

PENTA

How Co-Impact Collaborates for Change

By **Abby Schultz** June 20, 2019 2:57 pm ET



Teaching at the Right Level provides students with the focused instruction they need to master foundational math and reading skills. **Courtesy of TaRL Africa**

More than 20 years ago, the Indian nonprofit Pratham gleaned from annual household surveys that at least half the children in the country were struggling with basic math as well as reading and comprehension skills.

It's not that the children weren't in school, it's that they weren't learning. And without gaining foundational skills, these students couldn't expect to advance, says Rukmini Banerji, Pratham's CEO.

Pratham began working with schools to group students by their abilities, so teachers within the schools could spend at least an hour or two a day providing them with focused instruction. What the nonprofit found is "if you group kids by their level of reading, rather than the grade or age, and [leave] the grade/age curriculum aside for a bit, you could have pretty good progress," Banerji says.

This simple approach has been widely and effectively used across India, and recently, through Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) a joint venture with the

global nonprofit Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), it's expanding throughout Africa as well.

The expansion got a boost earlier this year with a five-year "systems-change" grant from Co-Impact, a collaborative philanthropy founded in November 2017 by Olivia Leland, who worked with Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffet as the founding director of the Giving Pledge.

Co-Impact is called a donor collaborative, or aggregated fund, because it's backed by several individuals and foundations that are pooling resources to fund nonprofits. Co-Impact's specific aim is to fund organizations that are addressing health, education, and economic opportunity in low-to-middle income countries, with an emphasis on groups that can accomplish systems-level change.

The collaborative approach is one that's gaining traction among a number of major funders as a way to more effectively accelerate and scale their impact.

Co-Impact is backed by six "core partners"—Jeff Skoll, Richard Chandler, Bill and Melinda Gates, the Rockefeller Foundation, Rohini and Nandan Nilekani, and the ELMA Foundation—as well as co-investors who support individual initiatives.

The group began with a coffer of \$500 million, and in January announced its first round of five-year grants totaling more than \$80 million to five nonprofits, including TaRL, with each receiving \$15 million to \$25 million.

TaRI was selected, Leland says, because "essentially we saw this proven model and the potential it had to help millions of children to learn to read and do basic numeracy and worked out how we could support these efforts."

Pratham and J-PAL began working with one another with a grant from the Quality Education in Developing Countries (QEDC) Initiative, a smaller collaborative co-funded by the Hewlett and Gates foundations from 2006-'14. That effort allowed J-Pal to test the effectiveness of the program in India, and allowed it to begin rolling it out in Africa.

Then, with an initial, \$700,000 "preparation grant" from Co-Impact, Pratham and J-PAL researched how they could collaborate and work with education ministries across the African continent to expand the program.

The preparation grant allowed the nonprofits "to think in a different way," says Laura Poswell, J-PAL's executive director, who is based in Cape Town, South Africa. "And we learned even how to work together in a different way,

which we never would have put it in a proposal because we would not have realized that would be a beneficial thing for us to do.”

Similarly, the subsequent five-year grant funding works differently than a traditional grant, allowing J-PAL and Pratham to “move between opportunities and respond to the ones that are most compelling, but with some form of patience to take account of the ebb and the flow,” Poswell says. “It’s very difficult for many funders to allow you this.”

To Co-Impact, the idea of collaboration to further systems-level change on humanitarian issues like health and education works on several levels. There’s the pooling together of substantial resources, yes, but also the collaboration that results from a community of funders who regularly meet to share ideas and resources, as well as the collaboration between nonprofits that TaRL represents.

For TaRL to succeed, as well, will require funding from other philanthropists, as well as collaboration within schools and governments and other nonprofits across Africa.

“This is especially important when the goal is systems change,” Leland says. “So when we’re supporting efforts to address, say, a national health system in India or an education system in Zambia...it’s about recognizing that philanthropy has one seat at the table and figuring out how to listen to and partner with others so that we can contribute to large-scale change which can ultimately benefit millions of people.”

[MORE FROM NEWS CORP](#)

[Individual Giving in 2018 Drops to \\$292.1 Billion](#) [PENTA](#)

[Jenny Craig’s California Home Sheds Another \\$7 Million Off Listing Price](#) [MANSION GLOBAL](#)

[4 gorgeous beach towns where you can retire comfortably on \\$40,000 a year](#) [MARKETWATCH](#)

[J. Lo and A-Rod Buy and Sell Their Manhattan Condo in a New York Minute, but How?](#) [REALTOR.COM](#)

[New-Build Spec House in Beverly Hills Includes an Andy Warhol Art Collection](#) [PENTA](#)

