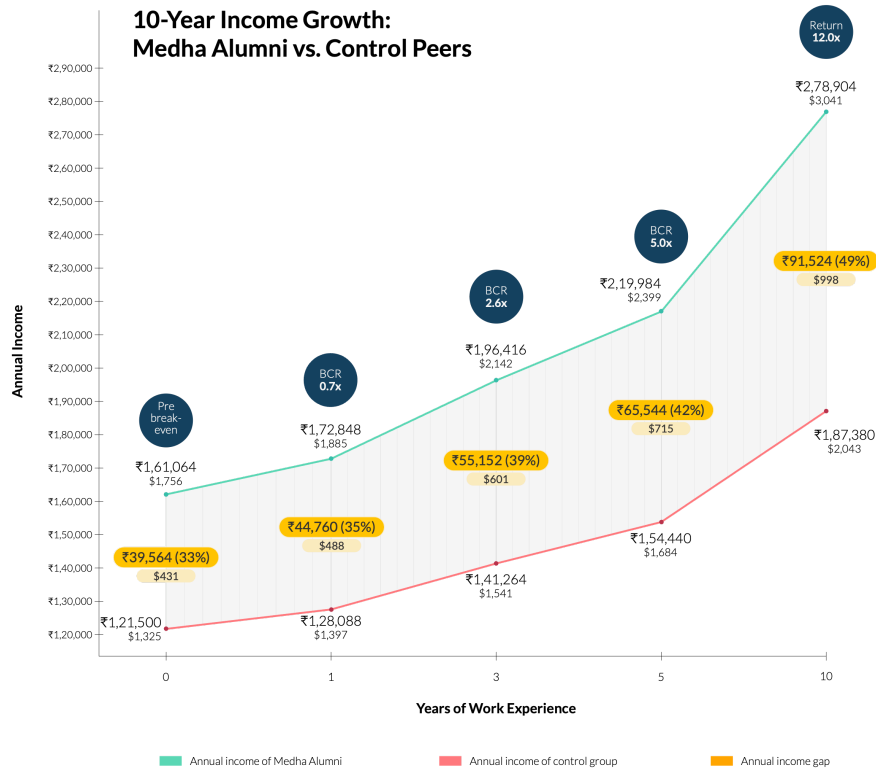


ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE FOR INDIA'S GEN Z

About Medha – 2026

Medha enables India's Gen Z to build rewarding careers of their choice. Income growth is one key outcome:



Modeled earnings trajectories from respondents who reported income in the RCT endline survey. Methodology in the [technical appendix](#).

A [randomized controlled trial](#) found that Medha alumni begin their careers earning 68% more than comparable peers and potentially experience faster income growth over time. Early differences in career readiness and work experience can compound into large lifetime income gains.

Key Impact Results (all significant at the 5% or 10% level)

39%

more likely to be in education, employment, or training

(+13.6 percentage points)



39%

more likely to be employed

(+9.5 percentage points)



69%

more likely to earn more than ₹15,000/month (\$167)

(+4.7 percentage points)



India's Youth Moment

Over the next decade, [more than 100 million young people will enter India's workforce](#)—creating a once-in-a-generation opportunity for economic growth and mobility. Yet for many—especially youth from public educational institutions and young women—this opportunity remains difficult to seize ([ILO, 2024](#)).

Despite rising school and college enrollment, too many young people transition from education into unstable, low-paid, low-quality work – or, worse, into prolonged periods of complete disengagement from the workforce. As a result, educational credentials often fail to translate into sustained employment, upward mobility, or [economic independence](#).

The challenge is particularly acute for young women. In 2022, [48.4% of young women were not in employment, education, or training \(NEET\)](#)—a rate nearly five times higher than that of young men ([ILO & IHD, 2024](#)). Improving the transition from education to work for young women is therefore not only a question of equity but a critical challenge for India's long-term economic growth.

What Actually Changes Career Trajectories

Evidence suggests that skills alone do not create careers. Young people are most likely to succeed when skill development is combined with career guidance, mentorship, and workplace experience ([OECD, 2025](#)).

The years immediately after leaving school are especially consequential. Early labor market participation and job quality shape long-term earnings, and small early differences can compound over time ([Chetty et al., 2020](#)).

Yet many programs intervene too late or too narrowly, focusing on short-term job placement rather than the broader transition from education to careers ([McKinsey Global Institute, 2013](#)).

Medha's core insight follows directly: **career preparedness must begin before young people leave formal education and continue through the first years of work**. When [skill-building, guidance, and work experience are embedded in education systems](#), young people are more likely to remain engaged, employed, and positioned for long-term career success.

Medha's Model: Simple, Evidence-Backed, Built for Systems

Medha applies this insight through a [practical, scalable model](#) that builds skills, provides guidance, and enables early work experience through the systems that already reach young people. Rather than treating career support as a standalone intervention, Medha [embeds career preparedness within public schools, vocational and technical institutions, and colleges](#)—ensuring young people receive the right support at the right moments.





Building Career Readiness and Foundational Skills



Bridging the Information Gap Between Education and Industry



Supporting Early-Career Persistence and Mobility

At its core, Medha’s model is anchored in three mutually reinforcing elements:

- **Building Career Readiness and Foundational Skills**
Students develop transferable skills—communication, collaboration, problem solving, and digital competency—through experiential learning and guided reflection.
- **Bridging the Information Gap Between Education and Industry**
Internships, apprenticeships, and employer partnerships provide early workplace exposure, professional networks, and opportunities to earn.
- **Supporting Early-Career Persistence and Mobility**
Alumni mentorship and networks help young professionals navigate the first years of work, when career trajectories are fragile and have a big impact on future success.

