School Libraries
Post-Completion Study

SUMMARY REPORT

Room to Read®
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Overview

While most international development projects strive for sustainability, research studies show that sustainability is hard to achieve. For example, only 52 percent of projects in a World Bank study and 11 percent of projects in a USAID study were sustainable after assistance was terminated.

With support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Room to Read conducted a study from 2011-2012 that examined post-completion library projects – school libraries that have graduated from our three years of ongoing support. The study, which took place in Cambodia, Nepal, and South Africa, explored the sustainability of Room to Read libraries and the reasons why some libraries were functioning better than others after our support ended.

Overall, the study showed that Room to Read libraries are sustainable. Across the three countries, we visited 517 post-completion libraries established from 2003-2007 and found that 97 percent were still operational. Qualitative data collection from a sub-sample of libraries in each of the three countries revealed that library training and principal support contributed to library sustainability, usage of the library by early-primary grade pupils was low, and more can be done to involve parents and community members in the library.

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Background

Room to Read’s school libraries are one component of our larger Literacy Program that transforms government primary schools into comprehensive learning environments that enable children to develop the skills and habit of read and become life-long, independent readers. Room to Read establishes libraries in all 10 of our countries by:

- Providing schools with the resources necessary to establish a child-friendly library;
- Enlisting the community to co-invest to ensure long-term sustainability of that library;
- Building the capacity of teachers and librarians to manage the library and conduct reading activities for students;
- Providing three years of ongoing monitoring and support to schools.

Given Room to Read’s systematic monitoring efforts, much is known about the active libraries. However, visits to post-completion libraries are not a formal part of the Literacy Program model, and little is known about these libraries’ operational status. From 2011-12, we launched a two-phase research study in Cambodia, Nepal, and South Africa to learn more about our post-completion libraries. The first phase of the study sought to determine the library management status of a representative sample of post-completion libraries through quantitative data collection. The second phase of the study used qualitative data collection to gain a deeper understanding of the quantitative findings and identify factors that may contribute to library sustainability.
Results

Quantitative Results

As shown in Figure 1, nearly all of the post-completion libraries included in the study were still operational, and two-thirds of libraries were moderately functioning or better. Quantitative data revealed that 35 percent of the libraries visited were well or highly functioning and 32 percent were moderately functioning. Only three percent of the libraries were completely non-functional. These findings indicate that most libraries were sustainable even after Room to Read support had ended. More importantly, the results suggest that many of schools had been able to take ownership of the library project and effectively manage and maintain it for students and teachers.

Figure 1
Library Ratings Overall
Overall (n = 517 Libraries)

35% 32% 30% 3%
HIGHLY OR WELL FUNCTIONING MODERATELY FUNCTIONING POORLY FUNCTIONING NON-FUNCTIONING

Figure 2
Library Ratings by Country

CAMBODIA 208 LIBRARIES
53% 30% 15% 3%
HIGHLY OR WELL FUNCTIONING MODERATELY FUNCTIONING POORLY FUNCTIONING NON-FUNCTIONING

NEPAL 279 LIBRARIES
23% 33% 42% 2%

SOUTH AFRICA 30 LIBRARIES
40% 37% 10% 13%
PERCENTAGE OF LIBRARIES
As shown in Figure 3, libraries established from 2006-2007 were functioning better than libraries established from 2003-2005. This result was found in each of the countries included in the study and suggests that year of establishment makes a difference in the library management status of post-completion libraries. One reason behind this finding may relate to age: as libraries get older, they simply become more difficult to manage and maintain. As libraries get older, they also grow further removed from Room to Read support and assistance. Another reason behind this finding may relate to the evolution of the Literacy Program. From 2003-05, Room to Read only provided library management training to the librarian, and the training only happened at the beginning of the project. We also provided on-site support only during the first year of the project. Beginning in 2006, however, the Room to Read expanded its library support to three years. This included trainings to librarians and other school staff (usually the principal) at least once a year, as well periodic monitoring and support visits by Room to Read staff. Additionally, the staff supporting the libraries gained more experience and, presumably, developed their capacity to implement the program. This evolution may be partly responsible for the higher library ratings of the newer post-completion libraries.

