

**PROCEEDINGS OF**  
**THE FIRST ANNUAL NATIONAL CHILDREN'S READING SUMMIT**



**“Working Together to Foster a Generation of Readers”**

**March 13, 2019**

**Addis Ababa, Sapphire Hotel**

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIRST ANNUAL NATIONAL CHILDREN'S READING SUMMIT,  
ORGANIZED BY ETHIOPIA READS**

**Theme: "Working Together to Foster a Generation of Readers"**



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## Executive Summary

Since 1994 great strides have been made in education in Ethiopia, with massive improvement in access to education. Primary school enrollment has increased five-fold since 1994, and there were more than fourteen (14) million children in school in 2010 compared to five (5) million in 2000. Girls have achieved almost equal access to primary education. Secondary school enrollment has also shown a modest improvement, with a 3.2% increase in the net enrollment rate between 2005/06 and 2009/10. These are extraordinary achievements in terms of increasing enrollment. In spite of the remarkable progress in increasing educational access, and in particular in terms of increasing enrollment, education quality still remains a daunting challenge along with challenges in government targets in enrollment and completion of primary and secondary education.

The Ethiopia Reads Annual Children's Reading Summit, under the theme "Working Together to Foster a Generation of Readers", held in the Sapphire Addis Hotel on March 13, 2019, recognized that investment in education in Ethiopia can yield high returns to both individuals and to society. To capture these benefits, however, the Summit noted that it would not be enough simply to increase the number of students who attend school for more years. Quality education enables improved student learning achievement and is the key to reaping these high returns.

The Summit, which brought together around 100 participants from Ethiopia and abroad, included literacy and library experts, education experts, researchers, educators, authors and writers, civil society partners, entrepreneurs, representatives from university communities and government representatives. The Summit suggested that the deterioration in quality and pupils' poor reading culture might be one of the critical challenges for improved learning achievement in the country. The Summit also conferred on issues that identify the strong correlation between independent reading and academic achievement. Expanding school libraries and equipping them with the necessary resources along with proficient staff were identified as key tools in encouraging reading.

The Summit explored the state of early years reading culture and the challenges and opportunities around that as well as the value of having libraries for young children. It also explored the children's books market and the challenges in publishing and distribution. The Summit also deliberated on how to collectively strengthen early reading and accessibility to children's books and also how to improve community involvement to promote children's reading culture. Ethiopia Reads with years of experience in this regard was acknowledged at the Summit and received recognition from various stakeholders including government representatives.

Presentations at the Summit stressed that reading is one of the basic interests of human kind since antiquity. Reading is an activity which helps to develop the mind and personality of human beings and ultimately enriches their intellectual lives. It was also highlighted that as students learn to enjoy reading, learning becomes relevant and in that way improves their reading ability and self confidence. Free reading helps readers have mastery of their lives, and situations in life. Young people can only achieve their potentials in life if they have developed an interest in reading as that helps an individual to achieve greater control, increased independence and a greater sense of self-worth and belonging.

The presentations as well as the panel discussions highlighted the major factors in building a reading culture in Ethiopia, including increasing access to selections of books, considering the range of needs of society, designing proper places for reading, enhancing the capacity of librarians, curtailing the high cost of publishing and building and promoting the ecology of a reading culture, among others. The Summit also noted the value of picture books to children, who can read a book without words, the benefit of reading with children, and the value of a trained librarian.

An educational system capable of producing good readers needs to be established, and there needs to be the provision of appropriate reading facilities. It was also suggested that reading periods and professional development should be part of the country's education curriculum. Apart from the provision of reading materials, students sole interest in passing exams, rather than enjoying reading, as well as teachers' priority solely on text books, needs intervention so as to make schools provide reading programs that motivate students to read for pleasure.

It was also noted that engaging students in a variety of reading experiences through book talks, readers' theatre, and storytelling would help students develop the habit of listening, comprehension and recall. It was emphasized that the issue of a poor reading culture in society cannot be ignored. Presentations underlined the experiences of developed countries as reading makes inspired people and great nations.

The role that libraries in the country could play in reducing poverty has not been sufficiently recognized and hence the necessary policy development and investment in the library network has to be made. Policymakers and donors, recognizing the link between poverty reduction and literacy, have given due attention to textbooks in policies to increase literacy and student achievement levels. Yet textbooks are the beginning of the solution, not the complete answer. Libraries sustain literacy and are the basis of providing a cost-effective means of support for a whole community of readers who seek information for tackling their own problems.

