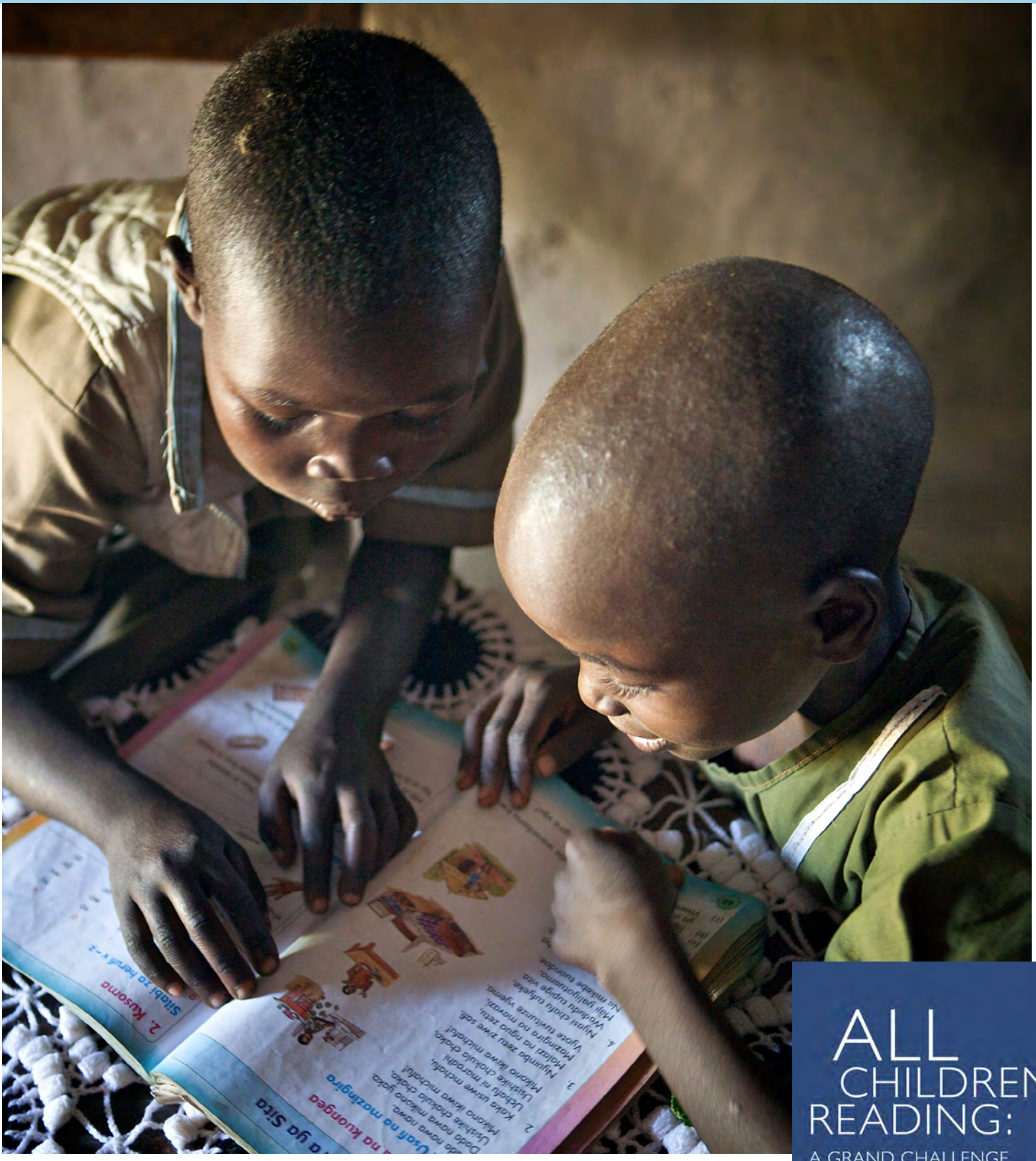
ALL CHILDREN READING:
A GRAND CHALLENGE FOR DEVELOPMENT



ANNUAL REPORT **2019**

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COVER PHOTOS: WORLD VISION

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Message from the ACR GCD Partners

This year, the ACR GCD Partners recommitted to advancing EdTech innovation and research to improve reading outcomes for marginalized children in low-resource contexts and refined our areas of focus to address key gaps impacting global literacy outcomes. After dedicating substantial time reflecting on what we've achieved and learned over the years and casting a vision for goals we want to achieve in the years ahead, we developed a new strategy and results framework to guide our future work. To announce this new strategy, we held a celebratory EdTech Open during which we announced our Begin With Books competition to support the creation of accessible books for children in the spoken or signed language they use and understand.

