



# 2021

## Annual Report



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**PAL NETWORK**  
People's Action for Learning



## Abbreviations and acronyms

ALP – Accelerated Learning Program

ASER – Annual Status of Education Report

CBC – Competency Based Curriculum

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

CIESAS – Centre for Research and Higher Studies and Social Anthropology

CLA – Citizen-led Assessments

COVID-19 – Corona Virus Disease of 2019

CSO – Civil Society Organization

EAC – East African Community

ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States

EE4A – Education Evidence 4 Action

EFA – Education for All

ELANA – Early Language & Literacy and Numeracy Assessment

FLN – Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

FT1 – First Field Trial

GAML – Global Alliance to Monitoring Learning

ICAN – International Common Assessment of Numeracy

IID - Institute of Informatics and Development

PAL Network - People's Action for Learning Network

SADC – Southern Africa Development Community

SDG – Sustainable Development Goal

SSA – Sub Saharan Africa

TaRL- Teaching at the Right Level

TEP Center – The Education Partnership Center

UIS – UNESCO Institute for Statistics

UN – United Nations

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

## Who we are

The People’s Action for Learning (PAL) Network is a south-south partnership of 15 organizations in 14 countries working across Africa, the America and south Asia. Member organizations conduct citizen-led assessments and/or action programs aimed at improving learning outcomes.

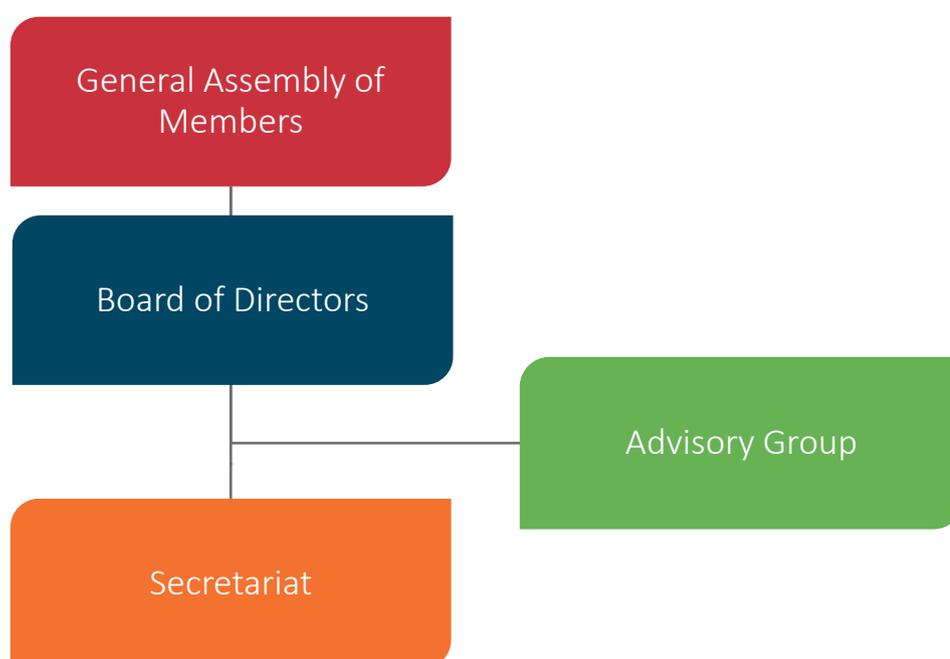
### Our vision

A world where all children have a foundation for lifelong learning.

### Our Mission

Generate evidence through assessment and action to inform, influence and improve children’s learning.

## Structure of the PAL Network



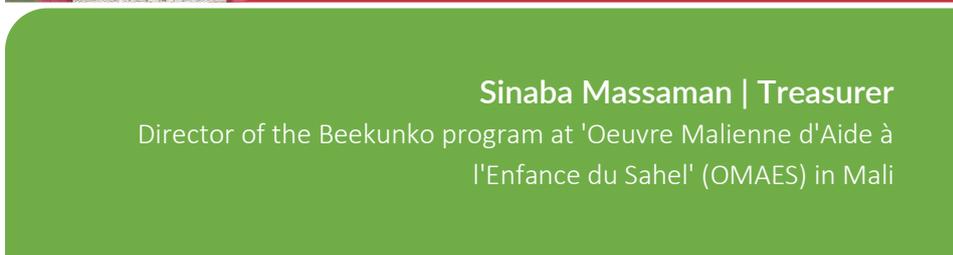
## Member organizations



## Our Board of Directors



**Dr. Suman Bhattacharjea | Chairperson**  
Director of Research at ASER Centre, India.



**Sinaba Massaman | Treasurer**  
Director of the Beekunko program at 'Oeuvre Malienne d'Aide à l'Enfance du Sahel' (OMAES) in Mali



