

# Pre-FLEX

## Building Foundations for Learning in India: Adaptable Lessons for Africa

### Concept Note

**Date:** 14 July 2026

**Venue:** Lilongwe, Malawi

#### Background

Across Africa, governments are strengthening their focus on foundational learning as a national priority for long-term economic development and improved human capital outcomes. Countries are reforming their early childhood education systems, rolling out competency-based curricula, upgrading teacher professional development, and introducing new assessment strategies. Yet a central challenge persists: how to design and implement large-scale, coherent reforms that improve learning outcomes consistently across diverse and resource-constrained contexts.

India's recent journey offers a powerful and highly relevant example of foundational learning reform for African Ministries of Education. Following the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020,<sup>i</sup> India introduced a unified vision for learning from ages 3 to 8, bringing together early childhood education and early primary under a common framework—the National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage (NCF-FS). Complemented by the nationwide National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat Mission),<sup>ii</sup> this reform aligned policy, curriculum, pedagogy, teacher capacity development, assessment systems, community engagement, and governance mechanisms into a single, coordinated effort to improve foundational learning at scale.

Despite the disruptions caused by COVID-19, India has demonstrated notable recovery in learning outcomes. The national achievement survey<sup>iii</sup> conducted by the Government of India as well as the Annual Status of Education Report 2024 (a nationwide rural household sample survey) showed steady improvements in reading and arithmetic proficiency in early grades, both in language and mathematics, with government schools surpassing private schools in terms of learning recovery.<sup>iv</sup>

India's context—marked by multiple languages, varied teacher capacity, rural–urban divides, and uneven resource allocation—mirrors many conditions faced by African countries. Its experience demonstrates how a large and decentralized system can pursue systemic coherence while maintaining state-level flexibility; how multilingual teaching and learning materials can be scaled up cost-effectively, and how structured pedagogy, teacher support, governance structures, community engagement, and data systems can be aligned to drive learning improvements.

For FLEX, hosted by Malawi on 15-17 July 2026, India offers a particularly rich case and adaptable lessons for African countries. African ministries are looking not for perfect models, but for credible, large-scale examples of systemic reform undertaken in comparable conditions. India's progress—along with its challenges and ongoing learning—provides practical insights into how countries can accelerate foundational learning through sustained political commitment, institutional alignment, and evidence-based implementation.

This note presents a dedicated Pre-FLEX event on India's reforms to give African governments a meaningful opportunity to engage with and learn from India's experience.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this one-day pre-FLEX learning exchange, tentatively set for 14 July 2026, is to deepen African countries' understanding of how India conceptualized and is operationalizing foundational learning reforms across a diverse, multilingual, and resource-constrained education system. The session aims to foster practical, peer-driven learning that helps African policymakers identify which aspects of India's journey may be adaptable to their own contexts.

Through presentations, moderated discussions, case examples, and structured reflection, participants to FLEX will explore how India strengthened the continuity between pre-primary and early primary education, developed a national curriculum framework for the foundational years, introduced structured pedagogy,

expanded multilingual learning resources, built teacher capacity at scale, leveraged digital platforms for support, mobilized communities around learning, and used assessment data to drive instructional and policy decisions.

The learning exchange is designed as a collaborative dialogue to support African governments in shaping or accelerating their own foundational learning strategies through relevant, South–South knowledge sharing.

By the end of the session, FLEX participants are expected to have:

- **A clearer understanding of India’s system-wide approach to foundational learning reform**, including the policy architecture, institutional arrangements, and implementation pathways that enabled progress.
- **Actionable insights on how elements of India’s experience may be adapted** to support ongoing reforms in African contexts, particularly in curriculum design, teacher development, multilingual instruction, and use of assessment data.
- **Strengthened South–South collaboration channels**, laying the groundwork for future technical exchanges, bilateral cooperation, and continued engagement during and beyond the FLEX conference.

### Practical Information

This learning exchange is being convened by the Ministry of Education, Malawi, with technical and organizational support from UNICEF and other education partners. The session forms part of the broader FLEX programme and is intended to enrich the engagement of participating governments through practical South–South learning ahead of the main conference.

All FLEX delegates, including the ministers, senior policymakers, development partners, researchers, practitioners, civil society leaders, and other education actors who make up the FLEX community—are warmly encouraged to attend this learning exchange. Attendance is voluntary and should be accommodated within existing travel plans, as no additional support will be provided for travel, flights, or accommodation beyond what has already been arranged for FLEX participation.

Participants will receive further information regarding venue details, session timings, and any preparatory materials closer to the date of the FLEX conference. For additional information, please contact:

- Director Lindiwe Chide, Department of Quality Assurance, Ministry of Education, Malawi (lichide@gmail.com)
- Joy Maler, Education Specialist UNICEF Malawi (kmaler@unicef.org)

---

<sup>i</sup> Ministry of Education, Government of India. (2026). National Education Policy [Web page] [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Ministry of Education, Government of India. (2026). NIPUN Bharat [Web page]. <https://dse.education.gov.in/nipun-bharat>

<sup>iii</sup> PARAKH, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). (2026). Rashtriya Sarvekshan (RS) 2024: Technical report. New Delhi: NCERT. [https://ncert.nic.in/parakh/pdf/PRS\\_2024\\_Technical\\_Report.pdf](https://ncert.nic.in/parakh/pdf/PRS_2024_Technical_Report.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024. [https://asercentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ASER\\_2024\\_Final-Report\\_13\\_2\\_24-1.pdf](https://asercentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ASER_2024_Final-Report_13_2_24-1.pdf)