In the year ahead, we look forward to announcing the Begin With Books prize winners, exploring how EdTech can support foundational literacy, and building on our work to enhance learning for children with disabilities.

Sourcing solutions to advance child literacy

This year saw the closing of the Institute for Disabilities Research and Training and The Asia Foundation projects. This marks the end of all 13 grants awarded in our Round 2 grant competition.

Our Book Boost: Access for All Challenge and Sign On For Literacy prizes remained in implementation, enhancing learning opportunities for children with disabilities. Through new collaborations, awards and funding, many of our awarded innovators continued to advance their work beyond our initial investment. We're delighted to share those advancements with you in the project profiles that follow.

"All Children Reading and Sign On For Literacy gave us the resources and support to focus on harnessing technology to deliver inclusive education."

-Matt Utterback, eKitabu

GRANTS

Benetech
India + Global

Innovation: *Adding human-narrated Marathi audio capabilities to create accessible, grade-level storybooks that can be listened to on low cost audio devices by children who are blind/low vision.*

Benetech's Bookshare initiative now reaches people with print disabilities in more than 90 countries through national partnerships and Bookshare membership. Benetech's relationship with fellow ACR GCD grantee, Pratham Books, has not only enabled the expansion of the Bookshare collection in multiple Indian languages, but has opened pathways for local books to be uploaded to Bookshare by partners and volunteers in more countries throughout South Asia and East Africa.

Institute for Disabilities Research & Training (IDRT)
Morocco

Innovation: *Assistive technology that enables educators to easily create and publish Moroccan Sign Language (MSL) supported educational materials for students who are deaf/hard of hearing.*

ACR GCD's investment in IDRT's project has made a lasting impact on education in Morocco, influencing policymakers to ensure children who are deaf or hard of hearing, as well as other children with disabilities, have access to quality education. In 2019, the Moroccan Ministry of Education took exploratory steps toward creating a system to provide quality teaching and learning materials to children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE)
Cambodia

Innovation: *Transforming early grade reading books into electronic formats with interactive features, including multi-modal presentations that build on children's oral Khmer language skills.*

The Smartbooks app has received subsequent investment by the Phoenix Foundation and the Ministry of Education for rollout into additional schools and programs. The software is also available in the Google Play store and has been downloaded more than 30,000 times.

Little Thinking Minds
Jordan

Innovation: *An online leveled and differentiated early grade Arabic literacy learning platform supported by after school literacy clubs.*

In response to the Syrian crisis, INTEGRATED International and Little Thinking Minds adapted Qysas for schools attended by Jordanian and displaced Syrian children.

Resources for the Blind
Philippines

Innovation: *Supporting children with disabilities by training parents and teachers to practice reading with their child as well as providing technology to create, upload and use accessible books.*

Building on experience from their ACR GCD grant, RBI was awarded a $1.8 million grant from USAID Philippines to implement the three-year "Gabay" project to strengthen inclusive education for blind and deaf children. RBI will work with the Department of Education to strengthen services for children with disabilities, train parents and families in early detection, and provide appropriate referrals and resources. To implement the project, RBI is partnering with Better Hearing Philippines, De La Salle University-College of St. Benilde's experts in sign language, and School-to-School International to use ACR GCD's adapted EGRAs to assess reading outcomes for children who are deaf or blind.

