

2016

# Bridging the Gap:

Bringing together NGO/INGO stakeholders with academic researchers to explore how greater collaboration can inform the development of women's literacy learning

## Final Project Report

15 February 2016

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17 February 2016



*A BAICE-Funded Building Capacity and Networks Project organised by the UK Literacy Working Group and the Literacy and Development Group, University of East Anglia*

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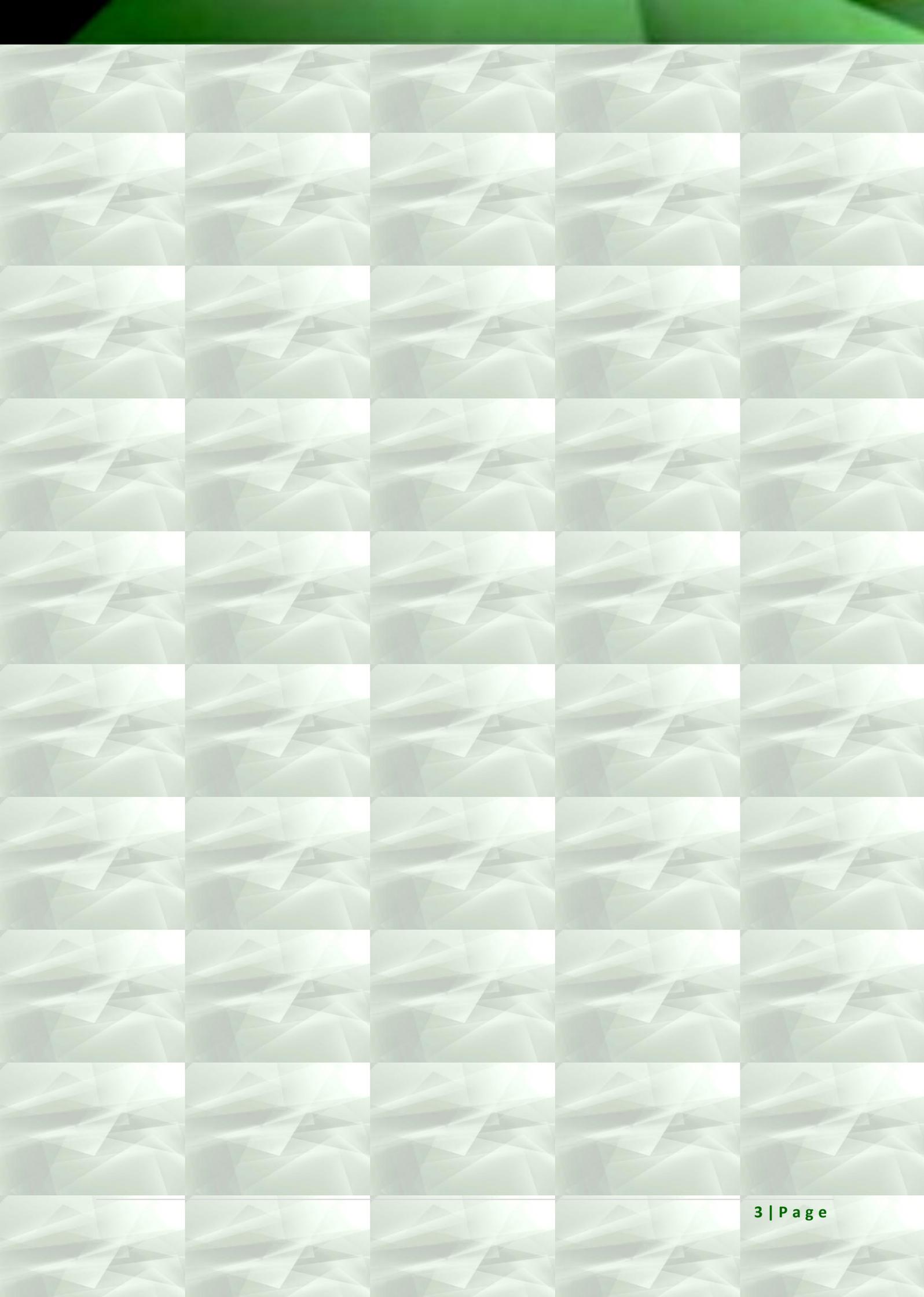
## ACRONYMS

ASPBAE -	Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education
BAICE -	British Association for International and Comparative Education
BALID -	British Association for Literacy in Development
DfID -	Department for International Development
EFA -	Education for All
ICT -	Information Communications Technology
INGO -	International non-governmental organisation
LDG -	Literacy and Development Group
LWG -	Literacy and Working Group
MDGs -	Millennium Development Goals
NFE -	Non-formal education
NIACE -	National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education
NGO -	Non-governmental organisation
PR -	Participatory Research
RaPAL -	Research and Practice in Adult Literacies
SDGs -	Sustainable Development Goals
SIL -	Summer Institute of Linguistics
UCL -	University College London
UEA -	University of East Anglia
UKFIET -	UK Forum for International Education and Training
UNESCO -	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

## ***Acknowledgement***

The organising team would like to express its gratitude to the **British Association for International and Comparative Education (BAICE)** for providing the financial and technical resources for the successful implementation of the ***Bridging the Gap Project***.

This report was prepared by Dr. Gina Lontoc, University of East Anglia Literacy and Development Group, based on contributions from participants and discussions with the organising team at the UK Literacy Working Group.



## Executive Summary

***"Bridging the Gap: Bringing together NGO/INGO stakeholders with academic researchers to explore how greater collaboration can inform the development of women's literacy learning"***

was a BAICE (British Association for International and Comparative Education)-Funded Building Capacity and Networks Project organised by the UK Literacy Working Group and the Literacy and Development Group at the University of East Anglia. It aimed to bring together literacy policy makers, researchers and practitioners to consider issues around developing adults' literacy learning, and women's literacy learning in particular. The purpose of this project was to provide an opportunity to explore the gaps in communicating and constructing knowledge between these different communities, in order to inform future sustainable development of practice in adult literacy. It utilised e-Forum and networking events such as meetings/seminar-workshops.

The first networking event was the "Quick-fire Session at the UKFIET 2015 International Conference on Education and Development held from 15th to 17th of September, 2015 at the University of Oxford.

The second activity was a seminar-workshop at the University of East Anglia on 23rd of October, 2015. This event focused on the question, *"How can academic research into adult learning inform and learn from international development agencies working in this field?"*

The UEA event was followed by an e-Forum from 7th to 14th of November, 2015. Over seventy participants from more than twenty countries joined the online forum.

The project was concluded by a seminar focusing on the question, *"How can we increase the extent to which NGO activities, developments and documentation inform the academic research community?"*. It was organised and hosted by the British Association for Literacy in Development (BALID) in London on 26<sup>th</sup> of November, 2015.

Emerging issues and challenges from the project were categorised into themes including:

- forms of collaboration
- challenges in adopting ethnographic research
- capacity building strategies
- policy shift
- power relations
- the place of adult literacy in local contexts.

Lessons learned from the project were tackled within the core issues of:

- collaboration process
- hierarchy in relation to collaboration between academic researchers and practitioners
- impact of the project
- the accountability aspect
- the shift in agenda from women's literacy to gender and literacy.

In terms of recommendations for future directions, two immediate follow-on activities were conceptualised by the organising team:

- a policy brief based on the outcomes of the project would be produced
- a seminar-workshop would be conducted to launch the policy brief.

In addition, the following suggestions have been made:

- Create a portal where academic researchers and practitioners can share resources and, in this regard, establish stronger links with Research and Practice in Adult Literacies (RaPAL).
- Support students through partnerships with NGOs in terms of volunteering opportunities, internships and placements.
- Produce a glossary of research language to help practitioner-researchers to access academic research material.
- Further strengthen collaboration between NGOs and academic researchers through seminar/conferences both virtual (webinars) and face-to-face.
- Consider how to conceptualise and facilitate online courses focusing on topics such as capacity building strategies, ethical frameworks, ethnography, action research, gender mainstreaming, etc.

To conclude, the project confirms the considerable benefits that collaboration between academic researchers and practitioners brings.

However, the biggest challenge that these communities have to confront is how their collaboration efforts can impact policy and practice. This goes beyond building the capacity to carry out research, publish in peer-reviewed academic journals and disseminate the research through a range of mediums in different styles to suit the diverse range of audiences. What is more

complex is the greater attention needed in terms of whom the research is intended for, what framework would best capture the specific practices and needs of the groups who are the perceived beneficiaries of the research and how data could be reported and disseminated in such a way to better influence policy and practice.

Thus, further exploration on these areas is necessary for collaboration to be innovative, dynamic, relevant, responsive and empowering.



## Project Context

The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2014 estimates that 775 million adults, including 514 million women, around the world, are unable to read and write effectively to fully participate in community, economic and political activities. Despite the recognition given to adult literacy by UNESCO and other bodies, this sector continues to be under-developed and under-supported.

Many NGOs and INGOs are involved in initiatives, programmes and projects, which embrace or include women and men's literacy learning in diverse ways. They work in the field for sustained periods of time close to communities and as trusted intermediaries and are thus well placed to both use and inform research around literacy development. However, their experiences, insights and understandings are usually captured in reports and feedback, the 'grey literature', of a kind not

always available to academic researchers or applied in practical programmes.

The impact of many literacy programmes tends to be evidenced by practitioners through observation and local reporting, rather than being formally recorded in published reports accessible to the academic community. Academic research, whilst usually rigorous, peer-reviewed and often used to inform policy, can remain unavailable to and under-used by practitioners and policy makers through researchers' lack of communication with those who might use it in the field in government or NGO programmes.

Bringing together these communities of academic researchers and practitioners, to consider issues of developing adults' literacy learning, and women's literacy learning in particular, offers new opportunities to enhance existing knowledge and to inform future development of practice.



## Aims and Objectives

This BAICE-funded initiative led by the UEA Literacy and Development Group in collaboration with the UK Literacy Working Group aimed to develop networking and collaborative partnerships between NGOs/INGOs and the academic research community, to share insights into issues of literacy learning, including equity, impact and sustainability of adults' involvement, and that of women in particular.

The following were the specific objectives of the project:

1. To identify and share insights into issues and questions, relating to the development of adults', particularly women's, literacy learning, which academic research communities, including PhD students are pursuing
2. To identify and share insights into the range of adult literacy

learning initiatives and practice in which NGOs/INGOs are active and the extent to which this experience is accessible to researchers through relevant 'grey literature' relating to such initiatives

3. To identify ways in which these two, different research communities, can be brought closer together, to the mutual advantage of the parties concerned and to the benefit of literacy theory, policy and practice in the context of international development
4. To inform future collaboration between NGOs and academic institutions working in the field of adult literacy and development through exploring new strategies and forms of partnership

## Project Participants and Participating Organisations

The ***Bridging the Gap Project*** brought together a diverse group of individuals and organizations who were interested in and whose work involved adult literacy learning. There was a mixture of academic researchers and practitioners from various universities and NGOs/INGOs who attended the projects' meetings/seminars. One of the achievements of this project was to build a strong line-up of presenters and session chairs who are internationally renowned and widely recognised in the

fields of literacy, gender and development. Furthermore, the project was successful in providing opportunities for Masters, PhD and Postdoctoral researchers to be actively involved in the project not only as participants but as presenters, breakout session facilitators and members of the organising team. This was an important capacity-building aspect of the project.

For the complete list of individual participants and participating organisations and countries, please see *Annex 3*.

## Project Methodology

To explore key issues, gaps and challenges arising from the collaboration between academic and practitioner communities in relation to adult literacy learning, particularly women's literacy learning, the *Bridging the Gap Project* utilised networking events in the form of meetings/seminar-workshops and e-forum. The project concluded with a discussion meeting by the organising team to finalise this report and identify specific outcomes to take forward through future initiatives.

The first networking event for this project was the "Quick-fire Session" at the UKFIET 2015 International Conference on Education and Development entitled "*Learning for Sustainable Futures – Making the Connections*". This was held from 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> of September at the University of Oxford. Five members from the *Bridging the Gap Project* team participated in this event. The presenters shared their thoughts on issues surrounding women's literacy learning and the gaps between the work carried out by academic researchers and practitioners in order to improve the construction of knowledge and the framing, dissemination and application of research findings outside academia.

Moreover, this project involved two meetings/seminar-workshops. One was organised by the Literacy and Development Group and was conducted at the University of East Anglia on 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 2015. This served as the project's second event which focused

on the question, *How can academic research into adult learning inform and learn from international development agencies working in this field?* Another meeting/seminar-workshop was organised and hosted by the BALID in London on 26<sup>th</sup> of November, 2015. This meeting focused on the question: *How can we increase the extent to which NGO activities, developments and documentation inform the academic research community?* Both events were attended by members of funding agencies, academic researchers and practitioners in education and development.

