

ALL CHILDREN READING:
A GRAND CHALLENGE FOR DEVELOPMENT

All Children Reading A Grand Challenge for Development

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

Marking 10 years of advancing EdTech innovation and research to improve reading outcomes for marginalized children in low-resource contexts



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ANNUAL REPORT 2021

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A message from the Challenge Director

LAST YEAR was a challenging year for many, but especially for children. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNESCO reported that 387 million children of primary school age were estimated to lack basic reading skills. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and forced migration have increased that number to 584 million, according to the United Nations.

For 10 years, All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development (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—and this year 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.

Last year the seven awardees of our three competitions were implementing innovative initiatives in 10 countries, engaging some of the most marginalized children in the world. This work is resulting in:

- the expansion of accessible, free e-storybooks in 10 underserved spoken languages and nine sign languages available for free through the open source book repository, Global Digital Library.
- accessible reading solutions for young children with disabilities, especially those that are blind and deaf, in Nepal, Rwanda and Papua New Guinea.
- new approaches to engage preschool children and their caregivers in reading readiness activities to prepare them for school in Nepal, Malawi, Philippines, Fiji and Papua New Guinea.



ACR GCD facilitates the research and development of EdTech solutions to advance literacy by assuming the risks involved in developing, sourcing out and scaling successful and viable tools to improve reading outcomes. Since 2011, we have cultivated over 1.7 million learning materials, including 1 million books and ebooks in more than 50 underserved languages and materials in sign languages and braille.

Finally, we are particularly proud of our innovators' work to bridge gaps for children with disabilities. We have grown to be one of the largest innovation funds focused on reading for children with disabilities, with more than \$4.5 million invested in inclusive education.

In summary, our Grand Challenge continues to fulfill its promise to remain at the helm of advancing innovation and research to improve reading outcomes for children in low-resource contexts through funding the cutting-edge work of 10 awardees around the world, breakthrough research and learning to evidence the role of EdTech to improve reading outcomes, and ongoing advocacy with global influencers and EdTech leaders. ■

On behalf of the Challenge Partners

Sergio Ramirez-Mena

Challenge Director, Challenge Management Group

A Grand Challenge that is changing lives

ACR GCD identified as a successful Grand Challenge in USAID meta-evaluation report

SINCE 2011, USAID and partners around the world have launched 11 Grand Challenges for Development designed to catalyze co-investment between governments, companies and foundations around important issues with the objective to bring in new voices to solve development problems, source new solutions, test new ideas and scale what works.

Launched as the second Grand Challenge in 2011 by USAID, World Vision and the Australian Government, ACR GCD is now recognized as a leader in catalyzing innovation and implementing and scaling game-changing EdTech solutions and tools to increase literacy for marginalized children in low-resource contexts. In November 2021, ACR GCD was featured as a successful Grand Challenge in USAID's *Grand Challenges for Development Meta Evaluation Report*. The report assessed the effectiveness of nine of USAID's grand challenges through solving development problems by catalyzing co-investment, ecosystem engagement, sourcing new solutions, sharing knowledge and testing innovations.

The report highlighted ACR GCD successes, including our strides in the area of inclusive education for children with disabilities:

"The objectives relating to enhancing literacy for children with disabilities can be considered achieved through the number of



INNOVATOR & SCALING SPOTLIGHT

Kukua Education Limited Founder Lucrezia Bisignani follows children's reactions while playing with SEMA during a testing session of the game's prototypes during the ACR GCD EduApp4Syria Prize. The app enables children to learn how to read, write and do basic numeracy through digital games. Kukua now has three SEMA apps available.



INNOVATOR & SCALING SPOTLIGHT

A student at Miriam Bint Imran School in 2016 using Qysas, an interactive and animated Arabic early grade literacy app featuring more than 125 eBooks that introduces reading through a leveled reading platform and provides automated feedback and recommendations for a child-centered and differentiated approach to learning. In 2018, Qysas was transformed into a digital leveled library called Let's Live in Harmony—adding 120 digital books co-created with the Jordanian Ministry of Education.

A Grand Challenge that is changing lives

learners reached and the uptake of innovations beyond ACR GCD grantees.”

“The [Grand Challenge] was able to establish much-needed focus on inclusive education and technology aid to make inclusive education a possibility.”

One of our ACR GCD awardees, Little Thinking Minds (LTM), was featured as a case study, noted for their success in scaling effective EdTech solutions to improve reading for the most marginalized children:

“ACR GCD was instrumental in making a business model which was active in the private sphere and open and accessible to the public sphere. Without ACR GCD, students in public schools might not have been able to use the reading facilities that they are accessing now.” (LTM’s business model for the public sector is currently being scaled by the Ministry of Education in Jordan.)

Building on our experience and lessons learned to date and the recommendations from the *Grand Challenges for Development Meta Evaluation Report*, ACR GCD is uniquely and purposefully positioned to continue influencing education systems to be more inclusive and provide vital resources to support literacy programming, undergirded by our commitment to the development of reading and learning materials that are accessible to all learners—and that all those solutions are open source so that the work of the entire education sector is strengthened to ensure a future where all children can read. ■

ACR GCD is uniquely and purposefully positioned to continue influencing education systems to be more inclusive....

Advancing literacy in the midst of a pandemic

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC continues to impact children around the world. The UN calls the pandemic's effect on schooling a "generational catastrophe, with over 100 million additional children falling below minimum reading proficiency in 2020.