In conclusion, government officials acknowledged that the Summit had been most interesting and a useful reminder of the need to work on the next steps and to do so jointly in the days to come. It was also indicated that a similar event would be held in subsequent years by Ethiopia Reads which stressed the need to forge collaborations among stakeholders.

It was widely acknowledged that the Summit had been a good platform from which to promote Ethiopia Reads and its projects and successes gained so far. The Summit had created opportunities for potential partnerships with other similar organizations in working together and tackling challenges in harmony. It had also urged the need to structure future conferences on an annual basis to address current topics in education by exploring the challenges and problems that exist nationwide and providing the opportunity to influence policy-makers to revise necessary policies around early reading in classrooms and libraries which could lead to real longer term solutions.

## Objectives

- To inform, discuss and reflect on the challenges and opportunities around children's reading culture and libraries for children.
- To identify practical, low-cost strategies to promote early reading and improve access to books for children.
- To explore opportunities for collaborations and cross-sector partnerships.
- To present the work of Ethiopia Reads and its accomplishments so far on promoting children's reading culture.
- To influence policy-makers and implementers to give the necessary attention for early reading and libraries.





**Ethiopia Reads staffs and Volunteers**

## Welcoming Speech



Mr. Malcolm Clark, chairman for the Board of Director of Ethiopia Reads, initially welcomed participants and highlighted the crucial role of the Summit in promoting learning and education. He briefed the gathering about Ethiopia Reads (ER), which he identified as a small organization with big ambitions. He discussed Ethiopia Reads major activities focussing on three areas: establishing libraries across the country, providing training for librarians and producing children's books in

different local languages and making them available for children. He stated that about 80 libraries in primary schools, including a mobile horse-powered library, have been established throughout the country by Ethiopia Reads with donor funding from the USA. Recognizing the gaps seen in having enough qualified librarians in the country, Malcolm said the organization provided efficient librarian training. Availability of children's books has been one of the most challenging issues in promoting a reading culture. He noted that ER was fed up waiting for so long to see this problem being addressed. So in partnership with donors, Ethiopia Reads started producing a range of children's books in a number of local languages. The books have been distributed across the country to primary schools and libraries.

In his personal observations, Malcolm lamented that Ethiopia with large numbers of young students has very few books. This is a huge challenge for all stakeholders, he emphasized. This brings into focus the need to harness the potential of stakeholders, including organizations attending the Summit. He urged that these problems need to be addressed in order to improve reading and that this Summit would be the platform through which to initiate such conversations among stakeholders. He finally thanked participants for attending the Summit and expressed his view that the Summit would deliberate on key issues that had become stumbling blocks to creating reading culture ecology in the country as well as share good practices on the subject.



## Opening Remarks



Ato Birhanu Moreda, Director of General Education Development, FDRE Ministry of Education, started his opening remark by stating; “as we know education is a major factor in a country’s development. Especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the world is in rapid change so expanding education and knowledge is the primary goal of every nation. Our country Ethiopia has been trying to improve access to education all over the country and it is known that we strive to improve the existing quality of education as well as accessibility to it. To resolve the obstacles of education the government works in engaging with professionals and counseling them to maintain and improve our education system. To ensure the quality of education there are a lot functions and activities that we have to undertake. To implement those activities the government and non-government organizations have made efforts to improve the quality and accessibility of education. Non-government organizations play a significant role in increasing literacy rates and educational resources by adhering to the rules and regulations of the country’.

“The source of finance for most non-government organizations is from foreign aid to support their activities. The government’s challenge is to avoid being perceived as uninterested in the financial stability of our motherland and in some ways depending on charity. All stakeholders should have to stand guard to enhance the quality of education for the development of the country. To develop the quality of education and a reading habit in the younger generation Ethiopia Reads plays a significant role, including the delivery of today’s Annual Children’s Reading Summit. Starting with the establishment of libraries the organization works throughout the regions in order to enhance and develop the reading culture of children. And he finalized his speech by forwarding his hope that the Summit has brought together policymakers, experts, publishers, government officials, writers, researchers, teachers, and other stakeholders and serves as a platform for producing fruitful deliberations”.