Another networking strategy used by the project was the *Bridging the Gap e-Forum*, an online platform where individuals from global international development communities of practitioners and researchers shared their perspectives on how to bridge the gap between policy and



research in adult literacy in the global South. From 7<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> of November, 2015, the forum was hosted on the BAICE website. Overseen by a moderator and facilitated by seven experts in the field of adult learning,

literacy and development, the e-Forum provided a virtual space for interaction and networking for more than seventy participants from over twenty countries (See Annex 3).



<http://baice.ac.uk/2015/bridging-the-gap-research-policy-and-practice-in-womens-literacy/>



HOME ▾ ABOUT ▾ NEWS ▾ MEMBERSHIP ▾ COMPARE ▾ ARCHIVE ▾

HOME / ARCHIVE / BRIDGING THE GAP: RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE IN WOMEN'S LITERACY

Nov 5th, 2015  
Archive, Projects, Projects,  
Thematic Forum

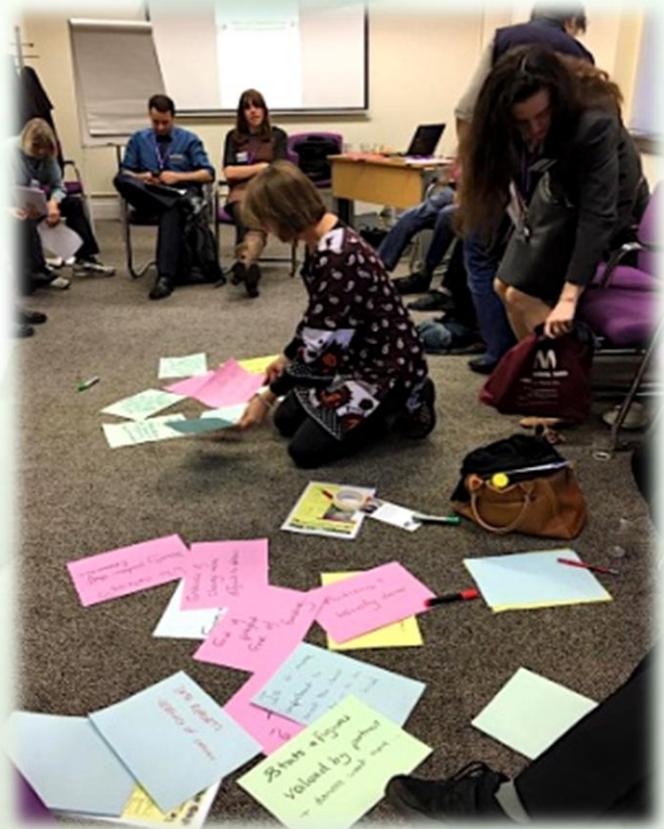
## Bridging the Gap: Research, Policy and Practice in Women's Literacy

# e-Forum



Welcome to the BAICE e-Forum on *research, policy and practice in women's literacy!*

The e-Forum is a virtual space where interested organisations and individuals can interact, network and exchange ideas around adult literacy issues in the global south/developing countries. This is one of the Bridging the Gap activities sponsored by the British Association for International and Comparative Education and organised by the UK Literacy Working



## Highlights of Bridging the Gap Events

This section contains an overview of key issues and challenges that emerged from

each event. It also outlines suggestions and recommendations from participants.

### A. Bridging the gap: research, policy and practice in women's literacy (Quick-fire session)

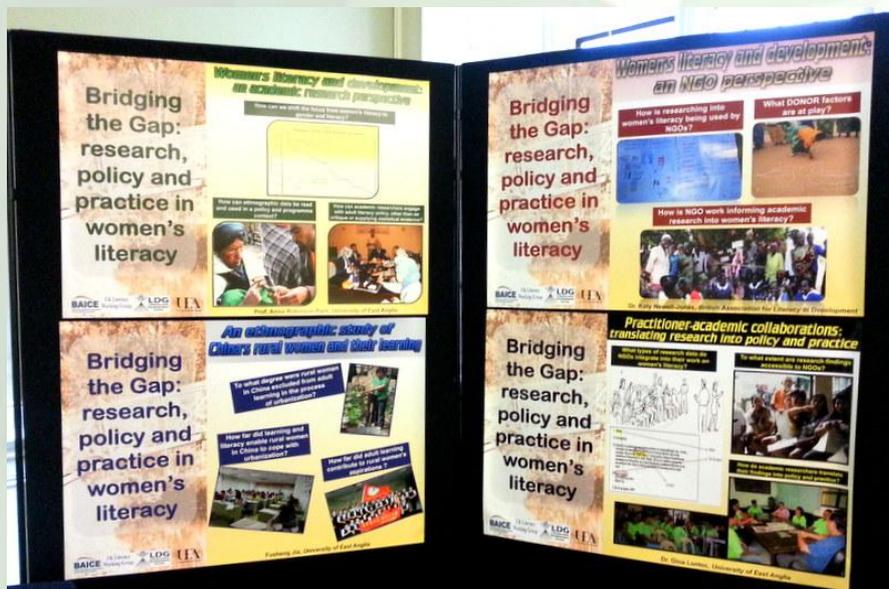
The quick-fire session, "Bridging the gap: research, policy and practice in women's literacy" was the first activity for the BAICE-funded Building Capacity and Networks Project organised by the UK Literacy Working Group and the Literacy and Development Group at the University of East Anglia. This event was part of the UKFIET 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Education and Development held at the University of Oxford on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015. Academic researchers, policy makers and practitioners in education and development attended the quick-fire session which was chaired by Dr. Ian Cheffy from SIL International. Each presenter shared their thoughts on issues surrounding women's literacy learning and the gaps between the work carried out by academic researchers and practitioners in order to improve the construction of knowledge and the framing,

dissemination and application of research findings outside academia.

Prof. Anna Robinson-Pant from the University of East Anglia gave an academic research perspective on women's literacy and development by mapping the directions in research on women's literacy learning and providing current challenges for academic researchers working in this field. To give a country-specific example which reflected the issues raised by Anna, Mr. Fusheng Jia, a postgraduate researcher from the University of East Anglia, shared an ethnographic perspective on how the learning of Chinese rural-urban migrant women affects their capacity to cope with urbanization.

Taking an NGO perspective on the issue, Dr. Katy Newell-Jones, Chair of the British Association for Literacy in Development (BALID), identified the gaps in partnerships between NGOs and academic

researchers in the field of women's literacy. She talked through the issues around NGOs' access to academic research, looking at constraints in terms of funding, time, research skills, and inaccessibility of academic language. Relating to issues presented by Katy, Dr. Gina Lontoc, a Visiting Fellow at the University of East Anglia described how activities and organisational structures



perpetuate gender inequalities and related them to her research findings based on her analysis of learning materials used in the Alternative Learning System in the Philippines. She identified the cost of journal subscriptions and access to databases as barriers to NGOs integrating academic research in their work and emphasized the skills and training involved for the NGOs' utilisation of the software.

Dr. Juliet McCaffery, Secretary of BALID, talked about her experience as a practitioner in reviewing, and then updating, the literacy curriculum for adults in Cambodia. She presented the challenges on working on adult literacy curriculum with

very limited access to academic journals, research reports and ethnographic information with the additional pressure of producing outputs in a short span of time. For the final presentation, Dr. Clare Meade, Senior Associate at NIACE, delivered a talk based on her experience working as practitioner, trainer and researcher in adult learning and family literacy and learning in Uganda and in Europe, and particularly in the UK. She underscored the problem of availability of data and the lack of infrastructure to process and to utilise these data. She also expressed the practitioners' lack of academic links and resources to publish their work.

## **B. Academic research: How can it help and support NGOs in the field (Network Meeting 1)**

The speakers who set the scene for Bridging the Gap Project's first network meeting were Prof. Anna Robinson-Pant from the University of East Anglia, Dr. Katy Newell-Jones from the British Association for Literacy in Development (BALID) and Dr. Carew Treffgarne from UCL Institute of Education.

The presentation made by Anna provided an academic researcher perspective. She underlined the necessity to move literacy research from its traditional direction of providing statistical evidence on the relation between literacy and development to more qualitative research approaches. She provided arguments which include criticisms made about the dominant direction which tends to take correlation as causation and consequently set limitation for researchers to produce knowledge about the process of literacy learning and outcomes. In addition, Anna's presentation underlined the need to embrace new research methods for the provision of in-depth data in order to move away from



perspectives framed by policy. Finally, she outlined some areas of challenges for academic researchers namely, the growing gap between research and policy discourses around adult literacy; difficulties around communicating and using ethnographic research data in policy contexts; and the need to move away from 'women's literacy' (situating women as the problem) to a gendered perspective on literacy practices and programme structures.

The second presentation by Katy focused on NGOs' perspectives. She highlighted the extent NGOs are aware of the existence of research but also sceptical



about it. One of the major issues she underlined is that of credibility where NGOs tend to see and prefer research in its technical form. Yet, there are certain groups of NGOs who seem to be more open to ideological and ethnographic type of research. In terms of access to research, Katy raised issues of perception (on the usefulness of research), time (devoting time to research is not seen as a priority), funding, research skills and language. Beyond these, there is also the need for active involvement in research to have a cost-benefit impact for NGOs. Katy also asserted that research is generally used by NGOs to provide evidence of need, to justify selection of approach, to quote impact in other contexts and to inform evaluation methodology. Donor requirements have a major impact on the type and nature of reports and publications produced by NGOs. Consequently, academics have limited access to the reports of NGOs and it therefore often has only a limited impact. To improve this situation, Katy put forward key initiatives through which NGOs and academic researchers can inform each other. This includes funding Master's research projects in literacy and providing

program officers with research training.

In the third presentation, Carew gave a Development Agency perspective, based on her past experience at DFID. She cited four exciting Research Papers on literacy practice funded by DFID in 1994, 1996, 1999 and 2003, and questioned why they had not had a more significant impact on UK policy? One reason could have been the political focus on UPE in

the MDG framework, which led to Ministerial preference for Primary Education, rather than embracing the wider concept of Basic Education. However, adult literacy enjoyed a brief period of political focus during the interest in DFID in the sustainable livelihoods approach during the early years of the Labour Government. As an example of the outsider/insider alliances that can influence policy, the work of Gordon Conway and Robert Chambers at IDS Sussex, alongside advocacy from ODI, Oxfam and IIED, led to the establishment of the Sustainable Livelihoods Support Office in DFID in 1999. It provided a useful tool to map how literacy practice fits into people's everyday lives and resulted in Natural Resource Advisers and Education Advisers jointly working on the DFID Background Briefing: *'Improving livelihoods for the poor: the role of literacy'* (March, 2002). Hilary



Benn, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for International Development, 2001/2, played a key role in encouraging this inter-sectoral connection, which embraced the concepts of literacy as social practice and multiple literacies.

The reasons why this interest in literacy and livelihoods did not become mainstreamed across DFID country programmes are manifold. Carew reported that the Community Literacies Project in Nepal influenced DFID thinking, and several large literacy programmes, supported by DFID at that time in Nigeria, Egypt and South Africa, followed similar approaches. Unfortunately, with the departure of Hilary Benn to the Home Office in late 2002, and the establishment of DFID's new Policy Division in 2003, the window of opportunity suddenly disappeared.

What this example illustrates is that insider/outsider alliances can be very significant in policy leverage, but such new initiatives will not necessarily be sustainable if the policy climate changes, or if the preferred channels for delivering aid are sectoral rather than multi-sectoral. In order to promote the research/policy/practice interface, she said that it is important to find the right entry point (which may or may not be women's literacy *per se*), to identify policy champions within the Development Agency and to select the channel for delivering that aid that appears to be the most feasible.

During the afternoon sessions, Dr. Vicky Duckworth from Edge Hill University and Ms. Pallawi Sinha from the University of Cambridge delivered the key presentations. Vicky highlighted how participatory research (PR) could be utilised to challenge the academic divide by demystifying the research process and the academy. In particular, she discussed how research empowered seconded practitioners who, in carrying out research, were supported by experienced researchers.

Vicky, then, gave a specific example how PR was used and how participants experienced the research process. Her study explored how sixteen Basic Skills learners were shaped by schooling, college and work and by the private domain of family, home and friends. Offering models for PR, the research offered Vicky the opportunity to work with learners by involving them in the dissemination of research findings on local, national and international levels. The research also allowed her to involve learners in community initiatives, such as



publishing and setting up awards to support future learners. Lastly, Vicky emphasised that academics and practitioners need to work together to transform and empower communities.

