

Making Schools Better: The Joy of Working with School and System Leaders of Goa

There is a government school near you where young students can be seen sitting in a circle huddled around the teacher looking at a book. Their eyes are full of wonder from the story the teacher is reading to them in an animated voice. Over in the government high school, grades 9 and 10 have just returned from their visit to the fire department. The girls are particularly happy as they have just found out that women can be firefighters too! Keep walking into the school. A couple of rooms further down the corridor, sounds of discussion are emanating from the staff room. You will find that the principal of the high school is meeting the leaders of primary and middle schools for their monthly "Hub Meeting" catch-up (the hub being a cluster of primary and middle schools with the high school being the apex). The leaders of all the schools are exchanging notes about what is working really well in the classroom and working together to solve their own and each other's challenges.

The seed for what is happening in government schools today was sown five years ago. The year was 2017, and the Chief Minister's Office in Goa and the Directorate of Education had made a decision that they needed an assessment of the government schools that would give them information on what was going well and enable them to improve the quality of education. The State had, for some years, been investing in improving infrastructural needs of government schools. The then CM, Mr. Manohar Parrikar, knew that the teaching and learning needed to be at par with the infrastructure development.

5 years later, most government schools in Goa look like the one we just described. Here's the story of how this change came about. In 2017, when Goa decided to make quality of education a priority, an external agency was required to support the already stretched resources of the Directorate and SCERT. Adhyayan Quality Education Foundation with its experience in a whole school review came to be the State's implementation partner for the Systemic School Improvement Programme envisaged by the Directorate of Education and anchored by SCERT. Adhyayan's partners for this massive programme



across 824 schools of Goa in the first two years of this programme were Tata Trusts, and in subsequent years, first ATEChandra Foundation and now Avanshali Foundation and Mastek Foundation.

Adhyayan has a process for school assessment that enables an honest discussion between students, teachers, parents, school leaders and system leaders, based on evidence collected by them. This creates a common language between the school's stakeholders and also across schools and between schools and system leaders. Together, based on the evidence they collect through scientific methods of assessment, these leaders evaluate areas where their school is strong and those they need to strengthen further. The goal is to ensure that every school stakeholder understands and agrees



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what good quality education looks like.

The process uses the quality framework adopted by a State. In the case of Goa, this was the 46 Shaala Siddhi standards developed by the Ministry of Education in 2015. Shaala Siddhi spells out the updated national expectation from schools on 7 aspects - Infrastructure, Teaching and Learning, Learners Progress, Teacher Development, Leadership and Management, Community Participation and Inclusion, Health and Safety.

School stakeholders and system leaders were introduced to a process of conducting school reviews to determine the starting point for each school. Quite naturally, leaders using this standards framework realise that the school is at the beginner level on some parameters and at the developing level on some others. At the end of the assessment every school decided on improvement targets.

Goa's 824 schools were divided into 104 'hubs' in which high schools and primary schools would work together to drive their own improvement on the parameters. It was decided that schools would start a continuous improvement journey till they achieved the highest level on all 46 standards. The school leader of the high school or a significant primary school was designated the 'hub' leader. Supported by Adhyayan, hub leaders across the State ensured that all their schools 'best practices' were

documented during this process and made available on the SCERT website.

The hub schools worked together to support and champion each other's progress to a higher level. They visited each other's schools, appreciating progress that had been made and asking the school leaders whether they needed support to reach their desired standards with clear action-oriented steps. Every school obtained support from the others in their hubs and the hub leaders met together every second month and kept the motivation alive by accessing and providing opportunities for professional development to each school to achieve their targets. Adhyayan Foundation worked closely with Hub leaders, block level officers and

“Since the programme has started, schools have started showing a lot of improvement. Teaching has become joyful and the students are having fun. Practical learning is more evident in the classrooms. An overall improvement in the system can be observed.”

- Shri. Dilip Bhagat,
Former Deputy Director of Education, Central Education Zone in 2018-2020 and Director Education in 2021.

district officers to ensure that the hubs were actively able to identify and meet their needs for teacher development.

The programme had been running in Goa for two years by March 2020 and 70% of the 824 government schools had already improved by at least one level on the Shaala Siddhi framework when suddenly the pandemic closed down schools throughout the country. Everyone wondered how any quality improvement could be made if schools were closed indefinitely. Was the progress made so far going to be

undone?

