



# National Reading Barometer 2023 Launch Presentation

13 June 2023

This project was commissioned and led by the Nal'ibali Trust  
in partnership with the National Library of South Africa (NLSA),  
with funding from the NLSA, Zenex Foundation, DGMT and the National Education  
Collaboration Trust

# Framing



The National Reading Barometer Project has two elements:



## National Reading Survey

Nationally representative survey  
(N=4250) of individual reading practices

### Topics

Adult reading practices, motivation, contexts  
Reading with children  
Reading materials access and preferences  
Library use  
Digital reading

### Objectives

**Understand reading cultures, motivation and attitudes, and access challenges**

Track change over time  
Inform research, policy and practice  
Enable sector coordination



## National Reading Barometer

Compilation of primary and secondary  
data on the national reading ecosystem

### Topics

Reading ability  
Access to reading materials  
Institutional framework  
Reading practices

### Objectives

**Understand system constraints and opportunities**

Track change over time  
Inform research, policy and practice  
Enable sector coordination



## 2023 NRS in context

The 2023 NRS is part of a longitudinal series of studies about adult reading in South Africa.



## Defining 'reading cultures' for our context



### Multidimensional understanding of reading:

- Purpose
- Habits
- Volume
- Depth
- Motivation and Identity
- Materials Access



### Pluralistic view of reading that considers:

- Different purposes
- Many types of materials
- Print and digital mediums
- All South African languages



### Balancing appreciative enquiry and policy focus

# Survey Methodology

**Complete survey (196 questions, 800 variables, 4251 respondents)**

## **Adult Reading**

4251 respondents (100%)

Some Qs only  
if able to read  
(3783, 89%)

## **Reading with Children**

1980 respondents  
who live with  
children (47%)

## **Digital Reading**

3101 respondents  
who have access  
to the internet  
(73%)

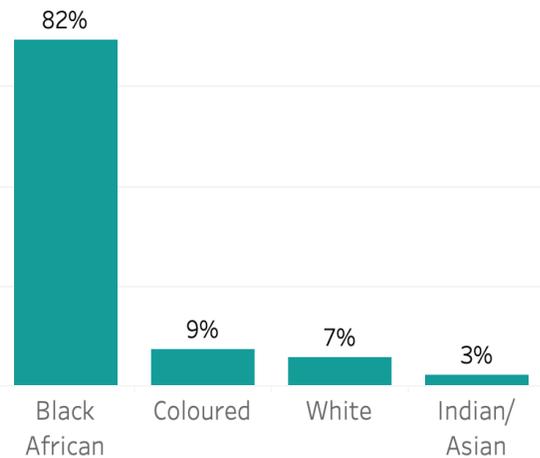
## **Libraries**

2804 respondents  
who have ever  
visited a library  
(66%)

