



Room
to
Read

Making room for
CHANGEMAKERS





FOREWORD

Education is the most effective tool for solving the world's greatest challenges, including poverty, climate change, and inequality. When children learn, they create waves of change that extend throughout their families, communities, and future generations.

Room to Read is celebrating the next generation of Changemakers — the girls charting their chosen life paths, helping to create a more gender-equal world—and the remarkable educators, caregivers, and community members who support them.

The series of stories in the report celebrates girls, and their achievements — in their lives — the impact they have made in their own lives and the lives of others.

These stories and thousands of other stories are also an inspiration as we continue to scale our Girls' Education Program, which helps girls cultivate the skills, they need to navigate social and cultural barriers blocking their path to leading fulfilled lives of their choosing.

Our program is one of the longest interventions of its kind, providing support to girls for up to seven years (grades 6-12). This depth of engagement allows girls to build upon and strengthen their life skills as they advance each year, fostering better long-term outcomes. We partner with governments to scale and sustain this model, supporting a new generation of educated young women to become leaders in families and communities.

Join us in celebrating the journey of these extraordinary girls, for in their stories lie the seeds of change, ready to blossom and inspire generations yet to come.

**With hope and determination,
Room to Read**

Making room for



GROWTH



EQUITY & EQUALITY



POSSIBILITIES

QUALITY EDUCATION



DREAMS



LEADERS

“I refused to let go of my right to my education. Regardless of the challenges I may face, I am resolute in my determination to complete my schooling.”

*Sajana, Girls' Education Program Participant,
Tanahun District*



Making room for POSSIBILITIES.

Sajana, Grade 10, serves as the president of the child club in her school. The child clubs in community schools are primarily formed to organize extracurricular activities to provide opportunities to unveil students' hidden potential. Sajana, along with the child club members, is determined to advocate passionately for an improved learning environment for students.

But Sajana's journey was not always on this positive trajectory. A few years ago, she found herself at a crossroads, contemplating giving up on education to provide for herself and her sister due to financial hardships and challenges within her family, particularly with her stepmother.

“My stepmother was unkind to me, she spoke rudely to me and she did not like that I went to school instead of helping out with chores at home,” Sajana explained. The absence of her father, who was out of the country for work, compounded the difficulties she faced.

Reflecting on those challenging times, Sajana acknowledges that she initially questioned the necessity of education. She now dreams of becoming a teacher — one who can support herself and help girls like her.

Sajana emphasizes her commitment to education despite ongoing financial challenges and family threats to withdraw from school due to financial hardship. Instead of becoming disheartened, Sajana applied the skills learned in Room to Read's life skills session, such as creative problem-solving and managing emotions.

“I emphasized the importance of investing in my education to my parents, highlighting the potential long-term benefits for both myself and our family. Similarly, I addressed their concerns about household chores and managing our small farm by carefully organizing my schedule and keeping them informed. Additionally, my social mobilizer played a crucial role, providing support by engaging with my family and ensuring I had someone to confide in.”

Now, in her role as the child club president, here she holds monthly meetings to understand the challenges of the students. She then liaises with the school faculty and management team to make these challenges heard. These challenges have been about increasing awareness against early marriage in the school and also creating a harassment-free school environment.

One notable case is of a 15-year-old girl from her school who eloped due to an unbearable family feud. Through effective and empathetic communication, Sajana persuaded Simran to return to school. She also worked to foster acceptance within the community since love before marriage is taboo. She created a supportive environment for Simran's reintegration into school and continued education.

This is a power of education and life skills, it has the potential to change an individual and hence repel effect on the community.

“I see little Ambika in all the girls I now mentor. I want them to know that they are not alone and that they can achieve anything”

Ambika, Alumna and Social Mobilizer for Tanahun District



Making room for girls to GROW

Since the age of 16, Ambika has been her family's primary income earner, supporting her parents and four younger siblings on her own. She completed her education, too, and ensured her siblings did the same.

Ambika now sees herself as *didi*- an older sister to dozens of girls in Room to Read's Girls' Education Program. As a social mobilizer, Ambika provides one-on-one mentoring and support, helping girls navigate the many challenges of adolescence and complete secondary school.

