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Gurgaon-based NGO bags prestigious USAID recognition

All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development, a joint funding initiative of USAID, World Vision and AusAID, recognized Pragya, a Gurgaon-based development NGO working in remote areas and fragile ecosystems of the Himalayas and Africa, for its innovative project addressing the specific educational problems of tribal/border/hilly/forested (TBHF) districts.

The US Agency for International Development administers the US foreign assistance program providing economic and humanitarian assistance in more than 80 countries worldwide.

The joint initiative was launched to fund the design and implementation of innovative projects that improve early grade reading outcomes in low-resource settings. In particular, the program tries to catalyze innovative practices and target applied research for teaching and learning materials (TLM) and education data that have the potential to be brought to national scale and across multiple contexts.

32 projects from organizations across the globe were recognized and supported under the program. Pragya's Dynamic (and Decentralized) Education Information System for Planning Improvement (DEISPI) was recognized and awarded a grant for its innovative solution for improving education data of marginalized schools and channeling it to improve school management and educational policy planning. An 'Innovation Exhibit' was organized in Washington, DC on September 7, 2012, wherein the innovators of the awarded projects were invited to share their insights with various actors involved in the global fight against illiteracy. The Directors of Pragya, Ms. Gargi Bannerji and Mr. Sunil Pillai, attended the event.

The TBHF districts, which are the target areas of the DEISPI project, are characterized by remoteness, distance from administrative centers, weak infrastructure, and marginalized populations. These areas most often prove to be the toughest challenges in pushing the boundaries of literacy in India.

The uniform 'one size fits all' approaches towards provision of basic public education have failed miserably in TBHF districts, and as a result, these districts have among the highest illiteracy rates in the country. Pragya, which has had a long-term experience of working in some of the remotest and most marginalized regions of Himalayas, seeks to address this issue through an area-specific, cost-effective, community-based system of monitoring and generation of education data - DEISPI. The system generates data on 3 dimensions - student reading levels, instruction quality and school operations. Local community-based organizations such as Student Committees, Village Education Committees, Parent Teacher Associations and Barefoot Monitors (trained local youth) are trained to collect quantitative and qualitative data on the 3 dimensions.

This data is then analyzed against contextual variations, and used to guide area-specific planning, as well as school/teacher/student-specific improvement actions via peer-group 'education dialogues' for collaborative educational problem-solving. The project also aims to document and disseminate

effective strategies and best practices at state and national-level, and increase uptake of DEISPI among the TBHF districts.

Pilot DEISPI systems will now be implemented by Pragya in 11 TBHF districts across 6 states, targeting 330 schools.
For details on the NGO's work please visit our website: http://www.pragya.org

Link to USAID site: http://allchildrenreading.org/dynamic-and-decentralized-education-information-system-planning-improvement-deispi-solution-marginal

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