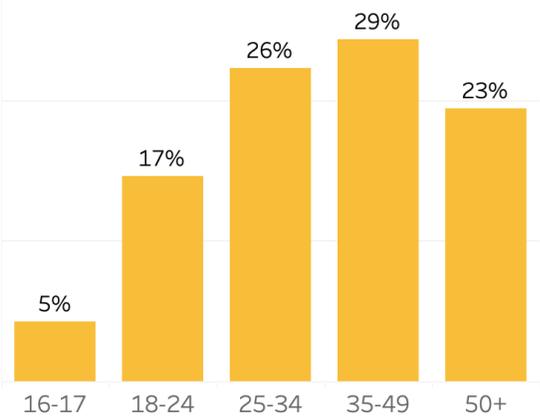
# Survey Sample



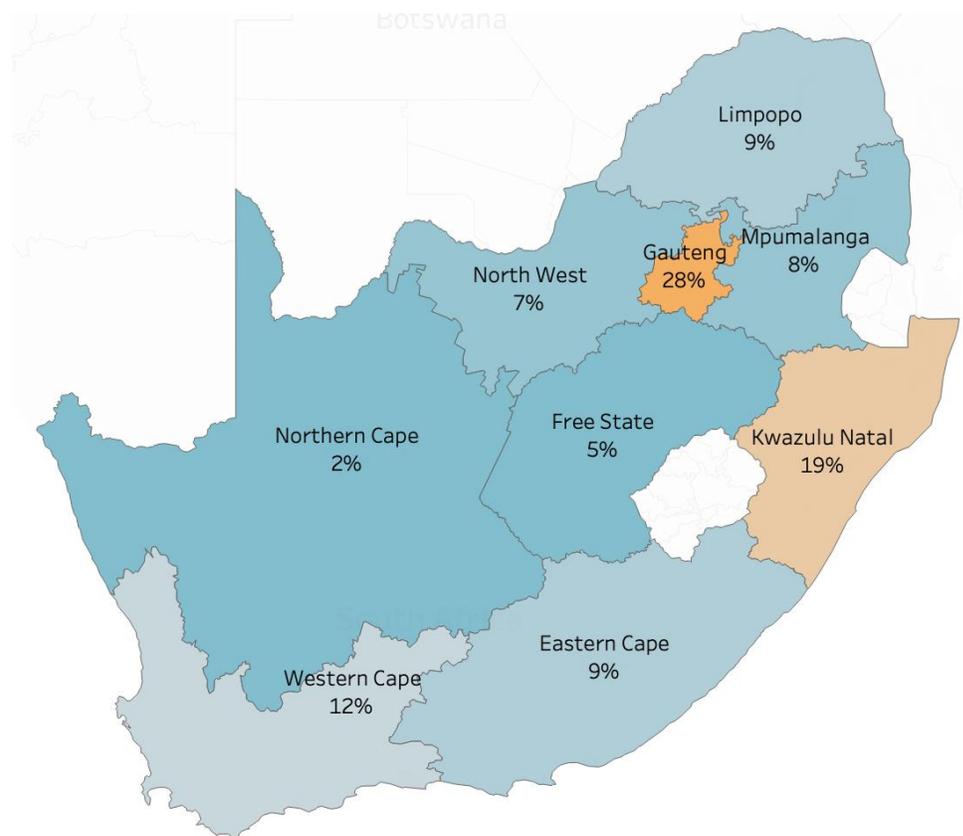
### Race



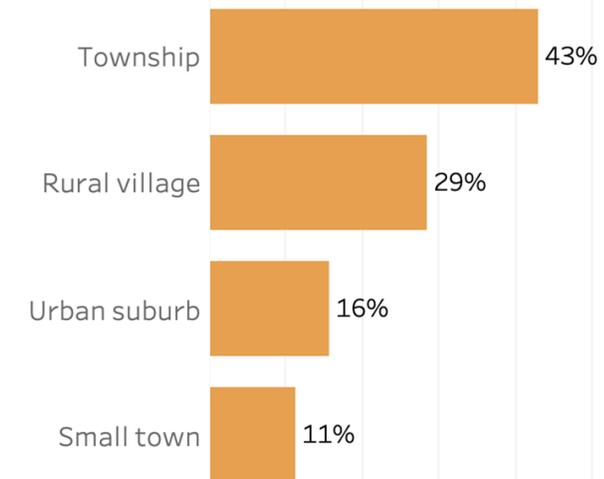
### Age



### Province



### Area Type





# National Reading Survey

# How many South Africans read?

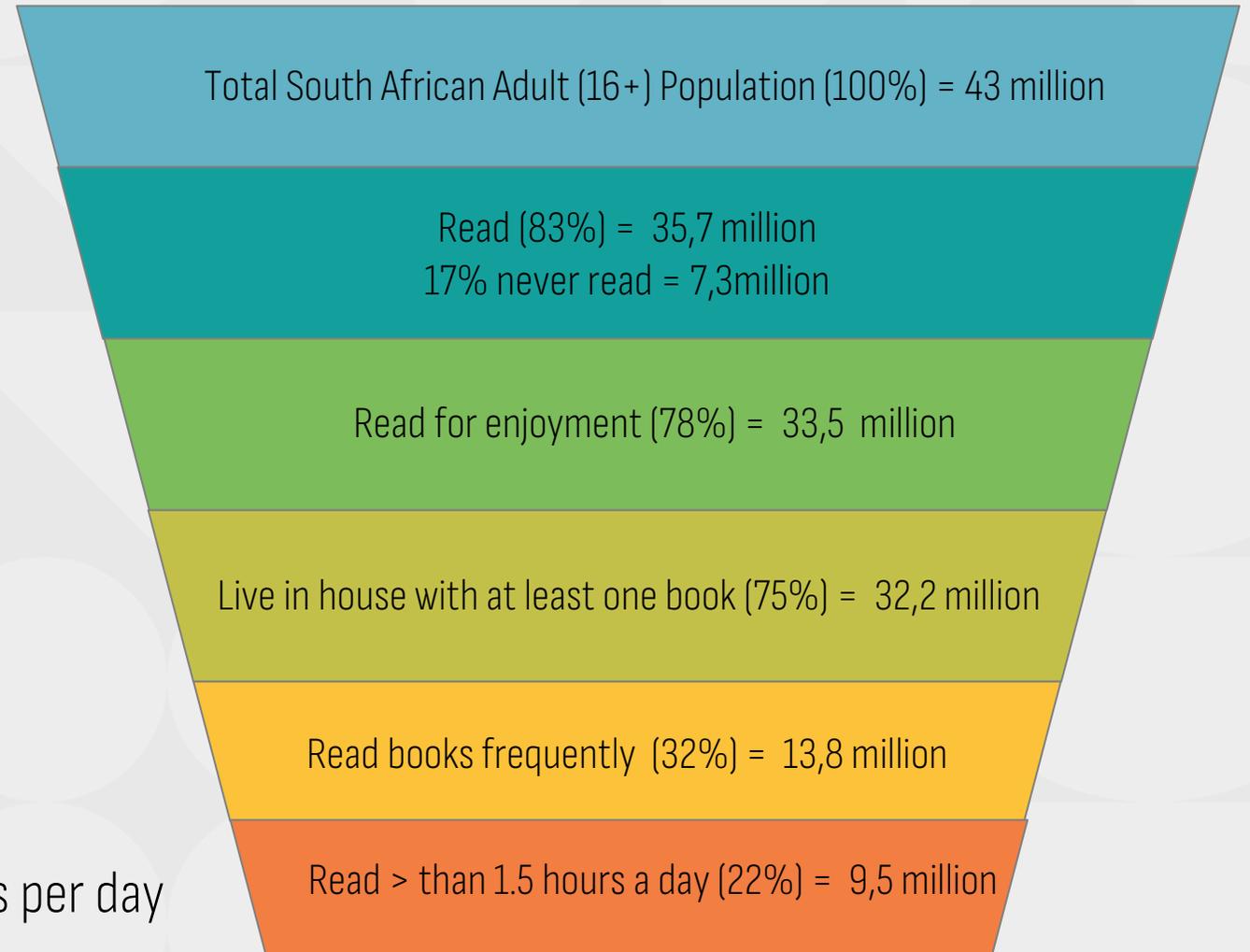
**83%** read

**78%** read for enjoyment

**75%** homes with at least one book

**32%** frequently read books

**22%** read for enjoyment >1.5 hours per day



# Access to materials



## Volume of books in homes is increasing

75% of adults have **any books** at home



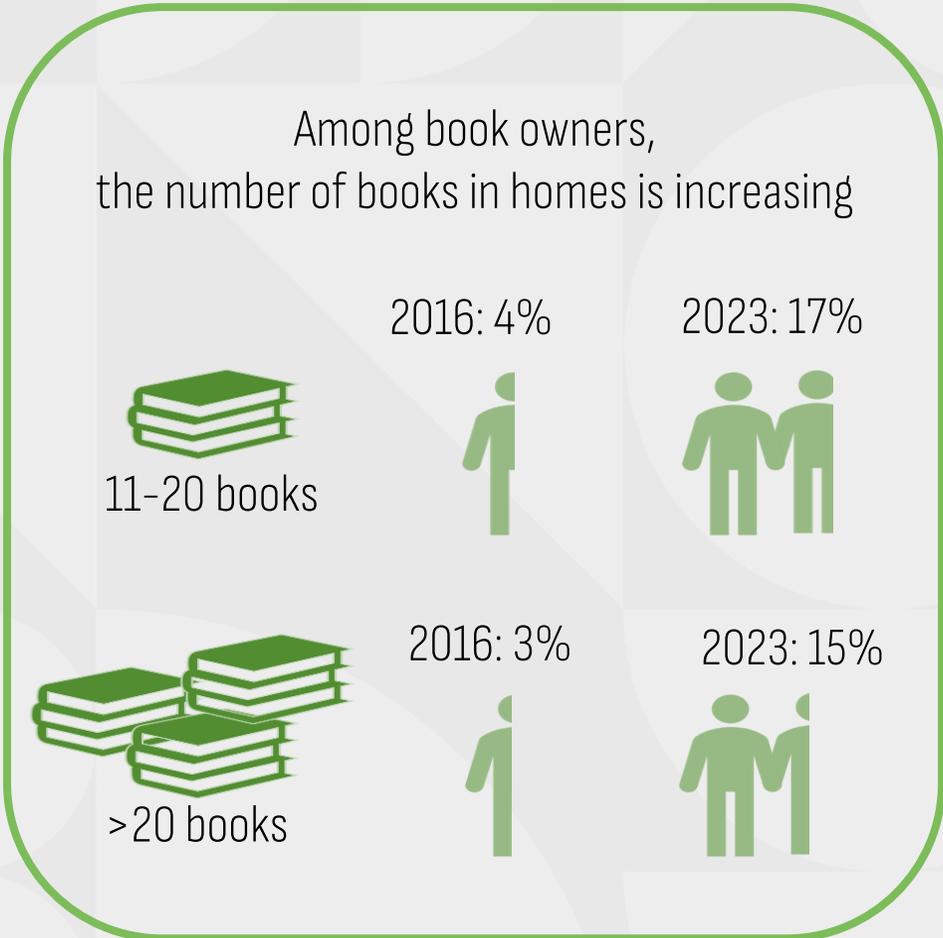
**but homes with (non)fiction not changing**

37% of adults have **any fiction or nonfiction print books** at home



2016: 58% no books

n=4251



## More Adults Read with Children

52% of South Africans with children in their households have ever read with them.

2023



In 2016, 35% of adults with children said they read with their children.

2016



Only 5% of caregivers read digital materials with their children

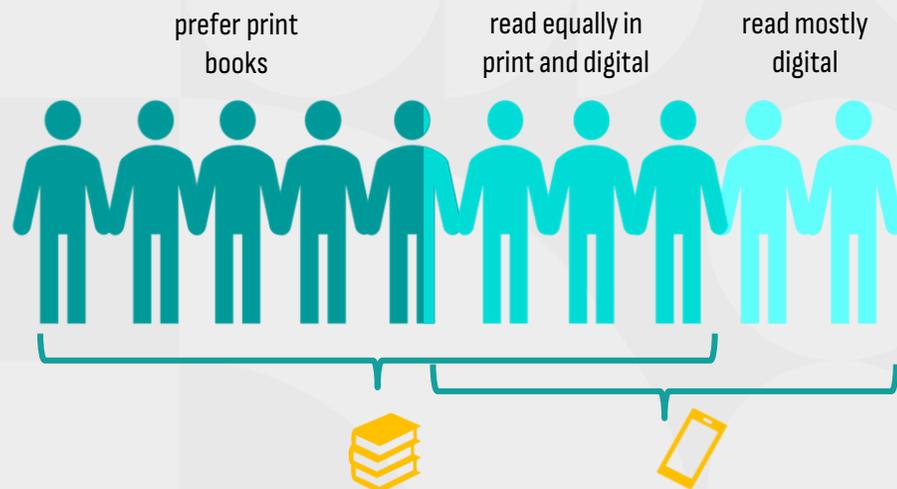
## Digital reading has grown

55% of adults read online materials



27% of adults have no access to the internet

*n=4251*



48% of book readers prefer print

82% read print at least some of the time

53% read digital books

*N=3024*. Excludes those who cannot read and those who 'rarely or never read books'

