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## IMPROVING READING IN ETHIOPIA

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” – *Nelson Mandela*

Ethiopia has made tremendous progress to increase access to primary education (grades 1-8). In 1996, fewer than 3 million students were enrolled, with a net enrollment rate of 57.4 percent. Today, over 18 million children are enrolled at the primary level with a net enrollment rate of 99.9 percent. Unfortunately, the positive achievement of getting more children into school has strained the capacity of the system, and student learning has suffered. The deficit of qualified teachers means that many teachers are inexperienced with modern pedagogy. Additionally, few classrooms have high quality learning materials in the designated language of instruction.

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT FOR ETHIOPIA?

Education is a foundational driver of development—sustainability of investments across all sectors requires skilled populations capable of leading and managing their own growth. Ethiopia’s National Learning Assessments reveal that student learning at grades 4 and 8 fail to meet standards. USAID’s 2016 Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) suggests that only about a third of grade 2 and grade 3 students can read at a functional level (more than 20-25 words per minute). The lack of printed materials and insufficient support for teachers has resulted in many students failing to acquire basic literacy skills that would allow them to learn other subjects and advance beyond primary school. This is demonstrated by a low secondary enrollment rate of under 30 percent. Without adequate reading skills, students are more likely to dropout or repeat a grade level, further straining an already overburdened education system. Students who do not continue or complete secondary education fare worse in employability due to lack of skills. This leads to an increased risk of unemployment and discontent in a population where nearly 70 percent is under the age of 30. Without a focus on literacy and student achievement, Ethiopia’s ambitious goal to become a middle-income country by 2025 cannot be attained.

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT FOR THE UNITED STATES?

USAID—in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Regional State Education Bureaus—invests in early grade reading because literacy is at the core of developing independent thinkers whose academic excellence will enable them to make a meaningful difference in their community and around the world.

Investing in Ethiopia's children and youth creates benefits in armed conflict prevention, poverty reduction, economic stability, public health, and women's empowerment. Improving the quality of education in Ethiopia can also boost productivity and innovation in the country that can be beneficial for American investments and industries. A commitment to education is a commitment to human dignity. Equipping the future generation of Ethiopia with foundational literacy skills paves the way for the country to plan, finance, and implement solutions to its own development challenges.

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

Building upon USAID's Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed (READ) project in Ethiopia, the follow-on READ II project seeks to improve the quality of literacy instruction by training teachers in reading curriculum, and by providing effective early grade reading materials in seven mother-tongue languages and English. READ II will also promote supportive spaces outside the classroom to encourage student reading and advocate for school environments dedicated to teacher professional development. We ensure that books and materials produced with USAID assistance are gender-neutral and positively support at-risk children. Our education activities are inclusive and allow students with special needs to participate and learn alongside their peers. Additionally, the READ II project is partnering with the Ministry of Education to develop the ability to anticipate and rapidly respond to student, school, or household needs so children can continue their education during crisis. To evaluate the impact of our interventions, we support the Ministry of Education in conducting Early Grade Reading Assessments in seven local languages and English every other year, as well as annual learning assessments.

## **QUICK FACTS**

- Duration: 2018-2023 (5 years)
- Estimated number of beneficiaries: 15 million children (grades 1-8) in six regions

## **RESULTS TO DATE**

In the last six years, through the READ projects, USAID has:

- Trained over 176,000 teachers and 3,200 school supervisors and principals to implement revised reading and writing curriculum in schools, with many participants indicating renewed enthusiasm for teacher pre-service courses and excitement to apply lessons learned from manuals and workshops.
- Distributed more than 2.5 million textbooks and 500,000 copies of supplementary reading materials--in English and the seven most common local languages--so that students have access to materials to practice reading inside and outside the classroom.
- Trained local experts who revised curriculum and materials in two additional languages in Amhara and 17 more languages in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), as part of the effort to equip the Ministry of Education and Regional State Education Bureaus with the ability to reach as many of the 51 instruction languages as possible.
- Produced 56 learning episodes and 8 public service announcements to encourage a reading culture.
- Worked with communities to establish 2,488 reading camps and distribute nearly 6 million storybooks, with activities led by over 9,500 youth volunteers. These community efforts to promote reading outside the classroom have transformed many students from shy and slow readers to book lovers and active participants in the classroom, which will have positive effects on their journey to continue learning.
- Collaborated with stakeholders from the Ministry of Education, Regional State Education Bureaus, and the National Examination Assessment and Evaluation Agency to conduct the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) to better reflect skills needed to read and comprehend at grade level.
- Raised the reading comprehension levels of nearly 40 percent of targeted students in grades 2 and 3 across all seven languages, as demonstrated by the 2016 EGRA results.