

A woman in a white lab coat and a young girl in a black and white striped dress are holding colorful educational toys. The woman is holding a light blue toy with icons, and the girl is holding a yellow one with a USAID logo. Another child is visible in the background.

# All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development

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ANNUAL REPORT FY 2022  
HIGHLIGHTS

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Submitted by the  
ACR GCD Challenge Management Group

ALL  
CHILDREN  
READING:  
A GRAND CHALLENGE  
FOR DEVELOPMENT

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Cover Photo: Courtesy of All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development, a child holding a Talking Book, part of the Ready2Read ILC Africa project in Malawi.

# Message from the director



One additional year makes a big difference in the life of a Grand Challenge. As we write this report, and thanks to the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and World Vision USA (WVUS), All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development (ACR GCD) is embarking on its one-year extension to provide our Challenge Management Group (CMG), collaborators, and awardees the opportunity to reach more marginalized children and children with disabilities, complete the production of books, and test new ideas in foundational literacy.

For the past 11 years, ACR GCD has catalyzed innovation and implemented and scaled game-changing education technology solutions and tools to increase literacy for marginalized children in low-resource contexts. In 2022, our work was more important than ever. Our innovators stepped up and continued to prove that EdTech innovation and approaches can address gaps and barriers to child literacy both in and outside of school and in crisis and emergency situations.

The additional year has allowed us to help meet the expectations to double the amount of accessible digital books, improve our work with sign language book publication standards, help fully implement two out of three awards

for children with disabilities, train and expand the use of adapted reading assessments in four countries, and launch the child-functioning module. It also allowed us to prepare a robust and revamped ACR GCD website to make it easier to search for and find solutions, research, guides and toolkits to increase literacy.

In summary, this additional year will allow our Grand Challenge to fulfill its promise to remain at the helm of advancing innovation and research to improve reading outcomes for children in low-resource contexts working with innovative approaches in EdTech through our nine awards around the world, increasing our knowledge of what works through breakthrough research and learning to evidence the role of EdTech to improve reading outcomes, and ongoing advocacy with global influences and EdTech leaders.

*Sergio Rameriz Mena*  
Chief of Party, All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development



Illustration from a book in the underserved language of Tamang, one of 380 children's books in six local languages being produced by The Asia Foundation through the Begin with Books Prize.



# Cultivating solutions

Since 2011, ACR GCD has directed nearly a dozen competitions aimed at supporting the most promising EdTech solutions for improving child literacy in developing countries. In our current competitions, we are funding evidence-based solutions that can go to scale. Below are some highlights of their work to improve reading outcomes for marginalized children in low-resource contexts.

## **UnrestrICTed Challenge: Advancing solutions for children with disabilities so they receive improved language and literacy support at home and at school**

This was a pivotal year for each of the three UnrestrICTed awards. Below are a couple of background remarks:

- After an almost year-long delay, **Project LEARN** in Nepal received full government approval and started project implementation. The project consolidated a review of available EdTech resources in Nepal, created teacher training modules in conjunction with the Government of Nepal, and conducted training sessions.
- In Papua New Guinea (PNG), the **Yumi Read Together** project completed its proof-of-concept phase and transitioned to a scale-up phase in Western Province.

### **UnrestrICTed Nepal**

In collaboration with Government of Nepal teacher trainers, **Project LEARN** conducted 17 teacher training events focused on inclusive education for early grade reading; 395 teachers from 201 schools participated in trainings, which emphasized Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and EdTech. Implementing partners also finalized school EdTech needs assessments at

participating schools and began the process of distribution. Additionally, three Nepali technical partners started developing EdTech solutions based on their areas of expertise: Autism Care Nepal Society is finalizing a mobile application for children with neurological disabilities; the National Federation of the Deaf Nepal is developing 25 Nepali Sign Language (NSL) decodable video books with audio; and Action on Disability Rights and Development-Nepal is preparing DAISY players to distribute to children with visual impairments.