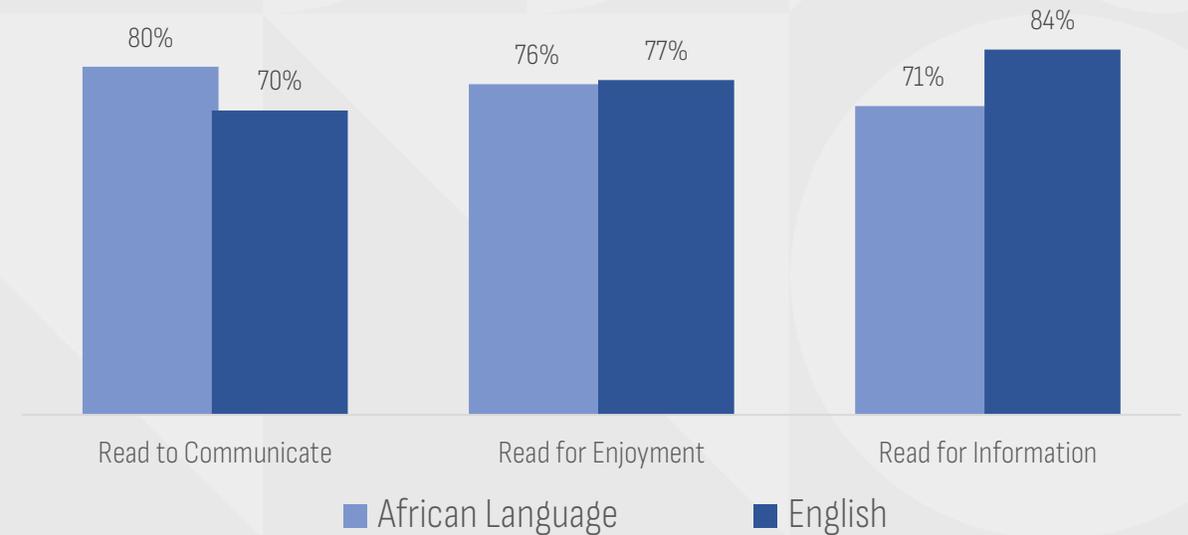
## South Africans are multilingual readers



The demand for reading in African languages is high

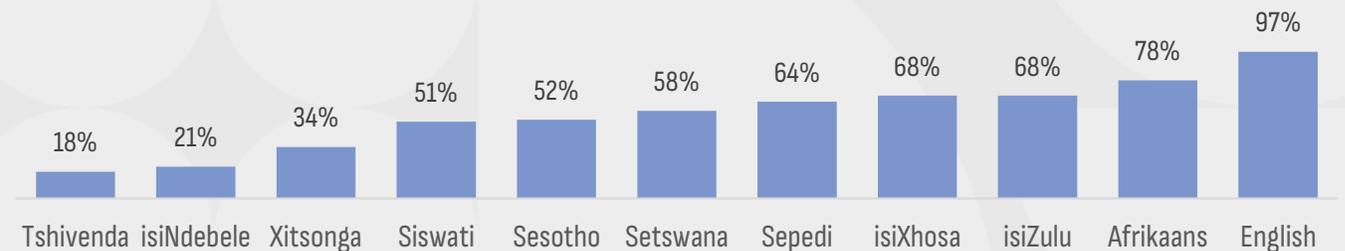
and co-exists with reading in English

### Preferred Reading Languages of African Language Speakers



but availability of texts lags behind demand

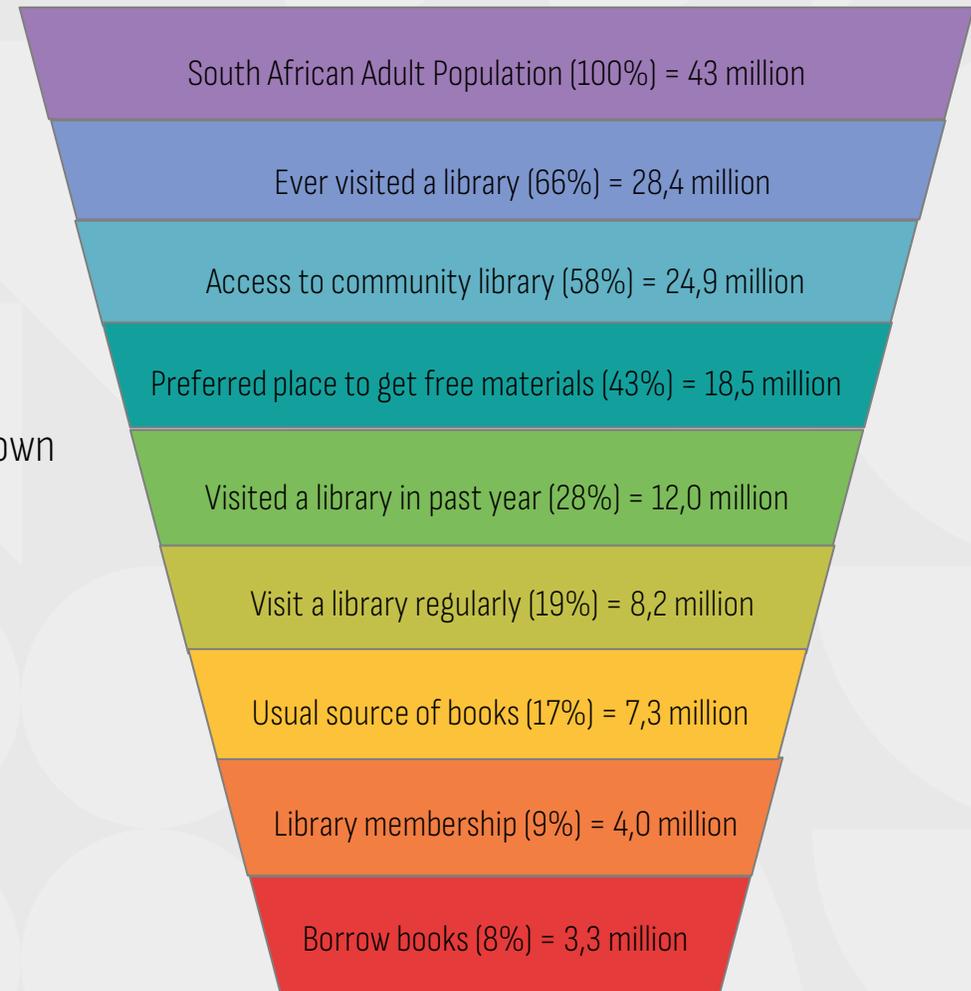
### % of Main Home Language speakers with books in that language



## Libraries are important places for reading material access

but are still not accessible to all, and many users don't borrow books

- 66%** have ever visited a library
- 58%** have access to the community library
- 43%** preferred location to get free reading materials to own
- 28%** visited a community library in the past year
- 19%** visit a community library regularly or frequently
- 17%** name libraries as their 'usual place to get books'
- 9%** have a library membership
- 8%** borrow books from the library



## Reader identity matters

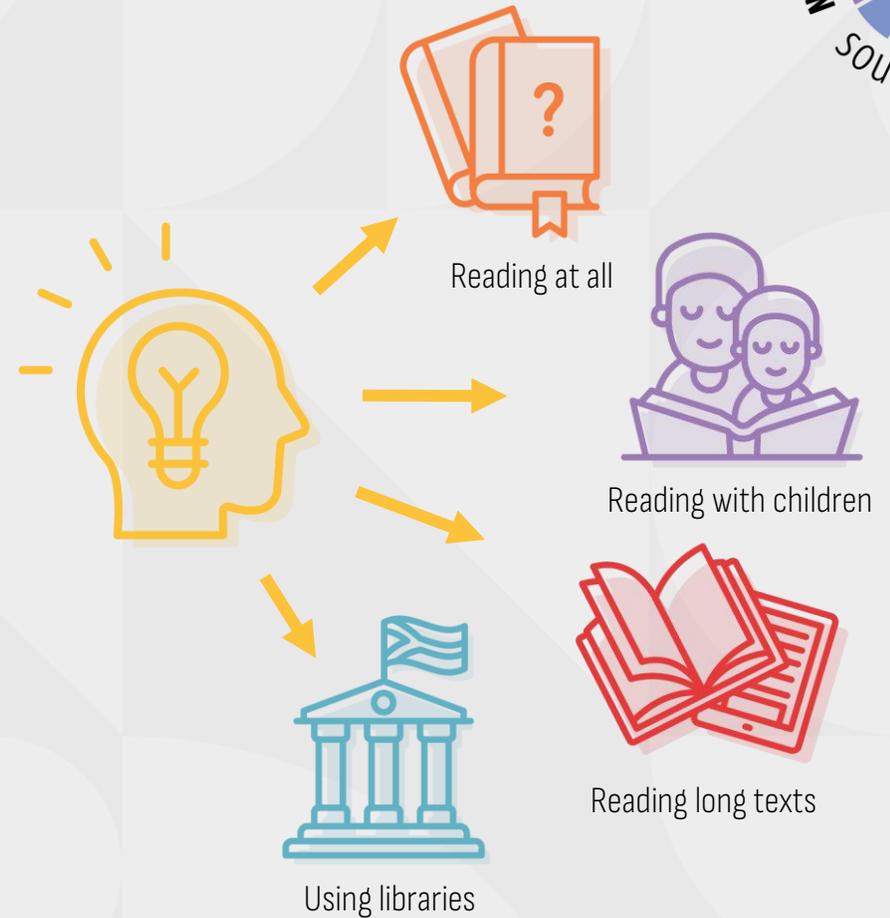
Self-identification as a reader is a strong predictor of reading behaviour

Adult attitudes towards reading are more positive

Agreement with positive statements about reading

2016: <10%

2023: >50%



## Adult Reading Personas

We built six multi-indicator indices to analyse key dimensions of reading:

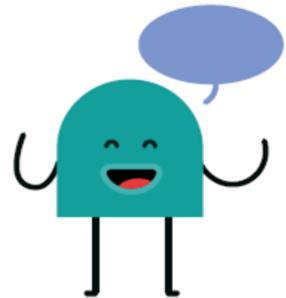
1. Reading Purposes
2. Reading Habits
3. Reading Volume
4. Reading Depth
5. Reading Motivation and Identity
6. Reading Materials Access

What's weighted more heavily?

