Thanks to Education
STORIES OF IMPACT
As Room to Read works steadily toward its mission of solving the critical crisis in global education, we see profound changes taking place every day in the schools and communities we partner with—changes captured in stories told by students and teachers, families and communities. It’s their stories we want to celebrate and share with you.
Each person’s story is different, though they illustrate one common goal: to give thanks to education for the role it has played in shaping their lives.

As you read their stories, we hope you will reflect upon your own story of how education has shaped your life and we invite you celebrate with us as we continue on our path to creating a better world—thanks to education.
Thanks to Education
MY STUDENTS ARE PREPARED FOR THE NEXT GRADE

“To my surprise, the students immediately showed interest in the activities. They became involved in the whole lesson even though I was not yet accustomed to this new way of teaching.”

The Challenge:
Less than 50% of first graders in Cambodia are expected to complete their primary education.

Results: Cambodia
Second grade students in Room to Read’s literacy program read over 2x more than second graders in comparison schools in 2014.

Results: Global
In 2014, Room to Read provided professional development to 10,000 teachers and staff.
I asked their parents to try another school but they were insistent. Honestly, I was surprised. This never happened before I took Room to Read’s teacher training program.

I was already a seasoned teacher. I had previously practiced many teaching methodologies under the guidance of Cambodia’s Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. And I had attended training programs at several other nonprofit organizations. But Room to Read’s program is different.

In fact, the first time I participated in a training, I thought Room to Read’s teaching strategy was complicated, putting additional pressure on teachers. And the Khmer-language teaching sequences demanded more time and effort to prepare. I also felt I already had enough experience to teach first-grade students. So I asked myself, why would I accept such hard work in return for the same wage?

When I finished the first course, I assumed there must be a good reason for Room to Read to propose this new teaching strategy. So I rolled up my sleeves, read the teacher’s guide book, prepared a new lesson plan, and started using the new techniques.

To my surprise, the students immediately showed interest in the activities. They became involved in the whole lesson even though I was not yet accustomed to this new way of teaching.

A week later, a member of Room to Read’s technical support staff observed me in my classroom. I asked her about my teaching and my students’ involvement. She was very appreciative of some of my lessons and demonstrated how best to teach others that I found difficult.

At three months, I saw significant changes in my students’ behaviors. Their letter recognition skills improved dramatically and by the second semester they started to read simple words better than I had seen from students I previously taught.

Over the next two years I continued to attend Room to Read’s teacher training. My favorite part has been learning new teaching techniques and sharing my experiences with my colleagues.

Now I find that students enjoy their classes from day one. First graders are learning how to hold pencils, draw different shapes, and color in the Room to Read activity books. Whereas I used to write words on the blackboard and ask students to repeat them, now I apply phonological awareness to expand their vocabulary and reading comprehension.

I am very happy that my teaching has also been acknowledged by parents and other teachers. My colleague from second grade has said my students come into her class with outstanding reading and writing skills. And many higher-grade teachers say their students are easier to teach because they come with a strong foundation in literacy.

This year I have a big class—46 students who are eager to learn how to read and write!
Thanks to Education
I CAN CHANGE MY FAMILY’S DESTINY FOR THE BETTER

THE CHALLENGE:

62 MILLION
GIRLS AROUND THE WORLD ARE NOT IN SCHOOL

RESULTS: VIETNAM

84% OF PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF GIRLS IN THE GIRLS’ EDUCATION PROGRAM ATTENDED MEETINGS IN 2014

RESULTS: GLOBAL

95% OF GIRLS’ EDUCATION PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS WHO REMAINED IN SCHOOL ADVANCED TO THE NEXT GRADE IN 2014
By the time I was 13 years old I was a student, a sister, a father and a mother. My responsibilities began when my mother was diagnosed with cancer. My family has been torn apart ever since.

Every day I woke up at 3 a.m. to do my homework and the housework. Then I rode my bike for one and a half hours to school. After school, my siblings and I went fishing for our dinner.

My father had to leave our home in Long An Province for Ho Chi Minh City, which is two hours away, to take care of my mother while she was in the hospital. He worked in the city to pay the hospital bills, then he came home once a week to give us money and see how we were doing.

To lessen the burden on him, the temple in my community offered to help raise my older brother. I became responsible for my two younger siblings. A year and a half later my mother died and my family fell into debt.

Being responsible for the whole family is hard. Sometimes I feel really exhausted, but I know my parents put their hopes in me. I have to be strong. I say that sometimes to my siblings when we cry and miss our parents: “We have to be strong.”

