

**PROCEEDINGS OF  
THE SECOND ANNUAL CHILDREN’S READING SUMMIT**



**“Children’s Education and Reading Practice”**

**March 12 – 13, 2020**

**Magnolia Hotel**

**Addis Ababa**

**PROCEEDINGS OF  
THE SECOND ANNUAL CHILDREN’S READING SUMMIT,  
ORGANIZED BY ETHIOPIA READS**

**Theme: “Children’s Education and Reading Practice”**



**Written by;  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Ethiopia Reads in collaboration with FDR.E Ministry of Education organized and hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Children’s Reading Summit at the Magnolia Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from March 12 – 13, 2020 under the theme “Children’s Education and Reading Practice”.

### **The objective of the summit was**

- To inform, discuss and reflect on challenges and opportunities on children’s reading culture and libraries for children.
- To identify practical and low cost strategies to promote early reading and improve access to books for children.
- Explore opportunities for collaboration and cross-sector partnerships.
- To inform and influence policy-makers and executives to give the necessary attention for early reading and developing children libraries.

The summit was attended by around 200 participants who came together from Ethiopia and abroad on both days comprising panels of literacy experts, researcher and scholars, educators, development agencies, civil society partners, entrepreneurs, children’s book writers, book printers and publishers, illustrators, representatives from government offices as well as universities, and individuals working on children’s literacy who shared how they are each working towards improving children’s learning.

The summit highlighted the fact that despite there being a variety of programs underway to develop children’s reading habit and to upgrade their education level, such initiatives had not to date delivered the improvements in literacy results that had been hoped-for or expected. It emphasized on the awareness and impression from many participants that all stakeholders need to focus in an integrated and coherent manner, to upgrade the quality of education and reading culture in Ethiopia.

An important part of the summit featured presentations from different organizations and individuals. A special presentation made on behalf of the Adaptive Technology Center for the Blind showed that technology and science could open up a whole new world of knowledge and information to the blind scholar. Each session was followed by a brief discussion that allowed participants to exchange ideas and best practices. A panel discussion was hosted during which writers, representatives of a printers and publishers association and illustrators shared their experiences in addressing learning problems and showing direction in which children's book printing and similar work could be implemented in a professional manner.

Valuable ideas and suggestions were offered on how to continue to move beyond dialogue towards practical and effective children's engagement on reading and government intervention on reading culture and quality of education. It was identified that the need for collaboration between writers, printers, illustrators and publishers was paramount in order to develop and strengthen the work that has been already started regarding providing children with quality reading materials that will enhance their reading skills.

The discussion that took place during the summit resulted in identifying a few opportunities for cross-sector collaboration.



**Ethiopia Reads staffs, Board of Directors and volunteers**

## Welcoming Speech



Mr. Malcolm Clark, chairman for the Board of Directors of Ethiopia Reads, initially welcomed participants and thanked everyone for coming in such big numbers. He introduced himself and explained that this was the second time Ethiopia Reads has

done Children's Reading Summit. He mentioned that he is very happy for FDR.E Ministry of Education's support and endorsement of the summit. He extended his appreciation to thank all speakers including some of them who came all the way from USA. He was happy that everyone has showed up and determined to participate. He witnessed that there are interesting range of groups from Ethiopia including people who know very well the ground conditions and the issues that the summit addresses.

He also thanked Ms. Metasebia Kessela for providing some polished coordination and being master of ceremonies. Additionally, he appreciated the board of Ethiopia Reads who are very appreciative of the young and very capable team in Ethiopia lead by Ms. Yemisrach Worku. He highlighted what they are within Ethiopia Reads: the Book Centered Learning committee. He witnessed that Ethiopia Reads group abroad is a remarkable assembly of volunteer professionals, professors on children reading, children literacy and senior librarians. Interestingly they are all women and they have been volunteering for many years. To develop very strong professionals is really core to what Ethiopia Reads is doing. The core of what Ethiopia Reads trying to do is to support Ethiopia in the building of professional expertise adapted to the environment here around children and reading. It focuses on librarians and

teachers, and on how to encourage reading. Not just teaching the curriculum but helping children become self- educated, which is what reading is all about.

He explained about what this summit is trying to do. According to Mr. Malcolm, Ethiopia Reads is a very small organization. It has been in Ethiopia for more than 17 years. Firstly, the organization has been building libraries and providing books around the country. It has operated in every region of Ethiopia. A series of projects cannot change the culture along with book market in them. Therefore, Ethiopia Reads has decided to hold this event. It is a way of trying to start a conversation. Mr. Malcolm believed that problems cannot be solved unless discussions lead the issue. Last year everyone was invited for the first summit. This includes; the Ministry of Education, major agencies involved, big donors, small non-profits who do similar but overlapping work, publishers, writers, illustrators, teachers and some librarians. It was intended to have everyone's point of view.

He attested that Ethiopia Reads has done quite well, certainly for the first summit last year. A lot of people have requested to do it again. Therefore, it is one of the reasons to hold this summit again. Despite the encouragement to do it, he believes that many people are doing what they are doing but the system doesn't work that well regarding children's reading. He explained that there is a very interesting topic about the science of reading. It is methodological and real science about what's happening in children's reading. The government is also presenting on EGRA and its findings on the summit, which is a very practical "facing of the facts" about what's happening in Ethiopia around children's reading.

Mr. Malcolm continued his speech briefing about Ethiopia Reads for participants who don't know its work in detail. Ethiopia Reads was co-founded 20 years ago by Ethiopian children librarian named Ato Yohannes G/Giorgis in the US and by a foreigner who grew up in Maji for 17 years, Mrs. Jane Kurtz.



Ethiopia Reads opened a library in Addis, with a lot of books coming from abroad, and it was remarkably successful. It is a public library with a dozen or so children showing up and it is always full. It also established over 70 good quality libraries in public schools throughout Ethiopia. Additionally, librarians were trained for those libraries and donated language books for the libraries. The goal is to build a reading culture. He believes that reading is fundamental to everything. He said Ethiopia Reads has public children libraries. One is in Addis Ababa around Kebena and the other, longer standing and bigger one, is in Hawassa. Donkey and horse-powered libraries are part of the work as well. A lot of books were imported through support from LeAnn Clark. She has imported over half a million books with her husband over the past 17 years. These carefully-selected and important reference books were donated to over a hundred libraries in the country.

In addition to this, Ethiopia Reads has worked on another project to print and distribute Ethiopian story books with an organization called Open Hearts Big Dreams. It has created many and yet very attractive Ethiopian children books. In 2018, alone over 100,000 books were printed in different local languages: Amharic, Afaan, Oromo and Sidama with the help of donors.

According to Mr. Malcolm, the aim of the conference is to address improved training and professional development. It is because educational professionals will get better training on professional development. He believed that teachers are usually encouraged for the use of books outside of the strict curriculum encouraging children to read independently as part of what Ethiopia Reads is trying to do. In addition to this he mentioned that most schools all over Ethiopia are given books from Ethiopia Reads. He noted that books delivered to the schools are sometimes just kept in sheds and boxes. The reason for this is that the teachers are not trained to read books. They haven't even seen the books in a children's library function well. Unless teachers and educators are provided with some training about how they can incorporate those books into

their work, it is a problem. It is one of the reasons to hold this summit. He indicated that this summit will act as a catalyst to transform literacy and education in Ethiopia. These are things he trusts the summit will address. Mr. Malcolm showed that the other crucial purpose of the summit is about networking. Ethiopia Reads can demonstrate what it's doing on children's books and can find out what others are doing. As professionals, parents and Ethiopian citizens, it's great to see what everyone can do for children's reading and collaborate with each other. Another issue here will be about how to transform the book market – particularly the children's book market - in Ethiopia. This will be a demanding task involving writers, illustrators and publishers.

