

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Education research consultant

CONTRACT MODALITY	Individual Consultancy
DUTY STATION	New Delhi India & Remote (With Possible travel)
DURATION OF CONTRACT	11.5 months

Purpose of Assignment

The consultant will provide independent technical review and advisory support to UNICEF India to strengthen the methodological rigour, implementation quality and analytical robustness of three education research studies. The assignment will focus on reviewing research designs and methodologies, monitoring progress against agreed milestones, assessing implementation readiness and data quality, and critically reviewing analytical outputs and emerging findings.

The consultant will identify methodological gaps, implementation risks and areas requiring further technical attention, and provide evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the credibility and policy relevance of the research. The consultant will prepare defined technical review reports, progress monitoring updates and a consolidated technical handover report to support UNICEF's oversight of research quality and inform its engagement with the agencies undertaking the studies. Responsibility for conducting the research, collecting and analysing data, and producing the research outputs will remain with the respective research agencies.

Scope of Work

Background: UNICEF India is supporting three research studies to generate evidence to inform education policy, programming and system improvement:

- 1. Effectiveness of a Comprehensive Skills Package Delivered Through Classroom-Based and AI-Enabled Blended Approaches in Secondary Education in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh:** The study aims to assess the effectiveness of the skills package and compare learning and skills outcomes across different delivery approaches.
- 2. Secondary Education Diagnostic Study:** The study aims to analyse the status, key challenges and disparities in secondary education, drawing on existing administrative and survey data, literature and qualitative consultations, and to identify evidence-based recommendations for strengthening secondary education.
- 3. Longitudinal Study on Children's Educational Trajectories:** The study follows children from approximately four to seven years of age to examine their educational experiences and trajectories, including learning, participation, institutional readiness and family engagement.

Rationale: The three research studies involve different methodologies, data sources, research stages and implementation timelines. Dedicated technical support is required to help UNICEF assess the quality and progress of the studies, identify methodological or implementation issues, and ensure that emerging evidence is credible and relevant to education policy and programming. The consultant will support UNICEF through systematic technical review of research designs, instruments, implementation processes and analytical outputs; monitoring of progress against agreed milestones; and documentation of technical observations, recommendations and outstanding issues. This will enable UNICEF to provide informed technical guidance to the agencies undertaking the studies and maintain oversight of research quality throughout the consultancy period.

The consultant will undertake the following tasks in close coordination with UNICEF and the respective research agencies, providing independent technical review, advisory support and systematic monitoring of the three research studies:

Task 1: Research Inception, Design and Methodological Review

- 1.1. Review the inception reports, research protocols, research questions, conceptual and analytical frameworks, research methodologies, sampling strategies and workplans prepared by the agencies undertaking the studies.
- 1.2. Assess the alignment of the proposed research designs and methodologies with the objectives of each study, including the appropriateness of indicators, assessment approaches, data sources and analytical methods.
- 1.3. Review study-specific methodological considerations, including the assessment of skills outcomes and comparison across delivery approaches; the selection and analysis of secondary education indicators and state-level diagnostic approaches; and cohort tracking, longitudinal data collection and measurement of children's educational trajectories.
- 1.4. Review technical comments and recommendations provided by UNICEF, assess the extent to which these have been addressed in revised documents, and identify outstanding methodological issues requiring further consideration.

Task 2: Research Coordination and Progress Monitoring

- 2.1. Coordinate with UNICEF and the respective research agencies to review progress against agreed workplans, milestones and timelines through regular review meetings and structured follow-up.
- 2.2. Maintain a consolidated research monitoring tracker covering key milestones, documents submitted for review, technical observations, agency responses, outstanding issues, implementation risks and follow-up actions across the three studies.
- 2.3. Review progress updates and identify delays, dependencies or emerging issues that may affect the quality, timeliness or completion of planned research activities.
- 2.4. Prepare periodic progress summaries for UNICEF, highlighting the status of each study, key technical issues, actions required and matters requiring UNICEF's attention.

