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Global Alliance for Literacy within the Framework of Lifelong Learning (GAL)

Report of the Annual General Meeting on 29 September 2021

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Introduction

The Global Alliance for Literacy within the Framework of Lifelong Learning (GAL), launched in 2016, brings together 29 countries¹ committed to improving access to literacy provision for youth and adults. The Alliance includes countries facing particular literacy challenges, as well as nine highly populated countries (known as the E9 group), where the largest numbers of non-literate adults are found. UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) serves as the GAL Secretariat and organized the 2021 Annual General Meeting, the sixth of its kind, in close collaboration with the UNESCO Section of Youth, Literacy and Skills Development (YLS).

The meeting took place as the world continues to respond to the deleterious effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on educational provision of all kinds, including literacy provision for youth and adults. In the light of the GAL Strategy (2020–2025), adopted in April 2020 and aligned with the current UNESCO Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy (2020–2025) and the aim of achieving SDG 4, the Alliance is committed to finding effective and innovative ways to counter further disruption to learning opportunities, fostering equitable access and quality outcomes in literacy learning. This GAL Annual General Meeting was therefore an occasion to share strategies, approaches and provided a platform to strengthen cooperation and mutual support at this critical moment in order to coordinate a relevant and targeted response to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Objectives

The overall objectives of the meeting as shown in the Agenda (**Annex 2**) were to:

- review the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on youth and adult literacy;
- provide GAL members with an opportunity to share their experiences of and challenges to promoting literacy provision throughout the pandemic;
- identify opportunities to develop partnerships for the GEC–GAL initiative on improving the digital competences of literacy educators in GAL countries.

Participation

The four-hour meeting was held online (via Zoom) because of prevailing COVID-19 restrictions. There was a total of 86 participants; this included representatives from 14 GAL countries and 10 associate member countries, two participants from non-GAL countries, and three Global Education Coalition (GEC) partners. Moreover, the participants included one minister of education, a further 13 representatives from government, three participants from Permanent Delegations to UNESCO, two from National Commissions for UNESCO, seven participants from UNESCO Field Offices, 11 representatives of international bodies and networks, two from universities, and five from the private sector. Twenty-three directors, programme and support staff represented UNESCO and UIL, with the latter carrying out the tasks of the Secretariat for the meeting. **Annex 1** provides a list of the meeting participants. Due to technical issues, the attendance of some of the participants could not be verified and therefore the total number of participants may not be accurate.

This report follows the order of the meeting as shown in the agenda in **Annex 2**; it presents the highlights of each presentation and discussion. This report is produced by the GAL Secretariat with the support of an international consultant and in consultation with the UNESCO Section of Youth, Literacy and Skills Development (YLS).

¹ The GAL countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, the People's Republic of China, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gambia (the), Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone and South Sudan.

Opening session

Mr David Atchoarena, Director of UIL, warmly welcomed the participants. He noted that the GAL Annual General Meeting provides a regular opportunity to monitor and assess progress in literacy among member countries and partners. He stressed that GAL must continue to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, building on the discussions of the 2020 meeting and, in particular, seeking ways to further harness technologies to tackle literacy needs. The crisis has further exacerbated the disadvantageous prospects of low-literacy groups, such as women and marginalized adults; this situation, he said, calls for even greater efforts to bridge the digital divide. Mr Atchoarena further elaborated on this, saying that the divide includes aspects of infrastructure and connectivity as well as the capacity to use digital services. In today's world, he stressed, the digital divide 'continues to amplify existing inequalities in access to meaningful literacy opportunities.' Thus, this meeting must explore creative and innovative solutions – be they high-, low- or no-tech – to maintain continuity in provision,

Introducing the agenda and the meeting objectives, Mr Atchoarena emphasized the role of GAL as a platform for exchange, reflection and partnership among its 29 members, GAL associate members and other active literacy stakeholders and partners, keeping in clear view the ultimate aim of removing 'barriers of all kinds to the realization of the right to a meaningful literacy education for all.'

Following this introduction, two further interventions set the scene for the subsequent deliberations:

Mr Arnould Gbaguidi, Technical Advisor in Literacy, Ministry of Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education, Benin, representing H.E. Mr Kouaro Yves Chabi, co-chair of the GAL Steering Group and Minister of Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education, Benin.

Expressing his pleasure in representing the minister, Mr Gbaguidi stressed Benin's efforts to promote literacy for its adult and youth population, seeing it as a means of promoting well-being and opportunity. In particular, the government focuses on providing new opportunities to the youth of the country. In pursuing these aims, Benin has been happy to work with UIL, especially in implementing the RAMAA² programme, which is designed to measure the effectiveness of literacy efforts. Mr Gbaguidi said the country looks forward to seeing this initiative through to completion and to UIL's continued support in this and other aspects of literacy promotion in the country.

Mr Edouard Firmin Matoko, Assistant Director-General for Priority Africa and External Relations, UNESCO (via video message)

Recalling UNESCO's initiative in setting up GAL as a platform for synergizing efforts in pursuit of literacy as part of SDG 4, Mr Matoko underlined the importance of the creation of the Global Education Coalition (GEC) in 2020 in response to COVID-19 crisis. Literacy provision was at the margins of national responses to the pandemic, with alternative literacy strategies based on the use of technologies only gradually coming into use. As an essential element in addressing literacy inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic, it is now crucial to embed the acquisition and use of digital skills in literacy provision, linking GEC and GAL initiatives. In this way, literacy will play a role in the ever-increasing 'digital culture' in life, work and lifelong learning. He closed by appealing for recognition of the new opportunities that the responses to the pandemic have enabled; namely, to open up new learning pathways and engage new partnerships based on integrating technologies into literacy provision.

² To read more about the RAMAA (Recherche-action sur la mesure des apprentissages des bénéficiaires des programmes d'alphabétisation [Action research: Measuring literacy programme participants' learning outcomes] programme, visit <https://uil.unesco.org/literacy/measurement-of-learning-outcomes-ramaa> [Accessed 20 October 2021].

