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# **Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed Technical Assistance (READ TA)**

Cooperative Agreement No.: AID-663-A-12-00013

## **READ TA Baseline Assessment Report Teacher Professional Development and Support Systems: An Analysis of Seven Language Areas in Ethiopia**

April 2014



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### **Teacher Professional Development and Support Systems: An Analysis of Seven Language Areas in Ethiopia**

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#### **DISCLAIMER**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>ABOUT READ TA.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>ACRONYMS .....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>BACKGROUND.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ASSESSMENT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>STAKEHOLDER INPUT AND REVIEW .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>ABOUT SAVE THE CHILDREN.....</b>	<b>28</b>

## **The READ TA Project**

Initiated in October 2012, the Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed Technical Assistance (READ TA) Project is a five-year initiative to improve the reading and writing performance of 15 million primary grade students in seven (7) Ethiopian languages (Amharic, Afaan Oromo, Sidamu Afoo, Af Somali, Tigrinya, Wolaittatto and Haddiyisa), in addition to English as a second language.

The READ TA Project is implemented by Research Triangle Institute (RTI) and its partners: Save the Children, Inveneo, Florida State University (FSU), SIL LEAD, WhizKids Workshop and Africa Development Corps.

## **Acknowledgments**

READ TA expresses gratitude to Officials and Staff of the FDRE Ministry of Education, the Regional, Zonal and Woreda Education Bureaus, and government and non-governmental agencies, for providing a wealth of information and expertise that made this assessment possible. We thank the administration, faculty, staff and students of the Colleges of Teacher Education, Primary Schools, and School Cluster Centers for their participation in interviews, focus groups and questionnaires. We acknowledge the Baseline Assessment Consultation Meeting participants for their contributions. READ TA expresses appreciation to the many others who participated in various ways.

## Acronyms

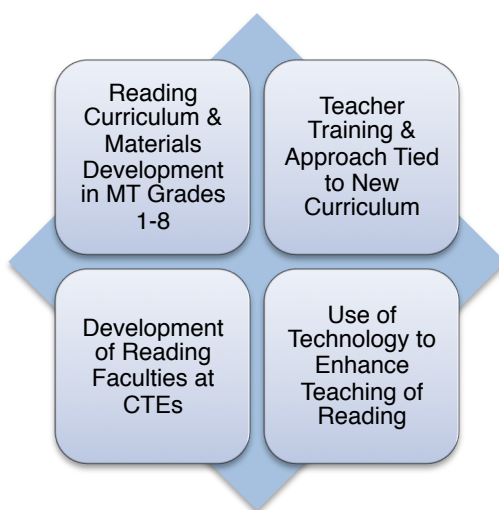
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CRC	Cluster Resource Center
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EETP	Ethiopia's Education and Training Policy
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GQUIP	General Quality Improvement Program
L1	First Language
LOI	Language of Instruction
MOE	Ministry of Education
MI	Medium of Instruction
MTI	Mother Tongue Instruction
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
READ CO	Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed Community Outreach
READ TA	Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed Technical Assistance
RSEB	Regional State Education Bureau
SC	Save the Children
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region
TDP	Teacher Development Program
TPD	Teacher Professional Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WEO	Woreda Education Office
ZEO	Zone Education Office



## Background

A USAID-funded Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) performed in May and June of 2010 in six languages and seven of Ethiopia's nine regional states revealed shockingly poor results in reading achievement. By the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, 34% of students were unable to read even one word and 48% of students scored a zero in comprehension. Grade 3 students were 20% nonreaders and 30% with zero comprehension.<sup>1</sup> These results diverge greatly from the MOE's minimum learning competencies – the national standards that expect a child to be reading near levels of fluency, with appropriate levels of comprehension, by the end of Grade 1. The Reading for Ethiopia's Achievement Developed Technical Assistance Project (READ TA) is a 5-year initiative, in collaboration with MOE and funded by USAID, to improve the reading and writing performance of 15 million primary grade students in 5 regional states and 7 Ethiopian Mother Tongue languages.

As implementer of READ TA, RTI, in collaboration with MOE and its Partners, intends to achieve these results by focusing on these four (4) main activity areas:



Beginning in Spring 2013, MOE, in collaboration with READ TA, began the process of developing new reading curriculum and materials for MT reading in grades 1-8 by first reviewing and validating findings for what was currently in existence. A similar process for the remaining three activity areas began in May 2013 with rapid baseline assessments for pre- and in-service teacher training and ICT in Colleges of Teacher Education and primary schools. This report is one in the series that outlines not only the findings and validation process for the baseline assessment for the respective activity area, but also presents conclusions and early recommendations to MOE for review and approval so that READ TA work under the associated activity area can begin.

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<sup>1</sup> Piper, B. (2010). *Ethiopia Early Grade Reading Assessment, Data Analytic Report: Language and Early Learning*. Report prepared for USAID/Ethiopia under Ed Data II Task Number 7 and Ed Data II Task Number 9.

## Introduction

The professional development of teachers is a central element and strategy of the overall READ program. Teachers sit at the nexus of changes that will include revised learning standards, new and expanded curricular and supplementary materials, and increased community engagement for improved learning outcomes in reading and writing. Key to developing a successful teacher professional development program in reading is an understanding of the current situation with regard to the knowledge, attitudes and practices of stakeholders at the school level – teachers, students and parents. For its part of the READ TA initial rapid baseline assessment, Save the Children was tasked with understanding the current situation at the school level of the following related issues: (a) teacher professional development and support, and (b) the teaching and learning of Mother Tongue (MT) and English reading and writing.

The SC rapid baseline assessment survey addressed the following topics:

- Description and status of current teacher development policy, practices and support systems as they are seen at the school level, particularly as they relate to the teaching of Mother Tongue and English languages.
- Teachers', school directors' and RSEB/woreda education officials' understandings of and expectations for teacher professional development.
- Mother Tongue and English language teaching methods being practiced in Ethiopian primary schools.
- Good practices and barriers that either support or hamper the teaching of reading and writing in Mother Tongue and English languages in Ethiopian primary schools.
- Key cross-cutting issues, focusing on the ways in which schools approach the needs of diverse learners, including girls and students with special needs.

## Executive Summary

The relationship between student achievement—measured in learning outcomes—and teacher professional development is taken as a given in the literature on educational quality (Anderson, 2002; Asgedom et al., 2006; UNESCO, 2006). In Ethiopia, teacher professional development is addressed through the Teacher Development Program (TDP), as spelled out in the country's Education and Training Policy (EETP) of 1994. Under the second phase of TDP, which began in 2005, in-service teacher training is focused on continuous professional development (CPD). The CPD framework aims to raise student achievement and learning as part of a career-long process of improving the knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers, centered on the local context and particularly classroom practices (MOE, 2009:16). This report presents findings of a rapid baseline assessment conducted in May and June 2013 of Ethiopia's current teacher professional development program and support systems, language teaching and learning culture, and stakeholder attitudes about Mother Tongue instruction carried out as part of a broader set of baseline assessments by READ TA.

