

What is LIFE?

The Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) is conceived as a ten-year (2006-2015) strategic framework through which national governments, NGOs, civil society, the private sector, UN agencies, and bilateral and multilateral agencies collectively accelerate literacy efforts in 35 countries where illiteracy poses a critical challenge. As a key operational mechanism for the implementation of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD, 2003-2012), which is led and coordinated by UNESCO, LIFE is basically an initiative to support countries in achieving a 50 per cent improvement of their adult literacy rates until 2015.

LIFE is not a project or a programme and does not replace national policies and programmes in LIFE countries.

LIFE is

- A framework of collaborative action for enhancing and improving national literacy efforts.
- A process in support of literacy which is country-led and country-specific.
- A support mechanism embedded in national policies and strategies.
- An initiative for technical support services and facilitation by UNESCO in the areas of policy, advocacy, partnerships, capacity-building and innovations.

LIFE is UNESCO's support mechanism to promote national processes and capacities that help to improve and expand literacy activities and increase participation with the aim of raising literacy rates in LIFE countries.

Why literacy and LIFE?

Literacy is a fundamental right. As the foundation for basic education and lifelong learning, literacy is key to enhancing human capabilities as well as achieving other rights. It is instrumental in supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and in empowering in particular the poor. Nevertheless, illiteracy is receiving minimal political attention and remains a global disgrace, keeping 774 million adults – two-thirds of them women – on the margins of society and around 72 million children out of school. Most countries have made some progress during the past decade in promoting literacy, but overall too little to reduce the absolute number of adult illiterates.

LIFE was created by UNESCO when it became apparent that existing literacy efforts would not be sufficient to achieve a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015 (Dakar Goal 4) in countries with high illiteracy rates (more than 50 per cent) and/ or large illiterate populations (more than 10 million).

Who participates in LIFE?

A total of 35 countries were invited to implement LIFE over a ten-year period (2006-2015), through three progressive cycles to receive direct UNESCO priority support. These countries account for 85 per cent of the world's non-literate population, the majority of whom are women.

Start →	2006 →	2008 →	2010 → 2015
Africa 18	Mali Niger Nigeria Senegal	Benin Burkina Faso Democratic Republic of Congo Ethiopia Gambia Mozambique	Central African Republic Chad Djibouti Eritrea Guinea Guinea Bissau Madagascar Sierra Leone
Arab Region 6	Egypt Morocco Sudan Yemen	Mauritania	Iraq
Asia and the Pacific 9	Bangladesh Pakistan	Afghanistan China India Indonesia Papua New Guinea	Iran Nepal
Latin America & the Caribbean 2	Haiti	Brazil	

LIFE's goal and objectives

LIFE will contribute to the achievement of the goals of the UNLD, the MDGs and the Dakar EFA Goals – in particular Goal 3 (meeting the learning needs of all young people and adults), Goal 4 (a 50 per cent improvement in adult literacy rates) and transversal Goals 5 (achieving gender equality in education) and 6 (improve the quality of education).

The ultimate development goal of LIFE is

to contribute to the empowerment of learners so that they can make informed choices, take control of issues that affect them, and eventually enhance the quality of their lives.

The more immediate objectives of LIFE are

- to reinforce national and international **commitments** to literacy,
- to support the articulation of sustainable literacy **policies**,
- to strengthen national **capacities**,
- to enhance countries' innovative initiatives in providing literacy learning **opportunities**, and
- to foster **cooperation** and **solidarity** among countries.



Making it happen: LIFE at the country level

The main emphasis of LIFE is on concrete action at the country level in four strategic areas:

- (1) advocacy and communication to create national and international momentum and to mobilize awareness, commitment, partnerships and adequate resources for its expeditious implementation;
- (2) reinforcement of national capacities to develop appropriate policies and programmes and to create adequate human resources and institutions, including operational infrastructure;
- (3) delivery of programmes that effectively address poverty, gender inequalities and disadvantages related to health and social exclusion;
- (4) sharing of information to improve policies and practice by conducting research, supporting innovative and replicable programmes, promoting good practices, and undertaking monitoring and evaluation for assessing progress.

Within the framework of national literacy policies and strategies with a lifelong learning perspective, the country-led activities supported through the LIFE initiative should respond to the learning needs of out-of-school children and of adolescents, youth and adults with insufficient literacy skills or none. The focus will be on girls, women, marginalized groups and poor families, particularly in rural areas.

High levels of coordination and flexible responses are required to set up LIFE processes at the country level. Bringing together the relevant (and new) literacy stakeholders, ensuring an overview and in-depth analysis of the national literacy situation, identifying entry points for policy dialogue and advocacy, building a shared framework and vision, facilitating exchange of experiences, agreeing on strategic gaps that need to be addressed and developing a LIFE country support or action plan – all this is part of the preparatory activities to get LIFE started. Building and sustaining momentum on adult literacy and building strong partnerships and coordination mechanisms are among the strategic tasks of the LIFE framework in order to mobilize the required support for literacy.