Session 1: Ministerial panel on youth and adult literacy in regional and national education recovery plans

Picking up on remarks from the introductory session, the moderator of Session 1, **Mr Borhene Chakroun, Director of the Division for Policies and Lifelong Systems, UNESCO**, stressed the nature of the current context in education: many school systems still closed; only 117 countries where classes have resumed, with some in hybrid mode. Headline statistics have shown 1.6 billion students with disrupted education, but little has been said of the 773 million adults whose literacy learning has also been disrupted. The resulting rapid shift to digital learning has highlighted a digital divide – in the ecosystem of teaching and learning; however, the key role of literacy in learning presents opportunities for recovery and should be set as a priority. Mr Chakroun asserted that the Session 1 panellists did not need to be reminded of the importance of literacy for life and livelihood; instead, he said, there are two questions that they should address:

- What were the main challenges for youth and adult literacy provision during the pandemic and what measures have governments adopted to address them?
- Looking to the future, what key measures, plans and priorities do governments foresee in order to promote recovery and build resilience?

The representatives of Sierra Leone, Benin and the Commissioner of the African Union took the floor in response to these questions.

Sierra Leone

H.E. Mr Alpha Tejan Wurie, Minister of Technical and Higher Education, Sierra Leone

The Minister thanked UNESCO and UIL for the opportunity to take part in GAL proceedings. He began by noting that 75 per cent of the 7 million people in Sierra Leone are under the age of 35. He also took the opportunity to reflect on the struggles the country has had to face in the years prior to COVID-19; namely, the civil war that took place from 1991 to 2002 and its struggle with the Ebola virus from 2014 to 2016, which greatly affected both formal and non-formal education. Lessons learned as a result of Ebola meant, however, that the population well understood the need for preventive measures in response to COVID-19.

Recent major steps forward in education in Sierra Leone include a policy of free basic education, in which 2.2 million children are enrolled. Nevertheless, 800,000 children still do not access the system. A key priority is to provide training for youth, most of whom are engaged in small-scale agriculture; however, the regular local markets are rendered less accessible because of COVID-19 measures (e.g. mask-wearing, social distancing).

While basic literacy is essential, young people need skills. The government now has 202 learning centres across all districts and a smaller number of technical, vocational education and training (TVET) centres – initiatives that have attracted international funding. The aim is to build young people's skills for agriculture, mining, fishing, hospitality and construction. Using an apprenticeship model where learners spend time in local enterprises, some students find employment immediately after training.

The Minister noted that another initiative has led to the development of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF), enabling learners to define their level of achievement within the education system. The government has also undertaken a programme of youth employment – farming, public works, driving – under the aegis of the National Youth Commission.

A key remaining challenge is to address the needs of women and girls, including safe learning and working spaces.

Benin

Mr Arnould Gbaguidi, Technical Advisor in Literacy, Ministry of Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education, Benin (representing H.E. Mr Kouaro Yves Chabi, co-chair of the GAL Steering Group and Minister of Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education, Benin).

Speaking in response to the two questions posed by the moderator, Mr Gbaguidi said the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic in Benin resulted in more technical and financial support to artisans, sensitization campaigns (preventive measures), and making masks available to poorer population groups. Classes were suspended, but continuity for literacy learners was provided by means of a digital platform – and centres were later re-opened.

Moreover, before the pandemic, the government had produced 12 modules in 12 local languages and held training sessions to develop the pedagogical and multimedia skills of 60 literacy facilitators. With the onset of the pandemic, these efforts proved to be extremely relevant and were implemented in an experimental way with a focus on evaluating effectiveness.

Another initiative, also planned before the pandemic, aimed to develop the online presence of the country's libraries; this too proved relevant once COVID-19 took over. Access to the internet in rural areas remains patchy, however, with connectivity beyond the reach of poorer populations.

Special intervention: Regional perspective

H.E. Ms Sarah Anyang Agbor, Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology, African Union.

Ms Anyang Agbor expressed satisfaction at attending the GAL meeting, as literacy is a topic close to her heart. Setting literacy in the context of [Agenda 2063](#), she stressed that there will be no African progress or prosperity without quality education and lifelong learning.

Literacy is fundamental in today's knowledge-based economy – without it, people are excluded from the most basic opportunities. Sustainable development therefore requires continuous learning. Africa has made progress in building its populations' literacy skills, but low literacy remains a major challenge, with the poor, women and girls being the most affected. Agenda 2063 calls for major programmes to promote literacy and a culture of reading; to see that happen, governments will have to step up and 'walk the talk'.

Turning to technologies, the Commissioner stressed that every child should have the opportunity to access digital media and the internet; there is huge potential for such media to increase literacy rates, leaving no one behind as the SDGs call for. 'Achieving the Africa we want' through the SDGs will depend on quality education, lifelong learning and the opportunities they afford.

Connecting the 'DOTSS' for learning

- Digital connectivity
- Online learning
- Teachers as facilitators
- Safety online
- Skills-focused learning

To conclude, Ms Anyang Agbor emphasized the central role of teachers as agents of change and referred to the DOTSS approach (see **Box 1**). She also underlined that working together on policies, strategies and gathering evidence are key aspects of achieving SDG 4, and GAL and UIL are well placed to facilitate effective cooperation.

Box 1. The DOTSS approach

Session 2: Literacy provision during and post-Covid-19 in GAL countries

Mr David Atchoarena, Director, UIL, moderated Session 2 and invited the participants to examine more closely the challenges that countries have faced because of COVID-19 and the policies and strategies that they have put in place to counteract these challenges. Of particular interest are the innovative approaches that countries have developed and adopted in order to ensure continuity of learning. Experience from a wide range of GAL member countries will provide a rich basis for reflection and learning. Five countries took part in this session – Senegal, Bangladesh, Brazil, Niger, Mexico (by means of a video report).

Senegal

Ms Ndeye Name Diouf, Director of Literacy and National Languages, Ministry of National Education, Senegal.

