

IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT

Shiksha Setu Phase III

Period: August 2021 to March 2025

Impact Assessment Agency:

Anweshak Sathi LLP

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Table of Contents

Contents

1. Executive Summary	4
2. Programme Overview & Context	6
2.1 UNM Foundation: Institutional Context	6
2.2 Shiksha Setu: A Multi-Phase Education Initiative.....	6
2.3 The Three Programme Components	7
2.4 Balvatika: The Emerging Component	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3. Objectives of the Impact Assessment	8
3.1 Rationale for the Study	8
3.2 Overall Study Objective.....	9
3.3 Programme-Specific Objectives	9
3.4 Assessment Scope and Boundaries	10
4. Methodology	11
4.1 Evaluation Framework.....	11
4.2 Research Approach	11
4.3 Sample Size and Sampling Method	13
4.4 Tools and Data Collection Methods	14
4.5 Data Analysis Approach	15
4.6 Limitations	15
5. Data Analysis & Key Findings	17
5.1 Learning Enhancement Programme (LEP).....	17
5.2 Balvatika	21
5.3 Second Chance Programme	24
5.4 Saksham Programme	27

6. Key Insights	33
6.1 Relevance Is Established; Effectiveness Is Not	33
6.2 Parallel Programmes Struggle with Systemic Integration	33
6.3 The Sustainability Challenge: Inputs Decay Without Reinforcement	34
6.4 Aspirations Can Be Built; Structural Barriers Cannot Be Wished Away	35
6.5 The Case for Differentiated, Context-Responsive Design	35
7. Recommendations	37
7.1 Learning Enhancement Programme (LEP)	37
7.2 Second Chance Programme	38
7.3 Saksham Programme	39
7.4 Overall Strategic Recommendations	40
8. Conclusion	41
8.1 Overall Programme Assessment	41
8.2 UNM Foundation's Response: Strategic Recalibration in Progress	41
8.3 Way Forward: Towards Sustainable Impact at Scale	Error! Bookmark not defined.

1. Executive Summary

Background. Shiksha Setu Phase IV (2021–2025), implemented by UNM Foundation — the philanthropic arm of Torrent Group — represents a multi-pronged effort to enhance educational quality, support dropouts, and build vocational skills across five districts in Gujarat. This impact assessment, conducted by Anweshak Sathi LLP, examines the residual outcomes of three core programme components — the Learning Enhancement Programme (LEP), Second Chance, and Saksham — alongside the Balvatika initiative. The study was designed in two rounds: Round 1 (March 2025) to assess programme status and progress and to inform strategic decision-making, and Round 2 (April 2026) to evaluate sustained impact after a one-year cooling period, in compliance with CSR regulatory guidelines. Together, these two independent cohort snapshots provide a holistic view of what has worked, what has not, and where the programmes must evolve.

Key Findings. The assessment reveals a mixed but instructive picture.

Balvatika, piloted in 2024, emerged as the most effective intervention, with activity-based pedagogy demonstrably improving early learners' confidence, communication skills, and foundational conceptual understanding. Teachers self-reported adopting innovative methods in routine teaching, and the participatory design approach contributed to programme sustainability.

LEP, has shown moderate effectiveness in language — Round 1 schools averaged 63.5% against the PARAKH 2024¹ state benchmark of 57%, but has been significantly less effective in numeracy, where Round 1 and Round 2 schools averaged only 37.1% and 31% respectively against a state benchmark of 52%. Learning gains were not sustained between rounds, with a decline of 9.3 percentage points in language and 6.1 percentage points in mathematics, indicating weak retention and insufficient systemic integration.

The Second Chance Programme, after initial success in enabling students to clear board examinations, experienced a sharp decline in pass percentages in the last year (2024-25). This could be due to gaps in students foundational learning levels and

¹ PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development) is India's national student assessment framework under NCERT, providing benchmark learning levels across states.

difficulty in curriculum, frequent absenteeism and partly due to change in paper style by NIOS. Student interviews revealed frustration and eroding confidence; 47% of surveyed students reported no discernible change in their lives post-programme, and parental support was observed to decline after multiple examination failures. Nonetheless, the programme's relevance was affirmed: 74% of students aspired to continue their education despite setbacks, underscoring the enduring demand for alternative educational pathways.

Saksham demonstrated strong training delivery — 93% completion rates, 91.7% trainees rating centre quality positively, and near-universal willingness to recommend the programme — but has not translated into viable livelihood outcomes. Average monthly income stood at INR 1,649, which is 76.4% below the Gujarat minimum wage for unskilled labour, 34% below the rural poverty line, and 79.6% below what a woman could earn through MGNREGA. Only 50% of trained women were earning at the time of assessment, and production centres operated at a net deficit in most months, pointing to systemic unsustainability in the current training-led model.

Strategic Direction. In response to Round 1 findings, UNM Foundation has already initiated significant redesign: transitioning LEP to a whole-class integrated model covering Balvatika to Grade 10, shifting Second Chance from NIOS to the GSEB board for better curriculum alignment, and adopting direct implementation for improved accountability. The assessment recommends further action across all three programmes — including rethinking beneficiary targeting, broadening the definition of success beyond examination pass rates, and transitioning Saksham from a training-led to a manufacturer-led model with robust market linkages. These programmes remain relevant and necessary; however, their design, strategy, and delivery models require targeted recalibration to achieve meaningful and sustainable impact at scale.

2. Programme Overview & Context

2.1 UNM Foundation: Institutional Context

UNM Foundation, established by the Mehta family — promoters of Torrent Group — serves as the Torrent Group's philanthropic arm, with a stated commitment to building an inclusive and healthy society. The Foundation's work spans four core domains: enhancing the quality of education, promoting arts and culture, advancing healthcare outcomes, and supporting ecological restoration. These objectives are pursued through direct programme implementation as well as strategic partnerships with civil society organizations. Within the education vertical, UNM Foundation's interventions are designed to address foundational learning gaps, support out-of-school populations, and build employability skills — each reflecting a distinct but interconnected dimension of India's educational development challenge.

2.2 Shiksha Setu: A Multi-Phase Education Initiative

Shiksha Setu, initiated by UNM Foundation in 2011, is the organization's education programme, focused on enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in government primary schools across Gujarat. Over more than a decade of implementation, the programme has evolved through four distinct phases, each reflecting a deepening understanding of what works in the field. The early phases emphasized technology integration and foundational skills enhancement. Subsequent iterations adopted a more multi-pronged approach, incorporating diverse instructional strategies and broadening the scope of beneficiary engagement.

Shiksha Setu Phase IV (2021–2025), the subject of this assessment, represents the most comprehensive iteration to date. It was implemented across five districts — Mehsana, Banaskantha, Surat, Gandhinagar, and Dang — and operated through technical partnerships with Pratham Foundation, Gyan Shala, and the Centre for Environment Education (CEE).

It is important to note that the project design and partnership structure have continued to evolve during 2025–26; however, these subsequent changes fall outside the scope of the present assessment, which focuses exclusively on three core programme components: the Learning Enhancement Programme, Second Chance, and Saksham.

2.3 The Four Programme Components

The Learning Enhancement Programme (LEP) was designed to support students from grade 3 to 5 (ages 8–13) in acquiring foundational literacy and numeracy skills, with the explicit goal of enabling them to achieve at least Class 2 level competencies. Implemented by Pratham Foundation and CEE in their respective operational geographies, the programme targeted approximately 30 selected students per school from Classes 3–5, providing focused instructional support in language and mathematics. LEP represents the most academically oriented component of Shiksha Setu, addressing the critical foundational learning deficit that remains a pervasive challenge across India, as documented by national assessments such as ASER² and PARAKH.

The Second Chance Programme was conceived as a targeted response to the problem of secondary school dropout, particularly among young women in rural Gujarat. Its central aim is to provide out-of-school individuals, an opportunity to complete their secondary school certificate examinations (Class 10), thereby reopening pathways to formal education, vocational training, and improved livelihoods. The programme responds to a well-documented national pattern in which students disproportionately disengage from education at the secondary level, driven by factors including distant school locations, household responsibilities, and examination failure and poor learning levels at primary education level. By offering a dedicated pathway back into the formal examination system, Second Chance seeks to interrupt this cycle of educational exclusion.

In addition to the three programmes assessed in detail, Shiksha Setu Phase IV introduced Balvatika — a pilot programme initiated in 2024, focused on early childhood education. Targeting the youngest learners, Balvatika employs activity-based pedagogy, peer learning strategies, and age-appropriate teaching-learning materials to develop foundational concepts in language, mathematics, and socio-emotional skills. Given its recent introduction and the young age of its target cohort, Balvatika was assessed through a small-scale classroom observation study rather than the standardised learning assessments used for LEP. Its inclusion in this report reflects both its

² **ASER (Annual Status of Education Report):** A nationwide household-based survey conducted by Pratham since 2005 that assesses children’s foundational reading and arithmetic abilities across rural India.

substantive contributions during the assessment period and the Foundation's intent to integrate early learning more robustly into future programme design.

The Saksham Programme addresses the employability dimension of the Foundation's education mandate. Its primary objective is to empower young people and women with vocational skills — specifically in sewing machine operation — to improve their income-generating potential and economic independence. Operating through spoke centres in target villages, Saksham combines practical skills training with supplementary modules on financial literacy and entrepreneurship. The programme is designed for women who have not previously received formal training in tailoring, thereby increasing its relevance and accessibility for its target demographic.

