

TERMS OF REFERENCE (ToR)

for

Engagement of an External Research Consultant/Agency for a Three-Year Study of the Kadam Bridge Education Programme for Out-of-School Children (OoSC)

Project: Kadam Project for Mainstreaming Out-of-School Children

Project Component: Project Research and Learning Study

Organisation: Humana People to People India (HPPI)

Deadline for Proposal Submission: 28 October 2026

Duration of Study: Three years [with yearly reporting and yearly renewal of the contract]

Geographical coverage: Sitapur, Balrampur and Shravasti districts, Uttar Pradesh; and Thane district, Maharashtra

This three-year research study will examine the functioning and effectiveness of the Kadam Programme across 100 Special Training Centres (STCs) in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, assessing children's learning outcomes, mainstreaming, retention and sustainability of learning gains. It will analyse the Kadam model, its core elements, programme content and implementation processes, including multilingual approaches, mainstreaming pathways and government linkages. The study will identify what works, what does not, and factors influencing outcomes, while generating programme-level case studies, process documentation, evidence-based Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and recommendations for programme improvement and wider sector learning. HPPI will organise a final dissemination event to share the findings with key stakeholders.

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1. Background Summary

Humana People to People India (HPPI) is a development organisation registered as a not-for-profit company under section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956, since May 1998. HPPI currently works in multi-domains of school and teacher education, community development, including women empowerment, health and environment, with an overall reach of 1.52 million people through 130 projects in 98 districts of 16 states with the support of 70 partners. The educational component of HPPI encompasses interventions, including:

- Kadam bridge education programme for mainstreaming of out-of-school children (OoSC) in Primary schools.
- Kadam+ learning enhancement programme for primary in-school children.
- Samarth targeted education intervention for secondary school children.
- Sambhavana extended programme for upper primary grade children.
- NeTT programme for enhancement of pre-service teacher training capacity of State institutions (DIETs/CTE).
- NeTT+ programme for enhancement of the role played by DIETs in the government school system.

HPPI has extensive experience in designing and implementing bridge education programmes that have reached 251,000 out-of-school children and successfully mainstreamed 212,000 children in schools in 10 states through its Kadam Programme.

Kadam addresses the educational needs of out-of-school children by bridging their learning gaps before integration into formal schools at age-appropriate grades. The bridge course covers subject competencies, including foundational literacy and numeracy and life skills, in addition to self-assessment and formative assessment processes, TRIO peer learning, MIS tracking, and parental and community engagement. Kadam bridges learning gaps through 10 learning steps encompassing grades 1-5 and 11 theme headlines, combining subject competencies and life skills with self-paced, peer learning and activity-based approaches.

Kadam Project for Mainstreaming Out-of-School Children

The project aims to bridge the learning gap and mainstream Out-of-School Children (OoSC) aged 7–11 years into government primary schools. It includes using the government’s official list of out-of-school children, establishing Kadam special training centres (STCs) at schools, conducting Kadam bridge course through trained community-level facilitators, and subsequently mainstreaming them into formal schooling. The project commenced in January 2026, scheduled to be implemented in a span of a 39-month period (3 months of start-up and 36 months of project implementation), and will reach approximately 9,000 children across four districts, including three districts in Uttar Pradesh (Sitapur, Shravasti and Balrampur) and one district in Maharashtra (Thane).

The objectives of the project are:

1. To enable 9,000 Out-of-School Children (OoSC) aged 7–11 years across four districts in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra to attain grade-specific learning levels and enrol in and retain in formal Government primary schools.

2. To enhance academic resources in 100 government primary schools in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra through the establishment of a children's library in each school.
3. To demonstrate a model approach and good practices for identifying, educating, mainstreaming and retaining Out-of-School Children (OoSC) to Government Education Officials in the four target districts, State Education Department officials of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, and other stakeholders working in the area of mainstreaming OoSC.

