

# All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development



ALL CHILDREN READING:

A GRAND CHALLENGE FOR DEVELOPMENT

# 2020 Annual Report



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**World Vision** 

**Australian Aid** 



# Letter from the Founding Partners

At [All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development](#), we believed in the power of EdTech long before the COVID-19 pandemic made it a global necessity. Since our inception in 2011, our mission has been to source, test and scale EdTech to improve reading outcomes for marginalized children in low-resource contexts. With this background—and dozens of competitions yielding EdTech solutions and approaches to support children both in and out school—we were prepared in March 2020 when global school closures left Ministries of Education, NGOs, and others searching for solutions to help mitigate education lapses. Innovations like the free [Global Digital Library](#) of children’s books in more than 70 languages, [Bloom software](#) to easily create books in any language, [sign language storybooks](#), and others have supported learning opportunities for children, including those with disabilities, during the global health crisis, and will remain relevant long after the pandemic.

To guide our investments, ACR GCD also finalized a Results Framework and Learning Agenda, operationalizing the partnership’s shift toward solutions ready to transition to scale, and focused on addressing priority country-specific challenges, providing targeted technical assistance to awardees, and better serving our key communities of EdTech solvers, Ministries of Education, education implementers, and partners.

In this report, we highlight how the work of our global innovators has helped meet the education needs of children during COVID-19, as well as our ongoing competitions and programming to support children with evidence-based EdTech solutions—for language, literacy and learning—both at home and at school.

We thank each member of our community, including collaborators, innovators, and others, who in 2020 have broadened the reach of EdTech solutions to support literacy and learning for all children around the globe. In 2021, we look forward to working with existing and new partners toward the collective global goal of all children reading.







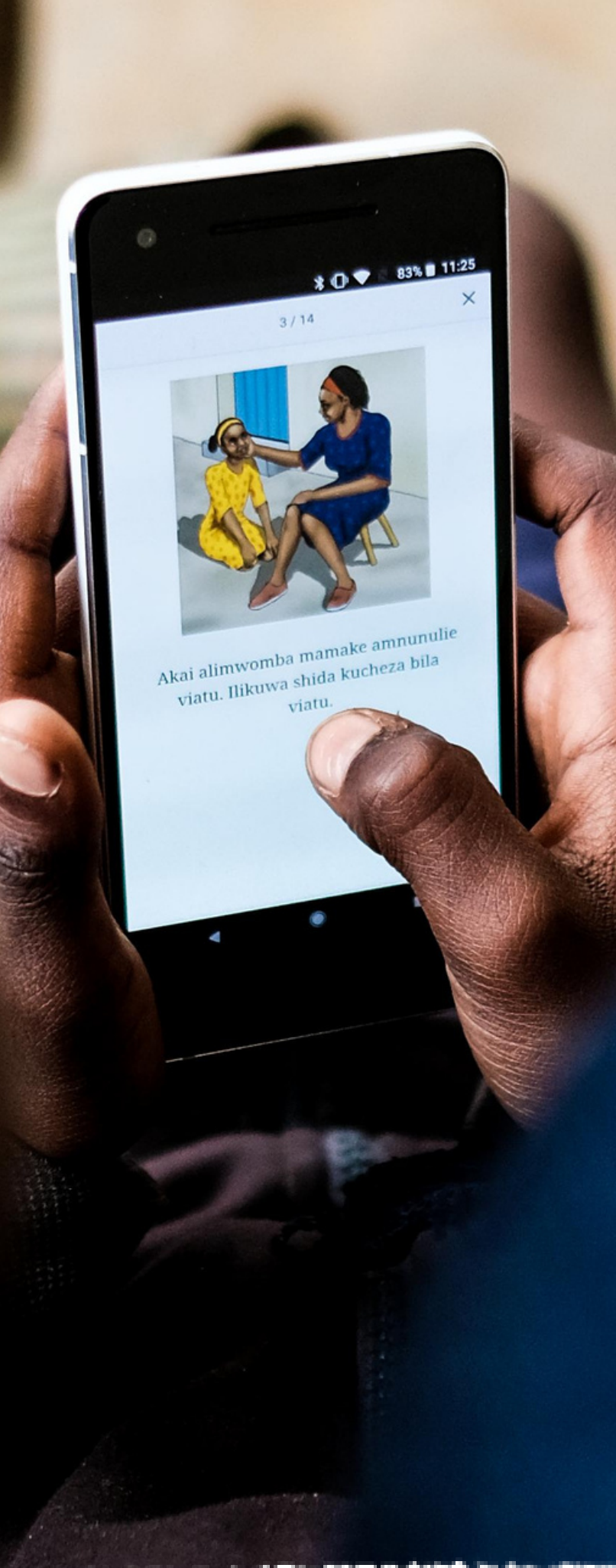
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# Pivoting in a Pandemic

