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***Reading Activities in USAID Supported
Basic Education Programs***



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READING ACTIVITIES IN USAID SUPPORTED BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS

BACKGROUND

Increasing literacy is presumably a major focus of USAID basic education efforts worldwide. There are several high level initiatives underway aiming to put literacy at the center of national education systems and development efforts (including UNESCO's LIFE and LAMP initiatives) as well as interest at the highest level in the USG (as evidenced the White House conference on Global Literacy in September, 2006). This being said, literacy or acquiring reading skills is often not specifically articulated in the education strategies of either host country governments, donors, or implementing partners.

This document reviews USAID's explicit incorporation of reading in major basic education policy documents as well as in basic education programs world wide based on publicly available information¹. The purpose of this study is to chronicle current programs and activities that include a stated, specific and intentional focus on reading in formal or informal primary school level programs (apart from stand alone literacy programs for youth or adults) beyond generic discussions of literacy and literacy rates. It is highly likely that some specific reading programs have been missed, and we welcome information on these programs in order to present a more complete picture. This document should be seen as a vehicle to spur the conversation rather than as a definitive "last word" on the topic of reading in USAID education programs.

READING IN USAID POLICY AND PLANNING DOCUMENTS

USAID's Education Strategy "Improving Lives Through Learning", April 2005

At the heart of USAID's education strategy is "facilitating the acquisition of basic skills, such as literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking" and references to literacy rates and gaining literacy skills throughout the strategy, acknowledging that children drop out of school before gaining "bedrock skills such as literacy", for example. This being said, there are no specific references to literacy in the more operational sections of the document, such as sections on quality, policy, and improving instruction where relevant skills and core subjects, competencies and standards are discussed.

Sections on curriculum state:

"curriculum includes specific knowledge and skills relevant to students' current environment as well as the more general knowledge and skills that students will need to deal with new challenges created by economic and social change" (p.8).

¹ The section on basic education programs world wide draws heavily on the USAID web site.

“promoting improvements in curricular content.....to make curricula relevant to learners’ economic and social environment and allow for continuity through grade levels” (page 9).

Key issues under promoting policy reform includes:

“Core subjects to be taught in the nation’s schools, along with the specification of teaching and learning competencies, standards, and measures” (p. 8).

There is no mention of reading as a relevant skill, or as a curricular content area or core subject nor is it mentioned as a learning competency in standards to be met.

2008 Congressional Budget Justification

In the 2008 Congressional Budget Justification, besides generic references to low levels of literacy in many countries, there is very little specific reference to reading programs. The few instances include:

- African Education Initiative: [AEI] will target basic education, with particular focus on **literacy** programs, teacher training, and increased educational opportunities for girls.
- Benin: U.S. assistance will target basic education and will help increase basic literacy and numeracy needed for a modern economy.
- Indonesia: In-service training for teachers in math, science and **reading**.
- LAC regional: Children's **literacy** will be improved by strengthening teachers' effectiveness through the regional Centers of Excellence for Teacher Training.

USAID BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS WORLD WIDE

Africa Region

Ghana.

Basic education program activities in Ghana include an innovative initiative to improve reading comprehension by teaching Grade 1 children to read in their local language before making a transition to English. To sustain the program, a cadre of trainers has been established to provide district level training to teachers. USAID has also developed a Literacy Acceleration program to assist the MOE to develop a national literacy approach to train 9,000 teachers. <http://www.usaid.gov/gh/education/background/index.htm> and http://www.usaid.gov/press/factsheets/2007/fs070924_3.html.



Guinea. USAID supports a national program to reinforce reading instruction for primary school teachers. USAID in-service teacher training sessions show Guinea's teachers how to teach reading to children in a meaningful and engaging way.



The first of its kind in Guinea, the program is ensuring that all children in grades 1 and 2 have their own set of story books to use in class, and to take home to share with friends and family. The use of storybooks designed particularly for the Guinean context coincides with the emergence of children's literature in Guinea; colorful children's stories that range from traditional to very contemporary African tales are appearing more and more in bookstores as the fledgling industry begins to take off.

The USAID reading instruction program, which trained nearly 15,000 educators in Guinea in 2003, encourages the creation of classroom reading materials designed to capture children's interest and imagination. Teacher's guides describing specific strategies for teaching reading skills and games that will help children enjoy learning to read were also provided. The program has been well-received by Guinean teachers, 91 percent of whom are now using the reading program in the classroom, 96 percent of whom say they have seen improvements in student's reading abilities since the introduction of the program in 2001. The Government of Guinea (GOG) has also shown strong support of the reading program by agreeing to fund the reproduction of all reading materials for children in grades 1 and 2, and to test students' reading abilities at the end of those grades. In addition, the GOG will take the lead in conducting teacher training in reading instruction in 2004, support that will ensure the program's adoption and successful continuation within Guinea.

http://africastories.usaid.gov/search_details.cfm?storyID=232&countryID=9§orID=0&yearID=4.

