

Overview

By examining the strengths and weaknesses of literacy programs around the World, it is possible to incorporate helpful practices into the communities of the United States. Ethiopia Reads is an example of an organization that is working to alleviate illiteracy among Ethiopians through a localized effort that employs outreach and accessibility to ensure its success. An examination of the environment and the methods used by Ethiopia Reads will reveal successful avenues of thought and action that can be applied to libraries in the United States.

This objective is achieved by:

- Using the resources available
- Developing culturally-relevant materials
- Breaking the cycle of poverty

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

Poverty and illiteracy are linked not only in Ethiopia but also in the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, adults with low literacy competencies are more likely to receive welfare benefits compared to adults with high level literacy. Thus, Ethiopia Reads' initiatives are proscriptive, as well as educational, as it works to break the cycle of poverty. The United States could use similarly modeled initiatives to empower children and adults to improve their daily living conditions. By improving literacy, it is possible to improve earning potential and awareness of entitled rights, thereby breaking the bonds of poverty.



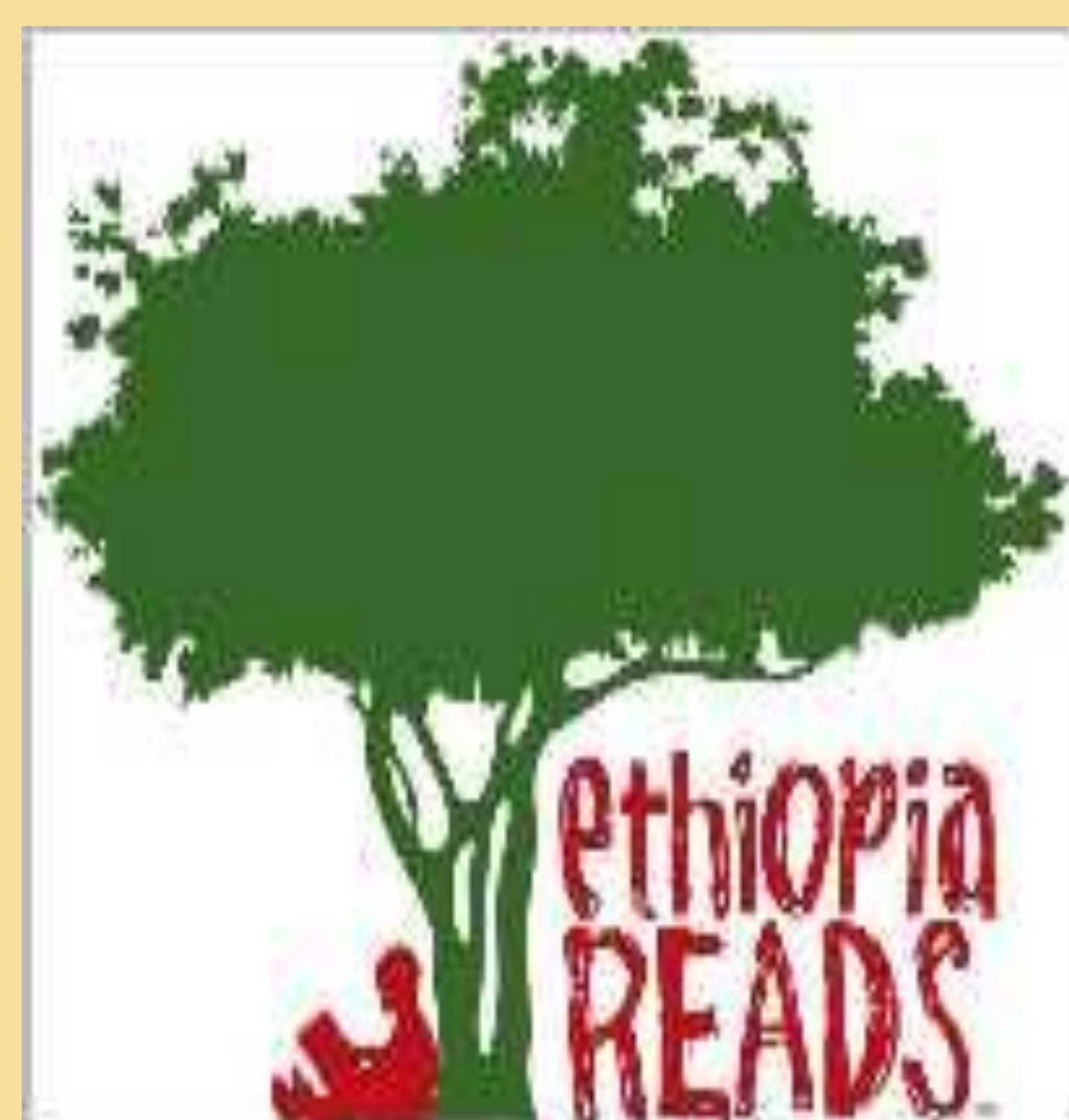
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Using the Resources Available

Although Ethiopia has a population of approximately 61 million, the vast majority live in rural areas, only 11% live in an urban environment. Information outreach and dissemination are leading challenges for developing countries that lack a centrally-located population. Ethiopia Reads uses donkey mobile libraries, to deliver access to reading materials for deprived Ethiopian, rural populations.



ETHIOPIA READS

Ethiopia Reads believes that education is the key to improving the lives of the next generation of Ethiopians, a country filled with children, and that books are the key to fostering a genuine love of learning. We invite all who love children and books to join us in the endeavor.

Ethiopia Reads initiates the development of libraries all over the country as well as rural outreach through their iconic donkey mobile libraries, which further connects communities with information resources. Ethiopia Reads also produces reading materials that are culturally relevant to the communities they support and are involved on a national level in education initiatives.

