

## Team tackles literacy in Ethiopia

Tallahassee Democrat - Tallahassee, Fla.

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Date: Aug 8, 2013

Start Page: n/a

Section: Local

Text Word Count: 492

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### Document Text

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A team from Florida State University's Center for International Studies in Educational Research and Development (CISERD), one of five centers in the Learning Systems Institute, is working to develop curriculum for teachers in Ethiopia.

The project, called Ethiopia-READ, received funding through the US Agency for International Development and is being implemented by the Research Triangle Institute and its partners, including CISERD. These organizations are now working to better the education system and literacy rate in Ethiopia alongside the Ethiopian education ministry, which has found that many students cannot read at grade level.

The project began in September 2012, and CISERD got involved in January, said Flavia Ramos-Mattoussi, principal investigator on Ethiopia-READ and associate director of CISERD. "From April until September, many faculty members are going back and forth from Ethiopia," he said.

Nenette Milligan, a teacher at Conley Elementary School, recently returned from Ethiopia, and Shannon Halls-Mills, an assistant in the School of Communication Science and Disorders at FSU, is scheduled to leave for Ethiopia later this week. In addition, there are reading specialists and faculty members from the College of Education involved in this project. Ethiopia-READ is expected to continue until 2017 and reach 15 million Ethiopian children.

"I've been teaching at Hartsfield Elementary School for nine years, doing intervention and reading with at-risk students," Milligan said. "I was able to become a very effective teacher and FSU heard about what I did and talked me into it. I was really privileged."

The team is focusing primarily on five regions of Ethiopia that speak seven different mother tongue languages, including Afan Oromo, Amharic, Hadissa, Somali and Tigrigna. They will be providing teaching instruction in both the modern tongue languages and English.

"None of us speak any of the mother tongue languages," Ramos-Mattoussi said. "In each region we have a leading specialist and a linguist in the team. We're working very closely with the linguist and local teachers to see how they develop their curriculum."

The education system in Ethiopia has proven to be vastly different from Florida's. Milligan said that teachers typically have between 40 and 60 students, without the necessities for teaching them all.

"In some areas, the schools have very little resources," Ramos-Mattoussi said. "Sometimes there's no textbooks, sometimes it's just a blackboard on a tree and no walls. We're helping teachers teach in those environments given their resources."

The income level in Ethiopia also poses issues in regard to having access to schools.

"It's depressing to see these kids in the street and wondering if they're going to school, and if they are, are they learning?" Milligan said.

However, despite the poverty, Milligan says that the people she met during her time in Ethiopia were wonderful and gracious, and after comparing what they have to what she has, she felt a sense of gratitude.

"I'm so grateful for this opportunity, that I could travel and make some kind of difference with these children," Milligan said.

ID\_Code: CD-308080042

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