Ms Diouf situated Senegal's literacy efforts in the context of the pursuit of the SDGs and the implementation of Education 2030. In this regard, she noted that women are particularly marginalized, both in urban and rural contexts, while recognizing that, in general, rural areas are neglected in terms of educational opportunities. Women and rural areas are therefore of particular concern, with a number of literacy initiatives to meet their needs. Ms Diouf stressed that the promotion of literacy and of Senegalese languages has been central to the country's development trajectory.

These initiatives include EBJA (Education de Base des Jeunes et Adultes – Basic Education for Youth and Adults) which focuses on literacy in Senegalese languages and the development of alternative learning models. Senegal has built on previous experience to produce further materials during the Covid-19 pandemic, including 50 'pedagogical capsules', digital kits in local languages, CDs in Wolof for use in 10 Community Multimedia Centres, as well as equipping 115 Regional Training Centres with kits in Sankoré.

In order to maintain literacy provision during the pandemic, digitally based initiatives included a programme Learn at home using TV, telephone, radio and the internet. In addition, plans for 2021/22 include 20 virtual classes to cover the whole country. Ms Agbor concluded by recognizing the need for higher levels of digital competence among literacy professionals, with four components: strengthening digital pedagogical methods, maintaining literacy delivery by digital means, strengthening the financing of these initiatives, and bridging the digital divide (connectivity, infrastructure, skills/capacity) to facilitate equitable distance learning.

Bangladesh

Mr Ataur Rahman, Director-General, Bureau of Non-formal Education (BNFE), Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), Bangladesh.

Mr Rahman recalled that the Government of Bangladesh has a long-standing and abiding commitment to education for all, enshrined in its constitution. Within that, the country sees literacy as 'the foundation for all sorts of education and development'. A human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis will depend, in part, on the acquisition of literacy and digital skills by youth and adults. After sketching out the structure and legal basis for educational provision in Bangladesh, the Director-General noted that the adult literacy rate in the country stands at 75.6 per cent – good progress, but still leaving almost a quarter of adults (15+) without access to written communication. The progress made over the last 30 years may be seen in the succession of projects that have targeted a total of over 37 million learners, with over 20 million having achieved literacy, he added. The literacy task is unfinished, however: the current 'basic literacy' project targets 4.5 million learners, with 2.37 million already having been reached. One million out-of-school children also benefit from non-formal education (NFE) opportunities.

The COVID-19 crisis led to the closure of all schools in Bangladesh from March 2020, as well as of non-formal learning centres. These institutions remain closed, leading to huge learning losses and social isolation, which has taken its toll in terms of the physical and mental health of students and their communities. The government has initiated programmes to remedy the situation using distance learning, mostly TV and radio; however, for learners in NFE programmes, often in more remote rural areas and from poorer households, there is in reality little or no access to digital media or devices.

In this context, the challenges facing Bangladesh are many, including:

- a low level of resources, e.g. funding, management capacity at local level, decentralized staff;
- declining support from development partners for adult literacy;
- the need for lifelong learning and skills training centres, as well as NFE training institutes/academies at national or district level;
- a lack of long-term and sustainable planning.

A fundamental process in addressing all these needs is to rethink NFE in a broader context, developing a long-term vision with clear links between formal and non-formal education, as well as drawing on national and international approaches in a harmonized way.

Brazil

Mr Anthony Tannus Wright, Chief of Staff, Secretariat for Literacy, Ministry of Education, Brazil.

Brazil is home to 213 million people, 11 million of whom are non-literate; approximately half of this non-literate population is aged 60 and over. The government is tackling this challenge through its Secretariat for Literacy, which was created in 2019, and its Programa Brasil Alfabetizado (Literate Brazil Program, PBA), running since 2003, which also trains volunteers to teach literacy.

During the pandemic lockdown, programmes such as ‘Read to me’, which focuses on early literacy and using online materials, were very successful in Brazil. Through the programme, 40 books are available for free download, at school or at home, complemented by companion podcasts and videos. Some books have no text: the aim is that parents, including those with low or no literacy, can tell their children a story or accompany their child in using the podcast or video. Brazil has coupled this programme with outreach sponsored by the Ministry of Citizenship to deliver literacy kits directly into people’s homes by means of trained volunteers. Moreover, three courses in the ‘Time to learn’ programme have seen large enrolments of 150,000 to 200,000 participants, and a phone-based literacy app developed in Finland called GraphoGame, which is fully usable offline, has been downloaded 800,000 times – a figure which makes Brazil one of the top users of the app in the world.

In August 2021, a literacy resource was made available to help support teachers in literacy instruction, with online materials, questions, expert advice and information on carrying out assessments. Work on the use of artificial intelligence is also ongoing. Overall, the government has made available US\$35 million for literacy support in schools.

Niger

Ms Kouriram Hatchabi, Technical Advisor, Ministry of Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages, Niger. Ms Hatchabi opened her presentation with an overview of Niger’s educational strategy, in particular with regard to NFE and literacy. In 2017, she noted, the national adult literacy rate (15+) was at 34.3 per cent and 53.2 per cent of children (aged 7 to 16) were out of school. Efforts to address adult literacy required the role of NFE, its structures, target groups and responsibilities to be defined – keeping in mind to the commitment of Niger to international goals. Since 2017, literacy programmes and materials have been developed to cater to diverse target groups,

and learning centres for youth and adults, as well as unschooled younger children, have been established.

COVID-19 affected Niger's efforts to address low literacy levels in a number of ways; for example, it resulted in:

- a move to limited function of NFE structures and the closure of adult literacy centres (following school closures);
- alternative ways of addressing the needs of certain groups that took into account social-distancing methods;
- the loss or dropping out of learners when restrictions were lifted, owing to seasonal activities.

In response to these outcomes and challenges, the government took a number of measures, including the extension of the regular school holidays, and the development of a recovery plan that addressed out-of-school children, and initiated catch-up classes and Covid-19 prevention measures. Importantly, the government also tested out distance learning programmes and considered how to integrate information and communication technology (ICT) into literacy programmes.