All Children Reading Grand Challenge programs and innovations adapt to support global response to COVID-19





# Spotlighting EdTech solutions for COVID-19 response



In March 2020, as COVID-19 ushered in an unprecedented shutdown of schools globally, Ministries of Education and education implementers were in search of EdTech solutions that could support children at home. ACR GCD's [blog spotlighting nine global EdTech solutions](#) to support distance learning for children during the pandemic achieved significant global reach to meet the immediate educational needs of children. These nine solutions are available for free in multiple languages, and, once downloaded, do not require a continuous Internet connection. These features were intentionally required by ACR GCD's [competitions](#) to support children's learning needs in any setting, including crisis and conflict, thereby enabling access to many of the most marginalized children around the globe.

 [Webinar: Education Technology for Continuity of Education in Response to COVID-19](#)



## ➤ **Begin With Books prize awardees create COVID-19 themed storybooks**

Ensuring children and families around the world can protect themselves and those around them from COVID-19 starts with providing them essential health and hygiene messages in their own language. Merely weeks after the announcement of our [Begin With Books prize](#) awards, ACR GCD requested awardees modify the first milestone of their project plans to [create a collection of books to support COVID-19 health and prevention messages](#). These efforts by SIL LEAD, eKitabu, Rochester Institute of Technology's National Technical Institute for the Deaf (RIT/NTID), and The Asia Foundation yielded accessible, early grade storybooks in 10 underserved languages, available for free on the [Global Digital Library](#) to support COVID-19 health and hygiene.

*"Storybooks are so important for children's development in the best of the times, but they are absolutely vital during trying times such as the current pandemic."*

*- Kyle Barker, associate director at The Asia Foundation*







# Ensuring accessible, at-home education for deaf children in Kenya



In Kenya, Mark, a child who is deaf, has been able to learn alongside his siblings during COVID-19 thanks to Digital Story Time, a 30-minute television show that features packages of Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) video books for early grade children. The TV episodes—requested by the Kenyan Ministry of Education and developed by eKitabu with sign language books created through ACR GCD's Sign On For Literacy prize—run twice daily on Kenyan television. The episodes have also been added to the Kenyan Institute of Curriculum Development's term learning activities. The daily broadcasts reach more than 4 million households through Kenyan television, YouTube, and eKitabu's website.

**4M**

**Kenyan households reached by eKitabu's Digital Story Time of sign language videos**

*“When we had the first signed Digital Story Time air on TV, Mark was overjoyed. He follows the signed stories keenly and repeats the signed words during the glossary sessions. It’s amazing that my three children can now enjoy learning together from the digital story through the listening and captioning provided as they also build their signing vocabulary together in KSL.”*

*—Leah Nguata, mother of Mark, a deaf child in Kenya learning through eKitabu's Digital Story Time during COVID-19*



## ➤ Spurring the creation of COVID-themed content using Bloom software

To reverse the statistic of 30 percent of people globally lacking basic health information on COVID-19 in their local spoken or signed language, ACR GCD-funded innovator [SIL LEAD launched a global campaign](#) encouraging others to translate COVID-19 health messaging, including children's books, into local languages using [Bloom](#) book creation software, which was funded and enhanced through our [Enabling Writers prize](#) and [Book Boost: Access for All Challenge](#). SIL's efforts have led to the creation or translation of 237 COVID-themed children's books in 174 languages and in a variety of formats, including digital, audio, and print.

*"It's rewarding to leverage both the power of Bloom for this cause and demonstrate what Bloom can do in helping communities create literature in their own languages."*

*-Paul Frank, executive director of SIL LEAD*

**174**

Languages in which COVID-19 children's books were developed or adapted







## UnrestrICTed Challenge calls for solutions to serve children with disabilities at home and school



While scaling an EdTech solution designed according to Universal Design for Learning principles was planned by ACR GCD well before COVID-19, the pandemic amplified the need for such a solution to serve the literacy and learning needs of children with disabilities during the global health crisis and beyond. As such, ACR GCD applied a COVID lens to the Challenge, calling on global solvers to co-create ICT for education solutions that can support children with disabilities both in and out of school.