"When my father stopped working during my eighth-grade year," Ambika reflected, "I knew I had to complete my education to take care of my family."

Ambika's father worked in factories and at construction sites until illness forced him to stay home. As the eldest sibling, Ambika felt a deep sense of responsibility. So, she put her strong academic skills to use, offering tutoring to local families for a fee. Her small business helped meet the family's basic needs and ensured she could continue her studies.

"This was the toughest period of my life," she remembered.

Her secondary school years were grueling and lonely. The obstacles that lined her path to graduation often felt too large and too heavy to overcome.

She was bedridden for a month. Doctors were unable to identify the cause. Her neighbors suggested marriage as a cure. Through it all, Ambika persevered to complete her exams. She enrolled in Room to Read's Girls' Education Program, accessing crucial support and guidance through her social mobilizer, a woman mentor from her community.

"If not for my will to pursue education and break this cycle of misery, I would have given up," Ambika said. "If not for the voice of my own didi, my mentor, echoing in my head, I would have given up on everything."

She also learned essential life skills classes like decision-making, resilience and perseverance — skills that Ambika used to set goals and pursue her dreams of graduating, supporting her family and becoming a mentor to the next generation of young girls in her community.

"Because of the life skills and guidance I received through Room to Read's Girls' Education Program," she said. "I see a little Ambika in all the girls I now mentor. I want them to know they are not alone and that they can achieve anything."



“I am fortunate enough to have gotten the life skills, that changed me from a shy girl to now someone who speaks up for girl’s rights in my community.”

*Rahimat, Alumnae of Girls’ Education Program,
Banke District*



Making room for LEADERS.

Rahimat, a 19-year-old trailblazer, is determined to advocate for girls' rights and education in her community, where cultural norms often discourage girls from accessing education. With unwavering resolve, she is working to change this reality.

When Rahimat was in grade seven, she was initially reserved and shy, hesitant to venture beyond the classroom. To address these challenges, she participated in regular informal meetings, discussions, and individual mentoring sessions designed to help her overcome her shyness and build her communication skills. These sessions provided a safe space for Rahimat to express herself, with her feelings and thoughts always respected.

"I didn't know how to express my thoughts coherently. I wanted to talk to the ward officials about the child marriage situation in my community and demand answers and solutions, but I just couldn't ask them," she recalls.

The impact of these interventions was profound. Rahimat not only developed strong coordination and collaboration skills but also emerged as an inspiring leader.

Through an election process, she became the president of the Khajura village-level child club, where she initiated efforts to address school-related gender issues. Through the club,

"Rahimat has empowered girls in her community to speak out against gender biases and take the lead in demanding their right to education.

Many girls in my community believe their voices won't be heard—and often, that's true. But I know we and our challenges cannot go unseen," Rahimat asserts passionately. Rahimat has also been a vocal advocate against sexual harassment, domestic violence, and early marriage in her community. She has become a role model for hundreds of girls, inspiring them to stand up for their rights. Looking ahead, she dreams of becoming a doctor to address women's health issues in here community.

"Although I always knew my daughter was special, her exceptional leadership skills and articulate expression of her viewpoints have made it evident to others just how extraordinary she truly is," shared Isratul Khan, Rahimat's proud mother.

Her story is one out of many girls and is a testament to the transformative impact that targeted interventions, mentorship, and educational programs can have on the lives of young women.



“I see myself in the
perseverance of the girls I
mentor”.

Megha, Social Mobilizer in Banke District



Making room for quality EDUCATION

Room to Read social mobilizer Megha's mother was still in school when she was born. With a new baby at home, it didn't take long for her mother to leave school forever. Still, she was determined to give Megha a life of possibility and opportunity. She often shared with Megha how challenging her life had been without strong literacy skills.

Megha was raised by her grandmother who could not recognize words or letters. She had grown up around strong women. But she often wondered how strong they could have been had they received an education.

“I used to walk three hours to my school and every time I felt like it was not worth it I would remember my grandmother who always said, 'the most expensive jewelry a woman can have is education.'”