To conclude, Ms Hatchabi acknowledged the efforts of partners in maintaining some training activities, with 58 per cent of centres continuing to function. The presence of adult literacy in the country's pandemic response strategies was not adequate, however, and thus Niger calls on UNESCO to advocate for a stronger emphasis on literacy in GAL countries.

Mexico (video message)

The National Institute for Adult Education (INEA) prepared a video depicting Mexico's response to the COVID-19 crisis.

As the pandemic arrived in Mexico, the government closed schools and INEA began to plan alternative methods of providing basic education opportunities to the most vulnerable and marginalized populations. It was agreed that maintaining three particular programmes was critical:

- 'Learn at home' for older people, their grandchildren and other household members, using TV and recognizing the life experience of the older adults;
- 'Days of exams' to enable learners to continue to certify their progress on various educational tracks – serving over 900,000 learners, of which 176,000 online;
- the Education Model for Life and Work (MEVyT) programme, to enable continuing learning in literacy and functional skills.

Thus, Mexico focused on providing opportunities while implementing the necessary preventive measures related to mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Session 3: Good practices, opportunities and challenges

Ms Graciela Sbertoli, General Secretary of the European Basic Skills Network (EBSN) moderated Session 3, which gave the floor to two countries that are not part of GAL: Morocco and Cambodia. The aim of this approach was to promote broader learning from a wider range of contexts, cross-fertilizing ideas and approaches. The presentations were an opportunity to examine what approaches have been adopted and what innovative practices may provide lessons for action in different parts of the world.

Morocco

Mr Abdessamih Mahmoud, Director, National Agency for the Fight Against Illiteracy (ANLCA), Morocco. The ANLCA Director presented three components of Morocco's COVID-19 response. The first, programme management, involved adopting blended learning methods; using distance learning approaches such as mobile apps and televised programming; developing literacy 'capsules' (sets of instruction materials); and producing a distance-training guide when literacy classes closed in March 2020 along with schools. Some in-person classes continued to take place, in designated groups and fully respecting COVID-19-preventive measures, and ANLCA arranged for the 2019/20 school year to end early, opening the 2020/21 year in January 2021. This involved adopting blended learning methods, using distance learning approaches such as mobile apps, televised programming, literacy 'capsules', and a distance training guide. In-person classes took place, in designated groups and fully respecting Covid-19 preventive measures.

For the second component, ensuring continuity of learning, ANLCA basic literacy programmes for artisans and fishing communities were developed as mobile apps; post-literacy apps are currently under development.

Finally, 155 'literacy capsules' were prepared by ANLCA professionals and other experts, and a digital resource user guide was also produced. Plans have also been made to build a virtual training institute for literacy professionals.

To conclude, Mr Mahmoud highlighted three positive outcomes of the pandemic:

- The development of a more straightforward deployment of distance learning materials;
- More hybrid (distance/in-person) models, which maintained access to learning;
- Learners are now more motivated to use digital/online services.

...and three challenges:

- A need for a more professional approach to distance learning;
- Development of digital infrastructure;
- Strengthening communication with learners and other stakeholders.

Cambodia

Mr Dy Samsideth, Deputy Director-General for Education, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Cambodia. Mr Dy focused on three areas of concern for Cambodia in relation to COVID-19: (1) the development of policy actions to deal with the crisis, (2) challenges in implementing lifelong learning and non-formal education programmes, and (3) good practices for the way forward in literacy and lifelong learning.

Noting that the adult literacy rate (15+) is 84.4 per cent, Mr Dy specified that non-formal education includes literacy, equivalency and re-entry programmes, both community-based and school-based. Turning to the COVID-19 situation, he observed that community outbreaks had affected both food security and social well-being, with closures of community learning centres (CLCs) necessary. Online and home-based learning provided alternatives for some, but connectivity and electricity supply problems made access difficult or impossible in some areas. A particularly negative impact of the long-term school closures has been that some young people lost interest in education, not completing their basic education but migrating for work to earn an income.

Despite these setbacks, new and positive practices emerged from the pandemic, including:

- a monitoring mechanism to assess factors for the opening and closing of schools;
- improved ALE programmes in response to local needs, managed through NGOs;
- a basic education equivalency programme that attracted overseas migrant workers in neighbouring countries;
- the development of short learning videos to be used at home, made available free of charge.

Moving forward, Mr Dy stressed a need for quality learning materials and relevant content in the context of establishing virtual learning centres; this also implies a commitment to professionalizing literacy and adult education providers/trainers, as well as promoting community-based literacy volunteers and university students and engaging the private sector in training programmes.

Discussion

In discussion, the Director of ANLCA was asked how teachers reacted to the introduction of blended learning. In response, Mr Dy said that a number of educators were reluctant, as they thought they would face competition. This reveals the importance of communicating transparently with literacy professionals, demonstrating the need for them to adapt, and building their capacities in digital skills as part of their own career development.

Session 4: Partnerships for the GEC-GAL initiative on literacy educators

Introducing the session, the moderator, **Ms Rakhat Zholdoshalieva, Team Leader, Policy Support and Capacity Development, UIL**, indicated that the aim of Session 4 was to facilitate exchanges among GAL countries and with GAL associate members, who were invited to join this session. In particular, the exchanges were to focus on the partnership between GAL and the Global Education Coalition (GEC) partners and on the joint initiative to raise the digital competencies of literacy educators. It is worth noting that countries identified this challenge in earlier sessions of this meeting, giving the topic heightened relevance.

After an introduction to the initiative, three GEC partners and two GAL associate members took the floor in what was described as an 'elevator pitch'.³ Further information and interaction took place in the subsequent breakout groups.

1. GEC–GAL initiative on literacy educators' digital competencies

Mr Jian Xi Teng, Programme Specialist, UIL, stated that the overall objective of the GEC–GAL initiative is to promote quality literacy provision by increasing the effective use of technologies in literacy instruction and learning, during and beyond major crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus is on the competencies of literacy educators in integrating technologies into the pedagogical process.

