



**GLOBAL
SCHOOLS
FORUM**

ANNUAL REPORT

2020-2021



CONTENTS

- 3 About Global Schools Forum
- 5 Letter from the Chief Executive Officer
- 6 Year at a Glance
- 7 Our Work
 - 7 – Learning & Development
 - 8 – Policy & Partnerships
 - 9 – Impact & Innovation
- 11 Our Impact
- 12 Organisational Development
- 13 Our Board
- 14 Our Members



Front page photo: Christel House
Photo (left): Edify

ABOUT GLOBAL SCHOOLS FORUM

Global Schools Forum works to strengthen global education through supporting non-state schools in developing countries who serve children from low-income backgrounds. We are a membership organisation united by a common vision of a world in which all children are able to access quality education.

OUR WORK

1. We create opportunities for our members to collaborate and share expertise, knowledge and best practice - and connect them to policy makers, funders, and other innovators.
2. We support education entrepreneurs to test and scale innovative approaches, and contribute to stronger education ecosystems nationally and globally.
3. We protect and enhance the policy, financing and operational space for non-state education to support national education systems and priorities.
4. We strengthen the evidence base on non-state education, and promote research uptake.



Photo: Building Tomorrow

LETTER FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Dear Global Schools Forum Supporter,

Welcome to our Annual Report, where we reflect on our year from September 2020 to August 2021 and share some exciting updates for the coming year.

We have had an eventful and action-packed year that culminated in Global Schools Forum spinning out from Ark, the organisation that has incubated us since inception, and being established as an independent registered charity. This is an important milestone for GSF, recognising that we have reached a point at which we can sustain ourselves and thrive as an independent entity.

Over these last few years, we have experienced rapid growth, built a tight-knit community of members, secured multi-year funding, and established our reputation as the go-to organisation for non-state education. We have many people and organisations to thank for their important role in backing us to get to this point. First and foremost, Ark for all their support in incubating and helping to grow GSF - we would not have been able to get to this point without them, and additionally, our wider set of funders including IDP Foundation Inc., Imaginable Futures, Jacobs Foundation, UBS Optimus Foundation, Vitol Foundation, and (the former) Pearson Affordable Learning Fund.

Our independence follows the appointment of a new board of trustees to govern the charity in August 2020. After a global search, and with significant engagement and input from members, we are thrilled that eight new trustees have joined us, bringing with them deep expertise in education alongside regional perspectives from South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and South America.

We welcomed several new people to the GSF team, significantly enhancing our ability to deliver strong programmes for our members and allowing us to engage more substantively to support the non-state schooling sector through our wider work. And we welcomed six fantastic new members to the GSF community, ending our year with 64 members that collectively run or support over 30,000 schools.

As we grow, we will continue to focus on ensuring that all children are able to access quality education, and supporting our member organisations to meet those needs.

With Covid-19 having compounded existing problems in accessing quality learning across many low and middle-income countries, we have sought ways to provide our members with ongoing opportunities to learn from one another and to collaboratively find scalable solutions to shared problems. We were pleased that 85 percent of our members said they feel better connected to a network of people that can support them to improve the quality of their provision and 83 percent agreeing that GSF provides relevant and practical learning opportunities for their organisation.

As we spin-out, GSF recommit itself to step up our work to support the non-state education sector to tackle the world's learning crisis.

We are excited to see how we can support the diffusion of innovations and can support them in the pathway to scale. This includes launching the GSF Learning Labs, which will support and fund members to test, evaluate and scale educational innovations; supporting our members to work more effectively and systematically with governments; establishing regional partnerships where we have strong clusters of members; and supporting a new generation of education entrepreneurs.

Thank you for supporting our work and being part of GSF's journey!

Best wishes,

Aashti

YEAR AT A GLANCE

2020/21 was a transformative year for GSF with a significant number of new appointments to the board and staff, intense preparations for our spin-out from Ark, and increased engagement with, and output for, our members.