## Keynote Address



Ato Yikuno Amlak Mezgebu, provided the gathering with an artistic insight into what reading has meant for human beings. He stressed that reading is one the basic interests of human kind since antiquity. Reading is an activity which helps to develop the mind and personality of human beings and ultimately enriches their intellectual lives. He noted that young people can only achieve their potential in life if they have developed an interest in reading as that helps an individual to achieve greater control, increased independence and a greater sense of self-worth and belonging. Children would learn reading skills step by step, he noted. He also highlighted about alphabets. He noted that reading began with the creation of an alphabet which created and preserved the transfer of knowledge. He said that simple communication transfers through reading words, phrases, and statements. He recognized the ancient civilization of Ethiopia which among other things had created its own alphabet. He discussed Ethiopian ancient literatures and, in order to capitalize on ancient wisdom, he urged participants to collaborate and encourage a reading culture in Ethiopia.

## First Presentation

### Developing Culture for Reading: Reading for All: by Dr. Laurie J.Curtis

Dr. Curtis highlighted that the purpose of her presentation was to share a vision for supporting literacy and libraries in Ethiopia. In doing so, she expressed her interest in promoting the benefits of libraries for young children and the importance of resources so as to enhance the benefits of a library for young children and explore types of resources that increase the benefit gained from a library for young children.



Dr Curtis highlighted the Ethiopia Reads vision as being a vision to strengthen and develop a reading culture in children. To achieve its mission, she acknowledged that Ethiopia Reads, which was founded in 1998, has always been a champion in building youth and children's literacy. The first library was established in 2003, and the numbers of libraries are currently close to 80 across the country. Ethiopia Reads' programs focused on access to quality books and libraries, advocacy and

training for library professionals, outreach to all children, urban and rural, and support of community and family literacy events.

Ethiopia Reads has distributed more than 250,000 books and serves over 130,000 children per year. Dr Curtis noted that the organization focuses on quality books and a skilled librarian. It has a unique mobile library program known as the “Horse Powered Literacy Project” in remote areas of rural Ethiopia. While discussing the benefits of a library for young children, Dr Curtis noted that it builds a love of reading early, encourages life-long learning, it also establishes a habit of scholarship from an early age, creates students who can independently learn beyond their classroom and school day and children become better readers by reading. But they must have something to read and the time and a place to read so that they can practice those skills. Texts that are meaningful and interesting will help motivate them to persevere and become strong readers. To achieve that, she stressed the need to provide books and create the opportunity for safe places and time to read books. Research also shows that a high quality library program has a role for the achievement of the child, especially for vulnerable children or those who are at risk.

She underlined the vital role of books with pictures. A library for children should include resources such as reference materials, fiction and non-fiction books, picture books and early-reader books and enough space for children to read safely. Particularly providing students with picture books would help them to understand the story and the characters in the book. Books with illustrations allow children to see others doing the same things they do. It helps them recognize that others have similar experiences to those they have. We all eat, we love our families, we work, we play, we experience joy and sadness etc.

Books with illustrations allow children to learn about other places and other people, helping them to learn about new ideas and different cultures. We may live in different types of houses, our families might not all look alike; we may engage in different work, we might play different games, etc. Picture books also help to identify the problems and solutions mentioned in a book. Once they learn to read they can also read to learn independently. Library materials should consider diverse languages and different age groups. Providing technology in the library is also vital to help children understand the subject matter. Pictures in books will help children to foster their vocabulary ability and properly clarify the story in a book. Research also shows access to two languages in a book doesn't confuse children. Books of illustration help young children to see themselves in the story, to know new people and to see them.

Dr Curtis said that the role of a librarian in this regard was noted as significant. The main important issue is the librarian as a professional to help the work of schools and communities. A well-trained

librarian will provide an organized system so that students can locate books and other resources to practice their reading and advance their studies of topics within the curriculum. Children learn more effectively when being assisted by a more knowledgeable adult who can guide and mentor them in the learning process through modeling, encouragement and effective and meaningful feedback. The trained librarian can serve to support and enhance student reading and the curriculum taught in the school.

Winding up her presentation, Dr Curtis expressed her confidence in the work that Ethiopia Reads is doing, saying ER believes that providing books, establishing libraries and training librarians would lead to a more resourceful generation, improving and strengthening communities. However, she highlighted the challenges in this regard underlining that the reality is that there are nearly 50 million children and young people in Ethiopia and not much for them to read apart from textbooks. There is often nowhere to go to read and little support available. So she underlined the need for 'working together so that we can change that reality'.

#### **Comment from Participant**

Following Dr. Laurie J.Curtis' presentation a participant from the Charities and Societies Agency, Fasikaw Molla, expressed his organization's commitment to render any support that Ethiopia Reads may seek from the Agency recognizing the vital role ER is playing in expanding reading culture across the country.



