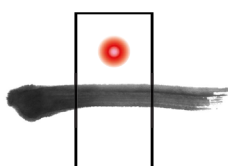


Preparing education for tomorrow

Our annual report for 2024



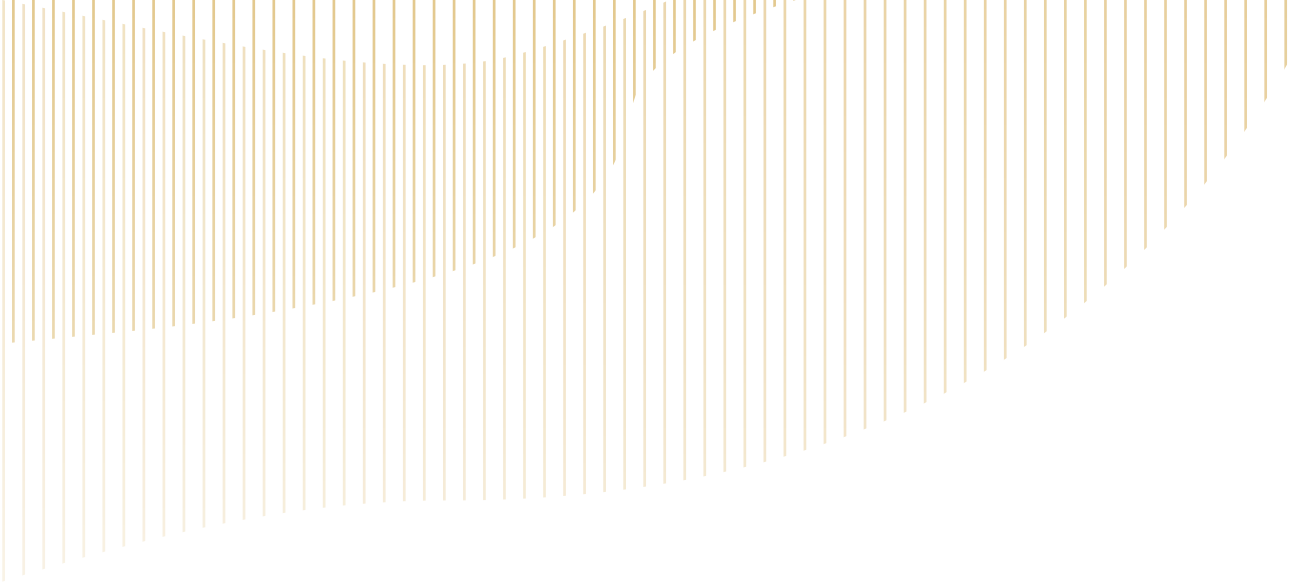
Yidan Prize
一 丹 獎

In this report

01	Opening statements	
	Dr Charles CHEN Yidan, Founder and Chairman of our Board of Directors.....	04
	Dr Qian Tang, Chairman of our Advisory Committee.....	06
	Dr Koichiro Matsuura, Chairman of our Judging Committee.....	07
02	About the Yidan Prize Foundation	
	Our work and mission.....	10
	Our strategy.....	12
	Board of Directors	14
	Advisory Committee.....	15
	Judging Committee	18
03	Spotlight: ideas that spark change	
	Building a community to shape the future of education	24
	Driving lasting change in education.....	26
	Cultivating the next generation of education researchers	28
04	Meet our 2024 laureates	
	Professor Wolfgang Lutz.....	34
	Professor Mark Jordans, Marwa Zahr, and Luke Stannard.....	38
05	Community and partnerships	
	Council of Laureates.....	44
	Yidan Prize funded projects.....	50
	Accelerating progress through collaboration and community	52
06	Our year in events	
	2024 Yidan Prize Conference	56
	2024 Yidan Prize Awards Ceremony	58
	2024 Yidan Prize Summit	60
07	Looking forward	
	Three things we learned from supporting projects	64
	Catalyzing change for a brighter future	66
08	Acknowledgments	
	Emeritus members.....	70
	Partners	71

01

Opening statements



“Our two prizes recognize powerful work in education research and development, presenting an opportunity to scale ideas that drive change.”

Dr Charles CHEN Yidan





Dr Charles CHEN Yidan

Founder and Chairman of our Board of Directors

A year of strengthening our network and creating meaningful dialogue

Since the beginning, we have known that working together is critical to our mission of creating a better world through education. Our two prizes recognize powerful work in education research and development, presenting an opportunity to scale ideas that drive change. But they also represent an invitation: to join a collective and amplify voices with a shared vision.

In that context, I am pleased to say that this year we deepened connections with our laureates, partners, and the wider global education community. Our 2024 Yidan Prize Conference, co-hosted with the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), showed the value of creating space to discuss, explore, and debate the most pressing issues in education. We will continue to nurture these opportunities as we move forward.

With nothing as certain as change, we shined a spotlight on resilience

While we don't set a specific theme for our prize, it's clear that resilience is critical to the work of our 2024 laureates. We see it in the work of Professor Wolfgang Lutz, whose demographic modeling methods give us both the evidence that investing in education drives human progress, and a foundation for building capacity to adapt to climate change. And through 'Can't Wait to Learn', Professor Mark Jordans, Marwa Zahr, and Luke Stannard demonstrate how access to learning in emergency settings helps children build their own resilience in some of the world's most challenging environments.

Evidently, resilience is essential at every level: for learners, educators, and the education systems they navigate. And it was that very topic that we explored at our 2024 Yidan Prize Summit in December.

As our 10th anniversary nears, we've already begun a new phase of growth

In 2024, we welcomed several new voices to our Yidan Prize community. But first, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my warmest thanks to Edward Ma and Dr Christopher Thomas, who stepped down as our Secretary-General and Director of Partnerships, respectively, this year. I also gratefully recognize the dedication of Mabel Woo, who took on the role of Acting Secretary-General to steer us through this transition.

Balanced perspectives and fresh ideas keep us on track. We welcomed four new judges and three new advisors, whose expertise enriched this year's prize deliberations and Advisory Committee discussions. Yidan Prize laureate Lucy Lake also joined the Secretariat as Director of Global Engagement, bringing with her decades of experience in nurturing partnerships to accelerate transformation. And in March 2025, Bruce Au will step into the role of Secretary-General. I look forward to the next chapter of our development, growth, and progress towards our mission.



Photo credit: Pratham Education Foundation



Dr Qian Tang

Chairman of our Advisory Committee

In 2024, we marked a step forward in outreach

As advisors, we are always concerned with how the prize can continue to grow and increase its impact. Being able to reach further and wider to source nominations and support innovation is key. So to see an increasingly diverse set of nominations, as well as an enthusiastic reception for our 2024 laureates, was extremely encouraging.

These achievements are the result of focused effort from my fellow advisors, the independent Judging Committee, our Secretariat — including the new Director of Global Engagement, Lucy Lake — and of course the laureates themselves. I extend my warmest gratitude to each of them for their determination and dedication.

Diversity is fundamental to growth and progress

This year, we welcomed three new advisors: Dr Peter Materu, Dr Karen Mundy, and Deborah Quazzo, enriching our perspectives on global development, education policy, and education technology. And we're excited to have Professor Kwame Akyeampong, who brings over 25 years of expertise in international education policy and development, joining the Advisory Committee in 2025.

Our committee now includes experts from governments, UN bodies, foundations, technology, and academia — all with international education research and development experience. This holistic understanding of the different challenges and opportunities in the global race to close education gaps stands us in good stead to work towards our mission of creating a better future through education. We are also deeply grateful to our emeritus advisors, whose valuable viewpoints have been instrumental in laying the groundwork and shaping our institutional memory.

Amidst uncertainty, we have a strong team and a clear goal

Education has never changed faster. The role of teachers and learners, and education formats are constantly evolving — especially with the recent surge in AI use. Our 2024 Yidan Prize Summit recognized that to navigate these uncertainties, it's essential to build resilience in both individuals and systems.

As an Advisory Committee, we must also look to the foundation's resilience. As we approach our 10th anniversary in 2026, we will keep our focus on increasing the foundation's influence. To help support these efforts, we've recommended a second external review to assess and enhance its effectiveness. I look forward to seeing the prize progress in the next chapter.



Dr Koichiro Matsuura

Chairman of our Judging Committee

We look far and wide for the brightest ideas in education

We don't focus on a particular theme, but we look for work that is future-oriented, innovative, transformative, and sustainable. To champion changemakers whose work brings lasting change to education, we need as broad and diverse an array of nominations as we can get. And I'm delighted to say that in 2024, nominations came from 60 countries and territories and covered 137 project sites — making it our most geographically diverse year of nominations since 2019.

In 2024, we were especially pleased to see increased representation from regions that have historically had less visibility, including French-speaking Africa and Latin America. I am keen to see this trend continue.

This diversity is the result of a great deal of hard work

Our judges carefully review each nomination to uphold the prize's reputation for rigor and quality. Our Secretariat and wider community work tirelessly to spread the word. And nominees and their supporters invest considerable effort in preparing strong submissions.

I extend my deepest gratitude to our judging panels for their time, expertise, and commitment, as well as to Dr Charles CHEN Yidan and the Yidan Prize community for their continued support. This process reflects an important truth: great educational advancements are the result of many dedicated people working together toward a shared vision.

Our nominations reflect the importance of teamwork

In recent years, we've observed a steady rise in team nominations. Indeed, we awarded our second-ever team in 2024. But even for individual nominations, supporters play a vital role in illustrating the context and impact of the work.

Working together — with colleagues and communities, educators and decision-makers, governments and civil society — is also a common thread in nominees' work. Collaboration is central to our mission and work, as we recognize the power of our community to create a ripple effect that goes further than each of us could achieve alone.

We also welcomed fresh perspectives to our deliberations

Strengthening our judging panels with new voices is another way we deepen our collective expertise. We were privileged to welcome Dr Faisal Bari and Professor Svein Sjøberg to our Education Research panel, as well as Dr Suzanne Grant Lewis and Professor José Weinstein to our Education Development panel. They represent decades of experience bridging the gaps between theory and practice — so while they might sit on different panels, they deeply understand the interplay between disciplines.

As the 10th anniversary of the prize approaches, and our community of laureates grows, I am hopeful for what this increasingly broad and diverse network can achieve.

02

About the Yidan Prize Foundation

The image features a minimalist design with two decorative elements consisting of numerous thin, vertical teal lines. These elements are positioned at the top and bottom of the page, creating a frame-like effect. The lines vary slightly in height and are closely spaced, giving them a textured, curtain-like appearance. The central area of the page is a solid, light gray, providing a clean background for the text.

How we're building a better world through education

Our work and mission

The Yidan Prize Foundation is a global philanthropic organization, founded in 2016 with a clear mission: to create a better world through education.