### **UnrestrICTed Papua New Guinea**

The **Yumi Read Together** project started the distribution of 450 smartphones and 2,435 microSD cards pre-loaded with Bloom Reader and digital books. The project also published 20 original stories, which were created by members of the Assembly of Disabled Persons in PNG in a Yumi-led workshop. Additionally, members of the deaf community collaborated with SIL LEAD to create five digital books containing 100 words in PNG Sign Language. This brings the total number of digital books now available for the Yumi project to 560. Finally, 76



Three of 20 original stories created by members of the Assembly of Disabled Persons during a Yumi-led workshop

teachers and 72 caregivers were trained on the use of smartphones and digital Bloom Reader books to support UDL-informed literacy development for children with disabilities.

### **UnrestrICTed Rwanda**

ACR GCD engaged with USAID Rwanda and local partners to coordinate next steps for the

planning of a workshop to adapt the existing Rwanda Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) to include children with disabilities. After initial consultations, it was agreed that School-to-School International (STS) would provide technical leadership moving forward given their past experience leading EGRA adaptation in multiple countries.

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## **Begin with Books Prize: Advancing opportunities for marginalized children to learn from books they use and understand**

**Begin with Books** awardees spent this period focusing on book production in underserved languages, including nine sign languages. Following a period of COVID 19-induced virtual rather than in-person training, Rochester Institute for Technology/National Technical Institute for the Deaf's (RIT/NTID) six regional teams implemented a capacity development approach that activated expertise from more experienced national teams (Philippines and Fiji) to support teams in PNG, Samoa and Indonesia that were producing sign language storybooks on the Deaf World Around You (WAY) platform for the first time.

As the **Sign Language Storybook Cohort (SLSC)** lead, RIT/NTID also collaborated, reviewed and provided extensive support related to best practices and minimum/gold standards of sign language book production to other awardees and their teams in Malawi, Mali and Nepal as well as to training modules the GBAIA project was producing.

In Malawi, following up and leveraging the USAID GBAIA project's content creation workshop in March, eKitabu successfully launched their accessible publishing toolkit and held an **accessible digital content training workshop** in May 2022, which was well attended by local stakeholders, including Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs), the Directorate of Special Needs Education, Ministry of Education (MoE), USAID Malawi and ACR GCD representatives.

World Vision Malawi (WVM) Education staff also attended this training and initiated the process of establishing an MOU with the Malawian

National Association of the Deaf (MANAD). WVM has also since engaged this local DPO to produce sign language videos to retrofit into books WVM previously created using Bloom Library, thus advancing accessible content into their reading camp programs and Unlock Literacy core project model, promoting content cross pollination across platforms, and ensuring future reading materials are locally created using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles.

In Nepal, NADH and NFDN (two local DPOs) worked together with The Asia Foundation (TAF) and the Nepali government's Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) to produce **Nepali Sign Language (NSL) storybooks**. They also used RIT/NTID's draft Minimum and Gold Standards to round out their training and support their sign language book production. By condensing the



**eKitabu's accessible digital content training workshop in May 2022**



*Ma Famille, one of the first books for children in Sign Language for Malian Schools.*

lengthy narrative and translating it into Nepali, they ensured local DPOs would be equipped to produce high quality accessible NSL storybooks, which have since been uploaded to the CEHRD's online learning portal.

**TAF also translated and adapted almost 100 Bilum storybooks in three PNG languages (Enga, Hiri Motu and Tok Pisin), 100 books each in Tamang and Lao, along with locally-created, accessible, open source new content (20 books) in Tamang and Lao.**

SIL LEAD heavily focused on their digital content in Soninke, Mamara Senoufo and Sign Language for Malian Schools. With support of the RIT/NTID as the SLSC lead, they produced the **first set of 20 books in sign language for use in Malian schools for the deaf** as well as dozens of titles in Soninke and Mamara Senoufo.

In 2022, ACR GCD conducted a Scalability Assessment with awardees to understand how awardees' solutions become more scalable during the life of their award. In Nepal, TAF executed their technical assistance award in partnership with Sattya Media, which conducted **social media training with two local DPOs to promote and drive awareness and use of Nepali sign language storybooks.**

SIL LEAD heavily focused on their digital content production in Soninke, Mamara Senoufo and

Sign Language for Malian Schools. With support of the RIT/NTID as the SLSC lead, they finalized the **first set of 20 books in sign language for use in Malian schools for the deaf** as well as dozens of titles in Soninke and Mamara Senoufo.