3. Objectives of the Impact Assessment

3.1 Rationale for the Study

The assessment of Shiksha Setu's core programme components was designed to serve a dual purpose, each addressed through a distinct round of data collection. Round 1, conducted in March 2025, was intended to understand the status and progress of the Learning Enhancement Programme, Second Chance, and Saksham, and to generate evidence-based insights that could inform strategic decision-making for subsequent programme phases. In essence, Round 1 served as a formative evaluation — a diagnostic exercise aimed at identifying what was working, what required correction, and where programme resources and design efforts should be redirected.

Round 2, conducted in April 2026, has been designed to evaluate the sustained impact of these programmes after a one-year cooling period, in compliance with CSR regulatory guidelines that mandate independent assessment of CSR expenditure outcomes. This temporal separation between programme conclusion and impact evaluation in addition to being a procedural requirement, also provides a more rigorous basis for assessing whether programme effects endure beyond the period of direct intervention, thereby offering a clearer picture of lasting impact. It is important to note that the two rounds constitute independent cohort snapshots rather than a pre-post comparison, a distinction that carries significant implications for how the findings of this report should be interpreted.

3.2 Overall Study Objective

The overarching objective of this impact assessment was to examine the residual outcomes of the Learning Enhancement Programme, Second Chance, and Saksham — one year post-conclusion — and to provide evidence-based insights on programme effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability. The study sought to answer the fundamental question: To what extent have the intended benefits of these programmes been realised, retained, and integrated into the lives and systems of their respective beneficiaries?

3.3 Programme-Specific Objectives

Within this overall frame, the study articulated specific assessment objectives for each programme component, reflecting their distinct theories of change and outcome pathways.

3.3.1 Learning Enhancement Programme (LEP)

- For LEP, the assessment focused on two primary dimensions. First, it sought to measure the impact on students' foundational literacy and numeracy skills, benchmarking performance against state-level indicators such as PARAKH 2024 scores and NCF 2023³ competency standards.
- Second, it examined the impact on students' participation in classroom activities following the programme's conclusion, as well as schools' response to and absorption of the pedagogical approaches introduced through LEP.
- These objectives were designed to assess not only academic outcomes but also the degree to which programme inputs had influenced the broader school environment.

3.3.2 Second Chance Programme

- For Second Chance, the study pursued two interrelated lines of inquiry. It examined whether participants had successfully passed the Class 10 board examinations. In addition, it explored participants' aspirations and intended pathways after completion of the SSC.

³ **NCF 2023 (National Curriculum Framework 2023):** A policy framework developed by the Government of India under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, outlining stage-wise competencies, pedagogical approaches, and learning standards for school education.

- It assessed the impact on students' aspirations across three domains — educational, career-related, and personal growth — recognizing that the value of a second-chance programme extends well beyond examination results.
- Finally, it explored the broader psychosocial effects, including changes in confidence, self-perception, and agency among participants.

3.3.3 Saksham Programme

- The assessment of Saksham was structured around three outcome areas. It evaluated the improvement in vocational skills acquired by trainees during the programme period.
- It measured the impact on income levels and economic activity, including the extent to which training had translated into sustained earning opportunities.
- It also examined the degree to which trainees had developed the confidence and intention to pursue sewing-related work independently, recognising that self-efficacy is a critical mediator between skill acquisition and livelihood outcomes.

3.4 Assessment Scope and Boundaries

- The study assessed the three programmes across the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.
- While the findings for each programme are presented independently, the cross-programme analysis in subsequent sections draws upon thematic patterns observed across all three, providing a consolidated view of Shiksha Setu's overall contribution to its stated objectives.
- The Balvatika component, given its pilot status and the young age of its target cohort, was assessed through a lighter-touch methodology focused on classroom observation, and its findings are presented as a supplementary narrative rather than a full comparative assessment.

4. Methodology

4.1 Evaluation Framework

The study employed the OECD-DAC (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development — Development Assistance Committee) evaluation framework as its primary analytical lens. This internationally recognised framework assesses programme performance across six interrelated criteria — relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability — and was selected for its capacity to provide a holistic and structured view of each programme's contributions and shortcomings. The application of a uniform evaluation framework across all three programme components also enabled cross-programme comparison, a feature that is particularly valuable for a multi-component initiative such as Shiksha Setu, where strategic resource allocation decisions must account for relative programme performance.

Each criterion was operationalised as follows.

- Relevance assessed the degree to which programme objectives aligned with the needs and priorities of target beneficiaries and broader educational policy.
- Coherence examined the internal logic of programme design and the compatibility of programme inputs with intended outputs.
- Effectiveness measured the extent to which programme objectives were achieved, drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative indicators.
- Efficiency considered the relationship between resources invested and outcomes attained. Impact evaluated the broader, longer-term effects of programme participation on beneficiaries' lives and systemic conditions.
- Sustainability assessed the likelihood that programme benefits would persist beyond the period of direct implementation.

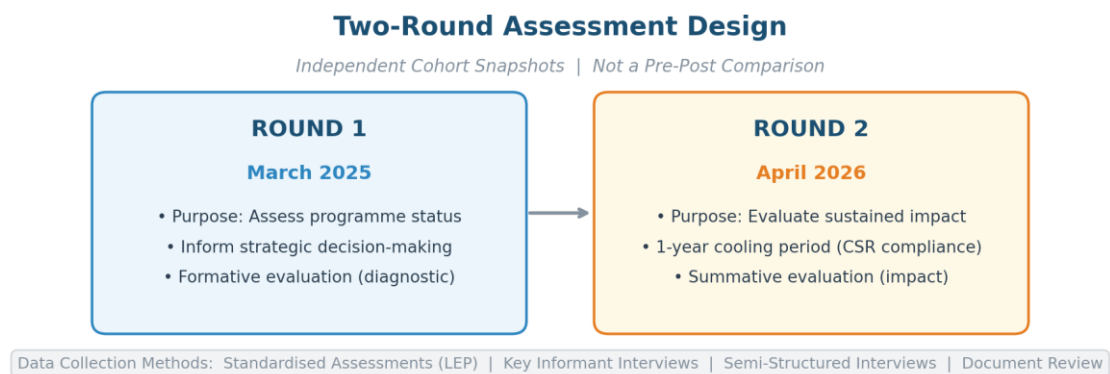
4.2 Research Approach

A mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. This methodological choice reflects the recognition that impact assessment in the social sector requires both the rigour of numerical indicators and the depth of experiential insight to capture the full complexity of programme outcomes. On the quantitative side, standardised learning assessments in mathematics and language were administered to LEP students, with assessment

instruments calibrated to the foundational stage competencies defined in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023. On the qualitative side, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, former students, and vocational training beneficiaries to capture perspectives, experiences, and contextual factors that numerical data alone could not reveal.

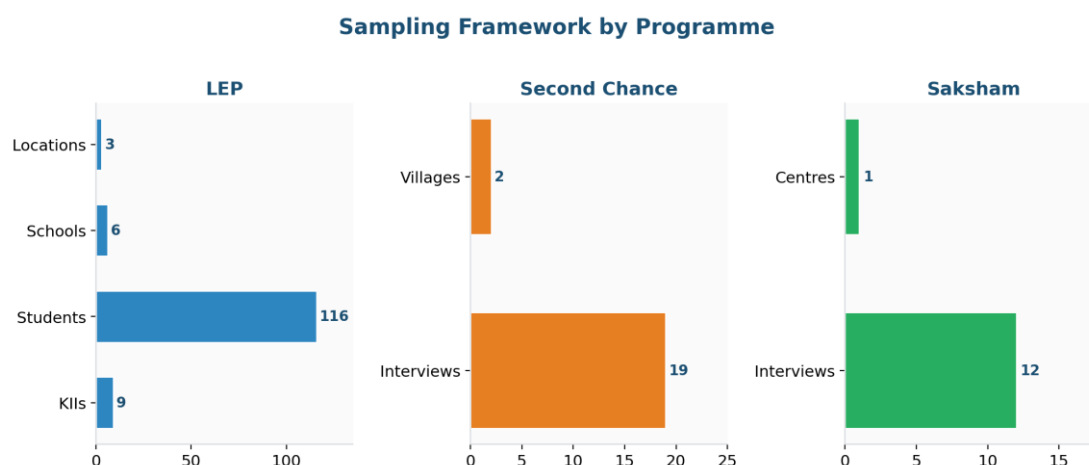
In addition, a desk review of relevant programme documents, implementation reports, and administrative records was undertaken to establish the context of programme implementation and to inform the development of data collection instruments. This documentary evidence provided essential background on programme design, partner engagement, and operational challenges that supplemented and contextualised the primary data.

The two-round assessment design merits particular methodological attention. Round 1 (March 2025) was conducted approximately at the conclusion of the programme cycle, providing a proximate measure of immediate outcomes. Round 2 (April 2026) was conducted after a one-year cooling period, offering insight into the extent to which gains had been retained or eroded. It is critical to emphasise that the two rounds do not constitute a pre-post comparison: they represent independent snapshots of different student cohorts at different points in time. The analytical value lies not in tracking individual student progress between rounds, but in understanding how programme-related learning gains compare with the subsequent learning experiences of students who were exposed to LEP at different stages of its implementation.