Our world is evolving, and with that comes complex global challenges

Education holds the key to solving them and unlocking a brighter future — but only if education systems can keep up with the pace of change. Through the prize and our global network, we encourage the world to embrace bold ideas and champion solutions that shape the future of learning.

Our theory of change is rooted in innovation and collaboration

We believe that by recognizing the most innovative minds in educational research and practice and building a global learning community around them, we will accelerate the adoption of best ideas and practices, thereby improving the quality of education around the world and promoting wider access to educational opportunities.

Each year, we award two prizes to changemakers in Education Research and Education Development

Research and practice work in harmony, constantly reinforcing each other and revealing new paths to explore. Ideas and action form a virtuous circle — enriching our understanding of how students learn best and transforming classrooms.



Education Research

Recognizing researchers whose work strengthens teaching and learning through a deeper understanding of learning sciences or effective education policy.

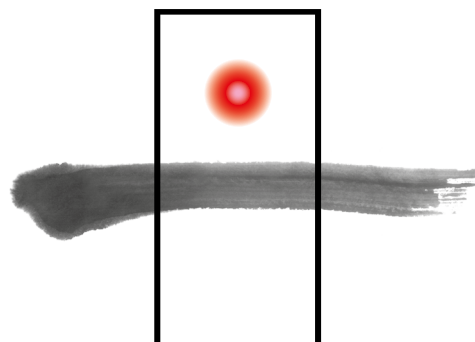


Education Development

Recognizing leaders who are advancing practice through innovative ideas and interventions that make quality education more accessible to all.

Laureates of each prize receive a cash prize of HK\$15 million and an unrestricted project fund of HK\$15 million over three years to expand and scale up their work.

Through our prize and community, we are creating a hub of scalable solutions that researchers, practitioners, and policymakers can turn to for inspiration and expertise.



Yidan Prize 一 丹 獎

The artistry of our logo and medals reflects our work

Designed by ink-brush artist Dr Kan Tai-Keung, our logo echoes our name, and centers on two Chinese characters. The first is *yi* (一), the Mandarin character for ‘one’, suggesting the unity of our global community. Then *dan* (丹), finished with the red bloom of a lotus flower to represent a loyal heart. Together, these strokes create a door: a door to a better world, opened by education.

In both medals, you’ll again see ‘—’: a reminder for our laureates that our community is with them in spirit. And both depict a pine tree growing from a mountain rock; even from the toughest foundations, the evergreen branches of education can spread.



Watch Dr Kan explain the inspiration behind the designs

Our Strategy

Our strategy rests on five pillars that advance our mission



Firstly, the quality of our nominations is paramount

To find the most powerful ideas in education, we need to develop a network of the most informed and engaged people in education, who can steer us to those projects.

We're building on this through our partnerships and events, outreach and communications, and by refining our nominations process.



We also need a crystal clear and effective selection process

Our independent Judging Committee represents a broad range of perspectives and expertise to ensure our process is rigorous and inclusive.

We publish our judging criteria and are as flexible as possible with our funding. We also ask nominees to make a short video so we can hear directly from changemakers in their own words.



We play an important role in amplifying projects

We share and promote the work of our laureates at every opportunity.

They are key speakers at our events and we share their work in many of our publications, blog posts, and short films. We also introduce them to partners and fellow philanthropic organizations to encourage collaboration.



We form partnerships around clear objectives and collaboration goals

They're an essential part of promoting our mission and our community's work, and give us an opportunity to explore different ways of working and bring attention to important, topical conversations.



Finally, we are a hub and channel for knowledge sharing

Ideas can only change the world if others can grasp them, adapt them, and build on them.

We take an active part in the global education conversation to make sure everyone has access to information that can improve education for all.

Our Board of Directors

Our Board oversees everything we do as a foundation. In particular, they appoint people to sit on our Advisory and Judging Committees, and approve the judges' decisions on each year's laureates.



Dr Charles CHEN Yidan
Founder, Yidan Prize

Best known for his work with Tencent and his philanthropy, Charles has had a lifelong love of learning. These days, he spends most of his time on education initiatives, from our foundation to the nonprofit university he set up in Wuhan.



Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz
Chair, Diamond Light Source

With a career that spans both the research and educational worlds, Sir Leszek understands the joint aims of our Education Research and Development prizes better than anyone. In fact, his 2001 knighthood was in part based on his contribution to medical education.



Professor Rick Levin
Senior Advisor, Coursera

In Rick's 20 years as President of Yale University, he rebuilt the campus, redeveloped downtown New Haven, strengthened the university's international programs, and co-founded Yale-NUS College. Now, he acts as an advisor to Coursera — an online learning platform offering courses from more than 250 universities.



Professor Tony Chan Fan-Cheong
President Emeritus, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Tony is a computer scientist by degree and a mathematician by trade. In his former roles, he managed everything from astronomy to chemistry, and from mathematical and physical sciences to computer science. He most recently served as the third President of King Abdullah University of Science and Technology.

Our Advisory Committee

Our Advisory Committee is an independent team that closely examines our work as a foundation and designs strategies to help us increase our impact on education around the world.



Dr Qian Tang

Chairman, Advisory Committee; former Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

In his role at UNESCO until 2015, Dr Tang facilitated education programs in all 195 member states. In particular, he helped to draft and roll out the Education 2030 Agenda — the fourth goal of the wider Sustainable Development Agenda — that so greatly influences our work today.



Baela Raza Jamil

CEO, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi

Baela is a public policy specialist and advocate for girls education. As a civil society champion, she has driven nationwide movements for the right to education, early years and girls' education, and second chance programs on education, life skills, and livelihoods. Since 2008, she's led the citizens' Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan on learning, equity, and inclusion.



Ruth Kagia

High-Level Envoy and Advisor, Global Partnership for Education

Ruth has devoted her career to advising on teaching, education management, and research. In between senior roles in the Kenyan government, she was the World Bank's Global Director for Education, and Country Director for countries including South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland, and Lesotho.



Dr Peter Materu

Chief Program Officer, Mastercard Foundation

Peter contributed significantly to developing the new operating model which saw Mastercard Foundation establish a footprint in Africa in 2019. Responsible for all programs, he leads a team of over 200 in eight locations. Together, they work towards enabling young people in Africa — especially women — and indigenous communities in Canada to access dignified and fulfilling work.



Dr Karen Mundy

Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy, University of Toronto

Karen's work includes research into the global politics of 'education for all', education policy and reform in sub-Saharan Africa, and the role of civil society in educational change. She's also served as Chief Technical Officer for the Global Partnership for Education and Director of the UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP-UNESCO).



Deborah Quazzo

Managing Partner, GSV Ventures

Deborah is a leader of GSV Ventures, which invests in education and workforce skills technologies globally — primarily in the US and India. She's also co-founder of the ASU+GSV Summit, a celebration of innovation and innovators across the global 'preK to Gray' learning and workforce skills landscape. She's thrice been named one of Insider's top 100 seed investors.



Professor Pauline Rose

Director, Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre, University of Cambridge

As Professor of International Education at the University of Cambridge, Pauline has collaborated on large research programs with teams in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, tackling issues related to education inequality. She provides evidence-based policy advice, supporting quality and inclusive education for all.



Dr Jamil Salmi

Global tertiary education expert

Jamil worked for 25 years at the World Bank, where he shaped policy on higher education reforms and development strategies. In the past 10 years, he has worked as a consultant with governments, universities, and donor agencies.



Dankert Vedeler

Former Assistant Director-General, The Ministry of Education and Research (Norway)

In his role at the ministry, Dankert has reformed secondary education, rolled out wide-scale programs, and chaired the steering committee for Education for All (EFA) and later the Education SDG Steering Committee. In these roles, he worked with Dr Tang to draft the Incheon Declaration and the SDG Framework for Action.

Our Judging Committee

Our judges put the 'prize' into Yidan Prize Foundation: they go through each nomination carefully, analyze the entries, and decide on our laureates. There are two panels — one for each award — both overseen by our Chairman.



Dr Koichiro Matsuura

Chairman, Judging Committee; former Director-General, UNESCO

With over 40 years in international relations, Dr Matsuura brings wisdom and a global outlook to our judging panel. His role as Director-General of UNESCO spanned 10 years, in which time he took brave initiatives for reform in many areas of great impact, from universal basic education to freshwater management.

Education Research



Andreas Schleicher

**Head, Judging Panel, Yidan Prize for Education Research;
Director for the Directorate of Education and Skills, OECD**

In his work at the OECD, Andreas analyzes and advises on educational policies for economic growth and social progress. He oversees several international assessments and surveys, most notably the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).



Dr Faisal Bari

Chairman, Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS)

Faisal is Associate Professor and Dean for the School of Education at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). He specializes in the economics of education, inclusive education, philosophy of education, microeconomics, game theory, and industrial organization. Among others, he's consulted with Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and the United Nations Development Programme.



Dr Elizabeth M. King

Non-resident Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution

Elizabeth, an economist, spent much of her professional career at the World Bank, ending her time there as the global director for education policy and acting vice president for human development issues. She's currently managing editor of the Journal for Development Effectiveness and teaches at Georgetown University and the University of the Philippines. She's published widely on education, poverty, the care economy, and gender inequality.



Dr Felice J. Levine

Executive Director, American Educational Research Association (AERA)

Felice is known for her work across a vast span of research and science topics — from big data to policy, and higher education to ethics. She serves on several steering groups and boards of US national associations focusing on sciences, statistics, and data.



Professor Svein Sjøberg

Professor Emeritus in Science Education, Oslo University

Svein is a nuclear physicist and also holds a PhD in educational psychology. He became the first professor in science education in the Nordic countries and has been instrumental in building this field as a discipline in the region. His research interests are the social, ethical, and cultural aspects of science education.



Professor Zhang Min-xuan

Director, Teacher Education Centre under the auspices of UNESCO

Professor Zhang is passionate about education research in areas of systems and policy, teacher education, and school-based curricula. He plays a pivotal role in leading education research and advises on policy in China and globally. In 2014, the Asia Society awarded him the Asia Outstanding Education Leader and Game Changer Award.

Education Development



Dorothy K. Gordon

Head, Judging Panel, Yidan Prize for Education Development; Board Member, UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education

As a technology activist and a firm believer in internet for all, Dorothy's judging perspectives are more valuable than ever in light of 2020's online education boom. In particular, she draws on her government, corporate, and UN policy and management experience to find laureates who can make an impact.



Warren Ang

Founder and CEO, Voyage

Warren works with foundations and NGOs as a long-term partner to design and build initiatives to achieve impact at scale through systems change. Their work has shaped over US\$800 million in strategic philanthropy in Asia across sector building, poverty alleviation, migration and livelihoods, youth and education, aging, and mental health.