## Second Presentation

### Professional Learning for Library Development: by Mrs. Carol Sett gast and Yitagesu Getnet



While commencing her presentation, Carol Sett gast disclosed her passion for books and her love for children and said that she has been working to bring children together through books for the last twenty years serving as school teacher and librarian.

She then highlighted the purpose of the presentation which was aimed at sharing research, data collection and analysis and also describing the challenges and experiences in the training outcomes in the Ethiopia

Reads Book Centered Learning Project.

She then narrated the history of the organization. She said ‘when we started in 2003 Ethiopia Reads had been establishing libraries, mainly in primary schools and by 2012 had planted over 70. Every library was established with a person to act as librarian. It became apparent that most Ethiopians had no personal experience of school or public libraries, no librarian role models, no formal training for librarians and no professional status for librarians leading to high turnover’.

Therefore, Ethiopia Reads decided to look at developing its own training, specifically to be effective in an Ethiopian context. This work was informed by six years of multiple school / library observations and conversations with ER staff and librarians in consultation with U.S. library and literacy experts. This led to the development of an assessment tool (a rubric) and subsequent training curriculum which became the Book Centered Learning Project (BCL).

The BCL Project was informed by two important guiding questions:

- What does a high-quality children’s library look like and how does it function?
- What does a well-trained library professional need to know and be able to do to best utilize resources available to benefit students?

The initial observations and conversations helped Ethiopia Reads to identify three areas to focus on with the project: (i) the library environment, (ii) engaging students in reading and (iii) professional development and advocacy. To answer those two questions Ethiopia Reads broke down the steps

needed to accomplish those outcomes. That helped Ethiopia Reads in establishing a rubric which helped to (i) establish clear desired outcomes, (ii) measure those outcomes and (iii) encourage self-reflection and professional growth related to exemplary library practice.

The assessment data from the rubric was used to inform the writing of the curriculum. Data was collected from 22 ER school libraries (which had received the training) and 8 ER control school libraries (which had not received the training), representing 5 regions of Ethiopia. The data collection took about three years, according to the presentation.

Carol noted that both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analyzed and helped to guide curriculum development. Selected data findings and responses, she discussed, identified that pockets of excellence exist revealing innovative practice which should be shared, and that librarian turnover presents a significant challenge with consistent and reliable differentiated training as being essential. In addition, librarians often view themselves as “guardians” of the books, seeking to control and limit book access. The role of librarians is to inspire a love of books, encourage a habit of reading and serve as a facilitator of increased academic learning.

It was also learnt that librarians were hesitant to model reading aloud to students. Carol said 23 BCL Training Modules and Manuals were developed and piloted and revised from 2015-2018;

- Library Environment/ Organization
- Engaging Students in Reading
- Professional Development and Advocacy

Finally, she disclosed that the accompanying Ethiopia Reads Book Centered Learning Manual has been completed and is in the process of being translated.

## [Analysis and Findings](#)

By Yitagesu Getnet



The areas of pilot implementation were Somali, SNNPR and Harari, and at city level in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. In total Yitagesu noted that 22 schools and 103 librarians, teachers and directors were included in the training. Languages used included Amharic, Oromiffa, Sidama, Somali and Tembaro. It was stated that the program was held over three years. Yitagesu noted that to teach how libraries should be organized, so that the library is open and available with



high quality resources and assistance. The three components of analysis criteria were used were: accessibility, attractiveness and book categorization.

After the assessment was completed, Yitagesu said that the training was delivered to libraries and educators in general. After incorporating feedback from the training, it would be extended to include advocacy. The next step the program followed was engaging students in reading and the main goal of that section was to teach librarians to utilize books by actively engaging students in an enjoyable and informative reading experience. Yitagesu lamented that most of the time librarians are only store keepers but they must have big role to play during the learning process in order to develop a reading culture in the student. The practice included storytelling and reading aloud, book club and reading periods. Yitagesu told the gathering that continued professional development would be the means by which schools assess the:

- competency of the librarian - whether there had been professional training on library science or not;
- assignment of the librarian - part time or temporarily assigned
- Concern of the school administration for the library.