4.3 Sample Size and Sampling Method

Sampling was conducted in consultation with the UNM Foundation team, with the deliberate goal of ensuring proper representation of all key geographic locations and direct beneficiaries across the three programme components. The sampling strategy prioritised geographic diversity and programme coverage rather than statistical generalisability, a pragmatic choice given the operational constraints of conducting field assessments across dispersed rural locations.



For LEP, data collection was structured in two rounds. Round 1 assessed LEP students enrolled in Classes 3–5 at the time of the study. Round 2 assessed students who were in Classes 4 and 5 at the time of data collection as students from grade 5 last year moved to grade 6, thereby capturing outcomes with a temporal gap. This two-phased design within LEP provided an additional layer of insight into how learning outcomes evolved over time, independent of the Round 1–Round 2 distinction applied across the broader study.

TABLE 1: Sample Distribution by Programme and Data Source

Programme	Unit	Sample Size	Details
LEP	Locations	3	Surat, Chhapi (Banaskantha), Chhatral (Mehsana)
LEP	Schools	6	Two per location (Virpor, Roswad, Shardashish, Pay-centre, Aldasen, Untwa)

LEP	Students assessed	116	67 boys, 49 girls; across Classes 4–5
LEP	Key Informant Interviews	9	One head teacher, one language teacher, one mathematics teacher per location
Second Chance	Villages	2	Piyaj and Borisana
Second Chance	Semi-structured interviews	19	Former students (74% aged 15–19, 21% aged 20–30, 1 above 40)
Saksham	Spoke centres covered	1	Production centre in target geography
Saksham	Semi-structured interviews	12	Former trainees (8 with no prior training, 4 with informal exposure)
Balvatika	Classroom observations	Select classrooms	Small-scale observational study (Round 1); not re-assessed in Round 2

4.4 Tools and Data Collection Methods

The data collection instruments were designed to align with the specific objectives of each programme while maintaining methodological consistency across the study. For LEP, separate assessment papers were developed for language and mathematics, pitched at the Class 3 level — the lower end of the primary stage as defined by NEP 2020. The language assessment focused on phonemic awareness, reading (words and text), and writing (words, sentences, and paragraphs). The mathematics assessment covered number sense, operations, patterns, word problems, and mensuration competencies. All questions were contextualised to the rural realities of the learners, with reasonable scaffolding provided through pictures and meaningful scenarios to reduce construct-irrelevant difficulty.

Qualitative data collection employed semi-structured interview guides for each programme. For Second Chance, the interview protocol explored educational histories, reasons for dropout and re-enrolment, programme experience, examination outcomes, and post-programme life changes. For Saksham, the protocol examined training

experience, skill acquisition, confidence levels, income changes, barriers to employment, and future aspirations. Key Informant Interviews with LEP teachers used a separate guide focused on programme recall, perceived student impact, and the extent of pedagogical knowledge transfer between LEP facilitators and regular classroom teachers.

4.5 Data Analysis Approach

Quantitative data analysis for LEP involved data cleaning followed by computation of average scores disaggregated by competency area, school, district, gender, and phase. This granular disaggregation enabled the identification of patterns that aggregate scores would have obscured, such as district-level performance variations and gendered differences in learning outcomes. Benchmarking against PARAKH 2024 state averages provided an external reference point for interpreting student performance.

Qualitative data analysis followed a thematic approach. Detailed notes were prepared from each recorded interview, group discussion, and classroom observation. These notes were then coded and categorised thematically, with themes derived both inductively from the data and deductively from the OECD-DAC evaluation framework and programme-specific concerns. This dual approach ensured that the analysis captured both expected patterns aligned with assessment objectives and unexpected insights emerging from participants' lived experiences.

4.6 Limitations

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged to contextualise the findings appropriately. First, the absence of a baseline assessment prior to programme inception means that causal attribution of observed outcomes to programme inputs cannot be established with certainty. While benchmarking against state-level indicators provides a useful reference, it does not substitute for a controlled pre-post design. Second, as noted previously, the two rounds of data collection represent independent cohort snapshots rather than longitudinal tracking, limiting the ability to draw conclusions about individual student trajectories. Third, the sample sizes, particularly for Second Chance (n=19) and Saksham (n=12), are modest and not statistically representative of the full beneficiary population; findings from these programmes should be interpreted as indicative rather than generalisable. Fourth, the geographic

scope of the study was limited to a subset of operational locations, and district-level variations observed in the data may not fully capture the heterogeneity of programme implementation across the full geographic spread of Shiksha Setu. Fifth, the assessment of Saksham was further constrained by the reliance on self-reported income data, which may be subject to recall bias or social desirability effects. Finally, for Balvatika, the young age of the target cohort and the predominantly oral, classroom-based nature of inputs rendered standardised assessment infeasible; consequently, the findings for this component are based on classroom observation rather than quantitative measurement.

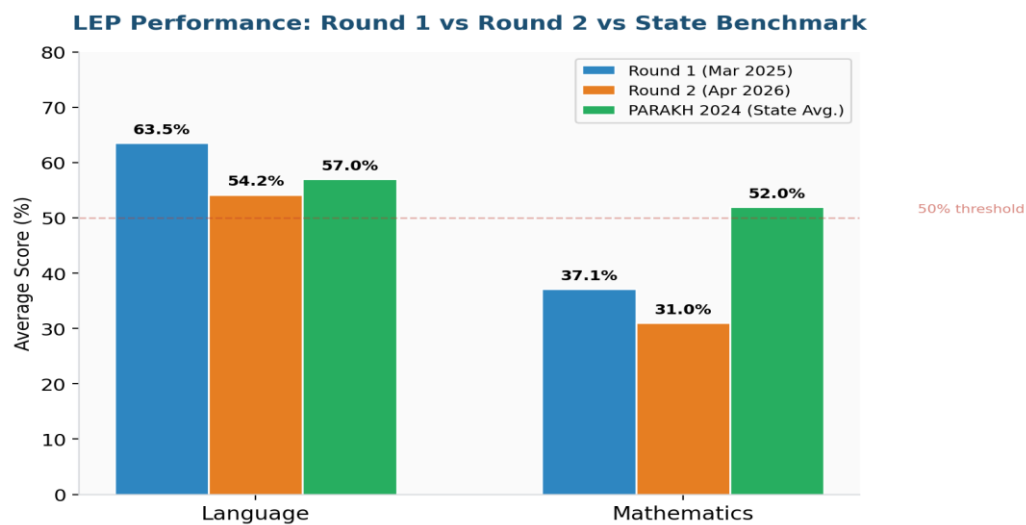
Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods approach, combined with the two-round assessment design and the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data sources, provides a reasonably robust evidence base for the conclusions and recommendations presented in this report.

5. Data Analysis & Key Findings

5.1 Learning Enhancement Programme (LEP)

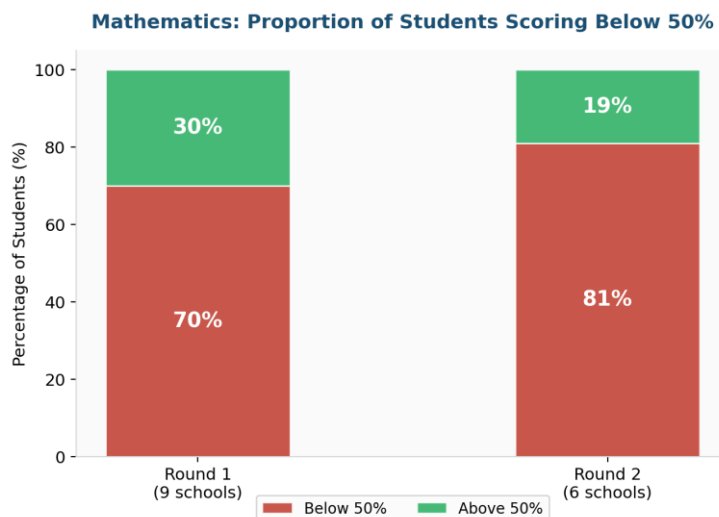
5.1.1 Language Performance: Moderate Effectiveness with Declining Retention

- The language performance data presents a cautiously positive picture that, upon deeper examination, reveals important nuances about the programme's effectiveness and the durability of its outcomes. In Round 1 students performed at comparable levels in language, averaging 63.5% across the assessed schools. This figure is noteworthy when benchmarked against the PARAKH 2024 average state score for the Foundational Stage in Gujarati, which stood at 57%. **Given that LEP students represent a cohort specifically identified for remedial support, this performance suggests that the language intervention was reasonably effective in building foundational literacy skills among its target group.**
- However, the Round 2 data introduces a note of caution. Round 2 schools averaged 54.2% in language, a decline of approximately 9.3 percentage points from Round 1. While this figure remains within the range of the state benchmark, the decline suggests that the gains achieved through LEP were not fully sustained in the absence of continued intervention. In Round 2, Class 5 students consistently outperformed Class 4 students across schools, indicating that while initial gains were distributed relatively evenly, their progression and retention varied over time — with younger students potentially more vulnerable to learning loss.