Vicky Colbert

Founder and Director, Fundación Escuela Nueva

Among her many accolades, Vicky was also our inaugural Education Development laureate. A sociologist and former Colombian Vice-Minister of Education, she pioneered the Escuela Nueva way of learning. It's now a world-renowned model, transforming learning in remote, resource-strapped regions of Latin America and beyond.



Dr Suzanne Grant Lewis

Emeritus Chair of Education Science and Policy, Education.org

Previously at Education.org, Suzanne offered strategic and technical guidance in global and country program design and implementation. Suzanne was Director of IIEP-UNESCO, co-founder of the International Education Funders Group (IEFG), coordinator of the foundation Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, and Harvard University faculty member.



Kiran Bir Sethi

Founder and Director, Riverside School

Kiran brings a designer's vision to education, as the driving force behind the award-winning Riverside School, aProCh — an initiative to make cities child-friendly and the global movement, Design for Change (DFC). DFC is now in more than 60 countries, where children are empowered by the 'Feel / Imagine / Do / Share (FIDS)' framework to design solutions for some of their greatest challenges.



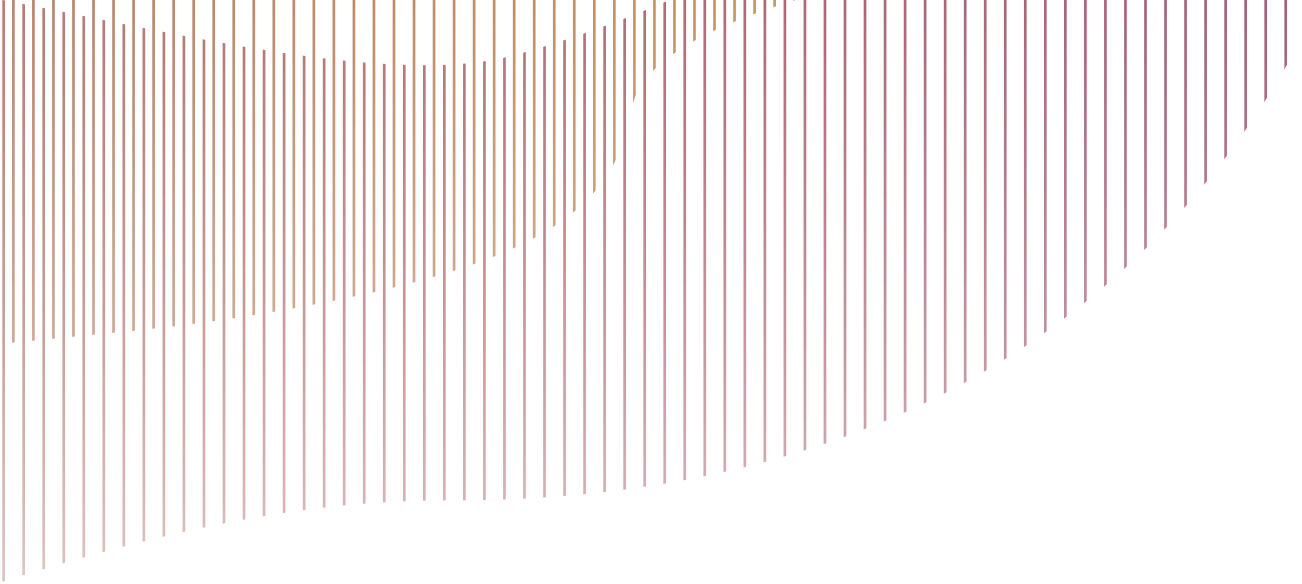
Professor José Weinstein

Director, School Leadership Program, Diego Portales University

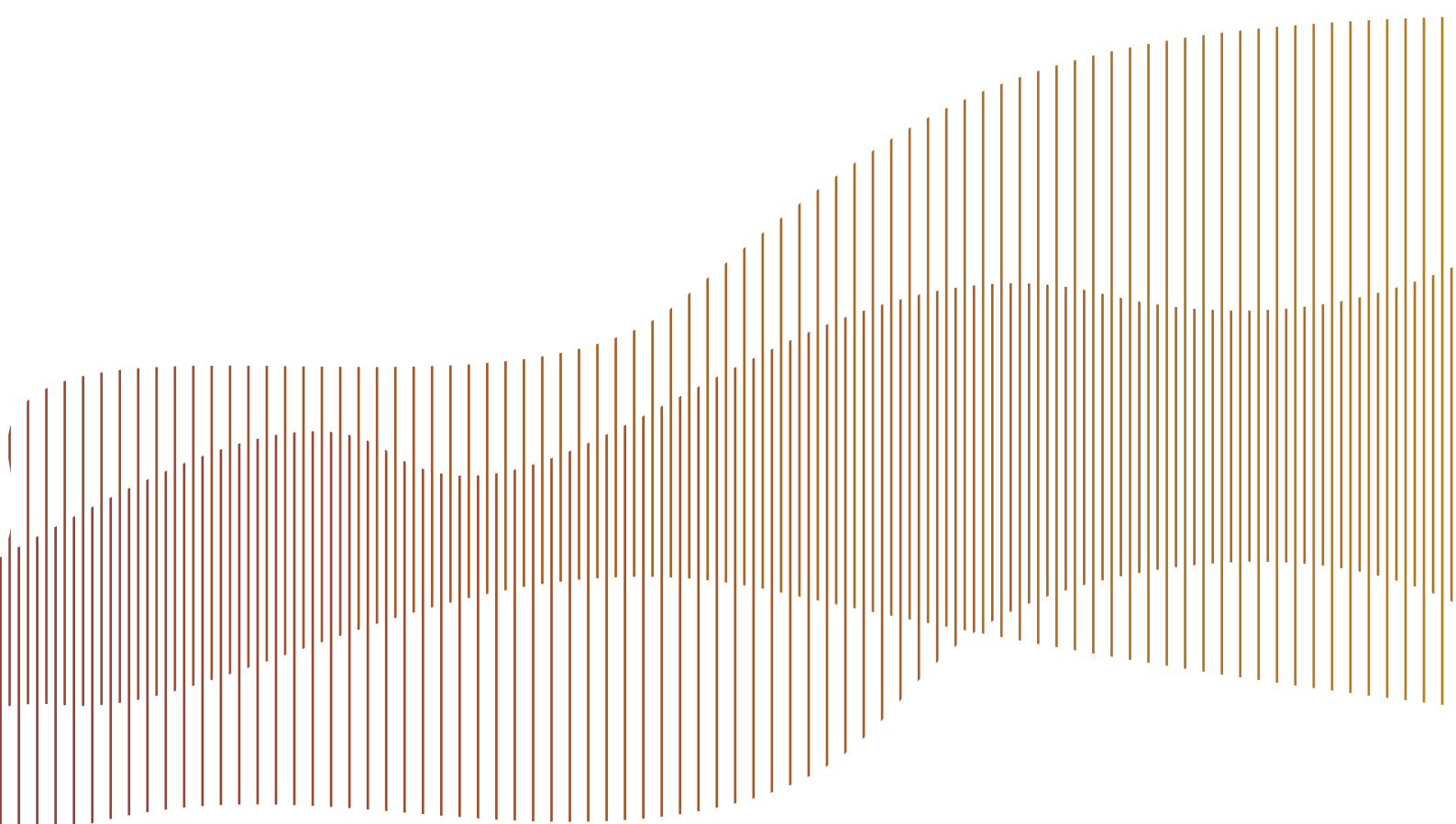
With over 30 years of experience in research, policymaking, and implementation in education, José was Chile's Undersecretary of Education and the country's first Minister of Culture. Over his career, he's created and directed programs on improvement in secondary education, leadership development in vulnerable schools, and new opportunities for cultural development in youth.

03

Spotlight: ideas that spark change

A decorative graphic in the top left corner consisting of numerous thin, vertical lines of varying heights and colors, including shades of brown, tan, and purple, creating a textured, curtain-like effect.

We're proud to work with people changing systems
— and lives. Here we take a closer look at their
progress in 2024, and celebrate the impact and
legacy of their work.

A decorative graphic in the bottom right corner consisting of numerous thin, vertical lines of varying heights and colors, including shades of brown, tan, and purple, creating a textured, curtain-like effect.



Building a community to shape the future of education

Our Director of Global Engagement, Lucy Lake has spent 30 years as a staunch advocate of girls' education and women's leadership — most recently as CEO of CAMFED and one of our 2020 Yidan Prize for Education Development Laureates. We sat down with Lucy to talk about her role at the Yidan Prize Foundation, building bridges between like minds to tackle education inequities and scale innovations for systems change.

Back in the early 1990s, many girls started primary school in Zimbabwe but very few completed secondary education. At the time, many people believed there was a cultural block — but CAMFED's work showed that the biggest barrier was actually poverty. With the right financial and community-based support, girls could progress through school.

The question we then had to answer was: what next? For young women, it wasn't a straightforward jump from school to higher education or work. So when 400 recent school graduates from Zimbabwe came together to discuss their futures, they created what became the CAMFED Association — a peer-support network that gave young women the tools and opportunities to become entrepreneurs and leaders in their communities.

Angeline (Angie) Murimirwa was one of CAMFED's first graduates. We worked together for many years to grow CAMFED into an organization supporting seven million girls in school and a network of over 300,000 women leaders across five countries in Africa. Over those years, CAMFED evolved its strategy, operations, leadership, partnerships, and governance — offering a model others can adapt and adopt. And as I passed the baton of CEO to Angie in 2023, it allowed me to consider where else I could use my skills to make connections and champion the transformative power of education.

"I've always seen my role as opening the door for others to walk through and take on positions of leadership."

“The Yidan Prize Foundation creates a space where research meets practice, spotlighting ideas that have the potential to transform education systems at scale. We’re uniquely positioned to bring the right people together to make that happen.”

The Yidan Prize Foundation takes a strategic approach to amplifying innovative education models and fostering connections between changemakers. That’s exactly what I’ve spent my career so far doing, and I know it works. The challenges facing education today — climate change, global conflict, demographic shifts, and harnessing the power of AI — can feel overwhelming. But education is the best tool we have to mitigate these challenges. And building those bridges between research and practice is an important part of making sure everyone gets a quality education.

After all, innovation doesn’t happen in isolation. It needs a platform where people and organizations can exchange knowledge and scale what works. When Angie and I became Yidan Prize laureates, we used our funds to build a digital hub for CAMFED Learner Guides — graduates who return to school as peer mentors. It was a critical part of making the project scalable. And it meant we could work with governments to make it a mainstream model that could improve outcomes for marginalized children — girls and boys.

Because that’s the other thing we can’t forget: keeping young people — especially those who are marginalized — at the center of the global education conversation. For example, at the 2024 Yidan Prize Summit, we curated a panel of young learners to speak directly about the issues affecting them right now. This approach — to enable and not impose, and to seek local solutions to local issues — is so important to me. And I’m so excited by the possibilities. We’re already sparking promising conversations and building awareness of the foundation in areas where lasting, positive change is needed most. I look forward to sharing more as our plans develop.



