



The Right to Read and Write

Ethiopia Fact Box

CAPITAL: Addis Ababa
POPULATION: Almost 94 million
OFFICIAL LANGUAGES: English, Arabic, Oromo, Amharic, Tigrayan
CHALLENGES: One of the poorest countries in Africa, Ethiopia depends on farming for its economy. Droughts have caused widespread food shortages over the past few decades, and military groups fighting for power have brought war. About two-thirds of its citizens can't read.
SUPPORT: International organizations support local agriculture and provide health care and education. Since launching in Ethiopia in 1994, CODE has supported quality education for young people by supplying books and promoting a love of reading.



By Katherine Dearlove

In countries like Ethiopia, children have little opportunity to learn how to read and write. Poor economic conditions and lack of education make literacy a challenge. But a Canadian non-profit called CODE is working to deliver literacy and education programs that train teachers, encourage aspiring writers, and teach children to love reading.



The idea behind CODE is simple: If you can read and write, you can learn to do, and be, anything. For more than 50 years, CODE has been supporting literacy projects in other countries. They get libraries up and running, help teachers learn new skills, offer awards to young writers, and work with local publishers to produce books in more than 20 languages and get them into the hands of kids. For more info, visit www.codecan.org.

A schoolgirl in Ethiopia at a library started by CODE.

Award Winner



For years, Ethiopian writer Linda Yohannes dreamed of writing a novel and becoming a published author. Time after time, Linda was told to give up her plans and use her energy for something more practical. But, says Linda, “against all odds, I went ahead and dreamt.” And after many setbacks, Linda won second prize in CODE’s Burt Award for African Literature. The Burt Award is offered in four African countries—Ethiopia, Tanzania, Ghana, and Kenya—and it’s given to talented writers who tackle subjects that will be interesting to local readers. The three winning writers in each country receive a cash prize and a contract to have their books published and distributed to schools and libraries. The writers get their work into their communities, and young readers also benefit by having good-quality, interesting new books to read.

After receiving this boost to her writing career, Linda promised herself that she would “step right up and continue to write another book, and then another and another...” Linda continues to write for several international magazines and newspapers. And because of CODE’s Burt Award, 30 new books have been published in Africa since 2008. The benefit to kids is tremendous: they have the opportunity to read books that reflect what’s going on in their lives and communities.

The School Newspaper

by Linda Yohannes

Linda’s award-winning novel is about Menna, a teen at a girls-only high school who wants to become a writer. But when she writes a controversial article for her school’s newspaper, she loses her best friend, gets into trouble with her family, and finds that her dreams of becoming a writer are suddenly in jeopardy.



Photos: CODE