Ekitababu and TAF completed their award requirements under Begin with Books, having completed **279 books in four underserved languages and 404 books in six underserved languages**, respectively.

RIT/NTID ramped up book production on books in six sign languages for Fiji, Indonesia, Philippines, PNG, Samoa and Somalia and submitted over 100 sign language books for review and approval.

Following the aforementioned Scalability Assessment, eKitabu identified MANAD as the appropriate organization to provide this service. **MANAD was the first local DPO to receive an award under this Grand Challenge.** MANAD will assist in the mapping, identification and location of children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, provide regular technical assistance and train staff at Malawian schools for the deaf as well as local government representatives on digital accessible content and EdTech device usage, and support local NGOs to better support children who are deaf and hard of hearing, particularly in early childhood development.

## Ready2Read Challenge: Advancing improved literacy support, stimulation and instruction outside of school for pre-primary aged children

Each of the three awardees moved towards project implementation.

- **Project TREE**, led by RIT/NTID, developed two modules in International Sign Language for the training of deaf project facilitators in Fiji, the Philippines and PNG. The country leads were then trained in the use of the two modules, Sign Language (SL) Rhyme and Rhythm and Shared Multilingual Reading Strategies, and started the process of adaptation for local use. Six SL stories were also developed to be used with participating families of children who are deaf and hard of hearing, and the country teams started the translation/adaptation process.
- The **Talking Books Malawi** project piloted supplementary, curriculum-aligned ECE audio lessons using battery-operated Talking Books and then started full project implementation in 50 designated Community-Based Childcare Centers (CBCC) in the districts of Blantyre and Nkhosha. A total of 22 lessons and five children's songs were created for use via the Talking Books. The project also facilitated community meetings aimed at strengthening community support for foundational literacy and the CBCCs.
- In Nepal, the **Ready2Read & Play** project hired an early childhood education consultant and started the development of 30 supplementary, curriculum-aligned lessons to support at-home foundational literacy development. Twenty facilitators were hired and trained to support each of the 10 participating wards from Kirtipur Municipality. Sixteen of 30 sessions were implemented through Q3. In Q3, the project also conducted a two-day refresher training for local facilitators.

### R2R Fiji, Philippines, PNG – Project TREE

Each of the country teams finalized project training materials and started family visits to each of the participating eight families (per country). Each of the country teams has reported that deaf and hard of hearing children and their majority hearing parents and siblings are improving their local sign language knowledge through the developed SL video books and

shared reading approaches. The project also continued the translation/adaptation process of the six stories that was started last quarter.

### R2R Malawi – Talking Books

The project continued implementation and monitoring of audio lesson usage in the 50 education centers and corresponding households. Weekly caregiver meetings continued, with over 800 caregiver participants. The project is expected to finish implementation and begin the endline evaluation next quarter.

### R2R Nepal – Ready2Read & Play

The project finalized remaining lessons and associated activities, for a total of 30 lessons, and continued lesson implementation and activity monitoring in Kirtipur Municipality. The project also continued to synchronously post all lessons on the Let's Read Nepal Facebook page and continued to create audio for the remaining books being used in the project. The implementation of all 30 lessons and the project endline will be completed next quarter.



A post from Let's Read Nepal Facebook page as part of the Ready2Read & Play project.



# Research & learning

Key aspects of a Grand Challenge include catalyzing co-investment, sourcing new solutions, testing innovations, scaling solutions, sharing knowledge and ecosystem engagement. Below are research and learning highlights from the current competitions.

ACR GCD Measurement, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL) activities during FY2022 were conducted in collaboration with our institutional partner **School-to-School International (STS)**. Below are a few highlights achieved in FY 2022.