Lucy Lake and Angeline Murimirwa. Photo credit: Kyalo Musyoka/CAMFED



Driving lasting change in education

Dr Peter Materu might have only joined our Advisory Committee in 2024, but he's long been a friend to our foundation. We spoke to Peter about his background in education, becoming an advisor, and how global philanthropic organizations can work together to spur progress.

Can you share a little about your background and what led you to focus on education?

My career began in academia, but a turning point came when I was invited by the World Bank for a short-term assignment at a time when technology was just starting to play a role in education. What began as a hobby — thinking about how to integrate technology into higher education — became a 17-year career. Africa has lagged behind in education access and outcomes, but I saw technology as a way to leapfrog traditional infrastructure challenges and reach more learners.

Why did you decide to become an advisor for the Yidan Prize Foundation?

What drew me in was a strong mission and values alignment. When I visited the foundation and met with Dr Charles CHEN Yidan, I was deeply impressed by his humility and commitment to using his own resources to drive change in education. The path forward isn't always clear, but his belief in the mission and his willingness to take the journey alongside us made it something I wanted to be part of.

What are some key challenges facing education right now?

For me, challenges are opportunities for growth. And I see three which are particularly important to address.

The first is the tension between expanding access and maintaining quality. As we use technology to widen access, the increase in student numbers can make individual attention harder. Africa has seen one of the fastest expansions of education. But who are those we have left behind? This is an ongoing journey.

The second is the traditional mindset in higher education. Many institutions still operate with an inward-looking approach — focusing only on teaching and academic progression rather than seeing themselves as agents of societal transformation. Instead, universities should play an active role in helping young people succeed in life.

Finally, we need resilient learning systems. Covid highlighted how easily education can be disrupted. We need systems that allow learning to continue despite disruptions, such as hybrid learning models.

Why is evidence-based decision-making important in education?

Without data, we can't measure; and if we can't measure, we can't manage. Data is essential for making informed decisions, planning effectively, and preparing for change.

We also need data to tell the story of impact. No single organization can solve education challenges alone — we need to inspire others to join the effort. Having solid evidence helps us do that.

Research also drives innovation. The world is constantly changing, and every policy decision raises new questions: how does this affect education? What adjustments need to be made? Data helps answer these questions.

Unfortunately, using data for decision-making isn't as mainstream as it should be in education. There's a big effort to improve this. But we must ensure data collection benefits the communities providing it. It should be a closed loop: the insights gained should also serve the people and societies they come from.

How can funders and foundations work together to scale education initiatives effectively?

Pooling money under one leader doesn't always work well. Instead, it's more effective when different organizations align around a common mission while maintaining their own approaches. Collaboration across disciplines — whether in research, policy, or practice — creates the biggest impact.

A great example of this is PhET, an interactive science and math simulation project that aligns well with Africa's educational needs. It didn't matter who started it — what mattered was recognizing its value and figuring out how to scale it in various ways.

When I joined the Mastercard Foundation, there was very little support for secondary education in Africa. To address this, we partnered with several other foundations. We shared information and met annually to coordinate efforts, which worked well for several years. However, leadership changes can shift priorities, making sustained impact challenging.

This is why having an anchor organization committed for the long term is critical. Education outcomes are generational; they take 10 – 15 years to materialize.

What is your vision for the future of education?

Education is evolving, but it will always be important. The key will be leveraging technology to make learning more flexible — allowing people to access education from different places at different times. This shift means we should focus on teaching young people how to learn, rather than simply delivering fixed content since knowledge itself is evolving rapidly. We now gain new knowledge every 18 months, and that cycle is getting shorter.

Beyond academic knowledge, we also need to foster ethical leaders committed to improving their communities. At the Mastercard Foundation, we've supported around 40,000 young people. Even if only a third become knowledgeable, ethical leaders with a service mindset, that can create significant change.



Students in Tanzania learning through PhET sims.

Cultivating the next generation of education researchers

Advancing education research means investing in the next generation of scholars — those who will uncover new insights and translate knowledge into meaningful change. We sat down with Professor Stephanie Fryberg, Dr Sameena Hossein, Dr Ramaele Moshoeshe, and Nicole Tan to hear how they're working with our Yidan Prize laureates to shape the future of education.

Creating inclusive classroom cultures

Professor Stephanie Fryberg is leading work to scale a training program for teachers that fosters culturally inclusive growth mindset (CIGM) classroom cultures. Building on our inaugural laureate Professor Carol Dweck's groundbreaking research, these classrooms are designed to improve motivation, learning, and academic success for students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

"I was trying to understand the challenges Native American children faced in the education system, but there wasn't a language for hope and growth," says Stephanie. "Carol's work offered another way to frame and address those issues. I reached out to her, and together, we started thinking about how to adapt growth mindset to fully address racial and social class disparities in education."

Stephanie shifts the focus to fostering sustainable changes in teachers' practices and classroom culture: how teachers talk about learning, how they respond to efforts and mistakes, and how they show that students belong.

"It's not just about helping students change their beliefs. It's also about changing the environment around them," she adds. "We need to redefine and expand the indicators of success, valuing not only academic achievements but also creativity, resilience, personal growth, and community contributions."

With part of Carol's Yidan Prize project funds, Stephanie and her team are developing online training modules that make their evidence-based curriculum widely accessible to educators and researchers across the US and beyond. The scalable, flexible online format makes it easier to equip teachers with practical tools while generating new research insights into the impact of inclusive teaching on student outcomes.

"We want to create learning environments where all students feel acknowledged, valued, and empowered to thrive. By helping teachers recognize the importance of identity, belonging, and cultural responsiveness in learning, we aim to break down barriers that have historically marginalized certain student groups."



"The mission of education should be to help every child maximize their potential, empowering them to grow, dream, and make a meaningful difference in their communities around the world."

Stephanie Fryberg

Photo credit: Michael Rios

Enhancing learning with virtual reality

At Arizona State University's ICAP Center for Teaching and Learning, Dr Sameena Hossein is working with Professor Michelene (Micki) Chi, our 2023 laureate, to explore the role of virtual reality (VR) — looking beyond active learning to how students can use the technology to engage in deeper learning.

"I've always been interested in how students learn, and how they can learn better. One of the challenges in education is that many learning environments remain passive — students simply receive information," Sameena says. "We are using ICAP to shift toward more interactive learning, where students engage more deeply with content, generate new insights, and apply what they've learned."

"VR can enhance student engagement and motivation, but most of the VR environments only engage students in active learning. That means they are simply interacting and manipulating whatever is presented. With ICAP, we can leverage technology to enhance learning outcomes."

"We're introducing constructive or interactive activities outside of VR to see whether students can generate new knowledge based on what they learned," she continues. "For example, are students just observing and taking notes? Or can they change a variable and start using prediction and inference?"

As part of that evaluation, Sameena is also comparing students' understanding after experiencing just the VR to their understanding after a constructive or interactive activity outside of VR. Micki's Yidan Prize project funds have made it possible to explore different VR environments, design new lessons, train educators, and eventually implement VR lessons using the ICAP framework.

"This opens up possibilities for young researchers like me who are interested in how immersive technology can enhance learning behavior. In the future, I see myself bridging the gap between AI and education research to build towards engaging, equitable, and personalized learning experiences."



"Research-backed frameworks like ICAP, along with technology, can open real possibilities to transform education."

Sameena Hossein

Building research capacity in Africa

In Africa, Dr Ramaele Moshoeshoe is leading efforts to support evidence-based policymaking. As Executive Director of Global Education Analytics Institute, he's working to bridge the gap between research and policy through the Africa Fellows in Education Program (AFEP).

"It's widely recognized that Africa has a severe skills gap," explains Ramaele. "Around 90% of students in sub-Saharan Africa are unlikely to reach a basic skills level. Research and policy evaluations exist, but only 3% of global education research comes from Africa — and that small share is dominated by Anglophone countries. We need to build research capacity across the entire continent."

And it's not just about generating research but encouraging its implementation by making it accessible and relevant to policymakers.

"Too often, we push evidence by making studies available — but that isn't enough. We need to create a pull: getting policymakers and stakeholders to demand and apply evidence-based policies. And we must connect highly skilled researchers with those who understand local political dynamics. If we can bridge these groups, we can turn knowledge into action."

Supported by 2021 laureate Professor Eric Hanushek's Yidan Prize project funds, AFEP offers emerging Africa-based researchers training, mentorship, and networking opportunities — helping them generate and promote high-quality, local education research that is deeply embedded in the realities of their communities.

"Ultimately, we want to see more Africa-based researchers deeply embedded in education research. But generating evidence is just the first step — we need local experts with the technical skills to translate research into action, drive implementation, and push for educational reforms," says Ramaele.

Looking ahead, he hopes to see progress from generating evidence to using evidence, as well as stronger networks and partnerships between key organizations and stakeholders across the board coming together to create sustainable, impactful reforms.



"A policy that doesn't align with local politics won't see the light of day. We need people who can influence policy by creating an understanding of what's at stake."

Ramaele Moshoeshoe

Unlocking the foundations of language learning

As part of 2019 laureate Professor Usha Goswami's research team, Nicole Tan is working to help children with developmental language disorder (DLD) improve their language skills. Her work focuses on interventions that use rhythm and melody to strengthen children's grasp of speech patterns.

"I've always wanted to make learning fun for children, particularly for those who often slip through the cracks," she says. "I was drawn to Usha's approach because it focuses on natural aspects of play and childhood while emphasizing the right elements for learning. Our interventions don't make children feel 'different' — they simply enhance the kinds of experiences all children have."

"Take this sentence: *down* at the *vet's* there are *all* kinds of *pets*. We ask children to tap with five fingers on stressed syllables and two fingers on unstressed ones. Research shows that children with DLD often drop unstressed syllables, so we want to help them tune into all aspects of rhythm," explains Nicole.

"That's because rhythm acts as a hidden glue that supports the entire language system. If we can help children develop strong language skills early on, we can set them up for success before they start school."

With brain imaging data and interactive tools, the team is shedding light on how the brain processes language — and how targeted interventions can support children with DLD to unlock their potential. Nicole's approach makes sure that support is embedded in the kinds of natural play any parent or teacher can introduce to a child, making learning both fun and effective.

"Learning difficulties like DLD are simply differences in brain function, not deficiencies. If we treat them as part of the normal spectrum of human variation, we can remove stigma while still providing effective interventions."

