

INPACTFUL EDUCATION IFOR AND

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Room to Read Bangladesh Annual Report 2022

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World Change Starts with Educated Children.®



Dear friends,

What an amazing year 2022 has been. We started the year as the aftermath of COVID19 receded. Despite a few bottlenecks, we had a splendid year at Room to Read Bangladesh. This 2022 Annual Report attempts to bring to you those stories of transformation, consolidation and change.

Looking back, we successfully launched our Programs and office in Moulvibazar. We also started our collaborative model of Literacy Program in Natore. We expanded into the realm of Pre-Primary education as well, and developed a range of Pre-Primary content in consultation with the government. And in Cox's Bazar, our custom project secured excellent rating in audit carried out by donor.

The prolonged curtain enforced by COVID closures finally lifted with all of our local offices implementing Programs in full swing. I hope you will join me in appreciating the quality of our programming as well as their relevance. Our relationship with the government has gone from strength to strength. Support from government departments have been incomparable in ensuring sustainability of our Programs and its transition into 'collaborative' phase.

Throughout 2022, we availed opportunities to closely work with government colleagues to support capacity development initiatives of district-level government officials, headteachers and teachers. We believe that these initiatives help children to excel in Bangla language and become independent readers.

2020 through 2022, we continued to be nimble and agile in shifting our programs to meet children's evolving needs.

We have achieved so much in 2022. None of it would have been possible without my colleagues' commitment for children's education. It is clear how hard and smart we all have worked. I would like you to take a moment and reflect on our accomplishments. It is important to receive support and constructive feedback. We celebrate our achievements and successes, and also learn from what could have gone better.

I am extremely proud and excited to be presenting our annual report for 2022.

In solidarity,

Rakhi Sarkar Country Director Room to Read Bangladesh

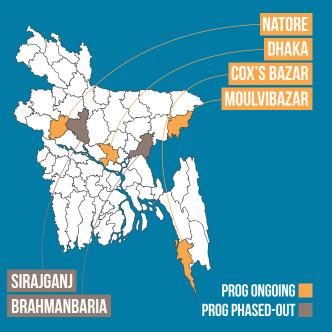


Founded in 2000 on the belief that

World Change Starts with Educated Children.®

Room to Read is a global organization transforming the lives of millions of children in low-income communities by focusing on literacy and gender equality in education. We envision a world in which all children can pursue a quality education that prepares them to be fulfilled and make positive change – in their families, communities and the world.

We target deep & systemic transformation within schools during two time periods that are most critical in a child's schooling: early Primary school for literacy acquisition and Secondary school for girls' education. Room to Read has benefited more than 32 million children in over 49,000 communities across 21 countries with additional support through remote solutions that facilitate learning beyond classrooms. Presently in Bangladesh, we implement Programs in four districts.



We combine the science of learning to read with the magic of loving to read. We sustain students' reading skills development by providing child-friendly libraries and quality children's books. We are developing a generation of independent readers and learners who are breaking the cycle of illiteracy within their own families.

We also equip adolescent girls with the tools to self-advocate and chart a path that they choose for themselves. We involve diverse stakeholders to support the creation of a gender-equal world.

We design, implement and also help institutionalize effective and efficient models for achieving quality learning outcomes related to children's literacy and gender equality. We operate at the nexus of long-term, school-level Programs, and positive, trusted relationships with governments. This experience positions us as a thought-leader in 'literacy' and 'gender equality' galvanizing support and action of government partners for system-level change.



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At Room to Read, we aim to create independent readers and lifelong learners. With this in mind, we implemented several initiatives in 2022 to support children's learning and reading endeavors, helped improve teachers' capacity, developed engaging and fun-filled instructional materials as well as rich storybooks with admirable partnership and ownership of government departments.

Development of Instructional Materials

As schools remained closed till the first quarter of 2022, we continued to support Grade 1 and 2 learners, we developed worksheet booklets with simple guides for parents to create their "home as a learning space". We also adapted our Literacy Program to reach more children directly and indirectly keeping them engaged in their education endeavors despite school closures.

Government started implementing an accelerated learning package to help minimize learning gaps. As we faced challenges in implementing the regular modes of literacy instruction at the school level, we redirected investments towards various home-based support for children and distance learning scopes for teachers and government officials.

To re-orientate teachers in our program constituencies and include teachers and government officials, we adapted the relevant and popular 'Library Management and Reading Hour Activity' training module to an online medium as a self-paced certificate course thanks to a space created by a2i – the government's digital hub under the Prime Minister's Office.