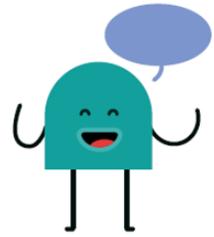
Reading for enjoyment

Reading frequently

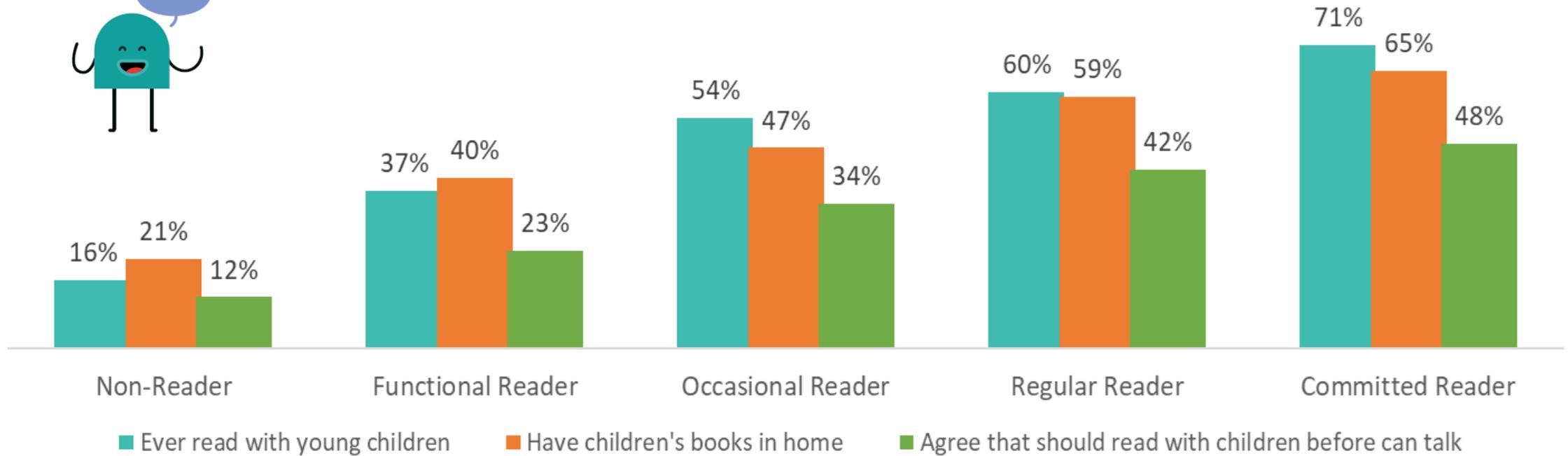
Reading long texts



## Personas and reading with children



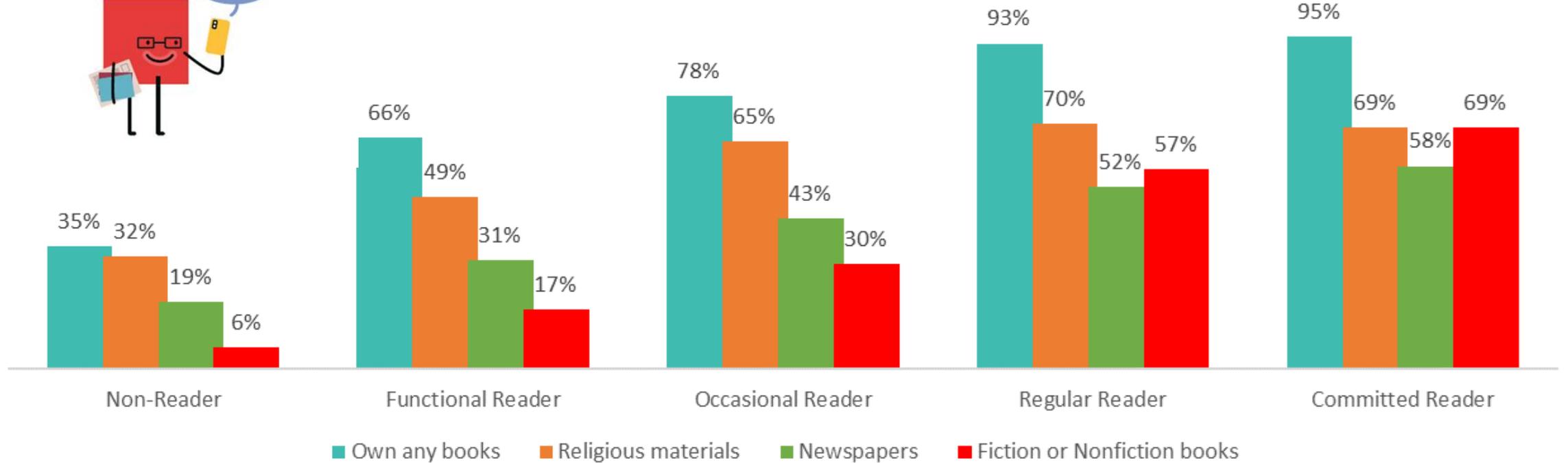
Personas and Reading with Children



## Personas and print reading materials

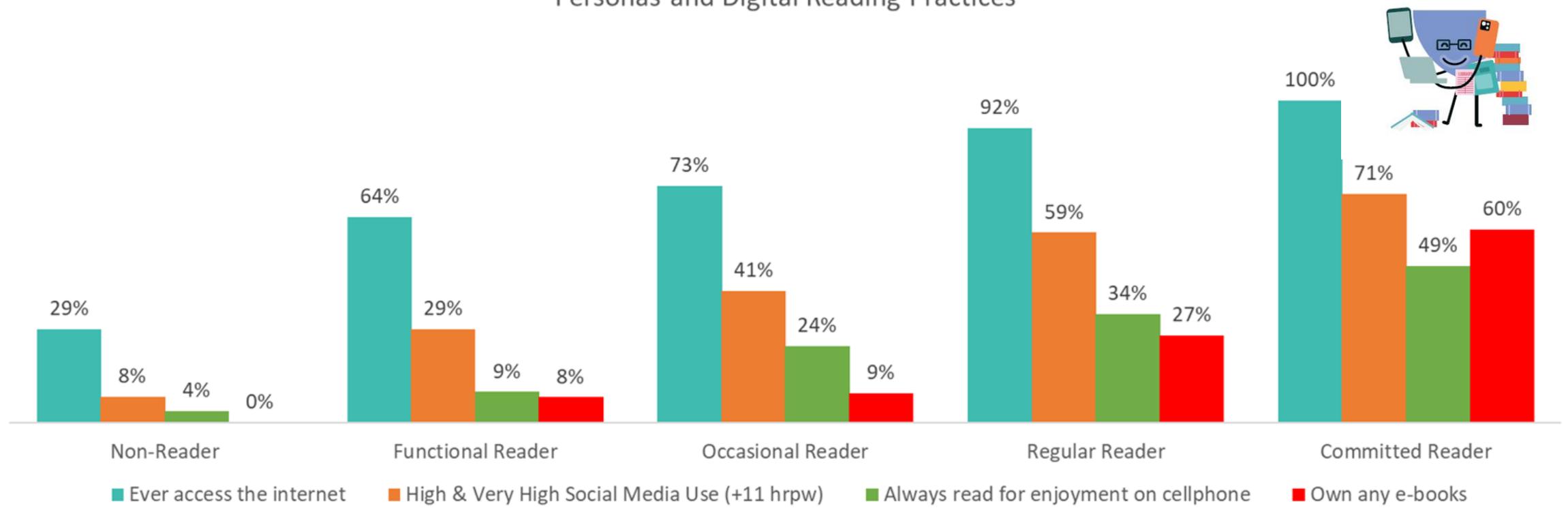


### Personas and Print Reading Materials in the Home

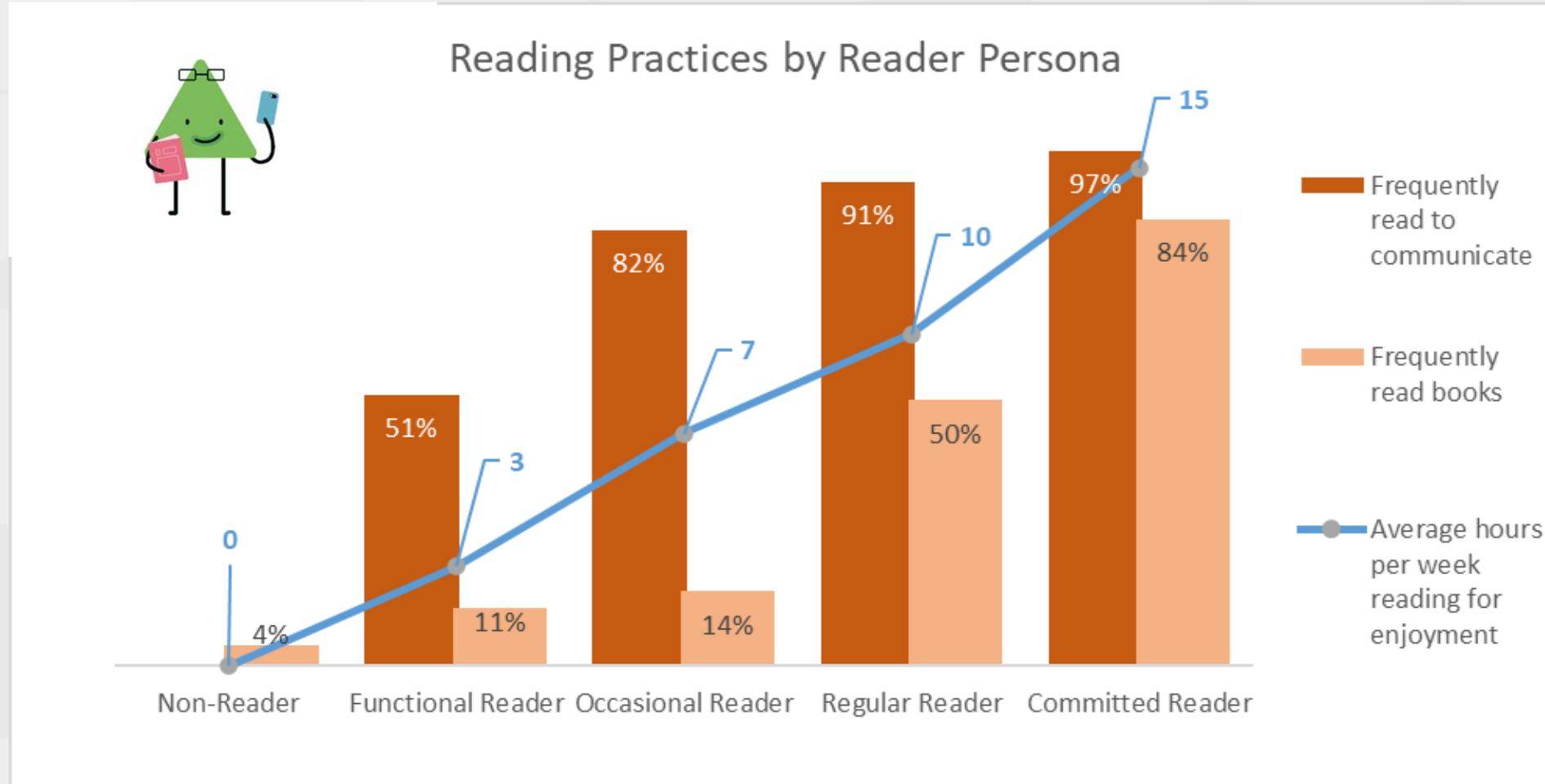


## Personas and digital reading practices

Personas and Digital Reading Practices



## Personas and reading practices

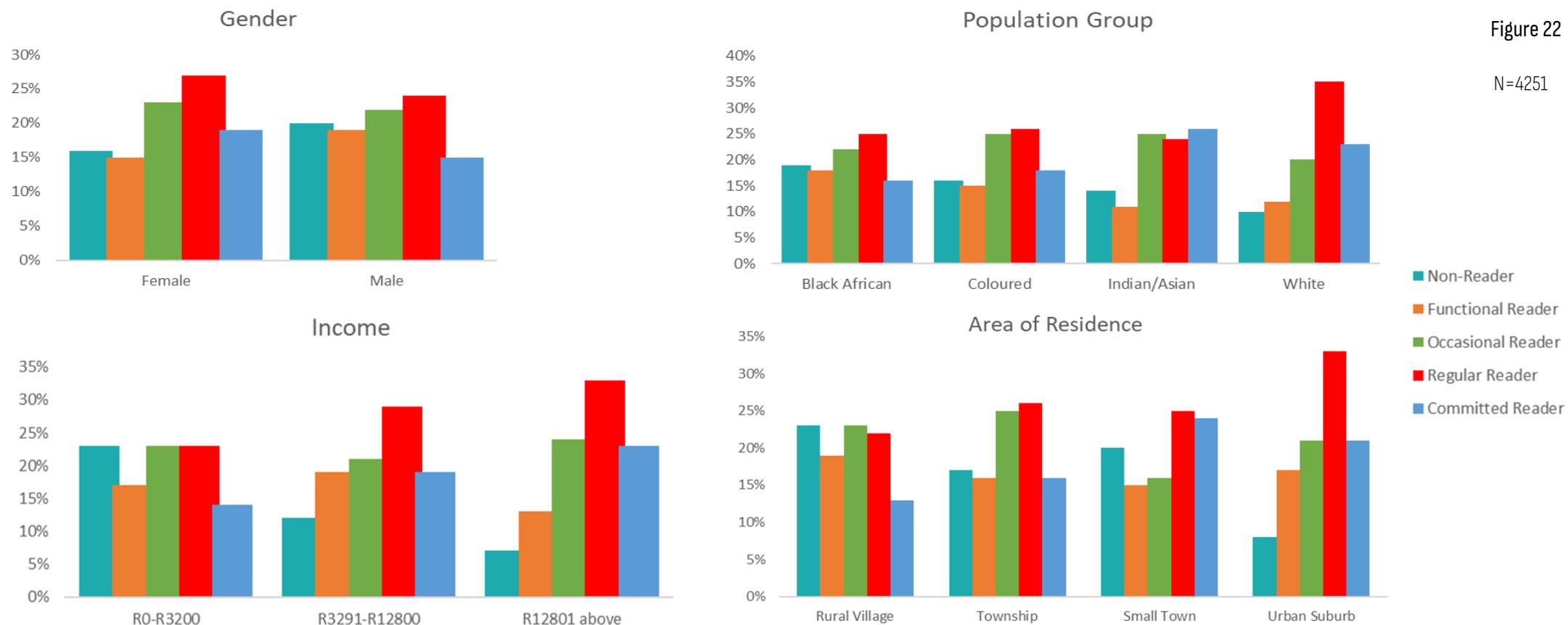


# Personas and demographics

Demographics affect reading, but avid readers are present in all demographic groups.

Figure 22

N=4251







# National Reading Survey Recommendations

# Recommendations

## ACCESS TO READING MATERIALS



- Run large-scale campaigns to get a few books into every home, starting from birth.
- Ensure every classroom has a library; ensure children borrow books from schools; and work towards every child owning an anthology of storybooks and an anthology of graded readers.
- Increase accessibility of free and low-cost print reading materials in African languages at people's preferred pickup points – libraries, post offices, schools, supermarkets/retail stores and clinics.
- Release libraries from generic government procurement systems so they can acquire new reading materials quickly and in response to user interests.

## READING WITH CHILDREN



- In addition to increasing access to children's books...
- Continue promoting reading with children, and introduce more nuanced messaging that focuses on building caregivers' confidence (any amount is good; give it a go; don't worry about doing it right), and **f**ocuses on starting early, before children can talk or read themselves.
- Raises more awareness about where to access free and low-cost reading materials, including libraries, schools, stationery shops, supermarkets, second-hand booksellers, and digital platforms (including NaI'ibali, the African Storybook Project and Book Dash).