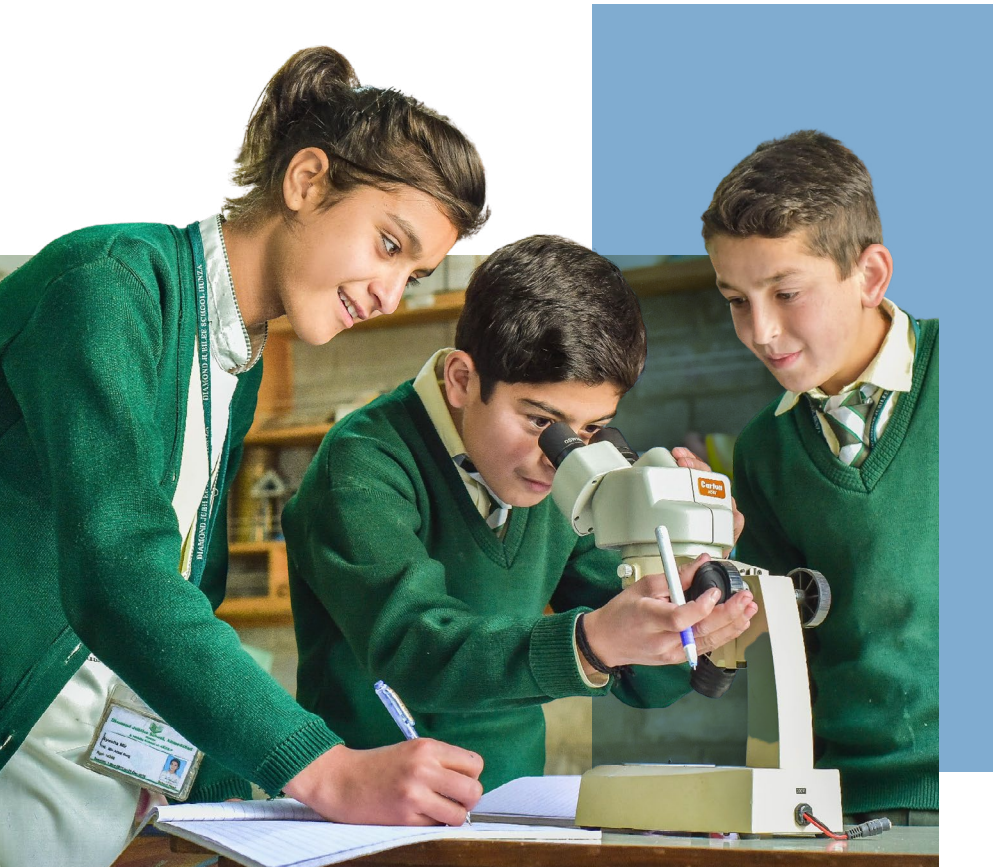


Photo: Aga Khan Education Services

Strengthening our organisation to better serve children

We spun out from Ark and became an independent charity.

Following a global search we appointed eight new members to our [Board of Trustees](#), including member representatives.

We expanded our team – welcoming Kavita Rajagopalan as Programme Director, Alina Lipcan as Director of Impact and Innovation, Joel Mullan as Head of Policy and Communications, and Catarina Gomes as Head of Operations and Strategy.

Following a major investment by funders, we launched a new Impact and Innovation programme that will see Global Schools Forum support and fund member organisations to test, evaluate and scale educational innovations.

We welcomed six new members - Aga Khan Education Services, Edfin Microfinance Bank, Edify, Instill Education, MAIA and Smart Start.

We increased member engagement – conducting deep dive and focus group discussions to inform GSF's work with more than half of our members.

Enhancing support for the non-state education sector

Over three days in October 2020, we hosted a virtual Annual Meeting on the theme *Making Connections Matter*. The Annual Meeting was attended by 41 of GSF's member organisations and brought together 175 educators, funders, policy makers and other ecosystem partners.

We worked with the Jacobs Foundation as a Challenge Partner for the “Scalable Innovations for Blended Learning” track at their Solveathon. Three of our four participating members were recognised for developing innovative solutions during the conference, including Rising Academies Network who won the Grand Innovation Prize worth over \$200,000.

GSF's learning offers moved to a completely virtual format over the past year. Our 16 learning modules were attended by over 450 participants and we ended the year with an average net promoter score of 72 ('Excellent').

We made nearly 100 connections for our members – introducing them to other members or to other partners in the education ecosystem, and helping to facilitate new collaborations and partnerships.

We published three policy reports on (i) the impact of Covid-19 on the non-state education sector in LMICs; (ii) the legal basis of the Abidjan Principles and the Right to Education; and (iii) education financing.

