Let’s Get South Africa Reading

Strategies involving all of us
Reading is critical to fulfilling individual potential and collective social development

The research is unequivocal:

- The degree to which children acquire language skills is a strong predictor of future academic success, educational attainment, employment and income.

- Reading is a powerful tool to tackle poverty and inequality: when children read for pleasure, it has a greater effect on their educational achievement than their family’s socio-economic status.

- Reading ability and comprehension promotes social cohesion and innovation by building empathy, critical thinking and imagination.

Yet, in South Africa, many children are not reading well. A recent review of the quality of education in South Africa indicated that as many as 58% of 13-year-olds living in rural areas are functionally illiterate (and 29% of 13-year-olds overall). The most recent international assessments (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study or PIRLS) showed that one in three Grade 4 learners were unable to demonstrate basic reading skills in their home language, and 43% of Grade 5 learners, who were tested in Afrikaans and English (which was either their home or instruction language), did not have rudimentary reading skills. Rural areas are of particular concern, the Annual National Assessments (ANAs) for 2014 showed that 42% of Grade 9 learners in Limpopo and 22% of learners in the Eastern Cape scored 29% or less in terms of home language achievement.

Such low performance in language and reading implies that these learners cannot read for meaning or create links between the classroom and daily life. Language competence underpins progress in learning, including mathematics. It enables children to understand symbols and metaphor, which is the basis for both scientific innovation and healthy human interaction.

This is a tragic loss of human potential, with severe economic and social consequences. Low literacy levels cost South Africa an estimated GDP loss of R550-billion per year, and GDP per capita would be 23% to 30% higher if all South Africans were sufficiently literate to participate in the formal economy. Poor literacy also excludes South Africans from participating meaningfully in democracy.

29% of 13-year-olds are functionally illiterate - most live in rural areas
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What is this document bringing to the conversation?

You cannot divorce the literacy development of children from the quality of the schooling system. In a comprehensive review of the quality of education in South Africa, Spaull (2013) makes the following observation:

“…the vast majority of South African pupils are significantly below where they should be in terms of the curriculum, and more generally, have not reached a host of normal numeracy and literacy milestones. As it stands, the South African education system is grossly inefficient, severely underperforming and egregiously unfair”10.

Serious efforts to address the inefficiencies of our schooling system and to improve the quality of education are critical – and Spaull makes important policy recommendations in his report. This document, however, seeks to highlight opportunities that all of us can get involved in to reduce the significant loss in potential in the short term.

It is worth remembering that resources are not our greatest obstacle. South Africa spends 20% of its national budget on education – in real terms, that is more than almost every other country in sub-Saharan Africa11 – yet its outcomes lag behind many of its poorer neighbours12. It is time for us to “work smarter” with what we have.

This calls for cooperation and alignment – for an ambitious, concerted and sustained national effort. While government plays a critical role, ensuring that every child can read well needs our entire society to get on board: business and civil society; publishers and the media; retirees and youth; teachers, parents and children. There is no quick fix to get South Africa reading; it requires commitment and collaboration.

Yet while the task ahead of us is enormous, we already know a lot about literacy interventions that work. If we build and innovate on existing research and experience, we can make major strides, now, for children who otherwise face a bleak future.

This document outlines five broad strategies in which we can all get involved to get South Africa reading. It is supported by case studies of what has worked in South Africa and elsewhere, and concludes with specific and practical actions that we can take to rewrite South Africa’s literacy story.
Let’s get South Africa reading

Invest heavily in early language learning from birth

Children’s developmental trajectories are shaped most profoundly before they start school\(^3\). Early experience with language, beginning in infancy, promotes fluency in understanding and vocabulary growth, which builds the foundation for later literacy and academic achievement\(^4\).

Numerous studies have found associations between pre-school language attainment and the ability to learn in school\(^5\). Research in the US has shown that children with professional parents hear 35 million more words by age 3 than children on welfare, and score higher on vocabulary and reading comprehension tests at age 9\(^6\).