Task 3: Technical Review of Research Implementation and Data Quality

- 3.1. Review documentation from piloting, validation and fieldwork preparation to assess readiness for implementation and identify operational or technical issues that may affect data quality.
- 3.2. Provide technical review of baseline preparation and implementation for the skills-package effectiveness study, including sampling and assessment readiness, data collection procedures, data quality documentation and preliminary baseline outputs.
- 3.3. Review the analytical approach, data processing and quality assurance documentation for the secondary education diagnostic study, including the use of administrative and survey datasets, indicator construction, disaggregation and the evidence base for state-level analyses.
- 3.4. Review relevant documentation for the longitudinal study, including cohort identification and tracking arrangements, household and education-institution data collection, follow-up mechanisms, participant retention and data quality procedures.
- 3.5. Document methodological deviations, data quality concerns and implementation risks identified through the review process, and provide recommendations for consideration by UNICEF and the respective research agencies.

Task 4: Technical Review of Analytical Outputs and Emerging Findings

- 4.1. Critically review analytical notes, baseline reports, interim outputs, state-level diagnostic reports and draft research reports submitted by the agencies, as applicable within the consultancy period.
- 4.2. Assess the consistency of the analytical approaches and emerging findings with the research questions, study objectives, data quality considerations and stated limitations.
- 4.3. Review the interpretation of findings relating to skills outcomes and programme exposure; access, participation, disparities and challenges in secondary education; and children's learning, participation and educational trajectories in the longitudinal study.
- 4.4. Identify analytical gaps, inconsistencies, limitations in interpretation and areas where additional analysis or clarification may be required to support credible conclusions.

4.5. Consolidate technical comments and recommendations for UNICEF's consideration, and track the extent to which substantive comments have been addressed in subsequent versions of the research outputs.

Task 5: Endline Readiness, Synthesis and Technical Handover

5.1. Review the proposed endline preparation plan for the skills-package effectiveness study, including assessment approaches, sampling and cohort-tracking arrangements, data collection protocols, analytical requirements and risks that may affect the comparability of baseline and endline findings.

5.2. Identify issues emerging from baseline findings and implementation monitoring that may require attention during endline preparation, and document recommendations for consideration by UNICEF and the research agency.

5.3. Review relevant final-stage analytical outputs and outstanding technical issues from the secondary education diagnostic and longitudinal studies available during the consultancy period.

5.4. Prepare a consolidated synthesis of key technical observations, emerging evidence, methodological limitations, unresolved issues and implications for the interpretation and use of findings across the three studies.

5.5. Prepare a technical handover report documenting the status of each study, reviews completed, recommendations and follow-up actions outstanding, and issues requiring continued technical attention beyond the consultancy period.

Work Assignments Overview	Deliverables/Outputs	Delivery deadline to complete the deliverable
Task 1: Research Inception, Design and Methodological Review 1.1. Review the inception reports, research protocols, research questions, conceptual and analytical frameworks, research methodologies, sampling strategies and workplans prepared by the agencies undertaking the studies. 1.2. Assess the alignment of the proposed research designs and methodologies with the objectives of each study, including the appropriateness of indicators, assessment approaches, data sources and analytical methods. 1.3. Review study-specific methodological considerations, including the assessment of skills outcomes and comparison across	Deliverable 1: Consolidated Research Inception and Methodological Review Report Linked to Scope of Work: 1.1–1.4 A report consolidating the consultant's technical review of the research designs, methodologies, analytical frameworks, sampling strategies, research instruments and workplans for the three studies. The report will document key technical observations, identified gaps, recommendations and outstanding issues requiring follow-up	31 January 2027