While the whole world was grappling with these questions, teachers and school leaders in Goa were recovering from the shock of school closure. They recognised the power of their collective efforts. For two years before the pandemic, exercising their own agency in making their schools better, they experienced the solving of complex challenges. Recognising this, with great foresight, the Goa government decided that each teacher in Goa needed to be provided training that would help them to get online and teach students during the pandemic.

Led by Smt. Vandana Rao, Director, Department of Education, and Shri Honnekeri, Director SCERT, a massive initiative was undertaken to train 11,000 teachers to teach online. Adhyayan Foundation and Tata Institute of Social Sciences worked closely with the Department of Education to train 250 master facilitators on a four day highly interactive training programme for all teachers and then supported them during their delivery to the teachers. A cadre of computer teachers were identified to provide technical help. Teachers overcame all odds to find

“This has been a great opportunity for the teachers who are creating content to reflect on the manner in which activities and assessments planned relate to the learning outcomes.”

- Dr. Gopal Pradhan,
Faculty, SCERT, after the teacher training in 2020

devices and bandwidth so that they could become familiar with online platforms, open education resources and concepts of synchronous and asynchronous learning.

Within 6 weeks, all teachers were equipped and planning with each other online. The question that was raised was, how were students going to get access to learning given that

half of them did not have devices or internet connections? For them, the teachers of Goa showed up and how! Head Teachers such as Ms Maria Miranda who recently received the national award for best teacher and Mr Melvin D'Costa who has been committed to his students against all odds, gathered their books and blackboards and visited students in small groups outside their houses, in parks, in community halls and in any place that was safely ventilated and available. From supporting students with ration and medical aid to running safety campaigns for the community's awareness, to holding sessions and competitions for the children's well-being, teachers in Goa gave their all. While teachers were there for the students in a commendable way to ensure their

“We have conducted 3 hub meetings in this academic year. This learning community has been a great support to each other during the pandemic. I have worked with the primary schools to create a plan of action to be able to continue teaching and learning. Above all, the hub meetings have been a place of receiving psychological support from each other.”

- Smt. Maria Miranda,
HM, GHS Morpirla, Quepem, 2021

learning, they also worked with each other to develop lesson plans for the Diksha platform. The structure of hub-meetings and block meetings helped them gain strength from each other.

If you would have walked the streets of Goa in 2020 and 2021, you would have seen what was rarely seen in any other part of the country. You could see students learning outside their homes with books and learning materials in their hands. You could see them interacting with the village leaders about community issues. You could see them creating awareness

posters for Covid-19 and initiating awareness sessions with doctors for their community so that everyone remained safe. You could see a van full of books travelling from one house to the other with the teacher driving it, or a whiteboard being held by a teacher in a park as he taught algebra. You could hear the same school-sounding cheers in the streets and common halls with safely distanced children and teachers. The school buildings were closed, yes. But the schools were not. They were just relocated.

Gradually as the schools re-opened, Hub leaders like Ms Sneha Gaonkar and Ms. Kavita Phaldesai continued their hub visits and ADEIs like Mr. Narendra Naik kept the morale of primary schools up. Adhyayan identified powerful programs with

SCERT and the Directorate to support the schools to improve their quality standards such as Reading Aloud by volunteers and teachers to enable primary students to develop the foundational literacy skills that they had lost during the pandemic and Career Awareness for Secondary school students. Corporates like Cipla and Godrej have stepped up to support the costs of these programmes. CII Goa has been a driving force enabling government school students to speak with experts, visit offices, and explore careers previously unheard of that matched their interests. Adhyayan's partnership with Gyan Prakash Foundation's Gooru Navigator is further equipping teachers to digitally track students' progress and provide them with practice in core skills in

mathematics.

As of August 2022, the SSIP and the schools in Goa have come a long way. Our biggest and most humbling learning at Adhyayan Foundation has been that it takes a village to raise a child. If you firmly believe that every child deserves a good education, come help the government schools by volunteering to read aloud to the students or to be the expert speaker for their career awareness sessions. If you have a business and want to support your local school, we will help you to use the Vidyanjali portal in which schools have uploaded their requirements. With your support, the government's consistent efforts will be amplified and you will have the deep satisfaction that you enabled every child in Goa to lead a life of dignity.



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BEST COMPLIMENTS