Data and figures across all areas in the BCL project were communicated by Yitagesu. The general success of the project as highlighted by the presenter can be measured as having delivered the following outcomes: contributing towards better accessibility and more attractive library set-ups; introducing new and practical concepts which are helpful to create improved reading habits and motivation in schools; and contributing to filling the gap on the professional development of the librarian at schools. The project also brought better awareness and concern for library and reading practice outside the classroom from the school administration. It has also created better engagement by students in the library activities and improved the motivation and orientation of librarians on library tasks. It also helped to establish a book centered learning environment in schools and contributed to better resource collections in the library. Overall, Yitagesu acknowledged that the BCL project had contributed to the enhancement of the reading culture among the school communities.

However, the project had encountered a number of challenges. Little concern was given for libraries and librarians by government bodies and this discouraged engagement in better reading promotional activities. In addition, frequent turnover of librarians and school administrators affected the follow-up and consistency of the program. Yitagesu added that poor resource and budget allocations for libraries and library set-ups in terms of space and design in the schools wasan ongoing issue. Low commitment and motivation in some schools was noted. Some librarians

didn't receive any professional training prior to taking the position, or whilst in post, either by the school or other party. Less attention to early grade students' reading practice and reading space was another one of the challenges identified by the presenter.

The project had learnt some major lessons, among which were that regular capacity-building training should be regularly available to a greater extent for school librarians and teachers and that equipping the libraries with quality and updated resources have a direct influence on the reading habits of the school communities.

In conclusion, Yitagesu urged the government education bureaus to give greater emphasis and dedication towards designing better book centered learning systems in schools as well as focusing on early graders and improving the school libraries. This would contribute much to the overall improvement and enhancement of a reading culture throughout the country.

### Third Presentation

#### Local Language Books: Success & Challenges: by Mrs. Jane Kurtz



Jane Kurtz commenced her presentation by explaining the two reasons that brought her to the Summit: children's books and Ethiopia. She displayed on the screen her childhood image depicting her reading at home in Maji, Ethiopia. That was one of the reasons that brought her to the Summit, she explained to the gathering. She also told the audience that some of her siblings were born in Ethiopia and she was brought to Ethiopia from England when she was two years old. She said that growing up she had enjoyed her most

tender years in Maji, in the southwest part of Ethiopia. Her parents were working for the Presbyterian Church for twenty three years in Ethiopia. She explained that her sister Caroline and her brother came to Ethiopia as adults to teach. They have children and introduced them to Ethiopia. She, however, was living in the USA. She was working very hard to become a children's book writer. As she began to think of the material she had to write about, she began to remember the stories of her childhood and the people she knew back then. So, she found her way back to Ethiopia through being able to write about Ethiopia.

This is Jane's story: Stories are meant to be shared. As soon as I had my own children I began to share stories with them. Reading aloud is important. Recent statistics in the USA show that reading aloud to children is increasing and that 77 percent of parents are now reading aloud to children before that child reaches his first birthday. Jane illustrated a picture of her husband reading aloud to her daughter who is here today and to one of her sons. We filled our homes with books. When they completed their college education they decided to come to Ethiopia to volunteer for Ethiopia Reads. They too began an adventure. In fact my son has had a big adventure. He got married to a person who was working at Ethiopia Reads. So I have had the pleasure of seeing my son reading to his children as well and teaching them to love books and my daughter, their aunt, reads books aloud to my grandchildren. That is one of the reasons I know how important reading aloud is because of the role it is playing in my family; passing down from my parents to me, from me passing down to my children and from my children passing down to my grandchildren.

There have also been many studies that show how important reading aloud is to children. Those children who have had books read to them at home had got good grades and had longer attention at school. For instance I read books to my daughter out loud at home and encouraged her to read and she is now professor of 18<sup>th</sup> Century Literature at Boston College.

Jane emphasized that just from reading amazing things could happen. Jane told the Summit that she knew about books because of her family and because she writes them. She said that professional writing is very hard. She added that she knew about children's literature because she teaches children's literature. She teaches a Masters of Fine Arts in Children's Literature degree course. She said her students spent USD \$10,000 per semester to be children's books writers.

She then briefed the gathering about how the USA had developed a reading culture. Books were not colorful in the USA initially. But starting back in the 1860's, colorful pictures began to come in children's literature. As the dark ages passed, children's books looked the reality of what was around them. In the 1940's books began to be very playful, imaginative and enjoyable for children. The 1950's and 1960's saw a lot of creativity starting as writers were encouraged to go to the field and use their creativity. She recognized the contribution of Dr. Seuss in that regard. It was because of Dr. Seuss that so many children loved books in America. She then asked the gathering who the Dr. Seuss of Ethiopia would be? Book publishing in the States was now very developed. There were two major camps. Those who developed books just for schools for teaching, and she disclosed that she didn't love that kind of book. And there are books that can be used at schools and in families. These are playful and interesting.

