

National Reading Barometer 2023

Technical Measures Report

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Introduction

The National Reading Barometer (NRB) is part of the National Reading Barometer project commissioned and managed by the Nal'ibali Trust in partnership with the National Library of South Africa, with additional support from the Zenex Foundation, DGMT and the National Education Collaboration Trust.

The National Reading Barometer maps the health of the South African reading ecosystem. It brings together findings from the 2023 National Reading Survey and published secondary data, including data on both adult and child reading, to provide a holistic view of what enables and constrains reading in South Africa. By drawing together new research and existing data, its intent is to spark debate and enable collective decision-making around shared priorities and collaborative action. This is the first time such a holistic view of what enables and constrains reading in South Africa has been compiled.

The 2023 Barometer is the first iteration of the NRB, and it will be reproduced in 2026 and 2030 to track change over time in the national reading ecosystem.

The Barometer assesses four dimensions of the reading ecosystem:

- **Reading Ability:** early literacy, primary school reading outcomes, youth literacy and adult literacy levels.
- **Reading Materials Access:** book ownership, access through libraries, publishing industry outputs, free reading material distribution and digital access.
- **Institutional Framework:** the policy environment, investment in reading (government budgets and private sector funding), and the education system's capacity to teach reading.
- **Motivation and Practice:** the degree to which adults self-identify as readers, regularly read for enjoyment and information, regularly read books and regularly read with children.

In total, the Barometer is composed of 55 measures: 8 for Reading Ability, 18 for Reading Materials Access, 19 for Institutional Framework, and 10 for Motivation and Practice.

What is a Barometer and what is its function?

The National Reading Barometer is an advocacy and awareness-raising tool that compiles credible data sources to establish a shared picture of the country's current condition and trajectory related to reading. This shared picture enables a conversation across the reading and literacy sector concerning relevant dimensions of the reading ecosystem, how these dimensions interact, what targets should be set, and which targets should be prioritised. By tracking change over time, the Barometer establishes a shared sense of urgency and galvanises collective action to change behaviour, interventions, institutions and policies.

The primary function of a Barometer is to enable debate across all stakeholders in the ecosystem. It is not intended to provide a final or comprehensive picture or to compete with or replace other target-setting initiatives and mandates (e.g. the National Reading Sector Plan or the Reading Panel) but rather to augment these initiatives, which to date tend to focus on reading by children, by broadening the debate to include adult reading.

How were the measures identified, rated and validated?

The measures included in the Barometer were identified through a consultative process with the NRB project Steering Committee, a 16-member body representing a wide range of stakeholders in the national reading ecosystem. Dimensions and indicators suggested by the Steering Committee were then translated into measures and included in the final Barometer based on the availability of supporting data that was a) published and b) likely to be repeated as a comparable longitudinal dataset to 2030, to enable inclusion in future iterations of the Barometer.

Each measure's status is assessed against a target or standard and rated as "enabling" (green), "emerging" (amber) or "constraining" (red). To establish cutoff points for the ratings, we considered:

- How South Africa compares to other upper- and lower-middle income countries (UMICs and LMICs)



- Targets and objectives set by the Departments of Sport, Arts and Culture (which is responsible for libraries) and Basic Education
- Data owner and expert assessments
- Equity considerations (whether ability or access is evenly distributed geographically and socio-economically)

The ratings related to institutional measures were validated through consultation with the respective institutions: Department of Basic Education, the National Library of South Africa (NLSA), the Publishers' Association of South Africa (PASA), DataDrive 2030, LITASA (the Literacy Association of South Africa) and civil society organisations active in the provision of free reading materials.

In some cases, there is little comparable information from other countries or there are no established standards in South Africa or internationally. In these cases, the cutoff points are value judgments made by the Barometer team, in consultation with key stakeholders. The considerations underlying the targets and rating given to each measure are presented in the report below.

Where data is missing, out of date or not yet available, a measure is captured as "not available/incomplete data" (grey). This results in an aggregated assessment for each dimension and for the full South African reading ecosystem, as well as recommendations to improve data collection.

Limitations and Caveats

The Barometer necessarily provides a simplified picture of each of the included measures, so many of the complexities within measures (e.g. reading benchmark levels, policy development processes, teacher training pipelines, etc.) are not fully reflected. In particular, the ratings for policies considered under the dimension of Institutional Frameworks do not have a full analysis of implementation quality. Some deepening of measures is recommended for future iterations of the Barometer; however, the function of the Barometer is generally to enable debate and provide an overview at a high level rather than to include all nuances for each measure.

Some measures for interesting aspects of the reading ecosystem were excluded because data was either not available, was only available as a once-off (not longitudinal into the future) or would have required compilation and analysis from multiple sources. Some such measures are included as 'grey' in the current Barometer as they were considered sufficiently important to the ecosystem to warrant recommendations for improvements in data collection or collation by the system.

The Barometer intends to spark and enable debate about shared goals in the literacy sector. If you would like to comment on the ratings or propose alternative targets, or if there is an indicator or data source you think is missing from the Barometer, please get in touch! We would love to hear your suggestions and will consider them for the next iteration of the Barometer in 2026. You can contact us at info@readingbarometersa.org.

Summary Results

Considering all 55 measures of the National Reading Barometer, the South African reading eco-system is predominantly “emerging” (46% of measures), and “constraining” (29% of measures), although 16% of measures are “enabling” (Figure 1).