The key activities involved in implementing this project are:

- Setting up Kadam 100 STCs across Government Primary Schools, including 50 in Sitapur, 10 in Balrampur, 15 in Shravasti, and 25 in Thane.
- Establishing functional libraries in those 100 STCs.
- Recruiting and training programme staff, including teachers.
- Validating the names of out-of-school children through household-level surveys and enrolment verification, and adding the names of any children missed from the government lists.
- Implementing a nine-month bridge course focused on grade-appropriate learning in four subjects: Hindi, Mathematics, English and Environmental Studies, alongside life skills development.
- Following up with mainstreamed children and their schoolteachers to support continued enrolment and retention.

The key partners and stakeholders involved in the Kadam project include:

- a. Humana People to People India (HPPI)
- b. Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (SDTT)
- c. Government of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra: State Department of School Education (DSE), which are nodal state units responsible for school education, as well as district and block education offices and schools of intervention.
- d. Children, parents and community engaged in the project
- e. Technical Partners
 - Technical Experts (e.g., for different components of library, assessment, research study, etc.), including individual consultants and private sector non-profits or social organisations
 - Co-implementing partners under state agreements, including non-profits working in partnership with the states in school education in geographies where the Kadam project is being implemented.
 - Advocacy Partners, including non-profits that have established credentials in working with state governments in education policy and systemic matters.

Project Outcome Indicators

Sr. No	Key Performance Indicators	Indicator Type	Weight ages	Overall Targets	Year-1 Targets* Jan-Mar 2026	Year-2 Targets Apr 2026-Mar 2027	Year-3 Targets Apr 2027-Mar 2028	Year -4 Targets Apr 2028-Mar 2029
1	Functional Kadam Special Training Centres (STCs) established across 100 Government Schools	Activity	10%	100	100	100	100	100
2	OoSC completing Kadam Bridge Programme	Output	10%	9,000		3,000	3,000	3,000
3	Functional libraries in schools	Output	15%	100		100	100	100
4	Out-of-school children enrolled who show at least two grade-level improvements in learning outcomes after support from the Kadam Bridge Programme**.	Outcome	20%	80%		70%	80%	80%
5	OoSC mainstreamed into formal classrooms after completing the Kadam Bridge Programme.	Outcome	15%	100%		100%	100%	100%
6	OoSC mainstreamed through the Kadam bridge programme who are retained in formal schools at the start of the subsequent academic session.	Outcome	15%	80%			80%	80%

*Here Year 1 refers to the year when the project started. The research study will start in Year 2 of the project.

** Learning outcomes are assessed through baseline and endline assessments. Grade-level improvement will reflect the extent to which children bridge learning gaps against age-appropriate grade expectations. The Consultant/Agency may conduct a sample survey to verify the data.

Theory Of Change

A Theory of Change (TOC) document can be seen in Annexure A, includes both short- and longer-term objectives and also reflects the inputs and outputs leading to changes at different levels, such as individuals, organisations, systems and communities, and how it promotes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities.

2. Scope of the Consultancy

HPPI proposes a three-year mixed-methods study across 100 Special Training Centres (STCs) in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. The study will assess implementation and learning outcomes, analyse the processes of the Kadam model and its core elements, and examine children's transition to formal schooling and the sustainability of learning gains.

- Analyse available baseline and endline assessment data and verify findings through a sample survey; assess implementation and track children's educational trajectories after mainstreaming.
- Examine learning sustainability, enrolment, attendance and retention, and identify the child-, family-, school- and system-level factors that support or constrain continued education.
- Analyse the Kadam model, including its core elements, programme content, implementation processes and the interaction between components; identify practices that work, those that do not, and the conditions shaping their effectiveness.
- Examine multilingual dimensions of bridge education, including how children's home languages and the language of instruction influence participation, learning and transition to government schools.
- Analyse pathways and barriers to mainstreaming, including documentation, age-appropriate grade placement, school readiness, school acceptance, continuity, attendance and retention.
- Examine how linkages with government institutions at school, block, district and state levels enable or constrain identification, bridge education, mainstreaming and retention, and how the Kadam model engages with this ecosystem.
- Generate actionable evidence for HPPI, Tata Trusts and relevant government stakeholders to improve programme delivery and strengthen the transition from bridge education to formal schooling. The study should also produce programme-level case studies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), supported by the findings.