**Dr. Sara Ruto | Member**  
Chief Administrative Secretary (CAS) at the Ministry of Education, Kenya.



**Fernanda Farinha | Board Member**  
social development specialist, consultant, and evaluator



**Dr. John Mugo | Board Member**  
Executive Director of the Zizi Afrique Foundation



**Dr. Emmanuel Manyasa | Board Member**  
Executive Director at Usawa Agenda



**Dr. Ariel Fiszbein | Board Member**  
Director at Inter-American Dialogue

## Our Advisory Group



**Baela Raza Jamil | Chairperson**  
CEO, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi and ASER Pakistan



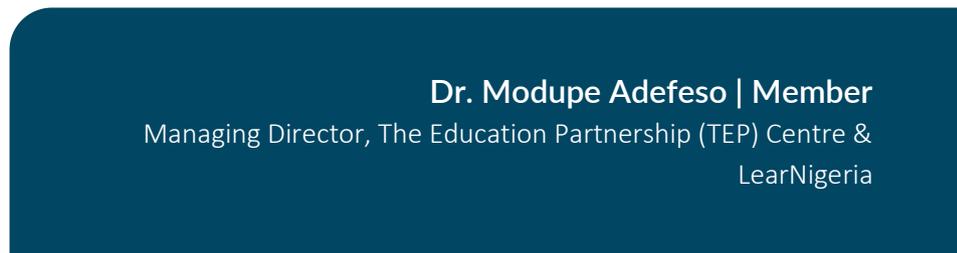
**Prof. Abdou Salam | Member**  
Director, Research Laboratory on social and Economic Transformation (LARTES) and Jangandoo



**Prof. Felipe Hevia | Member**  
Professor, Centre for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS) & Co-Director, Medición Independiente de Aprendizajes (MIA)



**Dr. Mary Goretti Nakabugo | Member**  
Executive Director, Uwezo Uganda



**Dr. Modupe Adefeso | Member**  
Managing Director, The Education Partnership (TEP) Centre & LearNigeria



**Zaida Mgalla | Member**  
Executive Director, Uwezo Tanzania

## Message from the Chairperson of the Board



“ I want to express my sincere gratitude to our esteemed donors for believing in our vision...”

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present to you PAL Network’s 2021 Annual Report, which summarises the Network’s activities and financial status for the period ending 31st December.

2021 marked year two of PAL Network’s strategy period, 2020 to 2023. It also marked the second year of global disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In a bid to achieve what we set out to do in year two while prioritising the health and safety of children and staff members, we leveraged technology to host our meetings and implement some of our projects.

Among our key achievements this year, we held the second PAL Network biennial conference. This three-day virtual event provided a forum for evidence-based global debates and the sharing of research and practices related to building back more resilient and better systems, actively supporting children’s learning. Over 500 participants from 40 countries agreed that now more than ever, the global education community must come together to ensure the continuity of learning for all children.

The development of a new digital common assessment called ELANA (Early Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment) continued during 2021. The assessment covers pre-primary and early primary grade competencies for children aged 4-10 years and is the latest initiative in the Network’s efforts to generate

assessment tools and evidence as a set of global public goods. An extensive item bank was developed, refined, and then piloted by Network members in 12 countries. To enhance our learning intervention programmes, under Every Language Teaches Us project, we have collated over 2,000 learning resources in 57 indigenous languages across eight countries. These language resources are being adapted for use in member intervention programmes. The resources will be collated into an open-access database to support the creation of learning materials for children worldwide.