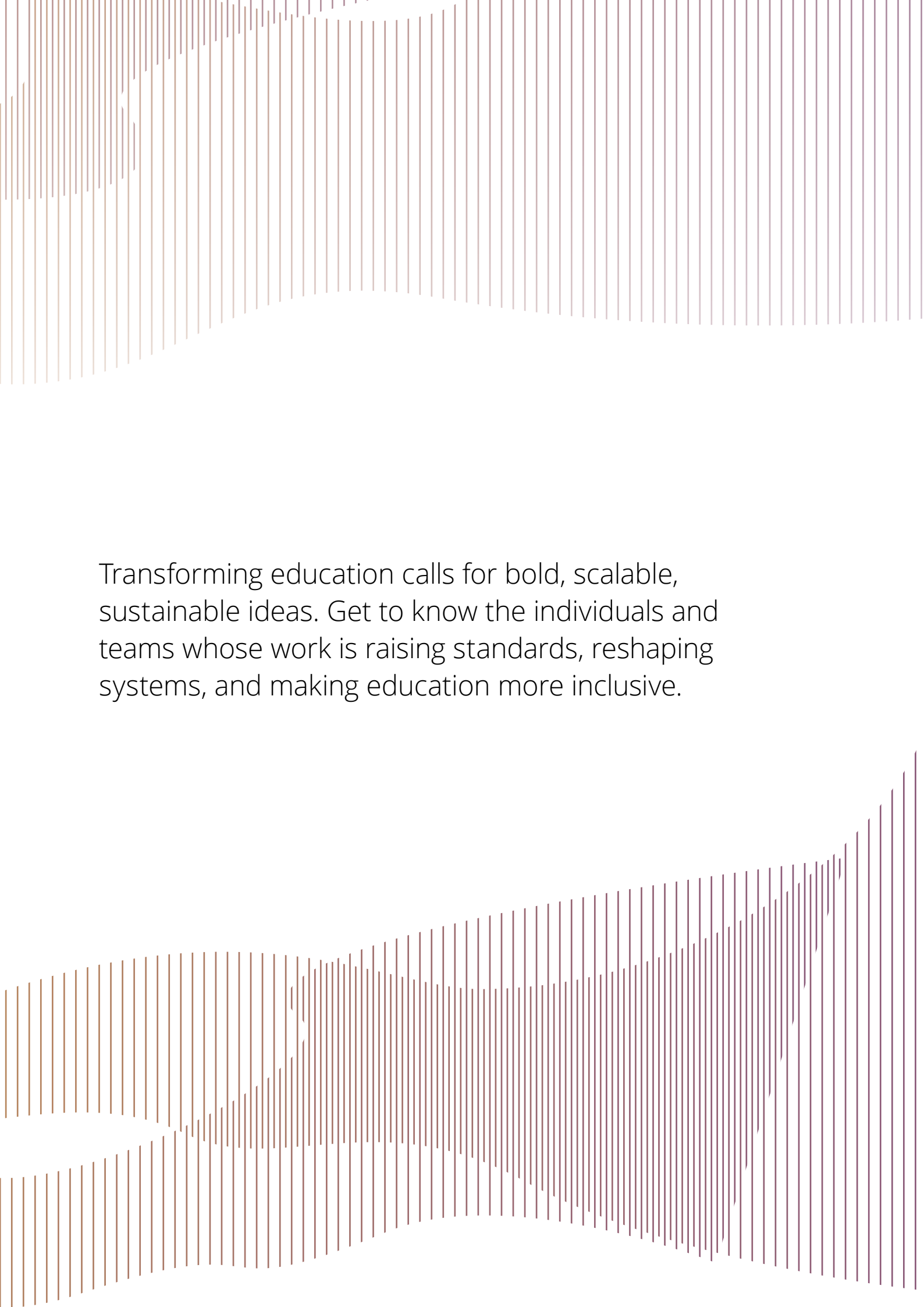


"No child should feel left behind or believe they're incapable just because their learning process looks different from their peers."

Nicole Tan

04

Meet our 2024 laureates



Transforming education calls for bold, scalable,
sustainable ideas. Get to know the individuals and
teams whose work is raising standards, reshaping
systems, and making education more inclusive.



Introducing Professor Wolfgang Lutz

Our 2024 Education Research laureate



“Demographers usually help us understand how our populations evolve and what that means for our future. What Wolfgang has added to this field is understanding the difference that education makes to this.”

Andreas Schleicher

Panel Head, Judging Panel for Education Research, Yidan Prize

With decades of work as a demographer and statistician, Wolfgang Lutz pioneered assessments of education’s impact on sustainable development goals, including health, economic growth, gender equity, and climate resilience.

Before Wolfgang’s work, most models of sustainable development were incomplete. They failed to include education — partly because of a lack of reliable data on human capital. He went on to develop methods to link educational attainment to human capital formation. Those methods have become the foundation for global projections — which now include not just education levels but quality of skills. All of which gives us a statistical picture of the benefits of education across all areas of human life.

In 2011, he founded the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital to broaden the possibilities of demographic analysis. As part of this, he created the Human Capital Data Lab and encouraged staff to focus on multi-dimensional demography. He also convinced the University of Vienna leadership to establish a Department of Demography, focused on developing the next generation of demographic researchers.

He’s made education central to long-term climate and development planning

One of the most influential applications of Wolfgang’s work is in global climate research. His models introduced education as a key variable in the Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSPs) — scenarios the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) uses to explore how societies might change and respond to global warming.



The data shows that education — especially for women — leads to smaller, healthier families, more inclusive economic growth, and a greater capacity to adapt to environmental stress. In short, better education today makes for more resilient futures tomorrow.

His project focuses on regions where education matters most for long-term well-being

With his Yidan Prize project funds, Wolfgang is launching a three-part project focused on Africa and coastal Southeast Asia.

1 In Africa, Wolfgang's team will work alongside the University of Cape Town to train six emerging scholars — three pre-doctoral and three post-doctoral — in how to apply education-focused modeling to their home countries. They'll use real-life data to develop policy scenarios and present their findings in workshops with national decision-makers. These locally grounded scenarios will show, for example, how expanding girls' education or improving teacher training translates into long-term progress in health, gender equality, and economic opportunity. The group also plans to publish a collection of alternative scenarios for all sub-Saharan African countries, working towards establishing a Centre for African Human Capital to continue this work into the future.

2 In Southeast Asia, where many coastal communities face escalating climate risks, the project will focus on how education supports climate adaptation. Wolfgang will partner with Chulalongkorn University in Thailand to host conferences and training workshops — bringing together researchers, policymakers, and climate experts to widen regional understanding of how education builds lasting resilience.

3 To broaden the impact of the project, Wolfgang will also collaborate with colleagues and institutions to create a practical, policy-oriented guide to the demographic methods that underpin their work. This resource will help analysts and governments, especially in lower-income countries, understand how near-term investments in education affect long-term development — and improve the way global progress is measured through tools like the Human Development Index and Sustainable Development Goal indicators.



Introducing Professor Mark Jordans, Marwa Zahr, and Luke Stannard

Our 2024 Education Development laureates



“Through its innovative, iterative, and collaborative approach, ‘Can’t Wait to Learn’ demonstrates that educational technology designed and deployed thoughtfully, taking into account the realities of the most vulnerable, can be a very powerful means of access to quality and equitable learning opportunities for the most marginalized children.”

Dorothy K. Gordon

Panel Head, Judging Panel for Education Development, Yidan Prize

At War Child Alliance, the ‘Can’t Wait to Learn’ team, represented by Professor Mark Jordans, Marwa Zahr, and Luke Stannard, is working to close learning gaps for children in some of the world’s most challenging settings.

It’s a team that puts collaboration, evidence, and sustainability at the core of its work. Mark leads global research and development at War Child Alliance, helping evaluate and adapt the organization’s programming, including ‘Can’t Wait to Learn’. Marwa brings her experience as a teacher, counselor, and humanitarian program lead to work directly with educators, ministries, and local partners. And Luke, also a former teacher, draws from years of humanitarian work to manage the program across nine countries and support long-term, cross-sector partnerships.

Conflict, displacement, and crisis have left 200 million children in need of urgent access to education

‘Can’t Wait to Learn’ is co-designed with children, educators, and local artists to help bridge that gap and give children the tools to keep learning even when schools aren’t open. It can run online or offline on different devices, including solar-powered tablets. And it uses play-based learning through games contextualized to their local culture and language.

As well as literacy and numeracy, the games model self-regulation, collaboration, and problem-solving. In some formats, learners take charge of their own spaces by planting gardens or running a small business — merging life skills with classroom subjects.



But it's not a one-size-fits-all solution. The platform is adapted to different contexts in deep partnership with national governments and local partners, including ministries, NGOs, and teacher networks, supporting existing education systems. That emphasis on local collaboration has made it part of the official education response in several countries, which has helped it reach more than 205,000 children so far.

The research shows it works — and improves lives, not just learning

From the start, the team behind 'Can't Wait to Learn' has committed to rigorous evaluation.

Research in Uganda showed the equivalent of 3 – 5 months of additional learning compared to formal schooling. A study in Lebanon found significant progress in Arabic numeracy among Syrian refugee children aged 10 – 14 who had never previously attended school. Across studies, girls — who are often the first to lose access to education — showed particularly strong gains.

The team's Yidan Prize funded project focuses on scaling in two crisis-affected countries

