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Ashwani Mishra

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Beyond Band Aid: Tech Brings New Ways to Use Data for Social Good



Technology has changed the way we do just about everything. For Karnataka Learning Partnership (KLP), a public platform for education which relies on new age technologies to generate data, the main objective is to create simple, intuitive and useful interfaces to collect data and insights for the education ecosystem.

KLP was formed as a framework for nonprofits, corporations, academic institutions, and citizens to get involved in improving government schools in Karnataka, India. The idea was seeded by Akshara Foundation's extensive work in government-run schools and preschools in the state. Since then KLP's work has touched thousands of children in the area of public education.

"The government primary school systems do not have assessments to gauge the learning levels of children - the first formal assessment is done in grade 10 by when the required remedial work becomes harder to implement. Akshara's initial foray in to assessments for programmatic improvements lead us to believe that a Universal Child Tracking system is essential and we started this as an effort to capture learning data on a child-by-child basis and use that data to bring in remedial interventions early in the academic progression of a child and accelerate their learning outcome," says Gautam John, Head of KLP project at Akshara Foundation.

Creating Fruitful Partnerships

After recognizing the need, in 2007, a comprehensive database of information covering all government primary schools in Bangalore was created as part of the initiative, which also has as an objective of information dissemination to various stakeholders.

As time progressed, it was decided that the database and platform could be more effective if it could create relationships with multiple partner organizations

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that work in complementary areas such as nutrition, health, infrastructure etc. "The idea was to create a more holistic database around the state of public pre-primary and primary education in Karnataka," Gautam says.

Since 2010, KLP has thus evolved from being an Akshara project, which collected and disseminated data about Akshara programs, to being an independent platform that builds partnerships and tools to create a transparent, accountable, efficient and participatory public pre-primary and primary education sector in Karnataka that engages all stakeholders involved in the process of delivering quality education to children.

Currently the KLP framework has impacted close to 250,000 children, in Bangalore, and covers close to 700,000 children in the state of Karnataka.

"Over the next three years we will expand our impact to over 1 million children and will reach out to over 2,000 elected representatives at multiple levels in the Indian democratic set-up and nearly 2,000 educators supporting public schools and pre-schools. This will make a significant difference to the learning outcomes of children in about 20 percent of the 46,000 schools in the state by ushering in transparent and data driven decision-making and community accountability of these institutions," Gautam informs.

Tech Aid

KLP uses multiple technologies - from web based data analysis and visualization platforms, to mobile applications, interactive voice response systems, to legacy paper based data capture. Organizations working in this space, Akshara included, have all suffered from problems of isolated impact, and have recognized that no one organization can change this ecosystem. KLP is a meta-layer to create a collective impact, coordination and insight and acts as the glue to bring in the efforts of every one of these organizations to deliver, using technology, tools and data required to bring force multipliers to the efforts of each of these organizations.

"All of our work is built on open-source technologies by a seven-person in-house technology team. We do, from time to time, outsource some work, such as design, to external experts," says Gautam.

The KLP platform is built upon the central idea that bringing together multiple data sets from various partners will allow in the creation of a better picture of the state of public education in Karnataka. To bring these data sets together, data fusion technologies are applied.

Once these disparate data sources are fused, multiple tools are employed to analyze and correlate the stories these data sets tell and to be able to translate these insights and make recommendations for policy as well. Use of visualization tools on top of these datasets are leveraged to better visualize data in ways that are easy to comprehend. Thousands of inputs from crowd-sourced observations are also received and big data processing techniques help in the analysis of these - including using non-relational databases.



ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

Ashwani Mishra is Executive Editor at DynamicCIO. ...

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