Early language development is rooted in children’s interactions with parents, significant caregivers, childcare providers and peers. Reading aloud to children in the early years has been found to be associated with language growth, early literacy and reading achievement in school\(^7\). The American Academy of Paediatrics recommends that parents read to their babies every day\(^8\).

In South Africa, however, only 5% of parents read to their children – at all, let alone daily\(^9\). Some caregivers are illiterate, and many more lack the confidence and skills to read aloud. Most have little or no access to books in their children’s mother tongues. The importance of oral storytelling, which also supports language development, is not often recognised.

Formal early learning is also failing most children. Although Grade R enrolment in South Africa tripled between 2001 and 2012, quality has not kept pace. In the poorest three quintiles, increased access has had virtually no measurable impact on learning outcomes\(^10\). Many parents and early childhood development (ECD) practitioners believe that children only need to learn to read when they start school, and do not understand that exposing children to rich language, books and stories before they can read or speak primes them to learn.

Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman has shown that, combined with the fulfilment of basic needs in early childhood, an investment in early stimulation and language development is the most powerful investment in human capital development that a country can make\(^11\). As broader efforts seek to expand access to ECD we must ensure that quality keeps pace with access, and that play-based approaches to language development are strongly integrated into expansion of ECD services.
Case studies

Book sharing for early language learning

A randomised controlled trial of a book-sharing programme in Khayelitsha found that caregiver-child reading interaction significantly improved children’s cognitive development22.

The programme offered 6 to 8 weekly training sessions to mothers of children aged 14 to 16 months. Mothers learned to use simple, effective techniques when reading books with children, such as responding to the child’s interest, pointing to and naming things on the page, asking questions, and connecting book content to the infant’s real life.

Children of participating mothers had significantly better vocabulary, language understanding and attention than the control group. Mothers who received training became more sensitive, facilitating and elaborative in book sharing.

READY4K!: texting tips to parents

A 2014 study in a low-income United States school district found that 4-year-olds whose parents received regular SMSes with tips to support language development were significantly more prepared for kindergarten than children whose parents only received texts about administrative issues23.

One group of parents received simple, practical suggestions three times a week to prompt teachable moments, such as: “Say two words to your child that sound the same, like happy and healthy.” The other group only received intermittent texts about issues like school enrolment and vaccinations.

Children whose parents received the literacy SMSes performed significantly better on a literacy assessment than children whose parents only received school-related announcements. Parents who received the literacy SMSes were also more likely to report engaging in home literacy activities, such as telling stories or pointing out rhyming words, and asked teachers more questions about their children’s lessons. Because most parents in the study had unlimited SMS plans (common in the US), the study cost less than $1 (approx. R12) per child24.
Exponentially increase access to books and stories, especially in African languages

Children cannot learn to read, or love to read, if they do not have access to books and stories. The presence of books in the home has a greater influence on a child’s educational attainment than parents’ income, nationality or level of education. Studies comparing groups of similarly disadvantaged children show that those with access to books consistently show higher levels of literacy development.

Choice and relevance are critical determinants of motivation. When children can choose what they want to read from a wide selection of books, they are more likely to want to read. Children are also more motivated when they have access to stories that are relevant to their lives.

However, in South Africa, 51% of households have no leisure books, and only 6% of homes have more than 40 books. Just 8% of primary schools have a library; many of these contain unsuitable books, or remain locked most of the time because teacher-librarians are busy in the classroom. Only 15% of South Africans live within easy reach of a public library. Reading materials in African languages are particularly scarce.

The publishing industry, under threat from government policies, digital start-ups and large electronic commerce companies, is risk-averse and targets existing markets. Most of its revenue comes from the textbook industry. Just 4% of South Africans buy books regularly; most of them speak English as a mother tongue, are affluent, and live or shop in urban areas. Even for English language books, the small market size means print runs are small and costs are high. For African language books, the market is even smaller, with the growing but still very limited entrepreneurial publishing of books for pleasure in indigenous languages. Quite simply, books are too expensive for most people to afford.

Even donating books is more difficult than it would seem. While large print runs of existing titles could bring down the cost of locally-printed books to R20 or less, distribution remains a bottleneck.