As of the end of 2022, a minimum of 5,800 teachers completed the online course and received certificates.

Following opening of schools post-COVID, we aligned our instruction materials for Grades 1 and 2 with ongoing academic calendar.

This helped minimize children's learning gaps at the school level.



We introduced Pre-Primary Education (PPE) package in Moulvibazar - our new working area. The main objective of our PPE is to strengthen the establishment of oral language intervention of early-Grade language development and transition from local language to the standard language. As part of PPE package, we developed conversation chart focusing on 20 topics, big books, language games, pre-reading and prewriting activities. Moreover, we developed training modules for teachers and our staff members.

Based on the newly reformed 5+ curriculum along with the early-Grade reading objectives, the PPE package was designed to support students with smooth transition from local dialect to standard Bangla language. We included different Oral Language Interventions (OLI) as storybook conversation charts. These were introduced with easy-tofollow instruction, and illustrations based on pictures and content from students' environments.

To holistically aid teachinglearning and increase access to scientific resources available in classrooms, we also developed reading cards on 10 stories with focus on vowel signs.



Partnership with Government Departments

The government of Bangladesh approved the new curriculum in 2021 and will introduce new textbooks for Grade 1 in 2023. Aligning with this new curriculum and textbook, we developed a Grade 1 instructional package, PPE and Grade 2 instructional packages.



The biggest achievement in 2022 was the extensive support from two main government departments: the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB). We received commendable inputs and validation from a government nominated committee in the development of our instructional materials.

Collaboration with the government continued throughout the year in several capacities. With DPE and NCTB, we organized a conference called 'Promoting Learners to be Independent Readers'. Together, we explored innovative practices to promote reading skills and reading habits among early-Grade learners.

Three papers presented in the conference covered standards to measure reading proficiency, evidence-based practices in promoting reading skills and habit, and the current status of children's reading skills.

Following government consultation, the action items for Room to Read

Bangladesh ranged from initiating the development of Bangla benchmarks to developing supplementary audio materials aiding the teaching-learning process in Bangla, and sharing copyrights of our storybooks with NCTB for mainstreaming them as supplementary reading materials.

In our efforts to mainstream literacy components focused on scientific ways to teach and learn, we continued our discussion in an international conference focused on equity and inclusion. A paper was presented on diversifying reading opportunities and promoting inclusion.

We also chaired a session on transformation in pedagogy learning environment and assessment.

ANNUAL REPORT 2022 04

Room to Read's supplementary reading materials help me conduct classes and create a more enjoyable learning experience for children. - Mohammad Saifullah

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Assistant Teacher, Lamshakhali GPS, Cox's Bazar

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DEI and Environment in Storybooks

While children's literature is critical to developing reading skills and a habit of reading, it is also important to give them an exposure to issues relating environment as well as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). The twenty storybooks we developed in 2022 are based on contemporary issues and tells stories of peace, unity, mutual respect, solidarity, harmony, compatibility, and cooperation. The stories are intertwined with characters' desire to counter the challenges facing them.

At another level, the stories cover skills such as self- and social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, relationship skills, and promotion of the virtues of equality, justice, and inclusion. The genres range from fantasy to nonfiction and realistic fiction to fantastic realism, adding to the variety of Room to Read's leveled books in its classroom corner libraries that are well suited to the interests of Primary school students.

In addition, a series of 3 titles were developed following the thematic approaches under our Global Book Development Projects, which includes *A JUNGLE Submerged in Water*, *A Stage in the Forest*, and *A Strange Land* that feature climate change, folklore and environment, and 'PLAY' – on children's social-emotional wellbeing.



Illustrations from A Stage in the Forest were featured in the Singapore-based 'Book Illustrators Gallery' – popularly known as the BIG exhibition. Bangladesh is the only Room to Read country featured in BIG of 2022 that showcased 150+ works by 58 talented illustrators and artists from 14 countries.

Like every year, we remembered to nourish literature and arts in the publication of our *Pora magazine* published with support from UN World Food Program. The text included poems, rhymes, short stories, riddles, comics, and jokes written by students and teachers from schools in Kutubdia and Ukhiya sub-districts of Cox's Bazar.

What makes a children's library ideal? What should children's literature be like to meet the need and interests of Primary school students so they become independent readers? The answers to these were sought at the 2022 'Ideal Book Collection' workshop, where 6,500 storybooks collected from local publishers were reviewed and shortlisted to submit to DPE and NCTB for extending approvals so that we could make them available in our classroom libraries.