As the pandemic upended normal operations and hampered the ability of organizations to carry out their plans, ACR GCD awardees cleverly innovated, shifting to virtual training and interactions, using more online reading materials such as digital storybooks, online teacher support, and working with local education authorities and community members to reach those with less access to technology.

In other words, their work not only continued but also expanded—and they are leveraging the lessons they've learned as they look ahead.

"We could not just stop and let this pandemic prevent us from serving communities, especially children who are in need of educational materials in the language that they understand best," said Rajib Mitra, program manager of SIL LEAD, an ACR GCD Begin With Books Prize awardee. SIL LEAD is creating the first large collection of 200 storybooks in the Soninke and Senoufo languages of Mali, as well as 20 more in Malian Sign Language.

The Asia Foundation (TAF) modified in-person presentations to virtual workshops and community gatherings for its Begin With Books projects in Laos, Nepal and Papua New Guinea, which included adapting presentations on how to create sign language storybooks with simultaneous integrated videos in the local sign language and materials to train educators of the local Nepali disabled persons organizations (DPO) to provide instructions and support for producing future sign language storybooks.



PHOTO CREDIT: THE ASIA FOUNDATION

INNOVATOR SPOTLIGHT

Begin With Books Prize innovator The Asia Foundation modifies in-person presentations to virtual and community gatherings in Laos, Nepal and Papua New Guinea during the pandemic.



INNOVATOR SPOTLIGHT

Members of The Asia Foundation project team - which includes local authors, illustrators, designers, language experts and volunteer translators - meet outside during a session focused on creating books in Tamang, a local language in Nepal.

PHOTO CREDIT: THE ASIA FOUNDATION

“We’ve seen an incredible surge in demand for online material as schools and families transitioned to remote learning,” said Kyle Barker, associate director for TAF. “We’ve also seen a wonderful outpouring from community members wanting to contribute to [adapting] books into their own language.”

eKitabu’s Begin With Books project in Malawi—to create accessible books in the Tumbuka language and Malawian Sign Language for early grade children—quickly shifted to building a process to train and work remotely with a team of local translators, content developers, audio narrators, illustrators and DPOs.

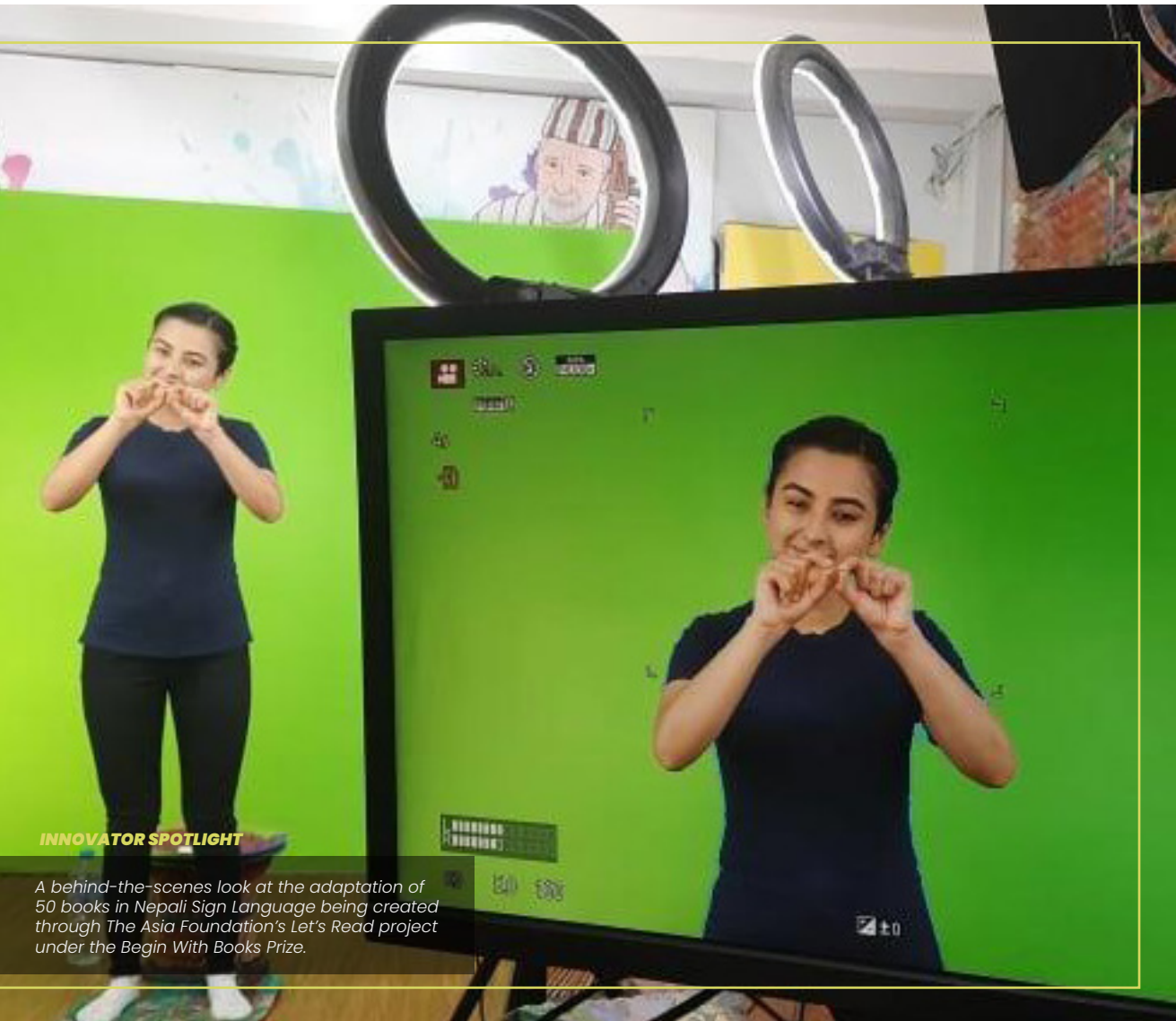
“Though this process has had its challenges, we feel it enabled us to reach out to a wider group of collaborators and pushed us to improve our tools and documentation,” said Lilian Kibagendi, eKitabu project manager.