As shown in Figure 4 on the following page, libraries established in primary schools were functioning better than libraries established in secondary schools. This result was found in each of the countries included in the study. These data suggest that primary schools are able to sustain libraries more effectively than secondary schools. One reason for this may relate to pupil and staff interest in the library. For example, pupils in secondary school may be faced with greater academic pressure than pupils in primary school. As a result, secondary school pupils may have less time and interest in visiting the library, leading to less use and poorer library management. Similarly, teachers and staff at secondary schools may feel more pressure to finish the curriculum and prepare their students for exams, which could result in teachers placing less value on the school library. Another reason behind the difference between libraries at primary schools and those at secondary schools may relate to reading materials. It is possible that the materials provided to libraries were better suited for primary schools, thus resulting in greater interest in and use of the library at primary schools.
Trends related to library status and such factors as school location (i.e. urban, semi-urban, and rural) and school enrollment were not consistent across countries.

Qualitative Results

Interviews and focus group discussions with pupils, parents, teachers, and principals from a small sub-sample of post-completion libraries in each country revealed overwhelming support and praise for Room to Read’s program. Respondents felt the library was a valuable part of the school environment and had provided numerous benefits to pupils and teachers, alike. Qualitative data also indicated that stakeholder involvement and support, particularly from the principal and teachers at the school, were critical for library sustainability. This is finding is consistent with the large body of research that identifies school stakeholders as key to education initiatives taking hold and succeeding at a school. Additionally, the data suggest that parent and community involvement was low across all three countries, regardless of the library’s functional status. This finding indicates that more can be done to engage parents and community members with what is happening at the library.

Quotations illustrating each of these findings appear in Textbox 1 on the following page.
Quotations from Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Benefits of the library:
The library has brought honor to me and the school. We have children who like to read and librarians and teachers dedicated to educating children. Not everyone can say that.

- Principal from a school with a highly-functioning library (Cambodia)

The library has helped children develop their reading habits and skills. Pupils at this school want to come to the library to learn and read books. This was not the case before.

- Librarian from a highly-functioning library (Nepal)

Principal and teacher involvement and support:
The school principal has been a big help. He gives me advice and motivates me to do library management work. When there is a new book arrival, he always helps me with coding the books and organizing the book display. He gives me ideas and encourages pupils and teachers to the library. He even created a children's library club that helps me with cleaning the library.

- Librarian from a highly-functioning library (Cambodia)

I have been fully supported by the principal. He often comes to me and gets updates about the library, and he offers advice on how to improve the library and include it as an important instructional component of the school.

- Librarian from a highly-functioning library (Nepal)

We do storytelling and book reading. We also dramatize books and sing...Participation by the pupils is what really makes these activities soar.

- Teacher-librarian from a highly-functioning library (South Africa)

Parent and community involvement:
I would like to support the library more, but I don't know how. The school tells us to make sure that our children take care of the books and bring them back on time. But if there was more that I could do, I would be happy to do it.

- Parent from a school with a highly-functioning library (Cambodia)

The parents that send their children to our school don't have positive attitudes about the school. It has been difficult for me to convince them to use and be involved with the library. They are simply indifferent.

- Principal from a school with a poorly-functioning library (Nepal)

The school has never involved us in helping out with the library. We even thought we were going to be involved but we haven’t.

- Parent from a school with a well-functioning library (South Africa)
Conclusion and Next Steps

Overall, this study shows that Room to Read libraries are sustainable and active even after our support ends. The findings also validate earlier program design decisions and point to areas for growth and improvement. Table 1 (below) summarizes the key findings and the steps Room to Read has taken that align with the findings. Through these and other initiatives, Room to Read hopes to ensure that our libraries promote literacy and the habit of reading among children even after our support ends.

