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# THE 2013 MOBILES FOR EDUCATION (mEDUCATION) ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM: COMMIT FAIR FOR PROJECT SCALING

## SUMMARY REPORT



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Cover image of attendees at the 2013 International Symposium opening plenary, held in the Organization of American States (OAS) Hall of the Americas. Image courtesy of Michael Lee.

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## The 2013 Mobiles for Education (mEducation) Alliance International Symposium: Commit Fair for Project Scaling

### Overview of the Event

The third annual Mobiles for Education (mEducation) Alliance International Symposium: *Commit Fair for Project Scaling* was held on October 15th and 16th, 2013, at the Organization of American States (OAS) headquarters in Washington, DC.

More than 170 participants from 23 countries, representing more than 90 organizations, attended the Symposium. With over 30 engaging presentations, the *Commit Fair* provided an opportunity for participants – representatives from leading donor and private sector organizations, NGOs, multilaterals, project implementers and research institutes – to explore new areas of project development and collaboration in order to further the use of technologies to enhance quality educational outcomes.

The *Commit Fair* was sponsored by All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development (ACRGCD), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Intel, JP-Inspiring Knowledge, OAS, and USAID, and was organized in collaboration with the 18 institutional members of the mEducation Alliance Steering Committee.<sup>1</sup>

The *Commit Fair* embodied a different approach from that of a traditional conference. It was designed to bring together competitively selected projects from the field and private sector /donor organizations that could potentially commit to these projects and/or in the mEducation field more broadly, whether through financial or in-kind contributions. The goals of the *Commit Fair* were to bring together leading project implementers and funders to promote and forge new partnerships; create innovative strategies for education development, through brainstorming and collaboration; help implementers strengthen their project pitches to funders; and raise the level of awareness and involvement of the private sector and other potential partners.

The Symposium's five session formats – *Partnering with the Private Sector*, *Project Presentations*, *Commit Your Knowledge Now: Provide Technical Assistance to Selected Projects*, *mEducation Alliance Working Group Meetings*, and *Pitch Fests* – brought together various stakeholders in the mEducation field and allowed attendees to engage with representatives from leading organizations from around the world. Over the course of the two-day event, attendees participated in the highly interactive sessions and explored opportunities and strategies to build partnerships, share knowledge, and scale and strengthen projects. Sessions were grouped into five focal areas: *Mobiles for Reading*, *Mobiles for Youth Workforce Development*, *Mobiles for Numeracy*, *Assistive Technology*, and *Mobiles for Education in Crisis and Conflict Environments*.

The *Commit Fair* also featured a panel entitled *Technology For Education and Partnering for Scale: Thought-Leaders' Perspectives* with panelists Luis Pinto, Director of Education Business Solutions at JP - Inspiring

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<sup>1</sup> Steering Committee member organizations include: British Council, Cambridge English Language Assessment, GIZ, the Global Partnership for Education, GSMA, IAmLearn, Inter-American Development Bank, International Telecommunications Union, International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), The MasterCard Foundation, Organization of American States, Peace Corps, UNESCO, UNICEF, U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of State, The World Bank, World Vision, and the World Wide Web Foundation.

Knowledge, Alex Palacios, Director, Special Projects, at the Global Partnership for Education, and Michael Trucano, Senior ICT and Education Policy Specialist at The World Bank.

Some of the most popular events at the *Commit Fair* were the fast-paced *Pitch Fest* sessions. During the *Pitch Fests*, project implementers from organizations such as Sesame Workshop India, MIT Center for Mobile Learning, Digicel Jamaica Foundation, and FunDza Literacy Trust had just five minutes to present their projects to audiences and judges (referred to as a “panel of investors”). The 17 projects were selected through a competitive proposal process.<sup>2</sup> After each presentation, the “panel of investors,” which included representatives from organizations such as The World Bank, OAS, Intel, Orange Labs, and Nokia, then asked key questions and provided constructive feedback to help the presenting organizations strengthen their projects and pitches.

This report includes highlights from the event, including opening and closing plenaries, Alliance Working Group meetings, and the *Pitch Fests*. The final section briefly discusses participant feedback based on survey responses collected at the end of the *Commit Fair*. For more information on the *Commit Fair* and the [projects](#) presented, please visit the [events page](#) on the mEducation Alliance website.

## Day 1: October 15, 2013

### Opening Remarks and Keynote Address

The Mobiles for Education (mEducation) Alliance International Symposium: *Commit Fair for Project Scaling* opened with introductory remarks by Michael Carrier, Director of Strategic Partnerships at Cambridge English Language Assessment, on behalf of the mEducation Alliance Steering Committee. Remarks included a brief overview of the Alliance’s history, goals, and activities, as well as an introduction to the 2013 *Commit Fair*’s innovative format.