Learning to read is important to learn reading skills. In addition, other skills develop from reading skills: children learn to predict, they begin to ask questions, to visualize and see patterns. She underscored that the art of writing children's books is a very creative process.

She then continued the development of children's books journey in the USA, adding the important roles libraries began to play following the creation of libraries through a donation from an American philanthropist. She and her brother, recognizing the important role of libraries, started to support them through Ethiopia Reads. She also acknowledged her family members' role.

She added that developing a reading culture needs training and support of the people. She then explained her initiative in 2016 to explore what kind of books can be written. She, with colleagues, including photographers, illustrators and family members travelled to Maji. The experiment the members had undertaken was discussed. Digital skills helped to substitute the gap of not having professional illustrators.

In 2018, Ethiopia Reads started publishing 100,000 copies of books having 22 titles. It was a pilot project, she said, adding that they continued to experiment. She also explained the contribution of the various people who had participated in the project, taking different tasks. She also acknowledged they were getting the opportunity to come from abroad and travel in Ethiopia.

To learn how books are good for children, Jane emphasized that it was through various experiments that can be found. Collaboration helps to create a good book. She finally told the gathering that children's books in the USA developed from mother goose to Dr Seuss.

#### **Fourth Presentation**

#### **Promoting Reading in the Ethiopian Context: Efforts and Challenges: by Dr. Mulusew Asrate, Addis Ababa University**



Dr. Mulusew commenced by noting that creating a reader society requires, firstly, establishing an education system capable of producing good readers, and, secondly, the provision of reading facilities (which has its own language-planning and publication issues) and the establishment and organisation of libraries. In an Ethiopian context, Dr. Mulusew said these two pillars divided the

Minister of Education and the Minister of Culture and Tourism, being the main stakeholders. In his presentation, Dr. Mulusew focused on the ongoing progress seen in an Ethiopian context, including the efforts being addressed by government offices. By Ethiopian context, Dr. Mulusew identified the need to recognize that there are more than eighty (80) individual languages indigenous to Ethiopia. More than seventy per cent (70%) of the population speaks just three languages. There are sixteen (16) languages spoken by more than two hundred thousand (200,000) people while each of the remaining languages has less than two hundred thousand (200,000) speakers. In the Ethiopian context all languages have speakers outside of their “native” region. If someone wants to learn another language it takes a long time.

Dr. Mulusew identified the issue of producing good readers within the Ethiopian context as challenging. While discussing the system of education in the country, he noted that out of the eighty plus (80+) indigenous languages fifty three (53) local languages are being used a medium of instruction and being taught as a subject in the education system. Sixteen (16) languages are taught only as a subject, twenty four (24) languages are used from grades 1-4, twenty nine (29) languages are used in grades 1-8, nineteen (19) languages are used in teacher training centers and the last 8 languages are taught in universities. He underlined that ‘if we need all Ethiopians as readers we need to communicate all the languages of the country’. He emphasized that the policy needs to be accompanied by a strong bilingual model which enables students to be competent in their mother tongue and also other well-developed languages. This requires good language planning and development activities on the language in use.

He then discussed the two types of models in practice. He said that the first bilingual model, was where most of those who speak Amharic and English can learn both subjects as a subject and as a medium of instruction. To be a good reader the student has to access written materials in their own mother tongue. But if they are forced to use their mother tongue there is not sufficient reading material available for use, except in Amharic, Tigrigna, Oromiffa and a few other languages, but for the rest of the Ethiopian languages there are not enough materials. In a nation where fifty three (53) languages are being taught as a medium for instruction the fact that there is only sufficient reading material designed in Amharic, Tigrigna, Oromiffa and a few other languages, indicates ‘a gap in the model’ he stressed.

He continued, stating that ‘In 2018 an organization called RTI was tasked to undertake research on the level of the language and educational status of the country. The research results showed that reading habits and reading achievement is very low in Ethiopia. When asked to read a simple passage at grade 2 level, many regions had more than 30% of grade 2 and 20% of grade 3 unable to

do so successfully, with children in Sidama zone and Oromiya region particularly struggling. This is a consequence of the policy model that Ethiopia has followed for over the last 20 years. The poor national reading outcomes of the MoE after 20 years effort requires new measures. He made an exhortation, at minister level, to put additional effort into promoting reading in seven (7) major languages (Amharic, Oromiffa, Tigrigna, Somaligna, Wolayita, Hadiya, and Sidama) and to simplify the learning process for students from 53 major languages.