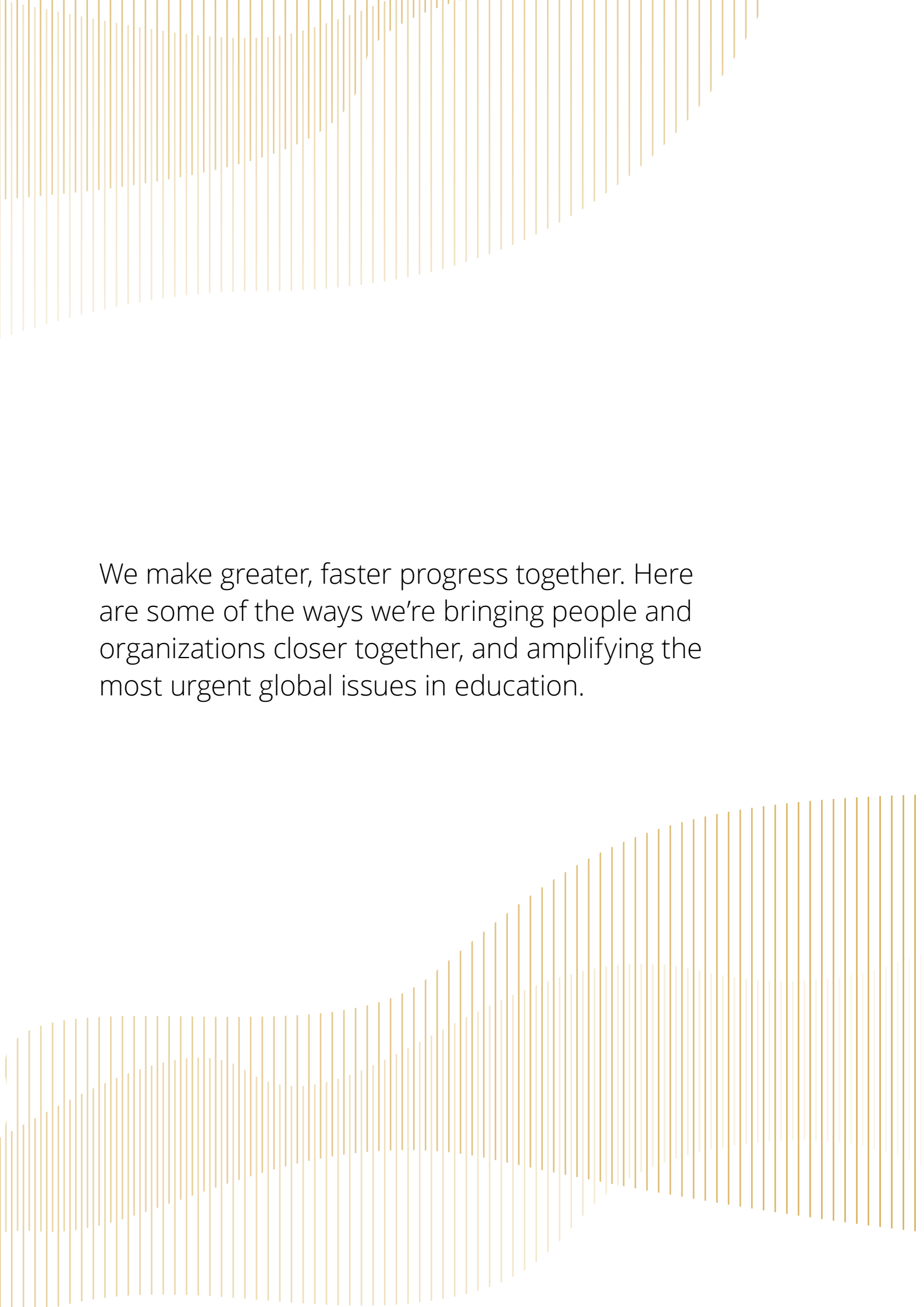
In Lebanon, ongoing conflict and refugee displacement have pushed education infrastructure to the limit. In this setting, 'Can't Wait to Learn' will be rolled out in over 100 learning centers, supported by the Ministry of Education and implemented through local partners. The team will also work directly with educators to understand their needs and develop a demand-based implementation model that can evolve with the context.

In Uganda, the approach builds on government leadership to embed 'Can't Wait to Learn' into formal systems, especially in regions most affected by neighboring conflict and learning poverty. A roundtable with ministry officials, donors, and community stakeholders will support the creation of a national strategy to scale up equitably.

The project also looks beyond 'what works' to 'how it works in the real world'. In Lebanon, the team will carry out research to explore optimization and improve cost-effectiveness of 'Can't Wait to Learn', hoping to inform and contribute to similar programs in the education in emergencies sector.

05

Community and partnerships



We make greater, faster progress together. Here are some of the ways we're bringing people and organizations closer together, and amplifying the most urgent global issues in education.

Council of Laureates

Our laureates are some of the world's brightest minds — educators, neuroscientists, psychologists, economists, and statisticians.

As a council, they are committed to taking concrete actions to close the inequality gap in education around the world. They aspire to build new bridges between the worlds of research and practice to make education more responsive to the challenges of the 21st century, and more inclusive for the millions of learners who are marginalized by today's systems.



Professor Carol S. Dweck

Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology, Stanford University

2017 Education Research laureate

Carol's work shows that, in the right environment, students can improve their intellectual abilities, raise their level of attainment, and open doors for the future. Creating these growth mindsets calls for a united effort between school settings and family life — with teachers perhaps playing the biggest role.



Vicky Colbert

Founder and Director, Fundación Escuela Nueva

2017 Education Development laureate

Vicky's work has demonstrated — first in Colombia, now around the globe — that with an innovative approach, under-resourced remote rural schools can develop active, cooperative, and personalized learning environments and increase equity. Environments where children learn to learn, and where a new role of the teacher as facilitator and guide can be promoted.



Professor Larry Hedges

Chairman, Department of Statistics, Northwestern University

2018 Education Research laureate

Larry's goal is to help transform the loose-knit study of education into a more rigorous science — shedding new light on subjects like class size and school funding. Larry sees three ways to strengthen educational research: creating rigorous methods for research; training researchers; and improving how research findings are shared.



Professor Anant Agarwal

Founder, edX; Chief Academic Officer, 2U

2018 Education Development laureate

edX is the global online learning platform that exists to help learners everywhere unlock their potential. edX was founded by Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2012 to make the world's best education available to everyone. Today, as a 2U, Inc. company (Nasdaq: TWOU), edX connects over 78 million ambitious learners with the skills, knowledge, and support to achieve their goals.



Professor Usha Goswami

Professor of Cognitive Developmental Neuroscience,
University of Cambridge

2019 Education Research laureate

Usha's neuroscience research suggests that rhythm is the hidden factor in how children learn and process speech. Her work has the potential to reveal the origins of developmental language disorders, and is already laying the groundwork for more effective ways to tackle screening and intervention.



Sir Fazle Hasan Abed

Founder, BRAC

2019 Education Development laureate

The late Sir Fazle championed education (particularly play-based learning) as a force for change. He founded BRAC in 1972, and today it's supported over 15 million children across eight countries in Asia and Africa, becoming a world leader in developing and implementing cost-effective, evidence-based programs.



Professor Carl Wieman

Professor Emeritus of Physics and Graduate School of Education,
Stanford University

2020 Education Research laureate

As well as studying the effectiveness of teaching interventions, Carl launched a STEM learning platform, PhET Interactive Simulations, at the University of Colorado Boulder. So far, the PhET project has delivered more than 1.1 billion simulations in 121 languages to learners of physics, chemistry, mathematics, earth sciences, and biology.



Lucy Lake

Former CEO & Executive Advisor, CAMFED

2020 Education Development laureate

Lucy and Angeline Murimirwa were our first team laureates. They have dedicated their careers to showing that education is the foundation of social justice. The CAMFED Association network they started is now more than a quarter of a million members strong, and they work with clients in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia.



Angeline Murimirwa

CEO, CAMFED

2020 Education Development laureate

Angeline was among the first Zimbabwean girls to get a CAMFED scholarship. Since then, she has steadfastly worked towards a world where women are champions from within the system, advocating for critical investments and driving reform, and making sure school systems are sensitive to the realities of those left behind.



Professor Eric A. Hanushek

Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow and Professor, Hoover Institution of Stanford University

2021 Education Research laureate

Eric's research has inspired the growth and development of a new disciplinary subfield: the economics of education. With his colleagues, he's shown that cross-country differences in economic growth are almost completely determined by the skills of the population.



Dr Rukmini Banerji

CEO, Pratham Education Foundation

2021 Education Development laureate

Under Rukmini's leadership, Pratham has focused on understanding and solving the problem of why children are in school, but not learning. Her team's 'Teaching at the Right Level' program has been used by many of India's state governments to deal with the learning crisis.



Dr Linda Darling-Hammond
President and CEO, Learning Policy Institute
2022 Education Research laureate

Linda has devoted her career to understanding how to create empowering learning opportunities for all children, especially those furthest from opportunity. Her work answers questions around how children learn and how best to teach them, as well as how policy and practice can ensure all students have access to well-prepared educators.



Professor Yongxin Zhu
Founder, New Education Initiative
2022 Education Development laureate

Professor Zhu founded the New Education Initiative in 2000 and has led its development ever since. Its systemic concepts and methods have helped to create school systems that empower teachers and help students achieve well-being through a growth mindset for learning at very low cost.



Professor Michelene (Micki) Chi
Regents Professor & Dorothy Bray Endowed Professor of Science and Teaching, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University
2023 Education Research laureate

Micki's work forms some of the backbone of modern cognitive science. She analyzes and organizes theories about teaching and learning — deepening our understanding of how students learn. Her ICAP framework offers educators a simple yet practical method to foster quality engagement in the classroom.



Shai Reshef
Founder and President, University of the People
2023 Education Development laureate

Flexible, adaptive, inventive, and low cost. These principles are at the heart of Shai's vision for University of the People, the first tuition-free, non-profit, American-accredited online university. Having founded the university in 2009, he is determined to ensure that every qualified high school student around the world has access to quality higher education.



Professor Wolfgang Lutz

Distinguished Emeritus Scholar, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis

2024 Education Research laureate

Wolfgang's work as a statistician and demographer has helped shape our understanding of how education underpins human potential and well-being. Thanks to his work, education is central to global efforts to reduce risk and increase capacity to adapt to climate change.



Professor Mark Jordans

Director — Research and Development, War Child Alliance

2024 Education Development laureate

Mark leads the research team at War Child Alliance to develop an evidence-based care system consisting of education, mental health, and child protection interventions — including 'Can't Wait to Learn' — to improve the well-being of children affected by armed conflict.



Marwa Zahr

Implementation and Practitioner Lead — Can't Wait to Learn, War Child Alliance

2024 Education Development laureate

With the games development team, Marwa works with communities to co-create content for 'Can't Wait to Learn' as well as helping teachers, ministry officials, and local partners to own, adapt, and use the personalized digital learning intervention effectively.



Luke Stannard

Program Director — Can't Wait to Learn, War Child Alliance

2024 Education Development laureate

Luke drives the strategy for 'Can't Wait to Learn', ensuring it remains evidence-based, adaptable, and accessible across diverse contexts. As well as ministries, he brings together national and international NGOs, donors, private businesses, universities, and local communities to deliver humanitarian and development projects at scale.



Teachers at a reading workshop held at Tuanjie Street Elementary School in Jiaozuo, China.
This illustration is based on a photo by New Education Initiative.