Following the opening remarks, Sherry Tross, Executive Secretary for Integral Development at the OAS, welcomed Symposium attendees to the OAS headquarters, and emphasized the organization’s readiness to explore new opportunities to improve education through the use of mobile technologies. Tross noted that mEducation is a new field for OAS, and, as such, OAS aims to broaden its already extensive program for education and international development through increased consideration of the benefits of mobile technologies, and promoting the democratization of access to information for the people it serves throughout its 35 member countries. Ms. Tross stressed that organization leaders and policymakers must become more involved in promoting the use of mobile technologies for education, to achieve improved learning outcomes.

Brian Gonzalez, Director of the Global Education Sector at Intel Corporation, followed Ms. Tross with the keynote address. Mr. Gonzalez discussed Intel’s involvement in a wide range of technology-based education programs in over 90 countries. Mr. Gonzalez highlighted Intel’s commitment to education as a foundation for innovation and discussed the company’s focus on promoting human interaction within

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<sup>2</sup> The Alliance launched an open call for proposals whereby all proposals received were reviewed and scored by the Planning Committee. The highest scoring proposals that related to the Symposium’s goals and themes were selected to present.

its education projects by developing technology and strategies that allow not just one-to-one, but also one-to-many opportunities for learners. Mr. Gonzalez and his team of 15 education specialists support teachers as they work to promote technology in schools, with a focus on education projects that allow students to collaborate with their peers, so that learning becomes more interactive and engaging. With Intel's support, Mr. Gonzalez stated, teachers are able to obtain the necessary skills to help their students achieve learning outcomes, including improved critical thinking and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills<sup>3</sup>. Mr. Gonzalez concluded with the assertion that with broadband penetration reaching new levels around the world, now is the time to push for mobile technologies to improve education and, ultimately, the competitiveness of countries.

### **Working Group Meetings**

Working Groups provide an opportunity for individuals and organizations to form communities of practice around specific topics in the mEducation community. At the time of the Symposium, three Working Groups existed under the mEducation Alliance umbrella: the Mobiles for Reading (mReading) Working Group, the Mobiles for Youth Workforce Development (mYWD) Working Group, and the Mobile Education for Numeracy (mNumeracy) Working Group. Each Working Group convened at the *Commit Fair for Project Scaling* to discuss current activities and new developments in each community of practice.

### **Official Launch of the Mobile Education for Numeracy (mNumeracy) Working Group**

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) representatives led the launch of the Mobile Education for Numeracy (mNumeracy) Working Group. The Working Group was commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and is being implemented by GIZ as part of their Sector Program on Numeracy, which is tasked with utilizing and adapting lessons from literacy programs for numeracy programs. The Working Group's aim is to explore the use of a range of mobile technologies and applications to address the high demand for math programming in many countries and the lack of attention given to numeracy in the international development agenda. The group sees the "mobiles for literacy" approach as a way to scale up numeracy education in formal school systems, particularly due to the increasing ubiquity of mobile phones in developing contexts and because phones are equipped with number pads.

The Working Group aims to: (a) address data gaps, especially for marginalized groups; (b) develop an understanding of the success factors for different groups, including refining success criteria; and (c) determine suitable technology and best devices for early grade learners.

Participants in the inaugural Working Group meeting highlighted the need to promote increased monitoring and evaluation; collaboration and sharing of findings and project successes and failures; and validation of academic research by practitioners on the ground. The group's current focus is on understanding the landscape and identifying stakeholders, with the intent to collaboratively set the agenda for the coming year.

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<sup>3</sup> 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills refer to skills that students must possess in order to function in an increasingly global and digitized world. Examples of such skills include critical thinking, problem solving, improved communication, and digital literacy. Available from [http://rd.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-94-007-2324-5\\_2#page-1](http://rd.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-94-007-2324-5_2#page-1)

### **Mobiles for Reading (mReading) Working Group Meeting**

The Mobiles for Reading (mReading) Working Group is dedicated to understanding how mobile technologies can be used to improve literacy around the world. Members share evidence of successful practices, discuss opportunities and challenges from the field, and explore potential areas for future collaboration and knowledge sharing.

In the mReading Working Group session, participants broke out into five discussion groups, each focused on a different aspect of mReading interventions: (1) assistive technologies; (2) monitoring and evaluation; (3) community engagement; (4) teacher capacity development and the use of technology in under-resourced schools; and (5) on-the-ground implementation. Participants had an opportunity to learn about a variety of current mReading initiatives being implemented by All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development<sup>4</sup> (ACR GCD) Round I grantee organizations: Urban Planet Mobile, Worldreader, Lubuto Library Project, and Sesame Workshop India. Each gave a brief overview of their project goals, challenges, and lessons learned

During the lively group conversations that followed these presentations, participants discussed their own experiences, possible approaches to the challenges encountered in implementing each project, and the potential that mobile technology has to improve literacy outcomes. The discussions covered a number of themes, including the importance of community engagement in creating successful and sustainable mReading initiatives, and the great potential for mobile technology to bring learning and reading materials to traditionally marginalized communities, particularly visually impaired populations and those who do not have access to formal education.