In Rwanda, eKitabu’s project to increase use of accessible ICT and widen access to accessible digital books for children with disabilities also found success in its virtual training with publishers.

Looking ahead, Mitra sees EdTech playing a key role in filling gaps in the delivery of education to children “As this pandemic continues to cause disruptions in our daily lives, and until we can return to some sort of ‘new normal,’ we need to continue adapting so that children can learn through various EdTech platforms.”

Catharine Morgan, senior program officer for World Education Inc., which is implementing its Leveraging Existing Accessibility Resources in Nepal (LEARN) Project, agrees. Even when the pandemic subsides, EdTech will be vital.

“Teachers will have to adapt to meet the variety of learning needs,” she said. “We are hopeful EdTech solutions will support children with tailored learning supports to meet their needs, and especially enable struggling learners to catch up.” ■



INNOVATOR SPOTLIGHT

A behind-the-scenes look at the adaptation of 50 books in Nepali Sign Language being created through The Asia Foundation's Let's Read project under the Begin With Books Prize.



Cultivating EdTech solutions to increase child literacy

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 shifting our focus from funding pilot or proof of concept innovations to evidence-based solutions that can go to scale. The work of the awardees and their teams is now solidly underway.

On the following pages are some highlights about their work to improve reading outcomes for marginalized children in low-resource contexts.

Developing books in underserved languages



ALL CHILDREN READING:
A GRAND CHALLENGE FOR DEVELOPMENT PRIZE

The Big Idea: Research shows that children experience greater reading success when learning in their local spoken or signed language. Providing engaging and accessible books in these underserved languages is essential to empowering and supporting these children on their path to literacy. In collaboration with the Global Book Alliance (GBA), ACR GCD is funding four teams of innovators to assemble cost-effective packages of high quality, accessible titles in underserved spoken and signed languages. The books are being uploaded to the Global Digital Library, a free web-based platform that makes high-quality early learning resources available in more than 90 languages.

Producing books gaining momentum through pandemic

Despite ongoing constraints due to the COVID pandemic, awardees have produced over 500 accessible books in 14 underserved languages to date with the momentum expected to continue in 2022 to create books for young learners in some of the world's most fragile contexts. This initiative is expected to culminate in the production of over 2,000 storybooks in 19 underserved languages, including local sign languages.

Supporting sign language storybook production through cohort mentorship

ACR GCD established the Sign Language Storybook Cohort (SLSC) to promote the collaboration, learning and adaptation (CLA) approach among Begin With Books Prize awardees and their local disabled persons organizational (DPOs) partners.

Recognizing the value of peer-to-peer learning and the need for deaf-led expertise and mentoring, ACR GCD funded Rochester Institute of Technology/National Technical Institute for the Deaf (RIT/NTID) to convene

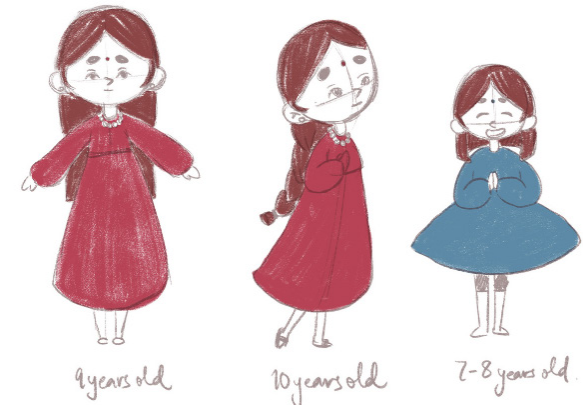
and lead the SLSC. This cohort is spurring co-learning between the awardees and strengthening their capacity to create high quality storybooks in local sign languages by pivoting the provision of technical assistance from in-person training events to virtual support and recorded sessions.

