4th March, 10 am to 6 pm
India International Centre, New Delhi
Welcome to Udaan 2024, India’s largest Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) conference, proudly presented by Rocket Learning. This gathering stands as a symbol of dedication to the holistic development of every child, guided by the mission ‘Har Bacche Ka Vikas’. Udaan 2024 brings together a diverse community of practitioners, policymakers, and experts steadfastly committed to supporting India’s youngest citizens. Building on the success of Udaan 2023, which convened over 200 changemakers, this year’s conference continues the tradition of fostering education, empowerment, and engagement for early childhood development.

Our thematic spotlight for Udaan 2024 is "Where Science Meets Economics for Progressive ECCE." The intersection of these two disciplines plays a pivotal role in shaping childhood development. Science delves into early stimulation, neurobiology for ages 0 to 3 and critical learning paradigms for ages 3 to 6. Simultaneously, an economic lens provides insights into the financing and larger labour and productivity implications of ECCE, combining to enable an equal foundation early for all India’s children.

Our esteemed lineup of speakers include luminaries such as Mr. BVR Subrahmanyam, CEO of NITI Aayog, Mr. Sanjay Kumar, Secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy, Mr. Abhishek Singh, CEO, Digital India, Ms. Mirai Chatterjee, Director, SEWA, and Mr. Ashish Dhawan, Founder, The Convergence Foundation, alongside other influential state leaders.

Your unwavering support means more to us than words can express. Thank you for joining us at Udaan 2024 and contributing to the collective voice that will shape the lives of millions of children through inclusive and progressive Early Childhood Care & Education in India.
## Agenda

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<td><strong>UNIVERSAL ECCE: INDIA’S KEY TO SCHOOL READINESS</strong></td>
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<td>Mr. Anurag Kundu, Member, Punjab Development Commission; Dr. Suniti</td>
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<td><strong>LEAVING NO CHILD BEHIND: PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDIA UNDER NEP 2020</strong></td>
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<td>11:30 AM - 12:15 PM</td>
<td><strong>THE ECONOMICS OF ECCE: EARLY EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION FOR DEVELOPED INDIA BY 2047</strong></td>
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<td><strong>ANGANWADI@50: PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD</strong></td>
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<td>Principal Secretary &amp; Development Commissioner, Govt. of Meghalaya</td>
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<td>Bilal Afroz, Lead M&amp;E, Rocket Learning</td>
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<td>Ayushree Gupta, Chief of Staff, Behaviour Change &amp; Marketing, Rocket</td>
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<td><strong>THE FIRST 1000 DAYS: ENABLING EQUAL FOUNDATIONS EARLY</strong></td>
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<td>Ms. Tripti Gurha, Additional Secretary, MWCD &amp; Director, NIPCCD; Dr.</td>
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<td>Aparna Hegde, Founder, Armman; Ms. Meena Yadav, Anganwadi Worker, Gurgaon; A Parent</td>
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3:50 PM - 4:00 PM  **TAking Big Swings - 3**  
Ms. Shalini Bajaj, Program Lead - Poshan Tracker Project, NeGD, MeitY

4:00 PM - 4:10 PM  **TAking Big Swings - 4**  
Ms. Samyukta Subramanian, Co-Lead, Early Years, Pratham Education Foundation, India

4:10 PM - 4:30 PM  **Tea and Refreshments**

4:30 PM - 5:15 PM  **Future-Proofing ECCE: Investments for Long-Term Impact**  
Mr. Anustup Nayak, Project Director, CSF; Mr. Keshav Kanoria, Principal, The Bridgespan Group, Prof. Venita Kaul, Professor Emerita Education, Ambedkar University  
*Moderated by Siddhant Sachdeva, Co-Founder, Rocket Learning*

5:15 PM - 6:00 PM  **Re-Imagining the Worlds of Mothers and Children**  
Closing Keynote Fireside: Ms. Mirai Chatterjee, Director, SEWA Social Security & Dr. Rukmini Banerji, CEO, Pratham  
*Moderated by Azeez Gupta, Co-Founder, Rocket Learning*