Time period of the study: November 2026- April 2029

The geographical scope of the evaluation is 2 states. The sampling frame would be 3000 children annually, from which the respective sample has to be decided. The sample for the longitudinal study component will be carried forward from the respective year of selection in years 1 and 2 to subsequent years. The number includes:

1. Uttar Pradesh – Sitapur (1500), Balrampur (300) and Shravasti (450)
2. Maharashtra – Thane (750)

The sample size for the study would be decided based on the selected research design.

3. Purpose and Objectives of the Consultancy

The purpose of this consultancy is to generate actionable evidence on the effectiveness and implementation of the Kadam Bridge Programme, including children's learning, mainstreaming, retention and sustained progress after entry into formal schooling. The study will also analyse how the Kadam model operates in practice and what can be learned for programme improvement and potential adaptation or scale.

The design should combine annual cohort analysis, relevant socio-economic and demographic comparisons, tracking of mainstreamed children, and longitudinal follow-up of a randomly selected sample. It should distinguish clearly between observed outcomes, plausible contributions of programme components and any causal claims supported by the design.

The study should generate contextual evidence to guide programme decisions, explain children's educational trajectories after the Bridge Course, and identify implications for practice and the wider bridge education sector.

Objectives of the Study

The study will aim to:

- Assess annual learning outcomes of children participating in the Kadam Bridge Programme using available baseline and endline assessment data, with a small sample survey to verify the baseline-endline data.
- Examine the functioning of the STCs, Bridge Course and Library components across the 100 centres.
- Analyse socio-economic and demographic variations in learning outcomes and mainstreaming, including selected comparisons by gender and geography.
- Track the mainstreaming and subsequent retention of all mainstreamed children after completing the programme in Years 1 and 2.
- Conduct a longitudinal study of a randomly selected sample of children to examine the sustainability of learning gains and factors influencing continued enrolment, attendance and learning experience after mainstreaming.
- Examine how specific Kadam components, individually and in combination, are associated with academic performance, life skills, successful transition to formal schooling and sustainability of learning gains.
- Test the programme's Theory of Change against available evidence, examining the pathways from implementation to learning, mainstreaming, retention and sustained gains, and identifying assumptions or links that are not adequately supported.
- Identify practical recommendations to improve programme implementation, mainstreaming and post-mainstreaming support, and develop programme-level case studies and evidence-based SOPs.

4. Intended Users and Uses

The intended users and uses of the study are listed below:

For HPPI

- Guide strategic decisions to refine programme implementation.
- Assess the feasibility of scaling up the programme based on evidence.

For Funding Partner (Tata Trusts)

- Study the implementation and effectiveness programme for further improvements.

- Inform decisions about continued or future funding.

For State Governments

- Assess programme outcomes for potential adoption at a broader scale.
- Inform policy adjustments to support or integrate the programme.

For Other Stakeholders (Partners and Researchers)

- Evaluate the merit and value of the programme in achieving its goals.
- Identify areas for improvement to enhance programme effectiveness.
- Generate knowledge to inform similar initiatives and contribute to the broader field.

5. Principles and Approach Guiding the Study

- **Principles:** Objectivity, transparency, ethical research, and sensitivity to gender, culture and children's circumstances.
- **Approach:** A mixed-methods, theory-based approach combining learning outcome data with qualitative evidence on programme implementation, mainstreaming, retention and sustainability. Stakeholder engagement will inform interpretation of findings and support practical recommendations for programme improvement.