We must increase the number of books in South Africa exponentially in order to meet our needs, and to invest most in African language stories. Achieving this will require thinking outside the box and coordinated effort.
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Case studies

A book in every child’s hand: Pratham Books

Indian non-profit publisher Pratham Books, established in 2004, seeks to put ‘a book in every child’s hand.’ To date, it has published 1,800 unique books in 11 Indian languages, printed more than 12 million books, and claims a readership of nearly 52 million. It offers quality materials at extremely low prices: books cost approximately R7, and story cards sell for less than R1.

Pratham has released many of its books under Creative Commons licenses, and made them available across multiple digital platforms. The CC attribution licenses Pratham uses allow anyone to access, translate or adapt its materials without asking for permission – even for commercial reasons – as long as Pratham and the original author, illustrator, translator and funder are recognised. People and organisations across the world have translated, recorded and repackaged Pratham’s books, which has helped it progress towards its goal of scale without increasing costs.

Notably, although Pratham feared that making books available for free online might reduce sales, it had the opposite effect: CC-licensed books released online outsold CC-licensed books that were not shared online by a factor of 3:1. This suggests that making books available for free has the potential to grow the market for books i.e. increasing supply can increase demand.

“Drip irrigation” of stories through Nal’ibali story supplements

The Nal’ibali national reading-for-enjoyment campaign has partnered with Times Media and a number of publishing companies to get more stories to children through an innovative, cost-effective and scalable solution: bilingual reading supplements that include read-aloud stories, cut-out-and-keep books, practical tips for parents and teachers, fun activities for children, and features about “Story Stars” – individuals and organisations who are doing great things to promote reading in their communities.

The 16-page supplements are currently available in five bilingual editions, and are published every two weeks during school terms. More than 36,000 copies of every edition are delivered directly to schools and reading clubs, and 186,000 copies are inserted in the Sunday World, the Daily Dispatch, The Herald and the Sunday Times Express (covering five provinces and Cape Town). A supplement costs about R1.20 to print, including publisher fees.

With supplements, even schools and communities without libraries can run thriving literacy programmes. Children can take cut-out-and-keep books home to read with parents and family members, and start their own mini home libraries. The bilingual supplements also increase the availability of reading material in African languages, and effectively support both mother tongue and English language learning. Regular prompting, through new content every two weeks, helps to develop habit of regularly sharing and enjoying stories, which is essential for a culture of reading to flourish.

Despite the huge potential of this strategy, distribution through newspapers does not always ensure that the children who really need it end up with a supplement in hand. Additional opportunities to print and distribute the supplements are required in the long run. In the meantime, if people buying newspapers pass the supplements on to those whom they know will benefit from it, the impact of the strategy will be enhanced.
Reading for pleasure is often the missing ingredient in literacy development. Extensive research over three decades confirms that self-selected reading for pleasure (where children choose what they want to read) results in profound growth in nearly all aspects of literacy, including reading ability, vocabulary, grammar, writing style and spelling. Children who read for enjoyment perform better in all subjects – not just in vocabulary and spelling, but in maths as well. In fact, across all 64 countries that participate in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), students who enjoyed reading the most, performed significantly better than students who enjoyed reading the least.

The logic is simple, and supported by research: when we are motivated to read, we read more; the more we read, the easier reading becomes; the easier reading becomes, the more we enjoy reading; and so we are more motivated to continue.

So how do we spark this all-important motivation? Children aspire to reading behaviour when they observe that it is socially valued and enjoyable for adults. They also develop motivation when they can engage with other people around what they are reading, and when they can receive constructive and supportive feedback from others.

Allocating time for sustained reading – during the school day and outside of it – is also important. Research in low-income communities has shown that children’s technical reading skills (word reading, decoding and comprehension) improved more when teachers spent more class time on reading for pleasure than when teachers spent more class time on instruction in technical skills such as word, alphabetic or phonemic awareness.

However, in South Africa, few children are read to regularly or exposed to adults who role model reading as a joyful, fun activity. Many teachers see reading for pleasure as an “add-on” or “nice to have”, rather than a vital part of literacy learning that supports curriculum objectives. The 2012 National Education and Evaluation Unit (NEEDU) annual report found that the state of reading corners in schools “suggested general apathy and disinterest on the part of the teacher to encourage reading”.