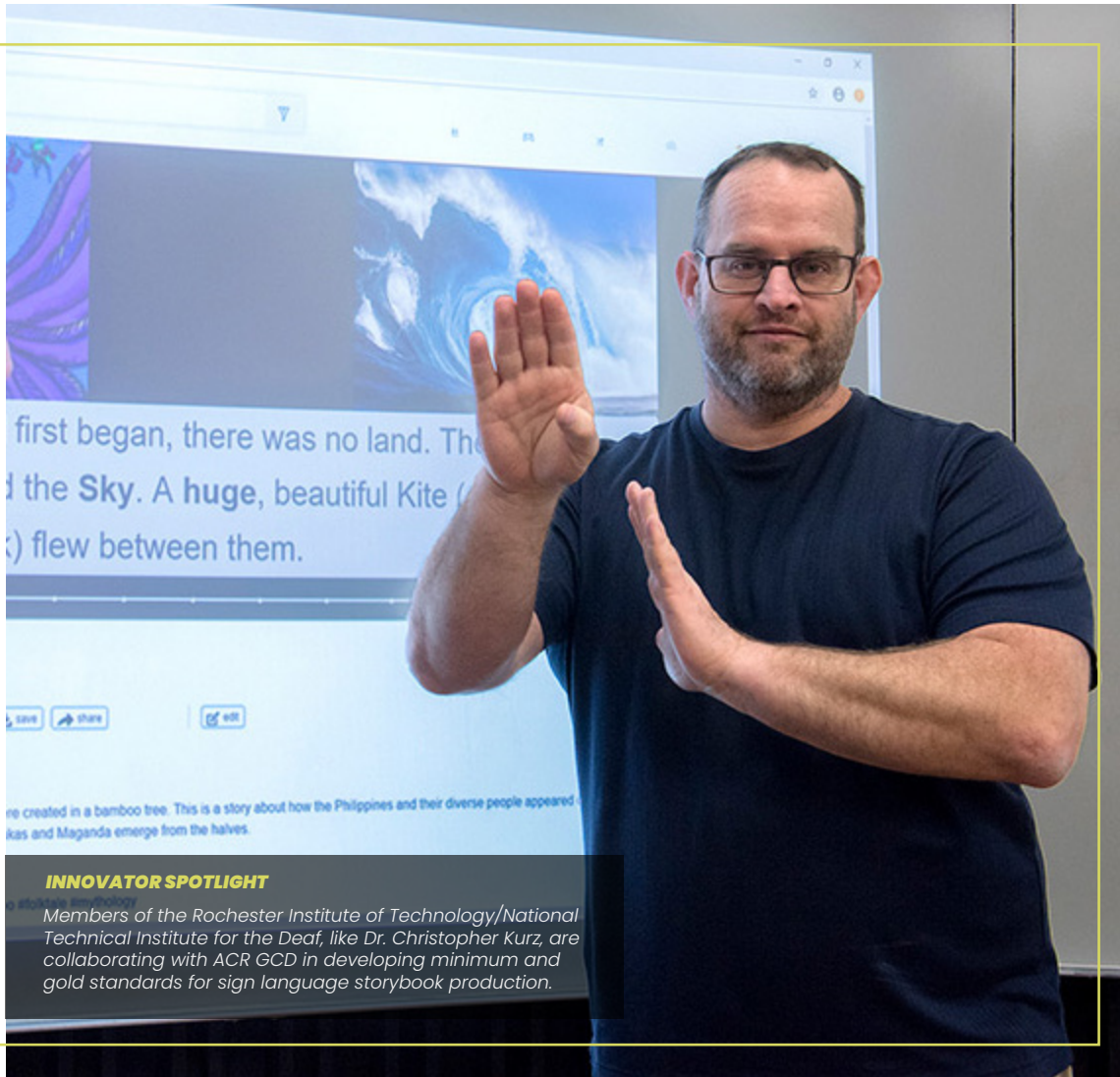
Awardees have already produced sign language storybooks for children who are deaf in Fiji, Indonesia, the Philippines and Somalia. In 2022, awardees will continue with the production of books in five additional sign languages for children in Malawi, Mali, Nepal, Papua New Guinea and Samoa.



PHOTO CREDIT: THE ASIA FOUNDATION

Early concept art for the adaption of books into the Tamang language of Nepal.





Developing Minimum and Gold Standards for sign language books for deaf children

The collaboration and learning between awardees through the continued work of the SLSC has not only further developed their capacity to adapt books into sign languages but also created new content that addresses social inclusion and heightens the visibility of children and family members who are disabled.

Through virtual, on demand YouTube sessions, experts from RIT/NTID provided training on the draft Minimum and Gold Standards for sign

language storybook production to guide the production of sign language storybooks in low resource settings and ensure quality bilingual sign language storybooks.

In 2022, the cohort will continue to validate these standards as they conclude their book production, and the lessons learned will be incorporated into the final version of the Minimum and Gold Standards. The standards toolkit will be open source and available for global distribution to support inclusive education and the creation of more sign language teaching and learning materials. ■

“The training has provided me the opportunity to understand how best to develop books according to children’s ability to grasp information, based on their age. I’m so proud to be working on this project.”

~ Bakar Ali, Somali National Association for the Deaf & Sign Language Storybook Cohort member

INNOVATOR SPOTLIGHT

Members of the Rochester Institute of Technology/National Technical Institute for the Deaf, like Dr. Christopher Kurz, are collaborating with ACR GCD in developing minimum and gold standards for sign language storybook production.



Big Idea: Providing children with the foundational skills needed to support grade-level learning is an effective pathway to address the global learning crisis. COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenge to provide pre-primary education to the 175 million children globally who don't have access during these vital years of their lives. This summer, ACR GCD selected three teams of innovators to adapt EdTech solutions and activities that enable marginalized children ages 3 to 6 to build foundational language and literacy skills at home or at school. In addition to targeting key foundational language and literacy skills—including alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness, expressive vocabulary, and listening comprehension—solutions are also supporting parents, caregivers, teachers and/or facilitators with resources and tools to assist in filling gaps in early learning among children, especially due to COVID-19 and other crises.

Supporting foundational literacy

Talking Books for preschool children in Malawi to boost foundational skills

In recent years, Malawi has increased interventions to support early grade reading, but much work remains to be done. As recently as 2018, 74% of grade 2 (standard 2) students could not identify any letter sounds, and the national average for grade 4 (standard 4) reading comprehension was only 38%. Early childhood education centers, known as Community Based Childcare Centers, also need support since they are mostly under-resourced and frequently overenrolled with 40 or more preschool children per teacher.

