

Global LIFE Mid-term Evaluation Report 2006-2011

# Looking Forward with LIFE

Literacy Initiative for Empowerment



UNESCO Institute  
for Lifelong Learning



## LIFE: a framework of collaborative action

The right to literacy has still to become a reality for about 793 million young people and adults around the world, two-thirds of them women. When regular monitoring of Member States' progress towards the Education for All (EFA) 2015 Literacy Goal showed that it would be missed by a wide margin, UNESCO decided to launch the **Literacy Initiative for Empowerment** (LIFE, 2006–2015). LIFE was conceptualised as a key operational mechanism for achieving the goals of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD, 2003–2012) and as a framework for action to accelerate efforts in countries where a lack of literacy and numeracy skills poses a critical challenge to achieving EFA, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000–2015) and the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005–2014).

LIFE **targets** the 36<sup>1</sup> countries with literacy rates below 50 per cent and/or a population of more than 10 million young people and adults reported to be illiterate. It is designed as a ten-year framework for national governments, NGOs, civil society, the private sector, UN agencies, and bi/multilateral development partners to collectively revitalise, enhance and advance national literacy efforts.

### Participating countries

Africa (19)	Arab Region (6)	Asia & the Pacific (9)	LAC* (2)
Benin	Egypt	Afghanistan	Brazil
Burkina Faso	Iraq	Bangladesh	Haiti
Chad	Mauritania	China	
Central African Rep. of Congo	Morocco	India	
Djibouti	Sudan	Indonesia	
Eritrea	Yemen	Iran, Islamic Republic of	
Ethiopia		Nepal	
Gambia		Papua New Guinea	
Guinea		Pakistan	
Guinea-Bissau			
Madagascar			
Mali			
Mozambique			
Niger			
Nigeria			
Senegal			
Sierra Leone			
South Sudan (2011)			

LIFE's overall **goal** is "to empower people, especially rural women and girls, who have inadequate literacy skills and competencies". The overall **objectives** of LIFE are:

- To reinforce national and international commitment to literacy through advocacy and communication.
- To support the articulation of policies for sustainable literacy within sector-wide and national development frameworks.
- To strengthen national capacities for programme design, management and implementation.
- To enhance countries' innovative initiatives and practices in providing literacy learning opportunities.

## LIFE: mid-term evaluation

Now that LIFE has been in place for five years, it was time to take stock and draw significant lessons for the way forward. Therefore, in 2010-2011 a LIFE mid-term evaluation process was conducted which offered a significant opportunity for bringing together all relevant stakeholders to assess its achievements, analyse challenges, and identify inspiring innovations. Since LIFE was devised as a strategic framework designed for flexible interpretation and adaptation at country level, a pragmatic approach was followed: the mid-term evaluation focused on progress made in LIFE countries with regard to the overall goal and four objectives promoted by LIFE, rather than trying to separate the specific contribution of LIFE from other interventions in the countries concerned.

Building on this collective reflection and on national and regional mid-term evaluation processes and reports, UIL has prepared a **global LIFE mid-term evaluation report**, which seeks to contribute to the effective implementation of the LIFE initiative through to 2015.

The majority of LIFE countries recorded an **increase in adult literacy rates** by on average **3.1** percentage points compared to the global average of 1.9 percentage points over the same period (from 1995-2004 to 2005-2009). However, 24 LIFE countries showed an **increase in numbers of adults** without literacy skills due to population growth and to the number of those passing into adulthood without having gone to school (long enough) to become literate. While LIFE is making a concerted effort to **empower women and girls**, there is still **much left to do**. Six out of the 32 LIFE countries with available data recorded a net decrease in the number of illiterate women during the period.

1 In 2011 South Sudan became LIFE country number 36

\* Latin America and the Caribbean

## Key findings and recommended strategies for the way forward

### LIFE: Relevant and fit for purpose in accelerating literacy

The mid-term evaluation confirms the relevance and added value brought to literacy development by LIFE. Stakeholders believe that LIFE is an important framework that can boost their literacy efforts. LIFE has evolved as a strategic framework to meet the needs of participating countries through collaborative action, which is country-led, country-specific and embedded in national policies and processes.

**The strategy for the future** should see the LIFE framework used by UNESCO, LIFE countries and the donor community more resolutely to develop and support global and country-specific solutions to address the major causes of the slow progress towards the EFA literacy goal. In the future LIFE needs to focus even more on women and become one of the priority platforms to advance the Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education.

### LIFE: Built on coordination and communication

The success of LIFE depends on the ability to improve and sustain processes at country level that will ensure ownership and mobilise all relevant partners around literacy. These processes require high levels of coordination, effective communication and flexible responses.

**The strategy for the future** should strengthen, reactivate or create effective coordination structures at global (UNESCO and international partners) and national levels to mobilise all relevant partners around literacy, facilitate cooperation and use and improve existing communication channels, platforms and networks for exchange, support and mutual learning.