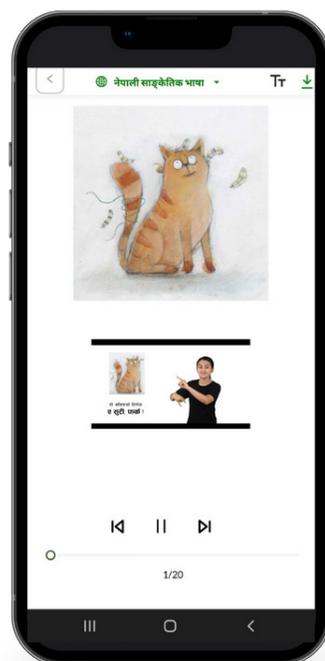
- Among the Ready2Read and Unrestricted projects, **1418 children with disabilities were assessed at baseline as well as 32 teachers and 881 parents.**
- STS hosted Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) sessions with ACR GCD awardees to collect information on the questions for the ACR GCD learning agenda. **The sessions provided an opportunity for awardees to collaborate and also provide a transparent space for raising concerns and challenges**, which are then shared with the ACR GCD Partners to address.
- ACR GCD's Learning Agenda focuses on two questions:
  1. **Do children benefiting from EdTech have improved reading and language skills?**
  2. **Has ACR GCD catalyzed action to scale context-appropriate EdTech solutions that improve children's language and reading skills?**

To that end, baselines were completed for the Talking Books project (Malawi), Ready2Read & Play project (Nepal) and Project LEARN (Nepal), with 2000+ children and caregivers assessed. For Project LEARN, two new Nepali Sign Language (NSL) subtasks were piloted as well as a video re-scoring process to accurately capture NSL responses and scores afterwards. STS also conducted a workshop with the Yumi Read Together in PNG in preparation for the baseline **determining which accommodations would be provided to ensure inclusion of all children in the assessment.**

- ACR GCD awardees completed a self-assessment of scalability across five dimensions using the Scalability Assessment

Tool. Following that self assessment, they identified activities that would improve their scores in each dimension. Scaling and technical assistance activities implemented this quarter included **TAF's work with Sattya Media to support social media promotion and distribution of the 50 Nepali Sign Language books created for the Begin with Books Prize by two local DPOs, NDFN and NADH.**

- For the **CFM-TV Study**, USAID provided additional funding to include medical screening with the scope for the study design as a follow up to the introductory meeting with implementing partners: World Education and World Vision Nepal. Agreements with a data collection partner and the two implementing partners were formalized and all necessary tools for pre-testing were developed, reviewed and updated. Pre-testing was conducted in Nepal in July and data collection started in November 2022.



One of 50 Nepali Sign Language books created by The Asia Foundation's project under the Begin with Books Prize.



# Expanding the reach of EdTech solutions for literacy

In 2022, ACR GCD continued to **catalyze action to expand the reach of EdTech solutions that improve children’s reading and language skills**. Below are a few highlights:

- ACR GCD continued to **expand its presence in the EdTech space through thought-leadership blogs, newsletters, news articles, media placements on UNESCO’s World Education platform and social media**. Social media platforms saw a 11% growth in followers on social media and a 33% increase in the number of page views on the website.
- The ACR GCD website was restructured to include **three hubs to better showcase and access ACR solutions, toolkits and research**.
- ACR GCD provided social media strategies and content for **promoting Education in Emergencies EdTech solutions to World Vision Georgia during the early months of the Ukrainian War**.

ACR GCD also continued to catalyze collaboration and accelerate the uptake and scale of ACR GCD-funded solutions through more than 15 convenings and events:

- ACR GCD hosted a **2023 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report consultation, a virtual convening of select ACR GCD awardees who shared learning, impact and outcomes, which were compiled in a report** to provide ACR GCD’s response

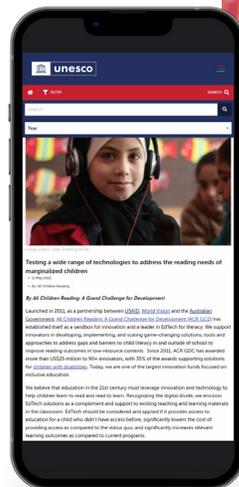
to the GEM Report concept note research questions related to Access for Disadvantaged Groups and Access to Content.

