
May Newsletter

ethiopiaREADS™



From Planting Libraries to Supporting the Reading Ecosystem

Almost 30 years ago, Ethiopia Reads was founded with a simple goal: to give Ethiopian children more access to books by planting libraries, filling them with appealing titles, and creating encouraging spaces in which to read. Since the official opening of our first library in 2003, we have worked to plant and support children's libraries across every region of Ethiopia.

Over the years, our programs have grown alongside the challenges we encountered, including no professional training for librarians, a shortage of culturally appropriate children's books, and limited support for parents wanting their children to develop reading skills and habits. Today, through practical services, advocacy, and wide-ranging partnerships, we are helping shape the future of reading and literacy in Ethiopia more broadly, and are beginning to reach children from the first months of life

The 6th Annual Children's Reading Summit



“Planting the Seeds of Reading in Early Childhood” was the theme of the 6th National Children’s Reading Summit on March 17-18 2026 in Addis Ababa. The conference is going from strength to strength. Ethiopia Reads brought together the Ministry of Education, National Archive and Library Agency, Addis Ababa City Administration, educators, early childhood development experts, regional education officials, academic researchers, authors, illustrators, and literacy advocates for two days of substantive, nationally important conversations about improving children’s reading and literacy across Ethiopia.

When we planned the first Summit in 2019, a bold investment for a small organization, we were anxious that we might not fill the room. Government reading surveys indicated that over 60% of nine-year-old primary students were unable to read a single word in their own language. We felt compelled to bring that crisis into a national conversation. Six summits later, we are proud that the Children’s Reading Summit is now the leading professional conference in Ethiopia dedicated to children’s reading and literacy. We are no longer worried about filling the room.

This year, the Summit focused on early learning support delivered through the ambitious and integrated Addis Ababa Early Childhood Development (ECD) Program. In addition to providing health and nutrition support, expanded public

childcare and preprimary schools, the ECD program promotes early learning and language development at home through storytelling, reading and song, empowering parents of young children to develop strong reading habits with their children.



Ethiopia's First Board Books for Babies and Toddlers

One of the most exciting programs showcased during the Summit was our partnership with the Addis Ababa City Administration Early Childhood Development Office, funded by the Van Leer Foundation.

Many children in Ethiopia do not encounter a book until they begin primary school at age seven, however the early years are critical for future success. Children raised in safe, stimulating, and nurturing environments are far more likely to succeed in school and their lives. Investment in early childhood development is one of the most effective ways to reduce long-term poverty.

That's why we're proud to be integrating reading corners into existing health facilities across the city of Addis Ababa, stocking them with a range of books suitable for younger children, and training parent health coaches to help families build strong reading habits at home. The ECD initiative brings together health and nutrition services, social support, day care, quality pre-primary schools, and learning through play for 300,000 vulnerable families across Addis Ababa.

To connect meaningfully with young children and their caregivers, we first needed books designed for them. Ethiopia Reads led the creation of eight new board books and two storybooks (and printed 20,000 copies in total). The board books were the first ever printed at scale in Ethiopia. These small, sturdy books, specifically designed for the little hands and exploring mouths of babies and toddlers ages 0-3, have been developed so parents can share stories with their children from the very beginning of their lives.

These new books will be available in the reading corners and will also be taken by

Helping Shape the Reading Ecosystem

Our work has always been rooted in serving children reading, and increasingly we are also helping shape the wider reading landscape. Since 2024, Ethiopia Reads has been a founding member of the National Reading Network, a coalition of twelve organisations dedicated to developing a stronger reading culture in Ethiopia and advising the Ministry of Education on developing a National Reading Policy. More recently we have also been providing our views and sharing our bibliographic work with the Ethiopian Policy Studies Institute with their current research. The results of this study is intended to help develop policies to improve the quality and availability of Ethiopian children's literature. Together, we are working to build a framework for how Ethiopia supports children's literacy and reading for years to come.

Our Libraries - Going Strong



Alongside these new initiatives, our core community work continues to grow. In 2026, the Hawassa Reading Center welcomed approximately 700 children and teenagers each month, while Gebeta Library reached around 500 monthly participants. The centers include activities like crafts, art projects, games, storytelling, tutoring, homework help, and summer camps, often with the enthusiastic support of local student volunteers. We are also deepening our support for the 70 primary school libraries we have established across the country.

A recent highlight was a pop-up reading festival on March 21st at Aware Children's Playground in Addis Ababa. More than 100 young children aged 0-6 came to explore books, listen to stories, and enjoy a lively and interactive clown performance. The goal of the festival was to ignite a love for reading in our young attendees and to introduce families to our newly launched board books. Their response was wonderful.



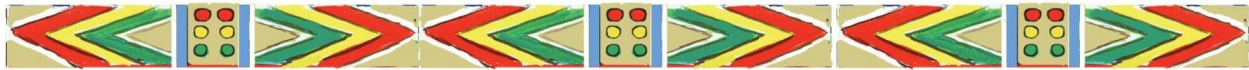


Upcoming events

ESFNA 2026, Minneapolis - June 27–July 4: Ethiopia Reads will be at the

Ethiopian Sports Federation in North America's [43rd Soccer Tournament & Cultural Festival](#) - the largest ongoing Ethiopian diaspora event in the world. We look forward to connecting with supporters and attendees. If you or someone you know is based in the Twin Cities and would like to visit our booth or volunteer with us, email info@ethiopiareads.org.

Congratulations to Ethiopia Reads board member Lulit Bezuayehu: Her first children's book "[Little Red Cape](#)" published bilingually by Open Hearts Big Dreams, our longtime publishing collaborator, has been recognized on the 2026 International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) Honour List. This August, she will travel to the 40th IBBY World Congress in Ottawa to accept her award alongside writers, illustrators, and translators from 59 countries. We are all proud of her!



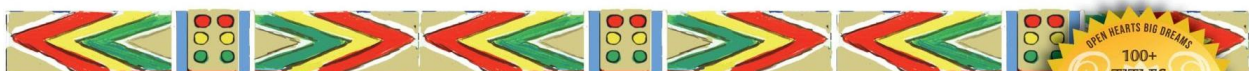
Little Red Cape



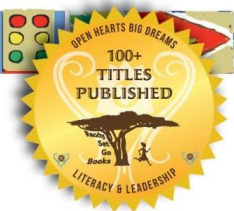
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English and Amharic



Author Lulit Bezuayehu
Illustrator by Eric Stilan



Thank You

Ethiopia has over 50 million children of primary school age or below - by comparison the USA has 59 million. Despite heavy investment in education, Ethiopia continues to face major challenges in improving reading outcomes.

Ethiopia Reads has spent decades planting seeds to help improve the reading environment for children - libraries in communities that had none, books in languages children actually speak, trained librarians who know how to help a child fall in love with reading. We are now tending the forest that has started to grow: cultivating vital conversations at our Reading Summit, developing board books for early learning, hosting reading festivals that bring books to life for families, providing support for authors and illustrators and becoming a growing voice in policy.

Our work will always focus on creating joyful and inspiring reading experiences for children.

None of this is possible without your generous donations and belief in what books and reading can do for a child's life. To keep this going, please consider continuing or renewing your support [here](#).

Thank you for being part of this work.

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Give Today!

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