*“The UnrestrICTed Challenge, with its focus on scalable ICT solutions to support learning for children with disabilities, is timely. Amidst this COVID-19 crisis, all children should have access to learning opportunities.”*

*-Rosemary McKay, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade*



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# Accelerating the impact of EdTech

Past solutions funded by the All Children Reading Grand Challenge receive follow-on investments to expand their reach or geographic scale





# Bloom

**Innovator: SIL LEAD**

Enabling Writers and Book Boost prizes

To field-test the accessibility features built into Bloom software, five staff from [Resources for the Blind](#) (winner of ACR GCD's 2014 grant competition) and 11 teachers from six schools were trained by SIL LEAD on the use of the Bloom software to create accessible books. SIL LEAD credits ACR GCD with raising awareness of Bloom, which has led to new contracts to provide Bloom-related services. They've also received a grant to improve Bloom's business model, which will include market research to inform the development of a business model for sustainability.

*"Winning the Enabling Writers Prize put Bloom on the map. That's helped us raise awareness of Bloom within the international education community."*

*- Paul Frank, SIL LEAD*



# ➤ Studio KSL

**Innovator: eKitabu**

Sign On For Literacy Prize

eKitabu piloted Studio RSL in Rwanda and completed seven Rwandan Sign Language (RSL) storybooks, with 20 more books in the pipeline. Through Studio KSL, eKitabu produced 70 Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) storybooks and distributed them to four schools for the deaf. The Kenyan-based company also produced 31 Tanzanian Sign Language (TSL) storybooks and documented 1,500 local signs of key vocabulary for each storybook.

Following the COVID outbreak, eKitabu worked with the MoE to package these stories as television episodes airing on Kenyan television to support all children, including those who are deaf, during the pandemic.

*"We were excited when the Ministry of Education in Kenya approached us to ask if we had any content that could be used during the [COVID-19] crisis. Because of the work All Children Reading supported us to produce through Book Boost and Sign On For Literacy, we had high-quality, accessible content ready to quickly respond to the needs of the Ministry."*

– Matt Utterback, eKitabu





# Feed the Monster

**Innovator: Apps Factory**  
EduApp4Syria Prize

Curious Learning [continues to localize the Feed the Monster app](#), originally made available in Arabic and English, to additional languages. To date, the literacy gaming app is available in 50 languages, with nine additional languages coming soon. The apps have been downloaded more than 160,000 times, a 150 percent increase over 2019. A [webinar](#), hosted by ACR GCD in February 2020, shared how to localize literacy apps like Feed the Monster for children in low-resource contexts.

*“Feed the Monster had all of this wonderful investment in terms of design, being open source, and all of the audio and video assets being Creative Commons license. This created a unique opportunity for us to take Feed the Monster to the next level—to localize it to as many languages as we could.”*

