visible. Therefore, please be patient and prepared to continue your support over a sustained period.
- 6) Understand Your Partner:** Our experience tells us that government can accept you as a partner if you understand their challenges, are sensitive to them, and do not have an approach of “I know everything and I am here to teach you”. Remember we are a very small entity compared to the government. For instance, the government education budget in Karnataka is over Rs.6000 crore. They have over 300,000 people directly or indirectly working for education. All private organizations in Karnataka together would at best bring one percent of this budget. What we contribute is but an expression of our responsibility as citizens of our country. It is also important to respect all the existing institutions such as the self help groups, the gram panchayats, the head teachers, the school development and management committees and all other players.

If we have to develop and grow as a nation, it is imperative that we all come together to contribute to the gigantic task facing us. We owe this to ourselves and our fellow citizens, and to our children who are the next generation, and to the future of this great country.

I congratulate the Government of Karnataka for taking this first step, which I trust will be the forerunner to the creation of enabling conditions, conducive to public-private partnership in education. We will have to create several conditions for the public-private partnership to succeed. We will have to enable it through spirit, letter, resource and legal framework. The private sector can do very little if the government does not provide the basic enablers such



as better quality school buildings and required number of teachers in the school. External efforts can come to a naught if the government does not build high quality monitoring and supporting systems.

As things stand today, I am very optimistic of all that we can achieve together.

I wish everyone here all the very best, and thank the Government of Karnataka for having invited me on this occasion.

- **Azim H. Premji**