Save the Children used a mixed methods approach for this study owing to the wide range of thematic issues under investigation and the vast geographic area under consideration. The research included 56 schools across seven languages in five regions: Amhara, Tigray, Oromia, and Somali, as

well as three zones in SNNPR region (i.e., Hadiya, Sidama, and Wolayta). The report outlines the selection process fully and describes the diverse and purposeful participant mix.

Observational data were collected in all of the schools using two types of tools described in the report. The Save the Children team designed and produced six types of instruments for the purpose of collecting relevant data from key informants at school and MOE levels. These instruments were validated for content prior to use by experts at both Save the Children and RTI. In addition, SC conducted a comprehensive review and analysis of relevant MOE policy, program guidance and recent reports that had either been commissioned or approved by the MOE and that touched on the scope of work of the READ TA project.

Following the collection of rapid assessment data, Save the Children staff participated in a series of briefings and consultative meetings with stakeholders to elicit feedback and details that were then used alongside the data collection instruments to enrich the data and hence improve the report.

Findings of the study show that despite the central place it occupies within Ethiopia's teacher professional development framework, the current CPD system has important gaps when it comes to reaching all teachers consistently and providing all teachers with supplemental training in Mother Tongue reading and writing instruction. Indeed, the study found existing teacher professional development opportunities – whether sponsored by the MOE, NGOs or others – prioritize training in general pedagogy over content and therefore do not adequately prepare teachers to teach students to read and write in MT and English. And yet, the need in this regard is great: the baseline assessment found that, on average, teachers lack a strong foundational understanding of the basic concepts of reading, a fact that held true across almost every group of teachers included in the survey.

Furthermore, the findings show that there was a significant gap between teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and their actual classroom practices. With minimal exception, the teaching methods and learning culture most commonly observed in MT and English classrooms across the various regions reflected a more traditional, teacher-centered model rather than a student-centered model considered good practice in current literature.

The supervision system for schools and teachers was found to be functional, even though respondents felt that in-service training in Mother Tongue reading and writing, where it was taking place, is not being monitored and evaluated for effectiveness. Stakeholders across the survey presumed that access to training inherently results in improved teaching practice. However, as findings from this survey indicate, participation in in-service training has not noticeably improved teachers' understanding of key concepts in reading.

The survey also found MOE staff and teachers to have a strong understanding of the value and pedagogic rationale for MTI. However, even though most parents, students, and community members held their MT in high regard, these stakeholders did not show the same level of understanding and support for learning to read in MT. On the contrary, parents and community members expressed opinions that indicated that they saw MT and English as competing priorities and not as part of a holistic and pedagogically sound MOE language strategy.

Across the linguistic areas surveyed during the rapid assessment, the study found a widespread awareness of children with special needs and encouraging efforts by school directors and teachers in support of these children. At the same time, these actors cited challenges of training, materials and curriculum in trying to create better and more inclusive learning environments to cater to the needs of children with special needs.

With regards to gender, findings from the rapid assessment indicate that governmental and nongovernmental efforts at promoting girls learning have made inroads, particularly in terms of access, measured by school enrollment and attendance rates, as well as attitudinal changes in teachers and parents around girls' schooling. However, while this progress is duly noted, the study shows that school participation and performance results are still gendered, with girls lagging behind boys, especially in rural areas and the upper grades.

The following report discusses these findings in further detail and offers recommendations to MOE and READ TA. The conclusions and recommendations, which are discussed in detail within the body of the report, are summarized here:

**Conclusion 1: TPD program suffers from inconsistent delivery and lack of content focus, especially in regards to MT reading and writing.**

- **Recommendation 1.1.** A centrally-coordinated and designed, and regionally contextualized, professional development program for teachers in Mother Tongue reading is necessary.
- **Recommendation 1.2:** Content that can either be mainstreamed throughout the main training or as modules that can be included alongside the main training or offered as supplemental content through the CPD system.
- **Recommendation 1.3:** The training program should be well integrated with a complementary supervision and mentoring strategy for teachers.
- **Recommendation 1.4:** Although it was not a direct component of this rapid assessment, discussions with the MOE indicated that a review of the MOE's current experience in designing and rolling out the Math and Science training program could provide additional, useful insights and lessons learned for the READ TA training.

**Conclusion 2: The value of MTI is not fully understood by the public.**

- **Recommendation 2.1:** The READ TA program can take advantage of its contact with key MOE staff at both national and regional levels, and in the design of materials that will reach down to teachers, to integrate strategies and messages for these actors around the importance of MT instruction, and how to communicate around the topic with parents and community members.

**Conclusion 3: Primary schools are print-poor environments.**

- **Recommendation 3.1:** While ensuring sufficient age-appropriate materials exist in MT and English is outside of its scope, READ TA can also take steps through the content of its training program to improve access to content, including training teachers on the importance of creating print-rich classrooms, on integrating library use into reading lesson plans, and on

how to create simple teaching and reading materials, including storybooks, using locally available materials.

**Conclusion 4: There is a gap in pre-Grade 1 learning that affects literacy acquisition.**

- **Recommendation 4.1:** Basic letter recognition and phonological awareness must be incorporated into the Grade 1 agenda and curriculum; textbooks and training for teachers also need to be adjusted accordingly.

**Conclusion 5: Attitudes amongst educators towards Special Needs learners are improving, but educators need more support.**

- **Recommendation 5.1:** READ TA should promote a flexible approach to curriculum delivery, allowing schools and teachers the ability to differentiate or adapt standards across students, as needed, for more individualized instruction.
- **Recommendation 5.2:** Training for teachers should include information on particular, reading-related disabilities and associated strategies that teachers can use to meet the needs of learners with special needs, and awareness of additional referral resources that might exist for these children.

**Conclusion 6: Performance at the primary school level remains gendered.**

- **Recommendation 6.1:** The focus of gender mainstreaming policy must now shift from a primary focus on access to education to attention to participation and performance.

## **Assessment Design and Methodology**

The current study featured a mixed methods approach, which SC selected because of the wide range of thematic issues under investigation, as well as the vast geographic area under consideration. The research included 56 schools across seven languages in five regions: Amhara, Tigray, Oromia, and Somali, as well as three zones in SNNPR region (i.e., Hadiya, Sidama, and Wolayta). The study used purposeful sampling to select four woredas for each language. Local educational experts chose woredas that represented as socially, economically and geographically diverse a picture as possible for each language. In addition to selecting the woredas themselves, education experts purposefully selected two schools from within each woreda, ensuring inclusion of one urban and one rural school. (See note below in limitations on “rural” schools.) Eight schools were selected in each language area. Of these, half (4) were urban and half (4) were rural.