To address some of these challenges, ILC Africa, in conjunction with the Association of Early Childhood Development in Malawi (AECDM) and the Amplio Network, will adapt Malawi's early childhood education (ECE) curriculum for students and caregivers into Talking Books, which are low-tech interactive radios that hold hours of content and can record usage activity. This adapted supplementary curriculum is intended to boost the foundational skills development of children in a fun and interactive way through both in-school and at-home support.

Ground-breaking project will use Rhythm and Rhymes for deaf children in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Philippines

Building off of their Begin with Books Prize, the Rochester Institute of Technology/National Technical Institute for the Deaf (RIT/NTID) will transform reading and language learning experiences in early education for children

who are deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines.

The Transforming Reading in Early Education (TREE) project will design a multi-layered signing-reading curriculum using Sign Language Rhyme and Rhythm (SLRR) and Shared Multilingual Reading Strategies to help address the signing and print literacy gaps that frequently exist for DHH students. The SLRR approach helps to increase vocabulary and phonological awareness through language play, using visual rhythms and rhymes in the local sign language through the use of visually similar signs, movements, and rhythms—for example, using signs that consistently use three fingers or five fingers, or that have similar up/down movement or use a similar location.



PHOTO CREDIT: AMPLIO NETWORK

Talking Books are interactive radios that hold hours of content and can record usage activity.

Shared Multilingual Reading Strategies are used for caregivers to support the language acquisition of DHH children during storytelling, as deaf children are using and learning two languages simultaneously—the sign language and the written language. This overall approach will also help to increase parental engagement and the use of sign language, which has been shown to increase the expressive and receptive vocabulary of DHH children.

Project TREE is a ground-breaking opportunity in these contexts, and is already helping to increase interest in supporting foundational literacy skills for children who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Read2Read and Play aims to spark curiosity and increase oral language and pre-reading skills

In Nepal, early childhood education (ECE) enrollment is low, especially among the poorest quintile of citizens where only 41% are able to access any type of ECE resources. Children are often ill-equipped to successfully start and stay in school from grade 1, while families do not have the resources to provide any meaningful support to remedy the situation.

The Asia Foundation's Ready2Read and Play program will train community mobilizers as ECE facilitators and will engage children and their families through 30 weekly, in-person Ready2Read and Play sessions aligned with the Government of Nepal's ECE curriculum. The program will also engage additional families virtually via social media and encourage use of existing online storybooks on the Let's Read Digital Library. ■



INNOVATOR SPOTLIGHT

Under the Ready2Read Challenge, The Asia Foundation will train community mobilizers in Nepal as early childhood education facilitators and will engage children and their families using print and digital books.

UnrestrICTed Challenge

LITERACY & LEARNING WITHOUT LIMITS FOR ALL CHILDREN

The Big Idea: More than 93 million children globally have a disability, and at least 90 percent of those residing in countries with high poverty levels do not attend school. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges and deepened the need for quality Information and Communications Technology (ICT) solutions to support learning for all children in or out of school. In March, ACR GCD selected three teams of innovators 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. Solvers participated 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 in low-resource contexts.

Ensuring best solutions reach children with disabilities

Digital Story Time supports children with disabilities to build literacy in and out of school

In Rwanda, the lack of accessible teaching and learning materials for learners with disabilities is often a major barrier to access and inclusion. Learners with visual disabilities often have to wait for braille materials, while learners who are deaf or hard of hearing lack access to materials in Rwandan Sign Language and are unable to participate in mainstream classrooms where learning is conducted in spoken language.

To address these challenges, eKitabu is collaborating with Rwandan disabled persons organizations (DPOs), former ACR GCD awardee Benetech, education organizations from the public and private sector, and the government to widen access to books in accessible formats. These resources will be locally developed, approved by the Rwandan Education Board, and informed by Universal Design for Learning principles.

eKitabu is also working with teachers, community members and caregivers to bring awareness to accessible ICT and how children with disabilities can actively participate in education using accessible digital books.

“We hope that by the end of our project, more children with disabilities in Rwanda will be reading at grade level—learning to read and reading to learn,” Clurman says. “We also hope attitudes among teachers, head teachers, parents and children will have changed countrywide toward the human potential of people with disabilities, and that accessibility will be a core requirement for technology in Rwandan education. Most of all, we hope Rwandan children with and without disabilities will be excited to use technology for learning to read together in schools, homes and community libraries.”

Yumi Read Together will use the Bloom Reader app to gain access to curriculum books in local spoken and sign languages

In Papua New Guinea, an estimated 95% of children with disabilities are not in school, a challenge that stems largely from stigma about disability and parents’ concerns about safety and teasing, according to data from Save the Children.

To address these challenges, Save the Children in Papua New Guinea is working in a consortium with former ACR GCD awardee SIL LEAD, as well as Callan Services for Per-



eKitabu is using the Digital Story Time platform to develop accessible digital books.

sons with Disabilities and Papua New Guinea Assembly of Disabled Persons, to provide children with digital books with audio and video features.

Their Yumi Read Together project is leveraging DPO outreach to support families in using SIL LEAD's Bloom Reader app to gain access to the Papua New Guinea's Department of Education primary curriculum books. These books have been translated into various local languages with accessibility features, including videos with American Sign Language (ASL) and Papua New Guinea Sign Language, and audio in English and Tok Pisin. Save the Children is also working with local companies, NGOs, government and civil society actors to provide training to more than 1,000 teachers and education professionals in screening, identifying and supporting children with disabilities.