- ACR GCD also presented at a Global Disability summit side event on **key factors for learners with disabilities to be successful and how different actors can contribute**. ACR GCD also presented at the eKitabu **Accessible digital content workshop in Malawi**, which trained ACR GCD Partner national office representatives, content developers and DPOs.
- ACR GCD showcased solutions at Devex World 2022 in July 2022 in Washington, D.C. It was ACR GCD’s first in-person participation in this **landmark event of international development experts**. During the event, ACR interviewed SIL LEAD and Benetech, two key innovators, to promote the role of our grand challenge in spurring the scaling of their solutions thanks to ACR GCD’s support.
- Other convenings included showcasing solutions and presenting at the annual **CIES**, mEducation Alliance Symposium and NetHope Summit.



Left: ACR GCD authored blog post on UNESCO’s World Education Blog platform

Right: The cover of a report compiled from the May 2022 consultation co-hosted with the GEM Report



# Integrating solutions

A significant part of increasing the use and scale of ACR GCD-funded solutions is the Partner agencies internal activities. Below are the highlights of integration activities completed by USAID, World Vision and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

## USAID

**USAID disseminated solutions and research to headquarter and mission education staff** through internal listservs, newsletters and the Global Reading Network (GRN) LinkedIn page, as well as showcasing Ready2Read through gatherings around USAID conferences and Community of Practice.

**The agency also supported USAID's Global Disability Summit commitments** through several means, including:

- Conducting an Education Sector Council webinar on UDL guidelines and framework, the MEQA+UDL tool, implementation lessons and procurement guidance.
- Providing capacity building through Accessible Content Creation Workshop attended by local USAID mission leadership, Ministry of Education staff and others.
- Collaborating to support the book supply chain through a complimentary Print + Digital approach of shared training through GBAIA workshop and an accessible digital publishing workshop.

## World Vision

**World Vision disseminate solutions/research to WVUS, WVI and field education staff** through WVUS and WVI channels (social media, internal newsletters, website, intranet, leadership speeches and sector summaries) and presented content at staff meetings for International Literacy Day and multiple internal departments

**The organization also integrated Solutions into Education Programming, including:**

- Deaf World Around You, Bloom, Let's Read Asia, eKitabu App and Feed the Monster were written into redesign of Unlock Literacy, a core project model.
- WV Georgia used Feed the Monster to support Ukrainian Refugee children.
- WV Rwanda using digital accessible books developed under Book Boost and Unrestricted.
- WV Malawi has integrated ACR activities through the Accelerator Fund, a \$75K fund to assess the drivers to scale use of reading solutions.

## Australian DFAT

**DFAT disseminated solutions and research to HQ and Post education staff** by sharing content through DFAT channels, including social media, newsletters and leadership talking points. DFAT also facilitated ACR GCD team members' presentation at the DFAT Education Policy Forum session on Education Technology to DFAT education field staff.



Illustration from one of 50 Nepali Sign Language books created by The Asia Foundation's project under the Begin with Books Prize.

# Scaling Updates

## Uptake or scaling of ACR GCD funded innovations

During this year, the CMG focused its scaling effort in its **Scale and Use prize competition** with the goal of expanding the use of proven solutions in three categories: more users, more geographic coverage or more local partners/networks. This award was funded through the USAID EPIC office (mentioned above). The second tranche of prize funding was for sign language digital books in action directed specifically to build the capacity of local disabled people organizations in the countries where ACR has presence.

Other noteworthy scaling and uptake stories include:

- **Feed the Monster: The World Bank's DIME Movies and Mobiles study engaged** 9,000 Nigerian households with children between the ages of six to nine with film screenings aimed at motivating parents to support their children's education and reshape attitudes around gender bias along with a lottery in which one-third of the participants received smartphones preloaded with access to the Global Digital Library and Feed the Monster, which now has more than 617,000 users and is available in 53+ languages.
- **Sign Language Books:** SIL and RIT/NTID continued the expansion of the list of sign language story books in **Somali** and **Mali** sign languages, the first time digital books in these sign languages have been produced.
- **Antura and the Letters:** This app has continued to increase its coverage and content in additional languages.



Feed the Monster, a reading learning game available in more than 50 languages, and Global Digital Library, an online library with books in many languages.