Participants in the study included:

- 224 student respondents (eight per school, from 4th and 6th grades, randomly selected; drawn from half of the sample schools (14 rural, 14 urban); evenly divided between boys and girls)
- 168 teacher respondents (six MT or English language teachers randomly selected per school, drawn from half of the sample schools (14 rural, 14 urban))
- 75 parents and 60 PTA members
- 84 woreda-level education officers (3 per woreda)

- 21 zonal and regional-level education officers (3 per language group)
- Focus group discussions and interviews reached an additional 203 children, teachers and other stakeholders

Observational data were collected in all of the schools. In half (28) of the schools, the school observation tool (*see description below*) was administered; in the other half (28), the classroom observation tool (*see description below*) was used in grade 1, 3 and 5 classrooms. A total of 75 classroom observations were conducted, nine less than planned because only 3 of 12 planned classroom observations in the Amhara region were conducted owing to scheduling conflicts with ongoing national examinations.

Additionally, the researchers and SC project staff conducted a review and analysis of relevant MOE policy, program guidance and recent reports that had either been commissioned or approved by the MOE and that touched on the scope of work of the READ TA project.

## Data Collection Instruments

The Save the Children team designed and produced six types of instruments for the purpose of collecting relevant data from key informants at the school and MOE levels. These instruments were validated for content prior to use by experts at both Save the Children and RTI. These instruments included:

- Classroom observation checklist, which gathered general information on the classroom, student engagement, teacher-student interactions, and use of active teaching techniques.
- School observation tool, which gathered general data on student numbers, available school supplies, library hours, etc.
- Student questionnaire, which gathered student background data, student ratings of classroom learning culture and teaching methods, perceptions of barriers to learning, and information related to gender and children with disabilities.
- Teacher questionnaire, which gathered teacher background data, including pre- and in-service training, understanding of theory in teaching reading and writing, teachers' self-evaluation of their classroom practice in teaching reading and writing, and questions on diverse related issues, like support systems, barriers to teaching/learning, parental collaboration, resources, and gender/disability in the classroom.
- Focus group discussion protocols, which were developed for students, teachers and representatives of the Woreda Education Offices, Zonal Education Departments, Regional Education Bureaus and MOE on reading and writing in Mother Tongue and English. Discussions with adults lasted approximately two hours, while the student discussions lasted about one hour. MOE staff responded in writing to the questionnaire because they lacked time to sit for face-to-face discussions.
- Interview protocols. Unique protocols were created for interviews with each of the following: parents, PTA members, and school directors. Interviews were used to gather additional qualitative data on issues relevant to reading and writing in Mother Tongue and English. Interviews with parents and PTA members were shorter, lasting between 15 and 30 minutes; interviews with school directors lasted between one and one and a half hours.

## **Data Collection**

In order to collect rich data from all 56 schools in the allotted time, consultants hired by Save the Children employed seven graduate students from the Addis Ababa area as data collection supervisors. Each supervisor had at least a Master's level of education (most were PhD candidates), was nominated by a respected professor, and was fluent in the language of the region to which they were assigned.

Data collection supervisors were trained by SC's lead consultants on the project's goals, methods, and ethical standards, as well as taught how to conduct FGDs, interviews, and observations for the purposes of the current study. They each also received a training manual prepared by the report's authors for their reference during fieldwork. Data supervisors were then deployed for between 14-16 days in their assigned regions. Once in the field, they hired two data collectors each to form a team of three researchers in each language area. Minimum qualifications for data collectors included completion of a bachelor's degree and fluency in English.

While the vast majority of data collection went according to plan, one regional data collection supervisor was required to make some last minute changes regarding sampled schools due to road conditions and weather. In total, about 95% of the expected data was effectively collected and returned for analysis.

## **Constraints and Limitations of the Rapid Assessment**

Save the Children's study faced several constraints in design and implementation, primarily regarding the project's allotted timing and funding. Data collectors were only allowed 14-16 days in the field, including weekends, to cover the wide range of research questions and areas of inquiry that the current project encompasses. Additionally, the lead consultants were unable to collect data themselves, and therefore were unable to ask follow-up questions, as they might have otherwise done. In the training, however, data collectors were instructed on how to complete this task. While the depth of the inquiry may have been constrained by time and logistics, it is believed that a wide breadth of data was collected effectively.

Regarding the selection of schools, the survey describes data from "urban" and "rural" schools. The term "urban schools" refers to schools in the study located within the main towns of the woredas. "Rural schools" were designated as schools located 5-10 kilometers from these towns. The decision to designate and visit rural schools that were easily accessible from the towns was made based on the limited time available for the study, as described above. As a result, the data presented here from rural schools may not be descriptive of schools in more remote rural locations and may represent more closely the situation of semi-urban areas of the regions visited.

## **Stakeholder Input and Review**

Following the collection of rapid assessment data, Save the Children staff participated in a series of briefings and consultative meetings with stakeholders to elicit feedback and details that were used alongside the data collection instruments to enrich the data and hence improve the report. These included:

- A meeting organized by RTI for the READ TA project partners on June 26, 2013, at which SC presented preliminary assessment findings. The feedback and inputs from this meeting were used to further work on and refine both the analysis and report writing.
- A pre-consultative meeting held at MOE (with MOE directors) in order to review the assessments made by partners before their presentation at the READ TA Baseline Assessment Consultation Meeting in Adama on November 21-22, 2013. SC used comments given by the Directors for Curriculum, Teacher Development and Educational Mass Media of the MOE to clarify the scope of the assessment and review the findings in preparation for the Adama meeting.
- SC presented its assessment report at the READ TA Baseline Assessment Consultation Meeting held November 21-22, 2013, in Adama. Feedback and suggestions from the presentations and group discussions were seriously considered and used throughout the process of developing the assessment report.

Following the Adama meeting, additional discussions were led by READ TA staff to guide the finalization of this report.

- The first was a meeting at the end of December 2013 of senior SC and RTI project staff to review the current status of the report, define the scope of the report and to prepare for a subsequent meeting with the MOE.
- Second was a productive meeting on January 2, 2014, with both MOE Directors for Curriculum and Teacher Development to review the scope and direction of the SC report.
- Third was a meeting on January 15, 2014, where MOE experts within the Teachers and Educational Leaders Development Directorate – including an in-service training expert, a teacher development program (TDP) expert and a consultant to the Ministry on teacher professional development – discussed in more detail the existing teacher training and support system with a focus on continuous professional development (CPD). These discussions were helpful in strengthening some of the findings and for offering suggestions as to how the in-service teacher training on reading and writing could be linked to the CPD framework.