# Recommendations

## DIGITAL READING



- Reduce barriers to internet access to enable more reading.
- Shift the narrative: using social media and reading for enjoyment are not a zero-sum game. Use social media, like Facebook and TikTok, to draw people into other types of reading.
- Recognise that less active readers and most parents prefer print; in reading campaigns, use appropriate materials for the target audience and age group.

## LANGUAGES



- In addition to increasing access to free and low-cost materials and enabling more effective library procurement as noted above:
- Provide more support to authors who write in African languages, including those who self-publish and sell their books directly to the public, and showcase them through awards.
- Include African language materials in programmes targeting less active readers.
- Expand initiatives that provide free African language reading material beyond young children to teens and adults.

# Recommendations



## LIBRARIES

- Continue to increase accessibility and promote libraries in communities.
- Raise more awareness about libraries' digital services, such as checking out ebooks.
- Develop strategies to retain young library users as they grow older.
- Make it easier and more enticing for library users to borrow books – for example, by streamlining sign-up requirements, running campaigns and removing late fines.
- Collaborate with campaigns that give away free reading materials on a large scale, such as the Nal'ibali campaign, Book Dash and others, to distribute via libraries.





# National Reading Barometer



## National Reading Barometer

# Functions of a Barometer

### WHY

Establish shared picture of the country's  
current condition and trajectory

enabling

Conversation across sectors

and

Shared sense of urgency

to

Galvanise collective action

### HOW

Simplify complex multi-dimensional context

using

Uncontested data

presented through

Visual storytelling

to

Show present status

in relation to

Comparators/targets

and

Track trajectory over time

## Approach to the Reading Ecosystem in South Africa



### Multidimensional

- Reading Ability
- Materials Access
- Institutional Framework
- Reading Motivation & Practices



### Recognising strengths and weaknesses



### Debating targets and progress

- **Constraining**
- **Emerging**
- **Enabling**

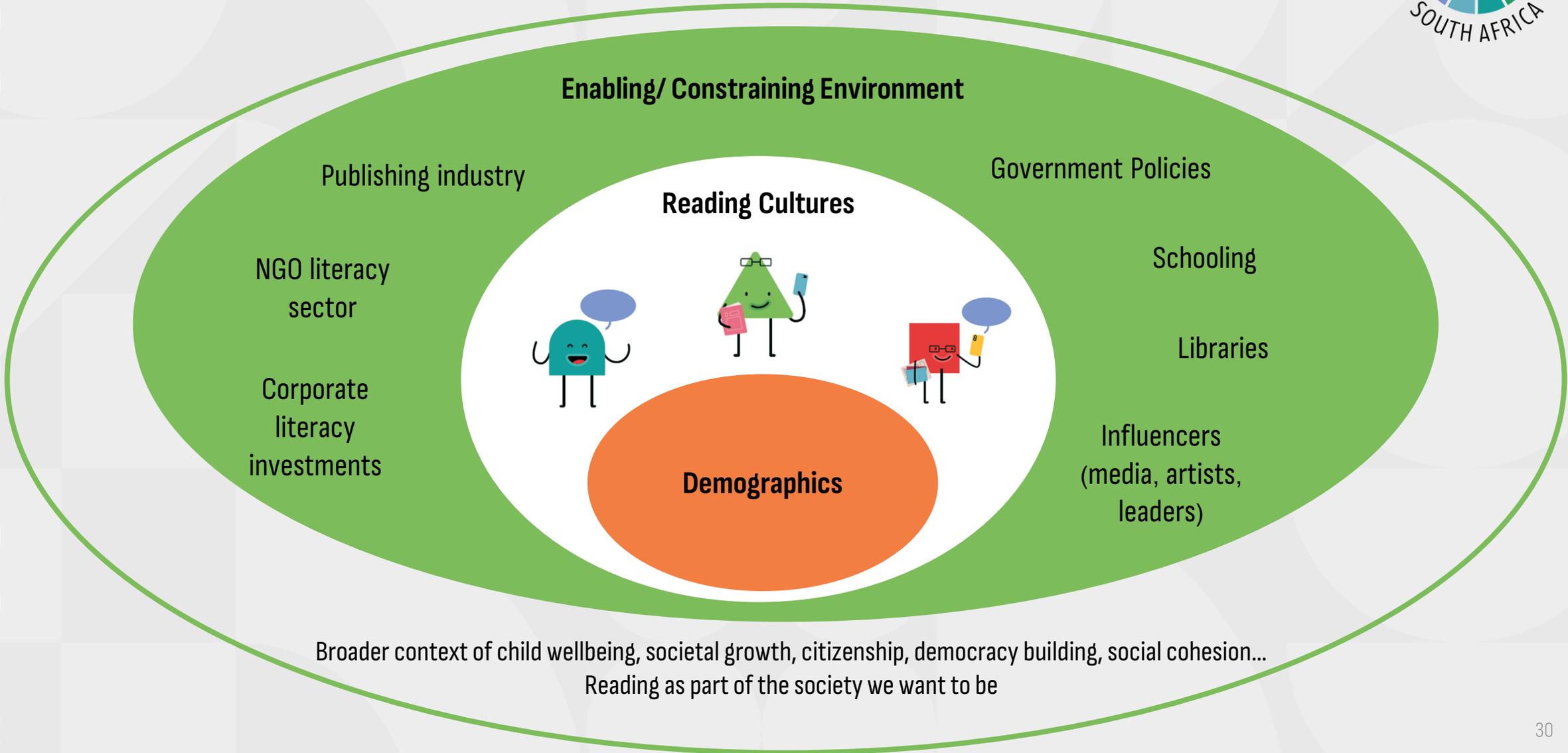


### Consultative



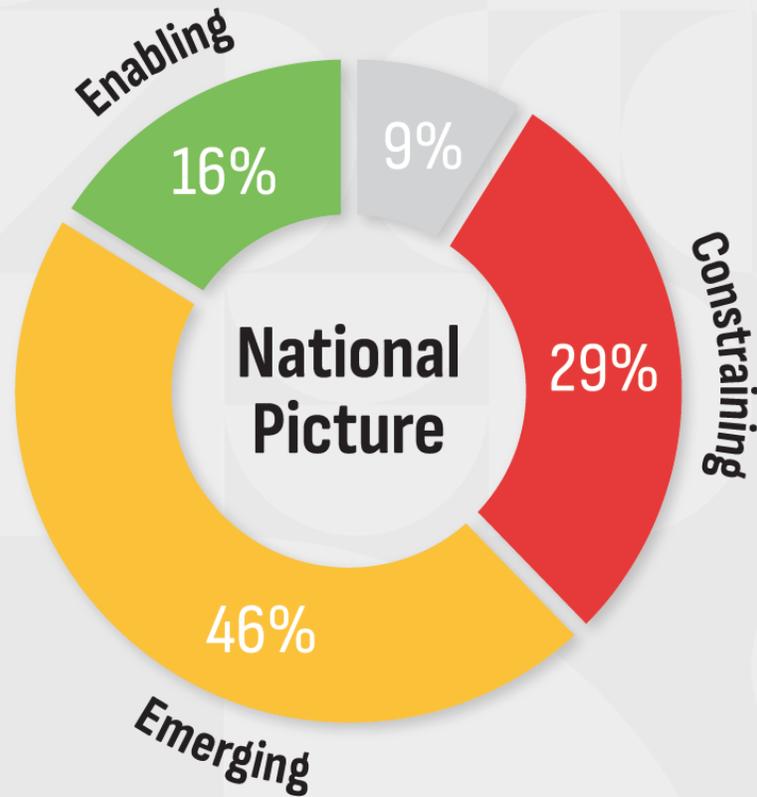
### Exploratory

## How does the ecosystem relate to reading cultures?



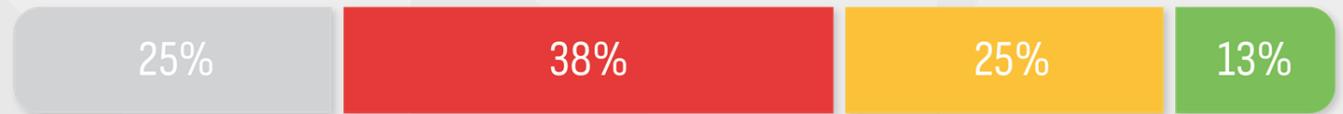
# National Reading Barometer

## 2023 NRB Results



● Not Available/Incomplete Data ● Constraining ● Emerging ● Enabling

### Reading Ability:



### Reading Materials Access:



### Institutional Framework:



### Motivation and Practice:



# Reading Ability: Types of Measures

Averages



Distribution /  
inequality



Rate of change





## Reading Ability

1	Emergent literacy and language skills at age 4/5	Thrive by Five Index	55%	Constraining
2	Inequality in emergent literacy and language skills	Thrive by Five Index	17%	Emerging
3	Foundation Phase reading skills	FUNS	n/a	Not yet available
4	Inequality in Foundation Phase reading skills	FUNS	n/a	Not yet available
5	Grade 4 reading skills	PIRLS	19% (288)	Constraining
6	Improvement in Grade 4 reading skills	PIRLS	-3% (-32)	Constraining
7	Youth functional literacy	World Bank	98%	Enabling
8	Adult functional literacy	World Bank	95%	Emerging

