



93%

of schools
in South Africa
have no library.



Our Presence in South Africa



Country Information

Population	57.8 million
Land area	1.2 million km ²
Languages of instruction	IsiZulu, Sepedi & Xitsonga
Launch of operations	2006
Room to Read office	Pretoria

Country Overview

In South Africa, it has been more than two decades since the end of the apartheid in 1994 and the country has seen many improvements. The country boasts a total of 11 official languages, with at least 35 indigenous languages total. Statistics South Africa shows that the most common first language is isiZulu, spoken by 25 percent of South Africans. English is only spoken by 8 percent of South Africans, making it the sixth most common language.

South Africa is Africa's second largest economy, however the World Bank reports that the overall unemployment rate remains high at 27 percent, and it is even higher for youth at around 55 percent. This is largely due to systemic inequality and poverty remaining from the apartheid era, where the black population was excluded from many employment opportunities. Unfortunately, with rising populations and little gross domestic product growth, there is little room to reduce poverty.

Despite recent progress, South Africa still has one of highest inequality rates in the world. According to the World Bank, the richest 10 percent of the population holds 71 percent of net wealth in the country. Intergenerational mobility is also low, meaning inequality is passed down from one generation to another, and there has been little change in inequality over time.



Educational Landscape

South Africa's education system has not yet recovered from the Bantu Education Act in 1953, which forced segregation between the black and white population of the country. In addition to the political and economic divide it enforced, the major provision was to force racially separated educational facilities, schools and even exposure to certain subjects.

Today, the South African government invests more in education. Based on UNICEF data, an average of 16.4 percent of the country's total budget has gone toward education per year since 2014. Much of this investment goes toward teacher training and retention because the country is experiencing a significant shortage of teachers. Despite the government doubling the number of annual graduates from teaching programs, the Center for Development and Enterprise predicts that the country will be in need of more than 30,000 new teachers by 2025.

In addition to a lack of teachers, the quality of instruction is also insufficient in South Africa. Students' academic performance is relatively poor compared to neighboring countries; the Economist reported that 27 percent of students who have attended school for six years still cannot read, compared to 4 percent in Tanzania and 19 percent on Zimbabwe. With this in mind, the Department of Basic Education has revised its goals to improve the quality of teaching, undertake regular assessments, improve early childhood development and ensure a system of outcomes-focused accountability.

History and Results

Room to Read implemented our Literacy Program in South Africa in 2006. Our program aligns with the need and government's focus on teacher training, instruction techniques, assessments and reading materials.

We are Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) accredited in South Africa, and we are one of a small handful of implementing partners with the Department of Basic Education's 1,000 Libraries campaign. They encourage organizations, such as Room to Read, to do similar work in underserved regions throughout South Africa.

In 2007, we ran an informal study and determined that our Girls' Education Program was not needed in South Africa at the time. This is because in addition to the inequalities and complexities present in the education system, the average graduation rate is slightly higher for girls than boys in South Africa. Since our program follows a global model and a key focus is secondary school completion, we would need to adapt the Girls' Education Program with different or additional components in order for it to be effective in South Africa's context. However, we are open to reevaluating, redesigning and launching the Girls' Education Program in South Africa in the future.

We are proud to have influenced systems-level change in South Africa through our Results in Education for All Children (REACH) technical assistance project. In partnership with the World Bank from 2017 to 2019, we increased the supply of high-quality indigenous language storybooks across the regions of Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Kwa-Zulu Natal. Through this project, we published 120 original storybooks in six languages (English, isiZulu, Tshivenda, Siswati, Xitsonga and Sepedi), distributed more than 46,000 copies to government schools and distributed more than 16,000 copies to the public. Additionally, we trained local publishers on best practices and published our guidelines for creating quality storybooks, so indigenous language storybooks will continue to be created in the future.

We will continue to be a catalyst for change in the educational landscape of South Africa by transforming the lives of thousands of children in underserved regions across the country.

2019 South Africa Targets

Literacy Program

New children benefited in 2018	44,181
Children benefited cumulatively	517,071
New schools in 2018	35
Schools cumulatively	629
New children's books published in 2018	20
Books distributed cumulatively	1,312,298