As part of the initiative, a set of training modules will be developed for youth and adult literacy educators in selected GAL countries, together with tools for assessing the resulting skills. This training process will be accompanied by developing further the capacities of relevant national institutions to support the building of networks of literacy stakeholders. The initiative envisages a target of training around 100,000 literacy educators in 10 GAL countries by the end of 2022. It is worth noting that the

³ The term 'elevator pitch', new to the majority of participants in the meeting, is defined (by Wikipedia) as a communication which 'is a short description of an idea, product, or company that explains the concept in a way such that any listener can understand it in a short period of time.' Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elevator_pitch [Accessed 22 October 2021].

primary focus is on active on-the-ground literacy educators, and secondarily on the institutions which train them.

As a joint initiative of the GEC and GAL, it will call on a wide range of partners from international agencies, NGOs, academia and the private sector. Implementation of the initiative will involve five steps:

1. Developing a framework of essential digital competencies for literacy educators;
2. Designing core training modules, taking account of online, in-person and blended modes;
3. Piloting the training in selected GAL countries with careful attention to the local context;
4. Scaling up the training within and beyond the selected countries;
5. Making appropriate adaptations for implementation in further national contexts.

Mr Teng provided a brief outline the proposed digital competency framework for literacy educators and concluded by showing the four parts of the training module structure: understanding technological devices, understanding learners, adopting specific technologies for literacy instruction, and training trainers.

2. GEC partners

Moodle

Mr Martin Dougiamas, Founder and CEO of Moodle, defined his company's goal as empowering educators to improve our world. Moodle does this by developing and providing software tools free of charge in order to enable users, of which there are 86 million worldwide, to build courses with a learning management system, relevant apps and cloud access. Mr Dougiamas illustrated on screen samples of various interfaces. Over 100 companies provide assistance with these initiatives in an ethos of openness, respect, integrity and innovation. One of Moodle's products, the Moodle Academy, offers online training in teaching via digital means. This training leads to a certified qualification, based on six groups of competencies and on the European framework DigCompEdu.

Breakout group

Responding to questions as moderator of the breakout group, Mr Dougiamas highlighted the open-source nature of the Moodle software, noting that the company is not-for-profit and aligns its operating principles with the UN SDGs. Moodle is used by more than 60 per cent of tertiary education institutions, and its appeal, according to Mr Dougiamas, is based on its open-source, adaptable and low-cost model. He then introduced the newly launched Moodle Educator Certification courses, Moodle Open Educational Resource database and the Moodle Academy portal – all of which have been developed to further Moodle's efforts to make quality education freely available, particularly in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. He concluded by underlining his openness to collaboration with countries and organizations on any aspect of Moodle, including technical training on its development and use as a learning platform, and to strengthen its open repository of educational resources.

PIX

Mr Benjamin Marteau, Founder and CEO of Pix, characterized the organization's mission as providing users with the means to improve their digital literacy skills by way of free access to its online resources. Users from all backgrounds, aged 11 and up, as well as teachers and trainers can develop and certify their digital skills.

The Pix platform assesses the digital skills levels of its users and their needs for further training. Pix aims to be a global resource in education for the common good and accessible to all. It is funded by the French Government, and is eager to develop synergies with GAL. Translating the term *illettrisme*

(functional illiteracy) for the non-French-speaking participants of the group, Mr Marteau asserted Pix's fight against *illectronisme* (digital illiteracy).

Breakout group

Moderating the breakout group, Mr Marteau followed up with more information on the evaluation and assessment of digital skills in the Pix system. The purpose of these assessments is twofold: first, to enable the user to be aware of the level of their acquired competences and, second, to provide information that can be used in the labour market.

Assessment takes place in five domains: information and data, communication and collaborative working, creating content, protection and security, and the digital environment. Each domain is assessed against eight levels.

The tests of capacity and digital knowledge that are associated with the assessment are adapted by algorithm to each learner's level; Mr Marteau demonstrated on screen an example of how a test works. The assessment is designed so that the user engages in learning as they take the tests, leading to targeted recommendations on skills gaps and areas for further learning. The system includes a dashboard for trainers, with the possibility of tracking individual or group progress, again with a set of appropriate recommendations for the future emphasis of training. As the outcome of the assessment, the user is shown their digital skills profile.

A question from the Senegal participant sought information on how to use the system as literacy programmes move to include – or indeed are based on – the acquisition of digital skills. Given the need to adapt Pix to context, it was recommended that further discussions be planned to respond to this need, with a focus on support for educators/trainers.

ProFuturo

The Head of Global Partnerships of ProFuturo, Ms Leticia de Rato, explained that ProFuturo is a digital platform designed to improve digital skills. Its particular focus is on bridging the digital divide by bringing opportunities to children in vulnerable situations. The programme is being implemented in 40 countries, with the goal of enabling teachers and learners to develop twenty-first century skills. Over 914,000 teachers are currently taking part in the programme, receiving both technical and pedagogical support. A total of 160 courses are available to teachers in four languages (English, French, Portuguese and Spanish), with 1,600 hours of content available in technology, mathematics and life skills, among other areas. During the COVID-19 crisis and the resulting closure of schools and other learning spaces, ProFuturo provided services free of charge to facilitate continued learning, with four African countries benefitting from free support to develop their own digital platforms.

Breakout group

In the breakout group, Ms de Rato's colleague, Ms Ana Delgado, who moderated, expanded on the functionality of the ProFuturo platform, providing examples of how to access it and use some of its tools, including:

- teaching and classroom planning tools;
 - planning tools for headteachers;
 - learning content focused on competencies and subjects, including maths, technology, language and literature, science, citizenship, health education;
 - a range of content types, including videos, lesson plans and exercises (these learning activities are linked to competency objectives);
- the ProFuturo platform in four languages, a feature that led participants to recommend that African languages be added in the future.

The ProFuturo platform offers a huge variety of content for both learners and teachers, which can be filtered by course content, language and age of learners; there is also focus on computational thinking and mathematical skills.