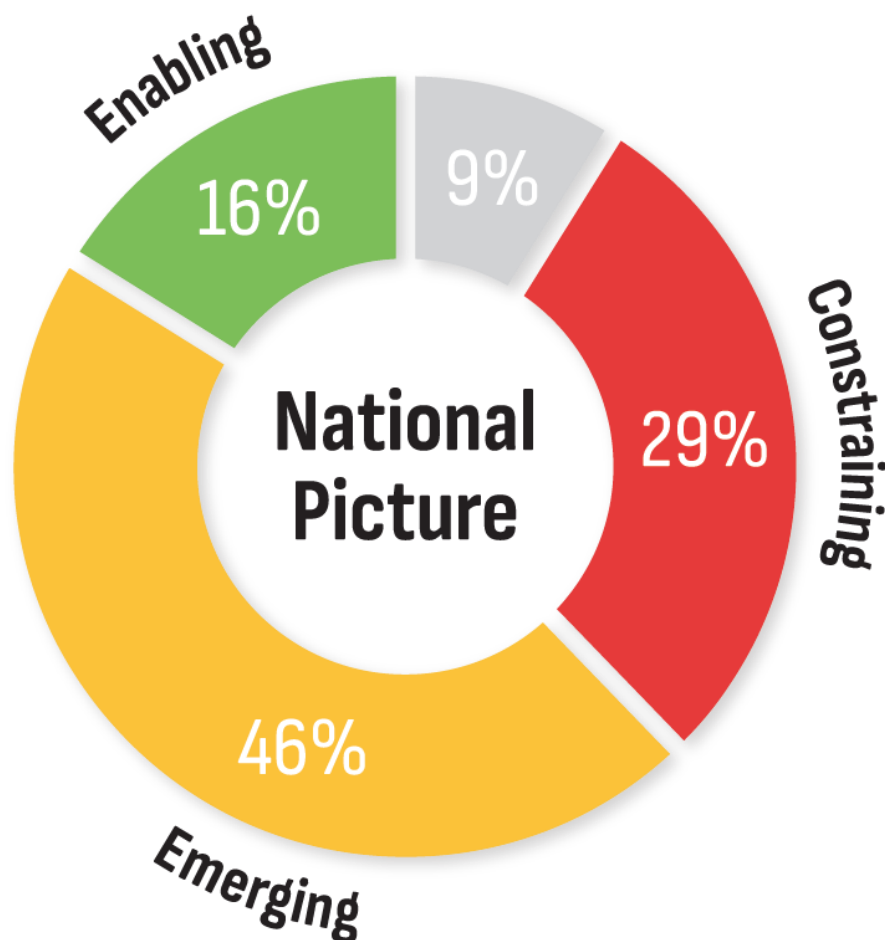


Figure 1: National Reading Barometer

Results by Dimension

When considering the four dimensions of the ecosystem (Figure 2), we see that Motivation and Practice (how South Africans actually read) is predominantly rated as “emerging”, even though the other dimensions have a spread of “enabling” and “constraining” measures as well. This suggests that the reading choices of South Africans are to some extent resilient to “constraining” conditions (*people who wish to read will do so, even if it is difficult*) but also that a more “enabling” environment across Reading Ability, Reading Materials Access and Institutional Framework is necessary to support more widespread reading in the country.

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

Reading Ability:



Reading Materials Access:



Institutional Framework:



Motivation and Practice:



Figure 2: National Reading Barometer by dimension

Documentation per Dimension and Measure

Reading Ability – Summary

South Africa has unequal early learning outcomes and extremely poor primary school literacy but reaches acceptable levels of basic (functional) youth and adult literacy by international comparison. Currently we do not know as much as we would like to about early literacy skills, but new assessments recently launched by the Department of Basic Education mean more comprehensive data will be available in the next few years.

Reading Ability:



#	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	YEAR	PERFORMANCE	RATING
RA1	% of children 'on track' for early literacy at age 4/5 who attend an early learning programme	Thrive by Five Index	2021	55%	Constraining
RA2	Percentage points gap between Quintile 5 and Quintile 1&2 children 'on track' for early literacy at age 4/5	Thrive by Five Index	2021	17%	Emerging
RA3	% of Foundation Phase learners meeting DBE reading literacy benchmarks	FUNS	n/a	n/a	Not yet available
RA4	Degree of inequality in learners meeting DBE reading literacy benchmarks	FUNS	n/a	n/a	Not yet available
RA5	% of Grade 4 learners who can read for meaning (and average PIRLS score)	PIRLS	2021	19% (score 288)	Constraining
RA6	Change in % of Grade 4 learners who can read for meaning (and average PIRLS score)	PIRLS	2021	-3% (score -32)	Constraining
RA7	% of youth ages 15-24 who are functionally literate	World Bank	2019	98%	Enabling
RA8	% of adults ages 15+ who are functionally literate	World Bank	2019	95%	Emerging

Figure 3: Summary of Reading Ability Measures

Reading Ability – Measures

RA1: Emergent literacy and language skills at age 4/5

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	% of children 'on track' for emergent literacy and language at age 4/5 who attend an early learning programme
Data Source	Thrive by Five Index
Data Point Year	2021
Performance	55%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 80-100% of Grade R children are on track / school-ready Emerging: 60-80% on track / school-ready Constraining: <60% on track / school-ready
Notes	The Thrive by Five Index will be repeated every three years from its initial baseline in 2021.

RA2: Inequality in emergent literacy and language skills

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Percentage points gap between Quintile 5 and Quintile 1&2 children 'on track' for emergent literacy and language at age 4/5
Data Source	Thrive by Five Index
Year	2021
Performance	17% gap between Q5 and Q1&2
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 10% or smaller gap between richest and poorest children Emerging: 11-20% gap Constraining: >20% gap
Notes	In addition to a national average level of children 'on track' for early literacy, the Thrive by Five Index shows high levels of inequality in the early education system, as reflected by this measure, which compares scores achieved by children in quintile 1&2 ECD centres versus children in quintile 5 centres.

RA3: Foundation Phase reading skills

Rating	Not yet available
Indicator Description	% of Foundation Phase learners meeting DBE reading literacy benchmarks
Data Source	Funda Uphumelele National Survey (FUNS)
Year	n/a
Performance	n/a
Rating cutoff points	Cutoff points will be updated in future Barometers in consultation with the DBE when targets have been set.
Notes	The Funda Uphumelele National Survey (FUNS) will measure outcomes against Grade 1-4 and Grade 6 reading benchmarks on letter recognition and oral reading fluency. The assessment framework and tools were launched in May 2023 and data collection throughout the education system will be implemented from late 2023 onward. Targets are being discussed by DBE as part of the National Reading Plan and revised Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF).

RA4: Inequality in Foundation Phase reading skills

Rating	Not yet available
Indicator Description	Degree of inequality in learners meeting DBE reading literacy benchmarks
Data Source	Funda Uphumelele National Survey (FUNS)
Year	n/a
Performance	n/a
Rating cutoff points	Cutoff points will be determined in consultation with DBE, considering inequality between quintiles, provinces and/or languages.
Notes	The Funda Uphumelele National Survey (FUNS) will measure outcomes against Grade 1-4 and Grade 6 reading benchmarks on letter recognition and oral reading fluency. The assessment framework and tools were launched in May 2023 and data collection throughout the education system will be implemented from late 2023 onward. Targets are being discussed by DBE as part of the National Reading Plan and revised Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF).

RA5: Grade 4 reading skills

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	% of Grade 4 learners who can read for meaning (and average PIRLS score)
Data Source	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)
Year	2021
Performance	19% (288 points)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: PIRLS score of 355 or above (MTSF 2021 target) Emerging: PIRLS score of 320 (2016 level) to 350 Constraining: PIRLS score below 320 (regressing from 2016 level)
Notes	The rating is based on the targets set in the MTSF (2021), which may be revised based on the May 2023 publication of the 2021 PIRLS results.