Finally, he appreciated the participants for coming and wished to have interesting couple of days in the summit.

## Opening Remarks



Ato Yasabu Birkinneh, Director of School Improvement Program, FDR.E Ministry of Education, started his remarks by expressing his gratitude for being there and said such kinds of platform has a great impact for educational

development, knowledge, information and transformation. He extended his appreciation to all participants for being on the summit with great expectation.

According to Ato Yisabu, education is key to solving the country's complex problems. In today's world, the difference between countries in economical, social and political issues depends on the focus they give to education; the work they do and the results they harvest. Taking this into consideration, the Ethiopian government has given special attention to education. It works to give access to education for everyone and tries to assure quality at every level. He showed that it is reflected in the government's budget. It assigned 25% of the country's budget for education which is more than 4% of the county's GDP.

Ato Yasabu noted that Ethiopia has done a lot of work to make education accessible for all. There are now more than forty thousand schools in the country. The schools have 0.7 million teachers. This sector currently accommodates more than twenty-six million children and youth. The government has done tremendous work in rural areas with farmers and pastoralists and also in emerging regions and with females to narrow the gaps and achieve a more successful result. Furthermore, he stressed that the

government is undertaking significant work to improve the quality of education at every level. However, he said that on top of these, there are still a lot of work to do with regards to making education accessible to all and assuring quality on each level.

Ato Yasabu also stressed that, the nationwide study conducted in 2010 G.C has shown most children in grade 2 and grade 3 have difficulty in reading and writing in their own mother tongue. Following this study, the government has carried out different kinds of improvements to the education system in collaboration with various development supporters. In addition, it's working to grow reading centers. The improvements include: training teachers, delivering books, organizing reading centers and also improving the curriculum. Furthermore, it's working to develop reading centers in communities at different locations. However, there are still drawbacks in lower level elementary schools and on children's reading and writing skills.

The government recently developed a road map for education to improve the reading and writing skills of children to advance the overall education system. Based on this road map, basic reform is being implemented in the ministry. The major reform focuses on qualifying children to read and write beginning from preschool classes. Despite the obstacles faced in the education sector, it is believed that the reform will do much to solve the reading and writing problems.

He believes that the summit will have great impact on improving the reading and writing skills of children. Additionally, he trusts it has the potential to yield book readers community in the country. He also believe that on top of what government does on reading, writing and quality of education, the work that supportive organizations do has great value. Especially, Ethiopia Reads plays an important role in this regard and it deserve gratitude and big appreciation for organizing this summit and facilitating the ground for stakeholders to

discuss on children's reading. He said that as Mr. Malcolm Clark has said, even though a lot of stakeholders work on education, there is no coordination or understanding or discussion on developing children's reading skills. Therefore, it makes this kind of summit of paramount for the issue. He finally wish the summit to be successful and declared it is officially open.

## Keynote Speech,



Ato Meseret Abeje started his speech by expressing his appreciation to Ethiopia Reads for organizing “The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual children’s Reading Summit”. He believes it has made it possible for professionals,

researchers, writers, publishers and librarians to come together and share research findings, expert ideas, experiences, observations and views. There is no cause nobler than the education of children. The actors in this mission including Ethiopia Reads are doing a meaningful job in this regard.

Ato Meseret articulated that committed to nurture a reading culture all over the country through improvements in literacy and reading, not only teachers but also librarians and communities of people play an important role. He disclosed how demanding the task is and no matter what the challenging the job may be, he believes stakeholders will not rest until they see their dream come true. Governments of especially underdeveloped countries always vow to give priority for the education of young minds. They have a lot of funds and sources of money to build schools. There are some countries where schools are mushrooming. The major point here is that the schools are provided with facilities such as good quality books. It is not encouraging that most schools do not have enough reading materials. Ethiopia is the case in bold. He stated that one who can travel in the country will see what is missing or most neglected as a vital part of the school. He/she might find out that it would be a library.

Government might be satisfied with its effort to build schools. However, quality education is much more important than constructing classrooms.

Ato Meseret stated that government build schools but the state of the schools is not as good as how it was half a century ago. Somehow, the situation can change and there is hope. For him there are people who are determined to make a change. He trusts Ethiopia is a land where the impossible is possible. Therefore, there should always be hope that there will be change.

Nations can rise only through cultivating the minds of its children. He said that Ethiopia Reads has convened today that Ethiopia can achieve its big dream of making reading part of a national culture. Reading is not a choice but it is a must. He believes children should be trained to love reading and make it a habit. To this end, there needs to be a scheme that motivate students for reading. Only then, can children be better achievers; only then can schools be expected to educate many more students who can go on and become heads of state through reading. The best magic to success is through reading; developing critical reading skills and holding paramount thinking. That is why the task cannot be kept for tomorrow.

He is certain that such platforms (as this summit) will awaken policy makers about the vital roles of reading and libraries in enhancing learning and quality education. He is positive that participants will work out practical ways of providing reading materials and training librarians and teachers on how to read faster and better. In addition, he hope that the summit will come up with some ways of improving the artistic, creative and critical competence of book writers so as to enable them produce books with stories that are both inspiring and appropriate to young readers and assist in overcoming the challenges in book publishing and distributing. In conclusion, he wished participants a fruitful session and appreciated all for engaging in the most satisfying career: that of promoting reading throughout the nation.

## **First Day: First Presentation**

### **The Art and Science of Reading: by Dr. Laurie Curtis (Assistant Professor, Emeritus at Kansas State University)**



Dr. Curtis explained the purpose of her presentation was to describe the basic principle of brain structuring during reading as we know from the medical profession. It is also to describe the five basic components of reading structure. However, the focus

will be on the following three components: namely fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. She also clarified that she will talk about the intersection between learning to read using high quality children books and how to apply this in the book centered learning curriculum.

Dr. Laurie Curtis explained that the book centered learning curriculum developed 23 comprehensive training modules based on three components. The first is in library organization, the second is engaging students in reading and the third is on professional development and advocacy for children libraries. She has enlightened that they have piloted 22 schools, collected and analyzed the data that was presented at last year's summit. The goal is to train librarians and other educators to assist children in their reading outside of the classroom and thereby developing lifelong readers.

Dr. Laurie Curtis noted that the art and science of reading is related to the neuroscience around education and psychology which deals with motivation. She continued her presentation by explaining basic information about the human brain. According to Dr. Curtis, the brain is 78% water, 10% fat and 8%



protein. It processes about 8 gallons of blood an hour. She pointed out that understanding this, as educators and teachers, helps to comprehend that hydration and nutrition are both very important for learning. She continued her briefing that sleep and exercise have been found to encode information and assist creation of new brain cells respectively in young children. Additionally, she explained critical and sensitive periods in learning. Critical period is explained as something that should happen on specific period or it will never happen. However, learning to read and write doesn't happen in a critical period. According to Dr. Curtis, that occurs during a sensitive period.

Dr. Curtis has explained that our brain is "plastic". It continues to change throughout life. This shows that learning occurs all the time. As sensory information is processed and repeated, connections become stronger and more long term memory will occur. If we don't connect something we have learned, we might forget. Moreover, she described that learning occurs through our five senses. Therefore, she suggested that as an educator, it is important that we should think about our instruction using all the five senses of the child. Using multimodal instruction in art, music, creative expression, reading, writing and speaking is very important.