"Children with disabilities will engage in more reading and demonstrate improved reading outcomes if their teachers and caregivers know how to support them, and if they have access to appropriate accessible books with strong links to the national curriculum," said Joy Wong, Program Operations Director for Save the Children Papua New Guinea. "Consistent practice and messages reinforced at school and at home is the key."

LEARN will develop a framework for integrating accessible Information Communication Technology (ICT) in government guidelines, training instruction

In Nepal, roughly 11% of children have a disability, according to UNICEF estimates. Access to education for children with disabilities in the country often depends on their type of disability, rural or urban location, and language, and only a small percentage are estimated to have tailored learning support.

To address these challenges, World Education is working with government education stakeholders and local organizations for disabled people to develop a framework for integrating ICT and Universal Design for Learning principles into government guidelines and training

instruction. The project—titled LEARN (Leveraging Existing Accessibility Resources in Nepal)—is also leveraging ICT to expand teacher professional development opportunities related to inclusive education.

"Right now, there are a variety of different technology resources and digital materials, but they're all disparate initiatives," said Helen Sherpa, Country Director for World Education Nepal. "Our vision is for government stakeholders, teacher trainers, teachers, DPOs and parents to have a better understanding of the resources that are available, how they can be used to support learning, and how to select the most appropriate resources for a particular context, learning stage, or child's needs." ■

"The UnrestrICTed Challenge, with its focus on scalable ICT solutions to support learning for children with disabilities, is timely," said Rosemary McKay, former director of the Education Section at the Australia Department of Foreign Aid and Trade, an ACR GCD partner. "Amidst this COVID-19 crisis, all children should have access to learning opportunities."

INNOVATOR SPOTLIGHT

World Education, Inc. is working to integrate ICT and UDL principles into government guidelines and training instruction with the aim to increase reading outcomes for children in Nepal.



PHOTO CREDIT: WORLD EDUCATION INC

Research, learning and scaling of solutions

Key aspects of a Grand Challenge include catalyzing co-investment, sourcing new solutions, testing innovations, scaling solutions, sharing knowledge and ecosystem engagement. The following section explores our work over the past year in the last three of these areas, including:

- *Using the collaborating, learning and adapting (CLA) approach to help strengthen our support for innovators developing solutions to increase literacy for children with disabilities.*
- *How sharing our knowledge and innovations through open source and Creative Commons Attribution licensing is supporting the scaling of solutions and advancement of literacy.*
- *Examples of innovators and solutions that have scaled beyond their original ACR GCD funding, helping to increase literacy through EdTech solutions for marginalized children in low-resource contexts around the world.*



CHALLENGE SPOTLIGHT

The Begin With Books prize is funding innovators to create accessible books to be loaded onto the Global Digital Library, where users can access more than 6000 free ebooks in 90 languages.

PHOTO CREDIT: ALL CHILDREN READING: A GRAND CHALLENGE FOR DEVELOPMENT

Learning and adapting to support ACR GCD innovators

ACR GCD honored as finalist in the 2021 USAID CLA Case Study Competition

ACR GCD WAS ONE OF 13 FINALISTS in the 2021 USAID Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) Case Study Competition. The annual competition captures real-life examples of USAID staff and partners using CLA approaches to achieve better development outcomes. Judges reviewed 80 submitted cases, which were asked to focus on how locally led development is fostered through strategic collaboration, how teams paused and reflected on activities, what was the learning cultures within organizations, and how activity implementation was adapted based on evaluation findings for performance monitoring.

ACR GCD's case study, "CLA Strengthens Efforts to Improve Language and Learning for Children with Disabilities," focused on our shift from supporting innovators and innovations at pilot (or proof of concept) stage to transitioning mature, evidence-based solutions for scale.

Furthermore, this year, ACR GCD hosted six CLA sessions with its awardees and

founding partners, which embed learning into our awards life-cycle and ensure the partners and awardees have regular opportunities to share knowledge and experiences and then adapt designs or technical assistance based on ongoing learning or changing circumstances.

For example, building on lessons from other Grand Challenges which found that heavy reliance on expert-led training did not adequately support innovators, ACR GCD established the Sign Language Storybook Cohort (SLSC) on the Slack platform. The cohort, made up of Begin With Books awardees and their disabled persons organization (DPO) partners, provides peer-led training on minimum standards for sign language storybook production and opportunities for awardees and partners to collaborate, learn and share resources. COVID-19 presented our awardees with the impetus to adapt and change, which resulted in being some of the first organizations to develop new books for students easily accessible online in 16 underserved languages with COVID-19 prevention messages. ■



PHOTO CREDIT: eKITABU

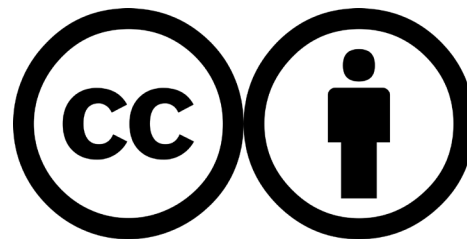
Open source tech spurs scaling of solutions supporting solvers

ACR GCD IS FIRMLY COMMITTED to open source solutions based on Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) licensed materials to support innovators, solvers and users around the world in developing, scaling and using EdTech solutions to improve reading outcomes for marginalized children in low-resource contexts.