RA6: Improvement in Grade 4 reading skills

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Change in % of Grade 4 learners who can read for meaning (and average PIRLS score)
Data Source	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)
Year	2021
Performance	-3% (-32 points)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: improvement at or above DBE target rate Emerging: improvement slower than DBE target rate Constraining: static or worsening
Notes	This measure augments measure RA5 by noting that South Africa's PIRLS score should not only be judged based on its absolute average value but also by the rate of change achieved over time. South Africa had one of the highest rates of improvement between the 2011 and 2016 PIRLS assessments and since the 2021 results are at least partly due to Covid-19 effects, this measure in future iterations of the NRB will show the extent to which an improvement trajectory has been regained. The rating for future iterations of the NRB will take DBE targets for the 2026 PIRLS assessments into account (which have not yet been set).

RA7: Youth functional literacy

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	% of youth ages 15–24 who are functionally literate
Data Source	World Bank
Year	2019
Performance	98%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: at or above average for Upper Middle Income Countries (98% in 2020) Emerging: <3% below UMIC average Constraining: >3% below UMIC average
Notes	Global data on literacy only measures functional literacy (the ability to read for basic meaning), not more advanced forms of comprehension that might be comparable with the PIRLS or similar assessments. Nonetheless, for broad functional literacy rates, South Africa is comparable with the rates of other Upper Middle Income Countries. The youth literacy rate is reported separately from the adult literacy rate as it reacts more quickly to changes in the national reading ecosystem.

RA8: Adult functional literacy

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of adults ages 15+ who are functionally literate
Data Source	World Bank
Year	2019
Performance	95%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: at or above average for Upper Middle Income Countries (96% in 2020) Emerging: <3% below UMIC average Constraining: >3% below UMIC average
Notes	Global data on literacy only measures functional literacy (the ability to read for basic meaning), not more advanced forms of comprehension. For broad functional literacy rates, South Africa is one percentage point below the average rate for Upper Middle Income Countries.

Reading Materials Access – Summary

Libraries are an effective but under-resourced public service. The formal publishing industry produces high volumes of materials and is technically skilled, diversified and commercially strong, especially for a middle-income country, but producing and distributing reading materials at all affordability levels and for all language preferences remains challenging. Digital access is growing but remains unequally distributed. Most households still do not have any fiction, nonfiction or children’s books, and few have more than 20 books (though this number is growing).

Reading Materials Access:



#	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	YEAR	PERFORMANCE	RATING
RM1	Libraries per population: national ratio	NLSA	2022	1 : 31,000	Emerging
RM2	Libraries per population: number of provinces meeting target ratio	NLSA	2022	4	Constraining
RM3	Libraries budget as % of draft library Norms & Standards requirements	DSAC budget report + CLSG evaluation	2022/3	58%	Constraining
RM4	Number of new materials procured by public libraries (and as % of target)	DSAC CLSG evaluation	2022	276,031 (95%)	Enabling
RM5	Number of librarians (and average # per library)	DSAC budget report + CLSG evaluation	2022/3	2563 (1.3 per library)	Constraining
RM6	% of adults who have used a library in the past year	NRS	2023	28%	Emerging
RM7	% of library users satisfied with library services	NRS	2023	75%	Enabling
RM8	% of Public Ordinary Operational Schools with stocked libraries and/or classroom libraries	SMS	2022	n/a	Not available
RM9	Number of publishers in South Africa	PASA Survey	2022	150-200	Enabling
RM10	% of educational titles (print and digital) published in African languages	PASA Survey	2022	3.70%	Emerging
RM11	% of trade publishing revenue from books (print and digital) published in African languages	PASA Survey	2022	0.13%	Constraining
RM12	Number of non-serial items deposited with National Library of South Africa	NLSA Annual Report	2022	10035 (165 per million)	Enabling
RM13	Number of free printed reading materials for children produced and distributed by civil society	Compiled for NRB	2023	>6,011,130 (0.54 per child <1)	Emerging
RM14	% of adults who live with children that have used free printed reading materials	NRS	2023	42%	Emerging
RM15	% of adult population with internet access	World Bank	2020	70%	Emerging
RM16	Cost of 1GB of data in relation to global median	cable.co.uk	2022	26% above global median	Constraining
RM17	% of households with any fiction or nonfiction print books	NRS	2022	37%	Emerging
RM18	% of households with children <10 with any children's books	NRS	2022	35%	Emerging

Reading Materials Access – Measures

RM1: Libraries per population

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Libraries per population: national ratio

Data Source	National Library of South Africa
Year	2022
Performance	1 library per 31,000 people
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 1 library per 29,000 people or fewer Emerging: 1 library per 35,000 to 29,000 people Constraining: 1 library per more than 35,000 people Target of 1:29,000 is based on 50% of draft Library Norms & Standards, taking into account international comparisons, in consultation with NLSA – see below.
Notes	The 2013 background research conducted to inform the costing of Norms and Standards for the National Libraries and Information Services Bill was never formally adopted. However, it provides a basis from which to debate appropriate targets for the number of public libraries in the country. The Norms and Standards study estimates the need for 4,170 libraries nationally, using ward-level population data and spatial libraries distribution. This represents a library to population ratio of 1:14,500 nationally (at 2022 population numbers). However, when considering global norms as points of comparison, we see that 1 : 14,500 is high for a Middle Income Country. In the United States, the ratio is approximately 1 library per 17,000 people. Comparative data from the UK puts the ratio at 1:18,400 in 2022. 2008 data from Latin America and Caribbean show that Venezuela, Chile and Brazil had an average of 1:25,000. Egypt's library per capita average is about 38,000 (2009). Overall, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) estimates the global average to be 6 public and community libraries per 100 000 people (1 : 16,000), with an African average of 0.54 libraries per 100 000 people (1 : 185,000). Therefore, instead of using the 2013 Norms and Standards estimation as is, the NRB uses 50% of their calculation, so a target of 2085 libraries and ratio of 1 library to 29,000 people nationally as an “enabling” target that is more appropriate for a Middle Income Country. The 2022 actual for South Africa is 1:31,000 (1,934 public libraries per 60.6 million estimated population), or 3 libraries per 100,000 (half the global average, but nearly six times the African average).

RM2: Libraries: provincial distribution

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Libraries per population: number of provinces meeting target ratio of 1:29,000
Data Source	National Library of South Africa
Year	2022
Performance	4 provinces
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 8–9 provinces with ratio of 1:29,000 or better Emerging: 6–7 provinces with ratio of 1:29,000 or better Constraining: 5 or fewer provinces with ratio of 1:29,000 or better Target of 1:29,000 is based on 50% of draft Library Norms and Standards, taking into account international comparisons, in consultation with NLSA. Full details above.
Notes	This measure accompanies RM1 by considering the unequal distribution of libraries across provinces. In 2022, the Northern Cape had a library-to-population ratio of 1:5,992 while Limpopo's ratio was 1:55,840. The five provinces with a ratio above 1:29,000 are Limpopo (1:56,840), Mpumalanga (1:40,642), KwaZulu Natal (1:40,355), Gauteng (1:38,921) and North West (1:32,543).