Support and Partnerships

Our journey with 40 government Primary schools in Natore culminated after 4 years of support towards children's literacy. During our standard 'phase-out and sustainability' workshop, the headteachers, local government officials, and members of the School Management Committee (SMC) indicated clear knowledge of the phase-out process, appreciated how we sustained literacyfocused assistance over the years, recalled important milestones and committed to continue the best practices of our Literacy Program. At the event, Md. Golam Nabi – the District Primary Education Officer of Natore – requested everyone to continue our best practices: schools located in the Kamolganj and Rajnagar sub-districts of Moulvibazar:

"Room to Read Bangladesh did very well. They showed a pathway and established [classroom corner] library with child friendly storybooks, and supported our students so they become independent readers."

High levels of enthusiasm and strong commitment from local government officials to take over and scale-up our Literacy Program models within and beyond the district was a clear sign of their confidence in our work.

With government approval, we signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with 100 more government Primary We are optimistic about +30K more students (pre-Primary to G5) benefitting from our scientific literacy support that will help them become independent readers. Our hon'ble Director General (Grade 1) of the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), Mr. Muhibur Rahman, unveiled classroom corner library and launched our Literacy Program.

Mr. Shamsur Rahman, the District Primary Education Officer (DPEO), the Assistant DPEO of Moulvibazar district, as well as sub-district level officials were appreciative of the Program expansion. Headteachers and 100 chairs of SMCs were in the audience while we signed the MoU led by our country director Rakhi Sarkar chairing the event.

In collaboration with DPE and with USAID funding, we developed training manuals and supplementary reading materials for Bangla subject. We also developed Master Trainers' (MT) training manual, Teachers' training manual and resource book – all based on Room to Read's five key components of reading.

The supplementary reading materials were created for Grades 1-2 students. Around 750,000 children are expected to benefit with the successful completion of this collaboration and technical partnership with government's key line departments such as DPE, NCTB.



For me, Room to Read means storybooks. All the books from Room to Read are nice, full of colors. They also read great. My classroom [when I was in Grade 5] had a bookshelf. The walls were colorfully illustrated. After recess, we would read storybooks [from that bookshelf]. We would share stories with one another. I still love reading books. Now, I read as I borrow storybooks from a Primary school student who lives nearby.

- Sumaiya Chowdhury Babu, Grade 8, Cox's Bazar



Girls Education

At Room to Read, we aim the making of sentient changemakers in adolescent girls. We equip them with education and life-skills that help them negotiate key decision for a dignified life. In 2022, we supported girls to continue education, delivered content nationally with government support, and ensured persistent human connection for girls to feel informed and secured.

Programming for Wider, Bigger Reach

One of our strategic priorities in 2022 was to design programs to reach an increased number of adolescent girls and boys while facilitating system level integration. To that end, we pressed on with content on mass media -Bangladesh Betar, the only state-owned radio channel with nation-wide coverage. Focusing on life-skills and mentoring concept intrinsic to the global mentoring manual of our Girls' Education Program, we contextualized content to cater to girls' realities and consulted the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) to develop and disseminate audio-visual content that supports girls' wellbeing during the crucial period – adolescence.

'Amar Mentor' (trans: my mentor) – 32 episodes of our radio program included 29 topics most relevant to the time and age, with 2 special episodes designed to generate audience participation, and 1 more to mark International Women's Day 2022. With news pushed through social sites, our radio program earned regular and repeat audiences who sent us emails and posted handwritten letters appreciating the initiative and also sharing ideas for improvement. Much of the two-way communication from our radio program was the result of a quiz provision of we kept in all of the episodes.

The content committee at the DSHE also endorsed 12 of our life-skill videos marking it as one of the major milestones with the government in over a decade of programs in Bangladesh with our digital content going public with increased volume and frequency since COVID19.

Building Capacities for Stronger Support

We initiated a series of capacity building actions conducted to support our staff members – especially our frontliner 'social mobilizers' to refresh knowledge and skills so that they can be ready to extend adequate support to girls inperson and also remotely on a daily basis. Mentoring as well as psychosocial support for Program participants were also instrumental to safeguarding the staff members' mental wellbeing and building long-term resilience to multidimensional psychological challenges foreseen in their roles. DSHE also extended initial approvals on building capacity of teachers, which is unique to our programming as well as to the Secondary school we supported via our Girls' Education Program. The training of teachers not only helped us contextualize our content catering to local needs and challenges; it was also crucial in building wider acceptance of the Program modules and approaches as well as strategies now more likely to sustain because teachers in Dhaka and Natore received trainings and have become experts on mentoring reducing dependency on us.