PRIZES

Sign On For Literacy

Innovation: *Improving sign language access and learning for deaf children in low-resource contexts.*

Our announcement this year of the following Sign On For Literacy Prize winners, and the roll-out of their work to improve sign language access and learning for deaf children, is giving deaf children the opportunity to learn in the language most accessible to them.

eKitabu

eKitabu launched Studio RSL (Rwandan Sign Language) in Rwanda and completed two RSL storybooks, with 20 more books in the pipeline. They also produced 50 Studio KSL (Kenyan Sign Language) storybooks and distributed them to four schools for the Deaf, and documented 400 KSL signs to build glossaries of key vocabulary for each storybook. eKitabu plans to produce 50 more Studio KSL storybooks by early 2020.

Rochester Institute for Technology's National Technical Institute for the Deaf

RIT launched the World Around You (WAY) platform, which features 17 storybooks in Filipino Sign Language (FSL), English and Tagalog. Users from Indonesia, Brazil and Vietnam have adapted RIT's books into sign languages used in their respective countries. The WAY platform is open source and available for creating sign language enabled books in any language.

Manos Unidas

Manos Unidas launched the "Signs and Smiles" app in Google Play, generating 250 unique users in the first week. World Vision-Nicaragua and Los Pipitos agreed to distribute the app across their teacher training programs and in-classroom iPad programs. The app includes 331 vocabulary list entries in 22 thematic categories, a video of the Nicaraguan Sign Language (NSL) sign, and the phonological parameters of handshape, location, and movement.

Book Boost: Access for All Challenge

Cost-effective solutions for incorporating accessibility at the onset of book development.

eKitabu

eKitabu delivered 100 accessible early grade readers for Kenya and 20 for Rwanda. To date, 75 accessible EPUBs have been delivered to the Global Digital Library. The editorial and development teams of 13 Kenyan publishing houses were trained in 17 hands-on sessions as part of the content development challenge to produce 66 new accessible titles for Kenya's Competency Based Curriculum.

Resource: Accessible EPUB Toolkit

2. SIL LEAD

To field-test the accessibility features built into the Bloom software, five staff from Resources for the Blind (RBI) and 11 teachers from six schools in Luzon and

Mindanao were trained by SIL LEAD on the use of the Bloom software to create accessible books. Each made two accessible books for 107 blind and visually impaired students in the pilot project schools. In total, RBI staff and teachers produced 80 accessible EPUBs in both Cebuano and Tagalog.

Resource: Bloom Resources for Creating Accessible Books

Begin With Books

Innovation: *Challenging innovators to assemble cost-effective packages of high-quality, accessible titles in more than 30 underserved spoken and signed languages.*

The Begin with Books prize competition launched on October 7, 2019. In collaboration with the Global Book Alliance, the prize will award up to $300,000 to multiple innovators with the most innovative proposals for creating quality books in one of more than 30 underserved spoken or signed languages. The winners, expected to be announced in early 2020, will upload the titles they develop to the Global Digital Library (GDL).

Global Digital Library

Innovation: *A collection of high-quality, open educational reading resources for children, available on web, mobile and for print. Facilitates translation and localization of GDL resources to 300+ languages.*

ACR GCD expanded the books available on the GDL by contributing 200 STEM-focused books created in English and Arabic by our awardee, Asafeer Education Technologies. Twenty of these Arabic books will be the first books from the GDL used by Google in their reading-tutor app, Bolo. The GDL has since conducted translation sprints on these books in French, Spanish and Zulu, with plans for translation into additional African and Asian languages in 2020. Books created by our Sign On For Literacy finalist, eKitabu, will become the first sign language-enabled books on the GDL in late 2019. The GDL now provides reading resources for children in 41 languages, with the community of users translating books into an additional 89 languages.

EduApp4Syria

Innovation: *Building out-of-school Syrian refugee children's foundational literacy and psychosocial wellbeing through free, open source gaming apps.*

Curious Learning continues to localize the Feed the Monster App, originally made available in Arabic and English, to additional languages. The literacy gaming app is available in 45 languages with additional languages anticipated.