Throughout the process of preparing this report, SC has received three clear elements of feedback: *first*, to keep the scope of the report tightly focused on the role and responsibilities of the READ TA project; *second*, to focus findings on pedagogical questions and avoid consideration of policy issues; and *third*, to gather additional information through the review of MOE research reports and discussions with MOE officials to better reflect the understanding of the MOE regarding the questions being addressed.

It is the sincere hope of SC that each of these has been adequately addressed in the findings, conclusions and recommendations presented below.

## Findings

### Teacher Professional Development

**Overview.** Ethiopia’s Education and Training Policy (EETP, 1994) incorporates many of the principles of commonly accepted good practices recognized in the literature today, including an emphasis on “active learning, problem solving, and student centered teaching methods” (MOE,



2009: 4).<sup>2</sup> Teacher professional development is addressed through the Teacher Development Program (TDP). Under the second phase of TDP, begun in 2005, in-service teacher training was focused on continuous professional development (CPD). The CPD framework aims to raise student achievement and learning as part of a career-long process of improving knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers, centered on the local context and particularly classroom practice (MOE, 2009:16).

In-service CPD is compulsory for all primary and secondary teachers, and it involves a two-year induction program for new teachers, as well as 60 hours per school year per teacher to be spent in small, school-based groups working through three course books of three units each. Teacher groups should be led by school-directors and, ideally, should meet once every two weeks. The three course modules developed by the MOE for CPD include the following themes:

- **Course 1:** Professional Ethics, Counseling and Mentoring Using Active Learning Methodology
- **Course 2:** Gender and HIV/AIDS issues, Continuous Assessment and Planning Approaches to Individual Subject Areas in the Context of Large Class Sizes
- **Course 3:** Rural Development, Civics and Methodology [MOE, 2009: 29]

While the CPD model requires 60 hours per teacher, individual schools can tailor their program based on specific local needs. Furthermore, the RSEBs are required by the Ministry to provide schools with the required materials and course books to complete the program. Indeed, the policy clearly delegates specific CPD-related responsibilities for each relevant level of administration, from ministry to region to woreda to cluster to school to the individual teacher.

By its very design, CPD moves beyond a workshop model to one integrated in school communities' and teachers' daily lives, just as it aims to be integrated, classroom-based, and content-focused. Furthermore, the CPD model features exemplary teachers as models and fosters a strong leadership structure among teachers (MOE, 2009: 9).

**Analysis of CPD.** The MOE and others have carried out a number of formal and informal analyses of the CPD approach. This report presents a summary of the findings of these analyses, as they are relevant to the READ TA project, here along with additional information gathered during the rapid assessment.

The most consistent finding across the reviews of CPD is that the application and quality of CPD implementation has been inconsistent. In 2006, one year into implementation, a pilot study commissioned by USAID (Asgedom et al., 2006) found that, given the decentralization of Ethiopia's education system, each woreda, zone, etc. could have vastly different professional development opportunities for teachers, even between schools in the same district.

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<sup>2</sup> Darling Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) write that successful TPD should: engage teachers in practical tasks and provide opportunities to observe, assess and reflect on the new practices; be participant driven and grounded in enquiry, reflection and experimentation; be collaborative and involve the sharing of knowledge; directly connect to the work of teachers and their students; be sustained, on-going and intensive; provide support through modeling, coaching and the collective solving of problems; be connected to other aspects of school change [Darling Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995: 2]

When the MOE commissioned Haramaya University to conduct a large-scale assessment of CPD in 2008 (see MOE, 2009), the review found that in “nearly four out of five schools the structure of CPD is either absent or inadequate” and that “few of the CRCs sampled were adequately prepared to run well organized, inspiring and transforming CPD activities”. [MOE, 2009: 5] At the same time, however, both of these studies note positive impacts and impressions from teachers. Asgedom et al. make clear the extent to which teacher and school directors value professional development opportunities in Ethiopia.

They [Ethiopian teachers and directors] reported that workshops sharpened their skills in teaching, provided new knowledge in areas such as continuous assessment, action research, lesson planning for self-contained classrooms... Teachers, importantly, reported that professional development created a more positive outlook on their profession. [Asgedom et al., 2006: 33]

Similarly, the Haramaya report found that “in schools where CPD has begun teachers are, however, able to demonstrate a reasonable mastery of the contents (of the CPD courses) they covered before and up to the time of the study”. [MOE, 2009: 5]

In addition to these general findings, three issues of particular importance to the READ TA project should also be noted. First, the focus of CPD to date has been mostly on developing general pedagogical skills of teachers and less on building their content knowledge. The report by Asgedom et al. notes that, while development opportunities helped teachers with such elements such as their relations with students, teachers did not feel supported in terms of content. Relatedly, for this rapid assessment MOE officials shared their view that an important gap in the initial CPD approach has been that the modules were too prescriptive and did not allow teachers flexibility and an opportunity to expand discussions outside of the content of the module.

Second, although CPD is by design a decentralized approach to teacher professional development, monitoring both the implementation of CPD and whether or not CPD is resulting in positive changes in the classroom has been lacking. Education officials tapped for this rapid assessment noted that for the most part there has been no entity responsible for monitoring the implementation of CPD and that the supervision system has only been loosely tied to CPD.

Third, there is recognition that local capacity has been an important constraint in the quality of CPD delivery. This includes the understanding by the MOE that it has been challenging for teachers to identify, organize, and follow through with their own CPD plans. Furthermore, when teachers do identify their professional development priorities, it can be difficult for schools or cluster supervisors to identify the right expertise to meet the teachers’ needs and to assure that the quality of any training or support is sufficient. As was noted above from the Haramaya report, few CPCs have been adequately prepared to support CPD. That said, MOE officials note that in their experience what most often explains effective CPD is the ownership by teachers and directors.

In interviews for this rapid assessment, MOE officials noted that they are aware of these challenges and are preparing – or have already introduced – a number of changes in an effort to strengthen the CPD system. The CPD program for the GEQIP II period (2013-2017) is intended to give a more active role to the teachers in determining needs and priorities, planning and implementation, and self-evaluation of their priorities and plans. It provides more formal opportunities for collaborative work among teachers, including peer observation, team planning and teaching, and coaching and

mentoring. It is also intended to improve coordination among schools, schools clusters, woreda, zones and regions, and ownership by all these groups over the CPD process. At the same time, a greater emphasis is being placed on providing more centrally led support for content knowledge in areas deemed national priorities by the MOE. CPD modules for English and Math and Science have already been prepared and reading and writing have been identified as a priority as well. Furthermore, schools will also be able to commission training or other support services from colleges of teacher education.

## TPD in Detail

**Supplemental training in reading.** Approximately half (50.3%) of the 167 teachers who responded to the teacher questionnaire reported having received some supplemental in-service training listed on a list of common concepts in reading. However, this means that roughly the same number of teachers in the survey (49.7%) reported receiving no in-service training during their teaching career on any of the key reading topics selected from a review of the literature on literacy instruction.