In Dr. Curtis' explanation, she pointed out that there is no specific part of the brain designated for reading acquisition. For a child to learn reading, multiple areas and processes of the brain must work together. The vision, the hearing, the articulation of the muscles and the mouse, the cognitive processing that goes on with language. According to Dr.. Curtis, modeling and demonstration is very important for learning. Likewise, she explained that children attend to information that has high emotional content. Furthermore, she argued that high challenge, low stress is conducive for learning.

Dr. Curtis pointed out that limbic system is a set of structures that regulates the processing of information. The hypothalamus is related to our sense of

information which regulates what is inside a human. She points out that our brain has a small part called the amygdala which releases hormones to our system which cause a person to react.

She summarized her presentation with the following points; there is no one area of the brain that is designated for reading. Reading occurs through a complex process of adapting multiple areas of the brain that have to work together to encode and decode information. There are structures that can inhibit or enhance learning that limbic system that are very dependent on the physical and emotional environment that students are in when they're trying to learn. Based on what is known about the brain during reading, it is beneficial to provide high-interest, accessible texts to their level, model the reading process and provide opportunities to practice reading in a low-stress, supportive environment. Discussing further, she has described that there are five components of reading instruction. These are; Phonemic awareness (deals with the sounds of language); Phonics (how the sounds put together with rules to make the words); Fluency (the three components here are the *rate* – how fast can they read, accuracy – how correctly are they reading the words written and porosity – reading with expression of conveying message); Vocabulary (words with meaning) and Comprehension (understanding what you read in order to react).

According to Dr. Curtis, the brain “plastic” continues to change as sensory information is processed and connections are made and synaptic pruning takes place when connections aren't utilized. Repetition strengthens these connections. Children's books invite repeated readings. There are multiple pathways to memory. Therefore, multimodal instruction is essential. She has stated that reading aloud to children should be a daily practice in classrooms and libraries. The book centered curriculum could be one part of this as it has multiple models to provide a read-aloud protocol.

Dr. Curtis believes that books that are selected for children by teachers and librarians should be sensory-rich, interesting for children and engage their interest. Books that are written in Ethiopia give a “mirror” for children, that the kids will say it looks like them. A trained adult will select a book that is high-challenge and low risk that does not stress children.

In conclusion, she pointed out that learning to read is a difficult task which children and adults seek to avoid as it brings frustration, stress and embarrassment. However, practice makes the reading experience better. Gaining access to books is very important in changing the culture of literacy and youth. The brain process information when reading and the components necessary for high quality reading instruction unanimously to apply this knowledge makes differences in the lives of our children.

#### Questions raised from participants

Following first presentation, participants raised questions with regards to reading and the presentation. Some of the questions raised were: As children have a lot of books to read and assignments to work on at home, when do they have time to read fun books? How can we reconcile reading with the academic obligations they have? Parents might not be educated and may not understand the importance of reading at early age thus, what is your plan to reach out to these parents especially in rural areas? How do Ethiopia Reads books get selected and distributed to children in Ethiopia? And the last question was raised by the Ministry of Education about the program sustainability if Ethiopia Reads needs or is interested to continue working with World Bank or GEQIP – E and the Ministry of Education?

Ethiopia Reads (ER) representative addresses the questions raised as follows; If reading only focuses on children, and didn't engage participation with and contribution from parents, then it is undercutting family life; The books that Ethiopia Reads distributes in Ethiopia are carefully selected and sorted even

before shipping to Ethiopia as well as after they get here. ER makes sure that they don't have any hidden agenda, religious, politics, race etc... issues. They are just good for children to read and raise their reading culture; ER is trying to work with the Ministry of Education (MoE) with projects similar to GEQIP-E. However, it takes time to reach one concrete point and this is an ongoing process. ER is happy there are Ministry of Ethiopia representatives who understand this kind of work process. And they had good collaboration in the past year with the ministry with a view to work on further projects.

## **Second Presentation**

### **Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) 2018: Key findings and its impact on the acquisition of reading skills: by Ato Yilkal Wendimeneh (National Education Assessment and Examination Agency, NEAEA)**



Ato Yilkal Wendimeneh briefed that EGRA assessment was done in collaboration with USAID, NEAEA and the MoE. The presentation will show the results on children reading skills and the achievements made in the

past years. The concern he had was about the children skill. He raised a question about children. What will happen to a child on grades 7 and 8 if he cannot read at early grades? He has emphasized that reading is a foundation stone for children's learning. According to Ato Yilkal, EGRA assessments were undertaken in 2010, 2014, 2016 and his presentation is a finding from the

2018 data collection. However, he mentioned that the assessment will continue in 2020 as well.

As an introduction, Ato Yilikal explained how Early Grade Reading Assessment works for participants. EGRA is a study conducted for measuring the foundational literacy skills that readers need for beginning reading. It is an assessment that measures performance in early grade reading skills and the education system's success in enabling children to learn. It has been conducted in Ethiopia since 2010 to inform important policy and pedagogical discussions about where, when and how to improve the level of reading among early grade students. To date, EGRA has assessed the reading and literacy levels of early grade students in over 120 languages and more than 70 countries throughout the world.

EGRA does not reflect a particular method of reading instruction but rather measures reading skills that can be targeted through intervention. Ato Yilikal further elaborated about steps in reading as pre-literacy: both learning to read and reading to learn. The major purpose of EGRA was described as to identify the gaps children have in reading and to provide data for decision makers based on the findings. The specific objectives are the fluency scores, comprehension scores, % of achieving benchmarks, monitoring progress over time, comparison of subgroups (gender, grade) and explain possible factors.

Ato Yilikal continued his explanation by telling the sampling technique which shows that, EGRA 2018 was conducted in grade 2 and 3 governmental school students in 7 local languages namely Af-Somali, Afaan Oromo, Amharic, Hadiyissa, Sidaamu Afoo, Tigrigna, Wolayttatto. The sampling was done in two stage stratified cluster sampling. The overall planned sample distribution was 18,360 students but the achieved number of students was 17,879 students or (97.4%). With regards to procedures; it was orally administered; one-to-one; measuring pre-reading and reading skills; and took 15 – 20 minutes. It was

administered with the support of tablet and if a student cannot read on the specific minutes, the tablet will stop and record the result. Instrument components are letter and sound knowledge (100 words were given); phonetic awareness; familiar words reading (50 – 60 words); invented words (words that do not have meaning); passage reading fluency (60 words per minute in their own words); reading comprehension; listening comprehension and questionnaires.

According to Ato Yilikal, the key findings of the assessment were presented focusing on the reading fluency and comprehension abilities of the children. The fluency skill of children was assessed based on three parameters. The questions are letter name recognition, familiar words reading and invented words reading. It was administered in grade 2 and 3 students in their own language to see their progress from grade 2 to grade 3. The fluency scores recorded in this regard were as low as 4.9 in Afaan Oromo and 5.2 in Hadiyissa for invented words reading for grade two students. It was noted that familiar words reading and letter name recognition was as low as 7.3 and 28.8 both for grade two students in Hadiyissa. Children have better comprehension in listening and understanding as the lowest score was 46.3, for Tigrigna in grade 2. However, initial letter sound was scored 47.2 in Afaan Oromo for grade 2 and reading comprehension was as low as 9.2 in Sidamu for grade 2. The basic problem for children was found to be reading. Therefore, Ato Yilikal suggested that due emphasis should be given to reading skills for children. Word reading fluency per minute was scored 6 words per minute for grade 2 students in Hadiyissa language. Nonetheless, grade 3 students can read 9 words per minute in the same language. The highest words per minute were recorded for grade 3 students in Amharic language. It was found to be 38 words. This shows that the range is wide and it raises the question ‘Why’?