Antura and the Letters (in Arabic) has achieved 250,000+ downloads and attracted 12 international awards and nominations. One of the developers, Video Games Without Borders (VGWB), has partnered with ProFuturo, to adapt the game for teachers' use in offline classrooms, starting in Lebanon. Antura and the Letters for Morocco (in Darija) was released in July 2019 and featured by Google Play in the MENA region in December 2019. Learn English with Antura (with instruction in Spanish and Italian) was released in September 2019 and is being distributed by Plan Ceibal to all primary school children in Uruguay. In late 2019, VGWB, together with several international partners, started adapting Antura and the Letters for Afghanistan to help internally displaced Afghan children to learn to read in their mother language of Pashto or Dari. To be released in 2020, the game already received UNHCR's 2019 NGO Innovation Award.

Resource: View the publications and research on Feed the Monster and Antura and the Letters

Leaders for Literacy

Innovation: *Equipping youth to address barriers to child literacy in their communities.*

World Vision South Africa integrated Leaders for Literacy with their Unlock Literacy program this year. The integrated program, called LIFE, was implemented in two area programs and trained 80 youth (in and out of school) as literacy volunteers to read with more than 600 primary-age children in literacy camps.

Resource: Leaders for Literacy User Guides

Tracking & Tracing Books

Innovation: *Equipping governments and parents with low-cost monitoring tools to ensure books arrive in the hands of students.*

The solutions sourced through our Tracking and Tracing Books competition continue to be used widely. JSI and World Education will be scaling the use of their Track & Trace solution nationwide, to approximately 9,000 schools in Cambodia. The competition also inspired the development of similar book tracking systems customized for governments' and implementing partners' needs in Honduras, Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Nigeria. An alpha test of the software in Ethiopia in August 2019 engaged 50 schools to confirm book deliveries via SMS and mobilized community accountability, through World Vision's out-of-school reading camps, to ensure the books reached their intended recipients.

Enabling Writers

Innovation: *Providing authors with easy-to-use software to create and export reading materials in underserved languages.*

As a result of ACR GCD funding, all Bloom users can now create books for children with print disabilities. The Bloom Library also offers 40 accessible books in Cebuano and Tagalog, and six books containing Guatemalan Sign Language. The program interface has also been translated into the Mam and K'iche' languages of Guatemala. In total, Bloom Library now has 5,500+ books in 200+ languages.

Strengthening the evidence base of EdTech for literacy

Continuing our commitment to building the EdTech for literacy evidence base, ACR GCD released two evaluations on projects implemented by The Asia Foundation in Afghanistan and the Institute for Disabilities Research and Training in Morocco. Both evaluations include results from the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and assess each project's potential for scale.

"Projects supporting children who are deaf or hard of hearing should include components of parental engagement, especially in contexts where deafness is poorly understood, and sign language is underutilized."

-IDRT Project Evaluation Report

Institute for Disabilities Research and Training
Project Evaluation Report

Conducted by research firm School-to-School International (STS), this project evaluation provides valuable lessons for designing and implementing reading projects for students who are deaf or hard of hearing as well as findings from the adapted Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) that assessed both the Moroccan Standard Arabic and Moroccan Sign Language (MSL) skills of students. Using a reflexive-comparison research design, the research found that Grade 1 and 2 students had statistically improved skills in letter name and syllable identification subtasks as well as improved MSL vocabulary. However, at endline students were still unable to answer a single reading passage or MSL comprehension question correctly. Overall, the report noted fundamental systemic issues in education for students who are deaf or hard of hearing that constrained the project's ability to influence students' reading and MSL skills development.

The Asia Foundation
Project Evaluation Report

Conducted by Mgtwell Consulting Services, this project evaluation determined the project was highly effective in the Afghanistan context. The project provided access to simple technologies and high-interest books via Smart TVs to classrooms across eight schools in Kandahar and Nangarhar provinces, and improved teaching practices in schools. The Asia Foundation project achieved and surpassed its objectives, with student participants demonstrating significant literacy skills improvement as well as increased school attendance, parent-school communication, and overall parental engagement. Additionally, the evaluation supported the possible extension and scaling of the project.

Partnering to extend our reach and impact

ACR GCD believes that only through concerted action can we accelerate breakthrough solutions for improving child literacy around the globe. We're so appreciative of our partnerships with organizations and individuals that extend the reach and impact of our efforts to get all children reading.

"Our ability to partner with ACR GCD to focus specifically on deaf children and their right to incorporate literacy in their home language via use of sign language first is remarkable."