Most instruction time is used for demonstration, recitation, memorisation and repetition, in order to develop technical skills like letter-sound awareness and decoding. When these approaches
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are used exclusively, as they are in many schools, children do not have enough time to practice and consolidate skills. Technical approaches can also render reading a decoding exercise that is detached from real-life meaning, which reduces the motivation to read. Prioritising these academic and technical approaches can be particularly harmful for young children, who are primed to learn through play and exploration.

We need to put conditions in place that will spark and sustain children’s motivation to read. Critically, we need more reading role models, more books, and more time dedicated to reading for joy – in schools and at home.

Making reading cool: FunDza, teens and cell phones

The FunDza Literacy Trust has set out to hook South African teens on reading. To achieve this, it publishes high-interest local content; supports budding writers; and targets teens where they already spend a lot of their time: on mobile phones.

This strategy has proven to be a winning mix. Since its launch in 2011, FunDza has distributed 45,000 print books to more than 350 beneficiary groups in all 9 provinces, and published more than 380 books and stories online (including stories in all 11 official languages). In 2014/2015, more than 400,000 people accessed its Mxit platform. While these figures have been dropping due to the declining popularity of Mxit, its experience proves that young people will read stories that spark their interest, speak to their lives, and are easily accessible at a low cost or for free.

Nal’ibali reading clubs: reading for joy, anytime, anywhere

The Nal’ibali reading-for-enjoyment campaign has supported more than 560 reading clubs across South Africa. The concept of a “reading club” is flexible, so anyone who wants to support children’s learning in a supportive and fun environment can start one. Clubs can be run by parents, unemployed youth, teachers or retirees. They take place at schools and libraries, in homes, in churches or under a tree. They may function in one, two or even three languages. Some take place in libraries full of books; others are in rural areas where Nal’ibali supplements (see page 7) are the only reading materials available.

Parents, teachers and children have reported outcomes including increased motivation and confidence; increased school attendance and better behaviour; and improved reading and writing abilities.
Access to books is not enough: South Africa needs an army of adults reading with children.

To reach their potential, especially in the face of poverty and adversity, children need adults who pay attention to them, listen to them, and make them feel safe and loved. Researcher Ann Masten calls this “ordinary magic”: competence and resilience are developed through positive relationships with nurturing and competent adults, positive self-perceptions, and a sense of belonging or meaning in life⁵⁰.

When it comes to literacy, reading role models and constructive feedback from adults support children’s motivation to read⁵¹.

This means that educating our children is not just up to parents and teachers – especially in South Africa, where 23% of children do not live with their mother or father⁵², and class sizes are often 40 learners or more.

Mobilising more people to get involved in education also offers the prospect of tackling another significant challenge: our 24.3% unemployment rate, which is as high as 48.8% among youth aged 15-24⁵³. Crowding communities into education can give unemployed South Africans valuable opportunities to develop skills and engage in rewarding work – both as volunteers, and through alignment of government’s education and job creation agendas.
Youth in schools: the Ghana Teacher Community Assistant Initiative (TCAI)

The Ghana Education Service, National Youth Employment Programme, National Association of Teachers and Innovations for Poverty Action partnered to recruit high-school graduates in local communities and place them in 300 schools as teaching assistants. The project tested different models of support, and found that in-school and after-school remedial classes, targeting the weakest learners in Grades 1-3 and focusing on basic literacy and numeracy skills, were most effective.

Stories as “useful work”: the Community Work Programme (CWP) and Nal’ibali

The Community Work Programme (CWP) offers 8 days of work per month to more than 170,000 South Africans living in poverty in all 9 provinces. In the Free State, the CWP is partnering with the Nal’ibali campaign to introduce “Storyplay” at educare centres. To date, Nal’ibali has trained 81 CWP workers and 80 educare practitioners to support young children’s language development by reading and building creative activities around stories. Teams of CWP workers visit four educare centres each week, bringing interactive and exciting story experiences to more than 2,800 children. Children benefit through exposure to language and stories, and CWP participants benefit through training and skills development.