5.1.2 Mathematics Performance: Persistent Foundational Gaps

- In contrast to language, the mathematics performance data presents a significantly more concerning picture. The PARAKH 2024 average state score in mathematics at the Foundational Stage was 52%. In comparison, round 1 schools averaged 37.1% and Round 2 schools averaged 31% — a gap of approximately 15 and 21 percentage points respectively below the state benchmark. The data clearly indicates that LEP has not been effective in addressing foundational mathematics skills, with the majority of students unable to achieve even a 50% score threshold.
- While it is important to acknowledge that LEP students, as a remedial cohort, would be expected to perform below general population averages, the magnitude of the gap and its persistence across both rounds, suggests that the programme's mathematics instruction has not succeeded in closing foundational learning deficits. The decline from Round 1 to Round 2, though less steep than in language at 6.1 percentage points, further compounds the concern. The assessment found that students in Classes 4–5, when assessed at Class 3 level, continued to perform poorly — with 81% scoring below 50% in mathematics in Round 2. This indicates that gaps in foundational understanding from earlier stages have not been adequately addressed.

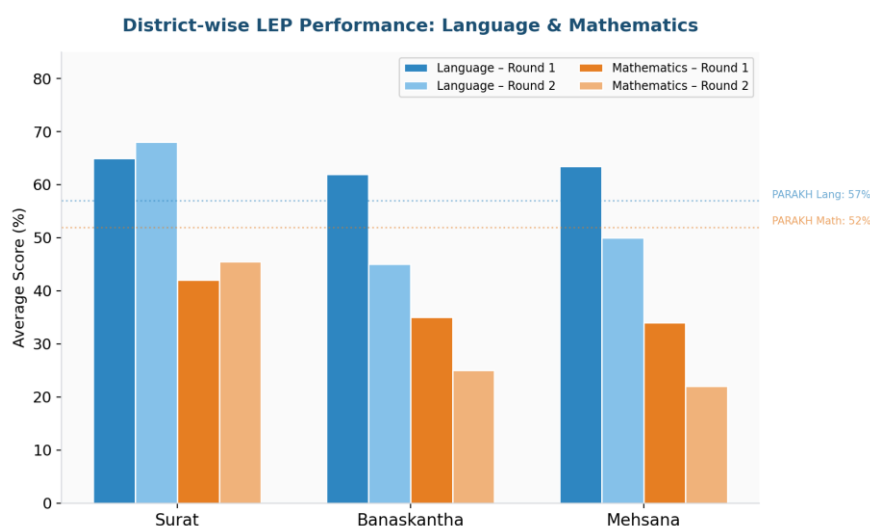


5.1.3 District-Level Variation

- The analysis of district-level performance reveals significant geographic variation. In Round 2, schools in Surat performed notably better than those in Banaskantha and Mehsana across both language and mathematics. In language, nearly 46% of

Surat students scored above 60%, with only about 29% below 40%. In mathematics, Surat's average of 45.5% approached the district's PARAKH score of 47% for rural schools — a significantly more encouraging outcome than the performance observed in the other two districts.

- The assessment notes that, in the absence of a baseline, it is difficult to ascertain whether Surat schools began with inherently better performance levels, which would complicate the attribution of observed differences to programme effectiveness alone. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the variation — particularly in mathematics — suggests that district-specific factors, including the quality of implementation by the respective technical partners (Pratham and CEE), school-level support structures, and community engagement dynamics, play a meaningful role in shaping outcomes.



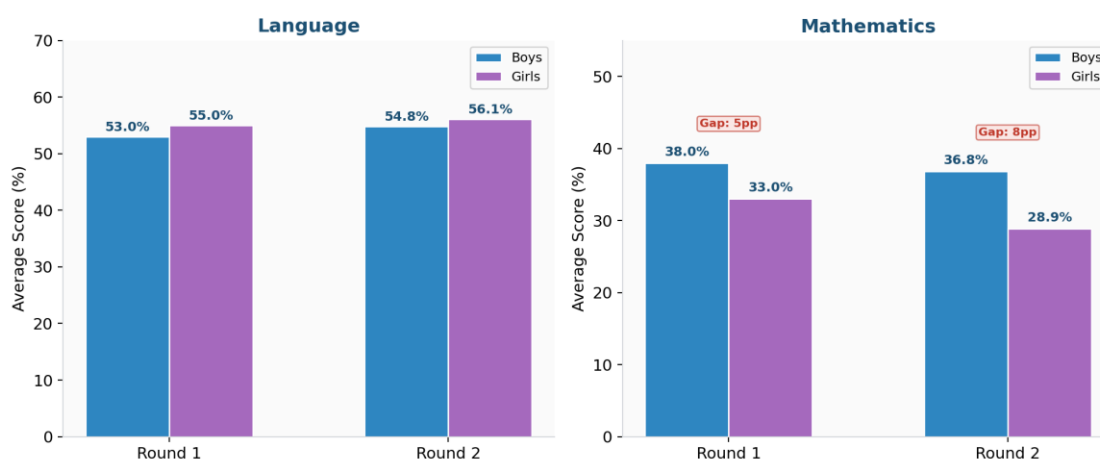
5.1.4 Gender Disaggregated Analysis: A Persistent Mathematics Gap

- Gender-disaggregated analysis reveals a complex and uneven pattern. In mathematics, boys consistently outperformed girls across both phases — **by approximately 5 percentage points in Round 1 and 8 percentage points in Round 2**, with Round 2 average scores of 36.8% for boys versus 28.9% for girls. The widening gap between rounds is particularly noteworthy, as it suggests that the gender differential in mathematics outcomes may be compounding over time rather than remaining stable. This pattern was observed across schools in different districts (Shardashish School in Banaskantha, Aldasen in Mehsana, and Virpor in Surat) indicating that the phenomenon is not confined to a single geographic or implementation context. Probably, cultural stereotypes and unequal distribution of

household responsibilities may have negatively impact girls' learning outcomes in numeracy, though further enquiry is needed to substantiate this hypothesis.

- In language, the picture is more balanced. Girls held a slight edge in both rounds, an average of 56.1% compared to 54.8% for boys in Round 2, though the difference was not statistically significant. No consistent gender-based pattern in language performance was observed across districts, with girls outperforming boys in some schools and boys outperforming girls in others.
- The consistency of the mathematics gender gap across diverse geographies and phases raises a substantive question about whether classroom practices in numeracy instruction are differentially engaging girls, and whether targeted interventions such as gender-sensitive pedagogical training, additional practice opportunities, or community-level awareness efforts are required to close this gap.

Gender-Disaggregated LEP Performance



5.1.5 Teacher Perspectives: Limited Integration and Knowledge Transfer

- Key Informant Interviews with nine teachers — comprising one head teacher, one language teacher, and one mathematics teacher from each of the three locations — yielded important qualitative insights that complement and contextualise the quantitative findings. Teachers recalled LEP as a Torrent-led programme that had been running for a number of years, and were able to articulate the previous approaches in terms of students covered, materials used, activities undertaken, and diagnostic tests administered. However, their role during LEP implementation was minimal, and with the exception of one or two examples of observation and feedback, their interactions with LEP facilitators were limited. This was primarily

because LEP classes overlapped with regular teaching hours, during which teachers were engaged with their own classes.

- This structural separation between LEP and regular classroom instruction had a significant consequence: good practices were not retained. LEP employed activity-based teaching, individual attention, and slower pacing pedagogical approaches that contrasted with typical classroom instruction. However, due to the limited interaction between regular teachers and LEP facilitators, there was little spillover of these innovations into standard teaching practice. As one teacher observed: "I adopted the activities used in LEP to teach area and perimeter in my own classroom" but such instances were exceptions rather than the norm. The assessment concluded that the current LEP model is limited by its remedial and selective approach, reaching a small group of students (35 per school), while learning gaps persist across classrooms.
- Teachers perceived LEP as having a positive but limited impact on students. They reported improvement in basic literacy and numeracy — for example, students progressing from being unable to read letters to reading with comprehension. Students gained confidence and became more interested in learning, often preferring LEP classes over regular classes. This was accompanied by improved participation and confidence in speaking and responding during regular classroom activities. However, these positive effects were concentrated among the small group of students who directly participated in LEP, and the absence of systemic integration meant that the broader classroom environment remained largely unaffected.

5.2 Balvatika

5.2.1 Pilot Overview and Assessment Rationale

- Balvatika, piloted in 2024 as part of Shiksha Setu Phase IV, represents UNM Foundation's foray into early childhood education within the government school system. Targeting the youngest learners at the foundational stage, the programme was designed to develop early literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills through activity-based pedagogy, peer learning strategies, and age-appropriate teaching-learning materials (TLMs). Unlike LEP, Second Chance, and Saksham, which were assessed through standardised quantitative instruments, Balvatika's

evaluation adopted a lighter-touch methodology. Given the young age of the target cohort and the predominantly oral, classroom-based nature of inputs, the Round 1 assessment (April 2025) relied on classroom observation, teacher self-reports, and stakeholder interviews. A formal Round 2 assessment was not undertaken due to the small time-gap between rounds and the developmental sensitivity of the target age group, making frequent standardised assessment neither advisable nor methodologically sound.