Mission:

To create a reading culture in Ethiopia by connecting children with books. By planting libraries for children, creating culturally appropriate reading materials and training educators to nurture a love of books, Ethiopia Reads brings hope and educational skills to this generation of Ethiopians.

Developing Culturally-relevant Literacy Materials

Ethiopia Reads founder, Yohannes Gebregeorgis, saw the need for culturally-relevant materials when he started working as a children's librarian. Although the children's collection was large and multicultural in subject matter, there were very few books that applied to his Ethiopian culture. Gebregeorgis took the following actions:



- Worked as a trailblazer. He created Ethiopia Reads, not only to collect and distribute reading materials to Ethiopians.
- Filled the need to produce and publish culturally relevant materials for Ethiopian children and his overall target population of Ethiopia. In 2007, Gebregeorgis released an old Ethiopian folktale called *Silly Mamma*.

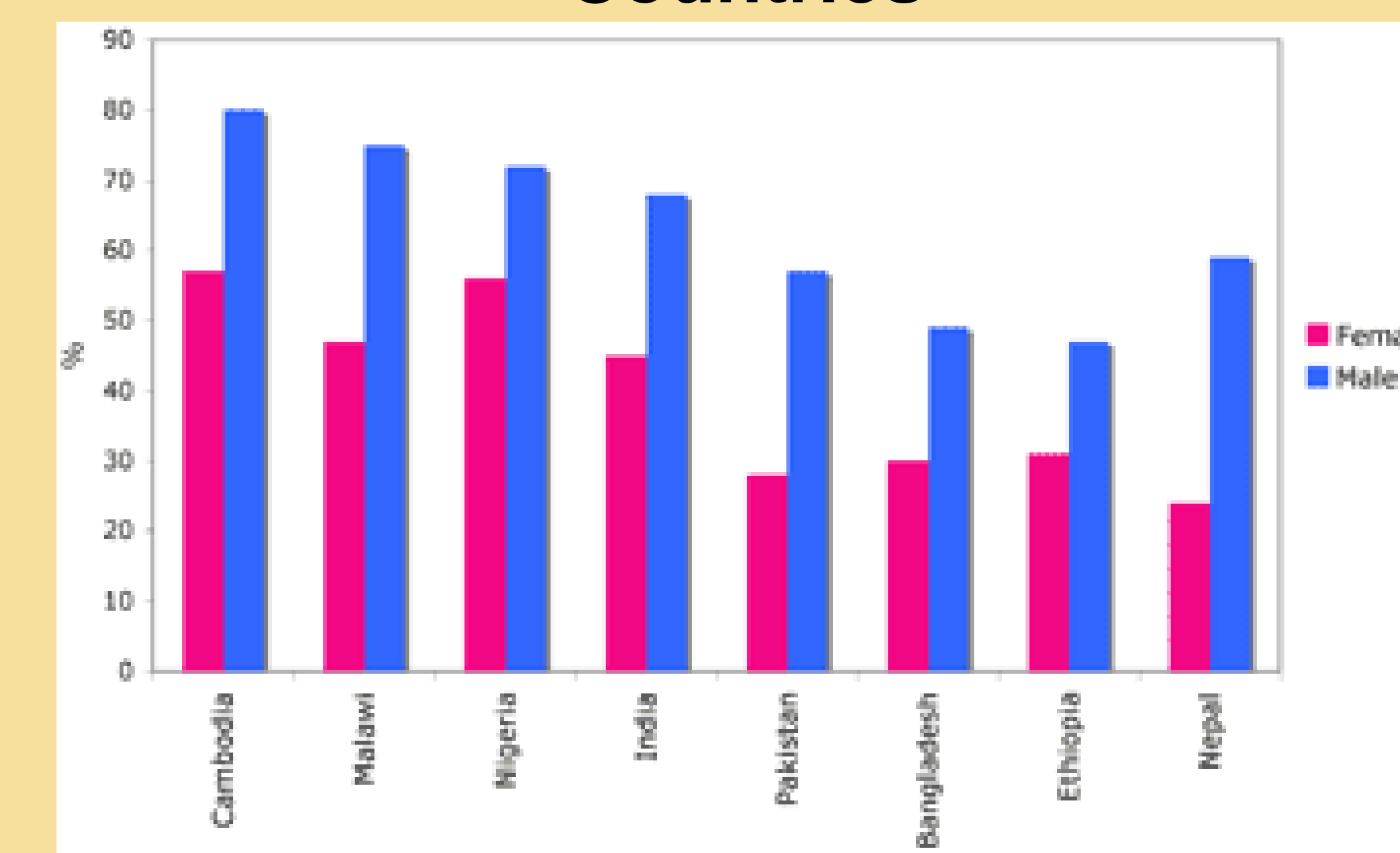
Publishing and disseminating culturally-relevant materials ensure community interest in literacy programs. Culturally-relevant literacy items serve a two-fold purpose, they embrace the cultural heritage of the reader and through cultural understanding, they optimize learning.

Literacy Program Necessities

To be successful in literacy development work a library must consider:

- The importance of community support and ownership
- Where and how to find sustainable funding
- How to find or produce dynamic culturally-relevant materials
- Outreach methods that are applicable to the community
- How to gather useful information from a community assessment

Literacy Levels in Developing Countries



Ethiopian women are comparatively less literate than men and less likely to go onto secondary and tertiary education (UNICEF, 2010).

Asian Development Bank. (2010). Retrieved March 31, 2010 from <http://www.himalayanlearning.org/issues-we-work-on/give-girls-a-future.php?page=50&page=58>