In Pallawi's presentation, she talked about her work with the Sabar community in India. Her study tried to listen to perspectives, interests, priorities and values of indigenous communities with regard to

education. She explored how arts, cultural practices and skills of these communities were integrated within school curricula, developing critical tool for learning. One of the greatest challenges Pallawi posed was the attainment of a sustainable future through the emergence of a self-determined community capable of defining its own educational and research agenda and democratic participation.

By constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing theoretical and

methodological frameworks, Pallawi looked into the notion of "marginalised voice" and issues surrounding insider-outsider dichotomy. Her research tried to narrow the gap between the researcher and the community through ethnomethodology and by the utilisation of participatory tools. This offered ways of locating local ethics and local voices by drawing the relationship between culture, knowledge, arts and communities.

### C. Bridging the Gap e-Forum (e-Networking)

The e-Forum was set up to provide organisations and individuals with a virtual space where they could interact, network and exchange ideas around how to bridge the gap between policy and research with regard to adult literacy in the global

South/developing countries. The group of facilitators was comprised of experts from around the world who have long experience in the area of adult learning, literacy and development and with differing roles in terms of research, policy and practice.

The first day e-forum was facilitated by Dr. Rafat Nabi, *Director of Education at Aga Khan Foundation in Afghanistan*. Discussions were focused around the meaning and scope of literacy, its importance, and challenges it poses to educational programs. It was underlined that literacy has generally been defined in relation to formal education. Some participants viewed literacy in two ways: basic literacy and literacy for better living (environment literacy, health literacy, financial literacy, IC-TI (digital?) literacy and so on). While the need of accreditation for the purpose of continuing education in formal programs and providing a higher status for women was underscored, it was argued that it constitutes a social exclusion and exploitation factors.

On the second day, the e-forum discussions were dedicated to the link between literacy programs and livelihood. Questions raised by Ms. Cecilia Soriano, *Programmes and Operations Coordinator at the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)*, include



understanding how literacy programmes can inform policy and what type of research, as well as its requirements, can bring more light about those programmes in order to enhance benefits for participants. The discussion underlined the need to assess the need of beneficiaries in order to bridge the disconnect between literary curricula and participants' aspirations. It is strongly believed that these programs can inform policy development through continuous engagement and by involving all the stakeholders in the process. This means creating collaboration conducive to research strategies, such as casework, participatory research, process documentation and the use of multi-media, which are more likely to help improve learning and the livelihood of the participants.

On the third day, Dr. Sushan Acharya, *Associate Professor from Central Department of Education, Tribhuvan University in Nepal*, problematised the ability of research to influence policy in favour of non-formal education (NFE). She posed questions on how to change donors' and INGOs' position for prioritizing continuous learning opportunities for women. Many have clearly underlined the negative impact of the absence of institutional structures for planning and coordinating NFE activities. It is believed that this affects the effectiveness of NFE programs wherever they exist. It has also been indicated that most of the existing NFE programs lack a systematic process of learner needs assessment upon entry.

Day four e-forum interactions were facilitated by Prof. Anna Robinson-Pant, *Professor of Education at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom and UNESCO Chair in Adult Literacy and Learning for Social Transformation*. She raised issues around research dissemination and the use of research by NGOs. It has been largely admitted that NGOs and other literacy agencies should be involved in conducting

participatory action research. They should use research strategies to monitor, evaluate and document the happenings of their projects. As such, they would be able to identify practical problems and suggest context-sensitive solutions.

On the fifth day of the forum, Dr. Janine Eldred, *Senior Research Fellow from The National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE)*, initiated a discussion focusing on approaches that could help researchers and practitioners to work more closely together. Such approaches include the involvement of development partners in the preparation of research proposals and producing materials, tools, and guides for practitioners during various phases of the research. She also proposed the inclusion of post-research development phases which would involve practitioners. Lastly, she put forward that evaluation studies should encourage and support reflective practice in the field in an ongoing manner.

The interrelation between literacy learning and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was the focus of discussions on the sixth day of the forum which was facilitated by Ms. Mari Yasunaga, *Programme Specialist, Section for Youth, Literacy and Skills Development, UNESCO, Paris*. Three key areas were highlighted at the forum. First, there were perceived strengths and weaknesses of the existing evidence base with regard to benefits of literacy for sustainable development. Second, there was an existing challenge in terms of how evidence base could be enhanced in relation to how progress in different areas of sustainable development influence people's motivation and readiness for literacy skills acquisition and learning and its outcomes. Third, there were possible new forms of partnership required to strengthen the evidence base on the interrelation between literacy and sustainable development and to ensure that

such evidence base is effectively used by policy-makers, practitioners and other actors.

Dr. M. Ehsanur Rahman, *Executive Director of Dhaka Ahsania Mission* in Bangladesh raised two issues during the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the forum. The first issue dealt with roles of higher education institutions in the professional development of literacy/ adult learning educators and in the widening the vision of adult literacy learning. It has been argued that there was a narrow perception on the design and scope of content of adult literacy programmes. This reflected the lack or absence of diverse and context specific adult literacy programmes supported by wider educational goals. Ehsanur's second point pertained to the convincing evidence that academic researchers and practitioners provide in terms of the effectiveness of adult literacy and learning. He tried to connect this element with the demand from the field for the increased roles of donors to promote adult literacy learning.

The last day of the e-Forum was facilitated by Ms. Malini Ghose, *founder member of Nirantar*. She focused on an area which has not been fully explored in the field of adult literacy learning, that is the use of ICT in literacy programmes. Complexities that incorporation of ICT with adult literacy programmes brings were taken into account. These involved debates around whether ICT is a tool for the creation of a transformative learning experience or a conduit through which unequal socio-economic and political relations flow. Another compelling issue raised relates to ICT intervention and the efforts in ensuring that voices of adult learners are heard on social media platforms. Lastly, participants were encouraged to figure out the kinds of research agenda and collaborative partnerships that could address the strengthening of literacy programmes through ICT.

#### **D. Women's Literacy: Enhancing the dialogue between NGOs, practitioners and researchers (Network Meeting 2)**

This meeting focused on the question: *How can we increase the extent to which NGO activities, developments and documentation inform the academic research community?* It provided NGOs with opportunities to share the kind of research they were involved in and the forms of project documentation they carry out. This event also aimed at determining various ways of accessing a range of research and drawing out the value that NGOs' work could have for academic researchers.

Dr. Katy Newell-Jones, the Chair of BALID, led the first activity. Katy invited the participants to position themselves on the continuum of researcher ... practitioner. This allowed the participants to introduce



themselves and the range of researcher/practitioner activities they

engaged in with regard to their position on the continuum. Several concepts emerged from this activity such as the nature of roles they perform, the challenges they encounter in the field, the factors contributing to these challenges, and the actors they had to interact with.

Another highlight of the morning session was the presentation by Ms. Tara Furlong from *RaPAL (Research and Practice in Adult Literacies* (<http://rapal.org.uk/events/bridging-the-gap/>). Tara introduced the innovative practices and scaffolding activities of RaPAL which aimed to support researchers and



practitioners in the field of adult literacy. Some of the activities that RaPAL carries out to promote interaction and discussion are publishing digital journals, running conferences and training, contributing dialogue in the field, supporting ad hoc projects and publications, encouraging and involving members in the organisation's work, and utilising web interfaces as a dialogue medium and repository for resources.

Tara's presentation was followed by a plenary discussion led by Dr. Mary Anderson from BALID. Mary highlighted the scaffolding activities RaPAL provide for their members. Along this line, she stressed that RaPAL's utilisation of internet-based platforms was very empowering. Mary then encouraged the participants to share three points from

Tara's presentation that they found striking. Some participants commented that activities of RaPAL were affirming, encouraging and provoking as they have provided interactive platforms in various social media. The final activity that closed the morning sessions was small group talks on putting the concepts that emerged from Tara's presentation into practice in grassroots literacies where the first language was not English.

Jamie Singleton and Harriet Labouchere from *Lifeline Network International* delivered the key presentation for the afternoon session. Jamie and Harriet shared the nature of projects led by *Lifeline* and talked through *Lifeline's Betteh Tumara* project funded by Comic Relief and Big Lottery. One of the challenges of embedding literacy and numeracy in this project was streaming different levels of abilities within a class. Another challenge was the lack of time to train vocational trainers to teach literacy and numeracy; as a result, the experienced literacy facilitators are sometimes taking on this role. This is part of the general lack of access to trainers with practical, theoretical and literacy and numeracy training skills. Apart from this, the lack of knowledge as to how to find resources and information essential to upgrading and improving literacy and numeracy training was also highlighted.

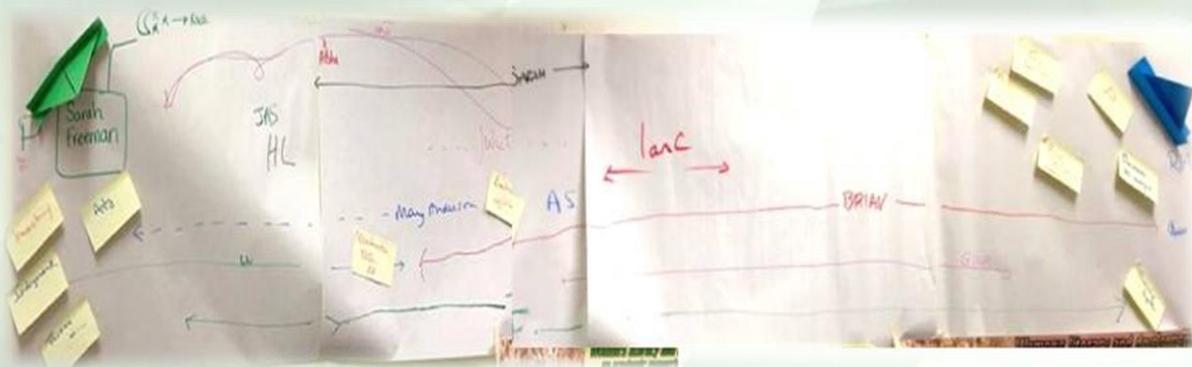


Jamie and Harriet stressed that the greatest influence on their literacy practice

was the support and joint workshop with other organisations. To be specific, they met with Dr. Katy Newell-Jones in 2013 and Katy helped them design their own initial assessment. Another one was the workshop with *Feed the Minds* and *Craftshare* on curriculum implementation. In terms of accessing information, they indicated that they gather information from practitioners with whom they have established a relationship. However, they also expressed difficulties accessing reports from international organisations, NGOs and universities as reports produced by these organisations and institutions were often too specific and irrelevant in terms of applying to their own work. Moreover, they considered committing to this specialist knowledge and information too costly and time consuming.

With regard to their project reports, *Lifeline* usually shares them with their funders and with their colleagues who carry out similar work. Often, they are restricted by the cost of publishing in international journals and the availability of platforms that host reports and document sharing. Thus, they believe in the significance of building relationships with academics and developing an awareness of the value of sharing research findings and communicating them to communities.

After the presentation by Jamie and Harriet, the group was divided into four. Four participants acted as inquisitors (Tara Furlong, Gina Lontoc, Burcu Evren, and Shuhui Liu) who posed questions to members of their respective groups whose practices dealt greatly with NGO work.



## Emerging issues and challenges

Issues and challenges that emerged from each activity were captured in major themes such as nature of collaboration, challenges in adopting ethnographic

research, capacity building strategies, policy shift, power relations and the place of adult literacy in local contexts.

### Forms of collaboration

- Some participants suggested that research should be a joint endeavour between academics, practitioners/NGOs and

beneficiaries. To be more specific, it might be beneficial to all stakeholders to look into the possibility of partnership between

literacy and university programmes in order to support MA students to undertake research projects in relation with relevant NGOs. It had also been expressed that framework of collaboration between academics and practitioners be shifted from the education sector to a more cross-sectoral policy-setting environment.

- Factors that influence collaboration were also

considered such as confidence, social status, motivation towards literacy learning, perceived benefits, and sources of opportunities (i.e. NGO, local government and national government recommendations)

- Barriers to collaboration were also raised which include inadequate research skills, use of academic language and access to "grey literature".

### ***Capacity building strategies***

- Concerns with regard to one's ability to access academic literacy, opportunities to engage practitioners in research and ways of building up a resource centre were also given emphasis.

- Concrete capacity building activities were recommended namely, online forums, qualitative/quantitative research training, ethical training, and seminar-workshops on academic-practitioner collaborations.