5.2.2 Round 1 Findings: Strong Effectiveness Across Multiple Dimensions

- The Round 1 assessment characterised Balvatika as "highly effective," with evidence of impact observable across several interconnected dimensions. On the learner side, the programme demonstrably improved students' confidence and foundational learning levels. Learners were observed to be confident speakers, able to narrate simple stories, and demonstrated a grasp over mathematical concepts such as patterns and simple comparisons of weight and size. These outcomes are particularly significant at the foundational stage, where early learning experiences shape subsequent academic trajectories and attitudes towards schooling.
- On the pedagogical side, teachers self-reported incorporating innovative teaching methods — including activity-based and participatory approaches — into their routine classroom practice. This represents a critical distinction from LEP, where knowledge transfer from programme facilitators to regular teachers was notably limited. In Balvatika's case, the programme design appears to have succeeded in building teacher capacity directly, thereby increasing the likelihood that improved practices would be sustained beyond the period of direct programme support.
- The programme's design itself was assessed positively on several counts. The content was found to supplement state textbooks effectively, with activities aiding motor skills and socio-emotional development. TLMs were evaluated as age-appropriate and effective. Importantly, the design process incorporated stakeholder feedback — including field team inputs — and the programme was adapted accordingly during implementation, reflecting a responsive and iterative approach that contributes to programme relevance and ownership.
- Parents reported observable improvements in their children's learning ability, enhanced communication skills, and higher engagement levels — anecdotal but meaningful indicators of programme reach into the home environment. Regular

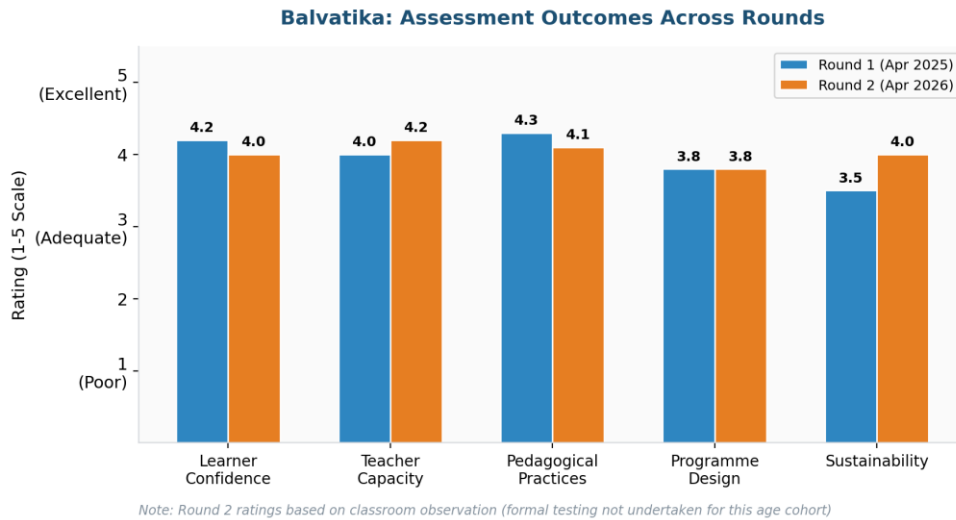
capacity building sessions and weekly on-site mentoring were identified as factors that eliminated continued external reliance and contributed to programme sustainability. The readiness of schools to adopt the programme was also noted as a facilitating factor.

5.2.3 Round 2: Observational Assessment

- For Round 2, the assessment team determined that a small classroom observation-based study would be more appropriate than repeat standardised testing. The rationale was twofold: the inputs were primarily oral and classroom-based, making written assessment an unsuitable measure; and the target group was very young, rendering frequent testing both ethically and methodologically inadvisable. This methodological decision, while limiting the comparability of Round 1 and Round 2 data, reflects appropriate assessment practice for early childhood interventions. The Round 2 observation confirmed that teachers continued to incorporate innovative methods, and the participatory design approach was assessed as having contributed meaningfully to the sustainability of changed teaching practices.

5.2.4 Comparative Assessment

- Balvatika's performance stands in notable contrast to the other programme components assessed. While LEP struggled with limited knowledge transfer, modest mathematics outcomes, and declining learning retention, and Second Chance and Saksham faced challenges in translating programme participation into sustained life outcomes, Balvatika demonstrated strong effectiveness across learner, teacher, and system dimensions. The key differentiator appears to be the programme's embedded approach — working directly with and through regular teachers in the classroom, rather than through parallel or external instructional structures. This finding carries an important implication for programme design: interventions that build systemic capacity from within the existing school infrastructure are more likely to produce sustainable outcomes than those that operate alongside it.



5.3 Second Chance Programme

5.3.1 Beneficiary Profile: Dropout youth, mostly women

- The Second Chance Programme aims to support out-of-school individuals to complete their Class 10 board examinations through NIOS. Insights from 19 interviewed participants indicate that the programme largely reaches recent dropouts, with 74% aged 15–19, while also including older participants seeking to re-enter the education system. The cohort was predominantly female (84%), with most respondents unmarried and from government school backgrounds (74%). Prior education levels were concentrated around Class 8 (53%) and Class 9 (37%).
- Reasons for dropout were varied but aligned with broader trends: 37% cited lack of interest, 32% identified distance to school, while others reported economic constraints, household responsibilities, or lack of family support.

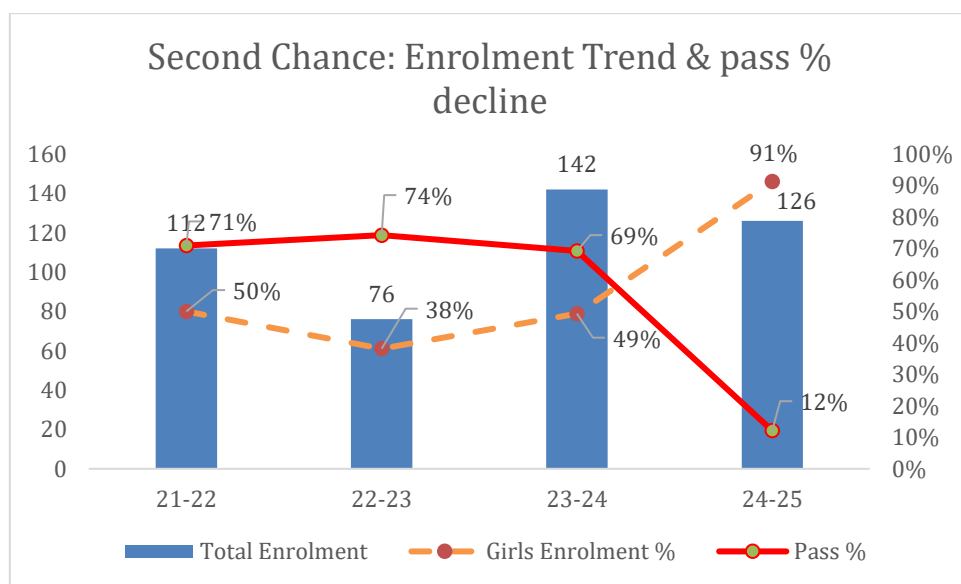
5.3.2 Relevance Affirmed, but Engagement Challenges Persist

- The programme's relevance within its operational geography is not in question. The lack of secondary schools in several villages, combined with the well-documented barriers to girls' education at the secondary level, creates a clear demand for alternative educational pathways. Most students were self-motivated, with a clear goal of passing the Class 10 board examination, and the majority learned about the programme through project staff during enrolment drives. However, despite appropriate targeting and initial interest, absenteeism emerged as a significant operational concern. Only 8–9 students were reported as regular attendees, with low perceived value of education, household responsibilities, and gradually fading

interest identified as the primary drivers of irregularity. This pattern suggests that while the programme successfully attracts and enrolls beneficiaries, sustaining their engagement over the duration of the programme cycle remains a persistent challenge.

5.3.3 Declining Pass Rates: From Success to Crisis

- The most concerning finding from the Second Chance assessment relates to the trajectory of examination outcomes. While the programme demonstrated relatively stable pass rates in the initial years—71% in 2021–22, 74% in 2022–23, and 69% in 2023–24—this trend was sharply disrupted in 2024–25, where the pass rate declined drastically to 12%.
- Overall, the average pass rate across four years stands at approximately 56.5%, masking the sharp recent decline in performance.
- Of the 19 surveyed students, 58% had appeared for the Class 10 board examination twice and 37% had appeared once — yet only one student had managed to pass.
- Students were also not aware of any other student from any batch passing the examination, suggesting that the low pass rate in the last year may reflect implementation-related challenges rather than isolated case.
- This pattern points to a growing misalignment between the programme’s instructional approach and the foundational competency levels of enrolled students, many of whom had dropped out at Class 8 or 9 level and had been out of the formal education system for extended periods.