A statistical correlation analysis run on years of teaching experience and the amount of trainings received showed no relationship between the two. This finding indicates that the chance of participating in supplemental training on reading is most likely related to local variables and not to length of service – with access to training opportunities varying from woreda to woreda.

The formal school system (schools, WEOs, REOs) provided 55% of the supplemental teacher trainings that touched on reading, while NGOs and other groups provided 45% of the available opportunities. Most of the trainings (46.5%) were reported to last 3 to 5 days, whereas some (17%) lasted for a week or more.

**Table 1: Organizer and Duration of In-Service Trainings**

		<i>f</i>	%
Organizer of training	School	10	11.8
	Woreda	12	14.1
	Region EO	25	29.4
	NGO	25	29.4
	Other	13	15.3

**The role of NGOs.** Follow-up questions revealed a wide range of entities and organizations providing supplemental in-service trainings, particularly NGOs. An analysis of responses given by teachers on the training provided by NGOs showed great variation in terms of training content, duration of training and profile of trainers (e.g. woreda education experts, zonal education language experts, teacher training college instructors, NGO staff). Additionally, although there are a range of organizations providing training to teachers, it is clear that access is not equal for all teachers.

**Education officials' feedback on TPD and reading.** When asked about plans for training in reading and writing, educational officials at the woreda, zonal, and regional levels often referred to their understanding that teachers should take ownership of CPD, for example, by requesting training opportunities in reading and writing in ways that were complementary to the needs assessments

conducted at the school level. Furthermore, officials expressed the following beliefs: that teachers should organize and engage in peer support and experience sharing activities; that those with access to limited NGO or other formal trainings should train their colleagues in kind; and, finally, that all teachers should be proactive in getting their professional development needs met.

**Teachers' feedback on TPD.** When teachers were asked whether the college training that they received adequately prepared them for their current job, 105 (63%) responded affirmatively and 34% said partly. Most teachers (122; 73%) said that they felt competent to teach reading/writing. Furthermore, of the 84 teachers who were able to gain access to trainings, the majority reported their experiences favorably. Indeed, 93% believed that it improved their teaching. For example, in Hadiya zone, a group of teachers shared a positive experience receiving training on Mother Tongue instruction (MTI) and Hadiya-language in particular.

At the same time, many teachers in the sample also reported that the current level of in-service professional support is inadequate, particularly with regard to MTI in reading and writing. While CPD core materials and requirements have been systematized, teachers reported that the offerings of supplementary, content-focused workshops and trainings have not. As a result, teachers across grade levels expressed concern that they did not receive adequate ongoing training, particularly around the teaching of reading and writing.

A broader finding that emerged across all seven surveyed regions is that teachers felt the degree to which they are expected to rely upon and support each other in the teaching of reading and writing is a weakness in the current teacher development program; in contrast to the views expressed by education officials, teachers look to MOE to take a proactive role in providing training on reading and writing.

**Content focus of in-service training on reading skills in Mother Tongue or English.** Among those teachers who had participated in an in-service training that included reading skills in Mother Tongue or English, teachers' responses showed that the focus of most training was centered on the same core themes, such as active learning, general assessment, and preparation of learning materials, rather than reading instruction itself. This was equally true of trainings offered by the MOE and NGOs. Many key topics useful for teaching of reading were not discussed; for example, the following three topics were almost entirely absent from trainings: *teaching of reading fluency, reading comprehension, and writing.*

**Monitoring of the impact of training.** There is regular supervision of teachers from RSEBs, Zonal Education Departments, Woreda Education Offices and School Cluster Supervisors. However, in focus group discussions and interviews, survey respondents (teachers and school directors) reported that the current supervision practice is not directly linked to any in-service training that is being provided on reading and writing. As a result, when training does take place on reading and writing, teachers do not receive support to use the skills that were presented in the training. A cluster school director in Oromia reported: "except for the supervision conducted through a checklist at school level, there is no monitoring or evaluation mechanism in place to evaluate the effectiveness of (in-service reading and writing) training provided."

**Teacher knowledge of reading.** 96.3% of 167 teachers who responded to the teacher questionnaire said they had been formally trained (certificate level) to become teachers: 69.5% of these same teachers reported that they were trained at the diploma level. The mean years of teaching

experience was 12.3. As noted above, most teachers (122; 73%) expressed that they felt competent to teach reading/writing.

However, when assessed on their familiarity with basic components of learning to read drawn from the academic literature on the subject, teachers revealed only a limited understanding of the subject, scoring on average only 31 out of a maximum 45 points. Statistical analyses were performed to understand if there were any noticeable differences in levels of knowledge of reading concepts between different groups of teachers, revealing the following:

- Teachers in urban areas performed significantly better than their rural counterparts, and there was a weak, positive correlation between years of service and knowledge of reading concepts; however,
- There was no significant difference based on teachers' (a) sex, (b) pre-service qualifications, or (c) participation in in-service training on reading, a finding that held no matter who (MOE, NGO, other) provided the training.

**Teacher self-reports on instructional practices.** Surveyed teachers were asked if they performed a range of listed activities that create a supportive environment for reading and writing in the classroom. In general, teachers were found to award themselves with high scores. They said they posted in their classes students' works, rules and directions, as well as texts collected from the community. They also described creating reading/writing corners, reading baskets and hand-made mobile libraries; but teachers also said that they were less likely to read aloud daily to students (modeling fluent reading) than to choose a passage for students to read aloud. Teachers were also asked to estimate the frequency with which they used specific methods (drawn from the relevant literature) of teaching the five key components of reading and writing: phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension. Here too, teachers also gave themselves high marks for all of the six sets of methods lists.

When asked about their use of student-centered pedagogy, teachers indicated that this is their goal, but some teachers reported that large class sizes make it difficult to use strategies, such as group work. Relatedly, these teachers also cited large class sizes<sup>3</sup> as a challenge to continuous assessment of children in the classroom and more individualized instruction. This finding echoes a similar finding in the report by the USAID-funded TELL project on *Literacy Policy and Practice in Ethiopia* (2012, 39-40).

**Classroom observations of teacher practices.** Despite teachers' positive self-assessments of their methods in teaching reading, another picture entirely emerged from the results of 75 classroom observations. The observation tallies (*see table below*) demonstrate a disconnect between what teachers reported doing and what they were doing – at least for the specific class periods the study was able to observe. More than half of the teachers in observed classrooms did not perform seven of the eight reading activities even once. Only one activity – teacher and/or students reading aloud more than four times—was recorded in 16 of the 75 classrooms. The picture was the same both for local language and English classes.

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<sup>3</sup> School observation results indicate an average ratio of 53.6 students per teacher with a standard deviation of 32. High variation was found between language areas –in some schools the ratio goes as high as 176 students per teacher and in other schools it is as low as 26.5 to one.