We launched a new briefing series to inform policy and practice. Our briefings will combine the latest research and evidence with insights from practitioners, parents and policymakers in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Through our Learning and Development practice we provide opportunities for our community of members to connect, collaborate and learn from one another, as they confront shared strategic, operational and pedagogical challenges. We curate an annual programme of events and training; develop associated toolkits and resources; and make informal connections to other members and external partners, including potential funders and collaborators.

This year, with the ongoing challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have pivoted our learning opportunities to a completely virtual format. We have also focussed on strengthening member engagement - developing and implementing new ways to learn about, and from, our members, to more effectively tailor our Learning and Development work. Through these efforts, we've seen an increase in member participation in learning offers, and in their engagement with GSF and the community more generally.

[FIND OUT MORE >](#)

Photo: EducAid



Annual Meeting

We held our 5th **Annual Meeting** virtually in October 2020, with 175 participants including members, funders, policy makers and the broader education stakeholders joining us to share information, make connections and strengthen networks. Following a keynote session with Wendy Kopp (Teach For All) and Vikas Pota (T4 Education), we hosted three closed-door sessions for members only, ten sessions open to all attendees and open networking sessions for members to connect with each other.

The Annual Meeting significantly leveraged our members' expertise - with nearly 30 member organisations leading sessions at the meeting. The virtual Annual Meeting was well-received by attendees and had an average net promoter score of 63.

“ I was really struck by how much the ‘feel’ of GSF Annual Meetings was maintained even in this very constrained format. I think that speaks to the power of this community

Learning Offers

We delivered two multi-module series for our members, based on their current needs. In partnership with Hippocampus, we ran a six-part series on **Early Childhood Education**. We also collaborated with Dignitas on a four-part series on **Supporting the Evolving Needs of Teachers**. These practitioner-led sessions allow participants to learn directly from the experience and expertise of other members operating in the global south, as well as engage with and connect with each other to further their own work.

This year we also launched learning sessions targeted specifically at our member CEOs. We ran a four-part series on **Succession Planning for CEOs** that provided participants with the tools and strategies needed to develop a succession plan to ensure organisational sustainability. Additionally, we have engaged with CEOs to understand their challenges with fundraising for school networks.

“ Participating in the Early Childhood Education learning series provided important insights as we simultaneously piloted our own Early Childhood Education workstream

Boosting Member Engagement

We have actively worked on increasing member engagement with GSF and the wider community. We have conducted one-on-one deepdive conversations with nearly 60% of our members to learn about their progress, priorities and challenges, and heard from close to 50% of our members through focus group discussions which allow them to provide input into our programmatic direction. Following an open application process we have appointed four members representatives to join an expert committee which will work with us over the next year to inform our learning offers.

This year we saw an increasing number of members reach out to the GSF team for specific learning requirements and to address specific challenges. Our team facilitated nearly **100 connections** for and between our members and with the external education ecosystem.

POLICY AND PARTNERSHIPS

Through our Policy and Partnerships practice we represent the voice of our members - and the wider non-state sector - in global education policy processes, and with key international organisations, including various United Nation agencies and donor organisations. Our work focuses on protecting the policy, funding, and operational space for non-state actors in education in support of national education system priorities to enable more children to access quality education. We also support members and local partners to undertake their own policy work at country-level.

In 2020/21 our work has focused on the following areas:

[FIND OUT MORE >](#)

Photo: School for Life Foundation



Responding to Covid-19

In October 2020, we published a [rapid review report](#): “Estimating the Impact of Covid-19 on the Non-State Education Sector in Low- and Middle-Income Countries”.

The report urged urgent action to make financial support (grants or low-interest loans) available to the non-state education sector, and argued that programmes set up to help overcome learning losses, particularly for the most vulnerable, should be opened to the non-state sector and not confined to government schools.

The research has been cited in reports published by UNICEF, UNESCO, Education Development Trust, Central Square Foundation, and GPE’s KIX Covid-19 Observatory as well as in articles published by The Guardian, NORRAG and UKFIET.

Right to Education and the Abidjan Principles

In December 2020, we published an [expert legal opinion](#) written by Ben Emmerson QC - a leading human rights lawyer - on the campaign being run by civil society organisations to get courts and international organisations to adopt the “Abidjan Principles.” He concludes that the Principles “are not an accurate statement of the requirements of international law” and “are deeply ideological in content”.

