

Press Release



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USAID AND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION LAUNCH A NATIONAL MOTHER TONGUE READING PROGRAM

15 million children to benefit from new materials and training of 65,000 teachers

Hawassa, October 29, 2014. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in collaboration with the Ministry of Education launched a national mother tongue reading curriculum to improve the reading skills of 15 million primary school students in Ethiopia. Minister of Education Shiferaw Shigute and USAID Mission Director Dennis Weller opened the event on the eve of the Ministry's annual review meeting in Hawassa, Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region.

This year's introduction of the new curriculum and reading materials to grades 1-4, complemented by teacher training, resulted from a massive two-year effort involving federal and regional officials, educators, linguists, and illustrators, teacher training colleges and pilot schools. A similar effort is now underway for grades 5-8.

To address the major challenge of poor reading comprehension in early grades, the Ministry of Education and USAID designed a national early grade reading program, valued at just under \$90 million USD, called *Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed (READ)*. The overall goal of this massive five-year program (2012-2017) is to improve the reading and writing skills of 15 million children in grades 1-8 in seven of the most widely spoken languages in Ethiopia—Amharic, Tigrigna, Afaan Oromo, Af-Somaali, Sidama Afoo, Wolayttatto, and Hadiyyisa. The use of mother tongue instruction reflects an education policy that helps children learn more rapidly in the languages they speak at home before transitioning to learn in other languages.

At the READ launch, Weller stated: "Close, dynamic, and tireless collaboration between the Ministry of Education and USAID teams has reached a major year with the launch of this new curriculum in the schools. READ will improve teaching skills, the availability and quality of materials, and most importantly, engage and enable girls and boys to learn faster and better. When children enjoy reading they are more likely to stay in school."

The READ program is comprised of four interconnected projects:

1. Technical assistance in curriculum and materials development for seven Ethiopian languages
2. Institutional improvement of the education system to support teacher training
3. Outreach to involve parents and communities in the attainment of READ objectives
4. Monitoring and evaluating outcomes.

The USAID READ program is carried out by Research Triangle Institute with the participation of Save the Children, SIL LEAD, Florida State University, Inveneo, and Whiz Kids Workshop.