RM3: Libraries budget

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Libraries budget as % of draft library Norms & Standards requirements
Data Source	Dept. of Sport, Arts & Culture (DSAC) budget report and Community Library Services Grant (CLSG) evaluation report
Year	2022/3
Performance	58%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Budget covers 80–100% of average minimum annual running cost per library Emerging: Budget covers 60–80% of average cost per library Constraining: Budget covers <60% of average cost per library Running cost calculated as per 2013 draft Public Library and Information Services (PLIS) Norms & Standards, which calculated that a public library would require a minimum budget of R1.252million per year in 2013. This would be the equivalent of R1.85 million per year in 2023 assuming 4% inflation.
Notes	The 2022 budget allocated to public libraries through the Community Libraries Services Grant was R1,601,400,000. In addition, Provinces allocated a combined R487,801,000 to public libraries from their Equitable Share allocation, as reported in the CLSG evaluation report. This comes to a combined budget of R2,089,201,000. When divided by the number of active public libraries nationally (1934), this comes to an average of R1,080,250 per library per year, 58% of the minimum per library budget as calculated above.

RM4: New library acquisitions

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	Number of new materials procured by public libraries (and as % of target)
Data Source	Community Library Services Grant (CLSG) evaluation report
Year	2022
Performance	276,031 (95% of target)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 90-100% of Conditional Grant target achieved (target 290,000) Emerging: 70-90% of target achieved Constraining: <70% of target achieved Context: This is a high target; IFLA guidelines recommend 172,000 new materials for a population of 43 million adults.
Notes	The CLSG Evaluation for 2021-2022 reports that a total of 276,031 new materials were procured, which represents 95% of the set target. This is an average of 143 new materials per public library. The NRB measure does not reflect on whether the original target is sufficient for the needs of readers or how it relates to Norms & Standards.

RM5: Librarian supply

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Number of librarians (and average # per library)
Data Source	Dept. of Sport, Arts & Culture (DSAC) budget report and Community Library Services Grant (CLSG) evaluation report
Year	2022/3
Performance	2,563 (1.3 per library)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: average of 3 or more staff members per basic public library (as per draft Public Library and Information Services Norms & Standards) Emerging: average 2 staff members per library Constraining: average <2 staff members per library The 2013 draft Public Library and Information Services Norms & Standards costing calculations estimated the minimum staffing requirement for a public library to be 3 people.
Notes	The DSAC budget report for 2022 shows that 2,563 staff members of libraries (2,495 positions maintained and 68 new appointments) were funded from the CLSG. The CLSG 2021-2022 Evaluation does not report any additional staff positions funded by provinces, although there may be some. Just considering the CLSG-funded positions, this represents 1.3 staff members per public library (1,934 public libraries).

RM6: Library Users

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of adults who have used a library in the past year
Data Source	National Reading Survey (NRS)
Year	2023
Performance	28%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 33% or more of adults used public library services in the past year Emerging: 23–33% of adults used a library in the past year Constraining: <23% of adults used a library in the past year.
Notes	This measure is based on findings from the National Reading Survey 2023 which included asking a representative sample of adults whether they had visited a community library in the past 12 months. 28% responded that they had. The ratings cutoff points (33% as the target for an enabling user rate) are based on comparative results from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Library Map of the World , which estimates the global average library usage rates (for those countries which report) to be around 33%. This is also the rate for countries such as the UK (34% of adults visited a public library in the last 12 months), Australia (34%), and Kenya (33% in 2011). Brazil's user rate is 51% (2015).

RM7: Library user satisfaction

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	% of library users satisfied with library services
Data Source	National Reading Survey (NRS)
Year	2023
Performance	75%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 75% or more of users are satisfied with their library Emerging: 50–75% are satisfied Constraining: <50% are satisfied
Notes	This measure is based on findings from the National Reading Survey 2023 which included asking users of public libraries whether they had any concerns about the libraries they visited. 75% responded that they were happy with the libraries as they were.

RM8: School libraries

Rating	Not available
Indicator Description	% of Public Ordinary Operational Schools with stocked libraries and/or classroom libraries
Data Source	School Monitoring Survey
Year	2022
Performance	n/a
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 80–100% of schools have a stocked library or classroom libraries in most classrooms Emerging: 60–80% have a library or classroom libraries in most classrooms Constraining: <60% have a library or classroom libraries in most classrooms
Notes	The data for this measure is not available because the NEIMS data only includes full school libraries, not classroom libraries or book boxes, and the 2021/22 School Monitoring Survey, which should have collected data on classroom libraries, did not result in reliable data for this measure. Future iterations of the NRB should be able to draw on future School Monitoring Survey data for this measure.

RM9: Number of publishers

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	Number of publishers in South Africa
Data Source	Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA) Book Publishing Industry Survey
Year	2022
Performance	150–200
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: The publishing industry is diverse and stable/growing, including 50+ small (local) publishing companies Emerging: The industry is stable/growing but with a limited number (>50) of local publishing companies Constraining: The industry is shrinking and/or almost entirely limited to non-local/multinational publishing companies
Notes	The Publishers' Association of South Africa (PASA) estimates that there are 150–200 publishers in the country, including a large and increasing number of local small- and medium-size enterprises. In addition, self-publishing is growing, as opportunities for digital self-publishing expand (this is not captured in the PASA annual reports). This diversity represents a healthy publishing industry, especially for a Middle Income Country.

RM10: African languages: educational publishing

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of educational titles (print and digital) published in African languages
Data Source	Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA) Book Publishing Industry Survey
Year	2022
Performance	3,7%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: The education sector commissions African language publications across primary, secondary and tertiary levels, and at least 5% of titles published are in African languages Emerging: The education sector commissions African language publications for limited grades (mainly primary), and 3-5% of titles published are in African languages Constraining: The education sector commissions few African language publications and <3% of titles published are in African languages
Notes	The publishing industry is divided into two major sectors: educational and trade publishing. Educational publications such as textbooks and 'readers' are generally commissioned by the Department of Basic Education of the Department of Higher Education and Training. The languages of publication are therefore also determined by the commissioning agencies rather than the publishing industry. In 2022, 3,7% of educational publication titles published in South Africa were in languages other than English and Afrikaans, i.e. indigenous African languages. The cutoff points for this measure represent debates on the importance of learners being taught to read in their home languages (requiring reading materials in those languages for Grades R-3) but also continuing to read in home languages beyond the Foundation Phase, and studying African languages as subjects throughout primary and secondary school and into tertiary.

