



# IGNITING YOUNG MINDS

**Born out of the realisation that existing schooling systems do not equip youth with critical life skills, Agastya International Foundation has been perseveringly reaching out to disadvantaged children and teachers through experiential, hands-on science education, teacher training and scalable, sustainable methods.**

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**A**merican theoretical physicist and string theorist Brian Greene once said: “Science is a way of life. Science is a perspective. Science is the process that takes us from confusion to understanding in a manner that’s precise, predictive and reliable - a transformation, for those lucky enough to experience it, that is empowering and emotional.” These words could not ring more true for

Agastya International Foundation, a charitable education trust which runs the world’s largest, mobile, hands-on science education programme for economically disadvantaged children and government school teachers.

The founders of Bengaluru-based Agastya International Foundation - a group of low profile scientists, educators and entrepreneurs - believed that “curiosity and creativity” are critical skills for development. But, looking at the

lack of engagement and motivation in school classrooms apart from outmoded learning methods deployed, they decided to do something about it. And that’s how Agastya was born in April 1999, with its mission “to spark curiosity and propagate creative temper in disadvantaged children and teachers through experiential, hands-on science education, teacher training and scalable and sustainable methods”. Agastya had its vision cut



Children conduct a hands-on chemistry experiment at the Agastya campus

out as “building an India of creators, tinkerers, solution-seekers and leaders who are humane, anchored and connected.”

Ever since, Agastya has been making practical, hands-on science education accessible to rural government schools with an aim to stimulate and transform the thinking of underprivileged children and teachers through different outreach methods. Today, Agastya, with the backing of scientists and educators from the Indian Institute of Science, DRDO and TIFR, has reached over six million children and two lakh teachers across 16 states in India. Impressed, the Prime Minister’s National Knowledge Commission has recommended an India-wide scale-up of the “Agastya

model” whereas the Clinton Global Initiative has recognised Agastya’s “commitment to action”.

### Effective outreach channels

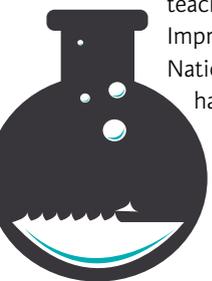
For over 70 per cent of India’s 250 million children, a rote-based, didactic and uninspiring schooling system has resulted in apathy towards education, high school dropout rates, and youth which is lacking in essential creative and problem-solving skills. The kind of infrastructure, technology and teaching that foster experiential learning are non-existent. This creates a mismatch between academic and professional success, leading in turn to youth which is lacking in creativity and confidence.

Agastya aims to use highly



School students participating in a science fair

*Agastya has been making practical, hands-on science education accessible to rural schools in order to stimulate young minds*





The innovation hub at Agastya



One of the activities at the CCT Centre



A Young Instructor Leader explains science theory

innovative and effective outreach channels to change all of this by bringing about a shift in five vital behaviours, viz, “Yes to Why”, “Looking to Observing”, “Passiveness to Exploring”, “Text-book to Hands-on” and “Fear to Confidence”. While the NGO does not really see any challenges stopping it from further scaling up its model, there are minor risks involved, including inspiring teachers, nurturing a good partnership with government, finding and training the right people to run the programme, and finding financial resources in remote rural areas to establish the programme.

### Work in progress

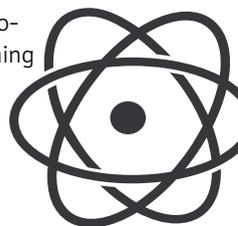
Educators, teachers, scientists, CEOs, bankers, entrepreneurs and philanthropists are Agastya

International Foundation’s trustees and advisers, with R. Raghavan being the Chairman. The NGO associates with children and teachers through various programmes such as school visits with interactive classroom sessions, science fairs, summer/ winter camps, night community visits, and teacher training programmes. It

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runs an evening school for educating and inspiring weaker students and school dropouts from villages apart from the Young Instructor Programme (YI).

Disadvantaged children in the age group of 6 to 18 years, mostly from rural India, whose parents are marginal farmers, carpenters, stone cutters, construction and menial white collar workers, are the ones who mainly benefit from these programmes. A majority of these children study in government schools, and have no access to laboratories or other hands-on learning opportunities. Through hands-on, interactive, teaching and learning methods, Agastya helps these children break socio-economic barriers by transforming attitudes towards learning.



## Broadening horizons

Not one to rest on its laurels, Agastya is now looking to increase participation in science projects and competitions. The NGO is now being lauded pan-India for its efforts. This is a clear indication that Agastya's programmes are positively impacting the lives of disadvantaged children. From the current 6 million children and 2 lakh teachers whose lives it touches, Agastya is committed to reaching its goal of as many as 20 million children and 1 million teachers by 2020. The NGO is also keen on collaborating with governments, corporates, individuals and other NGOs to nurture curiosity and creativity among India's underprivileged children and show them that learning can also be, "Fun, Useful and Accessible."



A Young Instructor Leader represents Agastya in a competition

## AGASTYA: FACTS AND FIGURES

The auditorium at Agastya's Kuppam campus



► The charitable education trust has reached over 6 million children and 2 lakh teachers in 16 states in India.

► 144 Mobile Science Labs and iMobile Labs take hand-on science education and digital literacy to village doorsteps.

► 63 Science Centres cater as science resource hubs for

surrounding schools and communities.

► There are 59 TechLaBikes and Lab on Bikes which blend hands-on science education with multimedia.

► In all, 282 Operation Vasantha Centres provide remedial classes for weak students and drop-outs.

► A 72-acre Creativity Lab campus in Gudivanka, Andhra Pradesh (two hours from Bangalore) houses science, art, astronomy and media labs and operates an eco-restoration programme.

► Agastya is supported by scientists and educators from the Indian Institute of Science,

DRDO and TIFR.

► The Prime Minister's National Knowledge Commission has recommended India-wide scale up of the Agastya model.

► The Clinton Global Initiative has recognized Agastya's 'commitment to action'.

► Agastya has won several awards, including the Google Impact Award, for its work with disadvantaged and underprivileged children.

► Agastya is currently partnering with BHEL, NTPC, BPCL, and other PSUs.

► The Rockefeller Foundation, in April 2013, nominated Agastya to a list of 100 Global Innovators.