-Colin Allen, World Federation of the Deaf, Sign On For Literacy prize partner

With a mission devoted to ensuring all children have access to books, ACR GCD collaborated with the Global Book Alliance (GBA) to launch the Begin With Books Prize. The competition challenged global innovators to assemble cost effective packages of high quality, open-licensed, accessible books in underserved spoken and signed languages.

Our successful collaboration with Pearson and Project Literacy ended this year with the completion of the Book Boost: Access for All Challenge and Leaders for Literacy. Pearson's publishing expertise combined with All Children Reading's innovator network led to unexpected benefits and behavior shifts in an entire industry. Book Boost awardees trained publishers and education implementers in Kenya, the Philippines and Rwanda in the creation of accessible content; developed toolkits and software available for global use; and created more than 260 new accessible books in four languages. Following the completion of its two Evoke: Leaders for Literacy pilots, World Vision South Africa integrated the curriculum into their early literacy program model to train youth as literacy volunteers to more than 600 children. The Leaders for Literacy curriculum and resources are open source and now available on AllChildrenReading.org.

Additionally, our collaboration with World Federation of the Deaf, the Nyle DiMarco Foundation, and Deaf Child Worldwide continued as our finalists for the Sign On for Literacy Prize implemented their projects in Kenya, Nicaragua and the Philippines.

Engaging and convening our community

ACR GCD's communication efforts in fiscal 2019 were driven by our goal to boost use of our funded solutions and research, drive attendance to our events, and engage existing and new advocates and solvers. Highlights of these efforts included a complete redesign of AllChildrenReading.org, revised marketing materials to support our Round 3 strategy, blog posts spotlighting our research and the creative work of our innovators, and visually dynamic social media content.

COMMUNICATION HIGHLIGHTS

Curated EdTech advocate and solver community

3,300+
newsletter subscribers

3,600+
Twitter followers

750+
Facebook followers

Championed ACR EdTech solutions and research

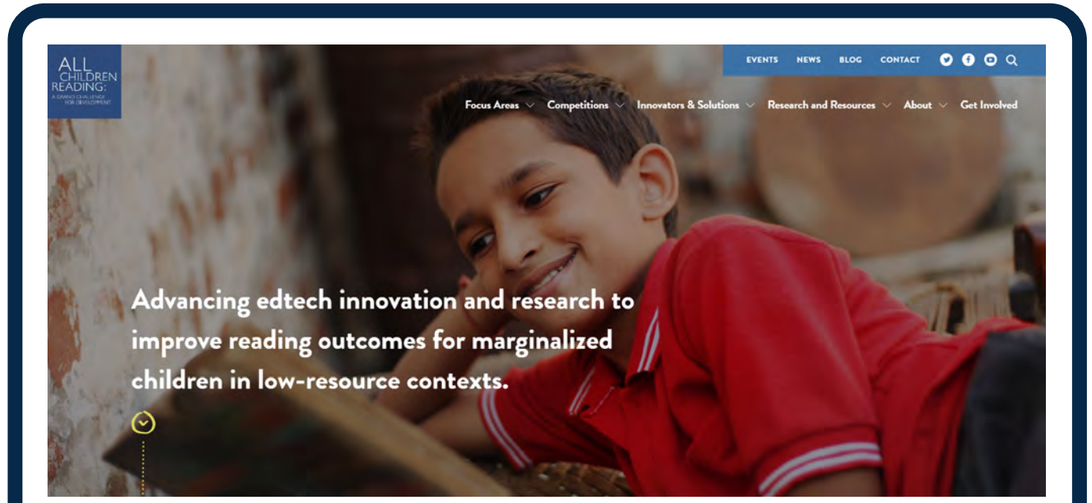
Disseminated at
10 events
(hosted or with presentations by ACR GCD)

Elevated ACR GCD's EdTech for literacy profile

Shared through
8
media placements &
9
blog posts

WEBSITE REDESIGN

In July 2019, ACR GCD launched a redesigned AllChildrenReading.org, featuring user-friendly navigation and filtering options to search for edtech solutions, research and resources appropriate to specific needs or contexts. The site also features additional information about ACR GCD's focus areas, news and blogs, as well as the multiple ways users can get involved to be part of the solution to improve literacy for 387 million children waiting for the opportunity to learn to read.