RM11: African languages: trade publishing

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	% of trade publishing revenue from books (print and digital) published in African languages
Data Source	Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA) Book Publishing Industry Survey
Year	2022
Performance	0,13%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: The market for African language publications increases to >5% of trade publication revenue among PASA-surveyed publishers Emerging: The market for African language publications increases to 2-5% of trade publication revenue Constraining: The market for African language publications is below 2% of trade publication revenue
Notes	Trade publishing is publications produced for commercial sale. In 2022, 0,13% of revenue from Trade publications (adult fiction, nonfiction and children's books, both in print and digital) were in African languages. English earned 89% and Afrikaans 11% of revenue. The PASA report does not report on the number of published titles for Trade publications, only on revenue. The small revenue from African languages is almost entirely in isiZulu. Small publishers that do publish in African languages report low sales of African language titles as a key barrier. Note that the PASA report numbers do not include self-published books in African languages or free printed or online materials produced and distributed by literacy NGOs.

RM12: Materials published in South Africa

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	Number of non-serial items deposited with National Library of South Africa
Data Source	NLSA Annual Report
Year	2022
Performance	10,035 (165 per million people)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Publication rate is >150 materials per million population Emerging: Publication rate is 100-150 per million Constraining: Publication rate is <100 per million
Notes	To measure the number of publications produced in South African annually, this measure uses the number of non-serial publications deposited with the National Library of South Africa in terms of its role as a statutory legal deposit library, so designated under the Legal Deposit Act 54 of 1997. Its mandate is to receive one copy of every item published in South Africa, be it a book, map, chart, poster, official publication, conference proceeding, audio book, newspaper, journal, or magazine; in the format, be it printed or electronic, in which it is made available for sale to the public (including self-published materials). In practice, many publications are not deposited with NLSA, especially self-published materials. There is a need for NLSA to gain capacity to collect all new publications through outreach to authors and publishers and simplification of deposit processes. Despite the available performance number being incomplete, a ratio of 165 publications per 100,000 in the population is comparatively high in international comparison (although comparative data is only available for 2009).

RM13: Free print reading material distribution (civil society)

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Number of free printed reading materials for children produced and distributed by civil society
Data Source	Compiled for NRB
Year	2022
Performance	>6011130 (0.54 per child <10)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 1 or more printed materials per year for every child under 10 (11.2m children in 2022) Emerging: 0.5–1 printed materials per child per year Constraining: <0.5 printed materials per child per year
Notes	6,011,130 free publications were distributed in 2022 (materials focus on reading with and by children). This data was compiled for the NRB from seven of the largest reading materials producers in civil society: Nal'ibali, NECT, Book Dash, Free4All, African Storybooks, Room to Read and Biblionef. It does not include printed materials produced by the DBE. The rating cutoff points are based on the calculation that each child under the age of 10 should own a minimum of 20 books or printed materials by the age of 10 (2 books per year). Targets assume reading material provision is not exclusively the responsibility of civil society and that civil society could contribute half of this target (1 material per child per year) with the public sector covering the other half. Given the population of 11,2 million children aged 0–9, this means an annual civil society target of 11,2m printed materials distributed. Currently, many civil society organisations distribute multiple materials to the same children (i.e. collections or monthly distributions) so to truly reach every child receiving one printed material per year, this number would need to be higher.

RM14: Free print reading material access

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of adults who live with children who have used free printed reading materials
Data Source	National Reading Survey 2023
Year	2023
Performance	42%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of adults who live with children have used free print reading materials Emerging: 33-66% have used free print materials Constraining: <33% have used free print materials
Notes	This measure is based on finding from the National Reading Survey 2023. Adults living with children were asked if they had used free printed materials from a list of organisations including the DBE, Nal'ibali, NECT, African Storybook (SAIDE), Free4All, Vula Bula and Book Dash. 42% had used at least one of these materials at least once.

RM15: Internet access

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of adult population with internet access
Data Source	World Bank
Year	2020
Performance	70%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: more than 3% above average Upper-Middle Income Country internet penetration (73% in 2020) Emerging: within +/- 3% of UMIC average Constraining: more than 3% below UMIC average
Notes	Given the rise of digital reading, internet access is a crucial enabler of regular reading. South Africa's level of internet penetration (the % of the population that use the internet) is 70%, which is just more than 3% under the 2020 Upper Middle Income Countries average of 73%.

RM16: Data costs

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Cost of 1GB of data in relation to global median
Data Source	cable.co.uk
Year	2022
Performance	26% above global median
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >5% below global median data cost for 1GB (\$1.62 in 2022) Emerging: Within +/-5% of global median cost Constraining: >5% above global median cost
Notes	Cost is a major driver of internet use. South Africa's average cost for 1 GB of data is \$2,04, which is 26% above the global median cost of \$1.62. It is also 10% above the sub-Saharan African median of \$1.85. South Africa is ranked 99 th most expensive out of 233 countries. Median was used instead of average as a small number of countries with unusual geographies and extremely high rates skewed the average significantly.

RM17: Books in homes

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of households with any fiction or nonfiction print books
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	37%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of homes have fiction or nonfiction books Emerging: 33-66% have fiction or nonfiction books Constraining: <33% have fiction or nonfiction books
Notes	This measure is based on the National Reading Survey 2023 finding on the % of households that reported having in the home (including owned and borrowed) any print fiction, print nonfiction or ebooks. It excludes other types of books such as religious books, textbooks, cookbooks, dictionaries, etc.

RM18: Children's books in homes

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of households with children <10 with any children's books
Data Source	NRS
Year	2023
Performance	35%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of homes with children <age 10 have children's books Emerging: 33-66% have children's books Constraining: <33% have children's books
Notes	This measure is based on the National Reading Survey 2023 finding on the % of households with young children (aged less than 10 years) that reported having any picture books or 'readers' (books for children learning to read) in the home. This may include 'readers' brought home from school. While not directly comparable, a 35-country UNICEF survey of more than 100,000 children ages 3-6 found that an average of 52% of children had at least one children's book at home.

Institutional Framework – Summary

While a large share of government and private sector CSI funding is directed towards education, there is insufficient ring-fencing of budgets for reading and literacy and monitoring budget use is challenging. The policy environment is a mixture of constraining and enabling, with no coordination across policies dealing with schooling, materials, resourcing and equity. Several policy initiatives have been stalled for years, resulting in a policy vacuum around reading and public libraries. The education system's capacity to teach reading is highly constrained.