– Stephanie Gottwald, Curious Learning



**160K**

Downloads of Feed  
the Monster on  
Google Play



# ➤ Reading Equality with Accessible Design (READ)

**Innovator: World Education, Inc.**

**Book Boost: Access for All Challenge**

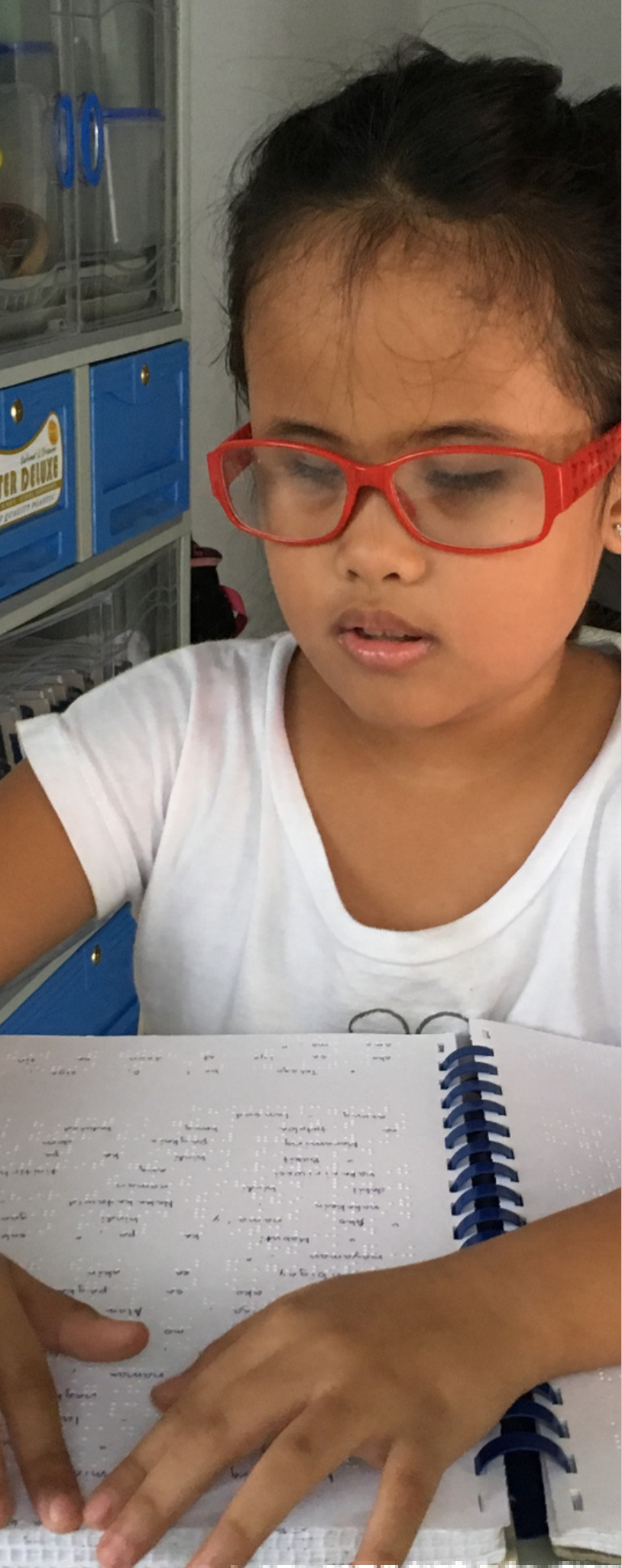
World Education, Inc., produced more than 2,200 children's books in 11 Nepali languages using Bloom book creation software. Many of the books offer audio capabilities for children with print disabilities, while a separate batch of storybooks are in Nepali Sign Language. Through our Book Boost award, as well as funding from UNICEF and the Australian Government, World Education worked with teachers and local writers to produce the books, and with local governments to print them. Other books in Nepali, Maithali and Bhojpuri languages were provided to community learning center libraries for use by out-of-school children.

**2,200+**

Books created in 11 languages using Bloom software for children in Nepal







# Reading Beyond Sight



**Innovator: Resources for the Blind, Inc.**  
2014 Grant Competition

Building on their ACR GCD grant, RBI was awarded a \$1.8 million grant by USAID Philippines to implement the Gabay project: Strengthening Inclusive Education for Blind and Deaf Children through 2021. Working with the Department of Education, RBI is strengthening services for children with disabilities by training parents and families in early detection. To implement the project, RBI is partnering with Better Hearing Philippines, De La Salle University-College of St. Benilde (experts in Filipino Sign Language) and School-to-School International to use ACR GCD's adapted Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) to measure reading outcomes for children who are blind, low vision, deaf, or hard of hearing.



# ➤ Qysas ("Stories")

**Innovator: Little Thinking Minds**  
2014 Grant Competition

In response to the Syrian crisis, INTEGRATED International and Little Thinking Minds adapted Qysas—an interactive and animated early grade literacy platform in Arabic—to schools where Syrians and Jordanians attend. With funding from UNICEF, a digital library of 120 stories was co-created with the Jordanian Ministry of Education to teach concepts of social cohesion in 100 double-shifting schools, reaching 20,000 Syrian and Jordanian children in Kindergarten through Grade 3.

*“There is an emerging body of evidence that shows EdTech, when designed the right way, works. And that, again, is where ACR GCD has been particularly helpful to us because it has been a convener and producer of learning globally. COVID has shown us the need for EdTech, and now the ears of supporters and even skeptics have perked to its power.”*

–Nedjma Koval-Saifi, INTEGRATED International







**30K+**

Downloads of  
eBooks 4 Khmer  
app in Cambodia

## eBooks 4 Khmer

**Innovator: Kampuchean Action to Promote Education**  
2012 and 2014 Grant Competitions

eBooks 4 Khmer has scaled within Cambodia and is currently testing for demand and market readiness. The app, available on Google Play, has been downloaded 30,000 times.





