

Foundational Learning Forum – What's working?

Date: Monday, September 1st. 2025

Time: 2:30 – 6:45 PM India Time

Venue: British Council, 17 KG Marg, New Delhi



Sh. Sanjay Kumar, Secretary, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, GoI




Sanjay Kumar plays a pivotal role of Secretary for the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education. In his previous capacity, Mr. Kumar held the position of Secretary in the Department of Youth Affairs, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, showcasing his multifaceted expertise. With an illustrious career, he has notably served as the Principal Secretary of Education in Bihar.

A distinguished member of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Mr. Kumar brings with him a wealth of experience, having joined the service in the 1990 batch. His diverse professional background and prior accomplishments underscore his commitment to advancing education and literacy, positioning him as a formidable leader in the realm of educational governance.



Dr Benjamin Piper, Director, Global Education, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Dr Benjamin Piper is the Director of Global Education at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. With over 20 years of experience in international education, he specializes in improving learning outcomes in low- and middle-income countries. Dr Piper previously led large-scale education projects across sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. He is known for his data-driven approach to education reform and advocacy for evidence-based practices in global education.

	<p>Albert Nsengiyumva - Executive Secretary - Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)</p> <p>Mr. Albert Nsengiyumva is the Executive Secretary of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). A consummate technocrat and education policy specialist with specialty in technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Albert has extensive experience in information communication technology (ICT) research, policy development and implementation in Africa. For 18 years he served the government and people of Rwanda, where he occupied various cabinet positions including as Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of State for TVET in the Ministry of Education.</p> <p>Albert has solid grasp of government functionalities and has built a strong reputation around leveraging social capital to mobilize resources that support policy development, advocacy, and implementation. He has helped expand ADEA's network across the world, building new relationships with various partners including multilateral development institutions, regional economic bodies, and philanthropic organizations.</p>
	<p>Mr. Luis Benveniste, Director, Director, Education Global Practice, World Bank</p> <p>Luis Benveniste is the Global Director for Education at the World Bank. He leads the World Bank's efforts in education development worldwide. Benveniste's research interests include education finance, gender, student assessment practices, and teacher policies. He has worked on numerous World Bankfinanced education projects across Africa, East Asia and Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean.</p>
	<p>Dr Obiageli Ezekwesili, Founder & CEO, Human Capital Africa</p> <p>Oby Ezekwesili is a former Vice President of the World Bank for the Africa Region. She has served as Nigeria's Minister of Education and Minister of Mineral Resources. Ezekwesili is also the co-convenor of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign and was a presidential candidate in Nigeria's 2019 election. Additionally, Dr. Ezekwesili was a Senior Fellow at the Yale Jackson Institute for Global Affairs in the United States and held the position of Richard von Weizsäcker Fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin, Germany.</p>



Matt Brossard, Regional Education Advisor, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia



Mathieu (Matt) Brossard is the UNICEF Regional Education and Adolescent Advisor for South Asia. He provides thought leadership and oversees UNICEF's education and adolescent programmes across the eight countries of the region. An international expert with extensive experience in research, strategy development, policy dialogue, and training, he has spent 25 years working with governments and education leaders worldwide to improve the quality and equity of education and to strengthen learning outcomes for all children.



Before taking up his role in South Asia, he served as Chief of the Education Unit at UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight (2019–2023) and as Senior Advisor at UNICEF Headquarters (2012–2019), where he led the development of UNICEF's Global Education Strategy 2019–2030: Every Child Learns. Prior to joining UNICEF, he was a Senior Economist at the World Bank (2006–2012), an Education Policy Analyst at UNESCO/IIEP-Dakar (2001–2006), and an Education Statistician at the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (1998–2001). He is a graduate of the French National School of Statistics and Economics, and also holds a Diplôme d'Études Approfondies in Sociology from the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po) and a bachelor's degree in Mathematics from Paris 6.