Megha is now a social mobilizer in Banke district, adored by girls who she supports. “I see myself in the perseverance of the girls I mentor.”

Social mobilizers, are a foundational part of Room to Read's Girls' Education Program. Each student is assigned a local woman they can learn foundational life skills like communication, empathy, resiliency and perseverance.

These education advocates not only serve as role models, but also help young girls step outside of their comfort zones to build leadership skills and confidence in their capacity.

“Helping them learn to think critically and getting them out of their shell is a joyful feeling.” shared Megha.

In the communities where Megha works, enrolling a girl in school is not the primary challenge; ensuring they stay and complete their education is. The longer a girl remains in school, the greater her chances of earning a higher wage, leading an independent life, and becoming a catalyst for local change.

To support this, social mobilizers act as a bridge between traditional customs and educational opportunities. During times when pressure to marry or leave school for work intensifies, mentors like Megha in the Girls' Education Program make room for girls to thrive and reach graduation day.



"I am enough, and I refuse to be confined by outdated notions of masculinity. If I love sports, then I shall pursue them with all my heart and soul."

*Sulochana, Girls' Education Program Participant,
Tanahun District*



Making room for DREAMS

On my way to school every day, I pass a playground where children play cricket and football. You can hear the cheers and laughter. It is a beautiful sight, but no girls are playing. I have never seen a girl join in any playground activity. Instead, they fetch water, work in the nearby fields, and stay in the kitchen.

I have always loved sports. The excitement and competition draw me in. But in my community, sports are seen as something only for boys. Playing on the field seemed like an impossible dream. When my friends and I walked near the field, boys would tease and catcall us, making us feel unwelcome. I wanted to start a sports group with my friends, but life got in the way. They had too many responsibilities at home, helping with chores and farming. There was no time for sports.

Just when I felt hopeless, a social mobilizer from Room to Read came to our village. She saw my love for sports and introduced me to Kabaddi training. It was a chance to follow my dream, despite the expectations around me.

I worked hard, training every day before dawn while still doing my household chores. As I improved in Kabaddi, I felt more empowered. I realized that sports also for me.

My mentor's encouragement helped me see that women have the right to pursue their passions in sports.

In life skills sessions, I faced my fears and doubts. Seeing pictures of successful women athletes from around the world inspired me. Their achievements showed me that anyone, regardless of gender, can achieve great things. Now, when I play Kabaddi, I am not just a player. I am a sister who can may be inspire girls who dream of breaking free from societal limits. I have earned my self-reputation and many provinces level award in Kabaddi, and there is more to come.

“Ranighat has a beautiful forest; it gives so much. But if we keep on just taking and not managing the use of the material we extract, the forest might not last.”

*Srijana , Alumna and Chairperson of Ranighat Community
Forest user Group*



Making room for GREENER EARTH

Srijana was born into a modest household as the middle child among five sisters. Growing up, she often heard neighbors pity her family for not having a son to take over family responsibilities. Her two elder sisters were married off without completing their schooling. However, Srijana defied these stereotypes through her hard work. She earned for her family and supported her siblings to ensure they completed their education.

Today, Srijana is the chairperson of the Ranighat Community Forest User Group, where she supports sustainable harvesting practices and works closely with both the community and government to prevent encroachment.

“Ranighat has a beautiful forest; it gives us so much. But if we keep taking without managing the materials we extract, the forest might not survive,” says Srijana, an alumna of the Girls’ Education Program from Banke District.

Collaborating with Kohalpur Palika, Srijana is also involved in creating a park that will serve as both a rejuvenation space for the community and a hub for eco-tourism.

“I worked on budget advocacy for the park, which involved building relationships, engaging with the local government, and creating proposals. I’m using the communication and leadership skills I gained in my life skills classroom,” she explains.

Srijana vividly recalls the lessons on leadership and communication, which transformed her from a shy, hesitant girl into a confident young woman.

“None of this would have been possible without education or life skills,” she asserts. “As a shy child, I struggled to speak in front of people. But through different activities in life skills training, I learned to analyze, ask questions, and express myself without fear.”