## Track & Trace

**Innovator: John Snow, Inc., & World Education**  
Tracking and Tracing Books Prize

John Snow, Inc., and World Education have implemented Track & Trace in more than 200 schools in Cambodia. The Prize also inspired the development of similar book tracking systems customized for governments' and implementing partners' needs in Honduras, Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Nigeria. A Beta Test in Ethiopia (completed February 2020) engaged 200 schools, of which 91 percent reported back on the book deliveries via the free Android POD app and a toll-free SMS system.

**91%**

of the 200  
participating schools  
in Ethiopia used the  
book tracking  
system to report on  
deliveries





A woman and a young girl are looking at a tablet together. The woman is on the left, leaning in, and the girl is on the right, holding the tablet. They are both looking at the screen with interest. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a classroom or community setting.

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## Scaling solutions to advance child literacy

New competitions focus on scaling evidence-based EdTech to support children in low-resource contexts





# Begin With Books Prize

The All Children Reading Grand Challenge and Global Book Alliance awarded the [Begin With Books prize](#) to four organizations: [eKitabu](#), [Rochester Institute of Technology's National Technical Institute for the Deaf \(RIT/NTID\)](#), [SIL LEAD](#) and [The Asia Foundation](#). The prize awarded \$200,000 or more to create cost-effective packages of high-quality accessible digital books in languages children use and understand. Over two years, the prize winners collectively will create thousands of leveled books in ten underserved written languages and nine sign languages, serving regions of the world where children have little or no books for kindergarten or preschool. For example, in Somalia, there are currently zero sign language storybooks for children. With their Begin with Books award, RIT/NTID and their partner, Somali National Association of the Deaf, will produce 200 Somali Sign Language Storybooks. Thirty percent of the sign language books RIT/NTID creates will be about the deaf experience.

*"The creation of these engaging, accessible books for children in some of the lowest-resourced regions of Africa, Asia and the Pacific will empower and support them on their journey to literacy and future success in school, health, employment and society."*

-Kerin Ord, global sector education lead for World Vision International


19

Underserved languages for which books are being created through Begin With Books





## **Begin With Books Awardees**

Languages and quantities  
of books being produced

 **eKitabu**  
Tumbuka (220), Lomwe (3), Yao (3), and  
Malawian Sign Language (50)

 **The Asia Foundation**  
Lao (120), Tamang (120), Enga (30), Tok Pisin (30),  
Hiri Motu (30), and Nepali Sign Language (50)

 **SIL LEAD**  
Soninke (200), Senoufo (200), French (400), and  
Malian Sign Language (20)

 **RIT/NTID**  
Sign Languages of Indonesia (200), the Philippines  
(200), Papua New Guinea (200), Somalia (200),  
Fiji (200), and Samoa (200)





**90**

**EdTech solvers,  
DPO and MoE  
representatives, and  
others participated in  
co-design workshops**

## UnrestrICTed Challenge

The [UnrestrICTed Challenge](#), launched in June 2020, sought solvers to scale ICT for education solutions that ensure children with disabilities benefit from language, literacy, and learning support grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) at home and at school. The Challenge focused on three priority contexts—Nepal, Papua New Guinea, and Rwanda—and engaged Solvers in a collaborative process to co-create forward-thinking ICT for education solutions that demonstrate the highest potential to improve language and literacy for children with disabilities. Three co-design workshops brought more than 90 participants—including EdTech Solvers, implementers, service providers, Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs), donors, Ministries of Education, and field office staff—to co-design concept papers focused on scaling appropriate EdTech to sustainably support language and literacy for children with disabilities.