To reach their potential, especially in the face of poverty and adversity, children need adults who pay attention to them, listen to them, and make them feel safe and loved.
Run a sustained, large-scale mass media campaign

Mass media interventions have been shown to be associated with changes in behaviour. Although the individual effect size is generally small, wide coverage can translate into substantial societal change\textsuperscript{56}.

As social beings, our choices and behaviour are driven in large part by a search for status, identity and belonging. Research has shown that mass media campaigns that activate positive peer pressure are more effective at changing behaviour than simply providing information or invoking fear\textsuperscript{57}. Tina Rosenberg calls this “the social cure”: using our innate desire for peer approval to drive social change.

Currently, only 14% of South African adults consider themselves to be active readers\textsuperscript{58}. To change this, we need a mass media campaign that makes reading “cool”, easy and fun; gives the impression that everyone is doing it; and firmly establishes a positive identity around “being a reader” that makes people feel like they are part of something much larger than themselves.

The Nal’ibali reading-for-enjoyment campaign includes mass media elements and promotes reading for pleasure through radio, billboards, public service announcements, newspapers, and publicity drives and events centred around key literacy days such as World Read Aloud Day. These media strategies can spark the desire and motivation to read for enjoyment, which, when backed up by opportunities and materials to read with children, will sustain and support the emergence of a national culture of reading.

However, to reach the majority of South Africans with sustained and compelling messaging, further partnerships are needed – with TV, community radio stations and newspapers, business, government and civil society.
UK: National Year of Reading (1998-1999 and 2008)\textsuperscript{59}

The UK ran its first National Year of Reading (NYR) campaign in 1998-1999. It included (among other elements) a major television/radio advertising campaign with the message ‘A little reading goes a long way’ that flighted for two months, and an accompanying informational booklet of which three million copies were distributed. The campaign provided the impetus for organisations and community groups to put reading at the top of the agenda. Corporates also participated: “News International and Walkers Snack Foods created their high-profile Free Books for Schools campaign, Sainsbury’s announced £6 million sponsorship of Book Trust’s Bookstart project for babies, Orange encouraged workplace reading groups and a host of companies signed up to have their staff act as reading volunteers in schools”. In terms of impact, the National Literacy Trust reported that the campaign successfully raised the profile of reading and began to change attitudes among a range of audiences.

A second National Year of Reading took place in 2008. It aimed to “help create a reading culture in England and, specifically, to engage those people who need help with reading or think reading’s not for them.” Besides achievements made in distributing reading materials, the campaign motivated two million new library members to sign up and significantly increased the number of boys (up by 23 000) taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge compared with the previous year. Six thousand (6 000) reading events took place over the course of the year (driven by libraries, individuals, organisations etc.).

Australia: National Year of Reading (2012) and Love2read\textsuperscript{60}

In Australia “The National Year of Reading 2012” was initiated to address “declining levels of literacy in Australia”. The campaign managed to unite 1 494 public libraries under one banner alongside booksellers, publishers, literacy organisations, schools, community members, politicians and like-minded commercial organisations. “The campaign included 200-plus partner organisations, ambassadors and friends, 4,000 events; 12,000 online followers; 200,000 active participants; $5.6 million in in-kind support; an estimated $26 million in media coverage; and a $20 return for every $1 invested.” The campaign was deemed so successful that government established Love2read as an ongoing resource for the advocacy and promotion of literacy in Australia. Some interesting features of the campaign:

- Young people were asked to recommend a book and to pitch it to other readers by creating something extraordinary. More than 300 entries featuring films, songs, poems, artworks and board games were received. Adults and children were also invited to tell a story on a postcard, inspired by an original illustration. More than 2 400 postcards were received.
- About 16 200 Australians voted online for their story collection for 2012, “providing a reading list for Australia’s biggest book group”.
- Partnering with media companies like Walt Disney and ABC, broadcast media promoted the “Reading Hour”, which was the call to action to “share a book with your child for 10 minutes a day, an hour a week, and give them the gift of reading”. Also on television, a programme documenting a year-long search for the “10 Aussie Books You Must Read Before You Die”. More than 500 000 viewers tuned in to watch the finale.
- Community storytelling festivals (also broadcasted on radio) celebrated both the oral and written traditions of storytelling.
What can we do specifically?