### ***Challenges in adopting ethnography approach to adult learning***

- Participants raised how research data are utilised which concerns the challenges of adopting ethnographic research within policy-making context, creating links between practice/research into policy, using research findings in developing programs and identifying gaps involved in this process, and ascertaining that policy is driven from practice and research.
- The function of research strategies to capture the complexities and passion

needed for the empowerment of gender-sensitive literacy and education programs had also been repeatedly emphasised.

- Additionally, participants pointed out the need for the kind of research that would provide policy makers with insights on what participants are saying about their journey. From this type of research, decisions can be made about what works and what can be done to support the efforts of bridging the gap.

### **Capacity building strategies**

- Participants looked at possible ways in which academics and practitioners might work effectively together. Some of their recommendations include capacity-building activities such as online forums, qualitative/quantitative research training, ethical

### **Policy shift**

- The link between literacy and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was addressed. Others argued for the kind of evidence that would capture important findings in

### **Power relations**

- Issues on power relations were particularly stressed by some participants stating that agenda were usually determined by the ministries, NGOs, donors and policymakers.
- In addressing structures of power differentials, it had been argued that language could be an instrument for exclusion. Others identified the need to translate research findings into

### **The place of adult literacy in local contexts**

- Participants supported the premise that it was vital to understand what development partners want from literacy programs and also the nature of their interactions with

training, and seminar-workshops on academic-practitioner collaborations.

- These strategies also entail the ability to access academic literacy and opportunities to engage practitioners in research and ways of building up a resource centre.

connection to the attainment of SDGs such as those from participatory and action research.

- A policy shift from women's literacy to gender and literacy was highlighted.

other languages apart from English and also write reports in simple language before dissemination.

- Another point that participants raised was the promotion of social justice. Empowerment within this premise, as most of the participants suggested, entails making the voices of adult learners heard.

practitioners. Another important point was the emphasis needed in designing literacy courses anchored to the goals of adult literacy programmes

- and to the relevance to community needs.
- Crucial in determining what to include in literacy programs and how to cope with challenges are ways to
- It has also been proposed that development partners should be involved from the inception of the research until the post-research phase so that possible follow-up activities could be

establish a balance where interests of donors, NGOs and governments match with the needs and aspirations of adult learners.

drawn from this partnership. Some of them also argued that beneficiaries of development projects should be involved making the collaboration multi-stakeholder.

## Lessons learned

The lessons learned from the project are categorised under five themes: collaboration process, hierarchy and power,

### Collaboration process

One of the significant features of this project is the involvement of different organisations (British Association for International and Comparative Education, UK Literacy Working Group, Literacy and Development Group at UEA, and British Association for Literacy in Development) who took the lead in different activities. Each organisation invested effort and time for knowledge sharing in order to map out

### Existing hierarchies

Issues around power imbalances had been raised across seminars and e-forum discussions. They were more pronounced not only in terms of sources of power such as donors/funders and policymakers who have greater influence in determining the agenda, but also in relation to the medium of communication.. This pertains to communication and the power embedded in language which, according to participants,

project impact, accountability and shift in agenda.

their plans for the whole project. From the conception of ideas until project evaluation phase, these organisations worked together to sustain the momentum for the project. This could be considered as one of the key ingredients for the success of this project. The collaboration among these three organisations involved in organising the events encouraged the participation of academic institutions and NGOs/INGOs within and outside the UK.

can become an instrument of exclusion, for example through the dominant language in journal publications. Another dimension of power differentials was observed on the existing hierarchies in organisations within which academic researchers and practitioners operate. An example was the systems for assessing academic performance, which prioritise publication in academic journals. Similar systems exist in the NGO sector too, which influence how reports and evaluation are conducted. The

Bridging the Gap events enabled both academics and practitioners to become more aware of the hierarchies within which the party worked. Though most of the participants have identified themselves to

### **Impact of the project**

The project affirms the vital role of collaboration in influencing policy and practice. The value of the exchange and the appetite for it signals an opportunity to strengthen and sustain collaboration efforts, in order to ensure dissemination of research

### **Accountability**

Throughout the project, the organising team maintained a sensitivity to audience. Issues relevant to different groups of people were tackled from all angles, making sure that diverse perspectives had been welcomed and innovative facilitation

### **Shift in agenda**

One of the greatest lessons from this project is the challenge of shifting the focus of initiatives and policies from women's literacy to gender and literacy. Although this issue was raised firmly in the initial activity, it was difficult to sustain the discourse until the final activity. This was partly because the overarching theme had been 'bridging the gap' between practitioner and academic

have moved to both directions of academic and practitioner worlds along the continuum, their negotiation of identities as they move between these worlds is worth acknowledging.

which is relevant to the community and has the capacity to impact the decision making of policymakers. This directs all stakeholders to be involved in capacity building activities that would enable them to get their message across, influence policymaking and strengthen collaborations.

methods were used to encourage everyone to have a voice. This process indicated accountability not only to project participants but to all stakeholders. The strength of this commitment lies in the continuous process of negotiating collaborations, shared understanding of expectations and taking concrete actions to influence change.

research, rather than focusing specifically on women's literacy or gender and literacy. Various issues on adult literacy learning have been raised and a lot of capacity building strategies have been put forward; however, to scale up collaboration towards valuable impact on policy and practice, the gender and literacy issues need to be pursued further in forums and discussions in future.

## **Recommendations for future directions**

The ***Bridging the Gap Project*** has successfully fulfilled its aims and objectives, but the organising team, along with the participants, have to deal with the question, "***What's next?***"

On 5th of February 2016, members of the organising team from three organisations (LWG, UEA LDG and BALID) held a meeting to review and evaluate the

project. Two immediate follow-on activities were agreed upon: 1) a policy brief based on the outcomes of the project would be produced, and 2) a seminar-workshop would be conducted to launch that paper.

Aside from these two activities, the following recommendations have been formulated in response to the issues raised

by participants and the significant lessons learned from this project:

- Create a portal where academic researchers and practitioners can share resources and, in this regard, establish stronger links with Research and Practice in Adult Literacies (RaPAL).
- Support students through partnerships with NGOs in terms of volunteering opportunities, internships and placements.
- Produce a glossary of research language to help practitioner-researchers to access academic research material.
- Further strengthen collaboration between NGOs and academic researchers through seminar/conferences both virtual (webinars) and face-to-face.
- Consider how to conceptualise and facilitate online courses focusing on topics such as capacity building strategies, ethical frameworks, ethnography, action research, gender mainstreaming, etc.

## Conclusions

This project confirms the considerable benefits that collaboration between academic researchers and practitioners brings. In unpacking the issues of adult literacy learning, these communities have to deal with factors affecting collaboration, challenges of research methodologies, power imbalance, shift in policy focus and contextualisation of adult literacy learning.

However, the biggest challenge they have to confront is how their collaboration efforts can impact policy and practice. This goes beyond building the capacity to carry out research, publish in peer-reviewed academic journals and disseminate the research through a range of mediums in different styles to suit the diverse range of audiences. What is more complex is the greater attention needed in terms of whom the research is intended for, what framework would best explore and respond to the characteristics of the groups who are the perceived beneficiaries of the research and how data would be reported and disseminated in such a way that they could influence policy and practice.

Thus, further exploration on these areas is necessary for collaboration to be innovative, dynamic, relevant, responsive and empowering.

# ANNEXES

## **Annex 1: Bridging the Gap Project reflections**

### **from Participants...**

*"I am very grateful for this online forum because of the opportunity to explore issues which are worth exploring both from the views of NGOs and academicians. It is very inspiring to read insightful comments from people who are working in both fields: development and academic research. You can articulate really well the theoretical and political-based perspectives; at the same time, you understand the challenges we, NGOs, are facing when it comes to presenting the results of our programs and justifying the grants we receive."*

*"I have really found the dialogue engaging, thought provoking and motivational."*

*"Particular thanks to the BAICE team for facilitating & offering us the platform for interaction."*

*"Starting from the first day of e-forum discussion on "bridging the gap", I have been learning a lot and I have begun adjusting my lens through which I look at literacy program. The facilitators have outstandingly managed the momentum of the discussions. I say thank you."*

*"I thank the team for providing us such an interesting e-forum discussions that have given us chances to learn a lot. I hope there will be other chances of participating in the forum. Please, I am ready to learn more from you. Thanks a lot. "*

*"Thank very much. I really appreciate this kind of sharing."*

*"I would like to thank you for giving me the chance to participate in this valuable forum. In many cases, the voices of females is not heard and I am thankful for giving me the change to contribute and to learn from senior professional. Thank you once again!"*

## from PhD and Postdoctoral Researchers...

*I was honoured and pleased to have participated in "Bridging the gap: research, policy and practice in women's literacy" in the latter half of 2015. I networked with different education researchers and practitioners. This was a process through which I deepened my understanding of my own research project while entering other new fields. The most interesting experience for me was how I prepared for the "quick fire" presentation to be given in Oxford University. This enabled me to realize the importance of giving an effective speech in a limited period of time.*

**--- Fusheng Jia**  
**PhD Student, University of East Anglia**

*My participation in the project entailed organising seminars and online forums, participating in conferences and producing project reports. In one of the activities for this project, I participated in the quick-fire session at the UKFIET International Conference in Oxford where I talked about my initial findings on gender inequalities based on my analysis of learning materials used in ALS and presented a country-specific example addressing the gap between academic-practitioner collaborations in women's literacy.*

*Another activity I was involved in was organising network meetings which gave me the opportunity to engage with academic researchers, practitioners and research students as we problematised and explored issues on literacy and development. These issues were taken into the cyberspace and I was privileged to be part of the organising team for an online forum. This offered the opportunity for colleagues from around the world to share their perspectives on adult literacy learning and development.*

*It was truly a privilege to be part of this project. This has brought me a profound perspective change. As I constantly try to see how I can contribute to current debates surrounding active citizenship and social justice, the whole process has strengthened my desire to make a difference in the field of literacy and development.*

**--- Gina Lontoc**  
**Postdoctoral Researcher, University of East Anglia**

*The programme centred on women's literacy was focused on how the gap could be bridged between academia and the NGOs. A wonderful mix of expert thinkers, experienced practitioners and novice researchers, the seminar brought some thought-provoking questions to surface such as how do we define literacy? Who gets to define it? What are ethical challenges in defining and developing literacy towards research excellence? How do we relate back academic research to NGOs and towards constructive policy advocacy? But these questions were not engaged with from a singular perspective instead, approached holistically with ideas challenged and pronounced from all concerned bodies that is, of the academics, the NGO's, the policy-makers and the practitioners.*

*The scene was thus set – first, by Anna, who provided linkages between ethnographic research and policy-making based on her research in Nepal whilst simultaneously urging considerations towards current challenges, and the role of women in developing literacy. Katy, who followed her, humbly revealed the often-unacknowledged achievements of NGOs, the challenges of accessing research and the credibility gap faced by NGOs. Carew underlined the policy perspective relating lessons learned from past experience, the internal debates about terminology and definitions and the changes in priority*

*over time. Decisively, two research studies were presented to the group, which were current, located literacy through the lens of the research participants and revealed innovative tools for generating data. The day was particularly engaging because these conversations were stimulated further by small group activities that mapped directions for the future. These ideas were reassessed in a final discussion. The day concluded with reflexive action devised in the form of an e-forum, which served as an excellent platform for all stakeholders to communicate, ideate and reflect.*

*As a novice researcher, I felt that this event was wonderfully organised, developed an inclusive understanding of literacy, and must be continued such that a cohesive platform may be maintained towards exploring literacy skills in the future.*

**--- Pallawi Sinha  
PhD student, University of Cambridge**



## **Annex 2: Biographies of presenters and session chairs**

### ***Sheila Aikman***

Sheila is senior lecturer in education and international development in the School of International Development, UEA. She has worked in the areas of gender equality, women's empowerment, indigenous rights and language policy in Sub Saharan Africa and Latin America.

### ***Ian Cheffy***

Ian Cheffy is a Senior Literacy and Education Consultant with SIL International, an NGO contributing to international development through equipping marginalised communities speaking previously unwritten languages with the means to use their languages for their own education and development. He and his wife worked in Cameroon for ten years until 1999 before they returned to the UK where Ian was responsible for training members of SIL for literacy roles; this included developing and leading an MA in Literacy Programme Development. He is currently undertaking a research project in five African countries exploring the changes which have come about in the lives of individuals and their communities as a result of literacy in local languages. His PhD (Lancaster University, 2008) explored the meanings of literacy for people in a language community in northern Cameroon.