Details of these and other achievements are detailed in the report.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to our esteemed donors for believing in our vision and providing us with the necessary support, both financial and in kind, to realise our goals for the year. I would also like to thank my colleagues on the board, the advisory group, the PAL Network Secretariat and the leaders and staff of our member organisations for your unity, dedication and hard work that enabled the Network to continue working towards its vision and mission. Most of all, my sincere thanks to the thousands of partner organisations, volunteers, community members, parents, and children who enable us to do what we do.

To you all, thank you.

**Dr. Suman Bhattacharjea**

## Message from the Chief Executive Officer



“We are indebted to your unwavering commitment to our vision- a world where all children have a foundation for lifelong learning”

On behalf of the PAL Network Secretariat, I am honoured to address our donors, partners, leaders, members, friends, and all children of the world. We are indebted to your unwavering commitment to our vision - a world where all children have a foundation for lifelong learning.

2021 came with transitions, celebrations, and innovations within the Network. Our co-founder and first Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Sara Ruto, assumed responsibilities in the Kenya Ministry of Education. We continue to recognise her unique contribution to the conception, inception and growth of this unique global south partnership through our commitment to continuing the Network's mission.

We remain grateful that even as the world grappled with the effects of the pandemic, we continued to strengthen our relationship with existing donors and secured funding to promote the salience of foundational literacy and numeracy in sub-Saharan Africa. We hope that our advocacy efforts continue to yield more partnerships and champions for what we truly believe in.

An interesting twist in our report this year. We shine a spotlight on our members' activities within our four focus areas: assessment, action,

advocacy, and research. After months of children being at home due to school closures occasioned by COVID-19, our members in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Kenya, and Uganda took to the field to understand the learning levels of children. A few adaptations were put in place, considering travel restrictions. Volunteers were trained virtually; some assessments were phone-based while other members adopted a hybrid approach. Our members in Mexico, Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana, and Pakistan continued implementing accelerated programmes to improve learning for all children. These efforts show a considerable level of resilience within the Network.

Lastly, we recognise the efforts of everyone without whom we could not have achieved 2021 milestones. Everyone from donors to partners, our leaders and their staff, national, regional, and global policymakers, friends of PAL and the Secretariat contributed to the results we celebrate in this report. It is a true honour to work with you, and I look forward to our fruitful collaboration in the coming years.

A luta continua.

Armando Ali

## Our 2021 Milestones

### ASSESSMENT PILLAR

#### **A new Digital Common Assessment**

PAL Network began developing its new common assessment initiative, ELANA (Early Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment). ELANA's objective is to develop and implement a digitally adaptive common-scale assessment that covers pre-primary and early primary grade competencies of children in the PAL Network member countries. The proposed digital adaptive tool is designed considering the global south realities and will be made available in the public domain as an essential public good. ELANA is designed for Global South realities and is currently under development in nine languages. The tool covers pre-primary and early primary grade competencies for children aged 4-10 years. Two pre-field trials were conducted in India, Kenya, and Pakistan to test the assessment items and the adaptive tool. Revisions from the pre-field trials were incorporated into the assessment items in preparation for the first field trial (FT1), which was conducted in 12 countries. The objective of the FT1 was to evaluate how the application works in the field, how the surveyors coped with the tablets, how the children reacted to the tasks, how well the instructions were developed and the training and monitoring procedures.

#### **Credibility of PAL Assessments**

Since the inception of the network, members have laboured to unify voices to advocate the importance of equipping children with foundation literacy and numeracy skills for lifelong learning. Through the assessment tools, members have continued to generate evidence on the learning levels of children year after year. All these efforts can be attributed to the designation of the PAL Network's instruments as an Assessment type on the UNESCO Institute for Statistics Dashboard. The UIS GAML Dashboard has embedded PAL Network instruments across all core areas applicable to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. Learning assessments represent a powerful tool to improve learning outcomes. The dashboard presents a repository of the most widespread learning assessment programmes with a special focus on their potential ability to monitor SDG 4 progress. The information is organised by listing all assessments with questions that could report against each specific indicator.

