



In Nepal,

56%

of women and girls are illiterate.



Country Overview

Nepal resides in South Asia and is landlocked between China, India and Bangladesh. The country is known for its famous peaks and has eight of the world’s 10 tallest mountains, including Mount Everest. Nepali is the official language, however according to the most recent National Population and Housing Census, only 45 percent of the population speak Nepali and there are more than 123 other languages spoken as a mother tongue. Nepal is also home to at least four indigenous sign languages.

In 2018, a historic governmental transition took place in Nepal, as the country moved to a federal and secular republic. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006 and a new Constitution in 2015, in 2017, Nepal successfully held their first parliamentary federal, state and local elections in 17 years. In February 2018, the elected officials took office. This shift to federalism brings new optimism for political stability, however, it also poses

new challenges as governments are clarifying responsibilities for providing human services, developing infrastructure and stimulating economic activity.

Although widespread poverty remains, in recent years, Nepal has made great progress in reducing poverty rates. According to the World Bank, the percentage of the population living below the international poverty line has decreased from 15 to 9 percent in the last 10 years. However, vulnerability remains extremely high, with nearly 32 percent of the population living between USD 1.90 and USD 3.20 per person per day. Climate-related disasters, such as earthquakes and floods, also increase vulnerability. The destruction from the 2015 earthquake, in particular, pushed more than 700,000 people into poverty and worsened overall social conditions.

Our Presence in Nepal



Country Information

Population	29.2 million
Land area	147,181 km ²
Languages of instruction	Nepali
Launch of operations	2000
Room to Read Office	Kathmandu



Educational Landscape

Nepal’s education system has seen great improvements in the past few decades. The government states that expanding educational opportunities is a priority, and a 2016 education reform bill established free and compulsory basic education for Grades 1 to 8. However, there is still much more work to be done, and many students still lack educational access and opportunity.

The World Bank states that more than 159,000 primary school age children are out of school in Nepal, and attendance and dropout rates remain inconsistent. This is partially due to deeply engrained caste divisions, which leaves those in lower castes and other marginalized groups with less access to education. In terms of attendance, UNICEF reports that rates drop from 78 percent of students attending primary school, to only 46 percent attendance once students reach lower secondary school. Many children are forced to drop out of school because they come from impoverished households and must help their families with farming work, or they live long distances from school and the walk is too far to attend class regularly.

For girls, the risk of dropping out is even higher and they are more likely to leave school earlier than boys. Unfortunately, girls’ education is still not seen as a priority in some rural households. Child marriage is also a relatively common practice with an estimated 37 percent of Nepali girls marrying before the age of 18 and 10 percent married by age 15, according to UNICEF.

History and Results

Nepal was our first country of operation in 2000. Prior to becoming Room to Read, in 1998, Co-Founders Dinesh Shrestha and John Wood delivered the first books to a school high in the Himalayas when the organization was known as Books for Nepal. Although we have changed our name and grown significantly, we continue to see much innovation in our Literacy and Girls’ Education Programs in Nepal today.

Over the past 20 years, we have built strong ties with Nepal’s government. In 2015, Nepal was struck by two consecutive earthquakes, which destroyed or severely damaged large parts of the country’s infrastructure, including a reported more than 9,300 schools. Our Room to Read team saw a need for our support, and we immediately joined forces with the government to lead recovery and reconstruction efforts. We focused on Dhading and Nuwakot districts, which had some of the most severe infrastructure damages. Through this work, we completed 60 schools and 646 classrooms, benefited 19,137 children, and trained 1,735 community members.

We have also influenced systems-level change within the country. In 2015, we collaborated with the Ministry of Education to support their National Early Grade Reading Program, in partnership with USAID’s Early Grade Reading Program. This technical assistance project aims to help children nationwide read with fluency and comprehension. Room to Read plays a key leadership role on the government’s technical team and helps develop teaching and learning materials to influence a national approach to Nepali early grade reading instruction. As of 2019, we estimate that the initiative has benefited more than 560,000 students in Grades 1 to 3 across the country.

Our Results in Nepal	
Literacy Program	
New children benefited in 2018	442,172
Children benefited cumulatively	3,000,915
New schools in 2018	3,302
New books distributed	172,740
Books distributed cumulatively	6,920,634
Girls’ Education Program	
New participants in 2018	1,095
Number of participants cumulatively	7,336
New secondary school graduates in 2018	120
Secondary school graduates cumulatively	438

Give with confidence. Room to Read has achieved 13 fourstar ratings from Charity Navigator since 2007, an achievement that less than 1% of charities can claim.

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