### ***Vicky Duckworth***

Vicky is a senior lecturer and research fellow at Edge Hill University. She has worked in community and Further Education; Adult Literacy education and as a teacher trainer. Her ethnographic research has resulted in the investigation of literacy, gender, symbolic violence and learning; possibilities, resistance and transformation; community empowerment and social identities in education and educational in/equalities.

### ***Jan Eldred***

Jan is a Senior Research Fellow at the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education, NIACE, with scores of years interest in adult literacy in both the UK and in international development. She has been a literacy tutor organiser, FE officer and Head of Faculty for Community Education as well as Assistant Director of NIACE. She is currently looking at the impact of literacy and numeracy learning across the UK as part of the European Agenda for Adult Learning. Jan has chaired the UK Literacy Working Group since its inception in 2006 and worked with the group on publications, events and parliamentary representation, particularly related to women's literacy development. She volunteers as a team leader with Habitat for Humanity, around the world, being particularly interested in the role of women in legal and financial literacy, related to home ownership.

### ***Tara Furlong***

Tara has twenty years' experience in adult education and training in the private and public sectors in the UK and abroad, specialising in integrated English language, literacies and digital learning. She is involved in delivering professional development via national organisations in the UK, and publication work; and has an established history of designing and implementing systemic quality initiatives in education providers. As well as work with Designing Futures <http://www.designingfutures.uk/>, Tara does pro bono work for RaPAL <http://www.rapal.org.uk/>, BALID <http://www.balid.org.uk/>, is an active local school governor; and engaged in postgraduate studies in educational leadership with UCL, IoE.

### ***Catherine Jere***

Catherine has recently joined the University of East Anglia as Lecturer in Education and Development, moving from UNESCO where she was with the EFA Global Monitoring Report team. She has worked as a researcher and educator in Malawi for over 15 years, with a focus on gender equality in education, flexible learning and youth development.

### ***Harriet Labouchere***

Harriet has responsibility for communications, fundraising, administration and supports with monitoring and evaluation of current projects. Harriet connects with Network members to support them in concept development of their work in order to position themselves to apply for funding.

### ***Gina Lontoc***

Gina is a Visiting Fellow at the University of East Anglia and has been involved in national and regional teacher training in the Philippines. She is exploring issues of gender inequalities in education, internal displacement, and indigenous peoples' education and community participation.

### ***Juliet McCaffery***

Dr. Juliet McCaffery M.Ed, PhD, Research Associate, Sussex University. Juliet specialises in literacy, gender and equalities. She has worked in school and adult literacy in the US, Brighton and London and then as the first gender and development officer at the British Council. On leaving she started consultancy and Training Services (CTS) and has worked in Africa, the Middle East and Indian sub-continent designing and evaluating education programmes and training literacy tutors. She has a number of publications including 'Developing Adult Literacy', 2007. Her current interest is in the education of indigenous and marginalised communities.

### **Clare Meade**

Clare is a Senior Associate at NIACE (National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education) and has worked as practitioner, trainer and researcher in adult learning and family literacy/ learning for over 30 years. She has worked with NGOs in Uganda, Europe and the UK supporting the development of Family Literacy/ Learning.

### **Katy Newell-Jones**

Until earlier this year Katy was Programme Director at Feed the Minds, a UK-based NGO which incorporates literacy into all its community development projects. She has worked as a programme developer, trainer and evaluator, particularly in post-conflict countries including Sierra Leone and South Sudan.

### **Hamissou Ousseini**

Hammissou is from Niger (West Africa). He is currently enrolled at the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia, as a postgraduate research student. He graduated in 2013 from a US TESOL program and is now conducting his PhD research on EFL teacher education. Hamissou's academic interests include teacher education, world Englishes, literacy, and action research.

### **Anna Robinson-Pant**

Anna is a Professor of Education at and is shortly to be appointed UNESCO Chair in Adult Literacy and Learning for Social Transformation at the University of East Anglia. She has worked as teacher trainer, planner and ethnographic researcher in the field of literacy, gender and development for many years (particularly in Nepal). She received the UNESCO International Award for Literacy Research in 2001 for her book, *Why eat green cucumber at the time of dying? Exploring the link between women's literacy and development in Nepal*. She has conducted a range of policy-focused research studies for various development agencies, and recently worked as Global Research Coordinator for an IFAD-UNESCO project in Cambodia, Ethiopia and Egypt, 'Learning knowledge and skills for agriculture to improve rural livelihoods'.

### **Alan Rogers**

Alan is an adult educator; Visiting Professor in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at UEA and member of the Literacy Working Group, he has worked for many years in adult learning programmes (especially literacy) in developing countries. He has published widely in this field.

### ***Pallawi Sinha***

Pallawi is a final year doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. Her research interests focus on postcolonial imperatives in education and the marginalised voice (whether street-children, indigenous peoples, disadvantaged crafts communities or children and youth). She is a trained educationist and product designer with extensive experience in creating innovative tools for authentic listening, childhood geographies and place-making. Her master's research with street-children of New Delhi and doctoral investigations with the indigenous Sabar peoples of Jharkhand, India, have engaged with located knowledge, arts, culture, environment and community towards developing sustainable educational ideas and ideals. She believes in an education of difference not dominance, of localisation not globalisation.

### ***Jamie Singleton***

Jamie leads on the growth and development of network partnerships and projects. He manages relationships with Network members, supporting, empowering, and strategising through visits and conferences with network members. He supports network members to access resources (knowledge, funding, personnel) from within or from outside the Network, needed for partners to pursue their vision.

### ***Brian Street***

Brian has a commitment to linking ethnographic-style research on the cultural dimension of language and literacy with contemporary practice in education and in development. Over the past 25 years he has undertaken anthropological field research and been consultant to projects in these fields in countries of both the North and South. . Books include Literacy in Theory and Practice (C.U.P. 1984), edited Cross-Cultural Approaches to Literacy, (CUP, 1993), Social Literacies (1995), and Literacy and Development: Ethnographic Perspectives (ed. Routledge, 2000). He is also involved in research projects on academic literacies (co-ed Student Writing in the University: Benjamins 2000) and on home/ school literacy and numeracy practices

### **Annex 3: List of participants**

**Academic research: How can it help and support NGOs in the field?  
(Network Meeting 1)  
University of East Anglia, Norwich  
23 October 2015**

<b>Names</b>	<b>Organisations</b>
Sheila Aikman	University of East Anglia
Aditi Bhutoria	University of Cambridge
Alison Brown	University of East Anglia
Nur Huslinda Che Mat	University of East Anglia
Vicky Duckworth	Edge Hill University
Janine Eldred	NIACE
Burcu Evren	University of East Anglia
Sarah Freeman	Sheffield University
Tara Furlong	RaPAL
Rafif Hakiem	University of East Anglia
Kate Jere	University of East Anglia
Katy Newell-Jones	BALID
Fusheng Jia	University of East Anglia
Shuhui Liu	University of East Anglia
Gina Lontoc	University of East Anglia

Ioanna Kokkinopliti	University of East Anglia
Charlotte Martin	Civil society organisation in South Sudan / ex-VSO South Sudan
Clare Meade	NIACE
Sarah Otto	Norwich Mind
Hamissou Ouseinni	University of East Anglia
Anna Robinson-Pant	University of East Anglia
Alan Rogers	University of East Anglia
Pallawi Sinha	University of Cambridge
Brian Street	BALID
Maria Theodoraki	University of East Anglia
Carew Trefgarne	UCL Institute of Education

## Bridging the Gap e-Forum (e-Networking)

7-14 November 2015

*(Note: The list contains only those participants who indicated their institutional affiliations and/or countries where they were based.)*

Names	Organisations
Turuwark Zalalam	Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia
Mahesh Nath Parajuli	Kathmandu University, Kathmandu, Nepal
Rebat Kumar Dhakal	Rebat Kumar Dhakal   Journal of Education and Research   Kathmandu University School of Education   Hattiban, Lalitpur, Nepal
Mana Wagley	School of Education, Kathmandu University
Katy Newell-Jones	BALID
Rafif Hakiem	University of East Anglia
Santanu Swain	Dr S.K.Swain, Professor of Education, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India
Nitya Rao	University of East Anglia
Tehmina Hammad	University of Cambridge
Flora Arellano	Polytechnic University of the Philippines /TEACHERS, Inc. /E-Net Philippines
Rebecca Gaddi	University of the Philippines / E-Net Coalition Philippines
Ulrike Hanemann	UIL Hamburg, Germany
Theophilus Nkansah	University of Cape Town
Ian Cheffy	SIL International
Carolyn Johnstone	Faculty of Education and Arts, Federation University, Ballarat VIC 3353
Bani Bora	International Institute of Adult and Lifelong Education, New Delhi
Willie Jonduo	National Literacy and Awareness Secretariat, TVET, Education Department within the Ministry of Education, Papua New Guinea
Denis Katusiime	University of Kisubi, Uganda
Laquene Laisse	National Direction of Adult Literacy and Learning Education, Mozambique
Iqbal-ur-Rehman	I am interested to join this e-forum as a facilitator. I am working in the field of Literacy and Non-Formal for the last 28 years. I am working as Director Education (program head) of National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) in Pakistan. NCHD is the lead Agency in Literacy in Pakistan and imparted literacy skills among 3.8 Million illiterates. My core competencies are Policy, Planning, Implementation, Curriculum/ material development and capacity building.
Joseph Wichai	Thailand
Sunil Dabhade	Savitribai Phule Pune University Pune
Nicola McCartney	National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults, University of Waikato, Hamilton
Samantha Duncan	Department of Education, Practice and Society, UCL Institute of Education, London
Tibekile Manana	Swaziland- Africa.
Rika Yorozu	UNESCO

Sarah Kahando	USA
Hashem Kazi M A	Training & material Development Division, Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Md. Modasser Hossain - <i>Masum</i>	Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Nafiz Uddin Khan	Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Buhai Simanjuntak	National Association Recurrent Education Specialist of Timor Leste Country
Dr. M. Ehsanur Rahman	Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Bangladesh
Catherine Djayouri	Togo. Coordonnatrice, Programme National d'Appui à l'Alphabétisation Fonctionnelle des Femmes
Michelle Bellino	School of Education, University of Michigan
Yoseph Abera	Federal Ministry of Education in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Demelash Assefa	Ethiopia
Celi Amarles	Philippine Normal University, Philippines
Carlos Humberto Spezia	UNESCO, Brasil
John Alexander Restrepo Monroy	Educational Model Flexible Semillas Minuto de Dios, Colombia
Dewan Sohrab Uddin	Dhaka Ahsania Mission Bangladesh
Catherine Jere	University of East Anglia
Janella Nelson	Child Fund International
Fusheng Jia	University of East Anglia
Naoh Sichula	UNZA, School of Education, Lusaka, Zambia
Vicky Duckworth	Edge Hill University, UK
Djingarey Maiga	Mali
Cecilia Soriano	ASPBAE
K M Enamul Hoque	Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Mohammadpur   Dhaka-1207   Bangladesh
Jamie Lee	Seoul National University, Seoul, South Korea
Koumba Boly-Barry	Nottingham University
Afroza Bulbul	SPO & Central Focal Point of MIS, Dhaka Ahsania Mission
Muleta Hailu	
Pia Salz	Division of Education, Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission e.V. / German Commission for UNESCO, Colmantstrasse, Bonn
Waugh, Gill	School of Education and Psychology, The University of Bolton, Deane Road, Bolton
Vikki Carpenter	Education and Children's Services
Holmes, Keith	Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems, Section of Youth, Literacy and Skills Development, Education Sector, UNESCO, Paris
Tricia Donaghy	Adult Literacies, Adult Learning and Literacies, Inverclyde Council, 32 Nicolson Street, Greenock

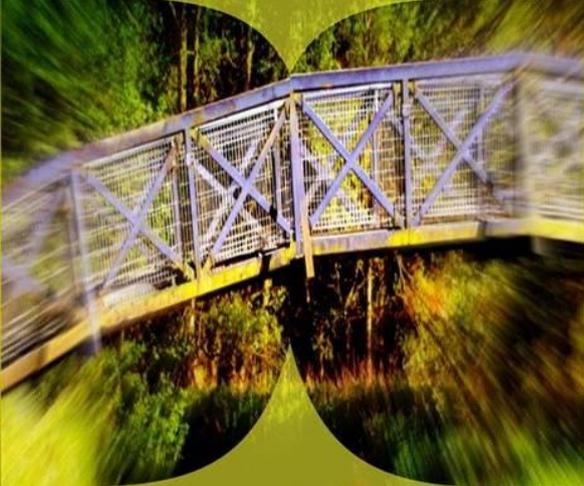
**Women's Literacy: Enhancing the dialogue between NGOs, practitioners and researchers  
(Network Meeting 2)  
Mary Sumner House, London  
26 November 2015**