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[Sarva Sangal Family Trust](#)  
[Ananta-OM](#)
Universal ECCE: India's Key to School Readiness

Speakers

Mr. Anurag Kundra
Member, Punjab Development Commission

Dr. Suniti Sanwal
Department Head, Elementary Education - NCERT

Dr. Rita Patnaik
Joint Director, NIPCCD

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes the importance of early childhood care and education, bringing preschool education into the continuum of learning at the foundational stage from ages 3 to 8. Evidence on learning outcomes of primary-level students in India (ASER 2019) paints a stark picture of substandard performance in cognitive skills, literacy, and numeracy, underscoring the need to initiate foundational learning much earlier in the student’s lifecycle. The NEP’s focus on universal preschool education is consistent with global recognition of the importance of the early years in developing the cognitive and socio-emotional skills necessary for school readiness and life success.

However, regulation and provision of early childhood education do not fit neatly into one agency or ministry mandate. Further, education remains a State subject and ICDS is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, designed by the Centre and implemented by the States. So, the roles of different stakeholders are often unclear, leading to fragmented policies and service delivery, and exacerbating the challenge of ensuring access, quality, and equity.

At the Centre, preschool non-formal education is provided through MWCD’s Anganwadi system, while pre-primary sections in government schools are governed by MoE. Given that preschool has historically been a small component of the ICDS scheme, the MoE has been raising investments in its pre-primary sections under the Samagra Shiksha Scheme.

Key Questions for the Discussion:
1. What are key structural issues that limit inter-ministerial convergence on the delivery of quality ECCE and how can they be addressed?
2. What models of collaboration and convergence have worked in the States, and that can be replicated at the Centre? Should co-location be pursued further or are other models more successful?
3. What are the areas of synergy between MWCD’s Poshan Bhi, Padhai Bhi program, and the MoE’s NIPUN Bharat program?
Leaving No Child Behind: Pre-primary Education in India under NEP 2020

Keynote Speaker

Mr. Sanjay Kumar
Secretary, DoSEL- Ministry of Education

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a significant advancement by integrating the pre-primary stage into the larger school education framework, establishing a coherent continuum of early learning. The policy calls for three years of preschool/Anganwadi and two foundational learning years in formal school grades 1 and 2. It addresses children from ages 3 to 8 years through the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. Additionally, the NEP advocates for the implementation of three delivery models for early childhood care and education to enhance accessibility and quality. These include Anganwadis (co-located with primary schools or standalone), pre-primary sections for children aged 5-6 in primary schools, and standalone preschools. Furthermore, to ensure school readiness of children before entry into primary school, the NEP directs government schools to ensure that only children aged 6 and above enter grade 1.

This policy directive underscores the critical importance of nurturing a robust educational foundation through a structured approach.

In line with these objectives, the Hon’ble Secretary of the Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL), Ministry of Education, will deliver a keynote address outlining the Government of India's strategies. These strategies are aimed at fostering a holistic approach to enhance educational outcomes for all young learners.
The Economics of ECCE: Early Education Transformation for Developed India by 2047

Keynote Fireside Chat

Mr. B.V.R. Subrahmanyam
CEO, NITI Aayog

Mr. Ashish Dhawan
Founder, The Convergence Foundation

Investing in high-quality childcare and education during the first six years yields profound returns in key social and economic outcomes due to significant gains in foundational skills, an increase in public revenue, and a lesser need for social spending on remediation in later life. As countries rise in income, they invest a greater proportion in pre-primary education - OECD countries spend on average slightly over 0.8% of GDP on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). India currently spends less of the education budget on the pre-primary sector than the average for Low Middle-Income Countries. Addressing this challenge will be crucial for bolstering the health of the economy and achieving Viksit Bharat by 2047.

In addition to better child outcomes, universal access to quality ECCE is an important precondition for women-led development. 41-48% of women in India reported childcare/personal commitments in homemaking as a reason for not even looking for work (PLFS 2021-22). Establishing a comprehensive ECCE system would free up women’s time for paid work and catalyze substantial job growth in the care economy, which would serve as multipliers for the returns on investment.

