



USAID | **ETHIOPIA**
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Launch of the New Mother Tongue Reading Program for Primary Schools in Ethiopia

Opening Statement

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HISTORICAL PARTNERSHIP AND PROGRESS FOR BASIC EDUCATION

It is great source of pride for me to be here and mark two decades of close cooperation between the United States Government and the Government of Ethiopia through the Ministry of Education and my agency, USAID. This collaboration to improve education quality and equitable access to learning have resulted in many more children in school, far fewer dropping out, improved student learning, and, very importantly, more girls in primary schools. So let me begin with congratulations to all of you and your predecessors on this very measurable progress.

Over the last 20 years, the American people through USAID have invested over \$290 million in financial, technical, and management resources to support Ethiopia's basic education programs. This is testament to the importance of education as the way to provide opportunity for all and the driving role education plays in the growth of any country and the transformation of its people. It is also testament to the depth of our partnership and which we celebrate today.

REMAINING CHALLENGES

In this vast country and with her population growing to over 90 million, there remain many challenges related to learning which we still need to address, given the rapid pace of expansion in the education system that now numbers more than 17 million students in primary schools.

We are fortunate to have measurable results to guide us on the way forward. For example, student learning results from four national assessments conducted over the last 14 years by the Ministry of Education with the support of USAID were lower than the standards set by the Ministry.

And as many of you know, data from the first early grade reading assessment conducted in Ethiopia in 2010 by the Ministry of Education and USAID revealed that by the end of second grade, 34 percent of students were unable to read a single word, and 48 percent scored a zero in reading comprehension.

RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES: USAID'S READ PROGRAM

In order to address these serious problems—for reading is the foundation of all learning, USAID in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, developed a new, comprehensive, and ambitious five-year program, with a USAID investment valued at 90 million U.S. dollars, called Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed, or READ. This multi-pronged program based on best practices is comprised of four projects that I would like to highlight to share the vision for this transformation in teaching and in learning. We seek to achieve with new materials and new proven methods and new skills to raise literacy and learning across primary schools in every region of the country.

USAID's READ Program is operating to provide four key types of expertise and support that will:

1. Improve the mother tongue curriculum for seven of the most widely spoken languages in Ethiopia (because research has shown that children learn to read faster in the language they speak at home);
2. Strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Education to support teacher training that is grounded in international reading research and experience;
3. Build the capacities of communities and parents to develop a culture of reading outside of school; and
4. Monitor and evaluate student learning progress—which we will be our ultimate test.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT: DEVELOPING THE NEW CURRICULUM, NEW MATERIALS, NEW TEACHING METHODS

The READ Technical Assistance, or READ TA project, implemented by our partner Research Triangle Institute (RTI), developed a national curriculum framework for reading and writing across different languages, regions, and grades together with the Ministry of Education, and many of you here today.

An exciting, creative and collaborative process, I myself saw was the development of new, updated textbooks and teachers' guides, illustrated and adapted to regional and cultural references, and aligned to the new curriculum framework for grades 1-4 in Amharic, Tigrinya, Afaan Oromo, Af-Somaali, Sidama Afoo, Wolayttatto, and Hadiyyisa. This work by the teams of the Ministry of Education and READ composed of technical and regional experts, and teachers, is inspiring and a major milestone on the road to raising reading comprehension and proficiency for children regardless of where they happen to be born. A similar process of content development for grade 5-8 textbooks began this summer and is progressing well.

Young children will learn to read in their mother tongues, and so, become excited about reading and learning in any language. This is a critical foundation for their future, their ability to develop, and also to contribute to the development of their communities. Today, together, we are here announcing and celebrating this huge accomplishment.

GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNMENT SUPPORT: Institutional Improvement, New Phase of READ

I am also pleased to be able to announce that for the first time over this long cooperation between the U.S. and Ethiopia on education, overall dating back to some 60 years ago, USAID is now able to directly fund the Ministry of Education through a \$10 million program called READ Institutional Improvement that began just a few months ago.

USAID is working through the Ministry of Education to train no less than 65,000 teachers on how to implement and use the new mother tongue curriculum and materials in the classroom. The quality of teaching is critical to the achievement of national literacy and learning objectives.

To date, nearly 15,000 grade 1-4 teachers have already been trained, with 50,000 additional teachers expected to be trained in the coming weeks. Once trained, these teachers will immediately begin implementing the new grade 1-4 curriculum and package of teaching and learning materials, changing the way over 6.5 million students learn to read and write in their mother tongue languages.

CLOSING ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND GOING FORWARD

We are here today not only to launch the new mother tongue curriculum, and present all the work involved in introducing a new curriculum—developing new materials, publishing and distributing those materials in a massive volume around the country, training teachers for primary schools; but also we are here to recognize the hard work of institutions, partners, and individuals whose efforts over the past two years have made this launch possible.

This extraordinary progress is the result of the strong partnership between the Ministry of Education, USAID, and our dedicated implementing partner, RTI, and their exceptional technical expertise at READ TA. They work tirelessly on the ground with regional state education bureaus, *woreda* (district) education offices, zonal education departments, teacher training colleges, principals and master teachers at pilot schools. I am pleased to be here in person to salute and congratulate you all from across the education system.

To the Ministry of Education, I would like to recognize the leadership and commitment you have shown since the inception of the READ program. Only with your leadership is USAID able to galvanize partners at all levels throughout the country.

Continuing to work together on behalf of the American people, and given the commitment and determination of this country, the abiding desire to learn of Ethiopia's people, I have no doubt we will reach our ambitious target of improving the reading and writing skills of 15 million children across Ethiopia.

They will learn to read, in order to read to learn. They will grow and thrive and, by virtue of their education, they will have the capacity to promote prosperity and peace.

USAID'S MULTISECTORAL PROGRAMMING ENHANCES EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT

I should mention that other USAID and U.S. Government programs are ensuring children are nourished to be able to focus on learning to read, and that the long term benefit of schooling is not sacrificed to a family's day to day survival. Nutrition, food security and new opportunities to earn income, hygiene and sanitation, and education are all mutually reinforcing. No one of these interventions can fully succeed without the others. These multiple interventions increase the likelihood of children, and especially girls, being able to attend and stay in school.

Finally, in the contemporary world, new technologies can enhance learning for new generations. USAID through its global Grand Challenge Grant Program with the Australian Government and World Vision called, “All Children Reading” is supporting the development and testing of technology-based innovations to improve child literacy. In Ethiopia, one such grant recipient was the Whiz Kids Workshop where Tsehay, the famous Ethiopian giraffe who loves to read, was born and inspires children to learn through animation, puppetry and television broadcasts.

In my country, there was once a campaign to raise funding for the education of a disadvantaged minority. The campaign motto was: “A mind is a terrible thing to waste.” A member of that minority is today President of the United States.

Thank you.