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Transforming Education for Adults and Children in the Hinterlands (TEACH)

Activity Close-Out

Remarks by USAID Ethiopia Acting Mission Director Ramon El Hamzaoui

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

(As prepared for delivery)

Indemen walachu. I'm so happy to join you today to celebrate the many achievements of the TEACH team and the incredible collaboration and dedication of the extended TEACH partnership, embodied by all of you here today.

Since 1995, the United States Government has been working with the Government of Ethiopia through the Ministry of Education to improve the quality and equity of education. This partnership has increased school access, decreased dropout rates, and improved student learning, particularly for girls in primary schools.

Over the last decade, the Transforming Education for Adults and Children in the Hinterlands activity—more commonly known as TEACH—has often served as one of USAID's flagship projects. It has provided reliable guidance to the Ministry of Education in addressing a range of challenges, including increasing access to education for the most marginalized and delivering high-quality reading materials for young children. TEACH was implemented by Pact in partnership with nine outstanding local non-governmental organizations.

One of the project's goals was to increase access to education for the hardest-to-reach populations in Ethiopia. The project focused on *woredas* with extremely low primary grade enrollment rates and very low teaching and learning levels. We're talking about places where schools can only be reached by long journeys on foot or horseback—where cars simply cannot go.

Together, through the project, we created more than 850 alternative basic education centers to provide better education services to traditionally underserved populations. These informal learning centers have since been integrated into Ethiopia's formal education system.

USAID also funded training in planning and management for nearly 1,200 local education officials to give them the skillsets needed to support and oversee these new education centers.

Through our combined efforts, we made access to education services a reality for more than 1.5 million students. This is an awesome achievement and we should all be very proud of this.

As we acknowledge the successful accomplishments of TEACH, we also commemorate this year's International Literacy Day with the theme "Literacy and Sustainable Societies." Reading is fundamental to learning, but it is also integral to creating well-functioning societies with informed citizens who are interested and able to participate in the growth of their local communities.

While access to education is the first step to ensuring future opportunities, the quality of education is now the biggest challenge and priority for Ethiopia's education system.

Through TEACH, USAID, our partners, and the Ministry of Education made significant and important strides to improve the quality of primary education. The fact that we developed 128 new supplementary reading materials is perhaps the best example of that.

The supplementary reading materials give new readers the chance to practice reading skills in their schools and their communities. The materials are for grades 1-2, when it is the most important for students to become interested in reading and to begin learning the fundamentals. More than 330,000 copies of these engaging materials will be printed and distributed by the end of October in Amharic, Afan Oromo, Somali, and Tigrinya.

In addition to being written in mother tongue, the materials have been contextualized and designed to attract the attention of young readers. These wonderful materials represent all of the creativity and talent of Ethiopia authors and illustrators.

I also want to highlight that, for the first time in Ethiopia, these reading materials are marked with an open-source, public Creative Commons license. This license facilitates maximum reproduction, dissemination and use of the materials by letting others distribute, remix, tweak and build upon these materials free of charge.

This Creative Commons license is quickly becoming the norm everywhere in the world and I'm glad to see Ethiopia leading the pack in this area.

The TEACH project has provided valuable insights as to how best to address issues of access, quality and equity. The success of the program is the cumulative effort of numerous stakeholders working together to bring about change for their children and wider communities.

On behalf of USAID, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the entire TEACH team for its numerous activities aimed at expanding access to education in previously underserved areas as well as the exceptional technical support it has provided in developing the supplementary reading materials.

To the Ministry of Education and the regional state education bureaus, I would like to recognize the leadership and commitment you have shown since the inception of the TEACH project. Only with your support are we at USAID able to galvanize partners at all levels throughout the country. We see this in the willingness of the local *woreda* education officials taking on the administration of the alternative basic education centers.

By providing opportunities for students to practice their reading skills and by continuing to collaborate closely with the Ministry of Education, I am confident that we will reach our ambitious target of improving the reading and writing skills of 15 million children in Ethiopia.

Before I conclude, I'd like to share a quote from probably the most famous writer and illustrator of children's books in America, Dr. Seuss. In his book, "I Can Read with My Eyes Shut" he wrote, "The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."

We're committed to continue working with the Government of Ethiopia to ensure that more Ethiopian children will have the chances to "go places" in their lives.

Thank you very much, *amasegenalehu*.