We wrote to all major international bodies working on the right to education to share the opinion and our view that, if adopted, the Principles would impinge the ability of governments to make their own decisions about how to run their education systems, and the ability of tens of thousands of schools to operate. Governments should determine the best way to provide education: this is their sovereign choice and must not be curtailed.

Education Financing

In June 2021, ahead of the G7 Summit, we published a [policy briefing](#) setting out our vision for the education financing landscape, and making recommendations on how development funders and governments can help fill the \$75bn per year funding gap.

This is the first of a series of briefings combining the latest evidence with insights from practitioners, parents and policymakers in Low- and Middle-Income Countries to inform policy debate.

Educational Planning

There is a real need to strengthen the guidance available to education policy-makers on how to engage with non-state partners. In Autumn 2020, we conducted a review of UNESCO’s education planning guidance documents to see whether and how they include non-state actors. In 2021, we have had dialogue with UNESCO and the International Institute for Educational Planning to explore how the guidance available might be strengthened.

IMPACT AND INNOVATION

Through our Impact and Innovation practice, we fund and support members to develop, test and scale education innovations. We connect them with mentors, other innovators, governments, and funders to support their journey to scale.

We use the evidence from this process - and the broader evidence base - to help inform global, national, and local decisions about which education interventions to fund, when, and how.

The new practice was launched in 2020-21, following a major funding grant from Jacobs Foundation and UBS Optimus Foundation. A major focus in our first year has been building out the team required to advance and implement our ambitious vision. Alina Lipcan joined us as Impact and Innovation Director in June 2021, and three further staff will join later in 2021. We are also actively exploring and developing new partnerships with other organisations working in this space.

Our first **Learning Lab** will launch in 2021. It will provide a vehicle for educators to unlock and test innovations across our network. Across 2021-2024 we aim to disburse c. **\$5,000,000** to support evidence-based innovation in the GSF network and beyond, and will make a first round of grants worth **\$500,000** in 2021/22. Our team will work with selected innovators in partnership with governments to support the educational model and strategy for scale, devise evaluation strategies, and design appropriate funding incentives.

In the run-up to the Global Education Summit in June 2021, we set out a **vision for scaling up educational innovation**, calling for more investment to de-risk innovation, embedding routes to scale from the outset, and the development of strong communities of practice that use the latest evidence on what works and what doesn't.

“

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that governments and non-state organisations across the world can together innovate and partner for scale... We need to foster an ecosystem which enables this resourcefulness to continue, including so that future crises cannot catch us unprepared.

Read more on [UNESCO's World Education Blog](#).



Photo: School for Life Foundation

[FIND OUT MORE >](#)

INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT: SCALABLE SOLUTIONS FOR BLENDED LEARNING

In April 2021, GSF was a Challenge Partner for an international Solveathon hosted by the Jacobs Foundation and run by MIT Solve.

GSF's Challenge invited participating teams to create 'Scaleable Solutions for Blending Learning' that would work in low-resource contexts, were cost-efficient and easily deployed, and could be piloted, iterated, and implemented quickly.

Three of our four participating members won awards totalling c. \$300,000 at the Solveathon and have since received support to pilot and test their innovations.



Photo: Rising Academies Network

GRAND INNOVATION PRIZE

RORI by Rising Academies Network

RORI uses a chatbot and recommendation engine to enable children to boost their language and maths skills by accessing the right curriculum topics for their level, in the right sequence.

RORI pulls text and audio clips, personalised to the learning needs of each individual student, from Rising's unique library of structured curriculum content. The library includes 500 hours of audio content covering language arts and math for five different age groups across K-12. RORI is delivered via SMS or WhatsApp, so that all students can access it.

PROMISING INNOVATION PRIZE



Photo: New Globe

Mobile Quiz Platform by New Globe

This pilot mobile quiz offers access to thousands of five-question quizzes via two-way SMS or WhatsApp. This solution provides high-quality, contextualised, curriculum-aligned practice opportunities for pupils through low-tech channels already in use among our parent communities. Rather than downloading a new app, parents and pupils can use the most popular global messaging tools (WhatsApp or SMS) in order to access hundreds of hours of interactive, engaging practice opportunities.