Institutional Framework:

11%

37%

37%

16%

#	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	YEAR	PERFORMANCE	RATING
IF1	National DBE has policy framework and capacity to hold provinces accountable for reading literacy policy directives and budget use	DBE qualitative assessment	2023	Policy framework and capacity insufficient	Emerging
IF2	Provincial DoEs and Treasuries allocate and use budgets in line with policy directives that prioritise reading literacy	DBE qualitative assessment	2023	Inconsistent allocation, use and reporting	Not yet available
IF3	Provincial LTSM budgets are clearly ringfenced and fully utilised	Treasury data	2023	Difficult to isolate LTSM budget/ spend in most provinces	Not yet available
IF4	Total value and % of CSI funding spent on literacy	Dialogue	2022	~R479.6m (4.4% of CSI funding)	Emerging
IF5	LTSM policy is adopted and implemented	DBE	2023	Draft done 2018, waiting for passage of BELA	Constraining
IF6	Benchmarks for reading fluency are established in all languages	DBE	2023	Benchmarks launched, FUNS assessments initiated	Enabling
IF7	National standardised assessments to monitor reading ability developed and implemented	DBE	2023	Thrive by 5, ELNA, FUNS and Systemic Evaluations launched	Enabling
IF8	Inclusive education policy is in place and implemented	DBE	2023	In place, but under-resourced and ineffective	Emerging
IF9	National Reading Plan is developed, regularly monitored and reported on	DBE	2023	MTSF in place, revised plan under development	Emerging
IF10	Zero-rating policy for educational websites is in place and implemented	DCDT, DGMT	2023	In place, but no implementation mechanism	Emerging
IF11	Language in Education Policy is in place and implemented	DBE	2023	In place, but inconsistent implementation	Emerging
IF12	Library and Information Services Bill is passed	DSAC	2023	Draft done 2018, stalled in consultation	Constraining

CONTINUED...

IF13	Libraries Norms and Standards are in place and being progressively realised	DSAC	2023	Draft done 2013; never passed	Constraining
IF14	Library procurement processes enable flexible and timeous procurement	DSAC	2023	Bound by generic procurement rules	Constraining
IF15	VAT is not charged on books	SARS	2023	Books are not VAT-exempt	Constraining
IF16	Imported books do not carry tariffs	SARS	2023	No tariffs	Enabling
IF17	Quality of initial teacher education programmes for teaching reading in African languages	CoPAL	2022	Insufficient	Constraining
IF18	Ratio of new teachers to projected teacher demand	RESEP	2022	69%	Constraining
IF19	Number of institutional Litasa members	Litasa	2023	62	Emerging

Institutional Framework – Measures

IF1: Budget accountability: national DBE

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	National DBE has policy framework and capacity to hold provinces accountable for reading literacy policy directives and budget use
Data Source	DBE qualitative assessment
Year	2023
Performance	Policy framework and capacity insufficient
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: National DBE, supported by National Treasury, has a clear policy framework and monitoring and oversight capacity to hold provinces accountable for consistent implementation of policy directives relating to reading literacy budget allocations and implementation Emerging: National DBE has the mandate and basic policy documents to shape national and provincial practice on reading literacy implementation but lacks full policy clarity and sufficient oversight and monitoring capacity Constraining: National DBE lacks the mandate, policies and capacity to oversee and monitor provincial implementation of reading literacy activities
Notes	The mandate of the national Department of Education is to set policy direction and monitor/oversee Provincial Departments of Education in the implementation of these policies. The measure is rated 'emerging' because national DBE currently has insufficient policy clout related to the prioritisation of reading, even though initiatives such as the revised Reading Sector Plan are underway to address this. Furthermore, the DBE has limited capacity to monitor and enforce compliance by Provinces with such policy directives. Rating of this measure is based on consultation with the DBE.

IF2: Budget allocation and use: provincial Departments of Education

Rating	Not yet available
Indicator Description	Provincial DoEs and Treasuries allocate and use budgets in line with policy directives that prioritise reading literacy
Data Source	DBE qualitative assessment
Year	2023
Performance	Inconsistent allocation, use and reporting
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 7-9 provincial Departments of Education allocate, utilise and report on reading literacy budgets according to or above national policy directives Emerging: 4-6 provincial DoEs allocate, utilise and report on reading literacy budgets according to policy directives Constraining: 1-3 provincial DoEs allocate, utilise and report on reading literacy budgets according to policy directives
Notes	Provincial Departments of Education (DoEs) have the mandate to implement education activities including teacher training and staffing, learning and teaching support material (LTSM) purchasing and the daily management of schooling. This measure reflects on the extent to which provincial DoEs prioritise reading in their budgets and programming, especially in the Foundation Phase, by following national policy directives. The measure is currently rated as 'not available' because there is currently no consistent allocation and utilisation of education budgets towards the prioritisation of reading and literacy across provinces, and data on provincial budget allocations and utilisation is not consistently reported on or collated to enable monitoring against national or provincial policies. This measure is based on consultation with the DBE

IF3: LTSM budgets

Rating	Not yet available
Indicator Description	Provincial LTSM budgets are clearly ringfenced and fully utilised
Data Source	Treasury data
Year	2023
Performance	Difficult to isolate LTSM budget and spend in most provinces
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: 7-9 provinces have clearly ring-fenced LTSM budgets and they are fully utilised Emerging: 4-6 provinces have clearly ring-fenced LTSM budgets and they are fully utilised Constraining: 1-3 provinces have clearly ring-fenced LTSM budgets and they are fully utilised
Notes	LTSM are not ringfenced in most provincial education budgets and so spend against budget is not transparent.

IF4: CSI funding for literacy

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Total value and % of CSI funding spent on literacy
Data Source	Triologue Business in Society Report (2022)
Year	2022
Performance	~R479.6m (4.4% of CSI funding)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Education makes up at least 33% of CSI funding, and dedicated literacy interventions make up at least 33% of education funding (~11% of all CSI funds) Emerging: Education makes up at least 33% of CSI spend, but literacy funding is less than 33% of education funding Constraining: Education and literacy funding are minimal in CSI allocations (education <33% of all spend and literacy <33% of education)
Notes	In 2022, of R10.9 billion in CSI funding, 44% went to education (R4.8 billion), and 10% of education funding went to literacy (est. R479.6 million). This was a 19% increase on the previous year's total literacy investment.

IF5: LTSM policy

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) policy is adopted and implemented
Data Source	Department of Basic Education
Year	2023
Performance	Draft done 2018, waiting for passage of Basic Education Laws Amendment bill (BELA)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: LTSM policy is formally adopted and implemented Emerging: Adopted but not implemented Constraining: Not adopted
Notes	A draft LTSM policy has been complete since 2018, but finalisation is dependent on passing of BELA.

IF6: Reading fluency benchmarks

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	Benchmarks for reading fluency are established in all languages
Data Source	Department of Basic Education
Year	2023
Performance	Benchmarks launched and incorporated into new assessment tools (see IF7)
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Reading benchmarks are adopted and implemented through regular data collection Emerging: In development or launched but not implemented Constraining: No benchmarks in place
Notes	Policy on reading benchmarks has been developed and most of the research to establish language and Grade benchmarks is complete (launched in 2022). Regular data collection to establish actual learner performance against benchmarks will commence from 2023 onwards.