delivery approaches; the selection and analysis of secondary education indicators and state-level diagnostic approaches; and cohort tracking, longitudinal data collection and measurement of children's educational trajectories. 1.4. Review technical comments and recommendations provided by UNICEF, assess the extent to which these have been addressed in revised documents, and identify outstanding methodological issues requiring further consideration.		
Task 2: Research Coordination and Progress Monitoring 2.1. Coordinate with UNICEF and the respective research agencies to review progress against agreed workplans, milestones and timelines through regular review meetings and structured follow-up. 2.2. Maintain a consolidated research monitoring tracker covering key milestones, documents submitted for review, technical observations, agency responses, outstanding issues, implementation risks and follow-up actions across the three studies. 2.3. Review progress updates and identify delays, dependencies or emerging issues that may affect the quality, timeliness or completion of planned research activities.	Deliverable 2: Consolidated Research Monitoring Tracker and Progress Report Linked to Scope of Work: 2.1–2.4 An updated monitoring tracker and accompanying progress report covering the status of milestones across all three studies, documents reviewed, technical comments and agency responses, implementation risks, delays, outstanding issues and recommended follow-up actions. The report will highlight key developments and matters requiring UNICEF's attention. (with the tracker updated periodically throughout the consultancy).	31 March 2027

2.4. Prepare periodic progress summaries for UNICEF, highlighting the status of each study, key technical issues, actions required and matters requiring UNICEF's attention.		
Task 3: Technical Review of Research Implementation and Data Quality 3.1. Review documentation from piloting, validation and fieldwork preparation to assess readiness for implementation and identify operational or technical issues that may affect data quality. 3.2. Provide technical review of baseline preparation and implementation for the skillspackage effectiveness study, including sampling and assessment readiness, data collection procedures, data quality documentation and preliminary baseline outputs. 3.3. Review the analytical approach, data processing and quality assurance documentation for the secondary education diagnostic study, including the use of administrative and survey datasets, indicator construction, disaggregation and the evidence base for state-level analyses. 3.4. Review relevant documentation for the longitudinal study, including cohort identification and tracking arrangements, household and education-institution data collection, followupmechanisms,	Deliverable 3: Research Implementation and Data Quality Review Report Linked to Scope of Work: 3.1–3.5 A report documenting the consultant's technical review of research implementation and data quality across the three studies, with particular attention to baseline preparation, implementation and outputs for the skills-package effectiveness study. It will present key observations, methodological or data quality concerns, implementation risks and recommendations for corrective or follow-up action	30 June 2027

participant retention and data quality procedures 3.5. Document methodological deviations, data quality concerns and implementation risks identified through the review process and provide recommendations for consideration by UNICEF and the respective research agencies.		
Task 4: Technical Review of Analytical Outputs and Emerging Findings 4.1. Critically review analytical notes, baseline reports, interim outputs, state-level diagnostic reports and draft research reports submitted by the agencies, as applicable within the consultancy period. 4.2. Assess the consistency of the analytical approaches and emerging findings with the research questions, study objectives, data quality considerations and stated limitations. 4.3. Review the interpretation of findings relating to skills outcomes and programme exposure; access, participation, disparities and challenges in secondary education; and children’s learning, participation and educational trajectories in the longitudinal study. 4.4. Identify analytical gaps, inconsistencies, limitations in interpretation and areas where additional analysis or clarification may be required to support credible conclusions. 4.5. Consolidate technical	Deliverable 4: Consolidated Analytical Review and Emerging Findings Report Linked to Scope of Work: 4.1–4.5 A report synthesising the consultant’s critical review of available analytical outputs and emerging findings across the three studies. It will document the alignment of findings with research questions, key analytical gaps, methodological limitations, areas requiring further analysis and recommendations to strengthen the credibility and policy relevance of the evidence	30 September 2027