### **Mobiles for Youth Workforce Development (mYWD) Working Group Meeting**

The *Mobiles for Youth Workforce Development (mYWD) Working Group* is dedicated to exploring the use of mobile technologies to increase access to employment for young people, and to provide them with opportunities to develop their workforce skills.

This meeting convened current members of the mYWD Working Group, as well as participants interested in the group's activities and the mYWD field in general.

The mYWD Working Group was launched at the 2012 mEducation Alliance International Symposium, as a collaborative initiative between The MasterCard Foundation, USAID, and JBS International, which manages the mEducation Alliance Secretariat.

Over the past year, the Working Group has held four well-attended Learning Series events to provide a forum for group members to explore mYWD subtopics, including innovations in the field, and issues concerning scale, sustainability, and gender-inclusiveness. One of the Learning Series sessions also included a hands-on workshop demonstrating mobile tools for youth workforce development. Linda Raftree, mYWD specialist and mEducation Alliance Consultant, also conducted a [landscape review](#) that focused on youth workforce education and training; demand-side programming; job matching and

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<sup>4</sup> “Launched in 2011 by the [US Agency for International Development](#) (USAID), the [Australian Agency for International Development](#) (AusAID), and [World Vision](#), the ACR-GCD is an annual competition which seeks to leverage the transformative power of science and technology to develop scalable, low-cost solutions that improve literacy rates for all children in the developing world.” Available from [www.allchildrenreading.org](http://www.allchildrenreading.org)

employment services; entrepreneurship and enterprise development; and overcoming social constraints to employment. Working Group members said they hoped that the landscape review and Learning Series briefs would be used as advocacy materials that could be shared with the wider development community, so that future mYWD initiatives would be better grounded in the needs of the field.

Members of the group rotate responsibility for hosting Working Group meetings and events. Plan International, Winrock International, and Souktel will chair the Working Group for the coming year.

## **Day 2: October 15, 2013**

### **Opening Plenary and Commitments**

Cecilia Martins, Specialist at the Department of Human Development, Education and Employment at the Organization of American States (OAS), opened the second day of the Symposium by emphasizing the importance of collaboration between the many stakeholders involved in the mEducation space. She outlined the shared collective agenda of these stakeholders which, among other things, includes community engagement, respectful partnership, sharing challenges and opportunities, improving access to education, and promoting social inclusion to advance economic growth. The implementation of these shared areas by individual stakeholders strengthens the overall process of developing partnerships through commitment, inclusion, accessibility, participation, and appropriation. She encouraged participants to learn more about the work of the OAS, and highlighted the strengths of their organization, which include a unique and innovative approach to addressing the development agenda, in addition to vast regional knowledge, experience, and access to key institutions.

The keynote address was followed by announcements from representatives from Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development (ACRGCD), Orange Labs, and Accenture Development Partnerships (ADP), outlining a range of commitments to the field of mEducation. These announcements were a culmination of several months of effort by the mEducation Alliance to bring forward private sector organizations and other partners that would provide tangible assistance to the *Commit Fair* participants and the broader mEducation community.

Nils Geissler, Head of the Education Section at GIZ, announced the first of the commitments, which focused on mobile education and numeracy. Working with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), GIZ, commissioned by BMZ, committed to: (1) coordinate and partially fund the activities of the Mobile Education for Numeracy (mNumeracy) Working Group, which was launched on the first day of the Symposium; (2) initiate and partially fund the commissioning and publication of research that collects evidence on the effects of sustainable mobile education for early grade math education and learning outcomes; and (3) fund a preparatory phase of a pilot exercise to measure learning outcomes in early grade math with the use of mobile devices. Dr. Geissler also stated that GIZ will focus on mobile education in four areas: using mobiles to support early grade numeracy; training/qualification of teachers and administrators; Education Management Information Systems (EMIS); and higher education, which includes open educational resources (OER), distance learning, and social media.

Rebecca Leee, World Vision's ACR GCD Project Director, highlighted the organization's continued commitment to develop scalable solutions to improve global literacy through a new round of ACR GCD. The second round of ACR-GCD will award grant funding and prizes to innovators launching new and/or scalable technology-based solutions that support early grade reading efforts particularly in low-resource communities in developing countries. This new round will build on Round I achievements, engaging non-traditional problem solvers and fostering broader participation, and will focus on key themes, including: (a) mother tongue instruction and materials; (b) mobilizing family and community engagement ; and (c) the use of technology for enhancing early-grade reading outcomes for children with disabilities.