With regards to gender evaluation, male students performed better except in Amharic language. In Amharic females scored 26 words per minute but male

students had a score of 23.6. The list in this observation is in the Hadiyissa language. Females scored 3.7 words per minute in grade 2. This statistic is the overall study. However, there are some students that cannot read a single word. Hadiyissa language scores the worst result in this regard. 71.5% of grade two students cannot read a word. Similarly, Wolayttatto language students had 57.4% non-readers for grade 2 and 33.7% for grade 3 students. Amharic language reading also has a score of 15.2% on non-readers in grade 2 and 7.3% for grade 3 students which are a better score when compared to other languages. According to Ato Yilikal's impression, the students are struggling in two directions: one is in reading and the other is in understanding the subject matter.

Three cutting scores were kept as a benchmark with a panel of experts to evaluate the students' scores. These scores are reading slowly and with limited comprehension; reading with increasing fluency and comprehension and reading fluently with full comprehension. The percentage of students' benchmark level by year was 27, 34 and 30 for year 2014, 2016 and 2018 respectively and the required level was not met. Non-readers were 42% for year 2014, 32% for year 2016 and 37% for year 2018. Reading with increasing fluency and comprehension was 25%, 27% and 26% for year 2014, 2016 and 2018 respectively. Those students who can read fluently and with full comprehension has declined in number with the statistics 6% in 2014, 7% in 2014 and 6% in 2018. Therefore, Ato Yilikal suggested that hard work needs to be done in order to qualify students in reading fluently and in comprehension.

The finding of 2015/16 report shows that the impact of low performance in early reading persists to higher grade levels. The average score of grade 4 students reading by their mother tongue was only 47%. The average score in different subjects was 44.74 which didn't even reach 50 percent. The study was conducted on grade 4 and 8 students and the composite mean score shows that all the percentage is below 50%. The reading skill of students by their

mother tongue had a declining score when we see grade 10 students from 35.9% in 2010 to 33.3% in 2018. In addition to this, 50% and above score was recorded by 36% and 25.2% in grade 4 and 8 respectively. The study shows that only 9.1% and 26.6% of grade 10 and 12 students respectively scored more than 50% composite mean score.

The presentation from Ato Yilkal identified points that have a positive association for children's reading improvement as a finding of background variables.

- The existence of a person in the house responsible for reviewing the mother tongue lesson plans of the student;
- The frequency of the review of the mother tongue lesson plans by MoE and USAID;
- The existence of a person responsible for observing the mother tongue language teachers while teaching;
- The frequency with which the mother tongue teachers are observed; and
- Classroom observation as an activity is also statistically significant when performed by a director, unit leader or department head.
- **Teachers' qualifications** are significantly related to student reading performance in schools. There was a strong positive association between the number of teachers with a diploma or degree and student reading performance in their schools.
- When **100% of mother tongue teachers receive in-service training**, their schools see a positive association with student performance in reading comprehension when compared to schools that have a lesser percentage of teachers receiving training.
- **Availability and use of SRMs (Supplementary Reading Materials):** When schools received supplementary reading materials, these materials are available to students and students are using the school library or



reading room. There was a positive association of these factors with higher performance in students' reading performance.

- **Teachers' seniority:** Teachers who report having 10 or more years of service are associated with a higher reading performance for their students.
- Teachers that reported using the "I do, you do, we do" teaching method and the student textbook and the teacher guide every time they teach are associated with higher performance in reading.
- Organizing **remedial classes** for students who are lagging behind the ordinary teaching and learning is also associated with higher performance in reading.
- When looking at the effect of **classroom activities**, those that are positively associated with higher performance in reading are **retelling a story they read**, sounding out **unfamiliar** words, learning the meanings of new words, reading aloud, and reading by themselves.
- Teachers who expect students to write their name, recognize letters, sound out unfamiliar words, and read short passages with few mistakes before grade 1 or at grade 1 are positively associated with reading performance of their schools.
- Regarding students' attitudes toward reading and those who report borrowing supplementary reading materials obtain oral reading fluency scores significantly higher points than students who do not report these activities.

### Recommendations forwarded

The recommendations forwarded after analyzing the findings of the assessment are:- allocating more time for teaching and reading; using better technique for teaching and reading; giving more texts for children; teaching children in their mother tongue and monitoring and evaluating children's reading progress. Additionally, strengthening the existing attempts of teachers' competency assessment by developing and administering assessments of teacher

competencies for teaching and reading. Furthermore, developing a system of reevaluating schools' capacity for teaching and reading was also recommended including giving time for children and continued classroom assessment.

### Questions raised from participants

The stage was open for questions and these were questions raised with regards to EGRA report; how can we work to make children's books more appealing for them? Does the reading problem get media attention? Are there social platforms which help to address this issue? Did the teachers get the necessary attention in the education sector? What was expected from Ministry of Education to improve children's reading skills? Why didn't children's reading skills improve through the years?

The presenter, Ato Yilkal replied to the questions raised by the participants as follows; we expect to see progress on the reading skills of students through years. However, the results we get are shocking for us. One of the problems is that we have loaded other curricular activities on children that they find reading a difficult task; the challenge we have with our organization and the Ministry of Education is to work in harmony without duplication and in coordination; we have to focus on solutions and working together; almost half of our students could not read a single word. However, improvements in the curriculum are required to make it easier for reading skills to make progress; we always undertake activities with the object of improving children's reading skills. However, this area needs further studies to exactly tell what the problems are. It may be linked with teachers' competency but it is under study yet.

### **Third presentation**

#### **An Enhanced Teacher Professional Development (ETPD) Model: A Package for Improving Teachers' Classroom Practice to Maximize Children's learning: by Ato Jemal Abdulkadir, (Creative Associates International, USAID - READ II project)**



Ato Jemal Abdulkadir started his presentation by briefing the audience about the Read II project in Ethiopia. He said it is a five-year project funded by USAID operating in five regions of Ethiopia. The goal of the project is to improve reading proficiency and

educational attainment of grade 1-8 students in 7 mother tongue languages and English as second language. He then explained participants of the summit about his presentation. He said his presentation will be about teachers' professional development intervention working in four general areas: improved classroom reading and writing instruction; improved community engagement; capacity building leadership and crosscutting. However, his presentation will focus on improved classroom reading and writing instruction; improving teachers' professional development so as to improve children's learning.

Why Teachers Professional Development (TPD): As the way forward, he pointed out why teachers' professional development is so important. Key role in the teaching-learning-assessment information flow-loop. Information stemming from curriculum transmits to students through teachers. The teacher is a variable underlying children's success in learning to read (Farstrup and Samuels, 2002). Teachers who have sufficient knowledge about how learners

go through the reading process will give due emphasis to the learners' reading problems and reduce their challenges through appropriate reading instruction (Richards & Anderson, 2003). He underlined that curriculum will flow to students through teachers.

The Ministry of Education in collaboration with USAID/Read II project had introduced a teachers' professional development package that offers quality instructional materials; effective and targeted training and on-going support to teachers on key knowledge and skills gaps reinforced with ICT support. The motivational factors behind TPD are: students' scores continue to fall short of expectation; low teachers' competency; the need for school-based professional support; growing need for cost-effective a teachers' professional development package and the quest for effective way to improve teacher classroom practice and student learning.