Malawi. One of the foci of USAID/Malawi's Primary School Support Program: A School Fees Pilot (PSSP) project is on improving literacy in target communities. PSSP is developing a literacy program that takes a balanced literacy approach: one that combines direct instruction with opportunities for pupils to engage in a variety of print-rich learning experiences. PSSP is conducting focused trainings for standards one and two teachers designed to help them develop improved skills for teaching reading. PSSP is working with teachers, students, and community members to develop supplementary reading materials and reading clubs.

Asia Near East Region

Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, the U.S. Government will contribute \$22 million, over five years, to support the Ministry's vision of a literate Afghanistan. This initiative will be a partnership between the Ministry of Education, public and private organizations and USAID.

The National Literacy Program aims to bring the ability to read and write into every household in the country through support across many government ministries in Afghanistan, as well as through the participation of NGOs, public and private organizations. In addition, there will be

new policies, standards of teacher certification and student assessment and a teacher support system at the national, provincial and district levels.

As part of USAID/Afghanistan's non-formal education activity, USAID has established a cadre of literacy trainers and developed literacy-related materials that can be used nation-wide. http://www.usaid.gov/locations/asia_near_east/afghanistan/.

Bangladesh. USAID's early childhood education program focuses on children between the ages 3 to 6 to improve their reading and math skills, which help prepare them for success in primary education. Key programs include the production of Sisimpur, the popular children's educational television program which airs on Bangladesh Television (BTV). USAID also supports the SUCCEED preschool education program, which uses innovative teaching techniques and games to teach children how to read and how to count. <http://www.usaid.gov/bd/sisimpur.html>.

Egypt. USAID is allocating \$8 million to producing Alam Simsim, Egypt's Sesame Street which reaches more than 80% of Egyptian schoolchildren. This TV show introduces millions of Egyptian children to reading, writing, math, and problem solving skills in order to better prepare them for primary school.



USAID also supports the National Book Program for Schools. Through its School Library Enrichment Program and Supplementary Educational Materials Program, the book program aims to provide 11.3 million books and supplementary educational materials to all 39,000 government schools in Egypt. In many cases, the National Book Program library is a school's only library resource, in others, the Book Program's library doubles the school's prior book collection. Working closely with the Ministry of Education and the Integrated Care Society, this program provides training for librarians and teachers to ensure effective use of new books and materials. In addition, the Book Program's social marketing program focuses on changing attitudes, particularly of parents, towards literacy and reading. Through its efforts, the National Book Program hopes to build up a generation eager to read not only for knowledge but also for pleasure.

The Education Reform Project has done some work in remedial reading for 4th grade and some limited work in teacher training for earlier grades (there are plans for an increased focus on reading in the coming years). <http://egypt.usaid.gov/Default.aspx?pageid=26>.

Indonesia. USAID is supporting the Sesame Workshop to develop a new Indonesian co-production of the renowned Sesame Street television show. Indonesia Sesame Street or Jalan Sesama, is one of the largest partnerships between USAID and the Sesame Workshop. Millions of Indonesian children will be better equipped to start school. The first season is scheduled to air in mid 2007. <http://indonesia.usaid.gov/en/Article.272.aspx>.

Philippines. USAID Distributed approximately one million reference and reading materials to schools in Mindanao. http://www.usaid.gov/locations/asia_near_east/countries/philippines/.

Latin American and Caribbean Region

Latin America and Caribbean. USAID supports The Centers for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT), announced by President Bush in April 2001. CETT supports work in the Latin America and Caribbean region to improve the quality of classroom reading instruction in grades 1-3, with emphasis on poorer countries and disadvantaged communities.

Centers of Excellence have been established in three regions of Latin America. The Caribbean CETT currently focuses in Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia, Guyana, Belize, Grenada, and Trinidad and Tobago. Dominica will join in October 2007. The CETT in Central America and the Dominican Republic is improving reading instruction in Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic. The Andean CETT works with teachers in Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia.

Hosted by leading pedagogical universities, CETT trains a cadre of “master teachers” in each country to use the best teaching strategies and practices from across the hemisphere. These master teachers, in turn, train hundreds of other teachers. Classroom visits — where master teachers visit teachers in their own classrooms and provide follow-up coaching and feedback — is a critical element of the CETT training. This in-the-classroom support ensures that teachers are able to apply new knowledge and skills, so that their students learn to read better.

CETT has introduced a more child-centered, interactive approach to the teaching of literacy in Latin America and the Caribbean. To date, 15,000 teachers in fifteen countries have received CETT training. Additionally, through an important alliance with Scholastic Books, CETT has made libraries of children’s books available in classrooms. The lack of reading materials for children is a serious problem in LAC, because without opportunities to practice, children cannot learn to read. The Scholastic libraries not only give children a chance to practice, but also make reading fun. http://www.usaid.gov/about_usaid/presidential_initiative/teachertraining.html; <http://www.readingforallchildren.org>; USAID briefer: The Centers for Excellence for Teacher Training