Emerging from these five broad strategies, we believe the following specific actions can significantly improve the literacy situation in South Africa (while acknowledging that improving the quality of education in South Africa remains critical). Some of these are “quick wins” – simple things we can do now that will pay off quickly. But these actions should not be tackled in isolation if we are to normalise reading in the daily lives of all our children and ensure a flourishing reading public for generations to come.

All of us should:

Support and take ownership of Nal’ibali as our national movement to support children’s language and literacy development throughout our society.

While Nal’ibali has achieved significant reach in its first three years, it is currently operating at a fraction of the necessary scale. If we can get reading clubs into every school, build sustained motivational mass media messaging to reach at least two thirds of the population, and we can distribute millions of stories in multiple languages to all children, we can galvanise the start of a reading revolution. Getting to this scale requires concerted and sustained support from both government and private sector funders and role-players.

Drawing on the clout generated by Nal’ibali so far, using its guidelines and resources, as well as other resources available in our communities and among us, we need to:

Read to children – from birth. Persuade and help others, especially parents and/or day-to-day caregivers (such as grandparents, siblings or day mothers), to read and tell stories to children. Point out print in everyday settings and help children understand what it means. Start reading clubs. Organise reading events in communities. Show children that we, as adults, read and enjoy reading. Donate books in English and other languages.
The private sector and authors could:

Form partnerships with Nal’ibali to develop unique projects as part of their social responsibility efforts.

Motivate employees to read for joy to the children in their lives and assist them to acquire books/reading material.

Bring your stories into the lives of children by giving special broadcasting rights and publishing privileges to Nal’ibali.

Back large print runs of African language storybooks.

Open new book distribution channels and markets.

Support efforts to reduce mobile data costs and zero-rate text messaging and mobile applications run by public benefit organisations.

For example, in 2013 Wimpy partnered with Nal’ibali to give every child a book with their kid’s meal when they visited a Wimpy outlet. It also sponsored a print run of multilingual books for schools, libraries and reading clubs to reach children beyond their restaurant outlets.

For World Read Aloud Day 2015, Ackermans encouraged its staff to read to their children by printing and sending Nal’ibali’s special World Read Aloud Day story to their employees and supported charities. South African Airways (SAA) also emailed the story to its staff locally and internationally as part of its broader support of the campaign.

For example, Cambridge University Press (CUP) and Jacana Media have granted Nal’ibali the rights to translate and repackage some of its most popular children’s titles, such as “The Jungle Box” and “Spots”, for use in the campaign’s newspaper supplement.

Large print runs of lower-specification versions of existing African language books can bring down costs to less than R20 per book\(^61\), and can be sponsored by businesses in exchange for branding.

With the possibility of bringing the cost of books down, the next systemic bottleneck that the private sector is uniquely placed to unlock is the high cost of distribution. Major retailers could stock low-cost books; publishers and retailers could accept reduced profit margins in return for access to a huge untapped market of potential book buyers; and large companies could use their distribution infrastructure to get books into rural areas.

This would allow the 89% of South Africans who own a mobile phone\(^62\) to access the free digital libraries offered by Nal’ibali, FunDza and Worldreader among others.
Civil society organisations that are not specifically dedicated to literacy development could:

- Equip people who are already working with children to provide quality language learning experiences, and support parents to do the same.
- For example, in government’s Community Work Programme (administered largely by NGOs), more than 10,000 participants work at schools and educare centres63 – fertile ground for a mass effort to get adults reading with children. Other large-scale programmes such as the NACCW’s Isibindi sites could build reading and story-based play into their programmes (Nal’ibali offers various resources and guidelines that can support such efforts).

Educators/teachers should:

- Encourage and enable children to read for pleasure – including in the classroom as part of regular language and reading instruction.
- The curriculum sets aside time specifically for reading. If that opportunity gets children excited about reading, it will fast-track and improve their language and literacy development. The “Reading is FUNdamental” booklet provides practical examples of how some teachers have integrated reading for enjoyment into classtime. Visit the DGMT website to get a copy: www.dgmt.co.za.

