

Press Release  
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## Laying the Foundation for Students' Learning in Nepal through Early Grade Reading

“Literacy is the cornerstone of economic and social development—171 million people could be lifted out of poverty if all students in low-income countries left school with just basic reading skills.”

- Christie Vilsack, Senior Advisor for International Education for USAID

The Government of Nepal, in partnership with the U.S. Government, will contribute to improving the reading skills of one million public primary students (grades 1 to 3) in 16 districts of Nepal through the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) new five-year, \$53.8 million Early Grade Reading Program. Based on lessons learned from this program, an evidence-based early grade reading model will be scaled up nationally. In addition, an estimated \$8 million through the government's Redbook mechanism will directly support the Ministry of Education's National Early Grade Reading Program.

The Ministry of Education remains committed to supporting early grade reading to improve students' learning by leveraging resources and building human capital through its School Sector Reform Program and future education sector plans.

USAID, with its long experience in primary education, recognizes that learning takes place at all levels, but places particular emphasis on early grade reading improvement as the foundation for future learning.

Nepal's first nationwide Early Grade Reading Assessment conducted one year ago found that the reading scores of 34 percent of second graders and 19 percent of third graders was unacceptably low in Nepali. It further determined that the majority of students read far below international standards; children whose mother tongue is not Nepali were more likely to perform poorly on reading assessments; and teachers have a limited command of research-based instructional techniques for early grade reading.

The new program will focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning materials, especially in different local languages, and on developing supplemental reading materials so that students can practice reading at home. It will also improve early grade reading instruction and assessment by training teachers and school administrators on evidence-based practices. Furthermore, the program will conduct community mobilization campaigns to create a culture of reading that involves parents in their children's learning.

This Early Grade Reading program is part of USAID's \$402 million assistance to Nepal. U.S. Ambassador Peter W. Bodde highlights, “We are proud to partner with the Government of Nepal to support early grade reading for children throughout the country. Every child who learns to read will bring Nepal one step closer to increased prosperity for all.”

The new five-year project will be implemented by RTI International and local partners to support the Ministry of Education's National Early Grade Reading Program from March 2015 – March 2020.

### THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN DEVELOPMENT

Quality education is strongly related to economic growth. Individual earnings increase by 10 percent for every year of school completed.

Countries that have increased literacy rates by 20 to 30 percent have seen simultaneous increases in GDP of 8 to 16 percent.

One year of schooling has the same stabilizing effect as an annual growth rate of 5 percent.