## Reading Materials Access: Actors

Libraries



Dept. of  
Education



Publishing  
industry



Civil society



Digital





## Reading Materials Access

1	Libraries per population	NLSA	1 : 31,000	Emerging
2	Libraries: provincial distribution	NLSA	4	Constraining
3	Libraries budget	DSAC budget report + CLSG evaluation	58%	Constraining
4	New library acquisitions	DSAC CLSG evaluation	276,031 (95% of target)	Enabling
5	Librarian supply	DSAC budget report + CLSG evaluation	2563 (1.3 per library)	Constraining
6	Library users	NRS	28%	Emerging
7	Library user satisfaction	NRS	75%	Enabling
8	School libraries	SMS	n/a	Not available
9	Number of publishers	PASA Survey	150-200	Enabling



## Reading Materials Access (cont.)

10	African languages: educational publishing	PASA Survey	3.70%	Emerging
11	African languages: trade publishing	PASA Survey	0.13%	Constraining
12	Materials published in South Africa	NLSA Annual Report	10,035 (165 per million)	Enabling
13	Free print reading material distribution (civil society)	Compiled for NRB	>6m (0.54 per child <10)	Emerging
14	Free print reading material access	NRS	42%	Emerging
15	Internet access	World Bank	70%	Emerging
16	Data costs	cable.co.uk	26% above global median	Constraining
17	Books in homes	NRS	37%	Emerging
18	Children's books in homes	NRS	35%	Emerging

## Institutional Framework: Notes on Policy

Not passed

Passed but not implemented

Passed and implemented

Constraining

Emerging

Enabling



## Institutional Framework

1	Budget accountability: national DBE	DBE qualitative assessment	Policy framework and capacity insufficient	Emerging
2	Budget allocation and use: provincial DoEs	DBE qualitative assessment	Inconsistent allocation, use and reporting	Not yet available
3	LTSM budgets	Treasury data	Difficult to isolate LTSM budget/ spend in most provinces	Not yet available
4	CSI funding for literacy	Dialogue	~R479.6m (4.4% of CSI funding)	Emerging
5	LTSM policy	DBE	Draft done 2018, waiting for passage of BELA	Constraining
6	Reading fluency benchmarks	DBE	Benchmarks launched, FUNS assessments initiated	Enabling
7	National standardised assessments	DBE	Thrive by 5, ELNA, FUNS and Systemic Evaluations launched	Enabling
8	Inclusive education policy	DBE	In place, but under-resourced	Emerging
9	National reading policy	DBE	MTSF in place, revised plan under development	Emerging
10	Zero-rating of educational websites	DCDT, DGMT	In place, but not implemented	Emerging



## Institutional Framework (cont.)

11	Language in education policy	DBE	In place, but inconsistent implementation	Emerging
12	Library and information systems policy	DSAC	Draft done 2018, stalled in consultation	Constraining
13	Library norms and standards	DSAC	Draft done 2013, never passed	Constraining
14	Library procurement processes	DSAC	Bound by generic procurement rules	Constraining
15	VAT on books	SARS	Books are not VAT-exempt	Constraining
16	Tariffs on imported books	SARS	No tariffs	Enabling
17	Initial teacher education for reading in African languages	CoPAL	Insufficient	Constraining
18	Teacher pipeline	RESEP	69%	Constraining
19	Civil society literacy sector	Litasa	62	Emerging

## Motivation & Practice: what matters



Reading  
Identity



Youth



Reading for  
Enjoyment and  
Information



Book  
Reading



Reading with  
Children

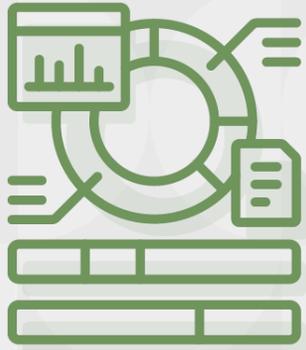


Digital  
Reading



## Motivation & Practice

1	Reader identity	National Reading Survey	35%	Emerging
2	Reading for enjoyment	National Reading Survey	48%	Emerging
3	Reading for information	National Reading Survey	53%	Emerging
4	Reading for enjoyment - youth	National Reading Survey	52%	Emerging
5	Reading for information - youth	National Reading Survey	59%	Emerging
6	Book reading	National Reading Survey	32%	Constraining
7	Digital reading	National Reading Survey	55%	Emerging
8	Reading with children	National Reading Survey	52%	Emerging
9	Reading with young children	National Reading Survey	35%	Emerging
10	Attitudes towards reading with children	National Reading Survey	93%	Enabling



# National Reading Barometer Recommendations

## Recommendations: Barometer Aims



## Recommendations

### IMPROVE THE DATA

- Include clear budget allocation reporting formats in the Reading Sector Plan so that DBE is able to monitor provinces' adherence to priorities set for reading at a national level, including purchasing of learning and teaching support materials (LTSMs) in general and in Grade R and the Foundation Phase specifically.
- Ensure better data availability regarding the presence of libraries, classroom libraries and book boxes in all schools so that monitoring can be improved.
- Consolidate existing data in the publishing and libraries sectors so that budgets, service levels, and spatial and language distribution of materials can be seen and tracked more accurately.



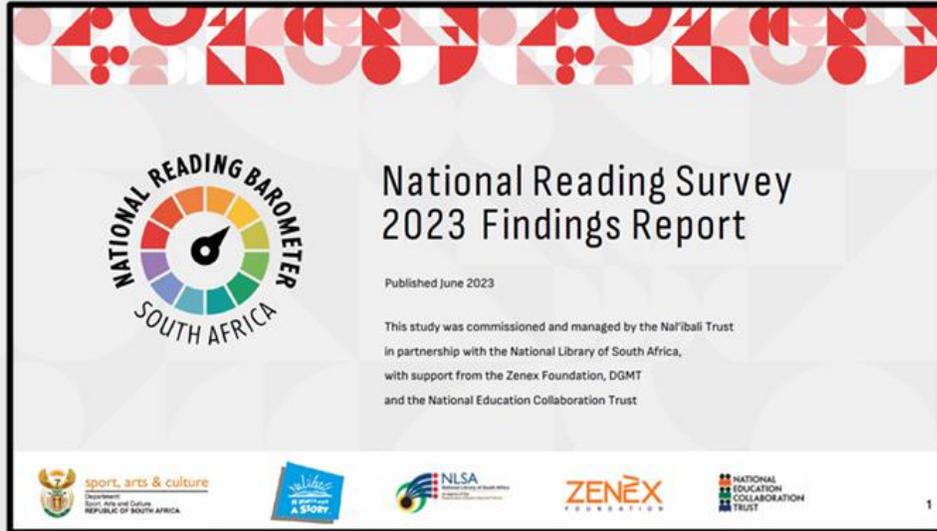
## Recommendations

### FACILITATE COLLECTIVE ACTION

- As a literacy sector, set clearer targets for desirable reading outcomes (beyond Foundation Phase reading benchmarks) and clarify collective pathways to achieving those targets.
- Consider interventions to increase access to books in rural areas, such as mobile libraries and distributing free materials at preferred pickup points, including libraries, schools, supermarkets and Post Offices .
- Increase the proportion of CSI education funding that is ring-fenced for literacy and materials access, including children’s literacy, adult reading and adults reading with children.
- Agree on an integrated approach to increasing access to reading materials for adolescents and adults, in appropriate languages, through a combination of incentive and free materials distribution.
- Agree on a collective advocacy approach to speed up stalled policy processes.
- Allocate training, resources and monitoring to improve implementation of existing policies such as inclusive education policy, zero-rating educational websites, language in education policy, and the National Reading Plan.