<b>Names</b>	<b>Organisations</b>
<b>Mary Anderson</b>	BALID
<b>Albha Bowe</b>	Feed the Minds
<b>Ian Cheffy</b>	SIL International
<b>Burcu Evren</b>	University of East Anglia
<b>Johanna Fadipe</b>	Mothers' Union
<b>Sarah Fewkes</b>	Feed the Minds
<b>Sarah Freeman</b>	RaPAL
<b>Tara Furlong</b>	RaPAL
<b>Jane Hughes</b>	BALID
<b>Harriet Labouchere</b>	Lifeline Network International
<b>Shuhui Liu</b>	University of East Anglia
<b>Gina Lontoc</b>	University of East Anglia
<b>Juliet McCaffery</b>	BALID
<b>Katy Newell-Jones</b>	BALID
<b>Alan Rogers</b>	University of East Anglia
<b>Jamie Singleton</b>	Lifeline Network International
<b>Anne Smith</b>	FaithAction/ Creative English Alliance
<b>Brian Street</b>	BALID
<b>Lesley Waller</b>	Africa Educational Trust

## Annex 4: Publicity materials

### QUICK-Fire Session

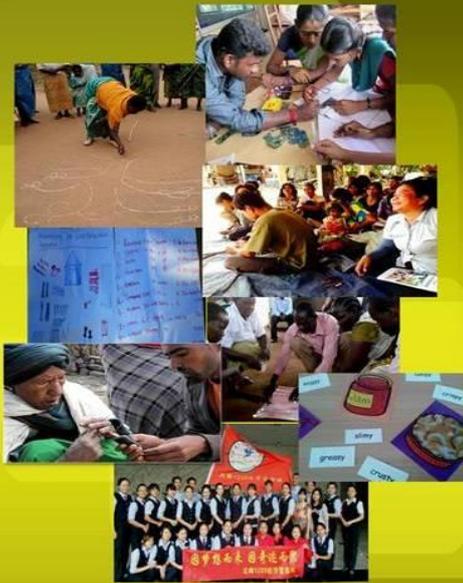
### Bridging the Gap:



The UEA Literacy and Development Group was set up in 2003 to bring together researchers working across the University of East Anglia and wider afield who share a 'social practice' approach to literacy. The group now has a national and international profile, established through commissioned research for international agencies (particularly UNESCO), convening International conferences and publications on adult learning, literacy and development.

Bringing together NGO/INGO stakeholders with academic researchers to explore how greater collaboration can inform the development of women's literacy learning

A BAICE-Funded Building Capacity and Networks Project organised by the UK Literacy Working Group and the Literacy and Development Group, University of East Anglia



For further information and to register for a place, please contact:  
BAICE Support Officer: [supportofficer@baice.ac.uk](mailto:supportofficer@baice.ac.uk)






Despite the recognition given to adult literacy by UNESCO and other bodies, this sector continues to be under-developed and under-supported. Many NGOs and INGOs are involved in initiatives, programmes and projects, which embrace or include women and men's literacy learning in diverse ways. They work in the field for sustained periods of time close to communities and as trusted intermediaries and are thus well placed to both use and inform research around literacy development. However, their experiences, insights and understandings are usually captured in reports and feedback, the 'grey literature', of a kind not always accessed by academic researchers or applied in practical programmes. The impact of many literacy programmes tends to be evidenced by practitioners through observation and local reporting, rather than being formally recorded in published reports accessible to the academic community.



And similarly, from the academic perspective, research, whilst usually rigorous, peer-reviewed and often used to inform policy, does not always take account of the perspectives offered by those working in NGOs and INGOs. Academic research, then, can remain unnoticed and under-used through researchers' lack of communication with those who might use it in the field in government or NGO programmes.



This BAICE-funded initiative of the UK Literacy Working Group aims to bring together literacy policy makers, researchers and practitioners to consider issues around developing adults' literacy learning, and women's literacy learning in particular. We aim to provide an opportunity to explore the gaps in communicating and constructing knowledge between these different communities, in order to inform future sustainable development of practice in adult literacy.



**You are invited to participate in our forthcoming events:**

- Tuesday September 15<sup>th</sup>:**  
Quick-fire session at the UKFIET Conference on International Education and Development (Oxford) on Bridging the Gaps: research, policy and practice in women's literacy Chaired by Brian Street, Kings' College London; Speakers include Katy Newell-Jones and Juliet McCaffery, British Association for Literacy in Development; Clare Meade, NIACE; Fusheng Jia, Gina Lontoc and Anna Robinson-Pant from University of East Anglia
- Friday October 23<sup>rd</sup>:**  
**Network Meeting 1.** Academic research: How can it help and support NGOs in the field?
- November 2nd – 14<sup>th</sup>:**  
**E-networking seminar** based on a stimulus paper
- Thursday November 26<sup>th</sup>:**  
**Network Meeting 2.** NGO/INGO practical activities, developments and grey literature: how can they inform the academic research community?

These network meetings will include presentations, reports and sharing of materials in relation to the development of adult literacy learning, and women's literacy learning in particular. The process will include small group discussion, question-raising and identification of issues and gaps between the academic research community and practice in the field. We will also consider mechanisms for continuing the dialogue between different communities of research and practice in women's literacy.

Some BAICE-funded bursaries are available to contribute to UK travel expenses. We welcome research students and post-doctoral researchers in this field.

The Literacy Working Group has collectively completed research and published findings for DFID and UNESCO. Individual members are experienced researchers from a wide range of UK HE Institutions (including the universities of East Anglia, King's College London, Leeds) and NGOs including Feed The Minds, Africa Educational Trust, ActionAid and NIACE.



## Academic research: How can it help and support NGOs in the field? (Network Meeting 1)

### Registration

Please return by email to:

Miriam McGregor  
BAICE Support Officer  
(supportofficer@baice.ac.uk)

by 14<sup>th</sup> October

**Please note:** owing to the size of the venue, places are limited so please respond as quickly as possible.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Numbers: \_\_\_\_\_

Area of interest/expertise  
(e.g. adult literacy, health etc): \_\_\_\_\_

If you are a student and would like to apply for a travel bursary, please indicate here and give your course/place of study:

If you book a place at the event and are then unable to attend, please let us know immediately so that we can offer it to another participant



#### Who:

• Staff and research students from academic institutions who are involved in research around the broad theme of the education of adults in developing countries. Areas of research can include work related to health, skills, empowerment, gender, early years, governance etc.

• Representatives of NGOs and International NGOs and other agencies who are involved in development activities including women's literacy learning. This development work can include activities related to health, skills, empowerment, gender, early years, governance etc.

#### When:

Friday, 23 October 2015  
10:30am to 4:00pm

#### Where:

University of East Anglia  
Norwich Research Park, Norwich,  
Norfolk NR4 7TJ

**"How can academic research into adult learning inform and learn from international development agencies working in this field?"**

**Bridging the gap:**  
research, policy and practice  
in women's literacy

(Second event)

This event is supported by the British Association for International and Comparative Education (BAICE) and is organised by the Literacy Working Group and the Literacy and Development Group of the University of East Anglia.

### PROGRAMME

10:30 - 11:00	Registration and coffee	
11:00 - 11:10	Welcome and introduction	<b>Professor Alan Rogers</b> <i>University of East Anglia</i>
11:10 - 12:00	Setting the scene of the project rationale: from an academic perspective  from an NGO perspective  from a donor perspective	<b>Professor Anna Robinson-Pant</b> <i>University of East Anglia</i> <b>Dr. Katy Newell-Jones</b> <i>British Association for Literacy in Development (BALID)</i>  Speaker TBA
12:00 - 12:30	Plenary discussion	
12:30 - 13:15	LUNCH	
13:15 - 14:00	<b>Presentation 1:</b> <i>"Stories of literacy, inequality and domination shared between and across landscapes reproduction and rupture"</i>  <b>Presentation 2:</b> <i>"Researching ethically with marginalised communities - A Sabar story"</i>	<b>Dr. Vicky Duckworth</b> <i>Edge Hill University</i>  <b>Ms. Pallawi Sinha</b> <i>University of Cambridge</i>
14:00 - 14:45	Small group session	<b>Facilitators:</b> <b>Dr. Clare Meade</b> <i>NIACE</i> <b>Dr. Gina Lontoc and</b> <b>Mr. Hamissou Ousseini</b> <i>University of East Anglia</i>
14:45 - 15:00	TEA	
15:00 - 15:30	Feedback from discussion	
15:30 - 16:00	Concluding reflections	<b>Dr. Jan Eldred</b> <i>The UK Literacy Working Group</i> <b>Professor Brian Street</b> <i>King's College London</i>

This event builds on first Bridging the Gap event, a Quick-Fire Session at the UKFIET Oxford Conference on 15 September 2015; it will form the second of four linked events.

The purpose of the Bridging the Gap events is to focus on how researchers and practitioners in adult learning, particularly with women, in international development can learn collaboratively from each other to support more effective adult literacy learning in the global south/developing countries.

Much of the interesting and valuable work which many development organisations do is not always recognised and evidenced and thus does not inform further practice and policy.

We want to bridge this gap by bringing together those working in academic research and those working in NGO/INGOs and other agencies.

This event at UEA will focus on the question: **How can academic research help and support agencies (NGO/INGO and government) in the field of adult learning/women's literacy in international development?**

In addition to this event, an e-networking activity will be set up during the autumn to invite the perspectives of colleagues in other countries, as well as the UK. A follow-up event, organised by the Literacy Working Group and the British Association for Literacy in Development (BALID), will take place on 26 November 2015 to look at the question: **How can the practical activities of NGOs/INGOs and other agencies in adult learning/women's literacy, along with their 'grey literature', inform the academic research community?**

The report arising from these events will inform future collaboration between NGOs and other agencies and academic institutions and also debate and dialogue in other networking and conference events.

# Bridging the Gap:

## Research, policy and practice in women's literacy

7th – 14th November 2015

The purpose of the *Bridging the Gap* events is to focus on how researchers and practitioners in adult learning, particularly with women, in international development can learn collaboratively from each other to support more effective adult literacy learning in the global south/developing countries.

Much of the interesting and valuable work which many development organisations do is not always recognised and evidenced and thus does not inform further practice and policy.

We want to bridge this gap by bringing together those working in academic research and those working in NGO/INGOs and other agencies.

This e-Forum offers the opportunity for colleagues from around the world to share their perspectives on adult literacy learning and women's literacy learning in particular. Starting with a stimulus paper based on our recent UK-based events, the e-Forum will be facilitated by a different moderator each day from the 7<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> November. These invited moderators are academics and practitioners who have done extensive work in adult education and literacy and international development projects.

*If you share an interest in adult learning, gender, literacy and development, we hope that you will join in the discussion – wherever you maybe!*

If you wish to participate, please contact:  
BAICE Support Officer: [supportofficer@baice.ac.uk](mailto:supportofficer@baice.ac.uk)

# e-Forum



Dr. Rafat Nabi  
Aga Khan Foundation,  
Afghanistan



Ms. Cecilia (Thea) V. Soriano  
Asia South Pacific Association  
for Basic and Adult Education,  
Philippines



Dr. Sushan Acharya  
Tribhuvan University, Nepal



Ms. Mari Yasunaga  
UNESCO, Paris, France



Dr. Jan Eldred  
The National Institute for  
Adult and Continuing  
Education, UK



Prof. Anna Robinson-Pant  
University of East Anglia, UK



Dr. M. Ehsanur Rahman  
Dhaka Ahcama Mission  
Bangladesh



Ms. Malini Ghose  
Nirantar, India



Women's Literacy: Enhancing the dialogue between NGOs, practitioners and researchers  
(Network Meeting 2)

# Bridging the Gap

## Women's Literacy: Enhancing the dialogue between NGOs, Practitioners and Researchers

Mary Sumner House, London SW1P 3RB  
26<sup>th</sup> November 2015  
10:30 – 16:00

### PROGRAMME

10:30 -10.45	Registration, coffee and networking	
10:45 -11:00	Opening Remarks	<b>Dr. Ian Cheffy</b> <i>SIL International &amp; British Association for Literacy in Development (BALID)</i>
11.00 – 11.30	Is there a continuum of researcher.....practitioner ?	<b>Dr. Katy Newell-Jones</b> <i>BALID</i>
11:30 -12.45	Presentations by <b>Tara Furlong, RaPAL</b> <b>What is the role of research in community literacy?</b>  <i>Johanna Fadipe, Mothers' Union</i> <i>Moving from literacy programming to mainstreaming literacy</i>  Plenary discussion	Chaired by <b>Dr. Mary Anderson</b> <i>BALID</i>
13.00 -13:45	LUNCH	
13:45 -14:30	Presentation by <b>Jamie Singleton and Harriet Labouchere, Lifeline Network International (LNI)</b> <i>The challenges of embedding literacy into a vocational training project</i>  Plenary discussion	Chaired by <b>Dr. Juliet McCaffery</b> <i>BALID</i>
14.30 -15:30	<b>NGO and practitioner documentation</b> What kinds of literature do we produce? What are the barriers to dissemination?	Group activity led by <b>Dr. Katy Newell-Jones</b> <i>BALID</i>
15.30 -15.45	<b>Plenary discussion (with tea available)</b> Potential ways forward to bridge the gaps between NGOs, practitioners and researchers: action points and requests for collaboration	<b>Dr. Ian Cheffy</b> <i>SIL International &amp; BALID</i>
15:45 -16:00	<b>Concluding reflections, evaluation and depart</b>	<b>Professor Brian Street</b> <i>King's College London &amp; BALID President</i>

*This event is supported by the British Association for International and Comparative Education (BAICE) and is organised by the Literacy and Development Group of the University of East Anglia, the Literacy Working Group and the British Association for Literacy in Development (BALID).*

**Annex 5: Quick-fire Posters**

**Bridging the Gap: research, policy and practice in women's literacy**

**Women's literacy and development: an academic research perspective**

How can we shift the focus from women's literacy to gender and literacy?