This panel will cover the need for additional public expenditure, the high return on investment expected, and what India should be spending on. It will touch upon the potential impact of ECCE on macroeconomic fundamentals and social outcomes.

Key Questions for the Discussion:
1. How much does India currently spend on ECCE, and on what major areas, i.e. infrastructure, staff costs, materials etc.? How should this change in the future?
2. What are the broad macroeconomic implications of achieving universal ECCE in India, including returns to human development and FLFPR?
3. How can India facilitate evidence generation on ECCE? How can national statistical systems incorporate measures?
4. How can the Anganwadi system and the broader childcare sector be leveraged to mobilize female workers and improve the national female labour force participation rate?
Anganwadis@50: Public Investment in Early Childhood

Fireside Chat

Dr. VK Paul
Member, NITI Aayog

Mr. Sampath Kumar
Principal Secretary & Development Commissioner, Govt of Meghalaya

Launched on October 2nd, 1975, the Integrated Child Development Services scheme stands as one of the world’s largest and most distinctive programs for early childhood development. It embodies India’s unwavering dedication to its children, addressing the dual challenge of delivering preschool education and combating the interconnected issues of malnutrition, diminished learning capacity, morbidity, and mortality. As we near the 50th anniversary of this scheme, it is an opportune time to craft key strategies towards meeting a new vision for Anganwadi Centres as a vibrant place for every parent and child, providing universal and comprehensive ECCE and addressing intergenerational cycles of malnutrition by 2030.

Strategic realignment within ICDS has the potential to address key gaps in service delivery, improve infrastructure and staffing in cities, expand creche provision for working mothers, and facilitate wider community involvement in the delivery of age- and culturally-appropriate ECCE. It can help pilot and scale innovative contextual models that will prepare Anganwadis to meet the aspirations of future India.

This panel will examine ICDS from a historical lens, and explore innovative strategies to (i) provide developmentally appropriate ECCE across 0-6 years, (ii) enable mothers to work, (iii) increase coverage in cities, (iv) streamline infrastructure upgradation, and (v) leverage new technologies in monitoring and evaluation.

Key Questions for the Discussion:

1. What has worked to improve ECCE access and quality through the Anganwadi system? Has it been human resources, capacity building, infrastructure, monitoring systems, ICT tools, and so on?
2. What should India spend on for the future of ECCE? Can we meet the UNESCO Global Partnership for ECCE goal of allocating 10% of the education budget for pre-primary learning by 2030?
3. How should the service delivery of ICDS be different in the urban context? How can we better address the needs of children from 0-3 years?
4. What kind of partnerships with multilateral and civil society organizations have worked and can be replicated or scaled?
First 1000 Days: Enabling Equal Foundations Early

Speakers

Ms. Tripti Gurha  
Director, NIPCCD & Additional Secretary, MWCD

Dr. Aparna Hegde  
Founder, ARMMAN

Ms. Meena Yadav  
Anganwadi Worker, Gurgaon

The first 1,000 days of a child’s life present a critical opportunity, as they are marked by significant plasticity in neurological development. 80% of the brain develops in the first three years of life and 90-95% by age six. However, early disadvantages in the form of poverty, malnutrition, and exposure to unsafe environments can have adverse effects on children’s cognitive and socio-emotional development, resulting in lifelong impacts.

In India, the Integrated Child Development Services scheme offers not just nutrition but free and universal access to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), so that even the most disadvantaged children can reap the benefits of early stimulation, adequate nutrition, security, and responsive caregiving. However, NFHS-5 (2019-21) reports that 60% of children in the 2-4 year age group did not attend any preschool, and 32% of children under age six did not receive any service from an Anganwadi Centre. Attending the Anganwadi plays a critical role in reducing gender and income-related gaps in cognitive achievement in India, including better school attendance and grade completion. This suggests that marginalized groups who have been historically underrepresented in the educational system, including first-generation learners, can benefit greatly from entering the system early. India needs to expand not just quality but also access to high-quality early childcare.

This panel will explore the challenge of extending service delivery of early childhood stimulation to the birth to three age groups in particular. It will explore how stimulation and pedagogy, capacity building, and digital applications can help in creating an equal foundation early.