Crucially, Medha is designed to operate within public systems. By working with state governments as a technical and implementation partner, Medha integrates career preparedness directly into existing education structures—creating a pathway to reach millions of young people through institutions that already operate at scale.

Proof It Works: Evidence of Impact and Economic Returns

Medha’s approach is supported by rigorous evidence showing that strengthening skills, guidance, and early work experience leads to meaningful improvements in education-to-career outcomes.

A [randomized controlled trial \(RCT\) by J-PAL](#) found that Medha alumni experience stronger education-to-career transitions (all findings below are statistically significant at the 5% or 10% level):

- **Improved productive pathways:** Alumni were 13.6 percentage points more likely to be in education, employment, or training (EET), and 14.8 percentage points more likely among women (39% and 46% relative gains, respectively).



- **Increased employment:** Among non-students, **32.5% of Medha alumni were employed, compared with 24% of their peers**, a 9.5 percentage point and 39% relative increase.
- **Crossing key income thresholds:** Alumni were **69% more likely to earn at least ₹15,000 per month (\$165)**, a meaningful benchmark in India's early-career labor market (11.4% vs. 6.7%).
- **Higher average income:** Alumni earned **₹1,799 (\$20) more per month on average – a 68% income gain over comparable peers**.

ECONOMIC RETURNS AND COST-EFFECTIVENESS

Early improvements in employment and earnings can generate substantial economic returns over time. Using the randomized trial's [intent-to-treat income estimate](#), Medha modeled how these income differences translate into earnings gains and compared them with the program's cost to [estimate benefit-cost ratios](#) under various projection methods and sensitivity scenarios.

Scenario	Core Assumption	20-Year Income Gain	Benefit-Cost Ratio
Projection A Conservative Estimate	Income gap remains constant over time	₹269,034 (\$2,934)	9.8×
Projection B Structural Scenario	Employment, wage effects, and experience growth	₹353,713 (\$3,858)	12.9×
Projection C Upper Bound	Earnings gap widens with experience	₹780,937 (\$8,516)	28.4×

Full details are provided in the accompanying [Technical Appendix: Modeling the Long-Term Economic Returns and Cost-Effectiveness of Medha](#).

Under the central conservative estimate, **every \$1 invested in Medha generates approximately \$10 in additional lifetime earnings for participants**. Program costs are also recovered quickly, with projected income gains exceeding program costs within **~1.3 years of participants' working lives**.

While projections help illustrate how early career advantages can compound over time, their real significance lies in the lives they change. Alumni like [Shivam](#), who now runs his own design studio supporting local artists, and [Rukmani](#), who began working while still studying, show how early career support can translate into sustained economic independence.

Scaling What Works: From Proven Model to System Adoption

Medha's next phase focuses on converting its proven model into durable system-level change — so that stronger education-to-work transitions become the norm rather than the exception.



SCALING THROUGH PUBLIC SYSTEMS

Medha's system-native design enables scale through government partnerships. By embedding career preparedness within existing public education institutions, Medha strengthens the effectiveness of government investments in education and skills development.

Rather than creating parallel delivery systems, Medha works with state governments as a [technical and implementation partner](#)—integrating career readiness, workplace experience, and employer connections directly into secondary, vocational, technical, and higher education systems.

Today, Medha partners with **five state governments and nine education departments, reaching approximately 200,000 students each year and engaging more than 4,000 faculty members.** These partnerships create a credible pathway to reaching millions of young people as models are adopted and expanded within public systems.

COMPLEMENTING SUPPLY WITH DEMAND-SIDE CHANGE

Improving youth [preparedness alone is not sufficient](#) if hiring systems remain inaccessible to first-generation professionals. Medha therefore works with companies and labor-market intermediaries to improve hiring, onboarding, and early retention practices—helping employers identify and support capable young professionals from underrepresented backgrounds.

By strengthening both the supply of prepared youth and the demand for their talent, Medha helps create pathways to opportunity that persist beyond individual program cohorts.

ENABLING SCALE THROUGH DATA, TECHNOLOGY, AND LEARNING

As Medha scales, it continues to invest in [data, technology, and learning systems](#) to ensure quality keeps pace with reach. This includes strengthening monitoring and learning infrastructure, supporting implementation fidelity across contexts, and serving as a [learning implementer](#) alongside governments and ecosystem partners.

The Organization Behind the Work

Founded in 2011, Medha has grown from a pilot program with 11 young women in Lucknow into a trusted partner to five state governments, hundreds of educational institutions, and thousands of companies—while maintaining a strong focus on evidence, execution, and learning. Today, Medha operates with nearly [200 full-time team members](#) across 10 regional offices in North and Eastern India, enabling deep local engagement and effective delivery at scale.





[Medha has been supported by](#) leading corporate and philanthropic partners, including [JP Morgan](#), the [Michael & Susan Dell Foundation](#), and the [Mulago Foundation](#), and its founders have been recognized by [Ashoka](#) and [Echoing Green](#).

More about Medha's team, partners, and governance is available on our [website](#).

An Invitation to Partner

Medha seeks long-term partners committed to systems-level change—embedding career preparedness within public education systems, shaping labor market practices, and strengthening pathways from education to work at scale. Achieving this vision requires sustained partnership, shared learning, and a willingness to work within complexity.

As Medha enters its next phase—scaling proven models, deepening system partnerships, and shaping demand for youth talent—we [invite aligned partners](#) to join us as we work to get India's Gen Z into rewarding careers of their choice and achieve economic independence.

