



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



READING

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” – *Nelson Mandela, Launch of Mindset Network, Johannesburg, South Africa, July 16, 2003*

In the past 10 years, Ethiopia has made tremendous progress to increase access to primary education. Almost 19 million children, or nearly one-fifth of Ethiopia’s population, are now enrolled in primary school (grades 1-8)—a 157 percent increase since 2000. Unfortunately, the positive achievement of getting more children into school has stretched the capacity of the system, and student learning has suffered. Before USAID commenced national-scale teacher training in 2014, most teachers had little experience with modern pedagogy or research-based reading instruction, and most classrooms had few printed materials, most of which were of poor quality. Over the past three years, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, USAID developed, printed and distributed more than 32.5 million reading texts written in the seven most common local languages and trained 30,000 teachers.

Still today, due to household and farm responsibilities, rural students attend just half a day of school, greatly reducing instructional time. A lack of school libraries and printed materials in local languages, infrequent professional development for teachers, large class sizes, and household poverty all prevent children from developing the necessary foundational reading skills to successfully advance through middle and upper grades. National learning assessments, conducted with USAID support since 2000, reveal that overall student learning achievement does not meet national standards and is in fact declining. The 2014 Early Grade Reading Assessment revealed that just 28.5 percent of third grade students in Ethiopia can comprehend a short reading passage. The Ministry of Education, USAID and other donors have prioritized improving the quality of education as Ethiopia’s most pressing educational challenge.

ROBERT SAUERS, USAID

PROGRAM GOALS

Over the next five years, USAID will build on the \$318 million education investment the United States has made in Ethiopia over the past 20 years. Increasing early grade reading skills enables children to become better learners in higher grades and decreases school dropouts. Since Ethiopia has largely succeeded in providing universal access to primary education, USAID will focus on helping the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of education and student achievement. USAID aspires to help children achieve improved reading fluency and comprehension through the following:

- Focus on early grade reading and writing — the foundation for learning in school — for better overall achievement throughout primary education and beyond
- Address children’s diverse educational needs, especially those of girls and children with disabilities
- Support youth workforce development, in collaboration with USAID’s agriculture and private sector development efforts, through community-based programs in literacy, numeracy, and life skills programs to raise skill levels, employment and entrepreneurship prospects for unemployed youth

Ethiopia’s social and economic development will stall without an enhanced focus on girls’ education. USAID ensures that books and materials produced with U.S. assistance are gender neutral and positively support both girls and boys in their learning. USAID education activities are inclusive and allow children with special needs to participate and learn alongside their peers.

ACTIVITIES

USAID, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and regional state education bureaus, has revised the primary school reading curriculum and developed textbooks, supplementary reading materials, teacher’s guides and teacher training manuals in seven local languages. In-service teacher training uses the new textbooks and teacher training manuals. USAID also supports:

- Establishing reading departments in colleges of teacher education to improve the teaching of reading
- Developing research-based training to help new teachers improve classroom reading instruction
- Involve parents and community members as reading ambassadors to promote reading and writing
- Develop and distribute simple assessment tools for teachers to track progress in children’s reading fluency and comprehension and build institution capacity to conduct educational assessments
- Improving reading rooms and libraries and establishing reading and writing clubs in primary schools

EXPECTED RESULTS

USAID is working to improve the reading skills of 15 million primary school learners. The Ministry of Education and USAID conduct a biennial 3rd grade Early Grade Reading Assessment in seven local languages and English as well as 4th grade learning assessments to evaluate the impact of USAID-supported interventions.