Key Questions for the Discussion:

1. Why do we need to approach the birth to three and 3 to 6 year age groups differently? How can age and culturally-appropriate pedagogy be deployed towards this goal?

2. How can capacity-building initiatives equip caregivers with the necessary skills to address the needs of their children? What kind of awareness-raising is possible, to close the gap between the knowledge levels and practices of high-income and low-income parents?

3. How are frontline workers today handling children with disabilities, and how can the government be more efficient at tracking developmental outcomes and screening for early signs of disabilities?
Internet penetration in India reached 52 percent in 2022 with 759 million users benefiting from Internet services, a figure that has grown more than three-fold since 2014 (DoEA-MOF, 2024). Around 600 million of these are also smartphone users (PIB 2022). At the same time, emergencies like COVID-19 caused widespread disruption in the education sector, reflected in a decrease in net pre-school enrolment rate from 59% in 2020 to 39% in 2022 (UNESCOUIS). Like schools, Anganwadis too faced extended closures, highlighting the need for at-home engagement of parents in the stimulation and education of children through innovative tools enabled by digital communications.

Between the ages of 3 and 6, digital tools cannot serve as major channels for instruction, as children need physical interaction, play-based activities, and social engagement with caregivers for effective learning. However, e-learning and digital capacity building can augment caregivers’ and educators’ capacities, including addressing the needs of children with disabilities. Moreover, emerging technologies like AI/ML for predictive analytics, Generative AI for content creation, VR, IoT etc. may be applied in the field of early childhood in innovative ways, from tracking educational outcomes, to amplifying community behaviour change campaigns and more.

Major technology companies have recognized that they can tap into the reach of their platforms for social good, particularly given the rapid increase in organic communication on social media and P2P messaging apps. As India is embracing these digital platforms, integration of low-cost, mobile-first edtech solutions can facilitate parental engagement and aid the learning of underserved children. This panel will discuss the potential of new technologies in transforming ECCE, capacitating Anganwadi workers, and empowering women and children in India.

Key Questions for the Discussion:
1. What are the major trends in the technology space that have opened up opportunities for social good? What kind of models could work for India’s women and children, particularly in the early education space?
2. How can emerging technologies help AWWs with better planning, inclusive learning experiences for children with disabilities, analysis of development outcomes, parental outreach and engagement etc?
3. What is the role of the private sector in partnering with government and civil society to deploy tech for social good, particularly for women and children?
Future-Proofing ECCE: Investments for Long-Term Impact

Speakers

Mr. Keshav Kanoria
Principal, The Bridgespan Group

Prof Venita Kaul
Professor Emerita, Education, Ambedkar University

Mr. Anustup Nayak
Project Director, CSF

Nobel-prize-winning economist Dr. James Heckman’s landmark study (2020) on social value creation of ECCE found that ROI for comprehensive, high-quality, birth-to-five early education could go up to 13%. This measurement was based on increased public revenue and savings when they took into account increased income in adulthood, reduced crime, improved health and quality of life, and better earnings for working mothers. It is estimated that an investment of ₹5,696 per child in early education can lead to a benefit of ₹5,98,537 per capita and gains in overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between four and 12 trillion dollars over the next 20 years (EAC-PM 2023).

However, investors also need to be comfortable with the fact that these effects need to aggregate over a decade or longer to generate social returns on investment. Moreover, every early childhood program will not necessarily generate large returns. Evidence of substantial potential returns starts appearing only after a program crosses a threshold of quality and intensity. Investing above this threshold could lead to a positive multiplier effect but investing below this threshold would most likely not even reap marginal returns proportionate to the investment.

The public sector currently bears the bulk of spending on ECCE in India. However, there is still a funding gap in the path toward realizing quality ECCE that can be filled by patient, flexible, and catalytic capital from the private sector. Such investments need to be tied to the achievement of strong outcomes while accepting lower returns in the short run to accommodate the economics of high-impact programs.