63%
Increase in website visits

54%
Increase in user engagement

2019 EVENTS TIMELINE

Oct. 31- Nov. 4 (Cleveland, OH)
2018 American Evaluation Association Annual Conference

Nov. 6-8 (Washington D.C.)
2018 mEducation Symposium

Nov. 9 (Washington D.C.)
Sign On For Literacy Pitch Sessions

Dec. 4 (webinar)
The Power of Technology to Improve Literacy for Children with Visual Disabilities

April 15-18 (San Francisco, CA)
Comparative and International Education Society Conference

April 30 (webinar)
Books for Every Child: Asafeer's innovative publishing model for creating STEM-focused, accessible content in Arabic

June 26 (webinar)
Adapting EGRA to Include Sign Language

July 23-27
XVIII World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf

October 7
ACR GCD EdTech Open

Our continued commitment to unlock literacy for all children

Despite decades of investment in global education, children's learning outcomes have failed to show significant gains, particularly in foundational literacy skills. Worldwide, an estimated 387 million children and youth can't read or do basic math, even though more than two-thirds of them have attended four or more years of school. More than 57 million primary school-aged children are out of school.

These challenges come at the expense of roughly $1 trillion to the global economy, according to UNESCO estimates. Further, Sustainable Development Goal 4, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, remains elusive.

The World Literacy Foundation estimates that if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty, which would be equivalent to a 12 percent cut in world poverty.

After an extensive review of the gaps in global education related to child literacy, ACR GCD developed a comprehensive strategy and results framework that will govern our focus and activities for years to come. With a wealth of solutions sourced to date by ACR GCD, and the growth of the EdTech sector, there is an even greater opportunity to scale and increase impact, as well as collaborate with innovative partners to accelerate our efforts.

Building on this foundation of past achievements, the ACR GCD Partners have committed to reinvest in ACR GCD to advance EdTech innovation and research to improve reading outcomes for marginalized children in low-resource contexts. We look forward to working with current and new solvers and partners in the coming years to unlock literacy for the 387 million children waiting for the opportunity to learn to read.

FOCUS AREAS

1 Enhancing literacy learning for children with disabilities

UNESCO estimates more than 93 million children globally have a disability. Of those children with disabilities who reside in countries with high poverty levels, at least 90 percent do not attend school in any form, and fewer girls with disabilities attend school than boys.

ACR GCD identifies and brings to scale the most promising EdTech solutions for addressing barriers that prevent children with disabilities from learning to read. To date, these efforts have increased the number of books and teaching materials available to children with disabilities, particularly in low-resource contexts.

2 Driving the development and use of accessible books in underserved languages

A leading barrier to improving children's reading skills is the lack of appropriate, accessible and engaging reading materials in local languages. Research shows that children experience greater reading success when learning in a language they use and understand, yet millions of children around the globe aren't provided the opportunities or resources to learn to read in these languages.

Providing engaging and accessible reading materials helps children get excited about reading, which in turn fuels their interest in practicing reading and engaging family members at home in literacy. ACR GCD sources innovative, low-cost solutions to increase the creation, production, distribution and use of high-quality, early grade reading materials in underserved languages, including sign languages.

3 Strengthening foundations for literacy to improve early childhood learning

The early years of a child's life (ages 3 to 6) present tremendous opportunity to support literacy and life skills that form the foundation for a lifetime of learning and fulfillment. Numerous research studies point to the power of early childhood education as an equalizer for children who live in low-resource contexts, thereby breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Yet access to these pre-primary learning opportunities is low, as only 17 percent of children in low-income countries are enrolled in preschool programs.

Recognizing the powerful role of pre-literacy as a foundation for a child's future success, ACR GCD sources and tests innovative approaches for improving early childhood literacy and development. These solutions involve a continuum of actors—including parents, caregivers, teachers, schools, community members and policymakers—with the goal of empowering families, communities and societies to strengthen early childhood education programs and resources.

SECOND FROM TOP: WORLD VISION PHOTO

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