### ACTION PILLAR

#### **Indigenous Learning Resources Collated**

PAL Network has collated over 2000 indigenous learning resources from over 130 communities in 57 languages across eight countries. These resources are being adapted to make the learning experience in camps richer and more contextual for children and teachers. The repository of indigenous learning materials includes riddles, proverbs, tongue twisters, legends, songs, weight, and distance measurements that will support the strengthening of children's foundational literacy and numeracy. Children reportedly perform better when teachers use their native language for instruction. Native language elicits active participation amongst learners and in turn, builds their confidence, aiding content mastery. It is against this backdrop that PAL Network members are incorporating learning materials in indigenous languages in the various intervention programmes across the Network. Through these interventions, children with low foundational competencies learn to read and do basic maths within 45 days of using principles from the Teaching at the Right level approach (TaRL).

## ADVOCACY PILLAR

### Expanding Inclusion of Learning Opportunities for All in Kenya

PAL Network published a policy brief detailing recommendations from a series of dialogues on expanding the inclusion of learning opportunities for all. The six dialogues were held between September 2020 and June 2021, bringing together over 380 stakeholders from government, civil society, research organisations and curriculum development agencies. Participants discussed and shared their evidence and perspectives on the development of relevant, sustainable approaches to policy formulation, implementation, and interventions. The recommendations from the dialogues align with and will spur on overarching education reform initiatives such as the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), 100% transition and equity and inclusion in education. The policy brief was presented at the Education Evidence 4 Action (EE4A) fourth biennial conference. EE4A gathered education stakeholders and policymakers to share education evidence and deliberate on key policy issues and priorities in education. Additionally, PAL Network partnered with the Directorate of Policy and Partnerships and East African Community Affairs in a three-day workshop to develop a structure and work plan for basic education homeschooling guidelines. The

dialogues will focus on expanding inclusion of learning opportunities for children with special education needs.

### Improving Salience of FLN in sub-Saharan Africa

For over 15 years, PAL Network members have advocated for the importance of foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) at the national and global levels. In 2021, the PAL Network sought to strengthen the voice and FLN awareness of Sub-Saharan African children by engaging three regional bodies: East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). The project aims to inform regional organisations across SSA about children's learning levels and persuade regional bodies to promote the need for greater investments in FLN. Low and inequitable FLN is a multi-country issue. A regional push for FLN that is also sensitive to national policies and frameworks can be beneficial in addressing this growing challenge that has been exacerbated by COVID-19. A policy gap analysis on FLN across the sub-Saharan African Education Policy landscape was conducted. The analysis will aid in identifying common themes across the regions to form the basis of regional dialogues.

### A Second PAL Network Conference

PAL Network held its second biennial conference themed *Building Better: Ensuring Learning Continuity for All* on November 2-4. The conference brought together over 500 practitioners, researchers, academics, policymakers, civil society actors and students to discuss progress, challenges and opportunities relating to children's foundational learning. The conference provided a forum for evidence-based global debates and the sharing of practices on building back resilient systems that actively support children's learning. The conference keynote speakers H.E. Dr. Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, Dr. Rukmini Banerji and Hon. Dr. Jaime Saavedra reiterated the need for the global education community to come together to ensure the continuity of learning for all children. The conference resulted in a [declaration](#) which denotes the Network's continued investments in ensuring that all children have a foundation for lifelong learning and that no child is left behind. Before the conference, a pre-conference was held for members and friends of the PAL Network to share and learn from each other and build common paths to respond to the current challenges posed by COVID-19.

## RESEARCH

### First PAL Book Published

The first-ever PAL Network book containing papers from the 2019 biannual conference was published. Titled *Ensuring All Children Learn: Lessons from the South on What Works in Equity and Inclusion*, the book is a collection of a rich tapestry of cases from three southern continents focusing on issues germane to access, learning and retention in basic education in the context of Education for All (EFA). Focusing on Africa, Asia and Latin America, the book highlights the challenges of implementing EFA, policy alternatives and hopes for the future. Four key issues inform the thematic analysis in the book: the overall experiences in implementing EFA, the specific challenges faced, the lessons learned and prospects for the future. The solutions to these challenges provide avenues for the attainment of basic education for all school-eligible children in tandem with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education.