**Table 2: Teaching Approaches Used in Class – Observation of 75 classrooms**

Students made to	Read aloud		Read silent		Read in pairs		Read in chorus		Copy from book/board		Write original		Teacher generated questions		Student generated questions	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
None at all	25	33	49	66	51	68	49	66	38	51	66	87	42	56	59	79
1 to 3 times	34	46	23	30	24	32	23	30	32	43	9	12	26	35	14	19
4 or more	16	21	3	4	0	0	3	4	5	6	1	1	7	9	2	3

- *f* indicates the number of classrooms.

Additionally, teachers' positive self-ratings around the posting of written materials in the classroom did not check out with classroom observations. The classroom print environment (posters, reading corners, etc.) was found to be poor. Of 60 classrooms observed, the average number of posted materials per classroom was less than 1 (.84); 45 classrooms had no posted materials at all.

In general, indications from the Active Teaching and Active Learning Classroom observation tools showed that the teaching methods employed remain teacher-centered rather than student-centered.

**Good practices in teaching reading.** Despite the limitations of the commonly observed practices of teachers, students and teachers themselves reported a wide variety of creative approaches already taking place in the classroom that can be used as examples when providing teachers with ideas for strengthening their teaching of reading. These include: creation of hand-made learning materials including letter cut outs (for the alphabet), flashcards, charts, models, labeled objects; students reading passages aloud individually and in chorus; story-telling/retelling; mixed-level ability grouping; peer teaching; songs; reading competitions; helping students create their own writing/reading materials, including asking students to write down cultural songs or stories from parents in their mother tongue; and the use of local resources to create teaching and learning materials.

## Support Systems

**Understanding the value of Mother Tongue Instruction.** Teachers, school directors, and TPD personnel who participated in this study agree that MTI is advantageous in the early grades, especially for pedagogic and cognitive reasons. Learning in Mother Tongue, they argued, enables students to easily associate newly acquired knowledge with what they observe daily in their home environments.

In interviews and focus groups discussions, however, parents and community members demonstrated misconceptions about the role of (and pedagogic rationale for) Mother Tongue education in setting a foundation for future learning, including success in learning to read and write in English. These misconceptions included the following:

- That since children already speak their Mother Tongue, parents felt that children were sufficiently knowledgeable in the subject and did not require further instruction;
- That time dedicated to Mother Tongue instruction detracted from time available to study Amharic or English;
- That using English as a medium of instruction in the first and second cycles of primary education would improve children’s English language abilities and therefore their results on the Grade 10 general education school leaving examination.

**Curriculum standards.** According to stakeholders surveyed in this study, there is a gap between curricular expectations for students in Grade 1 and the actual skills that these children are bringing to the classroom. Specifically, respondents noted that the Grade 1 curriculum is better suited for children who have had a year of pre-primary education to gain letter recognition and phonetic awareness skills. According to one teacher in Oromia region, “the textbook prepared for grade one is with the assumption that all students attended pre-school/kindergarten. The textbook begins with reading and writing without giving a base [in these skills] for those coming from rural areas.” Only 12.7% of the 211 children surveyed using the student questionnaire had attended formal kindergarten and 19.8% had accessed some form of traditional pre-schooling.

**Support for reading outside of school.** Parental support is a key variable in how quickly and how well children learn to read. A key finding of the 2010 EGRA study was that the presence of other books (not textbooks) in a child’s home had a significant and positive correlation with their reading skills (EGRA 2010, ES-5).

In this rapid assessment, a mixed picture emerged of support at home for education generally and for reading specifically. In general, parents expressed positive attitudes towards education. Interviews with teachers and MOE officials, however, clarified that parents lack concrete strategies to help their children with learning how to read, and that although parents may be supportive of education, they are in fact only able to dedicate very limited time or resources in this regard. The analysis of responses from children regarding support at home indicated that about 24.2% of the 211 students surveyed through the questionnaire reported that they have received regular support for reading at home<sup>4</sup> – given time to study, asked to read occasionally, or sharing reading materials from a neighbor – with urban students reporting greater incidence of regular support (26%) versus rural children (21.5%). The biggest challenge to studying, according to 70% of 211 children surveyed through the student questionnaire, was responsibilities for household chores.

**Teachers’ efforts outside the classroom.** 82% of 211 learners who responded on the student questionnaire said that teachers had helped them informally with some form of academic support outside of formal class hours. Similarly, approximately 68% of students reported that teachers also partly or usually provided them some guidance on how to handle personal problems. However, teachers’ direct engagement with parents around students’ learning was less evident. Three-quarters (74%) of teachers surveyed during the rapid assessment reported that they had worked with “a few” parents or “not at all”.

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<sup>4</sup> 37.6% of students (urban 26%, 21.5% rural) replied that they have received moderate home level support (36.5% urban, 39.2% rural), and about 38% of the learners reported that they received low home level support (37.5% urban, 39.2% rural).

**Libraries and reading materials.** Out of the observed 26 schools, 21 (81%) were reported to have functioning libraries. However, for those schools with libraries, the observed number of books in each library was very small (the book to student ratio was less than .01), and did not include large numbers of children's books or, importantly, children's books written in local languages. 63% of 167 teachers who responded to the teacher questionnaire identified the lack of books and readers as a challenge in their work. 69% of teachers said that insufficient materials exist for writing and posting written work on walls. In interviews and FGDs, participants reported that the books that were available in schools were often culturally irrelevant or not grade-level appropriate. Finally, respondents reported that books on hand often were printed in black and white, lacking pictures or other features to grab student attention.

**Reading in the school timetable.** In addition to books and libraries, the survey examined time allotted in the school schedule for the teaching and learning of reading and writing specifically. In schools, most learning periods were allocated to curriculum subjects, rather than to reading per se. Of the 28 schools observed, half had no specific times allocated to reading. Six schools had one period of 40 minutes per week dedicated to reading, one school had two periods, and seven schools assigned three periods per week for children to read.

**Extra-curricular opportunities for reading.** 63% of the 167 teachers surveyed through the questionnaire described their schools as having active language clubs with many members. Such active participation was corroborated by schools observation exercises—out of the 28 schools, 19 (68%) were reported to run active language clubs.

## **Cross-Cutting Issues**

**Gender.** Gender mainstreaming efforts have resulted in near parity in access to schooling across several regions. Performance, however, often remains gendered. The 2010 EGRA, for example found that boys performed better than girls on all components of reading skills and listening comprehension. The 4<sup>th</sup> National Learning Assessment, on the other hand, found 4<sup>th</sup> grade girls performing at par with boys in its assessment of reading. (MOE 2013)

For its part, the READ TA rapid baseline assessment found mixed results when looking at gender in the language classroom. When asked whether they considered themselves sensitive to sex/gender issues, the great majority (85%) of teachers in the survey responded affirmatively. In addition, 68% of the teachers surveyed said they purposefully assigned girls as group leaders in class, whereas only 28% said they did not do so. On the other hand, teachers recognized the gendered realities of their school environments. When they were asked whether it was more difficult to prompt girls to read aloud in class than boys, 48% said no but 52% said yes—which means half of the surveyed teachers still find it difficult to encourage active participation among girls, at least at the whole-class level.