Partnership with Ministry of Education: Ato Jemal highlighted that Read II is the project of the Ministry of Education to improve teacher's professional practice and USAID is giving technical support to the Ministry. In undertaking the project, Read II carefully navigated and examined ministry of education system, assessing the reality in schools (contextual factor) and learning in action to make adjustments and closely work with government structures.

Work flow: USAID - READ II has a formal workflow that follows the implementation of the project. Its central office communicates with READ II regional offices in vertical and horizontal communication structures. Vertically, USAID / READ II central office and READ II regional offices will communicate. Horizontally, READ II central office and Ministry of Education communicates on one side and READ II regional office and regional education bureau, woreda education office and schools will communicate. The Ministry also sends interaction messages according to these structures.

Teachers Professional Development Package: The platform of TPD has two packages. These are the enhanced model and the basic model. The enhanced model intervenes with English and mother tongue teachers in 6 regions of Ethiopia, 3,010 schools in 74 woredas. The basic model has 19,200 schools under the project in 6 regions believed to be covered in 3 years. The enhanced TPD model has two basic parts. Teachers' training is the first one. It is the teachers' key knowledge and skills gap identified by rapid assessment which is conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. It is a five-day scaffold face-to-face training followed by a three-day reflection session. After a year, READ II checks how far teachers have implemented the instructional strategies and the methodologies they were trained in. The second one is school based mentoring which is subject specific and focuses on one-to-one mentoring every month, Teachers' Study Groups (TSG) meetings, cluster level experience sharing (once per semester) and mobile phone key messaging. Teachers' training and school based mentoring together will lead to improved classroom instruction that will influence improved student learning. All the process will be closely followed by school management.

Targeted teachers training process: The first thing done was rapid assessment followed by training materials developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, professionals from universities, READ II experts etc. In addition to this, review, validation and adaptation to 7 mother tongue languages was conducted. Next to this, reprinting and distribution of selected reading materials to reach 1.8 million children in schools was done.

Number of trained teachers: So far the program trained 52 master trainers for mother tongue master trainers and 807 TOT and more than 19,399 grade 1-8 mother tongue teachers. Aside to this, 35 master trainers were also trained for English language with TOT training which is underway in different regions.

School-based TPD (Mentoring): Education and training policy must be updated as far as school based teachers' professional development is concerned followed by updating and upgrading teacher that are in service. Based on this, the Ministry of Education has developed a CPD framework and guidelines. CPD focuses on generic professional competencies. The first subject-specific Mother Tongue Language (MTL) mentoring was developed and implemented by READ I for 3 months in 2017 and READ II School based mentoring builds on the READ I pilot.

READ II mentoring approach: The READ II project mentoring approach follows one-to-one support twice in a month. It also has a teacher study group once a month using quick tools. The third one is cluster-based experience sharing which is supported by ICT done once in every semester.

Process in institutionalizing mentoring: The process in this regard is to hold consultative meetings among Ministry of Education, regional education bureaus and READ II project teams which leads to agreement on pre-existing mentoring and policy issues. The next step was to develop a framework and manual that has customization, review, validation and adaptation. After the above processes, quick tools were developed.

Structure of quick tools: Practical lessons were noted and awareness was communicated to teachers with reflection back and forward. Professional reading and key pointes of instruction were part of the quick tools. Discussion of new learning and modeling strategies for that particular component and continuous assessment. Finally, taking key components, action planning developed. Developed materials were tested before sending to schools directly to see the operational feasibility. It was noted that there was strong hope and belief among monitors and mentees that the program can be a good tool for changing the instructional practice. One of the lessons learned with the test was that every school does not have the appropriate mother tongue teachers. One teacher from other subjects like biology were assigned for the classes.

Training on mentors: On training mentors READ II has used the Cascade model and trained 21 master trainers and 246 TOTs. Additionally, 5,570 mentors were trained for grade 1-8 classes. Mostly trained master trainers and TOTs were city teacher educators and university instructors. School leadership was also given a highlight about mentoring and brief orientation for teachers about mentoring. It has given them instruction on why mentoring is important. The model created ongoing learning opportunities for teachers.

Accomplishment: One of the great accomplishments of READ II was training all actors, unlike READ I. It has supported the implementation of school-based teachers' professional development. With regards to schools, school grants were provided to facilitate the implementation of the program focusing on gender, teacher study group facilitation and other similar issues.

Challenges: One of the challenges in implementing the project is the shortage of student based teacher guides. Assigning of the right teacher to the specified subject was also another pitfall of the project. Mentors' workloads were not reduced in some regions. As the responsibility of government, there was weak follow up and support noted from regional education bureau and woreda education offices. The other challenge faced was high turnover of teachers and mentors.

Way forward: Ato Jemal has presented his final point on future fate of Read II project. The Read II project will continue to build the capacity of main government partners in the process to ensure sustainability. Close follow-up of the program in schools will be conducted through supportive monitoring. The project will also closely work with all stakeholders to address the challenges and gather evidence on effectiveness of the model and prepare for scale-up.

### **Questions raised from participants**

After the presentation, participants raised these ideas and questions: Even if there are tremendous efforts, it is not enough for developing a children's reading habit - everyone should play his own part. Parents, teachers, Ministry of Education, publishers and writers all have their own part to play and to contribute more; 70% of schools in Addis Ababa are private schools. Nevertheless, government didn't give due emphasis to qualify teachers for these schools. Since there is shortage of professionals, these schools are taking teachers from other professions like accounting and other business fields. There is a significant shortage of teachers in the market; we know that Ethiopia Reads is working a lot including in rural areas, even observed donkey mobile libraries. Non-readers in Amharic from grade two students are 15% and in Hadiyissa 71.5%. Why do we have this discrepancy in students that are on the same grade level but learning in different languages? They have economical demand. They need to be paid well. The questions and ideas were discussed and with this the first day of the Summit comes to an end.

On the second day, the Summit was scheduled to present two papers, one on experience sharing on an organizational level and the other one to initiate the panel discussion about the general situation of the country on children's books publishing. The panel discussion was followed by children's books exhibition presented by Ethiopia Reads as well as different children's book writers displaying their work.





## **Second Day: First Presentation**

### **Adapting and Digitalizing Teaching and Learning Braille**

#### **Material both for Academic and Other Literary Reading: by Dr..**

##### **Tamiru Ewnetu (Adaptive Technology Center for the Blind, ATCB)**



Dr. Tamiru gave an introduction and said that his focus is on the technology of printing and the distributing of braille material for blind people. General principles of policy development include: align policy and core values;

consider how the policy impacts on teaching and learning; consult the stakeholders (the blind community and their associates affected by the policy or representative should be consulted about it) who read it; don't just import a policy from another country. He believes that the policy in Ethiopia is copied from Finland. However, he argued that it should be adapted to our country; use samples as a guide to the process of developing our own policy; publicize to all concerned stakeholders (Dr. Tamiru claims that users must be consulted, including the local community).

Dr. Tamiru contends that the Ethiopian government enacted an inclusive education policy in 2006 adopted from other country and ratified by parliament. Blind children are currently institutionalized. However, they may not be integrated in the mainstream of education. There are few schools for the blind people now a days, like Sebeta School for the blind, Shashemene, Bako and Wolayita. There is inadequacy of braille services in the country. This leads

to high dropout rates from schools. There is little or no awareness among teachers about the intellectual capacity of blind people.

Points forwarded by Dr. Tamiru to solve the problems are

- A. Acknowledge the challenge that it poses for subject teachers;
- B. Identify current best practice in schools;
- C. Raise awareness and provide information for all: this includes integration and inclusion; categories of special needs; legislative context; strategies for effective teaching; resources i.e. braille reading and writing materials; subject inspection may highlight the need to plan for students with special needs within ordinary classes;
- D. Explore legislation and the implications for schools;
- E. Explore strategies that can be used by subject teachers;
- F. Encourage teachers to plan at subject department level;
- G. Establish a task group to develop a whole school policy;
- H. Ensure that the school has a staff member trained in learning support or resource.

