A Problem We Can’t Afford to Ignore: Failing schools keep most Indians trapped in the cycle of intergenerational poverty

60% Dropout before Secondary school
Only 8% attain College Graduation
Low retention: average person in school for 5 years

20% Below Poverty Line
27,00,00,000 Poor
50-75% in “Low Income” Category
37% Illiterate

Upward Social Mobility towards Middle-class
< 10%

Poor performing schools

10% Youth Unemployment
> 80% self-employed or unskilled labour
43% of Women were child brides
51% of Girls drop out before 10th grade

Poor Families

Dropout, Unemployment & Child Brides

The Costs of Poverty are immeasurable vis-à-vis unemployment (loss of GDP), mass migration, crime, civil strife, pollution, healthcare, uninformed voters, and a populace ill-equipped to face future challenges.
Akshar Forum disrupts the cycle of poverty by employing at-risk teens and dropouts as teachers for younger children.

Benefits of employing teens:
- Retention of at-risk teens who stay in school to earn
- Individual coaching for young children at low cost
- Vocational training and leadership skills for teens
The Solution: A benign pyramid scheme with an exponential growth model. Training and employing at-risk teens and dropouts as teachers for younger children.

- Dropout, Unemployment & Child Brides
- Poor family
- Poor School
- Vicious Cycle

1. Vicious Cycle
   - Ever-increasing Quantity of Skilled Teachers
   - Train every student as a teacher for small classes, high retention

2. Virtuous Cycle
   - Vocational Training, Online Colleges, Job Placement, Business Incubation
   - Upward Social Mobility towards Middle-class

3. Middle-class
Methodology: The entire school is a teacher training facility where every student is a part-time teacher. A military hierarchy incentivizes each student to “learn more to earn more” with wages based on academic level and teaching performance.

Typical Class Seven Student Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Class/Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:30-8:00</td>
<td>Geography X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00-8:30</td>
<td>Teaching: Class 3 Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30-9:00</td>
<td>English V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:30</td>
<td>English V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30-10:00</td>
<td>Teaching: One-on-one mentoring session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30-11:00</td>
<td>Teaching: One-on-one mentoring session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00-11:30</td>
<td>Lunch/ Online Tablet Free-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30-12:00</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1200-12:30</td>
<td>Math (Khan Academy on Nalanda tablet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30-1:10</td>
<td>Laptop video: Planet Earth documentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:10-1:50</td>
<td>Science: Biology VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00-6:00</td>
<td>Vocational training: Recycling and Construction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teenaged teachers gain:
• Self-esteem
• Respect for adult teachers
• Improved learning outcomes
• Leadership skills
• Work experience
• Financial skills
• Spending money for basic needs
• Enough earnings to stay in school
Akshar Forum’s teaching model is essentially a pyramid scheme with potential for exponential growth as beneficiaries climb the hierarchy and are transformed into team members.

Exponential Growth: With Government Partnership, Akshar has growth potential.

- Captain: One Qualified Teacher
- Lieutenants: 3 local high school graduates enrolled in online college course
- Sergeants: 30 teens and re-admitted dropouts. Teaching wages based on academic level and level of empathy
- Cadets: 70 children in small classes, with daily one-on-one sessions with older students
Akshar Fellowship: Akshar is working with the Education Alliance to implement Akshar’s model in a failing government school. This pilot intervention will serve as a model for reforming many more government schools. The Akshar Fellowship: training and deploying talented graduates to transforms schools.
Akshar School Reform Fellowship - Six Month Progress

Sponsored by Motivation for Excellence and the Bhanisani Trust, in partnership with the South Delhi Municipal Corporation and the Education Alliance, and under the leadership of Principal Seema Sharma, the Akshar School Reform Fellowship has made major strides in transforming an under-performing government school in only six months. The half of the school that were in the program for the full six months made significantly more progress than the half that were only in the program for 2 months.

We have successfully implemented our Meta-teaching peer model, transforming behaviour and learning outcomes of entire student body, despite notorious reputation of the school in the system. Children only behave well for Akshar staff, and govt teachers are starting to adopt the method voluntarily.

Results:
- Total behavioural transformation of notorious students, who were previously showing strong signs of ASPD (dishonesty, defiance, violence, self-harm).
- Students are strongly motivated to behave well, be compassionate and study hard, or risk losing points.

Enrolment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrolment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning of Year</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target (March 2020)</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October – November</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February – March</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NGO Teacher Attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Attendance</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct – Mar Average</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Retention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retention</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excluding graduates</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the promise of “wages”, even anti-social students are quickly incentivized to become model students. Students are progressing rapidly, and parents and other stakeholders have already noticed.

W: Model is new and unproven in this context, so we face scepticism from government teachers. Also, the area is affluent, so recruitment will be a challenge.

O: Parents will start to transfer their children from low-cost private schools, as in Assam model.

T: If there is too much pressure placed on teachers to adopt the model, they will want us removed. School inspector and principal are supportive, however.