Government should:

- Commit funding to promote reading for joy among children and youth.
- Government’s R439.6 million allocation to the Kha Ri Gude adult literacy campaign shows how serious they are about eradicating adult illiteracy in our lifetime – and what’s possible when significant political will exists. Yet research shows that focusing on young children gives the highest return on investment. Government should put comparable resources behind strategies that improve children’s ability to learn, such as increasing access to books and motivating children to read.

- Layer simple information and practical tips about early language and literacy development into existing mass communication platforms.
- For example, integrate language and literacy information and tips into the messaging for MomConnect, a national Department of Health initiative that seeks to communicate via SMS with every pregnant mother65.
Layer early language development efforts into all social services that target young children – in particular health, social grants and ECD services.

Clinics, social grant pay points, home visiting programmes, playgroups and educare centres should distribute story cards, books and information.

Link library provision to strategies that ensure libraries are open, well-stocked and used well.

As the Department of Basic Education continues to roll out libraries, its approach must strike a balance between books and personnel. Stipended library assistants and community volunteers can ensure that libraries stay open, provide greater access to multilingual books, and offer activities like reading clubs to spark motivation and interest.

Jointly tackle unemployment and education: enlist unemployed youth and adults to read with children.

As government has illustrated with the Kha Ri Gude campaign, unemployed parents and youth can have a huge impact as reading club leaders, library assistants, teacher assistants and tutors – and can develop skills which may open new career paths and study options. Mass strategies to train and place unemployed youth should be developed, involving the Community Work Programme (CWP), National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), the Jobs Fund, the various Skills, Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and other government departments.

The South Africa we believe is possible

Working together, we can rewrite the story of our children’s literacy development. We can create a society where all children hear stories from birth; are motivated to read and enjoy reading; have access to large amounts of exciting and relevant reading material, in all of their home languages; are supported by caring adults; and talk about books and stories with the people around them.

It will take large-scale cooperation, commitment and political will. There is a role for each and every one of us to play. But if we make reading a top priority and converge efforts behind it, we can nurture a generation of children who experience reading not as a difficult chore, but as a joyful, rewarding exploration of the world, and who are motivated, inspired, enabled and supported to reach their full potential.
Reading champions: who’s already making a difference, and what do they offer?

Biblionef SA offers books in all 11 official languages. www.biblionefsa.org.za

ELRU (the Early Learning Resource Unit) has an online store with children’s books and teacher guides. www.elru.co.za

PRAESA conducts research on literacy and multilingualism, increases availability of reading materials, and drives the Nal’ibali campaign. www.praesa.org.za

Room to Read South Africa establishes libraries, publishes local children’s literature, and builds foundation phase teachers’ skills. www.roomtoread.org


The Bookery establishes school libraries and train library assistants. www.thebookery.co.za

The Children’s Book Network (CBN) website includes stories to tell, book recommendations and book reviews written by children. www.childrensbook.co.za

The FunDza Literacy Trust is dedicated to improving literacy among teens and young adults. It offers a virtual ‘library’ of teen reads online and on mobile phones, and distributes books. www.fundza.co.za

The Nal’ibali reading-for-enjoyment campaign aims to spark children’s potential through storytelling and reading. It offers information on how to start reading clubs; tip sheets in a range of languages; recommended reading lists; and stories in all 11 official languages. www.nalibali.org

The Puku Children’s Literature Foundation has built a large database of children’s books, reviews and resources in all 11 official languages, and publishes newsletters about children’s literature. www.puku.co.za

The Read Educational Trust (READ) trains and develops educators in language, literacy and communication. It also offers new and second-hand books to interested parties, including teachers. www.read.org.za

The Shine Centre offers language and literacy support programmes in 24 primary schools. For information on paired reading, shared reading and reading with children in general see www.shineliteracy.org.za

Wordworks supports early language and literacy learning among children. Find stories, games and information sheets at www.wordworks.org.za

References


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