3. GAL Associate Members

Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

Speaking by pre-recorded video from Vancouver where COL is headquartered, the **President and CEO, Ms Asha Kanwar**, stressed that literacy and lifelong learning are important means of sustainable development and for ensuring the inclusion marginalized groups. The focus on the practices and potential of distance learning is timely, as is the aim of improving the quality and outcomes of learning opportunities. COL and UIL just published open and distance learning (ODL) guidelines for youth and adult literacy and are in the process of developing the into an online course for literacy providers. COL furthermore promotes family and intergenerational literacy and learning (FILL) and indigenous knowledge – courses on both topics are available – and, building on the contributions that families made in education during the COVID-19 crisis, COL has launched a programme for intergenerational learning in marginalized communities in Ghana.

COL defines its mission as ‘empowering educators to improve our world’ based on clear values and open-source software; part of this objective is making available a tool for building courses online and offering a cloud-based learning management system. Ms Kanwar concluded by emphasizing that literacy and development go hand in hand, and that literacy must be seen as an integral element as part of these processes.

ASPBAE/ICAE

Ms Cecilia Soriano, Regional Policy and Advocacy Coordinator for the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), took the floor to introduce to the breakout group the following topics for discussion:

- The nature and scope of civil society programmes on digital literacy;
- Who programmes are developed for, who has access to digital platforms, and how we can increase access to digital opportunities for those with low or no literacy competences;
- Curriculum globALE, which is designed to enable teachers to acquire digital skills;
- The challenge of financing digital education, particularly during the pandemic;
- The NGO Nirantar NGO in northern India, where women acquire digital competences within a socio-economically challenging context.

Breakout group

Ms Soriano and Mr Roberto Guevara, President of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), who moderated the group, gave an overview of Curriculum globALE, which has a cross-cultural and output-oriented approach and is designed as a core curriculum for adult education, comprising a digitalization module. A number of key learning principles underpin the process of digitalization:

- It should not be separate from the general concept of learning design, but at the core of understanding adult education and how adults learn differently;
- It is not merely about adopting the digital module, but adapting it to the needs of adult learners;
- Digital skills are not just technical tools, but need to blend in with non-digital learning; There are important resource implications of digital learning that need to be kept in mind.

The ASPBAE representative then spoke about the Applied Digital Literacy (AppDiLL) programme from Uttar Pradesh, India, which has developed a range of methods to improve the digital literacy of women, including:

- shifting to the use of digital tools to teach the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic;
- recognizing and responding to women's existing everyday digital literacy practices;
- integrating literacy and digital skills to demystify the digital world for women (including digital equipment, ATMs, mobile phones);
- adopting a learner-centred approach, i.e. asking women what they really want.

AppDiLL proved its effectiveness during the pandemic and could be adapted to other countries.

The group then reflected on how UIL can offer support to countries by developing a common understanding and knowledge base for digital learning, including making sure that learners' voices are heard and that future initiatives maintain a learner-centred perspective, especially for marginalized and vulnerable groups. In this regard, UIL can be a key actor advocating for such approaches in developing digital learning initiatives.

After closing the breakout groups, the moderator of the session asked for feedback from the participants on the substance and process. Comments focused on the high value of interaction among technical resource agencies and GAL members and partners – a process which will continue after the meeting in pursuing specific opportunities and addressing the challenges of diverse contexts.

Concluding session and the way forward

The GAL Annual General Meeting addressed the impact and challenges that youth and adult literacy has faced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and examined how GAL member countries, associate members and partners sought innovative solutions to maintain and adapt learning opportunities for youth and adults. This led to a range of key insights and reflections, emerging from the presentations and interactions (see **Box 2**).

Key insights and reflections from the GAL Annual General Meeting

- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the speed and scope of innovations in distance and e-learning and in blended learning in literacy provision have increased.
- It is urgent to reconceive literacy learning to include how to use ICTs (as a learning tool, in life and to improve livelihoods); in this way, literacy educators need adequate digital skills with the capacity to adapt instruction to the local context.
- Online resources are increasingly available, as GAL partners have demonstrated, with special applications to equip teachers, trainers and literacy educators with relevant skills.
- Literacy alone is not enough and is not an end in itself, but rather a means of further learning and acquisition of skills for life and livelihood – this perspective should characterize literacy programming.
- Literacy and non-formal education have remained marginal to the major efforts to develop alternative education opportunities during the pandemic, with most efforts focused on formal education – this worsens existing inequities.

- Because of the pandemic, millions of children have lost a year or more of schooling and some may never return to the classroom even when schools re-open; this will lead to a greater need for NFE of all kinds, including literacy provision.
- During and beyond the COVID-19 crisis, the challenge of enabling populations with low or no literacy to benefit from literacy provision, including through digital means, requires significantly more funding than is currently available.

Box 2. Key insights and reflections

The co-chair of the GAL Steering Group, H.E. Mr Kouaro Yves Chabi, Minister of Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education, Benin (represented by **Mr Zinsou Marcellin Hounzangbe, Director-General, Literacy and Education in National Languages Support Fund, Ministry of Education, Benin**) addressed the closing session of the GAL Annual General Meeting. The Minister stressed the value of the interaction among GAL members, enabling stronger connections to be made across diverse contexts, as well demonstrating the potential for and challenges of the Alliance. He called for GAL members to advocate for the Alliance so that its impact can make a difference to local populations. He concluded by expressing his satisfaction in filling the role of co-chair of the GAL Steering Group.

The final intervention was that of **Mr David Atchoarena**, Director of UIL, who presented his thanks to all the participants for their active engagement in the meeting. He was grateful that the technology had worked smoothly for the most part. Some connectivity issues from some parts of the world illustrated the challenge of ensuring digital access to all. He paid special thanks to the regional representatives, from the African Union and SEAMEO respectively. Mr Atchoarena highlighted the GEC-GAL initiative in increasing the digital competences of literacy educators and underlined the need for a clear roadmap of implementation, as a number of GAL countries take up the initiative. He concluded by looking forward to the next steps in building the cooperation which will be essential for the realization of the initiative.

