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I. Issue

Situation of reading in Albania

During Albania's transition from communism, education has been especially hard hit. Both quality and access have fallen, as has its share of the government budget. Efforts have been made to increase teachers' woefully low wages, but budgets for non-salary recurring expenditures have remained limited. As a result, spending on textbooks, school supplies and materials has been reduced to very low levels, leaving families to bear the burden of these costs.

The OSECD/UNESCO *The World of Tomorrow* report finds that well over half of the 15-year-old students in Albania were unable to complete any more than the simplest reading tasks.

Very little quality children's literature has been published in recent years in Albania, and even less has been available to students in the schools.

There is no regulatory body that monitors and sets standards for children's literature. Poor families, especially those in rural areas of the north, cannot afford to buy books.

According to a 2004 evaluation, only 11 per cent of children in the north have even one picture book in their home. As a result, a whole generation of children is growing up without books or encouragement to read. Under the communist regime, each city had a library, but since the transition they have degraded or been turned over to other uses. But generations of parents who were raised in a culture of reading and books cannot offer such an opportunity to their children - because they don't have the financial means and because there are no public or school libraries.

The situation is slightly improved during the last year. According to an estimate from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, the book fair held in 2005 showed an 11 per cent increase in book sales compared to the previous one. The reform on VAT Tax for books will decrease the costs of books, making them more accessible for all. The Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports have expressed their willingness to change the situation of reading in the country.

The *goal* of this project is to enhance the reading skills of children in Albania and promote the culture of reading.

The desired results

- Established minimum standards for school libraries
- Each school has a library
- Culture of reading re-established amongst children, parents and communities

Strategies

The following four key strategies will be employed to achieve the results of the initiative:

1. *Capacity building*: provide teachers with the skills to promote reading and to teach children how to use the library.
2. *Awareness raising and advocacy*: promote reading through advocacy with teachers and parents and the private sector. Reading promotion boards will be created and well-known Albanian authors/celebrities will be recruited.
3. *Standard setting*: standards will be established for school libraries and children's literature and quality monitored through a regulatory board.
4. *Policy development*: policies to promote reading in schools will be established.



II. Action

ACTION

The Ministry of Education and Science, in its 2004-2015 education strategy, adopted an integrated curriculum aimed at making it appropriate for the emerging needs and aspirations of students and parents.

As part of this strategy, standards will be developed for libraries, to be established in every school (preschool, compulsory and high).

In collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science, UNICEF aims to help bring a library to each school to improve reading skills and re-establish the culture of reading. UNICEF funding is being used to start the process by setting standards, buying books and initiating the reading advocacy campaign.

To meet the objective set that each school has a library the advocacy campaign will also target the private sector to support this movement. Publishing houses are encouraged as well to support the reading campaign through preferential rates for the project or through donations to ensure every school in the country has a library.

Activity 1: Provide a portable library for each school

Criteria for book selection are established, followed by a rapid assessment to identify a list of books that meet these criteria. This work has required close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Institute of Curricula.

As schools do not have libraries, an initial donation of 150 books will be given to each school to start a library.

With 4,771 schools in the country, it will be impossible to develop a library for every school at this stage.

Enhance reading skills of children in Albania and promote the culture of reading

The initial focus will be on compulsory schools and schools in the north, and the most marginalized areas of Albania. Seven hundred schools will be chosen by the Ministry and UNICEF to benefit during the first stage of the project.

Activity 2: Re-establish the culture of reading among children

A) Reading Promotion Board

A nationwide board will be created to promote reading among children. The board will include the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, UNICEF, publishing houses, media, private sector, young people and writers.

The board will have two purposes:

- (1) to bring back the culture of reading through awareness and promotion activities and
- (2) to encourage the role of the private sector and donors in buying books and promoting reading.

Special focus will be given to encourage Albania's 150 publishing houses to donate books to the selected schools (UNICEF has already begun negotiations for this effort).

B) Reading corners

Two 'reading corners' will be set up, one in Kukes and one in Tirana in cooperation with Home of Books for Children and the Municipality of Tirana.

The reading corners will promote reading to children by offering a variety of quality books for children to borrow as well as organizing competitions and other events to promote reading.

Two authors' workshops will be organized in Tirana to encourage development of quality literature for children and promotion of local writing talent.

Enhance reading skills of children in Albania and promote the culture of reading

A magazine for children will be developed and distributed in the poorest areas of the country. It will include literature for children both from Albania and classical stories translated into Albanian as well as poetry and short stories by children.

C) Training for teachers

A preschool and primary school teachers' guide will be developed with the Institute of Curricula with activities teachers can use to promote reading. They will also be shown how to initiate development of reading skills for preschool children, helping them prepare for first grade.

Training of trainers will be organized once the guide is completed.



III. Impact

IMPACT

1. Increased reading achievement of students
2. Children in marginalized areas have access to quality books
3. Minimum standards for school libraries are established
4. A culture of reading is re-established among children, parents and communities

NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES

It is expected that the following number of students and teachers will benefit directly from the initiative.

School Level	Schools	Students	Teachers
Preschool/Kindergarten	1,573	74,766	3,716
Compulsory	2,822	488,166	27,110
Secondary	376	140,000	7,384
Total	4,771	702,932	38,210

In addition to the students and teachers, children's book authors, parents and communities will benefit from workshops and activities associated with the newly established libraries and reading corners.

Albania Reads

Enhance reading skills of children in Albania and promote the culture of reading

LOCATION

The north of Albania, mainly the districts of Kukes and Peshkopia, and Tirana, focusing on children who live in informal settlements. Advocacy will take place nationwide.

TIMEFRAME

Three years.

SCOPE

- \Number of schools to be covered – 4,771 schools at all levels
 - 1,573 Preschools/kindergartens
 - 2,822 Compulsory schools (class I to VIII)
 - 376 Secondary schools
 -
- Three year project initially targeting compulsory schools
-
- Begin with schools in the most marginalized areas



V. Partners

PARTNERS

- Ministry of Education and Science (MES)
 - Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports (MOTCYS)
 - AMC
 - Vodafone
 - MJAFT!
 - Raiffeisen
 - British Council
 - YAPS
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- Publishing houses
 - Media
 - Private sector
 - Writers and other Albanian celebrities
 - Civil society
 - Children, parents, communities