Ralph Ankri, Program Manager at Orange Labs Products and Services, announced the company's commitment of 120 days of employee time to assist NGOs and social enterprises to design and implement innovative and sustainable mEducation solutions in countries where Orange works. Orange will also sponsor an mEducation Alliance research roundtable in the coming year. Mr. Ankri emphasized Orange's ability to support the launch of projects through its presence in the Africa and Middle East regions, its large range of technology expertise, and established links with the academic sector and donor agencies. Depending on the project, Orange has the capacity to offer guidance to develop effective marketing strategies, provide project management support, and design network and product platform services.

Linda Nemec, Senior Manager at Accenture Development Partnerships (ADP), announced her firm's commitment to provide 20 hours of business and mentoring consulting to help support mEducation projects. ADP provides management and technology consultants for international development organizations and corporate clients. Ms. Nemec mentioned that the Alliance aligns with ADP's corporate social responsibility efforts including *Skills to Succeed*, a program that gives people in need a chance to develop skills in order to become productive members of society.

### Highlights from the Pitch Fest Sessions

The second day of the *Commit Fair* featured fast-paced *Pitch Fests*, in addition to the project presentations and technical assistance sessions offered during the first day of the event. Participants were asked to provide thoughts on projects that were presented at the *Pitch Fest* sessions using the mobile feedback tool, Poll Everywhere.<sup>5</sup> Based on responses received, attendees voted for those projects which they thought demonstrated the most innovative uses of mobile technologies to develop life skills, support conflict resolution, and assist students with visual impairments.

When asked to reflect on the format and value-add of the *Pitch Fest* sessions, participants expressed a general appreciation for the fast-paced format, which allowed "investors" to ask tough questions and project implementers to benefit from the experience of promoting their projects within the five-minute presentation window. One of the members of the "panel of investors" noted that many of the ideas presented were very similar, and emphasized the continued need to improve knowledge sharing among organizations, to avoid duplication of efforts. Other "investors" suggested that those pitching projects should be more explicit about specific project needs, and include storytelling within their pitches, using

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<sup>5</sup> Poll Everywhere is an application that works in real-time, allowing participants to vote in custom polls, send in feedback, and immediate view responses in multiple formats. During the Symposium, JBS International created polls about Pitches, session types, and other topics to solicit quick feedback throughout the day. For more information about Poll Everywhere visit <http://www.poll everywhere.com/faq>

case studies and other narrative devices to hold investors' interest, and to differentiate their projects from others. Participants also liked the idea of a "request fest" where donors would present their interests to help implementers understand funding agencies' perspectives and needs.

### Closing Plenary and Event Reflections

Steve Vosloo, Senior Project Officer, Mobile Learning at UNESCO, gave the *Commit Fair's* closing remarks. Citing the well -designed projects presented at the Symposium, a growing evidence base, and an increasing number of partnerships, Mr. Vosloo concluded that while the mEducation field is maturing, much work remains. Mr. Vosloo emphasized the need to continue developing partnerships and learning from one another. He spoke of the importance of focusing on content, especially with the growing availability of platforms, as well as on the pedagogy of mobile learning, and engaging teachers to improve buy in. Mr. Vosloo acknowledged that the challenge to connect informal and formal learning persists, as does the need for more financially sustainable models for project implementation. He also emphasized that while scale is possible with more people connected via mobiles than ever before, project design and implementation must be carefully planned and must consider all stakeholders.

Mr. Vosloo thanked presenters and participants for their active contributions at the Symposium and tasked attendees with focusing on the goals of bringing promising mEducation projects and resources to scale and making technology and interfaces easier for teachers and students to use. He suggested that attendees be more proactive in building partnerships, sharing knowledge, and engaging with and learning from others.

### Participant Feedback

Following the *Commit Fair*, participants were asked to rate the usefulness and relevance of the event's breakout sessions. Fifty-six participants completed the feedback survey, the majority of whom were affiliated with NGOs (43 percent), followed by private sector organizations (25 percent), and research-oriented institutions (18 percent). Many of the open-ended comments and suggestions concerning the *Commit Fair's* format and ways to improve the Symposium for next year indicated that participants appreciated the innovative, action-oriented structure of the event and *Pitch Fest* sessions. Several respondents were pleased to have had the opportunity to engage with the "panel of investors" during these sessions, though some participants said the panel should have included more potential funders, and asked for further clarification concerning commitments announced. Several respondents suggested more information about session formats, content, and additional opportunities to participate in structured networking activities be provided prior to the event. Overall, most respondents found the *Commit Fair* to be beneficial and effective, appreciated the role of the *Commit Fair* in facilitating partnership building and promoting knowledge sharing, and expressed interest in attending the next mEducation Alliance International Symposium.