One successful example of how open source technology inspires and promotes scaling beyond original funding is *Feed the Monster*, which was created through our EduApp4Syria competition to develop smartphone apps that build foundational literacy skills in Arabic and improve psychosocial well-being for Syrian refugee children. Since the competition, *Feed the Monster*—originally developed in English and Arabic—has scaled far beyond its original funding. Curious Learning, through its own initiative and funding, attained the open source code from GitHub to adapt *Feed the Monster* into more than 48 languages. In 2021, *Feed the Monster* was adapted into Nepali and is currently being used by more than 60,000 users in that country in addition to being integrated with the EdTech Matrix, a tool being developed and implemented by UnrestrICTed awardee World

Education to help teachers choose the right technologies to support children with disabilities. Curious Learning's new Follow the Learners dashboard showcases the breadth of *Feed the Monster* use, now totaling more than 478,000 users globally.

ACR GCD also requires all content produced with our funding to be CC-BY licensed for anyone to use. This includes any books produced or adapted, training and coaching manuals, parent engagement booklets and more. This year, ACR GCD awardees produced and/or adapted 1093 accessible CC-BY licensed books and 116 training manuals and resources, such as videos and flipbooks, to support teachers, parents and community engagement in children's reading. All of these materials will be available for others to use. ■



Left image: The logos for Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) licensing, which allows licensees to copy, distribute, display, perform and make derivative works and remixes based on it if they give the author or licensor the credits (attribution) in the manner specified. ACR GCD is firmly committed to open source solutions based on CC-BY licensed materials to support innovators and solvers around the world.

Right image: *Feed the Monster* is now available in more than 48 languages on Google Play.

Scaling author training model creates pipeline of quality books

WHEN ASAFEER EDUCATION TECHNOLOGIES won the ACR GCD No Lost Generation (NLG) Tech Summit prize in 2017, they were charged with creating 100 audible, leveled and illustrated ebooks that presented engaging STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) topics in Arabic. Instead of seeking out a cadre of good authors to create the content, Abu-Hmaidan turned to Maria Dadouch, an author who received her degree in literature from University of California Los Angeles. Dadouch developed a syllabus to train 24 authors—the majority of whom were women—to create the 100 storybooks for the NLG prize.

“The prize enabled us to think about the problem differently,” says Amro Abu-Hmaidan, founder and CEO of Asafeer, a Dubai-based EdTech company. “Instead of just looking for good people, we created good authors.”

That decision has paid dividends over the last four years. Not only did the cadre of 24 authors create 100 quality Adventures in Science & Life ebooks in Arabic and English for free use on the Global Digital Library (GDL), but Abu-Hmaidan and Dadouch now had a reference point of quality Arabic content they could use to train more authors.

In 2020, with the 100 Arabic stories funded through ACR GCD now available for free across several platforms, Dadouch and Abu-Hmaidan determined they could now scale their model to reach more aspiring authors with training on creating quality children’s content in Arabic. Dadouch partnered with the Edraak Initiative, a massive open online course (MOOC) platform established by the Queen Rania Foundation, to create a course on how to write and create quality children’s storybooks in Arabic.

Since launching the course in 2020, it has engaged more than 34,500 learners, many of whom have since published books through Asafeer or other publishers. “We keep receiving thank you notes,” Dadouch says. “These authors are producing stories that are very different from what they used to be and are getting published.”

The impact of the books created by Asafeer through the NLG prize continues beyond the initial batch of books and ongoing use of them

Through the No Lost Generation Tech Summit Prize, Asafeer Education Technologies produced 100 STEM-focused ebooks.

to train new authors. The books are available on the Asafeer app and the Global Digital Library, an initiative of the Global Book Alliance that offers free digital and print-ready books in more than 90 languages. Because the books are open source, other authors can translate the stories or use the beautiful images to create new content. Many of the books have already been translated into dozens of additional languages on web-based platforms that make high-quality early learning resources available in multiple languages, like the GDL, Bloom Library and Let’s Read Digital Library. ■



Expanding use of adapted EGRA for children with disabilities

Resources for the Blind builds on their ACR GCD support

FORMER ACR GCD INNOVATOR RESOURCES FOR THE BLIND (RBI) IS GOING TO SCALE with its Gabay (Guide) project thanks to its successful work with ACR GCD in Round 2. Their Gabay project, a three-year project funded by USAID, involves working with local governments in the provinces in the Philippines to identify children from kindergarten to grade three who are blind, low vision, and/or deaf to ensure they receive language and literacy support and resources beginning at an early age.

The Gabay project includes implementing an innovative approach to student assessment using the adapted Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) to measure reading proficiency among children with disabilities—one of the project’s key indicators. The focus of adapted EGRA is on providing appropriate accommodations for learners with disabilities so they can access the assessment content equitably. Accommodations include providing large print or Braille stimuli, allowing extended time for certain subtasks, and providing enumeration in local sign language. The adapted EGRA was an ACR GCD initiative implemented in close collabo-

ration with its monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning partner School To School (STS) International, an ACR GCD long-time partner.