Dr. Tamiru argued that special need students could be put on the planning agenda by emerging as a priority during school reviews; by the board of management responding to recent legislation and raising differentiation as an issue in subject department planning.

Dr. Tamiru briefed the participants about the Adaptive Technology Center for the Blind (ATCB's) work in the past twenty years. The organization has been serving the community by supplying braille to blind students in secondary schools. ATCB introduced Ethiopic braille enabling students to access textbooks in the national language of Amharic and with a range of regional languages. Dr. Tamiru witnessed that he has invented a machine that is assistive technology for the blind in Amharic and other local languages so that they can cope with the technology advancements in education. This is done to

enable the blind to access the technology independently including reading e-mails and doing other activities.

Dr. Tamiru has explained that the intervention of ATCB for the blind has provided to solve the following problems;

- Independence in learning: - when schools open in September, blind people come to school empty-handed while other students have books. This poses a question that blind cannot learn independently without having braille;
- Completing assignments on time:- Having braille on hand helps blind students to complete their class assignments on time;
- Good results in schools – blind students with braille books can score results as other students do;
- Gradual reduction of teachers’ bias about blind students and their learning skills.

According to Dr. Tamiru, the world intellectual property organization was created in 1967 “to encourage creative activity to promote the protection of intellectual property copyright throughout the world”. The Government of Ethiopia has also signed the Marrakesh Treaty to implement it in the country. The Marrakesh Treaty makes the production and international transfer of specially adapted books for people with blindness or visual impairments easier. The Treaty was signed in Marrakesh on June 27, 2013 and came into force on September 30, 2016. After discussing the above points, Dr. Tamiru showed a one minute video on how braille is made in his center (ATCB). He concluded his presentation by informing participants that ATCB has distributed over 7 million books for the blind in Ethiopia.

## **Second Presentation**

### **Children's Books Distribution, Challenges and Future Hopes in Ethiopia: by Ato Yitagesu Getnet, (Writer and part time lecturer at Addis Ababa University)**



Ato Yitagesu Getnet started by explaining that his presentation is a ground for later discussion taking on children book publishing as one sector. According to Ato Yitagesu, Ethiopian written history is known as one of the most ancient in Africa and the world.

Ethiopians have contributed significantly in this regard by writing on stone, wood and parchment to pass the scripts to generations. This has enabled us to have tremendous written documents in religious places, museums and libraries. UNESCO has currently registered Ethiopia's 12 heritages of scripts. The history of printing changed in the world from time when the Gutenberg printing press was first introduced in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Following this advancement, different improvements in the printing industry and progress in education sector has enabled the world to change its shape for the better.

Ato Yitagesu further stated that the history of book publishing in Ethiopia begun when Ethiopia introduced the Gutenberg's printing machine maybe half a century after its introduction to the world. However, the printing machine development reached to Massawa, Dire Dawa and Harar for religious purposes. After a while, the government established the Birhan ena Selam Printing Press. This has enabled the printing industry to advance one more level. It took around 100 years to come to this advancement. Emperor Haile Selassie allowed individuals to print their own books which was another development for the

print industry in the country. However, Ethiopia didn't witness a publishing institution until the 1950's. Even if we can cite Oxford publishers and Ethiopian books enterprises, publishing was left for the authors and writers themselves, which is called self-publishing. Ato Yitagesu noted that we could not see strong publishers like the Kuraz Publishing Company which was functioning in 1980's as one of the best the country has seen in years.

The first objective of the presentation is showing advancement and constraints in the Ethiopian publishing industry. The second objective is to suggest solutions to the problems that the publishing industry faces. It is also to make the stakeholders in the industry aware about coordination and the solutions available. Additionally, it aims to address the preparation and distribution chain in children book publishing.

Ato Yitagesu continued his presentation by discussing the current situation that since this is a time of information and knowledge, focus should be given on the dissemination of information. The country currently has a quarter of its population in schools. This figure shows that a significant proportion of society can read and write and it is educated. However, it is very difficult to find research and educational and quality books available in abundance for the society. Even if the curriculum supports learning in mother tongue, we can see that books written in local languages for teaching are hard to find. The other scarcity in the country is reflected in the technology sector. It is not easy to find technologically supported materials like tablets, computers etc. We cannot even easily reach children by television as there is no electricity in rural areas.

Ato Yitagesu explained that problems of authors in Ethiopia by stating that authors have to write, print and distribute books through their own efforts and enterprise. The process they undergo is prepare themselves, write, get comment, look for money to print as there is no publisher, print and distribute in every shop. Every book shop takes only limited number of books to sell but

will also take books on a consignment basis like for a year or so. In this scenario, it is very difficult to expect quality and quantity in the books printed.

Children book writers face a far more difficult burden. To write children books, requires knowledge of culture, psychology, art etc. Authors should qualify themselves by doing many things. There are no schools for this. Additionally, they have to collaborate with illustrators for drawings and produce attractive books. The color, size and quality of the books is also different from books prepared for adults.

In comparison, only books written in Amharic are published at large. Even Amharic books are not published in the required amount for the market. Additionally, it was observed by Ato Yitagesu that there is no formal training within the country to qualify writers. Furthermore, he explained that authors face a problem of incurring high costs. Unit cost price increases as they cannot print a lot of books due to scarcity of cash. This problem emanates from the fact that they go to printers as individuals and not through publishers. Their negotiating power is far less because the number of books they print is fewer and the frequency of printing is limited. All these factors drive prices to be higher for the writers and authors.

He argued that sales procedure for books is totally unacceptable and illegal. It is not in an appropriate format but just follows friendship trend. We cannot put all book stores in one basket on this regard. Nevertheless, it is not a systematic and assertive transaction system. He witnessed it is a way of paying for 10 and 15 books at a time for the writer. It is not only an unfair payment system but the work in the market nulls the copyright of the authors and writers.

Ato Yitagesu mentioned that it has been almost a century since Ethiopia introduced printing enterprises. However, the industry is not embracing the always changing and upgrading technology. It doesn't consider printing of

books with less price and quality. The inputs they use and the machines they have are also outdated. Most of them are old and not durable. I had a chance to work in a printing enterprise. What technology the emperor had imported years ago is still in use. Nonetheless, the world has made a transformation in printing machine technology five or six times. Printers in Ethiopia largely use a manual system and plates for printing and this takes a lot of process to produce the final output. It is paradox that newcomers to the industry buy these old machines to join the business. This makes us to stay in a vicious circle problem.

Ato Yitagesu discusses that children's book printing needs attention. It requires quality and creativity to avoid boredom; requisite different shapes and differentiate age disparity. As a result, printing enterprises lack qualification for it. Moreover, businesses lack skills in customer handling. They push most of the burden to the customer or writer. They don't even give professional support like editing and other issues related to writing. Government hasn't given due emphasis to the print industry. There is a shortage of raw materials and qualified professionals in the industry. It is difficult to get a bank loan to purchase printing machines.

He noted that one of the gaps in the printing industry is lack of publishers. A couple of publishers could be cited as an example in the market but internationally set standards and qualifications are not met and it will be difficult to categorize them as publishers. They don't critique or comment on the books before printing and when their standard for print is observed, it is difficult to get clear editorial policy among the publishers. The other constraint they have is they publish books once or twice a year. It is very difficult to differentiate them with retailers and publishers the country. The credit they should take is usually overridden by simple retailers.