He also told the gathering that further measures should be put in place to include the revision and preparation of the curriculum and teaching materials, the publication of supplementary reading materials, the establishment of school libraries, the establishment of reading corners in classrooms and making school libraries more functional. Less than 24% of the libraries have professional librarians with a certificate or diploma level training in library sciences. Fewer than 6% are well organized. More than 75% were only partially organized and almost 19% were not organized at all.

In conclusion, Dr. Mulusew lamented that some of them are the oldest public libraries. There are 229 libraries in the country which is about one (1) library per 4.3 million people. An IT service is only available in three libraries in the SNNPR and than an IT service is not available in most libraries at all.

### **Panel Discussions and Q&A session**

Daniel Worku, children's book writer, made a speech regarding his personal experience. Daniel pointed out the following issues:

- stories are meant to be shared with children;
- the importance of reading out loud to children;
- the importance of writing children's books and teaching others how to write children's books;
- the importance of using pictures in children's literature;
- the importance of materials that show children's real life; and
- Books should be carefully modulated and children will learn to see patterns and ask questions.





Regarding picture illustration, the writer said pictures should be wellthought-out and initially books might be motivating and appealing to Ethiopian children. He also said thatwriting children's books is still under experimentation and many are involved in the process of producing illustrated books to Ethiopian children with a huge gap in translation. The writer suggests that more should be done to support professionalism.

The writer also suggested that using professional editors and also using teachers and librarians would help in identifying what books are appropriate for readers.

The other panelist for the day was Ayida Asegid a children's book writer. She highlighted the lack of reading materials, poor book distribution, the lack of editors, publishers, policy printed alphabet books, lack of books for reading in libraries and the greed of book sellers. She recommended that more publishers should come to the market.

Other challenges she mentioned included the high publishing price and lack of enough books in schools. While forwarding her recommendations, she emphasized the importance of learning from China's experience and that the Ethiopian government should invest more money to help writers and publishers. It is challenging to publish children's books in such circumstances.

During the panel discussion more recommendations were forwarded from participants such as books for the blind with illustrations, using tactile sense/images, the need for a platform of stakeholders to discusspromoting digital libraries and reducing the price of books.



Participants in the discussion also delivered their opinions on reading materials to consider blind people, as most focused only on non-blind readers. One participant urged a more adaptive technology be put in place for the blind and indicated that his organization was working on it.

There is no children's library in Addis Ababa nor in the country outside and we need to have more historical books for the present generation to know about the history of their country. In Ethiopia there are many NGOs working on children's issues, however they don't work on the intellectual development of the child. An academy should be put in place.

Other contributors emphasized the importance of working together and establishing libraries full of reading materials since many libraries do not have enough books. Another participant from Save the Children said most children's books have an academic nature. Book distribution is very challenging for NGOs, and the government shouldn't interfere while books are published and distributed.

To what extent are books correlated with Ethiopian history and Ethiopian culture? What are our efforts to incentivize children? What efforts are made to involve business people in children's books? What about the establishment of digital libraries?

While responding to these questions the German Cultural Institute and World Vision have started a collaborative project on a digital library. They have distributed books for free. There are several common challenges such as the high price of publication and consequently the high cost of books that discourages reading. But we can fight all the challenges by working together.

Daniel Worku, while expressing the challenges of book publishing in the country, identified that the first problem was that people were not interested in books, except school books. The other problem he encountered while writing various books was the expense incurred for illustrators, designers and other professionals. He lamented that it was very challenging to publish quality books in such

conditions. One initiative that Daniel had taken was to include the distribution of books he had published to a number of schools, for free, in order to contain costs. If the task of distribution had been given to the publishing firms this would have added an additional cost component and would potentially have priced the books out of the market so that they would be unaffordable. In addition, the publishing firms are not interested in publishing children's books as they consider them valueless.



A representative from the Ethiopian Literacy Association said the main objective of the Association is in establishing a platform with all stakeholders to achieve the same goal.

While responding Jane Kurtz said working together with passionate people on reading or publishing is essential to resolve our problems and challenges. Ato Yitagesu also said rather than focusing on problems it is wise to focus on the solutions. The platform helps us to work together for the same cause. He also invited more potential people to support reading culture and to achieve more.