Table 1
Key Findings and Next Steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Finding</th>
<th>Next Step</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our school libraries are sustainable</td>
<td><strong>Build on program model.</strong> Continue to provide children with an opportunity to access books in an environment that promotes reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of support affects library sustainability</td>
<td><strong>Provide three years of monitoring and support to all libraries.</strong> In 2006, we made three years of ongoing monitoring and support standard across all libraries in all Room to Read countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school libraries are more sustainable than secondary school libraries</td>
<td><strong>Focus on establishing school libraries in primary schools.</strong> In 2008, we began to establish libraries almost exclusively in primary schools across all countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals influence library sustainability</td>
<td><strong>Include principals in library trainings.</strong> In 2009, the inclusion of principals in our library training and support package became a standard practice across countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and community involvement in libraries is low</td>
<td><strong>Increase family and community engagement.</strong> In 2013, Room to Read developed guidelines to help schools successfully involve parents and community members in supporting the library. These guidelines identify such activities as engaging with parents and communities from the outset, ensuring schools have a designated committee of stakeholders to coordinate literacy activities, providing tools for parents to support their children with reading, ensuring schools hold literacy events to celebrate literacy in the school and community, and identifying community members to act as liaisons with the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library ratings can be an effective support tool</td>
<td><strong>Use library ratings to guide support to active libraries.</strong> In 2013, we launched a worldwide system for rating active libraries. This system, which was based on the system used to rate post-completion libraries, aims to track the progress of active libraries and help teams with determining how best to support libraries – both in terms of frequency of support visits and type of support provided.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix: Research Design

Research Questions

The School Libraries Post-Completion Study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the library management status of libraries that have graduated from Room to Read’s three years of support?
2. To what extent do such factors as year of establishment, school type, school size, geographic location, Room to Read support, and stakeholder involvement relate to library sustainability?
3. What other factors relate to library sustainability? How do some of these other factors contribute to library success during and after Room to Read’s support ends?
4. What program improvements can Room to Read take to ensure that libraries succeed and sustain themselves after Room to Read support ends?

Methodology

To answer the research questions, Room to Read conducted a two-phase study using quantitative and qualitative methods. The first phase of the study (Phase I) sought to determine the library management status of a representative sample of post-completion libraries. Phase I consisted of quantitative data collection done by external data collectors across a representative sample of post-completion libraries established from 2003–2007, one to four years after Room to Read support for the libraries had ended. Data were collected using a library checklist that includes yes/no response items related to library access, library systems, library usage, library environment, and library management and support.

The second phase of the study (Phase II) sought to gain a deeper understanding of the quantitative findings and identify factors that may contribute to library sustainability. Phase II consisted of qualitative data collection done by a team of external researchers at a sub-sample of purposively selected post-completion libraries that were included in Phase I. Data were collected through the following means:

- **Semi-structured interviews** with librarians, teachers, principals/headmasters, and district education officials.
- **Focus group discussions** with teachers, parents, and pupils.
- **Observations** of the library, language arts period (e.g., Khmer or English class), and school.

The data collection instruments focused on specific areas of interest that prior research and Room to Read’s own experience suggest influence the success and sustainability of education projects in general and library projects in particular. Additionally, the instruments sought to gather information about librarian, teacher, principal, pupil, parent, and district education official perceptions of how the library had benefitted the school and how the library could be improved.
Sampling Strategy

Phase I of the study attempted to generalize library management status across the population of post-completion libraries established from 2003-2007 within countries and also make valid comparisons across years of library establishment. We examined post-completion libraries in one country from each of the three sub-regions in which we currently operate. In South Asia, Nepal was chosen because it had the most post-completion libraries. In Southeast Asia, Cambodia was chosen for similar reasons: it had the oldest (beginning in 2003) and largest number of post-completion libraries in the region. At the time of the study, South Africa was the only country in Africa to have post-completion libraries, thus making it an obvious choice for inclusion.