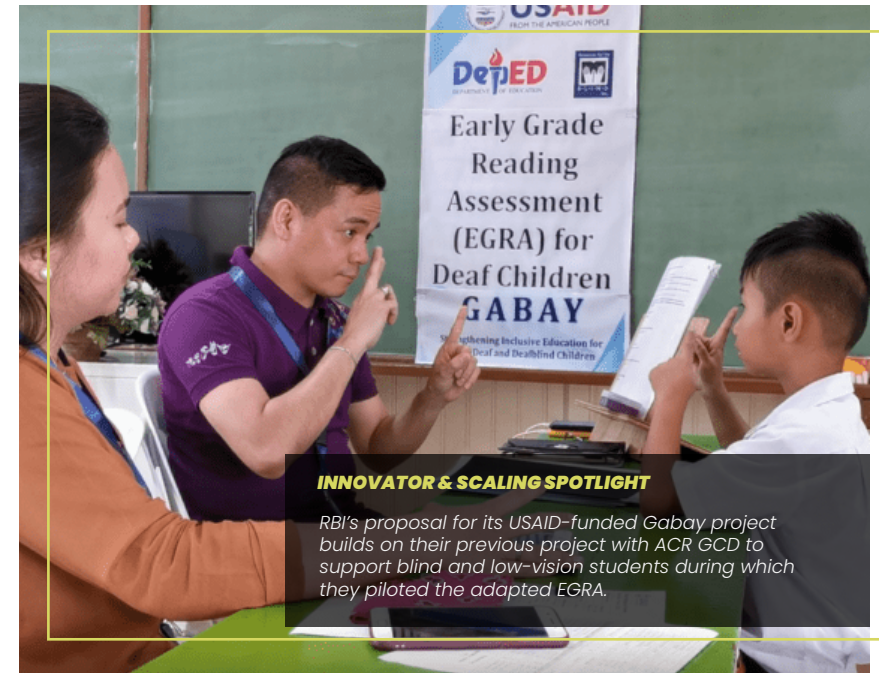
“We are really grateful for ACR, because our proposal for Gabay was based on our previous project with ACR to support blind and low-vision students,” says Amy Mojica, deputy chief of party for Gabay. “Piloting the adapted EGRA through ACR positioned us to expand our work to include deaf and hard of hearing students.”

The project has also leveraged other innovations funded by ACR GCD, including Bloom book creation software, Bloom Library, and the World Around You platform of sign language storybooks.

Aimee Reeves, MERL technical advisor for School to School, adds that ACR GCD’s laser focus on supporting and advocating for inclusive education, as well as its partnership with STS in adapting the EGRA for children with disabilities, particularly in the Philippines and Morocco, has influenced other governments to open education programming to learners with disabilities.

“The work started through ACR in adapting the EGRA through the Reading Beyond Sight project highlighted the importance of doing research

on learners with disabilities and proved that they can be part of these assessments, instead of being excluded,” Reeves says. “The influence ACR is having in engaging governments, bilaterals and other partners on the needs of children with disabilities does not happen with many projects. The motion and movement we’ve seen as a result of ACR feels unique.” ■



INNOVATOR & SCALING SPOTLIGHT

RBI’s proposal for its USAID-funded Gabay project builds on their previous project with ACR GCD to support blind and low-vision students during which they piloted the adapted EGRA.

PHOTO CREDIT: RESOURCES FOR THE BLIND

Expanding the reach of EdTech solutions for literacy

IN 2021, ACR GCD continued to catalyze action to expand the reach of EdTech solutions that improve children's reading and language skills.

During our campaign to promote the Ready2Read Challenge, we were delighted that more than 6,000 members of our ACR GCD online community showed an interest in the competition on our website and blogs. Furthermore, 8,000 of our online community engaged with us on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

ACR GCD continued to expand its presence in the EdTech space through media placements in larger forums like UNESCO's World Education blog, which featured awardee eKitabu's work to provide sign language storybooks to children who are deaf and hard and hearing in Kenya, and ICTWorks, which invited global solvers to participate in our Ready2Read Challenge.

The scaling of past innovations also helped ACR GCD's presence grow. *Grace in Space*, an award-winning storybook

created through ACR GCD's No Lost Generation EdTech Summit prize, received wide public exposure during International Literacy Day when a video of USAID Administrator Samantha Power and NASA astronaut Jessica Meir reading the book was circulated on social media. *Feed the Monster*, an innovative smartphone app developed through our EduApp4Syria Prize and now available in more than 48 languages on Google Play, was also highlighted in a World Bank blog post.

Through convenings, ACR GCD is disseminating innovations and evidence to expand the reach of the most promising context-appropriate EdTech as well as inform and support education decision-makers and practitioners working to improve children's literacy outcomes.

This past year, ACR GCD presented at global conferences such as Comparative & International Education Society (CIES), Global Digital Development Forum, and the mEducation Alliance Symposium as well as Global Book Alliance webinars. ■



NASA astronaut Jessica Meir reads *Grace in Space*.

Looking ahead: EdTech for literacy

IN 2022, more than 100 million new children will come of age to start school in the midst of a pandemic and forced migration crises. Of particular risk are children in low-resource contexts and children with disabilities, who remain among the most marginalized in accessing education. Learning to read will be a key factor in improving their lives and reducing poverty. Without new, appropriate solutions, we risk leaving these children further behind.

ACR GCD will continue to lead in the EdTech for literacy space, implementing and scaling game-changing solutions and tools to address gaps and barriers to child literacy and supporting and empowering innovators who are developing ground-breaking solutions to provide opportunities for all learners—including those in and out of school, in crisis and conflict situations, and children with disabilities.

We invite you to be part of the solution for the more than 584 million children globally waiting for the opportunity to learn to read. We encourage you to explore our solutions and tools to help you increase literacy opportunities for marginalized children in your work and programming. We hope, you too, will join us in advocating for meaningful investments in and use of innovations that increase access to local spoken and signed languages. We are excited about our mission in 2022. We invite you to partner with us to pilot or scale a solution or innovation in your community or region.

Together, we can advance EdTech solutions to improve reading outcomes for marginalized children in poor regions and developing countries around the world. ■



INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT

The children are playing Antura and the Letters, a game developed by Cologne Game Lab during our EduApp4Syria Prize. The game is available in Arabic and English.

PHOTO CREDIT: COLOGNE GAME LAB

ALL
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