AUDIENCE PRIZE



Photo: Justice Rising

Chalkboard Guides by Justice Rising

Chalkboard Guides is a structured pedagogy tool designed to help teachers to accelerate student learning. It supports teachers to deliver high-quality learning that can withstand the toughest challenges including war, disease and weak infrastructure. Harnessing the ubiquity of the chalkboard, the radio and the basic mobile phone – it can be used in high, low and no tech contexts.

[FIND OUT MORE >](#)

OUR IMPACT

IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

According to our Annual Member Survey:

85% of GSF members feel **better connected to a network** of people who can support them to improve the quality of their provision and/or to scale

83% of members agree that GSF provides **relevant and practical learning opportunities** for their organisation

71% agreed that GSF provided **useful support during the Covid-19 pandemic**

64% of members are able to apply the knowledge gained through GSF to **improve the quality of their provision and/or to scale**

60% of members felt well represented by GSF in its efforts to **influence the global policy, funding and operational space** for non-state actors.

Photo: Collaborative Schools



SATISFACTION

GSF has a strong reputation and credibility amongst its members. We gauge member satisfaction through a Net Promoter Score (NPS), measuring how likely members are to recommend GSF to peers. In 2021/21, **our NPS increased to 73 ('Excellent')**, up from 57 in the previous year.

Members felt engaged as part of the GSF community, with **93% saying they feel proud of being part of the GSF community**, and 100% reporting feeling valued as members.

WHAT OUR MEMBERS SAY

“ *The network of organisations is extremely valuable in that it is a real community that looks to assist, collaborate, and share. The programme team also provides a lot of support, interesting forums, great research, guidance regarding funding, and credibility. We truly appreciate being part of the network.* ”

“ *The opportunities to be exposed to others and their work in the sector, to be linked to a diverse pool of valuable resources, to learn about crucial and relevant topics, issues and avenues of solutions are all highly cherished.* ”

“ *GSF's strong networks enabled us to respond to Covid-19.* ”

“ *Through GSF work, we were able to design our Covid-19 intervention as we were initially overwhelmed.* ”

“ *Our pandemic response wouldn't have been what it was without GSF.* ”

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In October 2021, GSF became an independent entity. We are grateful to Ark Ventures, who has incubated and supported GSF since inception and are excited about the next stage of our growth.

We have continued to receive generous support from private donors, including a new grant to launch the Impact and Innovation practice. With the continued disruptions as a result of Covid-19, and its financial impact on our members, we took the decision to further delay the introduction of membership fees.

Over the past year, we have appointed eight new Trustees to our Board and expanded the GSF team, welcoming:



CATARINA GOMES

Head of Operations and Strategy



ALINA LIPCAN

Director of Impact and Innovation



JOEL MULLAN

Head of Policy and Communications



KAVITA RAJAGOPALAN

Programme Director

Looking ahead to 2021/22, the GSF team will focus on developing a new three-year strategy in partnership with our board, diversifying our income and reviewing our financial model to move towards increased financial sustainability, and setting our Diversity and Inclusion vision and targets.



Photo: Peepul

OUR SUPPORTERS



OUR BOARD

In preparation for independence, we ran a global search to recruit new members to our Board of Trustees. The new board includes member representatives, funder representatives, and independent experts. The new Board members bring significant expertise in the non-state education sector across different regions along with experience of growing and scaling education ventures.

EXISTING MEMBERS



MICHAEL CLARK (CHAIR)

Deputy Chief Executive
Ark



CORINA GARDNER

Executive Director
IDP Foundation, Inc

NEW MEMBERS



ZIA AKHTER ABBAS

Executive Vice President
The Citizens Foundation



VONGAI NYAHUNZVI

Head of Region, Africa
Teach for All



STACEY BREWER

Co-Founder and CEO
SPARK Schools



HARRY ANTHONY PATRINOS

Practice Manager, Education
World Bank Group



PABLO JARAMILLO

CEO
Alianza Educativa



PAUL SKIDMORE

Founder and CEO
Rising Academies Network



NIRAV KHAMBATI

Managing Partner
Kaizenvest



MAYA ZISWILER

Deputy CEO
UBS Optimus Foundation

Shikha Goyal (Imaginable Futures) and **Titise Kode** (Vitol Foundation) stepped down from the board this year on completing their terms. We would like to thank them for the valuable counsel and insight they provided as GSF board members over the last few years.