After Dr. Mulusew made his presentation participants forwarded their questions. Here are selections of them:

- Whether Gidicho is a language or an ethnicity?

- Whether the private sectors are involved in the research?
- How are prisons considered in the study?

Another question from the audience was regarding the language policy and to what extent teachers understand and use reading materials and the existing language barrier while using books?

Participants also expressed their doubt about the Ministry of Education's initiative in engaging the community when books are prepared or published.

While responding to panelists Dr. Mulusew indicated how he involved Addis Ababa Culture and Tourism Office for his study. He tried to make the study very short and tried to include parents, students and teachers as well. Regarding language planning it might have had some perception problems. Students learn in their native language rather than in English and this will create challenges to understand reading materials and lessons should be taken from abroad whereby they learn two or three languages at a time.

Another participant said that if the system lacks books and an interest in reading then teachers should take the initiative to read and become role model for their students. It is worrisome to see such a poor reading culture among society. We need to work hard to promote a reading culture and improve the attitude of the people towards books.

Participants also stressed the need for reading classrooms to be incorporated in the country's education curriculum. And the Ministry of Education should consider that and the need to expand awareness of the importance of reading among parents and communities across the country.

A teacher also commended Ethiopia Reads for their commitment in enhancing the reading culture and establishing libraries in different areas. The teacher also commented on the need to have more reference materials and a standard salary for librarians and we need to promote the profession.

An English language teacher who said he was a member of the British Council commended the role of Ethiopia Reads. Most libraries lack book organization and the coming of Ethiopia Reads has helped us to have proper library protocols such as classifying the various books based on the educational status. Ethiopia Reads is a good role model for the British Council. We have to give enough time for children to review books. All sectors of society should exert an effort to promote a reading culture.

Another primary school teacher applauded the role of Ethiopia Reads in supporting additional books for their school library. She also mentioned the existing challenges such as low salary for librarians. Another school director also mentioned the importance of education for the socio-

economic development of a country. Ethiopia Reads has helped to enhance the reading culture in our school, such as reading in front of students; hence we would like to thank them.

Participants also noted that some NGOs don't like to distribute the donated books or funds properly. While forwarding their reflection to raised issues, the board director of Ethiopia Reads mentioned his organization runs out of budget. The committee working with them follows up the trainings voluntarily without any payment. The book publishing industry should play a role in enhancing the reading culture.

One participant also expressed her organization's interest in publishing books for free and urged stories to be uncovered for publications. Participants also commended Ethiopia Reads for promoting reading culture but asked about the future strategic plans of the organizations and the educational policy of Ethiopia and the importance of taking lessons from countries like India.

Commending Ethiopia Reads, Ato Mesert highlighted the main points raised during the workshop: the need to support rural children, to support teachers and librarians, the good character in the story line, the importance of reading for vocabulary and the importance of professionalism, the importance of training, quality curriculum, the need to read aloud. In addition respecting librarians as a profession and promoting motivated librarians were mentioned as major points of the discussion.

Pictures should be used in conjunction with reading material for story building, the importance of bilingual books. The need to create fertile ground for reading culture in Ethiopia, the need to motivate teachers to promote their reading culture, training should consider reading skills.

As the way forward more has to be done to motivate teachers. Librarians need to have local reading materials and knowing the content of books is vital.

### **Final Remarks**

Producing appropriate books, their effective distribution, how libraries provide appropriate services and how to offer professional training for librarians was reviewed.

Whilst noting his opinion much emphasis was made of the need to reconsider the current curriculum and the Ministry of Education is subjected to. The communities don't have awareness about what their children learn at school.

In line with the Summit's discussions, participants were requested to provide feedback for the organizers of the Summit, and they did so accordingly. Ethiopia Reads director thanked participants

for engaging with the Summit, which she said was productive and efficient. She reminded the gathering that the feedback harnessing approach, using the form prepared by Ethiopia Reads, was believed to help lay the foundation to establish networking opportunities among stakeholders, to identify challenges and gaps as well as how to handle them and take forward steps.

While concluding the Summit the moderator commended panelists and participants for the wonderful gathering and deliberation for the day-long-meeting. Similarly the representative of Ethiopia Reads said the Summit was an interesting and useful discussion reminding all stakeholders to work on the next steps and the need to work jointly in the days to come.

Another concluding remark came from the director promising to hold a similar event next year and pledging to forge collaboration with stakeholders.



## Ethiopia Reads Books Exhibition

The Summit also included photo and book displays of Ethiopia Reads activities and publications.