The following solutions were proposed by Ato Yitagesu to the problems raised above. The first solution is to have clear policy by government to the population that is a quarter of the population which is in schools. Having clear structure in the government structure would also help. If government can give encouragement to printers, it will be great support for the industry. Clear strategy and sector for the printers is also expected. Printers should work in a specific manner rather than selecting markets which seem lucrative. Having a printers' association would help the industry to grow and define the sector in which they would be serving. Writers are also expected to stand together and have their own association and work for the common benefit. In the same manner illustrators and other stakeholders would stand together and collect resources and give support. Government may also look to make grants for books written in different local languages.

### **Presentation – Pre-Panel discussion**

#### **Mrs. Jane Kurtz (Award winning children's book author and Co-founder of Ethiopia Reads)**

Mrs. Jane stated that she want writers and artists to make money. She also



said that she wants structural things to change so that the things discussed in this summit can be solved for children. Small steps build an appetite for change. She assured that, she came to Addis Ababa from USA as two-year



child and went to Maji where her parents worked. She said that they didn't have television and grew up reading books. Her mother didn't have a college degree at the time but she was her teacher and she loved books. On later days she grew up and went to USA and began to publish books including some books about her childhood experiences in Ethiopia.

In her presentation Mrs. Jane said that after becoming an author, she started to travel around the world to give speeches about her experiences. In Nigeria, she was at the international school and the teachers asked her how they could develop a reading culture. She was there for only two weeks and got this question for me. And then she started to think about how reading culture has developed in United States. She stated that her grandparents didn't have books too. Libraries made a great contribution to the development of a reading culture. That is why she started to help Ethiopia Reads that has been working hard on developing libraries.

Mrs. Jane stated that she understood the term volunteer as she grew up in Ethiopia. Her mother was volunteering in an orphanage that mother Teresa had started. She saw people volunteering in her whole life. She also met Dr. Woubeshet when he was starting to do medical volunteering for Ethiopia. She met him in Minneapolis and he is a cardiologist who brings medical teams to Ethiopia. He says he really want Ethiopians to understand being volunteers. In America one wealthy person used his money to build a house as a library. Therefore, the work was not started by government but by volunteerism.

In Mrs. Jane view, as Dr. Laurie said in her presentation, decoding is a very important skill. There are people like Aida who are using decoding to teach in a very creative way. She understood that there are big problems with reading comprehension. Reading is a tool to fix that and books are important to solve this problem. She stated that question should be raised about why children are

lazy? Reading might be a difficult task but people tend to work hard for what they love. If they are given exciting books, they will learn to love to read.

The younger you start to read, the better. With this in mind, some of the books Mrs. Jane wrote for children have very few words. These shows the children learn to read fast if it is in their mother tongue. That is why Ready Set Go books will be published as many languages as possible. As witnessed by Dr. Laurie and research shows that children will read if all of the senses are engaged. Ethiopia nowadays has many potential artists. Further in her presentation Mrs. Jane said that research also shows children read a book if it has meaningful content. There are Ethiopian writers and illustrators who work on this and it is very important. Emotion is one of the things that drive children to read. If they laugh, if they find something interesting in the book, they will read it. If something is familiar to them, they will read. If children infer and predict, it will also attract them to read. A teacher who read books for children would ask them what's happening next? This will attract them to the story. In another way, it can be used in a number of Ethiopian proverbs to create the stories. If a book has art and words, it will tell a story. It is very important to teach and infer in telling the story.

Mrs. Jane shared her view for participants in a way which they engage volunteers in the United States to write stories. They give them pictures and stories and they draw pictures from that. It is so important that a child who grows up in one place in Ethiopia can see the diversity in another place through books. It is her hope that children in Ethiopia will read these books and be proud of their amazing country.

In conclusion of her presentation, she stated that their volunteer team is growing in number. As an example, an Ethiopian-Canadian illustrator has done two wonderful books by the title *The Boy Who Never Give Up* and *A Story of Hope*. A man who was the first president of Wollo University is now

volunteering in Seattle. Other Ethiopian college student in Seattle is also proud to write accounting books. She said that she is delighted this is becoming a group of Americans and Ethiopians. Be the change that you want to see in the world is a motto for her. If she want books for her grandchildren, she know she has to create them. The main issue is that she want this to expand and to reach to children in Ethiopia with these kinds of books. This is a good start that shows what books can do for children. It is a way to challenge how this can actually build the publishing industry in Ethiopia.

### **Experience sharing - Panelist**

#### **Mrs. Samrawit Araya (Children's book author)**



Mrs. Samrawit shared her experience of writing by telling her own story. She highlighted that she started to write books as her background is in literature and she was a reader as a child. Her other motivation is to find books for her children as a mother when

she was living in Sweden. She was struggling to sell books after publishing and found one book store. They said they will pay her 1000 birr but that was not interesting at all. The other challenge she had was to find an illustrator. She said she luckily found a very good illustrator for her first two books. It took her 6 months but the result was satisfactory.

With regards to printing, Mrs. Samrawit found some good printers in Ethiopia but they could not provide her with hard-cover books. She insisted on having hard-cover books but could not give them printed. She had friends in China

and sent the print there for her first book. The books came out with many struggles as she was both the writer and the publisher. On the next prints, she gave up the idea of hard-cover. The books were printed in Addis Ababa and it was not possible to print them as hard-cover books.

She wrote books for different organizations including UNICEF. She wrote a book about washing hands for UNICEF. Additionally, she wrote a book that is a collection of stories from different authors. It has been translated into German. Moreover, she wrote a book about malaria. It is called *The Mosquito Sisters*. This was done for an NGO. The books she wrote have different lessons in them. One of the books is titled “*The Runner*”. It is about the legendary runner Haile Gebrselassie. Her last book is about a frog and child which is written based on a true story observing her child’s experience on one winter day.

Regarding the distribution process, after printing her first book, she went to a seller. She shared her idea by stating about what the seller said. He appreciated the book and asked how much she would sell it. She told him it is 20 birr per book. He said 20 birr is very expensive. At the time the market for a children’s book was 4 birr. He took the book to sell it on consignment basis (ie sale or return) but he made her sign a contract saying that she would not complain about any damaged books or whatsoever if there would be a return of books. Actually he called after 2 months and said that he run out of books – they had all books sold. It was difficult to negotiate with a lot of distributors and she only deals with three of them now. She observed that writer in Ethiopia should have disposable money and leave it for three or four years before collecting at least part of the return.

She has affirmed the summit that she want to do only writing. If that was the possible, she would have written a hundred books. But it doesn’t end there if the writer is a self-publisher. She said she can write any kind of content if she is not given a topic as, for example, when she write for NGOs. The fact that she

is a communication graduate has helped her a lot with her writing. When she writes to NGOs, she has to go out and research. She has to check what the reading levels are. She has to test and edit what she has written. She has to give a sample of her work for the children to check. Children are very good editors, especially with pictures. If they misunderstand it, there is no argument. It is her belief that she has to go and change it. They are the target audience after all.

She told participants that she has some designing skills. After writing a book, and participated in the design, she give it to a publisher. In addition to that, following up is a hectic task for her. The distribution part is also one of the difficult tasks which she would like to avoid including to see books piled up in the house. That is why she publishes a limited number of books. According to Mrs. Samrawit, the maximum number of books she print is 2000.