Photo: Rising Academies Network

OUR MEMBERS

“ There is a rising cohort of international education NGOs ready to do far more good for the world, if only they had the financial support to further scale... excellent organisations doing remarkable work to expand educational opportunities for children globally: the Citizens Foundation, Educate!, PEAS, Rising Academies Network, Young Iove, the entire membership of the Global Schools Forum, and many more.

CAITLIN BARON, CEO, LUMINOS FUND

The Pathway to Progress on SDG 4: A Symposium, Centre for Global Development

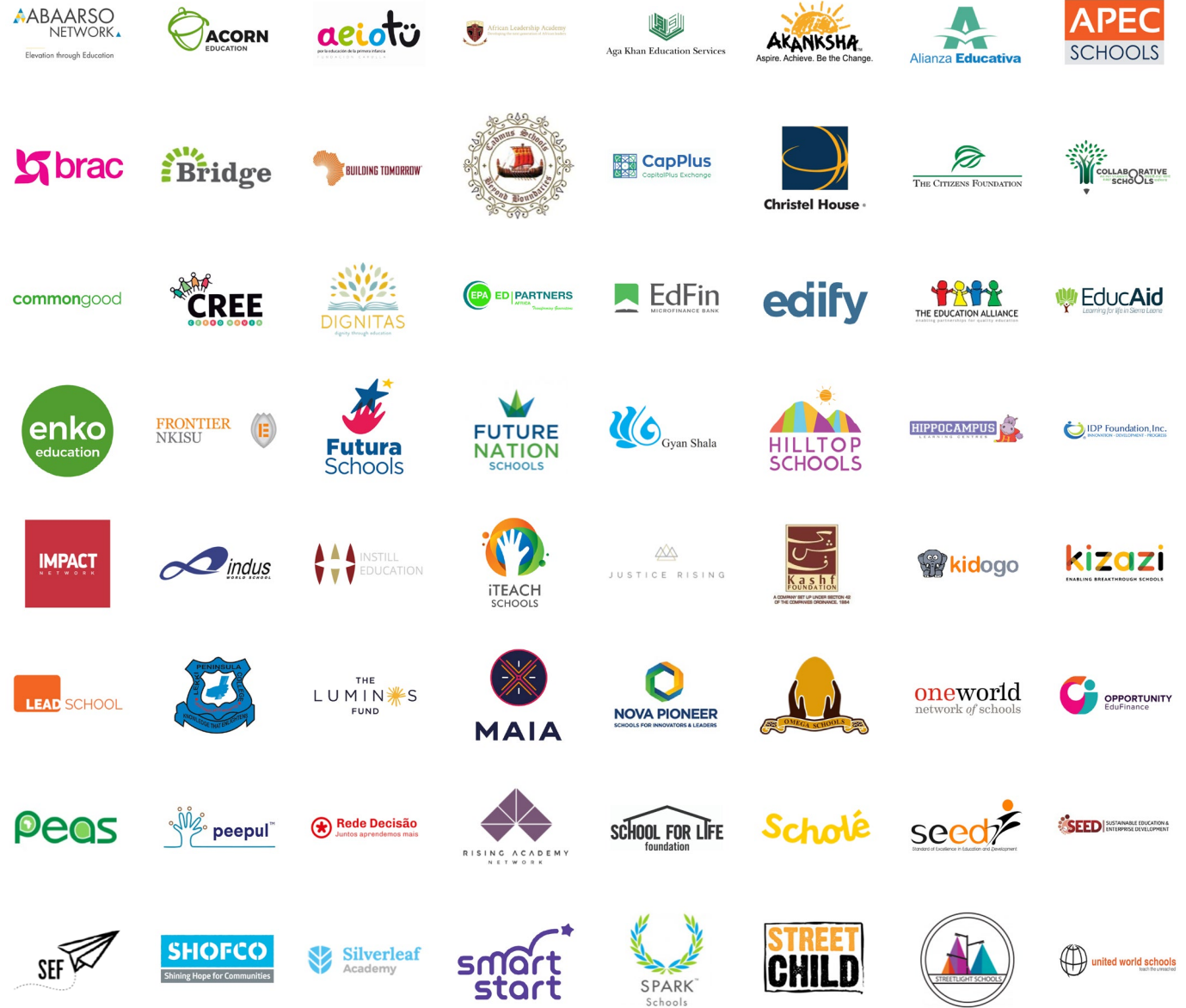


Photo: The Lumnios Fund



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