6 Months Full time Intervention

Class I Student Progress

- Know the Alphabet
- Can read 3 letter words
- Can count to 10
- Can add single digits

Start (Oct) vs After 6 months

Class II Student Progress

- Can read 3 letter words
- Can read sentences
- Can subtract single digits

Start (Oct) vs After 6 months

2 Months Part-time Intervention

Class III Student Progress

- Know the Alphabet
- Can read 3 letter words
- Can read sentences

Start (Oct) vs After 2 months (partial intervention)

Class IV Student Progress

- Can read 3 letter words
- Can read sentences
- Can add single digits
- Can subtract single digits

Start (Oct) vs After 2 months (partial intervention)
Theory of Change: Every student is a teacher and extra-curricular activities include vocational training, apprenticeships, and business training.
Young students—many abandoned, orphaned, or from broken homes—receive daily individual mentoring from an older student.
Results: A single qualified teacher leading instruction for 100 students

Teens earn their own basic needs, gaining confidence, self-respect, leadership skills, strong work ethic, financial and life skills, and compassion for younger children.

Maximum performance, maximum retention, at the same cost or lower than government schools.

90% of Remedial students attain 2nd grade reading level within one year, through individual coaching and learning apps.
Results: A single qualified teacher leading instruction for 100 students

Ridip was a 10-year-old dropout recruited back into school at Akshar Forum. He would often miss days of school to work full days breaking rocks in the local stone quarry. Like many, his mother suffered from mental illness, and his father was an alcoholic. He was thin, had no shoes, and was hungry in school. It was no surprise that he was angry, unfocused, mistrustful, and a bully to younger children. He was trapped firmly in the vicious Cycle of Poverty.

After he became a student-teacher, earning toy money which he could trade for sandals, food, soap and other basic needs, he was completely transformed. By teaching younger children, he has become more patient and compassionate; he’s now one of our top teachers. He has also become a better learner, completing four years of mathematics in one year, and on track to being recognized as a genius. How many more geniuses lay hidden in the slums and villages of India?
School to Career Pipeline: Akshar is partnering with local firms in the private sector to provide training and opportunities for teens. Our goal is to establish a direct pipeline from school to a fulfilling job in a trade, apprenticeship, or college. Some students will be recruited into the organization itself to work as school reformers.
Collection of clean plastic waste from homes in the village

Dozens of plastic packets are compressed into a plastic bottle to create a strong Eco-brick

Teens are trained and employed in mixing cement and basic construction

Teens gain vocational skills, earn enough money to stay in school, and build tree planters, toilets, classrooms
Many students have absolutely no documentation. Akshar strives to enfranchise these students, first by securing their birth certificates.
Akshar Animal Shelter enables students to learn compassion and veterinary science while helping their community. Students become development workers.
With field trips, students are exposed to experiences they have never had in their lives.
Founders / Board of Directors

CEO
Prof. Alaka Sarma
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, USTM
Former MLA from Nalbari

COO
Parmita Sarma
Graduate, TISS Guwahati
Principal, Akshar Forum

CCO
Mazin Mukhtar
ARC, Oakland, California
Alum, Univ. of Maryland

Akshar Advisory Board

Shaila Asave
Founder, Motivation for Excellence
Former MD, Orbit Exports Ltd.

Dr. Holly Shaw
Professor, Adelphi University, NY
Fmr Dir., UN DPI Exec. Committee

Chetna Sinha
Founder, Mann Deshi
Co-Chair, World Economic Forum ’18

Mahbubul Hoque
Chancellor, USTM
Founder, ERDF

Prof. Ashok Bhargava
Gandhian Scholar/ Nai Talim Expert
Banaras Hindu University
Akshar Consultants: Young professionals who donate their time and expertise to serve in vital roles for Akshar

CTO, Content Design, Teacher Trainer, Live-in Hostel Supervisor, Coach of Akshar FC
Arnab Thokder
Fmr. Senior Software Developer, Logitech California

CFO (Pro-Bono)
Himanshu Agarwal
Partner, NC Karnany & Company

CLO (Pro-Bono)
Samudra Sarangi
Associate, Veritas Legal

Miguel Galaz
Project Manager, Portugal Telecom Graduate, IE Business School, Madrid

Yale Levine
Sr. Software Developer, Nike

Mihir Bharali
Software Developer, Sabre Corp.

Sujat Jain
Business Analyst, Sabre Corp.
Akshar Football Club keeps at-risk teenage girls and boys engaged in school, developing discipline and teamwork.
Achievements

- Implemented tablet education program with the Nalanda Project

- Akshar granted “Special Consultative Status” by the United Nations

- Commenced intervention in failing government school in Lajpat Nagar

- “Emerging NGO of the Year” at SPO India CSR Awards and Summit 2017, New Delhi

- UN NGO Committee on Mental Health
  Presented Akshar at parallel event of United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, New York City

- Selected for first cohort of incubator from more than 1000 applicants

- Published peer-reviewed study: “Experiment on Holistic Rural Development in Northeast India”

- Nominated for UNESCO Hamdan Prize for Outstanding Practice and Performance in Enhancing the Effectiveness of Teachers

- Girish Gandhi National Award for Social Work
Break the Cycle at
www.aksharfoundation.org

Email: contact@aksharfoundation.org
Tel: +91 9706006555