## ENABLERS

### Spotlight on Members

A special bulletin was introduced on Mailchimp to shine a light on PAL Network members and their work. The sporadic growth of the Network has seen members from different parts of the world joining the Network over its 16-year existence. This necessitated a platform where members could give an in-depth view of their work and the history of their organisation. Since the beginning of the year, we have featured Uwezo Tanzania, TEP Centre-Nigeria, IID-Bangladesh, and ÁBACOnRed-Nicaragua. The interviews are on YouTube, and the summary is presented as a question-and-answer summary on Mailchimp. The bulletin has generated more views on the PAL Network YouTube channel.

### Virtual Family Hangouts

Face-to-face interactions, lockdowns and travel restrictions seemed to widen the distance between members who seek to share their work and learn from each other. Virtual meetings have become a valuable tool for the PAL Network family of learners and educators. Two meetings were specific in bringing the members of the network on a learning exchange. The first meeting themed *Genuine Cooperation* challenged members on the need to work together to effect change rather than compete against each other. The second meeting themed *Bringing the Tribes to Learn Together* sought to explore aspects of our different cultures that can be used for learning.

## A glimpse of member's work in 2021

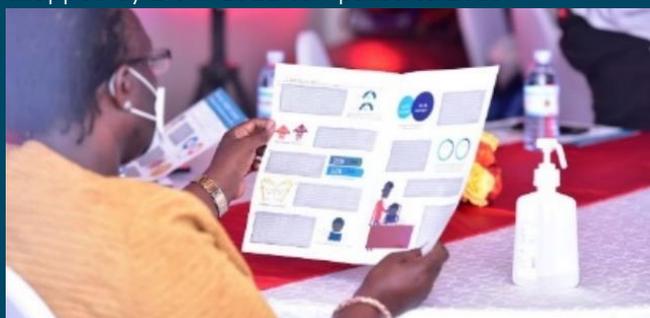
After months of children being at home due to the school closures due to the health pandemic, members went out on the field to understand the learning levels of children. PAL Member's in India, Pakistan, Uganda, Kenya, and Nepal conducted citizen-led assessments in 2021. Although most members have conducted assessments for years, the recent assessments deviated from the norm. Training sessions had to be done virtually due to lockdowns and travel restrictions. For some, the assessments were phone-based, other members used a hybrid approach while others opted for a face-to-face method of data collection. The assessments sought to understand the learning levels of children and other factors affecting learning outcomes caused by the long school closures.



**ASER Center, India** focused on the changes in enrolment patterns, schools reopening, access to learning materials among children while at home, the level of learning support available at home and school and household preparedness as schools began to reopen. The findings indicated learning support at home had declined, with children getting less support from their fathers in 2021 than in 2020



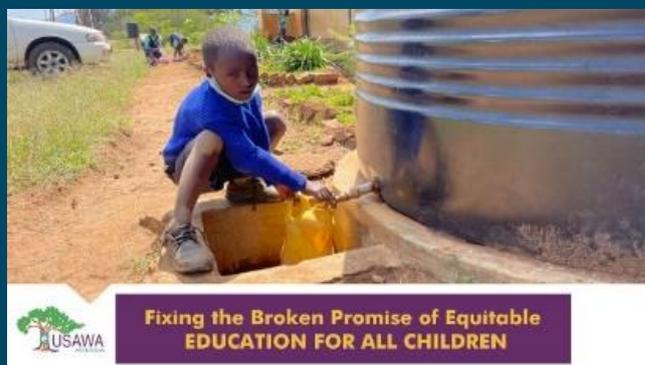
**ASER Pakistan** focused on how the mother's education affects children's learning and psycho-social wellbeing, especially with the children being at home. According to the findings, enrolment for the 6-16 age group dropped by 2% in 2021 compared to 2019.