IF7: National standardised assessments

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	National standardised assessments to monitor reading ability developed and implemented
Data Source	Department of Basic Education
Year	2023
Performance	Thrive by 5, ELNA, FUNS and Systemic Evaluations launched
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Standardised assessment tools to monitor reading ability are adopted and implemented Emerging: Developed or launched but not yet implemented Constraining: No standardised assessment tools
Notes	Multiple standardised assessments were launched as official DBE assessments in 2022-2023, including: - Thrive by Five, which assesses emergent literacy and language of children ages 4-5; - The Early Learning National Assessment (ELNA), which assesses Grade 1s on emergent literacy and numeracy; - The Funda Uphumelele National Survey (FUNS), which assess Grade 1-4 and Grade 6 reading benchmarks on letters and oral reading fluency; - Systemic Evaluations, which assess Grade 3, 6 and 9 in Mathematics and Languages.

IF8: Inclusive education policy

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Inclusive education policy is in place and implemented
Data Source	Department of Basic Education
Year	2023
Performance	In place, but under-resourced
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Inclusive education policy is adopted and implemented Emerging: Adopted but not implemented Constraining: Not adopted
Notes	Inclusive education policy is in place but implementation in most provinces is under-resourced and therefore ineffective. White paper on inclusive education is currently being reviewed.

IF9: National reading policy

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	National Reading Plan is developed, regularly monitored and reported on
Data Source	Department of Basic Education
Year	2023
Performance	Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) in place, revised plan under development
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: National reading plan is adopted, implemented, monitored and reported on Emerging: Adopted but not implemented, monitored and/or reported on Constraining: Not adopted
Notes	MTSF to 2024 is adopted. Revised Reading Plan is currently in development to support implementation.

IF10: Zero-rating of educational websites

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Zero-rating policy for educational websites is in place and implemented
Data Source	Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT), DGMT, Directions on Zero-rating of Content and Websites for Education and Health - Open By-laws South Africa (openbylaws.org.za)
Year	2023
Performance	In place, but not implemented
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Zero-rating of educational websites is adopted, included in mobile network operator (MNO) conditions of license and implemented Emerging: Adopted and included in MNO license conditions but not implemented Constraining: No policy; not included in MNO licenses
Notes	Zero-rating of educational websites is included in mobile network operators' conditions of license but there is no mechanism in place to facilitate this.

IF11: Language in education policy

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Language in Education Policy is in place and implemented
Data Source	Department of Basic Education
Year	2023
Performance	In place, but inconsistent implementation
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Language in Education policy is adopted and implemented Emerging: Adopted but not implemented Constraining: Not adopted
Notes	The policy on language use (languages of teaching and learning and grade of transition to English or Afrikaans) in Foundation and Intermediate Phase is established in the CAPS curriculum, but implementation is unclear and inconsistent

IF12: Library and information systems policy

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Library and Information Services Bill is passed
Data Source	Department of Sport, Arts & Culture
Year	2023
Performance	Draft done 2018, stalled in consultation with other government departments
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Bill is passed and implemented Emerging: Passed but not implemented Constraining: Not passed
Notes	Draft Bill produced in 2018 but stalled in consultation process with other government departments.

IF13: Library norms and standards

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Libraries Norms and Standards are in place and being progressively realised
Data Source	DSAC
Year	2023
Performance	Draft developed 2013, never passed
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Norms and Standards are adopted and implemented Emerging: Adopted but not implemented Constraining: Not adopted
Notes	Draft Norms and Standards were produced, with preparatory feasibility and costing research conducted in the early 2010s in preparation for the Libraries and Information Systems Bill, but the process to finalise and pass Norms and Standards into policy has stalled.

IF14: Library procurement processes

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Library procurement processes enable flexible and timeous procurement
Data Source	Department of Sport, Arts & Culture
Year	2023
Performance	Bound by generic procurement rules
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Library-specific procurement processes are adopted and implemented Emerging: Adopted but not implemented Constraining: Not adopted
Notes	Initial conversations with Treasury to adapt procurement process requirements for Libraries are underway, but discussions are in their infancy.

IF15: VAT on books

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	VAT is not charged on books
Data Source	SARS
Year	2023
Performance	Books are not VAT-exempt
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: VAT exemption on books is adopted and implemented Emerging: Adopted but not implemented Constraining: Not adopted
Notes	VAT on educational publications and learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) was debated with Treasury (Davis Commission) and a decision was taken not to exempt (since most are bought by the state). Other 'trade' publications were considered commercial products and so not eligible for VAT exemption or reduction.

IF16: Tariffs on imported books

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	Imported books do not carry tariffs
Data Source	SARS
Year	2023
Performance	No tariffs
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Imported books and publications do not carry tariffs Emerging: Tariffs are reduced but not waived Constraining: Imported books and publications carry tariffs
Notes	Imported books and publications do not carry tariffs.

IF17: Initial teacher education for reading in African languages

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Quality of initial teacher education programmes for teaching reading in African languages
Data Source	Universities South Africa's Community of Practice for the Teaching and Learning of African Languages (CoPAL)
Year	2022
Performance	Insufficient
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: Foundation Phase teacher training courses have a core focus on pedagogies and practice in teaching reading in African languages Emerging: Core focus on pedagogies and practice in teaching reading, but African language focus is limited Constraining: Pedagogies and practices for teaching reading are not a core focus in most programmes
Notes	Foundation Phase Teacher training courses do not provide sufficient training to teachers in pedagogies for teaching reading at Foundation Phase in African languages. There is a government framework on teaching reading in African languages , but it is not effectively implemented.

IF18: Teacher pipeline

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	Ratio of new teachers to projected teacher demand
Data Source	RESEP
Year	2022
Performance	69%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >90% of projected demand is met by new teachers Emerging: 70-90% of demand is met Constraining: <70% of demand is met
Notes	Projected teacher demand will be rising quickly in the next decade, as calculated based on teacher ages and retirement rates as well as the need for teachers to address current class sizes and other factors. The supply of appropriately trained teachers to fulfil this need is currently insufficient. The 69% datapoint is calculated based on reported actual ~30500 graduates as a proportion of the estimated ~44000 required projected graduates in 2022.

IF19: Civil society literacy sector

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	Number of institutional Litasa members
Data Source	Litasa
Year	2023
Performance	62
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >80 members Emerging: 41-80 members Constraining: 1-40 members
Notes	This measure is a proxy for the overall level of capacity of the civil society literacy sector. The number of institutional members of the Literacy Association of South Africa (Litasa) does not capture the full capacity of the sector, since a) not all civil society organisations active in literacy and reading are members and b) membership does not reflect on the level of coordination and effectiveness within the sector. See recommendations.

Reading Motivation and Practice – Summary

Overall, reading culture is best characterised as emerging. Agreement with positive statements about reading is high, and more adults are reading with children than in 2016, but only around a third of adults identify strongly as a reader or read books frequently.

All measures for the Motivation and Practice Dimension are from the National Reading Survey 2023. Further information about these measures, including how the questions were asked, how the measures were calculated and further analysis regarding the data points, can be found in the full National Reading Survey report as well as the questionnaire and technical survey report lodged on [DataFirst](#).