Life-skill education helped me to become confident. I utilize my skills to negotiate decisions that influence my life, and hope to never miss out on these skills. I thank my mentor [from Room to Read] for these.

- Nusrat Jahan, Grade 6 Girls' Education Program participant, Cox's Bazar



Increased Investment in Programs

Prolonged COVID19 school closures posed considerable challenges on monitoring of Program. Following the opening of schools, we were able to increase monitoring down to community levels to observe post-COVID impact on adolescent girls. We covered all 40 schools we supported throughout most of 2022 in all our Program locations: Dhaka, Cox's Bazar, Moulvibazar and Natore.



We also received approval from the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) to implement our Girls' Education Program in 8 Secondary schools in Juri of Moulvibazar. In 2022, we selected 500 girls in these schools. The government also approved expansion of our existing Program in Cox's Bazar with 500 new girls from 10 schools we are already supporting there.

Stories and illustrations overleaf are part of Room to Read's 'She Creates Change' initiative.

A multimedia storytelling, 'She Creates Change' spans animated and live-action films, books and audio stories and elevates girls' voices in the pursuit of gender equality.







Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh Girls' Education Program student

Keya loved to read the news. Her father was a barber, and each night she'd wait for him to bring home the newspapers from his shop. Keya poured over the pages, dreaming of becoming a great politician.

When Keya became a teenager, her father decided it was no longer appropriate for his daughter to read the news and stopped bringing home the papers. Keya was very upset. Reading was her connection to a world of possibility; and she would not give that up. Determined, she began collecting the newspapers street vendors used to wrap food. "He couldn't stop me," she recalls. "I would read them and tell my mother what was going on in the world."

One day, Keya and her friends were walking home from school when a group of boys started harassing them. She told the boys to stop, but they became belligerent. Keya asked her parents for help, but they were worried and told her to keep her head down. Keya went to her teachers. They did not have a solution.

Years went by and the situation worsened. Keya knew she had to do something. This time, she mustered up the courage to speak directly to the town leaders. "If you can feel the pain of others, you will feel the need to help us," she told them. "This must stop." Keya made history that day. The leaders listened to her and filed formal charges against the harassers.

Looking back, Keya is proud that she stood up and spoke out. "I did it for all girls. Not just myself and not just my friends, but for all girls."

Now, the story of Keya the change maker appears in the newspapers that she was once forbidden to read. This time, her father beams with pride.







Dhaka, Bangladesh Girls' Education Program student

Once upon a time, a Bangfadeshi third-grader named Shirin was eating a small biscuit for lunch. It was all her family could afford. Another girl approached and asked Shirin about her future dreams. "I want to be a teacher," Shirin replied. "Poor people like you never become anything," the girl scoffed. "You'll be married off by fifth grade."

The words cut through Shirin's heart as she feared they weren't far from the truth. "I felt so small," Shirin says. "But then I decided to prove her wrong."

Shirin convinced her parents to send her to a bigger school, with more opportunities. But in her 7th grade year, they changed their minds. Soon a family arrived to talk to her about marriage, Shirin summoned her courage and refused. She was so persuasive that her parents also agreed she could continue her education.

However, Shirin's family still could not afford tuition. So, Shirin started working at a lightbulb factory. Long hours of work and late nights of studying became her life. Shirin's work caused blisters and cuts all over her hands. But her dream lit her way.

At the factory, Shirin befriended girls who faced similar challenges. She encouraged them to speak up against child marriage, and even talked to their parents about how education could change a girl's life and her family's. "Never be afraid to speak up," she counsels. "When you see that you can accomplish small goals, you slowly gain confidence."

Today, Shirin is working towards a teaching career. She uses some of her money for school and saves the rest. Shirin hopes to inspire others to light up their own futures by speaking up and defending their dreams.







COVID19 was undoubtedly the biggest drawback to academic learning causing more than one and half years of school closures that ended in early 2022. We have been agile to understand and deliver upon the needs of students and teachers since the onset of the pandemic. We continued with distance learning modalities (pivot initiatives) and blended them with in-person method in both our Programs.