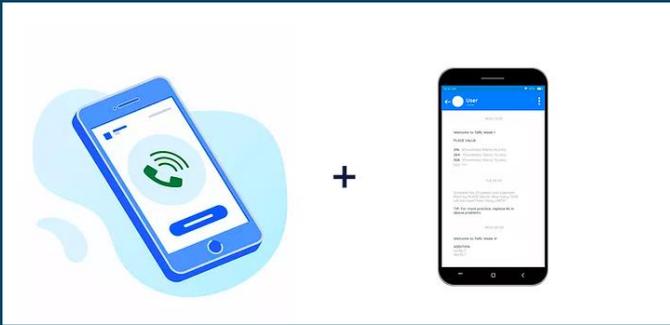
**Uwezo Uganda's** assessment sought to assess children's readiness for school, their literacy and numeracy competencies, variations in the learning levels and related factors to understand any 'learning losses' attributed to the pandemic. Findings revealed that compared to older children, younger children's learning has been delayed more by the pandemic and school closures. This pattern applies to literacy and numeracy



**ASER Nepal's** assessment was conducted at a local government unit level in Barahatal Municipality in the Karnali province under the South Asian Assessment Alliance: Communicating and Collaborating for Change project. This project will be expanded to five other rural districts in Karnali province in 2022.



**Kenya's** Usawa Agenda assessment incorporated secondary school surveys, focusing on equity issues and two surveys catering to CBC and 8-4-4 learners.



In **Botswana**, **Young Love** developed a phone-based intervention to keep children learning. The programme reduced innumeracy by 31%, generating global interest. Replication trials of this intervention were conducted in Kenya, India, Nepal, Uganda, and the Philippines.



In **Mexico**, **MIA** training sessions were held for teachers from the Secretariat of Education of Tabasco (SETAB) to create a learning community aimed at strengthening multi-grade and community schools in rural areas. More than 3,200 education specialists from over 400 schools took part. In addition, 12 Latin American countries joined the training, making a total of 4,142 participants.



In **Kenya**, **Zizi Afrique Foundation** through the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) strove to strengthen a culture of reading through community libraries. Advisory groups were established at county level to manage libraries and coordinate the communities' access to the facilities. In addition, a blended approach to learning camps combining low-tech (radio) and community-based camps to complement school-based sessions were implemented.

In **Nigeria**, **TEP Centre** held its annual NEDIS Education Innovation Summit in December. Stakeholders from government, research and academia, development and funding organisations, corporations, civil society organisations and a broad range of education innovators attended the sixth edition of the summit, NEDIS 2021, which focused on the theme *Skill Development: Vision for Skilled African Youth*.

In **Senegal**, **LARTES-IFAN** and PLNT of Leiden University in the Netherlands coordinated #CoCreateMyCity, an innovative programme initiated in Senegal by the Embassy of the Netherlands and the Dutch Enterprise Agency (RVO). The programme aimed to stimulate entrepreneurship among students, improve collaboration between public and private actors and raise awareness of entrepreneurship education.



In **Nicaragua**, **ÁBACOenRed**, joined with like-minded organisations from Mexico and Chile to create a Latin American website for the permanent exchange of learning experiences. The initiative allows for genuine cooperation towards the construction of a space for the free exchange of learning materials.

**Institute of Informatics and Development (IID), Bangladesh**, in collaboration with FHI 360 conducted a Rapid Ethnographic Assessment (REA) as part of the Play and Learning in Children's Eyes (PALICE) initiative, which aimed to create a tool that captures children's experiences of learning through play (LtP). Research shows that when children experience playing as joyful, actively engaging, meaningful, and socially interactive, it is likely to lead to deeper learning.

**Uwezo Tanzania** also joined over 20 like-minded organisations in education to celebrate the Global Action Week of Education (GAWE) 2021. Various education stakeholders convened for an annual event to advocate more and better financing in education

## Financials Highlights

2021 GRANT INCOME

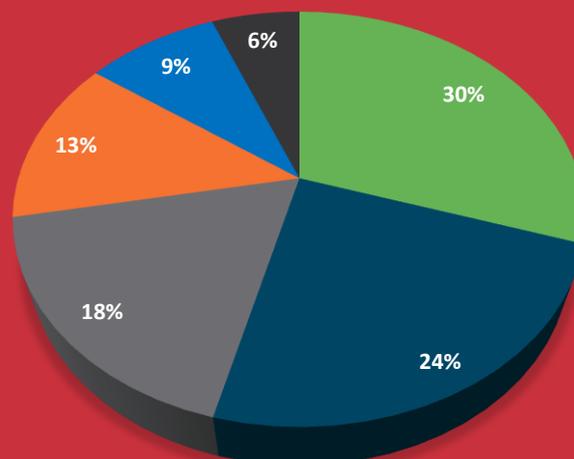
**US\$1.672**

MILLION

SPENT ON PROGRAMS

**77%**

EXPENDITURE PER PILLAR



■ Enablers ■ Advocacy ■ Assessment ■ Action ■ Research ■ Administration

## Statement of Income and Expenditure

For the years ending December 31, 2021, and December 31, 2020 (USD)