In Cambodia and Nepal, we decided to collect data from a sample of the post-completion libraries. In Cambodia, this included libraries established between 2003 and 2007. In Nepal, this included libraries established from 2004-2007. Using a 95 percent confidence interval and 10 percent margin of error, Room to Read drew a sample of 208 libraries in Cambodia and 279 libraries in Nepal. Schools in each of these countries were randomly selected by project year. In South Africa, we selected all the eligible post-completion libraries for inclusion in the study. Table 2 (below) summarizes the size of the sample for each country across year of library establishment:

Table 2
Sample Size by Country and Year of Establishment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Year</th>
<th>Cambodia</th>
<th>Nepal</th>
<th>South Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The population of post-completion libraries across all Room to Read countries includes three types (or variants): Separate Reading Rooms, Constructed Reading Rooms, and Mobile Carts. In 2008, however, Room to Read decided to halt establishment of Mobile Carts due to concerns over the effectiveness of the model. As a result, Room to Read decided to exclude Mobile Carts from the scope of the Reading Room Post-Completion Study. At the time of the study, Room to Read’s other two library variants – Classroom and Nodal libraries – had not yet entered into post-completion phase.

4 In Nepal, we decided to collect data only from those projects established in 2004 or later because libraries established prior to 2004 received vastly different levels of support, thus making it difficult to make comparisons or draw any lessons that could be applied to the existing program.
For Phase II of the study, Room to Read employed a purposive case sampling strategy to illustrate the typical processes and features of libraries according to different variables of interest. In each of the three countries picked for this study, 10 libraries were selected from the sample of libraries visited during Phase I of the study. The sample included a combination of highly-functioning libraries, poorly-functioning libraries, and non-functioning libraries to better identify unique characteristics that might contribute to or hinder library sustainability. In each country, the sample was further stratified by geographic/cultural regions, project year (i.e., 2003, 2004, 2006, and 2007), and school size (i.e., small and medium).

At the school level, two classroom teachers and pupils were randomly selected for interviews and focus group discussions. Schools were instructed to invite parents to participate in a focus group discussion on one of the days that data collectors were scheduled to visit the school. Those parents who were present became part of the focus group discussions. The classrooms that were observed at each school were the classrooms of the teachers who were interviewed. Verbal consent was obtained from all interview and focus group participants.

Data Collection and Entry

In each country, Room to Read hired and trained external data collectors for both phases of the study. Phase I data collection took place over a one-month period. Phase II data collection occurred four to six months after Phase I data collection and also lasted approximately one month. Data were compiled and entered by external data entry staff and provided to Room to Read for analysis.

Data Analysis

To determine the library management status of post-completion libraries, Room to Read created a library management index. We created the index by assigning a weighted score to each of the library management indicators and used the sum of these scores to determine an overall library management score for each library. Based on this score, each sample library was assigned one of five library management status ratings (see next page):
### Table 3

**Library Management Status Parameters and Description**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status Rating</th>
<th>Rating Parameters</th>
<th>Rating Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Highly Functioning     | Index Score > 90  | - Those library projects that are exceptional in terms of library access, usage, systems, environment, and support  
                        |                    | - Most, if not all, of the library management indicators are in place                                                                                 |
| Well Functioning       | Index Score > 70, < 90 | - Those libraries that are in very good condition  
                        |                    | - Many of the library management indicators are in place, and those few that are not in place do not affect the operation or usage of the library |
| Moderately Functioning | Index Score > 50, < 70 | - Those libraries that are in satisfactory-to-good condition  
                        |                    | - The majority of the library management indicators are in place, and those that are not in place do not affect the operation or usage of the library |
| Poorly Functioning     | Index Score > 15, < 50 | - Those libraries that are in unsatisfactory condition  
                        |                    | - Many of the library management indicators are NOT in place, and their absence limits how the library operates and is used |
| Non-Functioning        | Index Score < 15  | - Those libraries that are no longer in operation  
                        |                    | - Few, if any, of the library management indicators are in place, and the library is not being used by pupils or teachers at the school at all |