As a pivot initiative throughout 2022, Room to Read Bangladesh sent a total of 615,398 messages (SMS) as nudges to parents encouraging about facilitating children's education at home, sending them to school post-COVID, and for teachers sharing learning resources we made available online. Besides, 98,287 more virtual messages were sent to remind parents about the importance of girls continuing their education, and also to not consider child marriage over girls' education.

Literacy Program Initiatives



TV episode broadcast

615,398 Messages sent



35,338

Children received materials (first time in 2022)



18,138 Children received materials



Over 80% students of Primary schools that we support received education materials at home and at community levels. A total of 4,533 girls who are in Secondary schools received education materials from Girls' Education Program.

A total of 4,184 hours of virtual training and mentoring/coaching support were delivered to Primary school teachers. 21 TV episodes on children's storybooks published by Room to Read Bangladesh were telecast on Channel i and local cable TV, and 32 episodes of 'My Mentor' program focusing adolescent girls' wellbeing broadcast on Bangladesh Betar.

Girls' Education Program Initiatives



Z1 Radio episodes broadcast



98,287 Messages sent



4,533 Girls received materials (first time in 2022)

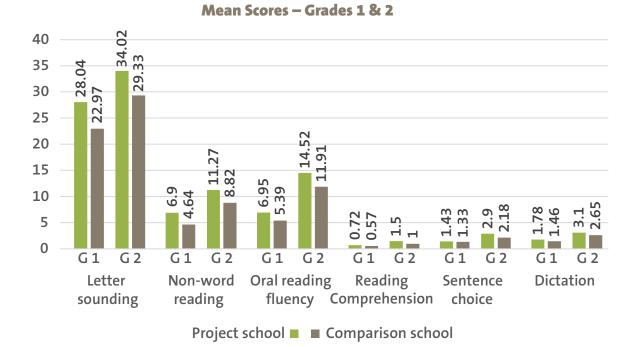


Measuring Program outcomes and making ourselves accountable for action aiming an enhanced Program delivery, cost efficiency and sustainability of our interventions by methodically generating and sharing evidence while ensuring data quality and transparency – are the foundation of intervention design and leads to continuous improvement of Room to Read Bangladesh's initiatives.

Assessment of Literacy Intervention

In November 2022, we conducted the first round of literacy assessments to assess the impact of WFP-funded literacy project in Cox's Bazar. Differences in reading and writing skills among 1,610 Grades 1-2 students of 20 schools (out of 137 we support in Kutubdia and Ukhiya sub-districts) were assessed in relation to same indicators in students studying in 20 other schools in Teknaf, which is outside of the project intervention. The assessment was carried out using the latest version of the Bangla Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) tool developed after three rounds of fieldtesting. App-based data collection was carried out using tablets and a licensed version of the SurveyCTO data collection software.

Results shows, students in project school outperformed students in comparison schools in various measures of reading and writing ability. Within each Grade,

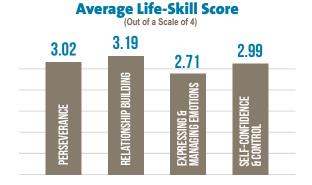


differences between groups favored our project group across all subtasks. Difference of data on reading comprehension subtask was statistically significant (p < 0.05) for Grade 2. As for the remaining subtasks across both Grades, differences were not as significant despite controlling of potential covariates.

Schools supported by WFP-funded project performing better in terms of all subtasks can be attributed to onsite intervention of Programs directly implemented by Room to Read Bangladesh. However, findings indicate substantial learning loss due to prolonged COVID closures. We will collect the final round of data in November 2023 from the same Grades to examine after additional exposure to literacy intervention.

Life-Skills and Gender Norms Baseline

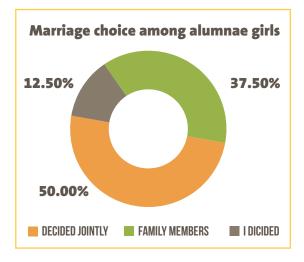
Room to Read Bangladesh's Girls' Education Program in Moulvibazar – our latest pin on the country map – was launched in 2022 with 100 more Secondary schools in Juri sub-district. To create reference points to Program comparisons later on, we undertook Adolescent Life-Skills Assessment (ALSA) to set a baseline of knowledge, attitude, and practice related to lifeskills and gender norms in line with life-skill evaluation methodology. The assessment that followed the



'Knowledge, Attitude and Practice' (KAP) survey method was conducted among 411 non-Program participants – adolescent girls in Grade 8. The tool covered 4 major domains: 'aspirations and attitude', 'gender roles', 'puberty, sexuality & health' and life-skills. This baseline is planned to be used to compare endline data after 3 years of Program to analyze expected changes.