For most of the measures in this dimension there are no established targets, standards or international comparative measures on the proportion of a population that 'should' be reading in a certain way. The cutoff points have therefore been set by the NRB team according to two logics:

- For measures related to reading for enjoyment, reading books and reading digital materials (which can be considered personal preferences and choices), the cutoff points are set for thirds of the population. For example, if more than two-thirds read for enjoyment, this is considered enabling.
- For measures related to reading for information (which is reading in the context of study or work), the cutoff points are set for quarters of the population. I.e. if more than three-quarters of the population read for information, this is considered enabling.
- For reading with children, there is some comparative data, as described in the notes for MP 8 and 9 below.
- For attitudes towards reading with children, the cutoff points are set for quarters of the population, as positive attitudes and perceptions are usually more widespread than practice.

'Frequently' is defined as more than once a week.

Motivation and Practice:

10%

80%

10%

#	INDICATOR	DATA SOURCE	YEAR	PERFORMANCE	RATING
MP1	% of adults with a strong 'reader' identity	NRS	2023	35%	Emerging
MP2	% of adults who frequently read for enjoyment	NRS	2023	48%	Emerging
MP3	% of adults who frequently read for information	NRS	2023	53%	Emerging
MP4	% of youth who frequently read for enjoyment	NRS	2023	52%	Emerging
MP5	% of youth who frequently read for information	NRS	2023	59%	Emerging
MP6	% of adults who frequently read fiction or nonfiction books (paper or digital)	NRS	2023	32%	Constraining
MP7	% of adults who read digital materials (excluding social media)	NRS	2023	55%	Emerging
MP8	% of adults living with children who read to them	NRS	2023	52%	Emerging
MP9	% of adults living with children who read to them before they can talk	NRS	2023	35%	Emerging
MP10	% of adults who agree that reading with children at home is valuable for their schooling	NRS	2023	93%	Enabling

Reading Motivation and Practice – Measures

MP1: Reader identity

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of adults with a strong 'reader' identity
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	35%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of adults have a strong 'reader' identity Emerging: 33-66% have a strong 'reader' identity Constraining: <33% have a strong 'reader' identity
Notes	See section intro above for logic on cutoff points. This is based on a self-reported question where the survey asked people which of the following they most identify with: a non-reader, an aspiring reader, an occasional reader, a regular reader or a passionate reader. 35% of people considered themselves either a passionate or a regular reader.

MP2: Reading for enjoyment

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of adults who frequently read for enjoyment
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	48%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of adults read for enjoyment frequently (more than once a week) Emerging: 33-66% of adults frequently read for enjoyment Constraining: <33% of adults frequently read for enjoyment
Notes	See section intro above for logic on cutoff points.

MP3: Reading for information

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of adults who frequently read for information
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	53%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >75% of adults read for information frequently (more than once a week) Emerging: 50-75% of adults frequently read for information Constraining: <50% of adults frequently read for information
Notes	See section intro above for logic on cutoff points.

MP4: Reading for enjoyment – youth

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of youth who frequently read for enjoyment
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	52%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of youth read for enjoyment frequently (more than once a week) Emerging: 33-66% read for enjoyment frequently Constraining: <33% read for enjoyment frequently
Notes	See section intro above for logic on cutoff points. Youth are included as a distinct category because interventions in the national reading ecosystem are likely to change youth results faster than overall adult average results. This enables better tracking of the impacts of ecosystem strengthening efforts between iterations of the NRB.

MP5: Reading for information – youth

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of youth who frequently read for information
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	59%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >75% of youth read for information frequently (more than once a week) Emerging: 50–75% read for information frequently Constraining: <50% read for information frequently
Notes	See section intro above for logic on cutoff points. Youth are included as a distinct category because interventions in the national reading ecosystem are likely to change youth results faster than overall adult average results. This enables better tracking of the impacts of ecosystem strengthening efforts between iterations of the NRB.

MP6: Book reading

Rating	Constraining
Indicator Description	% of adults who frequently read fiction or nonfiction books (paper or digital)
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	32%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of adults read books frequently (more than once a week) Emerging: 33–66% read books frequently Constraining: <33% read books frequently
Notes	See section intro above for logic on cutoff points.

MP7: Digital reading

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of adults who read digital materials (excluding social media)
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	55%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of adults read digital materials online Emerging: 33-66% read digital materials Constraining: <33% read digital materials
Notes	See section intro above for logic on cutoff points.

MP8: Reading with children

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of adults living with children who read to them
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	52%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of adults who live with children read with them Emerging: 33-66% read with children Constraining: <33% read with children
Notes	See section intro above for logic on cutoff points.

MP9: Reading with young children

Rating	Emerging
Indicator Description	% of adults living with children who read to them before they can talk
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	35%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >66% of adults who live with children read with them before they can talk Emerging: 33-66% read with children before they can talk Constraining: <33% read with children before they can talk
Notes	See section intro above for logic on cutoff points.

MP10: Attitudes towards reading with children

Rating	Enabling
Indicator Description	% of adults who agree that reading with children at home is valuable for their schooling
Data Source	National Reading Survey
Year	2023
Performance	93%
Rating cutoff points	Enabling: >75% of adults agree that reading with children is valuable for their schooling Emerging: 50-75% agree reading with children is valuable Constraining: <50% agree reading with children is valuable
Notes	See section introduction above for logic on cutoff points.

Recommendations

The National Reading Barometer is intended to promote debate and galvanise collective action by compiling data that can be used to agree on sector goals and monitor progress towards those goals at a high level.

To this end, the recommendations relate to the improvement of the data environment and collective debates and decision-making processes related to this data. They include:

Improving 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 (LTSM) in general and in the Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3) 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.

For further iterations of the NRB, measures currently included at a high level can be specified more closely. These include:

- Nuanced measures for level of implementation of key government policies
- Nuanced measures for level of capacity of the civil society literacy sector

Debate and 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 distribution of inexpensive free materials at preferred pickup points – which the National Reading Survey found to include libraries, Post Offices, schools, supermarkets/retail stores and clinics.
- 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 publishing (commercial, non-profit and self-publishing) and free materials distribution.
- Agree on a collective advocacy approach to speed up stalled policy processes.
- Allocate training, resources and monitoring to improve the implementation of existing policies such as the Inclusive Education Policy, zero-rating of educational websites, the Language in Education Policy and the forthcoming National Reading Plan.

Learn more

For more information about the National Reading Barometer and the National Reading Survey, visit www.readingbarometersa.org to access:

- The full dataset and questionnaire
- A technical report on survey methodology and analysis
- “What kind of a reader are you?” quiz
- Special issue briefs on reading with children, digital reading, languages and libraries
- Resources for NGOs
- Latest news and analysis

Follow the National Reading Barometer project on social media for the latest updates:

- LinkedIn: @national-reading-barometer-south-africa
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