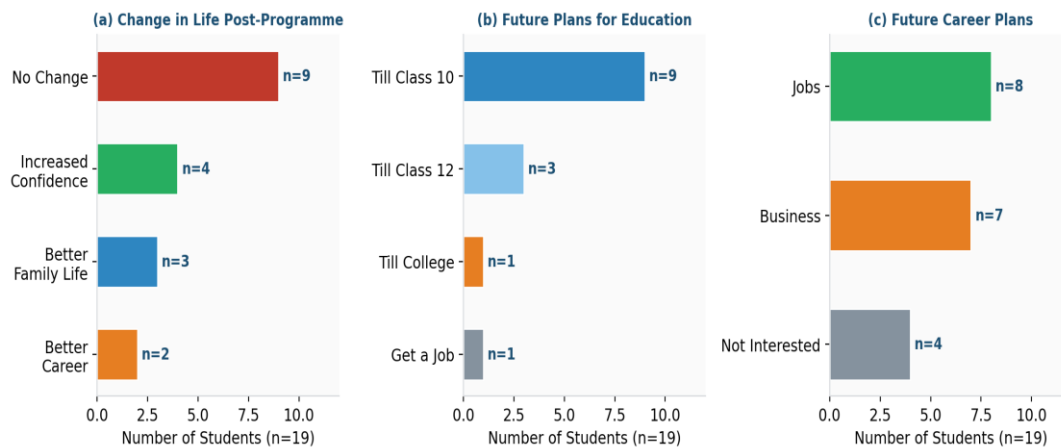


- The quality of programme delivery compounds this challenge. When asked what they liked about the programme, only four of 19 students cited teaching methods; the majority mentioned social aspects such as meeting friends and the sense of community. English was identified as the most difficult subject (cited by 7 students), followed by Mathematics (5) and Social Science (4) — subjects that require strong foundational understanding, which many students lacked upon enrolment. This suggests that the programme's instructional approach may not have adequately addressed the prerequisite competency gaps that students brought with them.

5.3.4 Psychosocial Impact: Frustration Coexisting with Resilience

- The programme's impact on participants' lives presents a paradoxical picture. On one hand, 47% of surveyed students reported no discernible change after attending the programme, highlighting a gap between intent and lived outcomes. Students expressed disappointment and frustration, with parental support declining after repeated examination failures and families perceiving limited returns on their investment. The absence of a credible “third chance” pathway further intensifies this challenge, leaving students at risk of reverting to their pre-programme circumstances without the intended credential.
- On the other hand, the programme demonstrates a clear ability to build aspirations and resilience. Despite failing the Class 10 examination, 74% of students intended to continue their education, reflecting sustained ambition. Career aspirations such as anganwadi work, nursing, teaching, parlour work, mehendi, and tailoring are grounded in their lived realities, while in some cases extending further — as seen in a student aspiring to become an advocate. Most students planned to continue within the education system, indicating that while aspirations remain largely near-term, they are nonetheless persistent and meaningful.

Second Chance: Post-Programme Outcomes & Aspirations (n=19)



5.3.5 Summary Assessment

- The Second Chance Programme embodies both the promise and the peril of alternative education pathways. Its relevance is firmly established, its ability to reignite aspirations is demonstrable, and the demand for its services within operational geographies is clear. However, the near-total failure in last year examination represents a fundamental crisis of effectiveness that, left unaddressed, risks undermining the programme's legitimacy and the trust of both beneficiaries and their families. The assessment findings strongly suggest that the current model — including board affiliation, curriculum alignment, instructional methodology, and foundational preparation — requires comprehensive redesign rather than incremental adjustment.

5.4 Saksham Programme

5.4.1 Beneficiary Profile and Programme Reach

- The Saksham Programme was designed to empower young people and women with vocational skills in sewing machine operation, operating through spoke centres in target villages across the Shiksha Setu geography. Of the 12 former trainees interviewed, eight had received no prior formal training in tailoring, making Saksham their first exposure to structured vocational instruction. Two respondents had prior informal exposure through family members or on-the-job learning, and two had been informally trained in basic stitching. **This composition confirms that the programme is effectively reaching its intended target group — women who**

have not had access to formal skill-building opportunities — thereby lending credence to its relevance within the operational context.

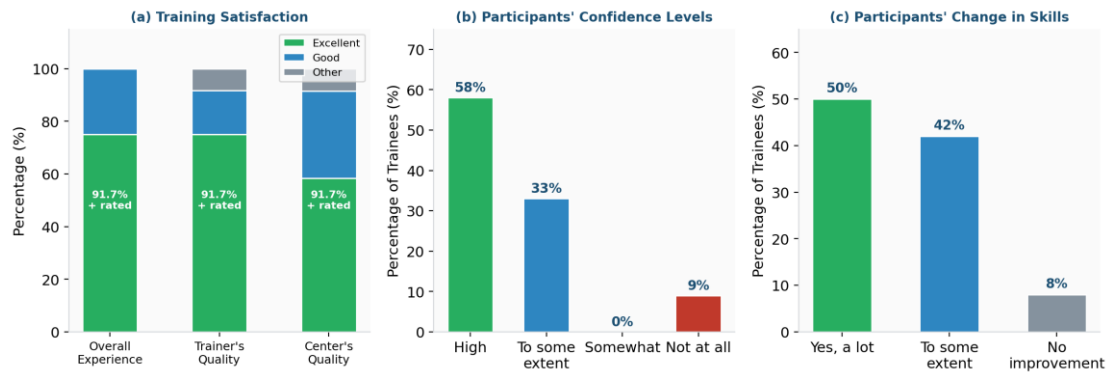
- The programme's reach was further evidenced by the fact that eight of the 12 respondents were informed of the training by family members, friends, Panchayat members, or ASHA workers, rather than by UNM staff directly. Only four respondents were reached through direct outreach by the NGO partner. This pattern of organic awareness — described as positive "word of mouth" — is a significant indicator of programme credibility within the community. When beneficiaries themselves become advocates for a programme, **it suggests that the programme experience has been sufficiently positive to warrant unsolicited recommendation, a finding that is corroborated by the near-universal willingness of trainees to recommend Saksham to others.**

5.4.2 Training Quality: High Satisfaction, Strong Skill Gains

- The qualitative data on training experience is overwhelmingly positive. A high proportion of respondents rated their overall experience as "excellent," with 100% rating centre quality positively and 91.7% rating trainer quality as excellent or very effective. These satisfaction levels are notably high for a vocational training programme operating in a rural context, and they stem primarily from two factors: the quality and supportive nature of the trainer, and the adequacy of centre infrastructure and equipment. Most trainees highlighted the individual attention, supportive approach, and proper guidance they received throughout the training, despite batches of 20–30 trainees — a cohort size that could easily dilute instructional quality in less well-managed settings.
- **The skill acquisition outcomes are consistent with these positive training experiences.** All respondents, including the four who had prior stitching experience, reported learning something new during the programme. Fifty percent of trainees reported a significant improvement in their skills, and 42% reported improvement to some extent. Only 8% perceived no improvement, and this was a single respondent. Confidence levels mirrored skill gains: 58% reported high confidence post-training, 33% reported confidence to some extent, and only 9% reported no improvement. **Notably, confidence was linked to opportunities for practice post-training — either at the centre or at home — suggesting that skill**

acquisition alone is insufficient without an enabling environment for application.

Saksham: Training Quality & Outcome Indicators (n=12)



5.4.3 The Livelihood Gap: Strong Training, Weak Economic Outcomes

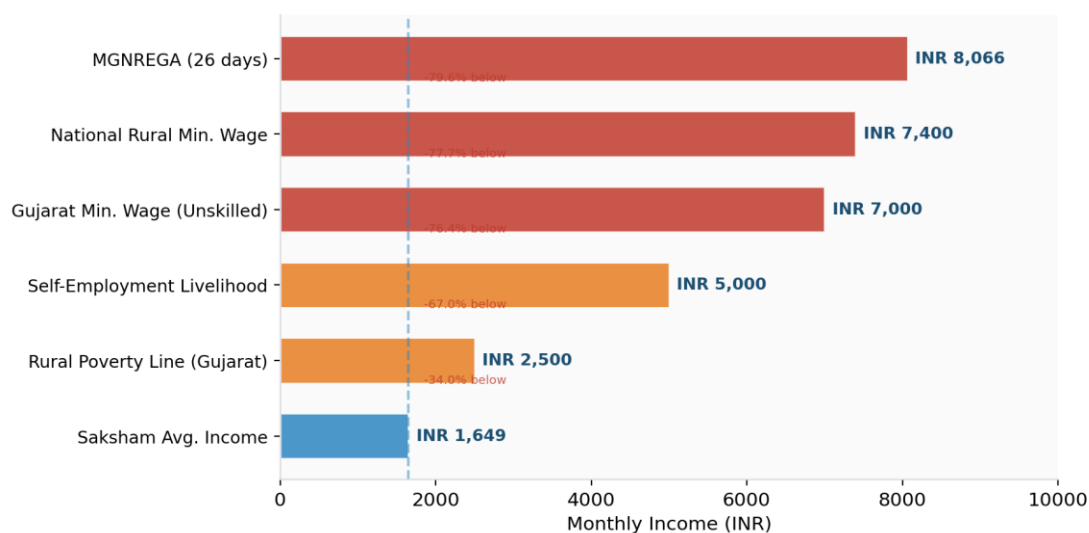
- The most critical finding from the Saksham assessment relates to the disconnect between training quality and livelihood outcomes. Despite the programme's success in building skills and confidence, it has not translated into viable, sustained economic activity for the majority of trainees. At the time of assessment, only six of the 12 respondents (50%) were engaged in any form of work — five in part-time, home-based sewing and one in full-time employment. Of the remaining six, three were planning to work and three were not. The reasons cited for non-employment among those not earning included lack of market access or customers (two respondents), absence of a sewing machine at home (one), and insufficient confidence or skills (one). Notably, only two respondents attributed their non-employment to family or time restrictions, indicating that the primary barriers are structural and market-related rather than household-related.
- The income data paints an even starker picture. Of the six respondents who reported earnings, five earned between INR 1,000 and INR 2,000 per month, and one earned between INR 2,000 and INR 3,000 per month. The average monthly income across earning respondents stood at INR 1,649 — a figure that falls dramatically short of every established income benchmark. The detailed comparison demonstrates that this average is 76.4% below the Gujarat minimum wage for unskilled labour (INR 7,000 per month), 77.7% below the national rural minimum wage (INR 7,400), 34% below the rural poverty line in Gujarat (INR 2,500), 67% below a self-employment livelihood threshold of INR 5,000, and 79.6% below what a woman could earn

through MGNREGA at the Gujarat daily wage rate over 26 working days (INR 8,066). These comparisons are not merely academic; they represent the concrete economic reality that trained women face, and they fundamentally challenge the proposition that current training inputs are producing livelihood-level outcomes.

