Summary record and recommendations of the

First meeting of the Core Group of

Global Alliance for literacy within the framework of lifelong learning (GAL)

held on 23 May 2016 in Room 13, Miollis, UNESCO, Paris

The meeting began with the opening remarks by Arne Carlsen, Director, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg(UIL) welcoming the members of the Core Group.

After a round of introductions, Arne Carlsen made a presentation of the concept of GAL highlighted the key principles underlying the Alliance. He recalled that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development envisages a world with 'universal literacy' [1] and the United Nations General Assembly as well as UNESCO General Conference have suggested establishing a multi-stakeholder partnership as a key modality to realize the global vision through synergistic action. GAL seeks to align multiple actions by diverse stakeholders towards this ambitious global agenda over the next fifteen years. Arne Carlsen underscored the importance of innovation and creative use of information and communication technologies(ICTs) as well as making a more explicit connection with other sustainable development goals through an intersectoral approach. He requested the Core group to suggest ways in which innovation and integration can make literacy open the gateway to lifelong learning, how we could possibly create hubs for convergence of literacy services and initiate a virtuous learning cycle by continuously improving the quality of literacy programmes.

The second session focused on' Fostering innovation through ICTs' and began with a short presentation by Venkata Subbarao Ilapavuluri, Chief Programme Coordinator, UIL, outlining how our world has been becoming a more literate place with literacy rates going up from 56 % in 1956 to 84% in 2015. However, technology has been transforming our planet into a digital world very fast. GAL will have to consider how this untapped potential of technology can be fully realized to enhance access to quality learning almost anywhere, anytime. The possibility of using ubiquitous mobile Apps, Open and distance learning opportunities and Massive open online Courses(MOOCs) may have to be seriously explored. The Core Group was invited to consider the following:

- How do we ensure that good quality literacy learning opportunities are made available through ICTs to learners across all ages and in the languages preferred by the learners?
- How do we ensure that the underserved communities and individuals are better served?

The third session focused on linkages between literacy and other SDGs and noted how 'Universal Literacy' is indispensable for achievement of many SDGs[2] and whether we can make literacy relevant by   connecting 'words' with the 'worlds' of the learners by making the life and livelihoods as the starting point for literacy programmes. One of the issues highlighted was the possibility of enhancing relevance by linking up literacy with other sectors like agriculture[3], health[4] as well as employment and decent work [5]. The questions addressed in this session included the following: How do we transform literacy learning to have a transformative impact on learners' lives? How do we connect literacy with other sectors/programmes? How do we meet the diverse learning needs of

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[1]   Para 7, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development

[2] Especially Goals 4, 5,10 and 16
[3] Goal 2 End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
[4] Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
[5] Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

learners and ensure that the 'content' is relevant and engaging enough? How do we know the learners are learning or not? How can we use assessment as a tool to motivate the learners to become lifelong learners?

The fourth session was focused on a discussion on the need to establish multi-stakeholder partnerships at regional and national levels. The short background presentation noted that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the value of multi-stakeholder partnerships[6]. Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA) also envisages a key role for national and regional partnerships in supporting the planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes, tackling common challenges coherently. FFA mentions the following roles for regional coordination built upon open, inclusive and participatory involvement of key stakeholders

- Data collection and monitoring
- Mutual learning and exchange of good practices
- Advocacy and resource mobilization
- Implementation of joint projects

Against this backdrop, the core group considered the following issues

- What regional alliances can be formed to advance the literacy agenda?
- Which organizations/stakeholders should be in the national and regional alliances?
- What functions will the national and regional alliances perform?

The fifth and final session looked at the possible next steps, especially the preparations for the formal launch of GAL on 8 September 2016. It considered actions required at national, regional and global level, the invitation to countries and development partners to join GAL and contribute to the work of the Alliance, setting up a web site for GAL[7] for sharing information and knowledge on good practices and engaging all stakeholders towards achieving the literacy goals in SDG 4, especially target 4.6 on youth and adult literacy.

After an extensive discussion, the members made the following suggestions and recommendations:

I. **Have a sharper focus but don't lose sight of the big picture**

1. 'Literacy' needs to be defined in the context of the current challenges. Numeracy and digital skills should inevitably be a part of this definition. Literacy skills are to be seen as foundational skills enlarging human capabilities and freedoms, enabling individuals to fully participate in contemporary society.
2. Literacy learning opportunities must be available in local languages and in the languages the learners want to learn.
3. Literacy learning must open up opportunities for lifelong learning. Systems promoting 'equivalency' and 'accumulated skills credits' could help learners gain access to further learning opportunities.