Education and Socio-Economy of Girls

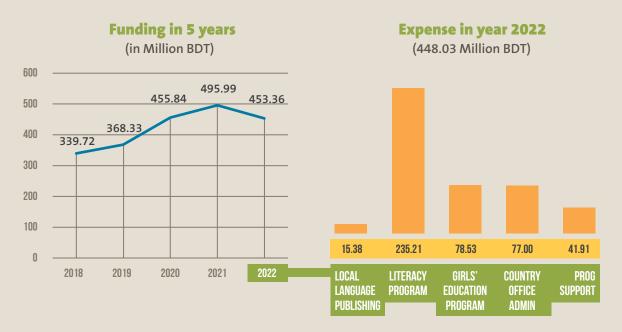
In Sirajganj where our Girls' Education Program phased out in 2016 after years of intervention, we conducted a survey among the Program alumnae to assess their socio-demographic status. A total of 24 alumnae were assessed in face-toface interview using a standardized tool.



On the other hand, 71% of girls who graduated from Room to Read's periphery of support were enrolled in the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh. Notably, 17% of girls were found employed with income-generating activity.



Room to Read Bangladesh worked relentlessly toward transforming the lives of children by focusing on literacy and gender equality in education. Our financials show the reflection of achievements against planned targets. In 2022, 99% of our budget was utilized.



Alongside direct implementation of both our Programs in four districts, we implemented three projects funded by UN World Food Programme (WFP), USAID and UNICEF. Total budget for donor-funded projects in 2022 was BDT 87.42 million and expenditure was BDT 107.25 million.

বাই দেৱ''' ক্ষ্ম থবসা সঁঘেৰ কেজে ধাসতে জোকটা।

কথাছে। বুঁঝা বৰে। কো কথ্ৰছ বুঁঝাঃ আন বেৰা হয়ে আহোন। 

To uphold our brand identity and extend support to Program teams in positioning Room to Read Bangladesh's thought leadership, the communications aspects of the organization mobilized internal and external capacities to leverage on the social and digital mediums. In addition, a campaign momentum was carried out with a focus on generating buzz around students getting back to school.

ON FACEBOOK, PEOPLE Reached Engaged		
2020	287K	87K
2021	1.6M	247K
2022	4 M	242K

Thoroughout 2022, we used a #LearningNeverStops hashtag for storytelling on Facebook showcasing inspiring data and visuals from rural communities we support. As photocards, animation pieces and also video clips (255 posts), these stories showcased how students in both Primary and Secondary schools continued their education endeavors from home.

As we covered news about urban and rural communities to the central platforms, we also shared learning resources ranging from children's storybooks to teacher training modules both accessible online. Our celebrity read-aloud videos aired on private national TV as well as our 'My Mentor' program on government-run radio *Bangladesh Betar* methodically attempted to engage on time-sensitive topics and to also grow audiences by adopting quiz segments in each episode and adopting a mechanism to receive, acknowledge and document audience responses.



Buzz on return to school culminated in PSA: rebrand.ly/ishcool

In 2022, learning content and inspiring stories reached 4,000+ thousand people on Facebook. People shared about their children pursuing learning at home and discussed the importance of children continuing education despite the closures and then return to school. This created a positive virtual space of learning sharing.

Our reach on YouTube increased significantly. Thanks to cross-posting and numerous SMS sent with video links, our organic-only reach of 82 new video pieces increased. A total of 435,919 views (30% increase since 2021) recorded 27,008 hours of video views (40% increase since 2021) with spikes in May and September. Growth in consumption of video and other resources reflected the efforts from government and civil society actors to popularize and increase access to digital learning resources during COVID19. Our support to the 'Safe Back to School' (#SB2S) alliance continued throughout 2022.





RAKHI SARKAR COUNTRY DIRECTOR



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Join us!

If you believe, just like we do, that -

World Change Starts with Educated Children.®

INVEST IN EDUCATION

Contact our head office to get involved. Donations can be made globally.

JOIN GLOBAL NETWORKS

To get involved in our global network of volunteers and campaigners, visit roomtoread.org/take-action

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Want to see how we are making literacy and gender equality work in Bangladesh?

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