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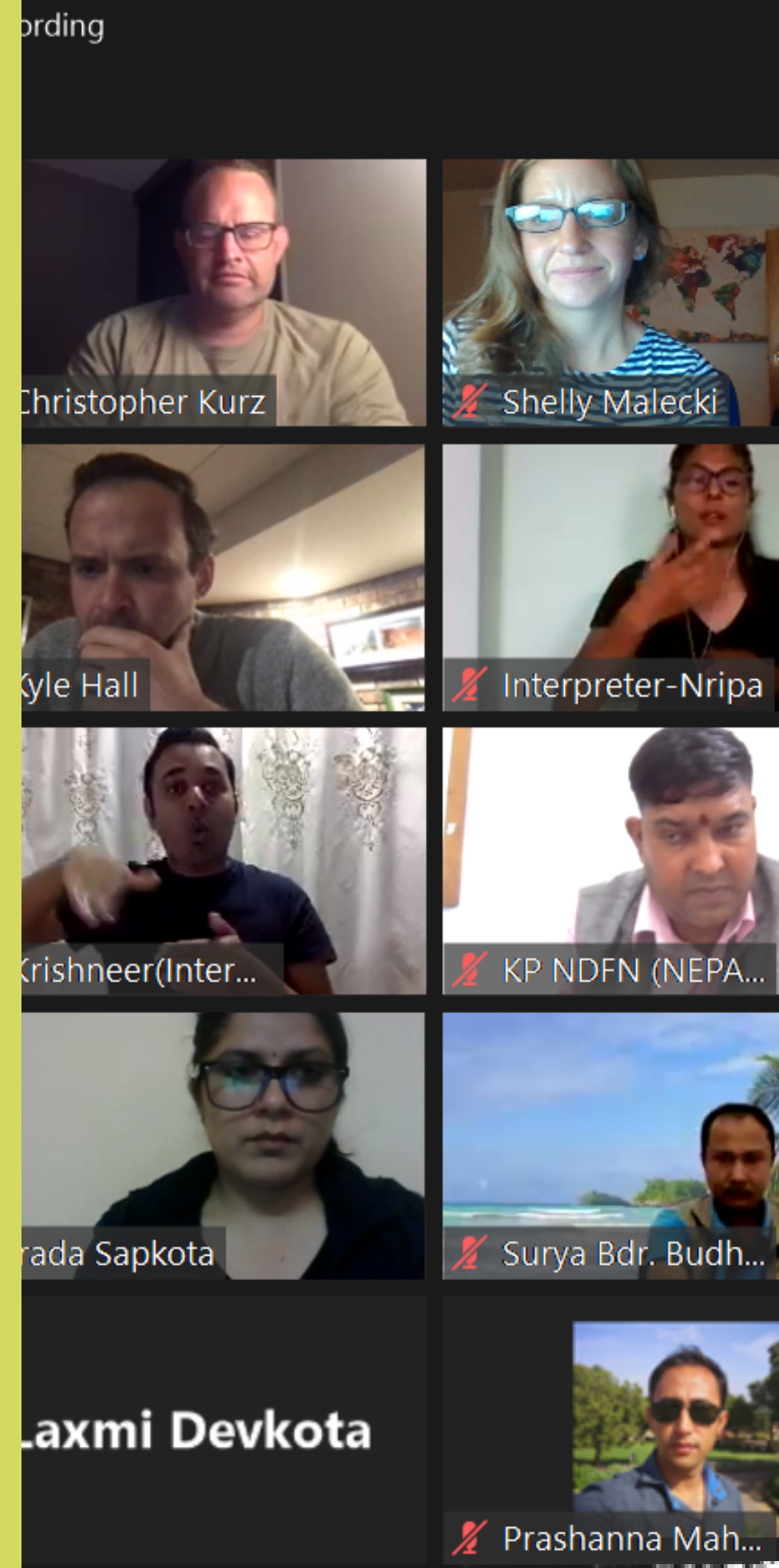
# Expanding our impact for children with disabilities

New programs and resources support and advocate for  
inclusive education



# ➤ Sign Language Storybook Cohort

To provide technical assistance and create an environment for shared learning for our Begin With Books awardees and their Disabled Persons Organizations (DPO) partners, ACR GCD developed a [Sign Language Storybook Cohort \(SLSC\)](#). In collaboration with Rochester Institute for Technology's National Technical Institute for the Deaf, ACR GCD developed minimum and gold standards for sign language storybook production. To train the cohort on these standards during COVID-19 and build local capacity to create sign language storybooks, ACR GCD produced an 11-module virtual training experience, complemented by virtual office hours with the trainers. The cohort collaborates on the Slack project management platform to share lessons, resources and view training videos. Learnings from the cohort will inform the production of a sign language storybook creation toolkit for global distribution.



# Sign Language Storybook Cohort

## Goals and Objectives

### DEVELOP & VALIDATE MINIMUM AND GOLD STANDARDS

Develop minimum and gold sign language storybook production standards, in consultation with RIT/NTID and other sign language specialists, to produce high quality storybooks in local sign languages.

### PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO BEGIN WITH BOOKS AWARDEES

Develop cohort of awardees and local DPO partners, through Slack and quarterly meetings, to provide technical assistance and encourage shared learnings and collaboration.

Train the cohort on minimum standards and book usage.

Refine and validate minimum standards through award activities.

### IMPACT GLOBAL STORYBOOK PRODUCTION

Leverage Begin With Books awardee learnings to inform the production of a toolkit for global distribution.

Propel consortium contributions toward the creation of sign language teaching and learning materials—including books on the deaf experience—ensuring greater visibility and support for sign language instruction and inclusive education.





# Book Boost: Access for All Challenge

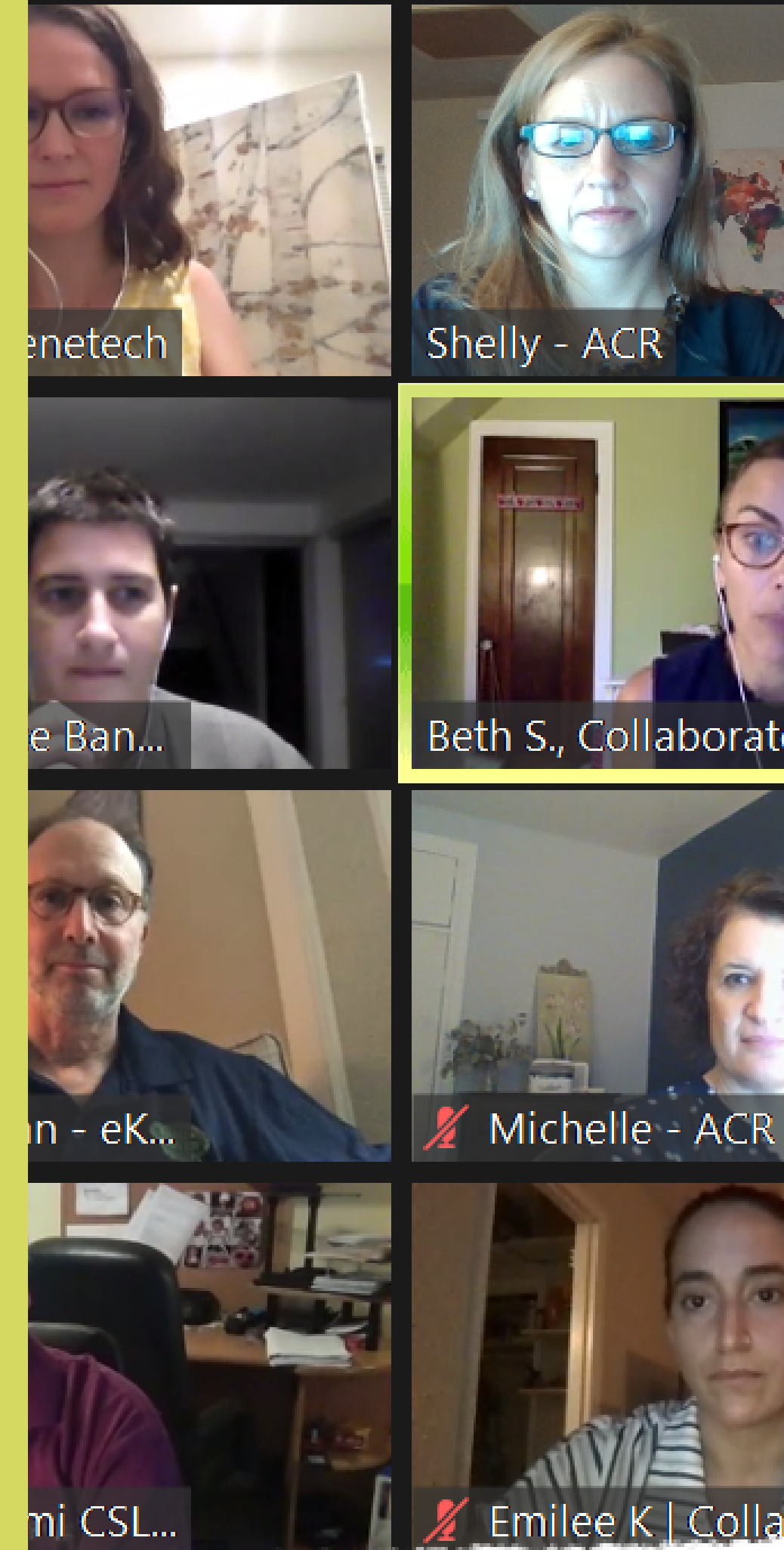
## New video spotlights tools for accessible publishing