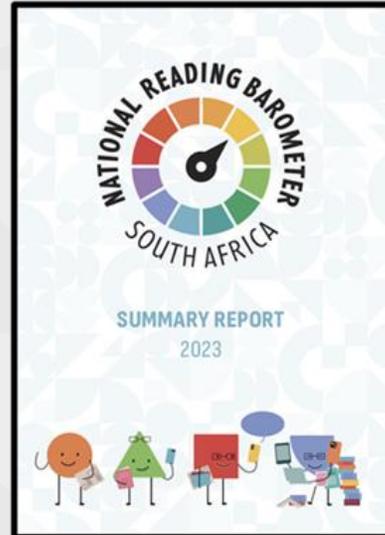
# Using the NRB resources



**National Reading Survey 2023 Findings Report**  
Published June 2023

This study was commissioned and managed by the Nal'ibali Trust in partnership with the National Library of South Africa, with support from the Zenex Foundation, DGMT and the National Education Collaboration Trust

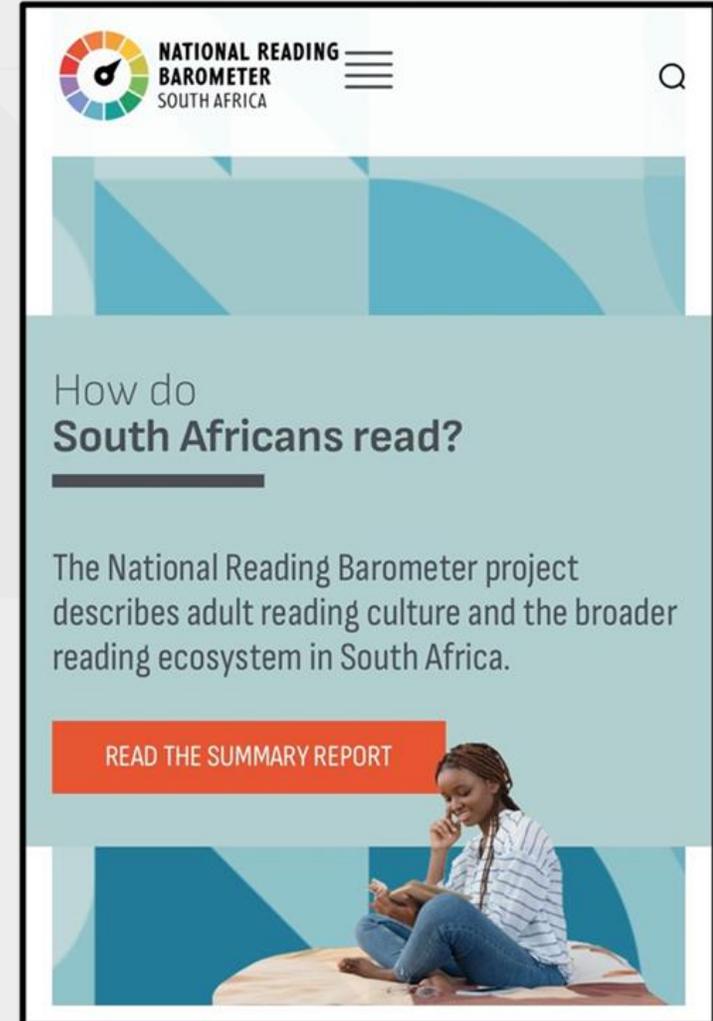
Logos: sport, arts & culture; NLSA; ZENEX; NATIONAL EDUCATION COLLABORATION TRUST



**NATIONAL READING BAROMETER SOUTH AFRICA**

**SUMMARY REPORT 2023**

Illustration of colorful characters representing reading and learning.



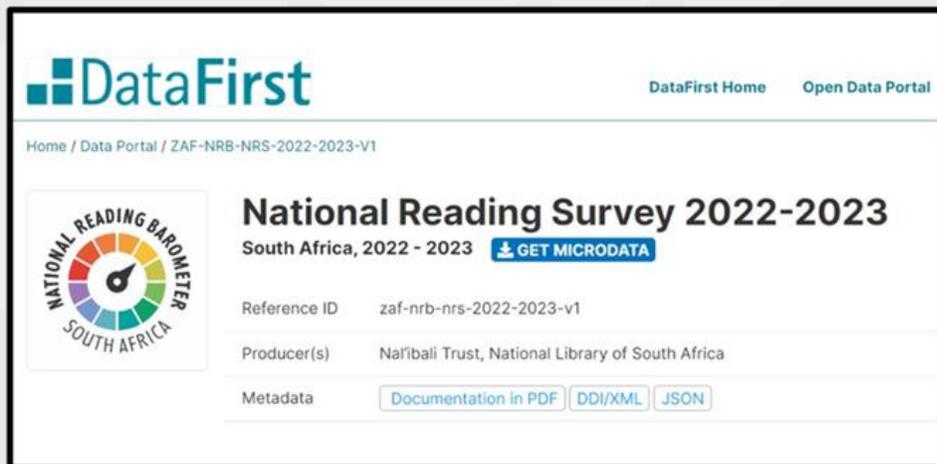
**NATIONAL READING BAROMETER SOUTH AFRICA**

## How do South Africans read?

The National Reading Barometer project describes adult reading culture and the broader reading ecosystem in South Africa.

[READ THE SUMMARY REPORT](#)

Image of a young girl sitting on a rug reading a book.



**DataFirst** | DataFirst Home | Open Data Portal

Home / Data Portal / ZAF-NRB-NRS-2022-2023-V1

**National Reading Survey 2022-2023**  
South Africa, 2022 - 2023 [GET MICRODATA](#)

Reference ID: zaf-nrb-nrs-2022-2023-v1  
Producer(s): Nal'ibali Trust, National Library of South Africa

Metadata: [Documentation in PDF](#) [DDI/XML](#) [JSON](#)



**National Reading Barometer 2023**  
**Technical Measures Report**

20 June 2023

**NATIONAL READING BAROMETER SOUTH AFRICA**

Logos: NLSA, ZENEX, NATIONAL EDUCATION COLLABORATION TRUST



# Thank you

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

More information about the National Reading Barometer project can be found at [www.readingbarometersa.org](http://www.readingbarometersa.org).

How to reference this presentation: National Reading Barometer (2023). National Reading Barometer and Survey Launch Presentation 13 June 2023. Nal'ibali Trust.



## Core National Reading Barometer team

The National Reading Survey was commissioned by the Nal'ibali Trust (led by its Director, Nqabakazi Gina), in partnership with and with significant funding from the National Library of South Africa (led by its CEO and National Librarian, Kepi Madumo).

Project design and implementation was led by the following core team:

Katherine Morse and Katie Huston - Nal'ibali Trust

Tara Polzer Ngwato and Lebogang Shilakoe - Social Impact Insights on behalf of Social Surveys Africa

Nokuthula Musa - National Library of South Africa



## Survey and data team

Data collection was led by Lebogang Shilakoe working with Kaytan Ewulu, Siziwe Sangulukani and other survey supervisors and field researchers under the auspices of Social Surveys Africa.

Data preparation and analysis was led by Tara Polzer Ngwato and Lebogang Shilakoe working with Kwame Gyekye, Lovemore Sigwaghi and Ling Ting with much support from Katherine Morse.



## Funders

National Library of South Africa (NLSA)

National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT)

Zenex Foundation

DGMT



## Communications team

Funie Rabambi, Kgotsfatso Mathabatha, Zia Taylor, Bongani Masombuka - twenty8zero7

Jolene Bhadais - National Library of South Africa

Monge Tlaka and James Swash - Neil Butcher & Associates (website)

Gaelen Pinnock - Polygram (graphic design)

Bart Love - AnotherLove Productions (persona design and video)

Monge Tlaka and NBA team - Neil Butcher and Associates (website design)



## NRB Steering committee

The project steering committee was selected via application to represent key stakeholder groups, including education, libraries, researchers, funders, literacy organisations, publishers/creatives, and community activists. It included Bafana Mtini (Khutsong Literacy Club/EarWorm Project), Catherine Langsford/Nadeema Musthan (Litasa), Dorothy Dyer (FunDza), Heleen Hofmeyr (RESEP, Uni. Stellenbosch), Janita Low (independent), Kentse Radebe (DGMT), Kulula Manona (DBE), Lauren Fok (Zenex Foundation), Lorraine Marneweck (NECT), Nazeem Hardy (LIASA), Nokuthula Musa (NLSA), Nqabakazi Gina (Nal'ibali), Ntsiki Ntusikazi (Wordworks), Smangele Mathebula (SAIDE), Stanford Ndlovu (Jakes Gerwel Fellowship) and Takalani Muloiwa-Klenam (Uni. Johannesburg).



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