Writers in Ethiopia are also expected to be publishers and distributors. Writers need to do their homework before publishing their stories. There are so many beautiful stories but written in adult language. There are some other stories where the content is not fit for children. In other ways, some books are very graphic.

## **Panel discussion - Facilitated by Mrs. Jane Kurtz**

**Panelists – Ato Ephrem Bayissa and Ato Mehalu Lule (Illustrators), Ato Shikur Worku (Ethiopian Publishers and Printers Association) and Mrs. Samrawit Araya (Writer)**

The focus of the panel discussion was on issues related with publishing,



printing and distribution of children books. Mrs. Jane started the panel discussion as follows. She appreciated all of the panelists having attended the summit to share their views. She started the discussion by forwarding her idea that

both days at the summit was a way that showed how important reading is. Mrs. Jane said she would ask few questions of the panel and invited the delegates to think about their questions because the panel would like everyone to have a chance to ask what they were wondering about.

Mrs. Jane - She learned in the previous presentations that there are obstacles to writing, printing and distributing children books in Ethiopia. She also suffer many of the same problems herself as a writer. Even though the United States has a very robust publishing industry, she said that she share some of the things Ethiopian writers face in the printing industry. Some of those issues also weigh on her shoulders. She cannot just write, even though she just love to do it.

Mrs. Jane forwarded her first question to the publisher representative. She started to tell a little story about her experience. When she was in Uganda, there was a publisher who was on the radio program which she was participating in. He said “In Uganda, there are people who want to write stories. I want to publish stories but we don’t have enough people buying the books in order to make publishing a reasonable way to make a living.” She then understood probably it isn’t easy in Uganda being a publisher either. Since the publishers have shared their own experience, she asked the same question. What are some of the problems encountered as a publisher in Ethiopia?

Ato Shikur. He stated that printing in Ethiopia is backward as Ato Yitagesu mentioned. It has a lot of complicated problems. Printers have technical problems too. It is very difficult for government to solve problems, because they have no idea what to do. For writers, the problem is inter-related. For example, price escalation on printing raw materials will lead to price increase on printers and publishers. Consequently, this will put cost burden on the industry; writers as well as readers.

Currently things seem that they are getting better. Government is giving attention too. Writers association may put pressure on government by being strong. Especially Read II project is supportive to this issue. If they continue like this, things will change for the better of the industry in the near future.

Mrs. Jane – She mentioned that there are two illustrators on the stage and it is their turn to share idea. Additionally, she said that illustration is one of the important parts in writing children books. Because children will learn to see pictures before learning to read books. After stating this, she asked the illustrators to know some of the challenges they face in the industry of children books printing.

Ato Ephrem – He started his reply by telling his point of view saying that illustration is one component of children books. It is not easy to make the illustration clear and beautiful by making it colorful and drawing pictures in their book. According to Ato Ephrem, major challenge they face with the NGOs is that they give comment and feedback from the view point of an adult. For example, adults might request to make the picture small. However, children might not like such kind of presentation in the books.

Ato Mehalu – He said that he has been working on digital illustration for 6 years. People who are not professionals in their field will comment on the work and it makes the task difficult. The other problem is that there is no consistency. If there is no work, the illustrator will leave the job. The money earned on the job is not that attractive too. There is no platform which connects writers and illustrators. The work has challenges in Ethiopia. He has told participants that it has been 10 years since he graduated from art school. However, he has never seen young substitutes/professionals in the field. They don't have many role models too. He believes that this kind of platform (the Summit) is very good for all who work in the industry. On the other hand, he witnessed that, children prefer to read books that have pictures. Therefore, it is a very important part of children books. It is paramount to tackle the problems faced in the field to pursue in the printing sector.

Mrs. Jane – She has shared her view that it is difficult to be both writers and illustrators. Nevertheless, she asked what is writers' motivation to do this difficult job?

Mrs. Samrawit – She said that she really want to do this job. In her case, family is her motivation. Especially her husband. She has told the participants that she has written only 12 books but she would have done a lot more. Now printing is expensive. She wishes she could do a lot of writing. However, she has to do other work to earn money.



Ato Shikur – the printing industry has worked for 100 years now. Yet, it is not modern enough in Ethiopia to contribute to the education system. Government is not giving due emphasis on the industry like coffee and other sectors. He believes that this sector is not even known. Is it a service sector or industry? It is big industry in the developed countries and it contributes a lot to the development of one country. The major problem in the printing sector here is that, the society is not reading sufficiently. In Ato Shikur view there must be a lot of work to open libraries and do other similar tasks. The association of printers needs to do a lot to advance this effort.

Ato Ephrem – He has told participants that he is motivated as a painter. He spent more time working on children related works and made more than 5000 illustrations. It is his trust that, children need additional books that will show them their environment, their county, and the world. If authors and illustrators can seed this, they can anticipate what they will harvest.

Ato Mehalu –He shared his view by saying that he is motivated to do the work because he loves it. He had another profession before being an illustrator. However, he want to do animation work on children books. He came to the illustration work hoping to contribute something in the field and he love it.

Mrs Jane – She said she believes it is a luck to see professionals in Ethiopia who love what they do. Before giving the chance to the audience, she asked questions like “What are the problems with books? What are the problems to love books?”

The paper all around the world is expensive. Gutenberg didn't make money from his printing press. It is difficult to solve issues regarding book printing. To get prices down, publishers have to print a lot of books. This needs a lot of cost too. Canada for example do it in a different way and Kenya is also doing it in

another way. She then open the stage to the audience so that questions could be forwarded.

The audience asked the following questions and shared their views.

- One of the problems about children book writing is that there are no experts who took this as a profession and attended college education in the field. The participants urge the printing and publishing association representative to see what they would do next year. It is usually just promise but no change in time.
- A question was raised about supporting blind children. The participant said that this is a demanding question and individuals must ask and promise for themselves that they will visit and support them.
- What is the guarantee to continue to work on children book writing? It usually has a question of sustainability.
- Let us meet together as writers and talk about our work.
- Parents don't seem to understand the importance of reading. One of the works needed in children reading is to work on parents.
- Let us think about selling books digitally. Why don't printers import more modern printing machines?
- How much work have you done to make the books culture focused?

Samrawit – Replied to the questions by saying that she has never thought about selling her books digitally. She anticipate who her audience is, how many of them access internet, read Amharic, how many of her target readers are in the list? These are her questions. But it is good to see the market in this regard. She understood the work she does includes parents too.

When she grew up, there was no satellite TV transmission which children watch and her mother used to give her book in which she can read with in a week. It is her belief that children should start to read books from their early

age. Furthermore, she said that she has never written books about Ethiopian culture but her books are not out of the culture.

Ato Shikur – People usually promise on meetings about the things they will do. However, individuals should try to do what we can every time. He told participants that they are in discussion with the Ministry of Education along with Read II project. Printers were part of the idea where the Ministry could print books that are currently being printed abroad. They are now waiting the reply from the Ministry. He said that they have a lot of work in pipeline. They hope that they can do a lot with regards to printing and changing the old printers at hand. He said that old printers are not all the same. New machines are needed to make change. However, it needs attention from government.

The Ministry of Education usually believes locally printed books have no quality. Nonetheless, new machines have high maintenance cost. If printers get tax free benefits to import the machines, it will be great help to import and print books locally. Double tax for raw materials is also one of the obstacles printers face. It is very difficult to compete with books printed abroad. Importing books tax free and loading tax on local printers makes it very tough for the printers. Even though printers need to install new machines, the task is not that easy to bear.

With this the two-day Summit ended and participants appreciated the work that Ethiopia Reads is doing in contributing to organizing children book printing, publishing and reading habits.