### LIFE: Elementary literacy will not be enough

Many LIFE countries aspire to becoming knowledge-based societies. The mastery of higher-order literacy skills is essential for individuals and societies if this is to happen. There is a growing acceptance that literacy involves a continuum of learning and that the achievement of sustainable reading, writing and numeracy skills requires levels of basic education beyond elementary literacy. Strategies should deal with literacy and basic education as foundation levels within comprehensive national education reforms that aim to build lifelong learning systems for all. Relevant plans need to be based on sound data and evidence of the scale of need.



**The strategy for the future** should use the LIFE framework to promote an enlarged concept of literacy as a continuum and part of lifelong learning. Its integration into national learning systems and development strategies within sector-wide and cross-sectoral approaches should be encouraged. Special efforts are necessary to improve the availability, reliability and comparability of literacy data for better planning and targeting.

### LIFE: The resources gap

This evaluation demonstrates that national budgets for literacy and non-formal education have increased and there are reports of newly-created funds and the mobilisation of additional financial resources. But the size of the literacy challenge shows that the majority of LIFE countries are far from allocating the resources necessary to accelerate the increase of literacy rates. There has been a failure on the part of all partners to convince the private sector of the value of literacy to national development.

**The strategy for the future** should ensure that the LIFE framework is to be used to mobilise sufficient, adequate and additional resources to accelerate the increase of literacy rates by engaging governments, non-governmental organisations and particularly the private sector, as well as bilateral and multilateral donors. By bringing together human and financial resources and utilising them in strategically planned ways, LIFE programmes within CapEFA will generate more resources.

### LIFE: Better policies, better programmes

In the first five years of LIFE, major efforts have been made to strengthen national capacities for policy development and delivery of good quality programmes. While significant change processes were initiated mainly in the context of the CapEFA LIFE programmes, sustained capacity development at all levels will be a key factor for the improvement of literacy rates. Effective capacity development works simultaneously upstream (policy level, governments) and downstream (actions on the ground) in coordinated ways.



**The strategy for the future** should see more concrete collaborative actions agreed by all actors – LIFE countries, UNESCO and the international partners – to strengthen capacities at all levels. Related capacity development strategies should include effective sub-regional and regional as well as sub-national and local strategies as well as a systematic approach to sharing knowledge and innovation.

### **LIFE: Quality teaching and learning**

The assessment of progress in literacy and NFE in LIFE countries supports the need to put stronger emphasis on improved quality of literacy programmes although there are many examples of LIFE countries recognising the importance of good materials, literate environments, trained staff and the use of ICT in literacy provision. It is not easy to strike a good balance between the strategic challenge to take literacy programmes rapidly to scale, particularly in the most populous LIFE countries, and the need to work towards achieving a certain standard of quality.

**The strategy for the future** years of the LIFE initiative should bring a clear focus on areas that are of strategic importance for improved quality of literacy programmes: teacher training, curriculum design, development and support of literate environments and the exploitation of the potential of ICT.

### **LIFE: Women in focus**

The results of the mid-term review show that much more needs to be done to address the existing gender disparities in adult literacy. Girls, women and families living below the poverty line, particularly in rural areas, need to remain the identified priority of LIFE.

**The strategy for the future** needs to concentrate even more clearly on women and highly disadvantaged adults, with a particular focus on rural populations. A systematic “gender lens” needs to be integrated into both the LIFE initiative and the monitoring and evaluation of literacy strategies. Stakeholders need to operationalise the concept of “empowerment” and develop an understanding of “gender mainstreaming” in the specific contexts in which they work.

### **LIFE: An arena for South-South cooperation**

The mid-term evaluation results show that LIFE has become an important South-South platform for exchange and co-operation. There are many examples of how the principle of solidarity has been successfully activated through South-South – and at times triangular South-South-North – cooperation. LIFE can play a key role in supporting South-South cooperation, which has already started to expand its reach beyond the 36 participating countries.

**The strategy for the future** should involve exploiting the potential of LIFE within the context of a broader network of collaborative action to strengthen South-South cooperation, networking and exchange of experience and knowledge.

### **LIFE: The next five years**

The next steps of implementing LIFE should include the review of the LIFE *Vision and Strategy Paper*, the development of international and national road maps or action plans for the second half of the LIFE initiative, and the refinement of the framework to monitor and evaluate progress.

**The strategy for the future** will build on the results of this evaluation, the recommended strategies identified and the action points to implement them. National and underpinning international road maps or action plans will be developed by all the actors to ensure accelerating progress during the remaining years of the LIFE initiative.

#### **For further information on the Evaluation Report, please contact:**

#### **UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)**

Feldbrunnenstr. 58

20148 Hamburg, Germany

Tel. +49 (0)40 448 04 10

Fax +49 (0)40 410 77 23

<http://www.unesco.org/uil>

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