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[6] 17.16 Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries
17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships
[7] Two UN websites were cited as examples that could be useful in this context.
Every woman, Every child (http://www.everywomaneverychild.org/commitments/all-commitments?filter_sectors=8)
UN partnerships for SDGs platform (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnerships/)

4. The focus of GAL should be youth and adult literacy (Target 4.6 of SDG 4) with the full recognition that it will encourage UNESCO, notably UIL to work with all partners to adopt a holistic view to address literacy learning across all ages from early childhood to adulthood. In fact, the achievement on target 4.6 is inevitably linked to whether or not or to what extent the countries focus on actions to provide good quality pre-primary and primary education. Literacy learning occurs across all age groups and, therefore, GAL will have to take a pragmatic approach that recognizes that effective literacy instruction must begin early if all youth have to be functionally literate. There are various examples of such an integrated approach like family literacy programmes and combining women's literacy programmes with early childhood programmes that need to be encouraged.

5. The existing hubs of learning -early childhood education centres, schools, community learning centres, Farmers' training centres- should be fully used as centres of literacy learning. Public libraries must be included as learning hubs.

6. There should be a clear focus on vulnerable and marginalized population groups, including migrants with special attention to impaired learners with special needs. Inclusion is the key.

7. GAL recommends to consider engaging youth in designing the literacy programmes for them and address the livelihood concerns of youth by linking literacy learning with skills development. Income generation opportunities should be linked to literacy learning as they have been in some successful programmes.

8. GAL recommends to focus on least developed countries, fragile states and those which are emerging from conflict.

9. GAL's work should be aligned to other UNESCO priorities (gender, youth and Africa) and be linked to the Education 2030 Framework for Action.

10. GAL will seek to enhance political will through a clearer articulation of the demand for literacy and encourage member states and development partners to enlarge the funding envelop both nationally and internationally.

II. Foster innovation, make creative use of ICTs and put learners and communities at the centre

11. Fully cognisant of the complex socio-economic and cultural barriers to achieve the SDG target 4.6, GAL will have to promote the opportunities opened up by ICTs and contribute to enhance national capacities for programme implementation through innovative use of ICTs and possibly blending ICT use with community level actions, peer support and mentoring. Investment in technology can result in significant savings in addition to efficiency gains.

12. ICTs should be seen as a supportive tool and be used to supplement rather than be seen as a substitute for face to face interaction, community level action and competent teachers.

13. ICTs can break barriers and massive online open courses (MOOCs) can be a potentially useful strategy in enhancing access to underserved groups of learners. GAL should catalyse the creation of open education resources and open online courses especially appropriate for learners with little or no literacy skills.

14. GAL should focus, in addition, on the training of tutors and building of communities of learners to supplement online, digital learning. Training of instructors can be done very effectively through digital courses as has been successfully tried out in many countries in francophone Africa.

15. GAL should focus on encouraging creation of relevant digital content, including mobile apps, short digital modules and moodles, to address the diverse learning needs of learners in appropriate languages.

III. Literacy learning should have multiple entry points to enhance its relevance for learners

16. GAL should promote intersectoral approaches. There are a number of successful examples where farming was used as an entry point for a successful literacy programme
17. GAL should focus on catalysing effective local level implementation through civil society partners. This would help adopt a convergent approach towards literacy learning adding value to ongoing programmes in different sectors.
18. Literacy assessments should be seen as integral to the learning process and help motivate the learners to achieve higher proficiency levels
19. In support of UIS, GAL should encourage countries to collect relevant data and make use of it to improve the programme implementation. We must tap into the potential of data analytics.

IV. Strengthen partnerships and collaboration at all levels, share information and knowledge

20. GAL recommends UNESCO to establish an online platform for sharing good practices and promote peer learning as well as inter-country collaboration and cooperation.
21. GAL recommends that UNESCO should develop tool kits for supporting countries towards a more effective programme implementation.
22. GAL should promote regional and national Alliances of relevant stakeholders. For example, there is a National Literacy Coordination Agency in the Philippines. There are similar bodies in other countries. These can be augmented by bringing in representatives from other sectors like agriculture, industries, Information technology and communications. SAARC has already initiated the discussions to form a SAARC level Alliance for Literacy.
23. GAL should leverage the potential of existing literacy networks like ELINET and European Basic Skills Network.
24. GAL should not only encourage quantitative data but also promote qualitative approaches assessing the impact literacy on sustainable development.

V. Prepare to launch GAL on 8 September 2016, International Literacy Day

25. GAL should use the International Literacy Day 2016 (ILD) as an ideal opportunity to launch this initiative. UIL should take preparatory steps towards this event and convene a second meeting of the Core Group either before or after the ILD.
26. UIL should encourage as many countries and partners as possible to join GAL as well as work with countries and regions to prepare fact sheets on current status of literacy plans for achieving the literacy targets. The feasibility of crowdsourcing digital learning materials in different languages, encouraging academic institutions to develop open learning courses, establishing regional alliances could be among the next steps.
27. GAL should involve the donor countries and ensure greater involvement of all relevant UN agencies.