TABLE 2: Saksham Average Programme Income vs. Established Benchmarks

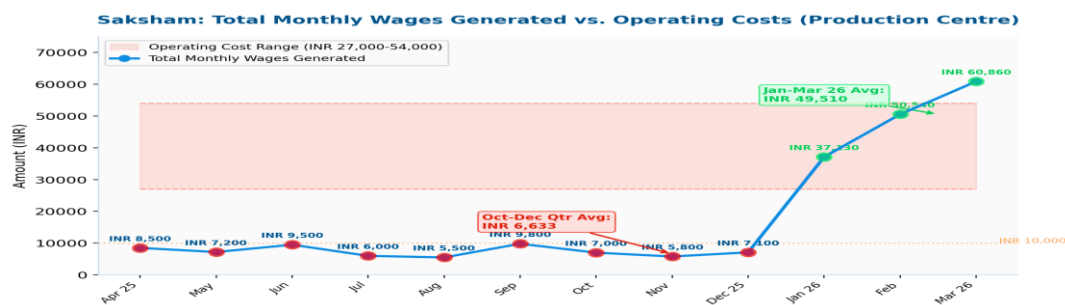
Benchmark	Avg. Program Income (INR)	Gap (INR)	Gap %	Threshold (INR/month)
Gujarat Minimum Wage (Unskilled)	1,649	-5,351	-76.4%	7,000
National Rural Minimum Wage	1,649	-5,751	-77.7%	7,400
Rural Poverty Line (Gujarat)	1,649	-851	-34.0%	2,500
Self-Employment Livelihood Threshold	1,649	-3,351	-67.0%	5,000
MGNREGA Daily Wage (Gujarat, 26 days)	1,649	-6,417	-79.6%	8,066

Saksham: Average Programme Income vs. Established Benchmarks



5.4.4 Market Linkage Failure and Centre-Level Unsustainability

- The livelihood gap observed in Saksham is rooted in structural limitations of the programme model rather than individual trainee constraints. The production centres, intended as post-training income-generation hubs, operate at a financial deficit in most months. Estimated monthly operating costs range between INR 27,000 and INR 54,000, while income generation has historically remained inconsistent and insufficient to cover these costs.
- Recent data (as illustrated in the production centre earnings trend) shows a notable increase in monthly revenues, reaching up to approximately INR 60,000 in March-26. While this indicates improved performance in the short term, the trend remains uneven, with earlier months showing significantly lower earnings—five out of nine months recorded revenues below INR 10,000, and the October–December 2025 quarter averaging only INR 6,638 per month.
- Revenue continues to be driven largely by low-value products, such as bags priced at approximately INR 7 per unit. At this rate, centres would need to produce close to 1,000 units per month merely to approach operational viability—an output level that has not been consistently sustained.
- The recent increase in earnings appears to be linked to episodic vendor orders rather than stable, recurring demand. As a result, income flows remain unpredictable, limiting the centres’ ability to function as sustainable livelihood platforms. Frequent product switching and dependence on a narrow product base further reinforce the absence of strong and sustained market linkages.
- These findings suggest that while there are emerging signs of improved revenue generation, the current model—focused primarily on training and centre-based production, remains structurally vulnerable. Without stable demand pipelines and stronger market integration, these gains are unlikely to translate into sustained and scalable livelihood outcomes.



5.4.5 Aspirations Amid Structural Barriers

- Despite weak livelihood outcomes, the programme has had a strong aspirational impact. Among respondents, 92% (11 out of 12) expressed interest in continuing with tailoring or related activities. Of the nine who articulated clear future plans, 33% aimed to start their own business, 45% sought advanced training, and 11% were interested in joining a production group or cooperative. Only one respondent (8%) did not intend to continue, choosing instead to focus on education.
- However, these aspirations are constrained by persistent structural barriers. Half of the respondents (6 out of 12) identified lack of market linkages as the primary constraint, while 25% cited lack of access to machines or equipment. An additional 25% lacked clarity on the support required, indicating gaps in post-training guidance. This reflects a broader constraint: skills have been built, but pathways to monetisation remain unclear or inaccessible.
- The programme's high completion rate (93%), 100% positive rating of centre quality, and near-universal willingness to recommend the programme indicate strong demand and satisfaction. However, with only 50% of trainees engaged in any income-generating activity and average monthly earnings at INR 1,649, the conversion from training to livelihood remains limited. This gap highlights a structural issue in programme design—where skill development is not sufficiently supported by market access, demand linkage, and post-training ecosystem support.

6. Key Insights

The preceding analysis of programme-level findings, while necessary for granular understanding, risks obscuring the cross-cutting patterns that emerge when the three programme components are examined as an integrated portfolio. This section synthesises the key findings into thematic insights, interpreting their implications for programme strategy, design, and systemic impact. Each insight addresses the fundamental question that an impact assessment must ultimately answer: What does this mean, and what should be done differently?

6.1 Relevance Is Established; Effectiveness Is Not

- Across all three programme components, the assessment finds that programme relevance—the alignment of programme objectives with beneficiary needs and contextual realities—is firmly established. The demand for foundational learning support is reflected in persistent learning gaps among students. The need for alternative education pathways is evident in continued enrollment in Second Chance despite repeated failures. Similarly, Saksham’s high completion rate (93%), strong word-of-mouth outreach, and near-universal recommendation by trainees demonstrate a clear demand for vocational skill-building among women.
- However, relevance has not translated into proportional effectiveness. LEP shows moderate gains in language but continues to underperform in numeracy, with scores significantly below state benchmarks. Second Chance has been able to mobilise learners but has not converted participation into examination success. Saksham has succeeded in building skills and confidence but has not translated these into viable livelihoods—only 50% of trainees reported earning, with an average monthly income of INR 1,649.
- This gap suggests that the programmes’ underlying assumptions require recalibration. The expectation that inputs—whether instructional support, examination preparation, or skill training—will automatically lead to desired outcomes is not borne out by evidence. Outcomes are mediated by critical factors such as foundational readiness, systemic alignment, and market conditions, which have not been adequately addressed in the current design.

6.2 Parallel Programmes Struggle with Systemic Integration

- A consistent pattern across programmes is the disconnect between programme interventions and the systems within which they operate. LEP functioned as a parallel instructional model with limited interaction with regular classroom teaching, resulting in weak knowledge transfer and low sustainability of pedagogical gains. Saksham’s production centres operate largely in isolation from stable markets, while Second Chance, through NIOS, was not adequately aligned with students’ foundational learning levels or examination requirements.
- Balvatika provides a contrasting example. Its embedded approach—working directly with regular teachers within the classroom—enabled stronger teacher capacity building, improved learning outcomes, and greater sustainability of practices.
- This contrast highlights a key design implication: programmes that operate alongside existing systems tend to face integration and sustainability challenges, whereas those embedded within systems are more likely to produce lasting impact.

6.3 The Sustainability Challenge

- The two-round assessment design provides a rare and valuable opportunity to examine the temporal dimension of programme impact, and the findings in this regard are sobering. LEP learning gains declined by 9.3 percentage points in language and 6.1 percentage points in mathematics between rounds. The gender gap in mathematics widened from 5 to 8 percentage points. In Second Chance, the trajectory from initial examination success to near-total failure in recent years suggests not merely stagnation but active deterioration in programme effectiveness. In Saksham, the disconnect between training quality and livelihood outcomes points to a model that builds capacity at the individual level but does not create the conditions for that capacity to be exercised and rewarded over time.
- These patterns highlight a key sustainability limitation in programme design. In the case of LEP, the intervention was structured as a camp-based, remedial model with no provision for continued support once the camp concluded. While this approach enabled short-term learning gains, the absence of follow-up mechanisms contributed to reduced retention over time.

- More broadly, the findings suggest that programme benefits are difficult to sustain without built-in mechanisms for continuity and reinforcement. For LEP, this implies integrating support throughout the year. For Second Chance, it underscores the importance of aligning curriculum and strengthening foundational readiness. For Saksham, it reinforces the need for sustained market linkages and post-training support to enable continued income generation.

6.4 Aspirations Can Be Built; Structural Barriers Cannot Be Wished

Away

- Across all programmes, there is clear evidence of increased confidence and aspiration among beneficiaries. LEP students showed improved participation, Second Chance participants continued to aspire for further education despite repeated failures (74%), and Saksham trainees expressed interest in pursuing livelihoods through tailoring or further training.
- However, these aspirations remain constrained by structural barriers. Second Chance students struggle to clear examinations due to weak foundational skills, Saksham trainees face limited access to markets, equipment, and demand, and LEP students return to classrooms where improved pedagogical practices are not sustained.
- This gap between aspiration and opportunity carries a risk. When programmes build motivation without enabling outcomes, it can lead to frustration and declining support—as seen with 47% of Second Chance participants reporting no life change.
- The findings underscore a critical point: while programmes can build aspiration, sustainable impact depends on addressing the structural conditions that enable those aspirations to translate into real outcomes.