6. Major Research Questions and Methodology

Major Research Questions:

- Learning outcomes: What learning gains are observed across annual cohorts, and how do outcomes vary by initial learning level, gender, socio-economic circumstances and geography?
- Programme functioning: How effectively are the STCs, Bridge Course and Library components functioning, and what factors support children's learning?
- Mainstreaming and retention: Are children mainstreamed into formal schools and retained in subsequent academic sessions? What factors influence their continued participation?
- Sustainability of learning gains: Do children sustain their learning after mainstreaming, and what family, school and contextual factors influence their progress?
- Theory of Change: To what extent are the expected pathways from programme implementation to learning outcomes, mainstreaming, retention and sustained learning gains supported by evidence?
- Programme improvement: What changes could strengthen implementation, mainstreaming, retention and post-mainstreaming support?
- Kadam model and processes: Which core elements and implementation processes appear to contribute to outcomes, what works less well, and under what conditions?
- Language and inclusion: How do children's language backgrounds and the language of instruction affect participation, learning and mainstreaming?
- Government ecosystem: Which school-, block-, district- and state-level relationships support or hinder identification, transition and retention?
- Learning for the sector: What lessons from the Kadam model may be relevant to other bridge education programmes, and what adaptations would be needed?

Methodology

- The Consultant/Agency will propose a mixed-methods design combining analysis of learning assessments and programme data with interviews, observations, document review and case studies, as appropriate. Capture perspectives of children, teachers, parents, community members, programme staff and government stakeholders, while applying age-appropriate, ethical and safeguarding procedures.
- Quantitative analysis will examine annual learning outcomes using available project baseline and endline data with a small sample survey to verify baseline-endline data, alongside socio-economic and demographic variations, including comparisons by gender and geography. The study will also assess the functioning of STCs, Bridge Course and Library components across all 100 centres.
- All children mainstreamed after completing the programme in Years 1 and 2 will be tracked to examine their enrolment and retention. A randomly selected sample will be followed longitudinally to assess the sustainability of learning gains and factors influencing continued enrolment, attendance and learning.
- The Consultant/Agency will propose appropriate methods to examine the contribution of specific Kadam components to academic performance and life skills development, based on available data and suitable assessment tools.
- The research design, sampling strategies, tools and analytical methods must align with the study objectives, research questions, available data, ethical requirements, budget and three-year timeline. Any causal analysis should be undertaken, as supported by an appropriate research design and adequate data.
- The Consultant/Agency will map the Theory of Change against research questions, indicators and data sources. Findings will identify supported pathways, gaps and factors influencing outcomes.
- Synthesise findings into practical recommendations for programme improvement, mainstreaming, retention and post-mainstreaming support. Analysis of implementation processes and lessons, develop programme-level case studies, and propose SOPs where evidence supports them. Distinguish transferable lessons from practices that depend on local context.

7. Roles and Responsibilities of Consultant/Agency

The Consultant/Agency will lead the research design, tool development, fieldwork, data management, analysis, process documentation and reporting. HPPI will facilitate access to available programme data, relevant stakeholders and study locations, including schools hosting STCs, and will review deliverables in consultation with Tata Trusts. The Consultant/Agency must independently report findings, including implementation gaps and study limitations.

8. Key Deliverables from the Consultant/Agency

1. **Ethics Approval:** Obtain required ethics approval, like IRB certification, before commencing research involving children. Follow consent, safeguarding and data protection requirements.
2. **Inception Report:** Present the research design, methodology, sampling strategy, research questions, data analysis plan, research tools and detailed work plan.