Teacher responses were crosschecked against classroom observations. According to data collectors, girls were partly (36, 48%) or actively encouraged (15, 20%) in more than two-thirds of the classrooms observed; only in one-third of the classrooms were girls not actively encouraged to participate at all. A similar analysis of the frequency with which boys and girls raised their hands found no significant difference between the two – in 35 (47%) of classes the frequency between boys and girls was equal; in 20 classrooms boys raised hands more than girls; and in 12 classrooms it was girls who raised their hands more than boys.



In their own observations on gender differences, among the 227 children who responded to the survey, a majority said that girls are more likely to lack confidence in their reading abilities than boys (86% versus 14%). And when asked who led groups in language (reading) classes, 62% said boys and 38% said girls.

**Learners with special needs.** The rapid assessment included many observations of schools that were aware of children with special needs and of the MOE expectations for addressing these needs within inclusive classrooms. A quote from an interview with a school cluster director in Oromia is a good example of this:

*We do have eight children with special needs. We address the need of these children as inclusive and provide them with materials as well as psychological support. We have club for organizing support and material provision for students with special needs. However, we do not have a trained teacher assigned for this purpose.*

Attitudes towards the education of children with special needs also appear to be changing for the positive. 44% of the teachers who responded to the survey believed that their communities had improved attitudes around the education of children with special needs. Furthermore, at the request of individual school directors and teachers, some school communities have made inclusive spaces for these learners. In FGDs and interviews, several informants discussed how they created an environment supportive of inclusive learning. Teachers' own awareness of children with special needs was generally high: 72% of teachers surveyed said they had special needs learners enrolled in their classes, and 69% had identified these students' specific learning needs. 42% of the teachers surveyed reported that they actively assigned children with special needs as group leaders.

Challenges also persist: 49% of teachers, however, reported that they found it difficult to meet the needs of their special needs students, and 60% stated that they did not feel that they have the necessary skills to do so. When asked about specific challenges in this regard, 59% of teachers reported that the national curriculum does not assist teachers in addressing diverse learning needs, nor does it allow for curriculum differentiation. Lack of materials for students with diverse learning needs was also cited as a big hurdle; 77% of teachers reported that their schools did not provide any kind of materials to support disabled children.

**Second language learners in Mother Tongue classrooms.** In about half of the 75 observed classes, students were observed who did not fully speak the LOI of their school – meaning, they were communicating using some other language or combination of languages. Additionally, about 72% of the 167 teachers who responded to the teacher questionnaire said that there are students in their classes whose Mother Tongue was not the LOI; 44% of teachers identified this as a challenge in their work. This finding echoes data presented in the 2010 EGRA report which states:

...in each region, the percentage of children learning in their mother tongue (home language) ranges from 71.5% (Benishangul-Gumuz) to 97.8% (Sidama zone, SNNPR), with the majority of regions surveyed having more than 85% overlap between language of instruction and mother tongue. This is certainly one of the highest uses of local languages in primary school anywhere in the continent, and likely contributes to literacy acquisition in Ethiopia, though the scores remain lower than expected. However, note that in each region a significant proportion of children learn in languages they do not speak at home; e.g., 28.5% in Benishangul-Gumuz and 12.2% in Oromiya. (Piper 2010, ES-2,3)

## Conclusions and Recommendations

**Conclusion 1: TPD program suffers from inconsistent delivery and lack of content focus, especially in regards to MT reading and writing.** Ethiopia has a relatively strong teacher corps with high rates of pre-service training and years of experience in the classroom. While the CPD system appears to be a strong component of teacher professional development in Ethiopia, there are important gaps in the current in-service system in terms of reaching all teachers consistently and providing all teachers with supplemental training in Mother Tongue reading and writing. Training in Mother Tongue reading and writing has not been prioritized in the in-service professional development system to date, and as a result few teachers report having had any significant continuing professional development on the topic.

And yet, the need in this regard is great: the baseline assessment found that, on average, teachers lack a strong foundational understanding of the basic concepts of reading, and this weakness holds across almost every group of teachers included in the survey. The current teacher professional development opportunities that do exist – whether sponsored by the MOE, NGOs or others – have tended to prioritize general pedagogy over content and have not prepared teachers with the knowledge necessary to teach students to read and write in MT.

When looking at teachers' beliefs and practices, there was observed a significant gap between teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and classroom practice and what was observed through surveys and observations. Further, with minimal exception, the teaching methods and learning culture most commonly observed reflects a more traditional, teacher-centered model.

The supervision system for schools and teachers is functional, but respondents felt that in-service training in Mother Tongue reading and writing, where it is taking place, is not being monitored and evaluated for effectiveness. Stakeholders across the survey presumed that access to training inherently resulted in improved teaching practice. However, as has been noted, findings from this survey indicate that participation in in-service training has not noticeably improved teachers' understanding of key concepts in reading.

- **Recommendation 1.1.** As improving Mother Tongue reading instruction is a key priority of the MOE, a centrally-coordinated and designed, and regionally contextualized, professional development program for teachers in Mother Tongue reading is necessary. The CPD system, which specifies content, provides materials, and stipulates the modalities and duration of the program could be a model or even the primary delivery modality for the training. In such a training program, the following elements would be recommended:
  - A centrally developed and well-structured training program in MT reading and writing (standardization of the content, mode of delivery, duration, and trainers profile) that could be contextualized regionally, but which would ensure a common foundation of knowledge and skills in reading for teachers.
  - A focus in training content on both procedural and conceptual knowledge (Ma, 1999); teachers need both *subject specific area knowledge and methods* (Birman, et al. 2000) in addition to teaching *methodology*. These should be done together; that is, student-centered pedagogy can be demonstrated and discussed in trainings on pedagogical-content knowledge, rather than focusing a separate training simply on active learning.