6.5 The Case for Differentiated, Context-Responsive Design

- The district-level variation observed in LEP — with Surat outperforming Banaskantha and Mehsana across both subjects — is not merely a finding about geographic disparity; it is a finding about the inadequacy of uniform programme design in the face of heterogeneous implementation contexts. The same programme model, delivered through different implementing partners in different districts with different school systems and community dynamics, produced meaningfully

different outcomes. This suggests that programme design must incorporate greater flexibility and differentiation, with the mode, material, pacing, and pedagogical approach calibrated to the specific conditions of each district and school.

- This insight applies with equal force to Second Chance and Saksham. The recommendation to switch from NIOS to the State Open Board (GSEB) for Second Chance reflects a recognition that the programme must adapt to the curricular and examination context of its students rather than the reverse. Similarly, Saksham's transition from a single-skill training model to diversified vocational offerings would reflect an acknowledgment that the livelihood opportunities available to women vary across geographies and that a uniform sewing-centric approach cannot serve all contexts equally well.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Learning Enhancement Programme (LEP)

Recommendation 7.1.1 — Transition to a Whole-Class, Integrated Model

The remedial, selective approach—targeting a limited group of students through parallel classes—has produced uneven outcomes and limited systemic impact. Transitioning to a whole-class model integrated within the school system, as already initiated by UNM Foundation, is a strategically sound shift. This approach can ensure continuity of support from Balvatika to higher grades, address classroom-wide learning gaps, and embed programme inputs within existing structures rather than operating alongside them..

Recommendation 7.1.2 — Realign with Stage-Wise Competency Frameworks

Instruction should prioritise stage-wise foundational competencies aligned with NCFSE 2023, rather than grade-level expectations. The finding that students in higher grades continue to struggle with lower-grade competencies underscores the need for this shift. Progress should be tracked over longer learning cycles using continuous and qualitative assessments, rather than relying solely on annual test-based outcomes.

Recommendation 7.1.3 — Differentiate Programme Design by District

Significant district-level variation in outcomes indicates that a uniform programme design is insufficient. Delivery models, materials, and pacing should be adapted to local contexts, supported by diagnostic assessments. Greater flexibility for implementation partners should be balanced with stronger monitoring systems to ensure consistency in quality.

Recommendation 7.1.4 — Build Teacher Capacity for Systemic Sustainability

Limited interaction between programme facilitators and regular teachers has constrained knowledge transfer. Structured mechanisms such as co-teaching, classroom observation, feedback loops, and mentoring should be institutionalized. The Balvatika model demonstrates that sustained teacher engagement is critical for long-term impact and reduced dependence on external support.

7.2 Second Chance Programme

Recommendation 7.2.1 — Switch to GSEB Board and Strengthen Curriculum Alignment

The shift from NIOS to GSEB is a necessary step already done by UNM to address misalignment between examination difficulty and student preparedness. This must be accompanied by curriculum alignment, appropriate pacing, and targeted support in high-failure subjects such as English and Social Science to improve pass outcomes.

Recommendation 7.2.2 — Adopt a Phased Examination Strategy

Allowing students to attempt subjects in phases can reduce academic pressure, improve focus, and create incremental milestones. This approach can also help sustain motivation and parental support, both of which decline after repeated comprehensive failures.

Recommendation 7.2.3 — Invest in Foundational Pre-Requisite Competencies

Many students enter the programme with significant learning gaps. Diagnostic assessments at enrolment, followed by structured bridging modules, are essential to build the foundational skills required for examination success.

Recommendation 7.2.4 — Broaden the Definition of Success Beyond Board Pass

Given the high proportion of students reporting no life change post-programme, additional pathways to value creation are necessary. Integrating certified skill modules—such as digital literacy, vocational exposure, and communication skills—can ensure that all participants derive tangible benefits, regardless of examination outcomes.

Recommendation 7.2.5 — Strengthen Attendance and Family Engagement

Sustained participation remains a challenge. Strengthening attendance tracking, engaging families, and building a supportive learning environment are critical to improving retention and outcomes. Regular follow-ups with irregular students and creating local support mechanisms—such as peer groups or community mentors—can further reinforce continuity and accountability.

7.3 Saksham Programme

Recommendation 7.3.1 — Transition from a Training-Led to a Market-Led Model

The current training-led model has not translated into sustainable livelihoods, as evidenced by low-income levels and limited employment. A shift towards a market-linked (Manufactures or retail) approach is essential, where trainees are connected to stable demand through partnerships with enterprises, cooperatives, or institutional buyers.

Recommendation 7.3.2 — Shift Towards High-Value Product Focus

The current focus on low-value products (some products get as low as 7 rupees) limits income potential despite adequate skill levels. Transitioning towards higher-value products—such as garments, customised orders, uniforms, or value-added textile work—can significantly improve earning potential. This would require support in product design, quality standards, and market alignment to ensure that trainees are positioned for better-paying opportunities rather than competing in low-margin, high-volume segments.

Recommendation 7.3.3 — Strengthen Entrepreneurship Training and Post-Training Support

The current financial literacy and entrepreneurship training module has produced mixed results, with only 33% of trainees planning to start their own business and significant gaps in entrepreneurial skills and market knowledge. This module should be substantially strengthened — with greater depth, regular attendance requirements, and practical application components — and supplemented by low-touch but periodic post-training inputs for at least one year following programme completion. These follow-up inputs should include market information sharing, facilitation of peer networks, and connection to microfinance or enterprise support schemes that enable trainees to independently establish and sustain their enterprises.

7.4 Overall Strategic Recommendations

Recommendation 7.4.1 — Rethink Beneficiary Targeting

The current model across all three programmes works with a fixed subset of beneficiaries — 35 students per school in LEP, enrolled dropouts in Second Chance, and selected trainees in Saksham — while the evidence demonstrates that needs are significantly broader. LEP's learning gap data suggests that foundational deficits extend well beyond the remedial cohort. Saksham's positive word-of-mouth indicates that demand for vocational training exceeds current capacity. **The programme design should explore mechanisms for scaling coverage — whether through whole-class approaches in education, formation of self-help groups for livelihood sustainability, or partnership models that multiply reach without proportionally increasing costs.**

Recommendation 7.4.2 — Build Robust Monitoring and Feedback Loops

The finding that Second Chance's examination outcomes deteriorated from initial success to near-total failure over successive years — without triggering a mid-course correction — points to a systemic weakness in the programme's monitoring and feedback architecture. **All three programmes should institute regular, data-driven progress reviews with clearly defined trigger points for programme adaptation.** Investment in simple, practical monitoring tools — combined with periodic reflective practice sessions involving programme staff, implementing partners, and beneficiaries — would strengthen the Foundation's ability to identify and respond to emerging challenges before they become entrenched failures.

Recommendation 7.4.3 — Prioritise Systemic Integration Over Parallel Delivery

Drawing upon the insights from both the Balvatika success story and the LEP integration challenges, the overall programme strategy should prioritise interventions that build capacity within existing systems (schools, teachers, community institutions) rather than creating and sustaining parallel programme-specific structures. This approach is not only more sustainable but also more scalable, as it leverages existing infrastructure and human capital rather than depending on external programme resources.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Overall Programme Assessment

- This impact assessment of Shiksha Setu Phase IV presents a nuanced picture of programmes that are highly relevant but uneven in effectiveness. Each component addresses a clear need—foundational learning gaps (LEP), alternative education pathways (Second Chance), and vocational skills for women (Saksham)—with Balvatika extending this to early childhood education.
- Across OECD-DAC criteria, relevance is strong, supported by persistent learning gaps, continued enrollment, and high training completion (93%) and community acceptance. However, effectiveness remains limited. LEP shows moderate gains in language but weak numeracy outcomes. Second Chance has struggled to convert enrollment into examination success. Saksham, despite strong training delivery, has not translated into viable livelihoods, with only 50% of trainees earning an average monthly income at INR 1,649.
- Coherence is moderate, with misalignment between programme inputs and expected outcomes. Efficiency is constrained by parallel delivery models and financially unviable production centres. While programmes have built skills, confidence, and aspirations, sustained impact remains limited. Sustainability is the key concern, with declining learning outcomes in LEP, poor examination results in Second Chance, and weak market integration in Saksham.

8.2 UNM Foundation's Response: Strategic Recalibration in Progress

- UNM Foundation has already initiated important strategic shifts based on earlier findings. These include transitioning LEP to a whole-class integrated model, focusing on children's learning level through extended periods. Shifting Second Chance Program from NIOS to GSEB for better alignment, and moving towards direct implementation for improved accountability. These actions reflect responsiveness to evidence and a willingness to adapt programme design.
- However, round 2 findings indicate that challenges persist. LEP learning outcomes have declined, Second Chance continues to struggle with examination success and retention of family support, and Saksham's livelihood gap remains significant, with costs exceeding income and earnings below viable levels. These trends point to deeper structural limitations requiring further redesign beyond initial corrective steps.