Marguerite Clarke, Lead Education Specialist, World Bank

Marguerite Clarke is a World Bank Senior Education Specialist, currently based in New Delhi, India. She leads the Bank's work on learning and skills assessment and has more than 20 years of experience working with countries around the world to strengthen their education systems, including in the areas of 21st century skills and learning competencies, student assessment, high-stakes examinations, vocational education, and second chance education. She is currently Task Team Leader for the Nai Manzil (New Horizons) program in India, which provides second chance education and market-relevant skills training to minority youth who have dropped out of school. Prior to joining the Bank, Marguerite taught at universities in Australia and the United States and also worked as an elementary and secondary school teacher in Ireland and Japan. She received a national award for teaching from the Irish Department of Education. She has a PhD in Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation and is a member of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics' Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML) and former chair of its Task Force on Sustainable Development Goal 4.1 ("By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes").

	<p>Judith Herbertson, Director of the Education, Gender and Equality Directorate, FCDO</p> <p>Judith Herbertson is the Head of Girls' Education Department at UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Judith has held previous roles in embassies and high commissions overseas, in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Sudan and Pakistan, as well as in the UK. She joined the Department for International Development in 2003.</p>
	<p>Dr Rachel Hinton, Global Education Research Lead, FCDO</p> <p>Rachel Hinton is the Lead for Global Education Research at FCDO, and a visiting Fellow of Practice at the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford. At FCDO Rachel grew a portfolio of research including RISE, EdTech, THRIVE on ECD, DeliverEd and the What Works Hub. She currently serves on the Secretariat for the Global Evidence Education Advisory Panel, which documents best practice of 'what works' to combat the global learning crisis. In 2014, she established the Building Evidence in Education global group with the World Bank, USAID, and the UN, to improve standards of research in the sector. She co-designed the joint World Bank, FCDO, and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation EdTech programme on the use of technology in education, including work with the BETER group to coordinate efforts to collect data on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education.</p> <p>Previously, Rachel served as the senior human development adviser for DFID in Ghana (2009-12), Western Balkans (2006-09) and Nepal (2001). She took a secondment to UNICEF in New York (2005).</p> <p>As a lecturer at the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh (1996-2000), she established new courses on refugees and South Asia and pioneered the Lacuna visual anthropology initiative. In Kenya, she taught gender relations at Kenyatta University, Nairobi (1997). Rachel serves on the Board of STIR Education, and she is an Advisory Member for the Brookings Institution Scaling Initiative.</p>

	<p>Joyce Poan, Programme Specialist & Chief of Education, UNESCO</p> <p>Joyce joined the UNESCO's New Delhi Office in October 2021 as Education Programme Specialist and Chief of Education to lead and manage the Organization's objective of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all, in Bhutan, India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka.</p> <p>Prior to New Delhi and since 2002, Joyce was with UNESCO at its Headquarters in Paris and worked on the Education Sector's priorities, including the Global Citizenship Education programme and thematic areas such as peace and human rights education, education for international understanding, nationalism, and prevention of violent extremism. Joyce also managed relations with UNESCO's external partners and Field Offices, and its Education Institutes and Centers.</p> <p>Joyce was also involved in UNESCO's initiative on Education and Culture together to advance the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals); on the progress to achieve SDG Target 4.7 on Quality Education, and on the review of teachers' motivations, skills and readiness to teach Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development.</p> <p>Joyce comes from Indonesia and holds a master's degree in political science from the University of Houston, Texas (USA).</p>
	<p>Dr Suniti Sanwal, Head of the Department, Elementary Education, NCERT</p> <p>Suniti Punetha Sanwal, Ph.D., is a Professor at the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), bringing extensive expertise in education. As Department of Elementary Education Head, she leads initiatives related to curriculum development and educational research. Their work history includes significant contributions to the field of education.</p> <p>During her tenure at NCERT, her responsibilities included mentoring students, conducting research, and contributing to policy implementation within the educational sector. Her contributions supported NCERT's goals in shaping educational standards and practices.</p> <p>Building on experience at NCERT, Suniti previously served as an Assistant Professor at Govind Ballabh Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, where she contributed to teaching and research activities. Prior to this, she worked as a Research Assistant at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences.</p> <p>Suniti's academic background includes a Bachelor of Science from G. B. Pant University Of Agriculture & Technology, a Master of Science from Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University, and a Doctor of Philosophy from Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University</p>



Wilima Wadhwa, Director ASER Centre

Wilima Wadhwa has been Director of ASER Centre and, since July 2015, has taken over as Head of the Centre. She has been associated with the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) since its inception in 2005. She is the architect of the ASER survey and other primary research studies currently undertaken by ASER Centre.