Revenue:	2021	2020
Grant Income	\$1,628,003	\$ 1,557,899
Other Incomes	\$44,875	\$ 18,357
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$1,672,878</b>	<b>\$1,576,256</b>

Expenditure per pillar:	2021	2020
Assessment	\$230,451	\$183,561
Action	\$169,920	\$92,475
Advocacy	\$304,106	\$223,804
Research	\$112,600	\$58,025
Enablers (Membership, Fundraising, MELS, Communication, Network Governance and Operations)	\$385,603	\$372,744
Administration costs	\$86,113	\$77,363
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$1,288,793</b>	<b>\$1,007,971</b>

## Donor Spotlight

Our donors are the heartbeat of the organisation. Their continued generosity makes our work possible and has been critical to our success. Their contributions ensure that we can not only implement programmes aimed at improving the foundational learning of our children but also help us scale our impact while meeting our shared goals.



We are grateful to all our donors around the world and want to take a moment to recognise their generous contributions to the PAL Network

**BILL & MELINDA**  
**GATES** *foundation*

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation partnered with the PAL Network in a multi-year evidence-based advocacy project to promote Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) across Sub-Saharan Africa, notably Kenya, Nigeria, and Mozambique. PAL is engaging with the African Union, ECOWAS, SADC and EAC to build awareness about FLN amongst policymakers, influencers, educators, and researchers. The Gates Foundation also supported the execution of the 2021 PAL Network Research Conference attended by over 500 participants seeking to promote inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, in line with SDG4.



Through the Echidna Giving support, PAL Network implemented Every Language Teaches Us (ELTU), a project that is creating a repository of over 2,000 indigenous learning resources to support foundational literacy and numeracy.



Foreign, Commonwealth  
& Development Office

Through a grant from FCDO, PAL Network developed [International Common Assessment of Numeracy \(ICAN\)](#) a robust, open-source and user-friendly assessment tool, available in [11 languages](#) that offers international comparability of results aligned to SDG 4.1.1 (a). Currently, FCDO is also supporting the PAL Network initiative that seeks to develop a common early language and literacy assessment tool.



The Hewlett Foundation has been a strong and supportive partner since the inception of the PAL Network. To date, it has funded multiple strategic programmes, providing critical organisational support that has enabled us to reach more children with our life-changing solutions. In addition, Hewlett Foundation has also provided an organisational effectiveness grant to help the PAL Network build capacity on fund development.



The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has invested in a four-year common assessment project dubbed Early Language, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (ELANA). ELANA's objective is to develop and implement a digitally adaptive common assessment that covers pre-primary and early primary grade competencies of children in the PAL Network member countries. The initiative intends to investigate the gaps in children's acquisition of key pre-numeracy and literacy and early numeracy and literacy competencies.



For the last two years, the INCLUDE Platform, has invested in a series of interrogative Policy Dialogues in Kenya, bringing together over 2,000 stakeholders, practitioners, policymakers and researchers. The dialogues sought to examine the extent to which the current education reforms address educational challenges of exclusion and inequality in terms of geography, gender, access, and quality.



For the last five years, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund has been PAL Network's leading thought in the areas of innovation, learning and systemic change. Through its support, PAL Network members have developed evidence-based remedial learning programmes based on Pratham's principles of Teaching at Right Level (TARL). It has provided critical training designed to build our capacity for fundraising and leadership.

# 2021

## Annual Report

[www.palnetwork.org](http://www.palnetwork.org) | [info@palnetwork.org](mailto:info@palnetwork.org)

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  [palnetworkHQ](#)

   [PAL Network](#)

 [www.palnetwork.org](http://www.palnetwork.org)

 [info@palnetwork.org](mailto:info@palnetwork.org)