Figure 2  
Female literacy and fertility in India

How can ethnographic data be read and used in a policy and programme context?

How can academic researchers engage with adult literacy policy, other than as critique or supplying statistical evidence?

Prof. Anna Robinson-Pant, University of East Anglia

**Bridging the Gap: research, policy and practice in women's literacy**

**Women's literacy and development: an NGO perspective**

How is researching into women's literacy being used by NGOs?

What DONOR factors are at play?

How is NGO work informing academic research into women's literacy?

Dr. Katy Newell-Jones, British Association for Literacy in Development

**Bridging the Gap: research, policy and practice in women's literacy**

**An ethnographic study of China's rural women and their learning**

To what degree were rural women in China excluded from adult learning in the process of urbanization?

How far did learning and literacy enable rural women in China to cope with urbanization?

How far did adult learning contribute to rural women's aspirations?

Fusheng Jia, University of East Anglia

**Bridging the Gap: research, policy and practice in women's literacy**

**Practitioner-academic collaborations: translating research into policy and practice**

What types of research data do NGOs integrate into their work on women's literacy?

To what extent are research findings accessible to NGOs?

How do academic researchers translate their findings into policy and practice?

Dr. Gina Lontoc, University of East Anglia

**Bridging the Gap: research, policy and practice in women's literacy**

**Family literacy and learning: Learning from practice**

How can family literacy and learning be evidenced effectively to inform research?

Valuing the literacy and learning of women and families- are their voices heard?

How can family learning practitioners contribute most effectively to the academic debate and inform policy?

Dr. Clare Meade, NIACE

## **Annex 6: Stimulus Paper for e-Forum**

### **Bridging the Gap: research, policy and practice in women's literacy University of East Anglia 23rd October 2015**

#### **(Stimulus Paper for E-Forum)**

How can academic research help and support agencies (NGO/INGO and government) in the field of adult learning/women's literacy in international development? This paper draws on presentations and group discussions which explored this question during the *Bridging the Gap* event at the University of East Anglia last 23rd October 2015. The aim of this paper is to provide some initial ideas and questions about the relationship between research, policy and practice in women's literacy, as the starting point for the E-Forum which will run from 7th- 14th November 2015.

#### ***Academic, practitioner and donor perspectives on women's literacy in international development***

Bridging the gap between academic researchers and practitioners working in women's literacy and development is a great challenge. Those implementing programmes on the ground set out to respond to the needs of local communities with regard to literacy – and in the case of national Governments, such initiatives may be informed by economic or political goals too. By contrast, critical analysis of policy, theory building and interrogating political objectives have often been the remit of those working in the academic world. The relationships between research and practice are often mediated by donor agencies, who provide the funding support for these activities.

The kind of policy that has dominated women's literacy learning has been largely informed by quantitative research evidence, often focused on statistical relationships between women's literacy rates and development indicators to justify investment in girls' schooling. Such research may reveal little about the educational processes involved in literacy programmes that can influence and facilitate social change (including transforming gender roles and relations). Research questions guiding academic studies have tended to respond to donor agendas around providing more quantifiable evidence of impact. Academic researchers are urged to show the impact of their work on policy and practice while navigating around the issue of the strong emphasis placed on an instrumental approach by funding agencies and governments. An even greater concern is how to shift the policy and programme focus on women's literacy to a consideration of gender and literacy.

Practitioners, though aware of the existence of academic research, may be sceptical about using it. There is an issue of credibility where some NGOs tend to see and prefer research in a 'technical' form which will help them to provide solutions to constraints and issues

encountered in adult literacy programmes. However, other organisations are more open to ethnographic and other qualitative approaches to research which end up raising questions rather than providing answers. Another challenge that practitioners have to deal with is access to research findings. There are gaps in terms of perceptions about the usefulness of research, time devoted to research and more practical issues such as funding, research skills and language (specialised research terminology).

Donor requirements have a major impact on the nature of collaborations in the academic and practitioner spheres. The interplay of factors such as power differentials, conflicting aims, priorities and expectations can trigger tensions between them. Adult literacy has been a low priority among donors and within the Education For All agenda. From the perspective of donors, academic researchers and practitioners have to identify their entry points and rather than directly addressing women's literacy, this goal may need to be reached through other priorities such as Early Childhood Education, and functional literacy skills for out-of-school youth. Also, it is hugely important to take into consideration understandings of literacy in specific institutions and cultural contexts in the field. Lastly, academics and practitioners have to be clear about donor funding modalities they require such as funding for research and country programmes.

### ***Challenges and future directions for academic and practitioner collaborations***

Challenges emerging from academic-practitioner collaborations can be grouped according to themes including: access to academic research, purpose and use of the research, institutional restrictions, and roles of funding agencies.

The issue of access to academic research goes beyond the cost of journal subscriptions; there are more compelling concerns such as the lack of an intellectual and publication space where academics and practitioners can share their work. Aside from this, the nature of language used in academic articles can set up barriers for practitioners wanting to access their contents making them appear abstract and irrelevant to work in local contexts. This leads to other issues such as the purpose of the research, which raises questions about for whom the research is intended and written.

With the changing higher educational landscape, institutional restrictions can pose threats to collaboration. Academics and practitioners work in different time frames where the former takes a longer time in producing a piece of research, which usually does not work well with the latter whose initiatives are pressured by donors to generate positive results in a short span of time. They also function within different ethical frameworks which can put into question the validity and credibility of the research. Another institutional restriction is the greater emphasis placed on quantitative over qualitative methods leading to the observation that participatory and action research can be less valued within research assessment procedures in Higher Education.

It is widely accepted that funding can be considered as one of the key factors that steers academic-practitioner collaboration. It hugely influences not only new directions to collaboration and research questions explored in academic studies, but particularly shapes the

purpose of the initiative as, in certain cases, donors have the power to set the agenda. The various perceptions of stakeholders have revealed their often differing concepts of literacy, ideas of research and notions of collaboration.

With donor factors constantly at play, the playing field for academics and practitioners is becoming increasingly more complex. However, this does not necessarily mean that donor factors need always be seen as sources of tensions. Recognising and responding constructively to the challenges identified by academics and practitioners, donor agencies can help to encourage innovative, relevant and sustainable academic-practitioner collaboration.

To address these challenges and bridge the gaps that exist between these collaborations, we need to explore possible solutions around training, dissemination of research, finding ways to mobilise resources and new forms of collaboration.

## **Annex 7: e-Forum facilitators' discussion issues**

### ***Dr. Raft Nabi***

What is our understanding regarding the term "Literacy"? Literacy means what?

Why do men and women want to be literate?

Accreditation of Literacy program by the Ministry. Is it necessary?

Is center based literacy course, only mean to learn literacy skills?

Whose agenda of literacy is important? (Donor, NGO, Ministry or people who wants to learn?)

What should be included in the literacy curriculum?

What are the real challenges of sustaining literacy skills?

### ***Ms. Cecilia (Thea) Soriano***

For adults, literacy should go beyond numeracy and literacy. From the rich experiences of NGOs working with marginalized communities, relevant adult literacy programs are those that facilitate acquisition of literacies that are integrally linked to access to livelihoods, decent work, leadership and participation in community affairs.

In India, the Azad Foundation is helping women develop their literacies such as driving skills to enable them to do non-traditional work and importantly provide taxi service for women in India.

- How can such programs inform policy and program development of government so that more illiterate women can benefit from such programs?
- What kind of research can capture the complex aspects of such literacy programs where, beyond the curriculum, social mobilization and support systems as drivers of effective programs for women will be scrutinized?
- What are the requirements of such research that hopes to inform education reforms through the rich and intense experiences of NGOs that exist outside of the public education system?

### ***Dr. Sushan Acharya***

Women learners come with different levels of literacy skills to literacy centres. Due to absence of non-formal continuing education opportunities non-literates have no choice than to come to the beginners' class. Education donors and INGOs do not recognize the importance of adult literacy and non-formal education (NFE) for lifelong learning opportunities for all. Women's literacy and NFE are obviously not the priority of most NGOs that are primarily operated through donor support. Bureaucrats don't recognize the potentiality of NFE beyond basic literacy. In this situation research can hardly influence policy and thereby the system. Where and how this situation can be effectively intervened?

**Prof. Anna Robinson-Pant**

After starting in literacy work 'on the ground' (mostly in Nepal), I have been based at a UK university and have engaged in research at a distance for many years now. As my role is often synthesising or analysing research studies for policy documents, I have been struck by how much powerful research evidence we now have on what literacy and literacy learning mean in people's lives. However, as the comments and postings so far show, it is very difficult to see what impact such research is having on the direction of Government and INGO policy and programmes. I have also worked in a training capacity with NGOs and other institutions to introduce and support action-oriented research approaches. Usually this has been part of a short term project – a 'one-off' activity – and afterwards these organisations have found it difficult to find time, space and resources to integrate such research into their programme planning and evaluation.

From my perspective as an academic researcher, I would be interested in others' experiences of these issues around dissemination of research findings and building research capacity:

- Is it realistic or appropriate to expect that NGOs and other literacy agencies conduct their own participatory and action research when they are busy implementing programmes? Or should that be only the role of academic researchers?
- How can we make sure that research findings (particularly of qualitative and participatory studies) are shared more widely with those who are implementing programmes or designing policy?
- How can we use existing research on adult literacy to advocate for more resources to be allocated to adult literacy and lifelong learning? What role can social media play?

**Dr. Jan Eldred**

As a practitioner, researcher and developer of adult literacy/literacies, throughout my professional life I have spent many hours reflecting on why others don't 'get' what all our Bridging the Gap discussions indicate. This is, that literacy makes a difference to people's lives in so many diverse ways but quintessentially, by empowering them to be fulfilled human beings, whether in relation to personal development, family, work, community or politics. There is no doubt that literacy development is complex and challenging but so are many other areas of learning.

I agree with some contributors who decry the lack of institutions and infrastructures, which support continuing education. I recognise the dominance of schooling and formal education and equating them with the only form of valuable education as well as the lack of vision of learning as a lifelong, life-wide activity for everyone. I agree with those who believe that this reflects power and hegemony. I also agree with those who say that adult literacy learning is often a campaign or an initiative; both of these suggest that adult literacy is a 'problem' which can be addressed by throwing money at it for a limited period of time. An acceptance of the concept of and commitment to lifelong learning would support and sustain adult literacy as part of that life – long continuum. Literacy learning would then be seen as important as any other area of learning and development.

It seems to me that it is up to us, who firmly believe in the value of learning throughout life, for all adults, to pick up the cause and be judged by our actions.

As Anna indicates, there is a lot of research out there, so it's not necessarily a lack of research, which stops adult literacy development. Participants in this forum agree that the gap is between research and practice. Much research stays within the research community. Yes, it is disseminated, but often, not applied and used. Practitioners are busy doing and don't have time – or often access – to the documents, which might inform their development. This gap would be unthinkable in medicine, where huge amounts of investment in research lead to changes in practice. (Again, this reflects power; the rich get sick, so influential people find funds; few of them need to develop their literacies.) I suggest we should have research AND development much more closely linked.

Practitioner research, where academics work alongside and in partnership with practitioners, has been demonstrated to be effective. Changes happen in practice as well as in academic thinking, as a result of such partnerships.