Rukmini Banerji is the Chief Executive Officer of Pratham Education Foundation.

Rukmini Banerji was trained as an economist at St. Stephen's College (Delhi) and the Delhi School of Economics. She was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University (1981-83) and completed her PhD at the University of Chicago in 1991. Rukmini returned to India in 1996 and joined Pratham. Over the years, she has worked extensively in Pratham's education programs in rural and urban areas. Along with her teams, she has played a major role in designing and supporting large scale partnerships with state governments in India, for improving children's learning outcomes. Rukmini led Pratham's research and assessment efforts including the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) exercise from 2005 to 2014. Since 2015, she has been the CEO of Pratham.

In 2008, Rukmini received the Maulana Abul Kalam Shiksha Puraskar by the Government of Bihar, India. She was the first recipient of this award. In 2021, Rukmini was awarded the Yidan Prize for Education Development.

Originally from Bihar, she is now based between New Delhi and Pune. Rukmini writes frequently on education in both Hindi and English dailies in India and enjoys writing books and stories for children.



Shaveta Sharma-Kukreja, CEO & MD, Central Square Foundation

Shaveta is the CEO, Managing Director and Advisory Board Member at Central Square Foundation. She has been part of the founding team at CSF since 2012.

Shaveta leads CSF's work on FLN (Foundational Literacy & Numeracy), Early Childhood Education (ECE), EdTech and School Governance and oversees the organisation's institution building. She is passionate to bring to life CSF's vision of quality learning for all children and government-led system reform for scale and sustainability.

Shaveta is on the advisory board of Language and Learning Foundation (LLF), Madhi Foundation and Saarthi Education. She is also on the advisory board of India Leaders for Social Sector (ILSS) in line with her commitment for high-quality leadership for the social sector. Another passion area for her is gender, and she is a founding mentor to The Udaiti Foundation that is working on women economic empowerment.

Prior to CSF, she worked at The Boston Consulting Group and Citibank. She has also been a visiting faculty member in the Human Resources and Organizational Behavior disciplines at many business schools. Shaveta earned her bachelor's degree in Economics from Shri Ram College of Commerce, University of Delhi, and holds an MBA in Management from IIM, Bangalore.



Dhir Jhingran, Founder-Director, Language and Learning Foundation

Dr. Dhir Jhingran, a former IAS officer from the 1986 batch, is the Founder & Executive Director of Language and Learning Foundation (LLF), a non-profit focused on improving students' foundational learning at scale. LLF works closely with the national and state governments to support systemic reform in primary education at scale.

Dhir has worked in the primary education sector for over 30 years, within and outside the Government. Within the Government, as an officer of the Indian Administrative Service, Dhir has served in policy-making roles in the Ministry of Education at the national level.

In Assam, he was Project Director of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Mission Director of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan as well as Principal Secretary, Education.

He has also handled several other profiles, such as Senior Advisor to UNICEF India, Advisor to the Ministry of Education in Nepal, Asia Regional Director and Chief Program Officer with Room to Read. He has made significant contributions to the development and implementation of early grade reading programs in several countries in Asia and Africa as well as first language-based multilingual education programs in several states in India.

Dhir is a member of the National Steering Committee for the development of National Curriculum Framework. He also conducts an education module at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie for IAS officers at different stages in their careers.

Dhir has authored three books in primary education based on empirical research and has contributed to several books and journals. Dhir holds a master's in economics and a PhD in Education.



GEEAP
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