Annexes

Annex 1: List of participants

Nr.	Sal.	First name	Surname	Position	Department/Ministry/ Organization	Country
GAL MEMBER COUNTRIES						
1	Mr	Ataur	Rahman	Director-General	Bureau of Non-formal Education (BNFE), Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME)	Bangladesh
2	Mr	Shahidul	Islam	Research and Liaison Officer	Permanent Delegation of Bangladesh to UNESCO	Bangladesh
3	Mr	Zinsou Marcellin	Hounzangbe	Director-General	Literacy and Education in National Languages Support Fund, Ministry of Education	Benin
4	Mr	Arnauld	Gbaguidi	Technical Advisor for Literacy	Ministry of Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education	Benin
5	Mr	Anthony Tannus	Wright	Chief of Staff of the Literacy Secretariat	Ministry of Education	Brazil
6	Mr	Alexandre	Piana Lemos	Second Secretary	Permanent Delegation of Brazil to UNESCO	Brazil
7	Mr	Zio	Kirassai	Director-General for Literacy	Ministry of National Education and Literacy	Burkina Faso
8	Mr	Wang	Li	Deputy Director	UNESCO International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education (INRULED)	China
9	Mr	Chebanni	Ben Said	Director-General	Literacy and Language Promotion, Ministry of Education	Comoros
10	Mr	Aboudou Soro	Ngolo	Secretary-General	National Commission of Côte d'Ivoire for UNESCO	Côte d'Ivoire
11	Mr	Lamin	Jarjou	Senior Programme Officer and ASPnet National Coordinator	Gambia National Commission for UNESCO	Gambia (the)
12	Mr	Cheick	Diallo	Head of the Basic Literacy Division	National Direction of Literacy of Formal and Non-Formal Education, Ministry of National Education and Literacy	Guinea
13	Ms	Maryse	Saint Pierre Cyprien	Counsellor	Permanent Delegation of Haiti to UNESCO	Haiti
14	Ms	Teresa Guadalupe	Reyes Sahagún	Director-General	National Institute for Adult Education (INEA)	Mexico

Nr.	Sal.	First name	Surname	Position	Department/Ministry/ Organization	Country
15	Ms	Kouriram	Hatchabi	Technical Advisor	Ministry of Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages	Niger
16	Ms	Ndeye Name	Diouf	Director of Literacy and National Languages	Ministry of National Education	Senegal
17	Mr	Alpha Tejan	Wurie	Minister	Ministry of Technical & Higher Education	Sierra Leone
NON-GAL MEMBER COUNTRIES						
18	Mr	Dy	Samsideth	Deputy Director General for Education	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports	Cambodia
19	Mr	Abdessamih	Mahmoud	Director	National Agency for the Fight Against Illiteracy (ANLCA)	Morocco
GAL ASSOCIATE MEMBERS						
20	H.E. Ms	Sarah	Anyang Agbor	Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology	African Union	AU
21	Ms	Cecilia	Soriano	Regional Policy and Advocacy Coordinator	Asia Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education	ASPBAE
22	Ms	Asha	Kanwar	President and Chief Executive Officer	Commonwealth of Learning	COL
23	Ms	Kantcheva	Maria	Special Advisor	Conference of the Ministers of Education of French-Speaking Countries (CONFEMEN)	CONFEMEN
24	Ms	Graciela	Sbertoli	Secretary-General	European Basic Skills Network (EBSN)	EBSN
25	Ms	Ricarda	Motschilnig	Policy and Advocacy Officer	International Council for Adult Education (ICAE)	ICAE
26	Mr	Roberto	Guevara	President	International Council for Adult Education (ICAE)	ICAE
27	Ms	Christine	Hofmann	Team Lead	Skills for Social Inclusion, International Labour Organization (ILO)	ILO
28	Ms	Ethel Agnes	Valenzuela	Secretariat Director	Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO)	SEAMEO
29	Mr	Ian	Cheffy	Literacy and Education Consultant	SIL International	SIL
30	Ms	Anna	Robinson-Pant	UNESCO Chair	UNESCO Chair in Adult Literacy and Learning for	UNESCO Chair

Nr.	Sal.	First name	Surname	Position	Department/Ministry/ Organization	Country
					Social Transformation, University of East Anglia, UK	
GLOBAL EDUCATION COALITION MEMBERS						
31	Mr	Martin	Dougiamas	Founder and CEO	Moodle	Moodle
32	Mr	Benjamin	Marteau	Director	PIX	PIX
33	Mr	Jean-François	Plard	Project Manager	PIX	PIX
34	Ms	Leticia	de Rato	Head of Global Partnerships	ProFuturo	ProFuturo
35	Ms	Ana	Delgado	International partnerships expert	ProFuturo	Profuturo
OBSERVERS						
36	Ms	Clarisse	Lime	Professor	Cesgranrio College	Brazil
37	Ms	Sandra	Araujo	Associate Professor ICT	Cesgranrio College	Brazil
38	Ms	Mariana	Sa	Professor	Cesgranrio College	Brazil
39	Ms	Audrey	Nirrengarten	Project Team Leader	Agence Française de Développement (AFD)	France
40	Ms	Caroline	Jolly	Project Team Leader	Agence Française de Développement (AFD)	France
41	Mr	Hervé	Fernandez	Director	Agence Nationale de Lutte Contre l'Illettrisme (ANCLI)	France
42	Mr	George	Cowell	International Director of People and Programmes	Rising Academy Network	Ghana
43	Mr	Per	Magnusson	Senior Programme Specialist	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)	Sweden
UNESCO REGIONAL BUREAUS, CLUSTER AND COUNTRY OFFICES						
44	Mr	Yves Marius	Sagou	Coordinator of Literacy Programmes and Projects	UNESCO Office Abidjan	FU/ABJ
45	Mr	Moussa	Doumbia	Senior Literacy Project Assistant	UNESCO Abidjan	FU/ABJ
46	Mr	Albert	Mendy	Programme Specialist	UNESCO Addis Ababa	FU/ADI
47	Mr	Tidiane	Sall	Project Officer	UNESCO Dakar	FU/DAK
48	Ms	Huhua	Fan	Education Programme Specialist	UNESCO Dhaka	FU/DHA
49	Mr	Lay	Vutha	Associate Project Officer	UNESCO Phnom Penh	FU/PNP
50	Mr	Bougroum	Mohamed	Consultant	UNESCO Rabat	FU/RAB
UNESCO HEADQUARTERS						
51	Mr	Firmin	Matoko	Assistant Director General	For Priority Africa and External Relations, UNESCO	UNESCO

