

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.

Contact

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)

Feldbrunnenstr. 58
20148 Hamburg
Germany

Ulrike Hanemann
Senior Programme Specialist

Tel. +49 (0)40 448041-0
Fax: + 49 (0) 40 4107723
uil@unesco.org

www.unesco.org/uil
UNESCO Literacy Portal:
www.unesco.org/education/literacy

What has been achieved so far?

- Regional consultation, planning and coordination meetings for LIFE implementation were held in March 2006, December 2007 and January 2008 with focal points from all LIFE countries.
- A facilitating coordination mechanism was built, providing a strong role to partner institutions in LIFE countries and to UNESCO Regional Bureaux, Field Offices and Institutes.
- Through a series of regional conferences organized by UNESCO in support of global literacy in 2007/ 2008 and other regional and national advocacy events, LIFE has become well known, even beyond the 35 selected countries.
- Countries not falling under LIFE criteria have expressed a desire to join the initiative, as they would benefit significantly from the experience, knowledge and resources that it has generated, as well as from related networks, partnerships and South-South-North exchanges.
- The 11 first-round LIFE countries received financial support from UNESCO to undertake activities in the area of policy, advocacy, capacity-building and innovations.
- 14 LIFE countries have carried out in-depth needs assessment exercises or situation analyses to serve as a basic for strategic planning. This has resulted in the renewal or improvement of literacy policies and strategies in a number of countries.
- The granting of extra-budgetary funds to specific LIFE projects within the Capacity-Building Programme for EFA led to implementation of significant activities in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Morocco, Senegal, and Niger (2006-2008), that have had a major impact within the framework of LIFE. As a result capacities have been strengthened for design, implementation and management of good quality literacy programmes, as well as for curriculum and material development, training of senior and middle-level management, assessment, monitoring and evaluation.
- A literacy database, containing examples of good practice and research on effective policies and programmes in literacy, numeracy and non-formal education, has been developed and will be soon launched along with a network and online platform ("Life-Line"). These facilities will provide an effective platform for South-South cooperation and will enable LIFE focal points and activists to communicate directly with each other, and exchange experiences.
- Through evidence-based information and LIFE documents, a better understanding of literacy as the foundation of lifelong learning has been developed in many countries.

- Major literacy programmes or campaigns are taking place in a number of LIFE countries with higher budgetary allocation and distinctive institutional structures (e.g. creation of ministries in charge of literacy and non formal education).

Coordination of LIFE

The overall coordination of LIFE is the responsibility of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), which is UNESCO's specialized institute for adult literacy, non-formal education and adult learning within a lifelong learning perspective. On behalf of UNESCO, UIL is mobilizing its expertise, accumulated knowledge base and dynamic networks to foster a broad alliance and partnership with all stakeholders concerned. In addition to the macro-coordination of LIFE, the Institute is also engaged directly through providing its technical assistance to LIFE countries responding to specific demands.

Within the UNESCO structure, field and cluster offices responsible for LIFE countries are at the forefront for implementing LIFE and for helping countries to strengthen existing literacy policies and programmes. Further the LIFE support structure consists of UNESCO Regional Bureaux, specialized institutes and related divisions at Headquarters.

Partnerships and synergies for LIFE

Proactive partnerships through networking, consultations and dialogue will help implement LIFE successfully. The wide range of partners includes government, private and NGO providers, the in-country donor community (including the UN Country Team), regional and international networks, the media, universities and research institutes. Synergies will be created with other EFA initiatives, such as the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) and the UN Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), and in particular with the other two core EFA initiatives promoted by UNESCO – the Teacher Training Initiative for Sub-Saharan Africa (TTISSA) and the HIV and AIDS Education (EDUCAIDS) initiative. The process of preparing and carrying out the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFITEA VI), to be held in May 2009 in Belém do Pará, Brazil, also provides an important framework to review progress made in literacy and to plan the way forward.

Literacy Initiative For Empowerment



2006-2015