3. **Research Tools and Tracking Framework:** Finalise tools to assess STC, Bridge Course and functioning of library; analyse relevant socio-economic and demographic variations; track children mainstreamed in Years 1 and 2; and conduct longitudinal follow-up on learning sustainability. Include tools for process documentation (SOP) and, where relevant, multilingual practices, linkages with government and post-mainstreaming support.
4. **Data Collection and Analysis:** Collect, consolidate and analyse relevant quantitative and qualitative data, including available baseline and endline assessments with a small sample survey to verify baseline-endline data, programme records and follow-up information.
5. **Annual Research Reports:** Report annual findings on learning outcomes, programme functioning, mainstreaming, retention and available longitudinal evidence. Include emerging explanations of what works, what does not, implementation constraints and recommendations for the next programme cycle.
6. **Progress Updates:** Share regular updates on progress, emerging findings, data quality and fieldwork challenges.
7. **Draft Final Report:** Present consolidated findings, analysis, study limitations and practical recommendations across the three-year study. Present findings against the Theory of Change, identifying supported pathways, gaps and factors influencing outcomes in the annual and final reports.
8. **Findings Validation:** Present findings to HPPI and relevant stakeholders. Incorporate agreed feedback into the final report.
9. **Final Report and Research Data:** Submit the final report, executive summary, recommendations, raw and cleaned datasets, research tools, analysis files and dissemination materials. Include a synthesis of the Kadam model and its core elements, programme-level case studies, lessons on multilingual education and mainstreaming, analysis of government-system linkages, and process documentation/ SOPs.
10. **Dissemination Support:** Prepare a presentation and summary of findings for the final dissemination event organised by HPPI.
11. **Timeline and Reporting Standards:** Follow the agreed schedule. Submit the Year 1 report by 30 April 2027, Year 2 report by 30 April 2028 and Year 3 report by 30 April 2029. All reports must be clear, objective, evidence-based and actionable.

Reporting Requirements

- **Format:** Submit all reports electronically in an agreed format.
- **Dissemination Materials:** Provide an executive summary, key findings and presentation materials for stakeholder communication.
- **Recommendations:** Include clear, evidence-based and actionable recommendations for programme improvement.
- **Submission:** Submit reports and supporting research outputs to HPPI according to the agreed timeline.
- **Publication:** Obtain prior written approval from HPPI before publishing or sharing any information from or based on the study.

Contract Terms

The anticipated contract type is **service agreement**. Unless stated otherwise in the statement of the work, the contractor is responsible for providing equipment and/or supplies required to perform the services.

Continuation of the Contract: The consultancy will be reviewed annually. Renewal for Years 2 and 3 will depend on satisfactory performance, acceptance of deliverables and approval of the work plan of the subsequent year.

9. Estimated Timeline of Activities

Overall study period: November 2026–April 2029, with continuation subject to annual submission of an yearly report and annual renewal. The study is planned over three years, aligned with the April–March programme cycle. The Consultant/Agency's engagement will be reviewed annually, and continuation will depend on satisfactory performance and acceptance of deliverables.

Timeline	Key activities and deliverables
November 2026	Consultancy commences; review existing programme documents and baseline-endline tools and baseline data.
November–December 2026	Present and submit the inception report, including the research design, methodology, sampling strategy, tools and detailed work plan.
November–December 2026	Finalise tools with HPPI and begin field research and data analysis.
January 2027–February 2027	Assess programme functioning, analyse available learning data, conduct qualitative research and establish graduate tracking and the longitudinal sample.
March 2027–April 2027	Submit the draft Year 1 report, present to discuss and incorporate feedback and submit the final report by 30 April 2027.
May 2027	Annual performance review and decision on renewal for Year 2.
May 2027–April 2028	Conduct the second-year cohort study, track programme graduates and undertake longitudinal follow-up. Submit the final Year 2 report by 30 April 2028.
May 2028	Annual performance review and decision on renewal for Year 3.
May 2028–April 2029	Conduct the third-year cohort study, complete feasible longitudinal follow-ups, consolidate findings and submit the final research report by 30 April 2029.
April 2029	Complete final deliverables and close the consultancy by 30 April 2029. HPPI will manage the final dissemination event. The Consultant/Agency will provide the final report, presentation and other agreed dissemination materials in the event.

The Consultant/Agency will submit periodic progress updates and datasets, tools and analysis files as agreed with HPPI. The detailed schedule will be finalised during inception, taking into account the availability of endline data and the timing of children's mainstreaming.