Yidan Prize funded projects

Laureate	Project	Objective
Professor Carol S. Dweck	Long-term effects of growth mindsets	Build a robust data bank to track the long-term impact of growth mindsets across the US
	Culturally inclusive growth mindsets (CIGM)	Develop an openly accessible platform to transform classrooms and teacher mindsets through CIGM
Vicky Colbert	The 'New School' model	Develop an online teacher training campus and expand reach to thousands more teachers in remote areas in Colombia and beyond
Professor Larry Hedges	Education research design and methodology	Reshape the design of education research in the post-pandemic era to support evidence-based policy and practice in education
Professor Anant Agarwal	MicroBachelors® programs	Deliver immediately transferable skills through an online learning platform while providing a pathway towards pursuing a full bachelor's degree
Professor Usha Goswami	The neural bases of language learning	Expand studies that use brain imaging and language tasks to understand how children with developmental language disorders differ in language learning, and how to best support them
Sir Fazle Hasan Abed	Play-based learning solutions	Develop home-based 'Play Labs' daycare project in Bangladesh, mainstream humanitarian Play Labs in Uganda, and expand Play Labs co-located in government schools in Tanzania
	'Pashe Acchi'	Reach parents of young children in Bangladesh through phone calls to support early learning and development during the pandemic
Professor Carl Wieman	PhET Global Initiatives	Expand PhET Interactive Simulations, an online STEM learning platform, and launch a Fellows program to support teacher leaders in Africa and Latin America

Laureate	Project	Objective
Lucy Lake and Angeline Murimirwa	CAMFED Learner Guide Hub	Develop a digital hub that improves training and supports CAMFED's Learner Guides, further scaling the program to keep girls in school across Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe
Professor Eric A. Hanushek	Africa Fellows in Education Program	Develop a fellowship program for researchers in Africa to increase capacity and support local experts in influencing educational policy decision-making
Dr Rukmini Banerji	Pratham's 'Leap Forward' approach	Ensure more children in India receive quality early childhood education to build strong learning foundations, reducing the need for catch-up interventions down the road
Dr Linda Darling-Hammond	Teacher education for deeper learning and equity	Connect preparation programs, school districts, researchers, and policymakers to put evidence-based, student-centered, equitable teaching at the heart of teacher preparation and policy
Professor Yongxin Zhu	Teacher development and well-being	Develop New Education Initiative's online teacher training capacity and expand the organization's reach to provide quality education in remote, rural areas in China
Professor Micheline Chi	ICAP in STEMM education	Support educators in STEMM (science, technology, engineering, math, and medicine) classrooms to improve learning outcomes using the ICAP framework
Shai Reshef	University of the People programs	Expand University of the People to offer tuition-free university education to more students who face financial, geographical, cultural, or political barriers
Professor Wolfgang Lutz	Human capital for sustainable development	Demonstrate the long-term effects of investing in education in Africa and vulnerable coastal regions for sustainable development and better adaptive capacity to climate change
Professor Mark Jordans, Marwa Zahr, and Luke Stannard	Can't Wait to Learn' programs	Scale up 'Can't Wait to Learn' in Lebanon and Uganda, while testing and optimizing its intervention to meet urgent demands in crisis situations

Accelerating progress through collaboration and community

Partnerships are fundamental to our mission. Our active engagement in the global education and philanthropy communities helps expand access to evidence, unlock new collaborations, and amplify the impact of our laureates' work. Throughout 2024, we've strengthened our position as a catalyst for change — bringing together leading thinkers, policymakers, and practitioners to spark, share, and embed powerful ideas in education.

Preparing for the future of education

This year, we explored creative thinking, systems change, and the evolving needs of learners in a rapidly changing world. Our co-hosted conference with the OECD themed 'Learning in a changing world' was a landmark event, bringing together practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to discuss creative and critical thinking as key competencies for the future.

As an official content contributor to UNESCO's **Futures of Education report**, we also reinforced our commitment to shaping global conversations and advancing evidence-driven solutions.

We further built on this theme through high-profile forums, such as the UNESCO International Forum on the Futures of Education and the IEFG Asia Circle webinar on The Learner of the Future. Our community contributed insights on transforming education to encompass broader skills and mindsets — making sure learners develop resilience, adaptability, and social-emotional competencies.

Strengthening connections across education ecosystems

Through our partnerships, we continue to bridge research, policy, and practice. Events like the BE² (Building Evidence in Education) meeting in London, the Global Partnership for Education board meetings, and the Transformative Education Symposium — organized by CAMFED and the REAL Centre — helped bring together diverse expertise to address challenges in foundational learning, gender equity, and education system transformation.

Our laureate community is also deepening engagements across geographies. An example is the growing partnership between Dr Rukmini Banerji and SUMMA, which culminated in her keynote at SUMMA's Evidence for Equity and Educational Transformation conference in Chile. By facilitating conversations between experts from African, South Asian, and Latin American countries, we're enabling cross-regional learning and local adaptation of high-impact solutions.

Creating new opportunities for impact

Our reach continues to grow, offering fresh platforms for education leaders to share their work and catalyze change. In 2024, we engaged in critical discussions on education policy and philanthropy at gatherings like the Asian University for Women Symposium on Equity in Education, the African Women Leadership Summit, and many UNESCO-led forums.

This momentum has also helped shine a spotlight on our laureates, and we're committed to fostering the network and visibility of our prize community to further accelerate progress. In 2024, we were delighted to celebrate CAMFED Zambia's recognition with a UNESCO award and Angeline Murimirwa's receipt of the Africa Education Medal.

At our core, we stand for building a more inclusive, innovative, and interconnected education ecosystem — one that creates opportunities, unlocks partnerships, and ultimately improves learning for all.



Dr Rukmini Banerji at SUMMA's Evidence for Equity and Educational Transformation conference. Photo credit: SUMMA



Michelle Zhang (middle), our Senior Manager of Global Engagement, at the fourth annual meeting of the Global Education Coalition. Photo credit: UNESCO/Cyril Bailleul

06

Our year in events



2024 Yidan Prize Conference

Learning in a changing world: evidence, innovation, and creative thinking in education

In June, we were delighted to welcome educators, innovators, researchers, and policymakers to our 2024 Yidan Prize Conference co-hosted with the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

Also marking the launch of OECD's PISA Volume III report, together we explored themes of creativity, innovation, and embedding research in practice. This is the first time the OECD has assessed creative thinking, exploring how well students around the globe can come up with, improve, and evaluate new ideas.

Keynotes and panel discussions explored how schools and education systems can better foster creativity and critical thinking — and use strong evidence to make decisions. We looked closely at teacher training, sharing ideas on how teachers can better develop their own creative and research skills. Our panel experts also discussed practical ways to close the gap between research, classroom practices, and government policies.

In an engaging working group, we focused on 'knowledge brokers': individuals and organizations who help connect research and practice in education. Session participants collaborated directly, exchanging practical examples, sharing challenges, and discussing the best ways for education systems to support brokers and make evidence accessible and useful.

Wrapping up the conference, OECD's Tia Loukkola invited each participant to identify one good idea they could take forward. She reminded us that, while we need high-quality research evidence, real change happens when we work together across classrooms, research institutions, and government departments.



**Watch highlights from our
2024 Yidan Prize Conference**

“Our rapidly changing world has many problems: poverty, inequality, conflict, and climate change defy easy answers. Creative minds will help us imagine solutions and build them.”

Dr Charles CHEN Yidan



2024 Yidan Prize Awards Ceremony



Each December, it is our privilege and pleasure to introduce our community to our new laureates.

As Dr Charles CHEN Yidan introduced Professor Wolfgang Lutz, Professor Mark Jordans, Marwa Zahr, and Luke Stannard, he noted how their work moves us closer to a brighter, fairer world, strongly reflecting how education is the driving force for social progress.



Watch highlights from our Awards Ceremony



2024 Yidan Prize Summit

When the only thing that's certain is uncertainty, it's vital that we ask ourselves: how does education adapt, thrive, and deliver what learners need to face any future? At our annual Yidan Prize Summit, we brought together our global education community to explore this theme.

Throughout the day, our laureates and guests explored practical ideas to support resilience in classrooms, support teachers under pressure, and develop school systems that can adapt to unpredictability. Conversations spanned from the role of technology and AI in education to addressing the unique challenges faced by vulnerable learners worldwide.

Lucy Lake, our Director of Global Engagement and herself a Yidan Prize laureate, closed the Summit by reflecting on key themes from the day:

Resilience is essential but cannot replace systemic change. Students and educators shouldn't be expected to cope endlessly with difficult circumstances. Instead, we must reshape education systems to create conditions where they can thrive.

Relevance and agency matter deeply. Sharing examples from CAMFED's work with marginalized girls in Africa, Lucy explained that when young people see their experiences reflected in their education, they feel valued and empowered — key factors for growing resilience and confidence.

Creative thinking boosts resilience. Referencing the latest OECD PISA findings presented during our joint conference, Lucy explained how creativity helps students build the adaptability needed in a rapidly changing world.

Technology can play a positive role. Discussions showed many examples where digital learning platforms such as 'Can't Wait to Learn' supported continued learning during crises, from pandemic closures to situations of displacement and conflict.

Communities build resilience through networks.

Lucy highlighted the power of peer support, collaborative learning methods, and ongoing networks that help students stay connected and community-oriented after school and university.