Key Questions for the Discussion:

1. What are the most exciting and impactful opportunities for philanthropic investment from a 3-5 year perspective?
2. Is there a space for blended finance instruments and results-based financing in supplementing funding for ECCE programs?
3. What are the friction points in this domain that are responsible for holding back more domestic investments from flowing in? How can we meaningfully motivate domestic philanthropic foundations and CSR bodies to invest and collaborate in early childhood development?
4. How can we influence the positioning of early childhood on the public agenda and advance public-private partnerships?
Re-Imagining the Worlds of Mothers and Children

Speakers

Ms. Mirai Chatterjee, Director, SEWA Social Security
Dr. Rukmini Banerji, CEO, Pratham

The Nobel Prize-winning economist Claudia Goldin has extensively utilized the concept of the ‘motherhood penalty’, demonstrating that childbirth typically drives large drops in mothers’ earnings because high-earning occupations disproportionately reward longer working hours and penalize career breaks (Goldin et al. 2022). For Indian women, beyond the gender wage gap, 41-48% of them also reported childcare or homemaking as a reason for not even looking for work (PLFS 2021-22). Therefore, investing in high-quality childcare services in India is a critical step towards enhancing the economic agency of Indian women (JPAL 2023).

As young mothers aspire to participate in the labour force, they also desire for more for their children in the early years and are able to participate significantly more in obtaining higher quality ECD in the form of stimulation, nutrition, health and care for their 0-6 year old children. These aspects are highly correlated and so are community practices around these, but our formal approaches have proven far more isolated.

India is at a juncture when it is critical to unlock both the care economy and ECCE together, to realize opportunities for our young children and mothers. This panel will share key insights and ideas around these topics.

Key Questions for the Discussion:

1. How have the aspirations and practices of young mothers changed over the years? And what has remained the same?
2. When we talk about ECCE, childcare and the care economy, we usually only talk about public provision through ICDS and pre-schools, or similar formal private services. What are the informal arrangements that communities have come up with, and how do these fit in the overall picture?
3. We create artificial silos when we think about the worlds of women and children - poshan, padhai and health are all looked at by different departments and individuals, which break up the ECD continuum. Yet, the women and children involved are the same. What are the negatives of the current approach? What would a reimagined, cohesive system look like to you?
4. What are new innovations and successes you are seeing on the ground around ECCE and childcare?
Voices from the Ground

Dipstick Survey on Institutional Childcare and Women’s Empowerment in India

India’s Anganwadi system, the world’s largest publicly funded network of child care centres, plays a pivotal role in early childhood education. Reaching over 80 million children under 6 and employing 1.39 million women as Anganwadi workers, this system is a cornerstone in Rocket Learning’s commitment to bring high-quality ECCE to the underserved bottom 30% of the population. We conducted an informal dipstick survey to explore the impacts of the availability of childcare at the Anganwadi, on women’s lives, asking the mothers themselves.

Exploring Empowerment through Institutional Childcare:
To investigate the perceived impact of the Anganwadi system on mothers of children availing its institutional childcare, the survey sought respondents participating in Rocket Learning’s programs from Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan. Reaching over 200 mothers, it explored women’s perceptions of the benefits of Anganwadi-provided childcare on their lives. It tested for cognitive load reduction as reflected in confidence levels, enhanced empowerment within the home and intra-household decision-making, and increased free time to participate in community activities or engage in paid work.

Testing Three Hypotheses for Impact
The survey sought to test the following three hypotheses of the impact of institutional childcare on women’s lived experiences, derived from Rocket Learning’s Theory of Change outcomes.

1. Cognitive Load Reduction and Confidence Increase:
Institutional childcare is expected to alleviate the cognitive load on mothers, and increase their confidence levels, by providing a structured care and learning environment for their children.

2. Enhanced Empowerment:
Mothers with children in institutional childcare are anticipated to experience positive changes in how they are heard and valued at home, contributing to an enhanced sense of empowerment as they engage in intra-household decision-making.

3. Increased Free Time:
The utilization of institutional childcare is expected to result in an increase in free time for mothers, fostering opportunities for personal development, community engagement, and the ability to participate in paid work.