All Children Reading partnered with Pearson and Project Literacy to fund the [Book Boost: Access for All Challenge](#)—a competition that awarded innovators for changing the way they create digital book files, so that when a book is created, all the components necessary to create accessible books are built in from the start. ACR GCD created and promoted a [video](#) to encourage broad adoption of these standards by publishers and commitment from governments and education implementers to ensure all children receive books they can use.



# ➤ UnrestrICTed Co-Design Workshops

To ensure solutions meet the needs of children with disabilities appropriately within each context, ACR GCD engaged more than 10 local Disabled Persons Organization (DPO) partners in the [UnrestrICTed Challenge](#) co-design workshops held in three countries. DPO members were on panels and in breakout groups to provide contextual details on a typical education experience of a child with a disability, potential barriers for scaling, ways to complement existing work, lessons learned from past mistakes of organizations seeking to support these children, as well as potential avenues for collaboration. DPOs raised concerns that children with intellectual disabilities are still consistently excluded from programming and asked that DPOs be given a formal role, with a budget, in any project serving children with disabilities.





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# Stewarding our solver community

Engaging a global community of innovators to create solutions for 387 million children waiting for the opportunity to learn to read





# Communications

We're delighted that this year our community of EdTech solvers, Ministries of Education, partners, and education implementers around the globe continued to grow. To ensure we can all learn and work together to get all children reading, we'll continue to share with you the stories and learnings of our innovators and their impact in supporting literacy and learning for marginalized children in low-resource contexts through blogs, social media, our website, and newly designed monthly e-newsletter.

No matter how you connect to us, we're grateful to our communities in 2020 for the following:

**4,200+**

Newsletter subscribers

**4,000+**

Twitter followers

**900+**

Facebook followers

**9,000+**

Engagements on  
Facebook, LinkedIn  
and Twitter

**94**

Submissions to  
ACR GCD competitions



# Convenings

All Children Reading considers convenings an essential tool for supporting informed decision-making and practice as well as disseminating innovations and evidence. To that end, we offer webinars to highlight innovations and lessons learned and provide technical assistance and capacity building to our awardees and other practitioners. ACR GCD also has established cohorts for shared learnings and presented findings from our projects at other's conferences. To accommodate for COVID, we have moved with agility to continue these practices virtually.



**ACR GCD EDTECH OPEN**

October 7, 2019



**MEDUCATION ALLIANCE SYMPOSIUM**

October 9-11, 2019



**DFAT EDUCATION FORUM**

November 4-5, 2019



**WORLD VISION INTERNATIONAL EDTALK WEBINAR**

January 22, 2020



**ACR GCD WEBINAR ON FEED THE MONSTER**

February 19, 2020



**BASIC EDUCATION COALITION COVID WEBINAR**

April 13, 2020



**3 UNRESTRICTED CHALLENGE CO-DESIGN WORKSHOPS**

August - October 2020



# EdTech Open

On October 7, 2019, the All Children Reading Grand Challenge Partners hosted innovators and other thought leaders in global education, for an event celebrating our past successes and launching another round of programming. The event, headlined by Necar Zadegan, education advocate and star of NCIS: New Orleans, also showcased our most promising EdTech solutions.

## EdTech Open Impact

52%

Collaborated with a person/organization they met or heard about at our EdTech Open

43%

Started using an edtech solution they learned about at our EdTech Open

% of survey respondents



# Our continued commitment to unlock literacy for all children

With the COVID-19 pandemic extending into 2021, the need for education resources for use by children in and out of school is critical to their continued development and learning. The work of All Children Reading is more important than ever before.

In 2021, we will continue to advance the creation of books in underserved spoken and signed languages, as well as validate our minimum and gold standards for sign language storybook production to inform a toolkit for broad distribution to support more inclusive education. We'll also seek to ensure the best ICT solutions reach children with disabilities around the world to enhance their language, literacy and learning, as well as test effective EdTech solutions to strengthen foundational language and literacy skills to improve childhood learning.

We look forward to you joining and continuing this audacious journey with us.





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