10. Proposal Timeline

- **21st October 2026** - Release of the request for proposals
- **28th October 2026** - Completed proposals with **Subject line: Application for Engagement of an External Research Consultant/Agency for a Three-Year Study of the Kadam Bridge Education Programme for Out-of-School Children (OoSC)** should be delivered electronically by this date to careers@humana-india.org, copy to Abhishek Kumar, Lead-Teacher Education, HPPI (abhishek.humana@humana-india.org) & Ved Prakash Yadav, General Manager- HPPI, (v.prakash@humana-india.org)
- Interested Consultants/Agency are requested to submit the following documents:
 1. **Technical Proposal:** A proposal demonstrating the consultant's understanding of the assignment and outlining the proposed research approach, methodology and analytical framework for the three-year research study.
 2. **Research Methodology and Sampling Strategy:** Describe the annual cohort analysis, review of existing baseline and endline data, sample-based verification from Year 2, assessment of STCs and programme components, analysis of socio-economic and demographic variations, tracking of children mainstreamed in Years 1 and 2, and longitudinal follow-up of a randomly selected sample. Justify sample sizes, methods and analytical choices. Explain how the study will analyse the Kadam model, programme content, multilingual dimensions, mainstreaming pathways and government-system linkages, and how it will identify what works, what does not, and why. Include plans for programme-level case studies, process documentation / SOPs.
 3. **Work Plan and Timeline:** A detailed three-year timeline with clear milestones and deadlines for each stage, from inception and tool finalisation to fieldwork, data analysis, annual reporting, longitudinal follow-ups and final synthesis. The plan should align with the programme cycle and reporting deadlines specified in this ToR.
 4. **Consultant/Agency's Profile:** A brief profile of the consultant, including relevant qualifications, experience and expertise. Where a team is proposed, provide CVs of team members and specify their roles and responsibilities.
 5. **Relevant Experience:** Evidence of experience in similar assignments, particularly in education research, learning assessments, mixed-methods research, longitudinal studies, research involving children, and studies of school enrolment, mainstreaming and retention.
 6. **Financial Proposal:** A detailed year-wise budget, inclusive of applicable taxes, covering:
 - Professional fees.
 - Travel, fieldwork, data collection and related logistics.
 - Data management, analysis, software and other research-related costs.
 - Any additional or third-party costs, with justification.
 - Total cost for the three-year research study.
 - Proposed payment milestones linked to agreed deliverables.
 - The financial proposal must remain within the consultancy budget ceiling specified in this ToR.
 7. **Risk Management and Contingency Plan:** Identification of potential risks, including delays in data availability, difficulties accessing schools or centres, challenges in tracking children after mainstreaming, participant attrition and stakeholder availability. The

Consultant/Agency should propose practical mitigation measures to ensure research quality and timely delivery.

8. Ethics, Safeguarding and Data Protection: A brief statement describing how the Consultant/Agency will address informed consent and child assent, as applicable, safeguarding, confidentiality, secure data management and the protection of children's identities. The Consultant/Agency should also explain the proposed arrangements for obtaining any required ethics approval.
9. Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest: A declaration confirming that the Consultant/Agency has disclosed any actual or potential conflicts of interest and will maintain confidentiality throughout the assignment. Proposals and supporting documents will be treated as confidential and used solely for evaluating submissions.

- **10 November 2026- Final decision announcement and offerors notified**

10. Budget Ceiling

Total consultancy budget ceiling for 3 years: ₹30,00,000, inclusive of applicable taxes

We expect the Consultant/Agency to develop a proposal based on your experiences and competencies to meet as many of our expectations as possible within the budget frame.

11. Adherence to HPPI policies

The Consultant/Agency must comply with HPPI policies on safeguarding, anti-bribery and corruption, anti-fraud and data privacy, or with its own equivalent policies if they exist and if agreed with HPPI. The applicant must observe and uphold ethical standards throughout the assignment and ensure that any suppliers comply with applicable national and International Labour Organisation standards, respect basic social rights and working conditions, and do not use child labour or other exploitative practices.

Appendix A: Theory of Change | Kadam Project for Mainstreaming Out-of-School Children