Overview of Results
The survey suggests that perceived positive impacts on confidence and value at home are very widespread, with more free time and community engagement slightly less so.
Dipstick Survey Results

94% mothers reported feeling more confident in making decisions for their children

96% of mothers experienced a positive change in how they were heard and valued at home since their children started attending Anganwadis
Dipstick Survey Results

68% of mothers reported a significant increase in free time

78% of mothers acknowledged that Anganwadis helped them make new friends or feel more part of the community
Journey 2023

DECEMBER 2023
First Steps, Big Leaps
Collaborated with MWCD & NDTV to celebrate AmritKaal ki Anganwadi, India’s most prominent ICDS-focused event on national TV. Closed 2023 with presence in 9 states, containing 40% of India’s population.

OCTOBER 2023
Depth of Impact
Increased the depth of engagement with communities through innovations across learning content, technology, and AI, driving the proportion of Parent Power Users from 30% in 2022 to 50% in 2023.

AUGUST 2023
New Frontiers for ECD
Incubated new initiatives for supporting cognitive stimulation and nutrition for 0-3 year olds, by using and adapting our current learnings for 3-6 year olds.

JUNE 2023
Partners for Education Parity
Joined hands with Meghalaya, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, taking early learning across the North East and rural hinterland.

APRIL 2023
Advancing the ECCE Frontier
Accelerated the goal of creating an open-source, digital, and print ECCE content repository. Today, we have 2,000+ content pieces for teachers and parents in multiple languages, validated by and uploaded on NCERT’s Diksha portal.

MAY 2023
8 Crore Smiles Alight
Supported the Ministry of Women and Child Development’s (MWCD) launch of the country’s first modern ECE policy “Poshan Bhi, Padhai Bhi,” with a 3X budget increase. Entered into a Formal MoU with NIPCCD, the Ministry’s nodal body, as their key partners for ECCE.

MARCH 2023
200 Hearts, One Mission
Conducted Udaan 2.5, India’s largest ECCE convening with over 200 champions, featuring keynotes by MWCD Secretary Indevar Pandey, Niti Aayog member Dr. V.K Paul, and Prof. Karthik Muralidharan.

FEBRUARY 2023
Product-market fit for AWWs
Achieved a strong fit for our 2022 model expansion to upskill and support Anganwadi daycare workers (AWW). Over 2023, we supported 100,000 AWWs, with 70%+ becoming frequent users and showing improvement in knowledge as educators.

NOVEMBER 2023
Habits Change
Introduced a new mascot, Chulbuli and her family, refreshing our Behavior and Mindset Change Campaigns, inspiring positive learning habits for India’s families and children.

SEPTEMBER 2023
Democratizing Quality Education
Awarded the $1.5 million AI for Global Goals prize from Google.org. This coincided with the launch of our first AI models for worksheet autocorrection and user engagement, showing very strong results.

JULY 2023
Building Brighter Tomorrows
Celebrated 3 years of Rocket Learning. In our 4th year, our dedicated 250+ team extended our impact to 2.5M children, helping them reach the top third of their class.

JANUARY 2023
Laughter & Learning with Malala and Kapil
Started the year by receiving the prestigious Elevate Prize, announced by Malala Yousafzai. Also appeared on India’s biggest talk show, the Kapil Sharma show to ignite a mass movement for early childhood development in India.
Rocket Learning’s Reach and Impact Over the Years

We have reached **2.5 million** children across 9 Indian states

Our platform has **1.5 million** engaged users

Our students score **30%** higher

Parents spend **2x** the time on learning

We've trained **100,000** teachers

**By 2028, we plan to support 10 million children across India**
Before Rocket Learning’s intervention, we faced challenges in conducting classes and educating children. Now, they learn and engage effectively — something that shows up in improved grades.

**ANITA RANI**
Anganwadi worker, Ghaziabad
ROCKET LEARNING

We deliver bite-sized, play-based learning activities to parents and teachers, so they can work with children on learning with joy every day. We partner with the Indian government and use low-cost technology, AI, and behavioral change techniques to engage caregivers to create a learning environment for children at home.