Nr.	Sal.	First name	Surname	Position	Department/Ministry/ Organization	Country
52	Mr	Borhene	Chakroun	Director	Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems (PLS), UNESCO	UNESCO
53	Mr	Hervé	Huot-Marchand	Chief of Section	Section of Youth, Literacy and Skills Development (YLS), UNESCO	UNESCO
54	Ms	Mari	Yasunaga	Programme Specialist	Section of Youth, Literacy and Skills Development (YLS), UNESCO	UNESCO
55	Ms	Agathe	Dorra	Intern	Section of Youth, Literacy and Skills Development (YLS), UNESCO	UNESCO
56	Ms	Isabel	Heikkila	Intern	Section of Youth, Literacy and Skills Development (YLS), UNESCO	UNESCO
57	Ms	Megan	Light	Intern	Section of Youth, Literacy and Skills Development (YLS), UNESCO	UNESCO
UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING AND GAL SECRETARIAT						
58	Mr	David	Atchoarena	Director	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)	UIL
59	Ms	Rakhat	Zholdoshalieva	Team Leader	UIL	UIL
60	Ms	Madina	Bolly	Senior Programme Specialist	UIL	UIL
61	Ms	Bettina	Reiss	Senior Assistant to the Director	UIL	UIL
62	Mr	Nicolas	Jonas	Programme Specialist	UIL	UIL
63	Mr	Jian Xi	Teng	Programme Specialist	UIL	UIL
64	Ms	Sofia	Chatzigianni	Assistant Programme Specialist	UIL	UIL
65	Ms	Annapurna	Ayyappan	Assistant Programme Specialist	UIL	UIL
66	Ms	Nora	Lorenz	Assistant Programme Specialist	UIL	UIL
67	Ms	Katja	Römer	Communications Specialist	UIL	UIL
68	Ms	Ana	Basoglu	Senior Project Secretary	UIL	UIL
69	Ms	Naomi	Rio	Project Secretary	UIL	UIL
70	Mr	Boxuan	Tu	Trainee	UIL	UIL
71	Ms	Kate	Fox	Intern	UIL	UIL
72	Ms	Irena	Bagdasarian	Intern	UIL	UIL
73	Mr	Clinton	Robinson	Consultant	UIL	UIL

Annex 2: Agenda

29 September 2021	
10:00 – 10:15	<p>Opening Session</p> <p>Chair: Mr David Atchoarena, Director, UIL</p> <p>Presenters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr Arnauld Gbaguidi, Technical Advisor in Literacy, on behalf of H.E. Mr Kouaro Yves Chabi, co-chair, Minister of Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education, Benin Mr Edouard Firmin Matoko, Assistant Director-General for Priority Africa and External Relations, UNESCO (video message)
10:15 – 11:15	<p>Session 1: Ministerial panel on youth and adult literacy in regional and national education recovery plans</p> <p>Moderator: Mr Borhene Chakroun, Director, Division for Policies and Lifelong Systems, UNESCO</p> <p>Presenters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> H.E. Mr Alpha Tejan Wurie, Minister of Technical and Higher Education, Republic of Sierra Leone Mr Arnauld Gbaguidi, Technical Advisor in Literacy, Ministry of Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education, Benin <p>Special intervention: Regional perspective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> H.E. Ms Sarah Anyang Agbor, Commissioner, Human Resources, Sciences and Technology, African Union
11:15 – 12:00	<p>Session 2: Literacy provision during and post-Covid-19 in GAL countries</p> <p>Moderator: Mr David Atchoarena, Director, UIL</p> <p>Presenters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms Ndeye Name Diouf, Director of Literacy and National Languages, Ministry of National Education, Senegal Mr Ataur Rahman, Director General, Bureau of Non-Formal Education (BNFE), Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), Bangladesh Mr Anthony Tannus Wright, Chief of Staff, Secretariat for Literacy, Ministry of Education, Brazil Ms Kouriram Hatchabi, Technical Advisor, Ministry of Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages, Niger <p>Discussion</p>
12:00 – 12:30	Break

5 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms Teresa Guadalupe Reyes Sahagún, Director General, National Institute for Adult Education, Mexico (video message)
12:30 – 12:50	<p>Session 3: Good practices, opportunities, and challenges</p> <p>Moderator: Ms Graciela Sbertoli, Secretary General, European Basic Skills Network (EBSN)</p> <p>Presenters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr Abdessamih Mahmoud, Director, National Agency for the Fight Against Illiteracy (ANLCA), Morocco Mr Dy Samsideth, Deputy Director General for Education, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Cambodia <p>Discussion</p>
12:50 – 13:50	<p>Session 4: Partnerships for GEC-GAL initiative on literacy educators</p> <p>Moderator: Ms Rakhat Zholdoshalieva, Team Leader, UIL</p> <p>Presenter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GEC-GAL initiative on literacy educators' digital competencies: Mr Jian Xi Teng, Programme Specialist, UIL <p>'Elevator pitch':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GEC partners: Moodle, PIX, ProFuturo GAL associate members: Commonwealth of Learning, ASPBAE/ICAE <p>Break-out group discussions</p>
	<p>Concluding Session and Way Forward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr Zinsou Marcellin Houngzangbe, Director General, Literacy and Education in national languages support fund, Ministry of Education on behalf of H.E. Mr Kouaro Yves Chabi, co-chair, Minister of Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education, Benin Mr David Atchoarena, Director, UIL

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Stay in touch

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