comments and recommendations for UNICEF's consideration, and track the extent to which substantive comments have been addressed in subsequent versions of the research output		
Task 5: Endline Readiness, Synthesis and Technical Handover 5.1. Review the proposed endline preparation plan for the skills-package effectiveness study, including assessment approaches, sampling and cohort-tracking arrangements, data collection protocols, analytical requirements and risks that may affect the comparability of baseline and endline findings. 5.2. Identify issues emerging from baseline findings and implementation monitoring that may require attention during endline preparation, and document recommendations for consideration by UNICEF and the research agency. 5.3. Review relevant final-stage analytical outputs and outstanding technical issues from the secondary education diagnostic and longitudinal studies available during the consultancy period. 5.4. Prepare a consolidated synthesis of key technical observations, emerging evidence, methodological limitations, unresolved issues and implications for the interpretation and use of findings across the three studies.	Deliverable 5: Endline Readiness and Consolidated Technical Handover Report Linked to Scope of Work: 5.1–5.5 A report documenting the consultant's review of endline preparation for the skills-package effectiveness study, the status of technical reviews across all three studies, key findings and methodological considerations emerging during the consultancy, and outstanding issues and recommended follow-up actions beyond the contract period.	15 November 2027

5.5. Prepare a technical handover report documenting the status of each study, reviews completed, recommendations and follow-up actions outstanding, and issues requiring continued technical attention beyond the consultancy period		
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Payment Schedule:

Payment will be made on submission and acceptance of deliverables. UNICEF reserves the right to withhold payment in case the deliverables submitted are not up to the required standard or in case of delays in submitting the deliverables on the part of the consultant.

Important Notes

- Individuals engaged under a consultancy or individual contract will not be considered “staff members” under the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations and UNICEF’s policies and procedures and will not be entitled to benefits provided therein (such as leave entitlements and medical insurance coverage). Their conditions of service will be governed by their contract and the General Conditions of Contracts for the Services of Consultants and Individual Contractors. Consultants and individual contractors are responsible for determining their tax liabilities and for the payment of any taxes and/or duties, in accordance with local or other applicable laws.
- Contracts are conditional upon the selected candidate's willingness to comply with any current or future vaccination requirements that may be established by UNICEF, where applicable. Failure to comply with applicable vaccination requirements, where required and without an approved medical exemption by UNICEF, may result in the withdrawal of the consultancy offer or termination of the contract in accordance with the General Terms and Conditions of Contract.
- UNICEF offers reasonable accommodation for consultants with disabilities. This may include, for example, accessible software, travel assistance for missions or personal attendants. We encourage you to disclose your disability during your application in case you need reasonable accommodation during the selection process and afterwards in your assignment.

QUALIFICATIONS / SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE/ COMPETENCIES (CORE/TECHNICAL/FUNCTIONAL) / LANGUAGE SKILLS REQUIRED FOR THE ASSIGNMENT

Minimum requirements:

- **Education:** Master’s degree (or above) in education, social sciences, economics, statistics, public policy, research methodology or another closely related field
- **Work Experience:** **Minimum of 8 years** of relevant professional experience in education research, social science research, policy research, programme evaluation, or related fields, including experience in reviewing research designs, methodologies, data collection tools, analytical outputs and research reports.
- **Skills:** Demonstrated experience in designing, reviewing or managing quantitative and qualitative research studies, preferably in education or related social sectors.

Strong understanding of research methodologies, including research design, sampling strategies, data collection methods, analytical frameworks and research quality assurance.

Demonstrated experience in reviewing research instruments, data quality processes, analytical approaches and interpretation of findings from primary and secondary data.

Experience in analysing education-related data and evidence, including learning outcomes, access, participation, equity and factors influencing educational trajectories.

Demonstrated ability to critically review technical research documents, identify methodological and analytical gaps, and provide evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the quality and policy

relevance of research.

Experience in monitoring research progress, coordinating with research teams and technical experts, tracking feedback and documenting methodological issues, risks and follow-up actions.

Strong analytical, report-writing and synthesis skills, including the ability to translate research evidence into actionable policy and programme recommendations.

Strong written and verbal communication in English

- **Language Requirements** Fluency in English is required
- **Desirables:** Experience in education research in India, particularly in school education, foundational learning, secondary education, skills development or educational transitions.

Experience with longitudinal research, cohort tracking, learning assessments or studies examining programme effectiveness.

Familiarity with administrative education datasets, largescale assessments and household or institutional surveys.

Experience working with government departments, research institutions, international organisations or development partners.

Prior experience working with UN agencies or other international development organisations.