- What if research proposals had to involve development partners?
- What if research proposals included post-research development phases with practitioners, as medicine includes clinical trials?
- What if such development phases had to produce materials, tools, guides and development for practitioners?
- What if evaluation studies encouraged and supported reflective practice in the field, in an on-going way, not just evaluation of an initiative or project?
- Would such approaches help researchers and practitioners to work more closely together, to bridge the gap and improve what we are all trying to do? Would such practices help us to demonstrate to those who don't 'get it' the impact of lifelong learning and literacy learning in particular?

**Ms. Mari Yasunaga**

*Women's literacy and sustainable development: bridging the gap for more integrated and coordinated efforts within the education sector and beyond*

Today's e-Forum discussion is framed by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which was adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit (New York, 25-27 September 2015) to stimulate and step up the efforts of the international community over the next 15 years. Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set, education is addressed as Goal 4 "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" with youth and adult literacy being focused as a specific target and featured by other targets. [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/L.85&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/L.85&Lang=E)

This means the beginning of a 15 years process that is intended to connect, meaningfully, the global agenda with policies and practice on the ground. Although adults from across the world who need to benefit most may not feel the changes overnight, this global agenda offers an opportunity to revisit the interrelations between literacy and sustainable development in

order to accelerate the pace of positive transformation for them, including women with limited literacy skills.

Indeed, “Literacy and sustainable societies” was the theme of International Literacy Day 2015 and the focus of a Global Meeting that was held on 8-9 September 2015 in Paris, during which a renewed focus was given to the notion of literacy as a continuum of skills that are acquired through different learning pathways. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002344/234483e.pdf>

As previously discussed in this e-Forum and elsewhere, literacy is a driver for sustainable development (e.g. poverty eradication, agriculture, health, inclusive economic growth and decent work). At the same time, progress in different areas of development does contribute to promoting literacy, generating a demand, opportunities and enabling environments for people to acquire, use and advance their literacy skills.

In enhancing this interrelation between literacy and sustainable development, generation, dissemination and use of relevant knowledge is a key. As the previous discussions highlighted, a body of knowledge is gradually expanding, including that related to the benefits of *literacy* for sustainable development, which however may be weaker than what we know about the benefit of *education* for sustainable development. The impacts of research on policies and practice, and ultimately on people’s lives, need to be greater.

In this context, I would like to invite you to reflect on how to boost more integrated and coordinated efforts of researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and other actors for adult literacy, connecting literacy and sustainable development, especially on the following:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the existing evidence base regarding the benefits of literacy for sustainable development? Do we know sufficiently about the impacts of women’s literacy on health, economic growth, environment and other areas of sustainable development?
- How could the evidence base be enhanced regarding how progress in different areas of sustainable development influence people’s motivation and readiness for literacy skills acquisition, as well as their learning and its outcomes?
- What are the kinds of partnership required to strengthen the evidence base on the interrelation between literacy and sustainable development and also to ensure that such evidence base is effectively used by policy-makers, practitioners and other actors?

**Dr. M. Ehsanur Rahman**

*Issue # 1: Roles of higher education institutions in professional development of literacy/adult learning educators and widening the vision of adult literacy/learning.*

The scope of adult literacy and learning are often kept limited and programmes are designed with narrow vision. Women literacy/learning courses are, for example, confined to certain stereotype fields, having no scope for future journey or career ladder. There is absence of diverse and context specific literacy/adult learning programmes supported by wider goal of education suitable for the next decades.

Professional development of adult literacy/learning educators is a key to widen the vision of adult learning/ literacy education, as it can bring longer term insights in course planning. At present in most cases the scope for professional/career development of adult literacy/learning practitioners is either very limited or not available.

In many higher education institutions there are departments/programmes on adult literacy/learning offering academic courses and undertaking researches. On the contrast, we see very few of those courses are linked with practical adult literacy/learning programmes; the adult educators are seldom engaged in the studies.

The point of discussion is thus, how we can enhance the roles of higher education institutions for professional development of literacy/adult learning educators and widen the vision of adult literacy/learning.

*Issue # 2: Providing convincing evidence to the financiers on effectiveness of adult literacy and learning for increased investment*

We often advocate for increased roles of donors and investors in promoting adult literacy/learning. Simultaneously we observe low key on the part of the adult educators to provide the investors convincing evidence on effectiveness of adult literacy.

There is difference in perceptions of the academics/researchers and the adult learning practitioners about effectiveness of literacy/adult learning. The objectives of research/study in adult learning/literacy education by these two groups often vary. Eventually the findings vary.

Over last few days in the e-Forum the issue of limited scope for dissemination of research findings/usage of literacy programme documents in the academic courses and vice versa came repeatedly.

I propose to bring the discussion again in the forefront to bring these two groups closer to bring synergy in this field to develop convincing evidences targeting the donors/financers for increased investment in adult learning/Literacy education.

**Ms. Malini Ghose**

Recently there has been a growing interest in the use of ICTs in literacy programmes, in policy and practitioner circles.

ICTs are offered as the solution to several challenges facing adult literacy programmes – low quality, poor results, lack of learner motivation, and paucity of resources. ICT-based literacy packages claim to make people literate within very short timeframes and with minimal investments in teacher/facilitator training.

Then there are the sceptics who argue that a simple “technological fix” cannot address the complexities confronting adult literacy programmes or larger issues: of the digital divide, for instance.

What does the field reality look like? I would like to initiate the discussion by briefly sharing some observations from a meeting I attended with women learners in rural North India, organised by an NGO exploring the possibility of introducing a mobile based literacy programme (a donor had expressed interest).

As the facilitator waved and circulated her mobile phone the excitement in the group was palpable as few in the group had regular access to phones. Many were not ‘allowed’ to use phones of male family members or felt scared to (in case something went wrong). When I asked one of the women how she managed to navigate her way, as she couldn’t read, she said giggling, “I put a picture along with the names. My husband is a sheep.” “It’s a phone, I use it to speak. Why do I need to read?” complained another woman. Another countered her and said she had learnt the English numbers after getting her phone. (Excerpted from field report)

1. Is the optimism around ICTs overstated? Can ICTs offer a transformative learning experience or will they only serve to reinforce existing iniquitous social and economic relations?
2. The above field situation points to several complexities, including the exercise of power relations, as well as the possibilities. Do any of these observations resonate with your experiences or do you have different ones that you would like to share?
3. Being a relatively new area of enquiry, not much research is available. What kind of a research agenda do you think would be useful to strengthen literacy programmes or unravel some of the complexities being discussed?
4. The use of ICTs have changed people’s literacy, numeracy and communication practices yet these have not found their way into literacy classes, training or curricula. What kinds of collaborative research or other projects could support such efforts?
5. The focus of ICT interventions seems to be limited to improving teaching and learning or improving learners’ access to information. Shouldn’t greater efforts be made to ensure that the voices of adult learners are heard on social media or digital platforms?

## Annex 8: Photo collages for each event

### QUICK-Fire Session



# Academic research: How can it help and support NGOs in the field? (Network Meeting 1)



# e-Forum

## 7th – 14th November 2015

# e-Forum

**Dr. Rafat Nabl**  
Aga Khan Foundation,  
Afghanistan

**Ms. Cecilia (Thea) V. Soriano**  
Asia South Pacific Association  
for Basic and Adult Education,  
Philippines

**Dr. Sushan Acharya**  
Tribhuvan University, Nepal

**Ms. Mari Yasunaga**  
UNESCO, Paris, France

**Dr. Jan Eldred**  
The National Institute for  
Adult and Continuing  
Education, UK

**Prof. Anna Robinson-Pant**  
University of East Anglia, UK

**Dr. M. Ehsanur Rahman**  
Dhaka Azadiya Mission  
Bangladesh

**Ms. Malini Ghose**  
Nirantar, India

**Bridging the Gap: Dr. Rafat Nabl**

BAICE e-Forum

**Bridging the Gap: Ms. Cecilia (Thea) V. Soriano**

BAICE e-Forum

**Bridging the Gap: Dr. Sushan Acharya**

BAICE e-Forum

**Bridging the Gap: Ms. Mari Yasunaga**

BAICE e-Forum

**Bridging the Gap: Dr. Jan Eldred**

BAICE e-Forum

**Bridging the Gap: Dr. M. Ehsanur Rahman**

BAICE e-Forum

**Bridging the Gap: Ms. Malini Ghose**

BAICE e-Forum

**Like**  
2015/11/07 - 08:02

Thank you for starting very interesting and relevant questions. Dr. Nabl: Defining literacy means you don't even really have to consider different perspectives. For what part of user? This links to another story I've read before which goes "I think one problem has the literacy effort focus on formal literacy, and you need both formal and non-formal literacy."

**Anna Robinson-Pant**  
2015/11/07 - 12:08

Not aware that many donor agencies and government policies followed this view say rather than regarding literacy as being a product and a strategy. I support this strongly especially in the case of literacy programmes that build the bridge from non-formal and non-formal literacy. One example is the 'Bridging the Gap' e-Forum which has been a very successful platform for sharing ideas and experiences.

**Sushan Acharya**  
2015/11/07 - 14:26

As an practitioner of literacy, I think it is important to have a clear understanding of the literacy programme that is being implemented. It is important to have a clear understanding of the literacy programme that is being implemented. It is important to have a clear understanding of the literacy programme that is being implemented.

**Lisa Fernandez**  
2015/11/07 - 16:28

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**Malini Ghose**  
2015/11/07 - 16:30

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**Dr. Sushan Acharya**  
2015/11/07 - 16:30

Thank you for starting very interesting and relevant questions. Dr. Nabl: Defining literacy means you don't even really have to consider different perspectives. For what part of user? This links to another story I've read before which goes "I think one problem has the literacy effort focus on formal literacy, and you need both formal and non-formal literacy."

**Ms. Mari Yasunaga**  
2015/11/07 - 16:30

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**Dr. Jan Eldred**  
2015/11/07 - 16:30

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**Prof. Anna Robinson-Pant**  
2015/11/07 - 16:30

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**Dr. M. Ehsanur Rahman**  
2015/11/07 - 16:30

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**Ms. Malini Ghose**  
2015/11/07 - 16:30

Thank you for starting very interesting and relevant questions. Dr. Nabl: Defining literacy means you don't even really have to consider different perspectives. For what part of user? This links to another story I've read before which goes "I think one problem has the literacy effort focus on formal literacy, and you need both formal and non-formal literacy."

Women's Literacy: Enhancing the dialogue between NGOs, practitioners and researchers (Network Meeting 2)



## Annex 9: Useful links

Quick-fire Session full report:

[http://baice.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Bridging-the-Gap\\_Quickfire-Session\\_Full-report\\_September-2015-1.pdf](http://baice.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Bridging-the-Gap_Quickfire-Session_Full-report_September-2015-1.pdf)

Network Meeting 1 full report:

[https://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/595200/10397292/Bridging+the+Gap\\_UEA+Event\\_23+October+2015\\_Full+Report.pdf/d88b4ac0-a09b-444a-9431-d9db0011e85d](https://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/595200/10397292/Bridging+the+Gap_UEA+Event_23+October+2015_Full+Report.pdf/d88b4ac0-a09b-444a-9431-d9db0011e85d)

e-Forum:

<http://baice.ac.uk/2015/bridging-the-gap-research-policy-and-practice-in-womens-literacy/>

Network Meeting 2 full report:

[https://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/595200/10397292/Bridging+the+Gap\\_London+Event\\_Revised+Report\\_Final.pdf/538e55c5-3157-4ca7-bf51-b6811d008590](https://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/595200/10397292/Bridging+the+Gap_London+Event_Revised+Report_Final.pdf/538e55c5-3157-4ca7-bf51-b6811d008590)

<http://baice.ac.uk/>

<https://www.uea.ac.uk/education/research/areas/literacy-and-development>

<https://www.uea.ac.uk/education/research/areas/literacy-and-development/conferences-and-seminars>

<https://www.uea.ac.uk/education/research/areas/literacy-and-development/bridging-the-gap>

<http://balid.org.uk/>

<http://africaeducationaltrust.org/>

<http://www.faithaction.net/>

<http://www.feedtheminds.org/>

<http://www.lifelinenetwork.org/>

<http://www.mothersunion.org/>

<https://rapal.org.uk/>

<https://rapal.org.uk/events/bridging-the-gap/>

<http://www.sil.org/>

**Bringing together NGO/INGO stakeholders with academic researchers to explore how greater collaboration can inform the development of women's literacy learning**



***A BAICE-Funded Building Capacity and Networks Project organised by the UK Literacy Working Group and the Literacy and Development Group, University of East Anglia***