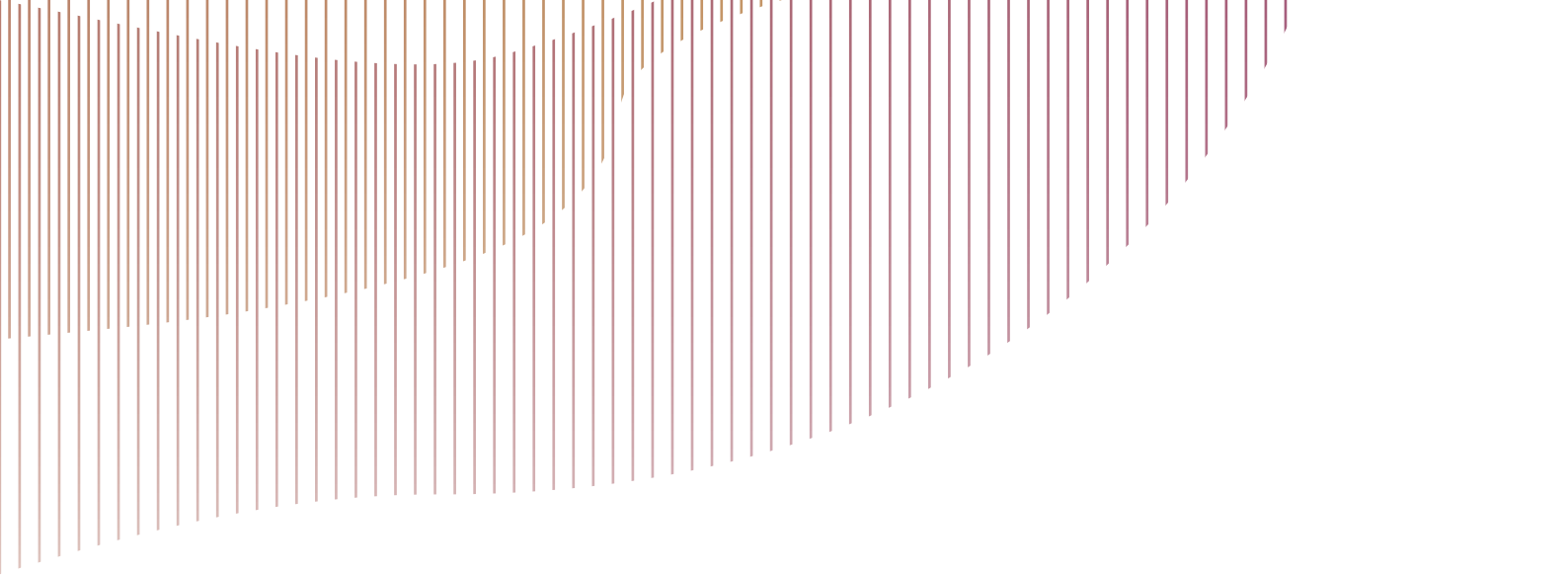


Read global perspectives from our 2024 Yidan Prize Summit

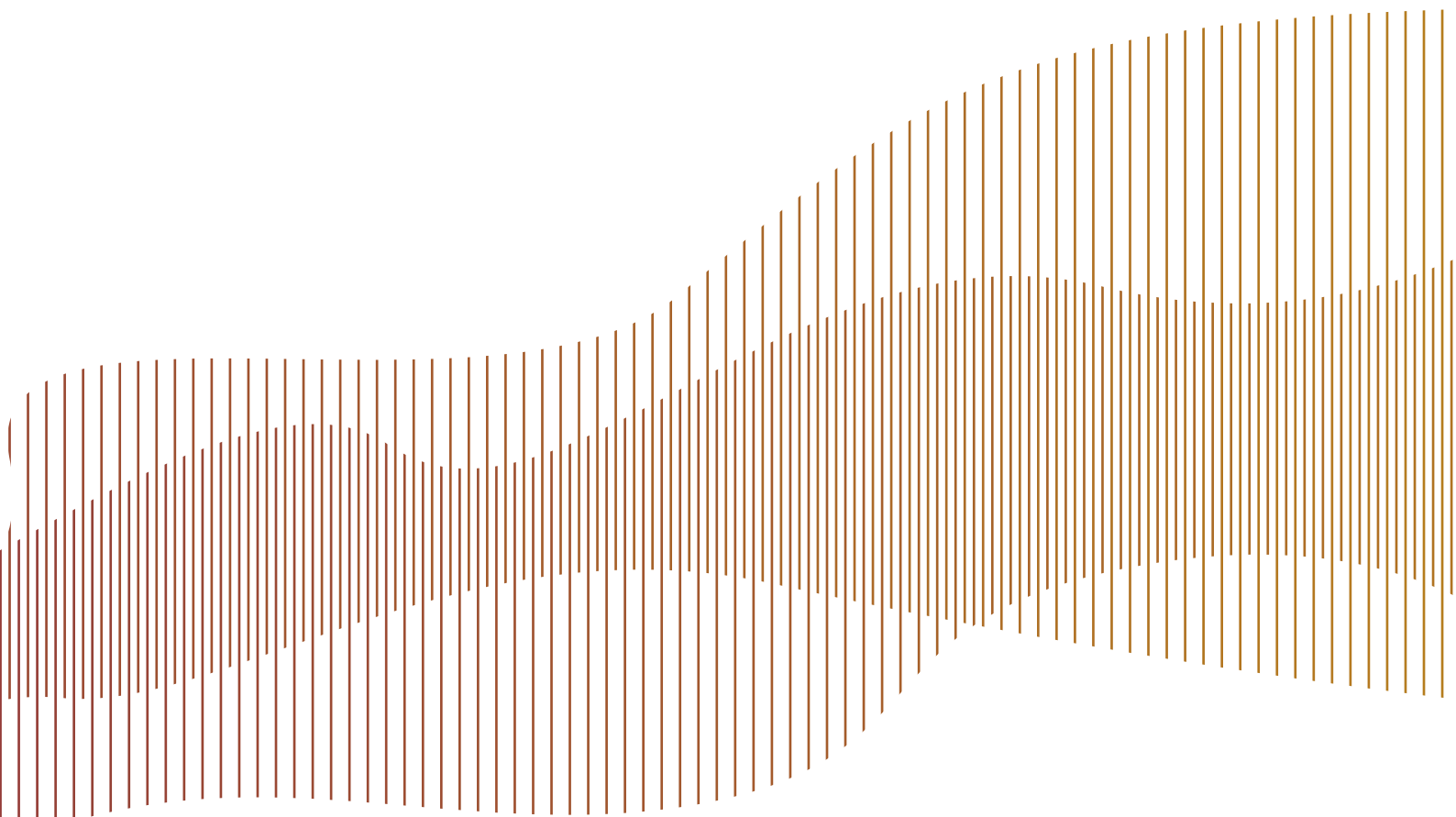


07

Looking forward

A series of vertical lines of varying heights and colors (ranging from light yellow to dark purple) that create a textured, abstract background at the top of the page.

Reflection is key to growth. Here, we revisit our steps
to take more forward.



Three things we learned from supporting projects

The best path for long-term, sustainable systems change is through government partnerships

We see that clearly in BRAC's work in Tanzania. The team secured buy-in from government bodies who committed to BRAC's early childhood development (ECD) programs. The government approved, adopted, and rolled out play-based learning curriculum across the country. And working with both BRAC University's Institute of Education Development and the government, the team developed the national curriculum for early childhood education.

BRAC also knows that government ownership can make sure a program continues in the long run. In 2023, after multiple site visits and with enough evidence of the ECD programs' success, BRAC handed over 30 ECD centers to the management of Tanzania's Ministry of Community Development, Gender, Women and Special Groups. The transfer of ownership is what continued to support BRAC's ECD programs in Tanzania beyond the Yidan Prize project funds.

Partnering with governments can also take the form of capacity building and strengthening existing infrastructure. In Haryana, India, Pratham Education Foundation supports the Women and Child Development Department and the School Education Department to strengthen preschool education activities. The Pratham team facilitates content development, capacity building, creating measurement and monitoring systems, and implementing the program.

Pratham also organizes workshops for its central leadership and implementation teams, ensuring they have the knowledge and advocacy skills for building partnerships with state governments. And that components of key programs on the ground are aligned with national policies.

Unrestricted funding helps us adapt to change as it comes

When an organization has the option to direct funds to where they see the biggest pressure points, they often use some to shore up their wider capabilities at the same time as pressing ahead with projects.

Fundación Escuela Nueva (FEN) founder Vicky Colbert chose to split her Yidan Prize project funds across various streams, including expanding Renueva — a virtual campus that serves as both a remote teacher training hub and community networking source. Though it launched before the pandemic, investing in Renueva put FEN in a strong position to respond when the Colombian National Ministry for Education came calling for help in 2020. Originally, the plan was to train 1,000 teachers in remote areas, and in 2021, FEN added 1,200 more.

Involving the whole community puts interventions in context to address real issues

People closest to the challenges are best placed to develop effective solutions that enable lasting change. And they can better navigate obstacles that might not be obvious from the outside.

We see this in the work of CAMFED when launching the Learner Guide Hub, a digital platform that improves training and support for Learner Guides across five countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Each country poses unique challenges to implementing technology. For example, while Zambia has 5G connectivity, many people in rural areas don't have access to electricity to charge their phones. Ongoing drought has also severely reduced water levels in the hydroelectric dams that power the country's electricity lines, prolonging power cuts. In Malawi, the infrastructure exists, but the high cost of data is often a barrier.

CAMFED worked with Learner Guides, trainers, and local IT experts to understand the rural contexts and design the Hub with these challenges in mind. That led to making improvements in CAMFED Association district centers, including setting up solar power facilities in Zimbabwe, uninterruptible power supplies in Ghana, and buying more IT equipment. Now the Hub is more accessible, and Guides and CAMFED Association members can use these facilities to study, apply for education and work, and connect with each other.



Photo credit: BRAC



Photo credit: CAMFED/Christopher Loades

Catalyzing change for a brighter future

Throughout this report, you can see the power of our foundation's community — growing more diverse as we welcome more laureates each year.

Over eight years, we've deepened our roots and spread our branches, establishing a solid foundation while continually extending our reach. These fresh perspectives and innovative approaches help drive our shared mission of creating a better world through education.

We're here to foster meaningful connections between laureates

When we introduce laureates to each other and the wider community, we aim to create strategic partnerships that spark collaboration and amplify impact. By bringing together diverse expertise and experiences, we're working collectively toward the greater goal of transforming education — not just in isolated pockets but across entire frameworks and structures.

We see ourselves as a catalyst for systems change

We want to strengthen our positive influence on mindsets and consistently reinforce the belief that education is inextricably linked to a brighter future. This isn't just about funding projects — it's about changing how people think about education's role in society and its power to transform lives.

As we look ahead to milestone events, we reflect on our collective achievements

We're already keenly anticipating the 2025 Yidan Prize Conference and preparing for our 10th anniversary in 2026. These moments offer opportunities to celebrate how far we've come, evaluate our progress, and set ambitious new goals that will guide our next phase of work.

None of our work would be possible without the dedication of our global community — our board directors, advisors, judges, laureates, and partners. And as we welcome Bruce Au as our Secretary-General in 2025, we'll keep nurturing collaborations and solutions that bring us closer to a brighter future. After all, we are stronger together.



Play leaders with children playing freely outside a Humanitarian Play Lab in Uganda.
This illustration is based on a photo by BRAC.

08

Acknowledgments



Emeritus members

Our board directors, advisors, and judges remain a central part of our community, even as they step away from their roles at the Yidan Prize Foundation — here's who they are.

Board of Directors

Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands
Founder and Director, Number 5 Foundation

Advisory Committee

Dr Manzoor Ahmed
Professor Emeritus, BRAC University

Professor Cheng Kai-ming
Professor Emeritus, the University of Hong Kong

Marc S. Tucker
President Emeritus and Distinguished Senior Fellow,
The National Centre on Education and the Economy
(NCEE)

Judging Committee

Professor Bruce M. Alberts
Emeritus Chancellor's Leadership Chair in
Biochemistry and Biophysics for Science and
Education, the University of California, San Francisco

Professor Paul Chu Ching-wu
Professor of Physics, T. L. L. Temple Chair of Science,
Founding Director and Chief Scientist, Texas Center
for Superconductivity, University of Houston

Dr Steven Cohen
Professor in the Practice of Public Affairs, School of
International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

Professor Gerd Gigerenzer
Director Emeritus, Max Planck Institute for Human
Development

Dr Allan E. Goodman
President Emeritus, the Institute of International
Education

Professor Ju-Ho Lee
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education,
Republic of Korea

Ruben Vardanyan
Social entrepreneur, impact investor,
and venture philanthropist

Partners

We offer our heartfelt thanks to the people and organizations whose generous support helps drive our mission.

Honorary Investment Advisor

John Lo

Chief Financial Officer, Tencent Group

Honorary Investment Advisor

Tsang Wai-yip

Group Financial Controller, Tencent Group

Honorary Legal Advisor

Richard Pu

Joint General Counsel, Tencent Group

Honorary Auditor

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)

yidanprize.org



@yidanprize



一丹奖