This newfound confidence inspired her to run for the position of secretary in the Ranighat Community Forest User Group. Now, as she watches the newly planted trees and flowers grow, Srijana envisions a vibrant community space that will benefit everyone. She believes the park will not only be a place for relaxation but also a source of income through eco-tourism, fostering a more dynamic and economically resilient community.

“We always wanted a son, but my daughters have proven to be just as capable, if not more, than any son I could have had,” says her mother, Chhot Kumari Tharu.

"I envision a healthy learning environment for my students, one that makes them joyful at the thought of coming to school each day."

Ayushma , Alumna and Teacher at Suryodaya School in Banke district



Making room for child-friendly LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

“Children require our unwavering support, and it is our responsibility to provide them with a nurturing environment for learning and growth in this world.”

Ayushma is currently pursuing her undergraduate studies in education, and she teaches English to students ranging from grades 1 to 5 at the same school. Revered by her students for her gentle and amiable demeanor, Ayushma captivates their hearts by reading stories, fostering a love for books, and engaging them warmly while imparting language skills.

I envision a healthy learning environment for my students, one that makes them joyful at the thought of coming to school each day,” shares Ayushma, emphasizing the importance of creating a positive and conducive atmosphere for education.

During her secondary school years, Ayushma aspired to become a teacher despite grappling with a fear of public speaking and acknowledging her shy and introverted nature. Unknown to her, she possessed innate qualities of creativity and empathy. It was during life skills sessions that she honed the skills of effective communication, learning to speak and listen adeptly, and building relationships with her peers.

Reflecting on her career aspirations, Ayushma openly shared her ambition to become a teacher, coupled with the financial challenges and perceived skill gaps hindering her path. With the support of her Room to Read social mobilizer, she found her voice, learning the power of expressing one's values and perspectives in both classroom and community settings.

Today, Ayushma is living her dream, defying the fears she once harbored.

“Ayushma is a critical thinker and exudes self-confidence. Though she may not speak often, when she does, it is purposeful, contributing significantly to informal discussions and classroom conversations,” remarks Rabindra Regmi, the principal of Suryodaya School, who extended the opportunity to Ayushma to become a teacher at the very school where she now excels.

“ You do not have to be fearful when you can be fearless.”

– *Diksha, Girls' Education Program Participant, Banke District*



Making room for DIVERSITY

In a world that often measures beauty by external appearances, one young girl named Diksha discovered the true essence of beauty and embarked on a path to empower herself and others. This is the inspiring story of Diksha, a Room to Read Girls' Education Program student from Nepal who learned to see her own beauty and went on to challenge unjust traditions and strive for gender equality in her community.

Diksha's skin was a darker shade than the people in her village. Everyone saw her as different. Kids teased her. Her mother pressured her to use whitening cream. Diksha would look into the mirror and ask herself, "How can I feel so beautiful on the inside, but not see it on the outside?"

Diksha's older sister was angered by the discrimination in her family. She took Diksha to a field of flowers. "Look," she said. "You are just another color in the midst of all these blossoms." In that moment, Diksha understood that she was beautiful, inside and out.

One day, Diksha noticed her friend, Sita, was not at school. Sita's family believed in a tradition that prohibited girls from going to school when they were menstruating, and forced Sita to sleep in the animal shed when she had her period. Diksha knew no girl should ever be made to feel ashamed of her body, so she took her Room to Read life

skills notebook and went to visit Sita's grandmother. It was unusual for a young person to confront an elder, but Diksha knew it was the right thing to do.

Diksha's journey from self-doubt to self-acceptance, from witnessing injustice to taking action with support and collaboration from family and friends, is a testament to the transformative power of developing self-confidence and using it to uplift others. Diksha plans to work for girls' equality when she is older. Her determination to fight against inequities serves as an inspiration for us all to stand up for what is right and work towards a more inclusive and just society.

Founded in 2000 on the belief that World Change Starts with Educated Children®. Room to Read innovative model focuses on deep, systemic transformation in historically low-income communities 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. We work in collaboration with local communities, partner organizations, and governments to develop literacy skills and a habit of reading among primary school children and ensure girls can complete secondary school with the skills necessary to negotiate key life decisions.

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