- A training design that reflects the current realities of teachers, students and schools with regard to issues of class size, availability of texts in Mother Tongue, diverse student experience of pre-primary education, and other relevant features of the environment for language teaching and learning discovered during this rapid assessment.
  - A training design that reinforces existing MOE efforts to create more child-centered learning within the reality of the current classroom context, and that allows the teaching of reading and writing skills with the active involvement of students.
  - Basic orientations on Mother Tongue reading for all teachers, not just language and English teachers since all teachers who teach subjects through MT language are required to ensure their students' comprehension of the lessons.
  - A more rigorous monitoring and evaluation system of the training program, integrated into the existing supervisory system to improve feedback and allow improvements to the training program to be made, as necessary.
- **Recommendation 1.2:** In addition to the core training content on MT pedagogy, this rapid baseline assessment report makes the following recommendations for content that can either be mainstreamed throughout the main training, or as modules that can be included alongside the main training or offered as supplemental content through the CPD system. (Some of these will be described in more detail in subsequent recommendations below.):
    - Explicit attention and concrete strategies given to ways to best support the needs of diverse learners, including girls, students with special needs, and children in Mother Tongue classrooms that do not speak the language of instruction.
    - Expectations and strategies for teachers and school directors to better engage parents in support of their children's reading development. Engaging parents and communities will primarily be the role of READ CO, but teachers are key advocates vis-à-vis parents and READ TA should not lose the opportunity in its design of the teacher training program to provide teachers with key messages and strategies that they can use to engage parents.
    - Strategies for teachers to improve the access and availability of printed materials, including posting prepared and student-created materials on classroom walls and creating simple materials using locally available resources.
    - Tailored strategies and approaches for teachers working in large classrooms or in areas with few print materials. Key elements of a reading program, such as reading aloud and continuous assessment, may need to be adapted or supplemental strategies provided.
  - **Recommendation 1.3:** The training program should be well integrated with a complementary supervision and mentoring strategy for teachers. This rapid assessment found a significant gap between teachers' beliefs about their teaching and what they are actually doing in the classroom. As a result, changing teachers' behaviors will take time and require ongoing support. The coaching and mentoring plan attached to the training should support teachers to accurately reflect on their practice in order to make sustainable behavior change.
  - **Recommendation 1.4:** Although it was not a direct component of this rapid assessment, discussions with the MOE indicated that a review of the MOE's current experience in designing and rolling out the Math and Science training program could provide additional, useful insights and lessons learned for the READ TA training.

**Conclusion 2: The value of MTI is not fully understood by the public.** There is a strong understanding among MOE staff and teachers of the value and pedagogic rationale for MTI. This is a strong base upon which the READ TA program can build.

Though most parents, students, and community members hold their MT in high regard, these stakeholders do not show the same level of understanding and support for learning to read in MT. Parents and community members expressed opinions that indicated that they saw MT and English as competing priorities and not as part of a holistic and pedagogically sound MOE language strategy.

- **Recommendation 2.1:** The READ TA program can take advantage of its contact with key MOE staff at both national and regional levels, and in the design of materials that will reach down to teachers, to integrate strategies and messages for these actors around the importance of MT instruction, and how to communicate around this with parents and community members. This rapid assessment found a need for MOE staff to continue to reinforce the pedagogic rationale for MTI so that parents are also actively promoting Mother Tongue language acquisition in their interactions with their children. Experience in other contexts has shown that open forums with experts from the MOE (in the context of other improvements in language instruction) can be very effective in persuading parents and other community members of the cognitive benefits of learning in L1 and the relationship of language learning to economic opportunity. These efforts can and should also be linked with the efforts of READ CO, which will work to mobilize increased household and community support for learning to read.

**Conclusion 3: Primary schools are print-poor environments.** The literature on reading acquisition is clear about the need for new readers to have access to a large quantity and wide variety of interesting materials in the target language in order to practice their new skills. This study did not find sufficient or the right kinds of materials currently in Ethiopian primary schools to support emergent readers in becoming fluent readers who can read for comprehension.

- **Recommendation 3.1:** While READ CO will primarily be responsible for ensuring sufficient age-appropriate materials exist in MT as well as in English, READ TA can also take steps through the content of its training program to improve access to content, including training teachers on the importance of creating print-rich classrooms, on integrating library use into reading lesson plans, and on how to create simple teaching and reading materials, including storybooks, using locally available materials.

**Conclusion 4: There is a gap in pre-Grade 1 learning that affects literacy acquisition.** A number of respondents working in the education system identified a gap between the expectation in the curriculum that children will have gained the foundational skills needed for reading before entering Grade 1 and the low percentage of children, particularly in rural areas, who are actually attending kindergarten.

- **Recommendation 4.1:** Recognizing that most students do not currently access kindergarten, foundational skills in reading, such as basic letter recognition and phonological awareness, must be incorporated into the Grade 1 agenda and curriculum; textbooks and training for teachers also need to be adjusted accordingly.

**Conclusion 5: Attitudes amongst educators towards Special Needs learners are improving, but educators need more support.** Across the linguistic areas surveyed during rapid assessment, the study found awareness of children with special needs and encouraging efforts by school directors and teachers in support of these children. At the same time, these actors cited challenges of training, materials and curriculum in better creating inclusive learning environments.

- **Recommendation 5.1:** In creating curriculum standards for reading and associated materials, and in its dialogue with MOE around supporting policy and guidance for these, READ TA should promote a flexible approach to curriculum delivery, allowing schools and teachers the ability to differentiate or adapt standards across students, as needed, for more individualized instruction.
- **Recommendation 5.2:** Training for teachers (either as part of the main training or a supplementary module) should include information on particular, reading-related disabilities, associated strategies that teachers can use to meet the needs of learners with special needs, and awareness of additional referral resources that might exist for these children. Promoting these strategies should be within the larger context of support for instructional differentiation within the classroom (see above).

**Conclusion 6: Performance at the primary school level remains gendered.** Findings from the rapid assessment indicate that governmental and nongovernmental efforts at promoting girls learning have made inroads, particularly in terms of access, measured by school enrollment and attendance rates, as well as attitudinal changes in teachers and parents around girls' schooling. However, while this progress is duly noted, school participation and performance results are still gendered, with girls lagging behind boys, especially in rural areas and the upper grades.

- **Recommendation 6.1:** The focus of gender mainstreaming policy must now shift from a primary focus on access to education to attention to participation and performance. READ TA materials and training should continue to reinforce MOE guidance around girls and gender and provide teachers with strategies that specifically address potential gender gaps related to reading pedagogy (such as girls' comfort reading aloud in class).

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## **About Save the Children**

Save the Children has operated in Ethiopia since the 1930's, providing both humanitarian aid and development support in collaboration with diverse local communities. In 2012, seven Save the Children member organizations (Save the Children US, UK, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Canada), which had previously operated independently, united to form Save the Children International (SCI) in Ethiopia. SCI currently has the mandate to deliver programming in nine regions of Ethiopia, in the following sectors: education, health, HIV/AIDS, child protection, nutrition, food security and livelihood, child right governance, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), emergency, and the Every One Campaign. In the education sector specifically, Save the Children has implemented several projects in the last two decades to improve access to primary education through formal primary education, alternative basic education, and mobile schooling modalities. Recent programming, including Literacy Boost, seeks to improve educational quality.