That’s why I want to be in school, surrounded by my friends and teachers. Focusing on my schoolwork has helped me worry less about our living situation. Above all, I want one day to change my family’s destiny. My father is my role model and my brother is my hero. Their silent sacrifices are my huge motivation for studying and getting an education.

Despite my father working far away, he never missed my school’s parent meetings. He wanted to make sure we study hard and do well. He used to tell us, “We don’t own land that I can leave you when you grow up. The only thing I can give you is an education.”

Education is not just something you do at school. You can learn wherever you are. I learned from my father and brother about the power of love and the strength of sacrifice for a brighter destiny. Even though I lost my mother, I feel lucky that I have a happy family.

I’m grateful to Room to Read for teaching me the life skills to help me become more confident and more open-minded about making friends. Now I have many friends in school and Room to Read is my best companion on my educational journey.

Even though my family still struggles, our life is better, thanks to the support we received from teachers, Room to Read and the community. We have overcome a lot of difficulties together. Now we can stay together.

This summer I passed the university entrance exam and I’m now studying Human Resources at the University of Labor and Social Affairs in Ho Chi Minh City. If I hadn’t gone to school, I would never have been able to imagine a long-term plan for myself and my family. The more I studied, the more I understood how to improve our situation.

Education has changed my awareness. I strongly believe education will help me create a brighter future for my family.

[Editor’s Note: You may remember that Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nicholas Kristof featured Phung in his New York Times columns in 2011 and 2014.]
Thanks to Education
I can teach girls the skills they need to make important life decisions

The Challenge:
48% of lower secondary school age girls in India are out of school

Results: India
100% of girls’ education program participants who received mentoring in 2014 stayed in school

Results: Global
Girls who participated in Room to Read’s Life Skills education had a 14% lower drop out rate than non-participants in 2014
Faiza

NEW DELHI | INDIA | SOCIAL MOBILIZER

When I was five my father died. With four children to raise, my mother had no time to mourn. She worked hard to feed my three sisters and me, and to send us to school.

I missed her presence at home. There was no one to guide me into adolescence.

Today, thanks to the education my mother ensured I received, I am a social mobilizer for Room to Read’s Girls’ Education Program, which guides girls in difficult circumstances through secondary education. I act as a mentor, role model and advocate to girls just like I was, providing them with the emotional support and life skills training they need to help them make important life decisions.

Every week I go into the slums of New Delhi to meet the families of girls who might benefit from our program. I have many positive experiences that make me tremendously proud. I’ve noticed that more girls can articulate their opinions confidently. Instead of being passive members of the family who are simply told what to do, they are becoming confident individuals who are active participants in family discussions—and in many cases even the change makers.

In talking with my students I also discovered that they discuss most of the topics they learn in our life skills training with their parents, siblings and neighbors. This means our Girls’ Education Program is reaching entire communities, which makes it all the more worthwhile.

For example, a student told me this inspiring story: one of her relatives asked her parents for a loan to marry off his 14-year-old daughter. Our student knew that, according to Indian law, the earliest allowable age is 18. So she and her brother persuaded their father not to make the loan.

Then the truly amazing part happened. The siblings explained to their relative the importance of letting girls get an education rather than marry early—and he listened! Their efforts stopped the marriage and the girl continues to attend school.

This means that what we teach our students—about human rights, about girls’ rights and girls’ education—goes beyond our students. We are affecting mindsets and how our communities treat women.

“INSTEAD OF BEING PASSIVE MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY WHO ARE SIMPLY TOLD WHAT TO DO, THE GIRLS BECOME CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN FAMILY DISCUSSIONS—AND IN MANY CASES EVEN THE CHANGE MAKERS.”
Thanks to Education

I LOVE SCHOOL
AND REFUSE TO PLAY SOCCER
WHEN I SHOULD BE IN CLASS!

THE CHALLENGE:

ONLY 53%
OF STUDENTS IN ZAMBIA COMPLETE PRIMARY SCHOOL

RESULTS: ZAMBIA

OVER 40,000
CHILDREN BENEFITED FROM NEW SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN 2014 AND 2015

RESULTS: GLOBAL

9,500,000
BOOKS WERE CHECKED OUT IN 2014 FROM ROOM TO READ LIBRARIES

“I WOULD PREPARE SIMPLE STORIES AND SHARE WITH THE CLASS EVERY DAY, AND THIS SO IGNITED MILIMO’S PASSION FOR STORYTELLING THAT HE ENDED UP BEING THE FIRST ONE TO GET TO SCHOOL EVERY MORNING JUST SO HE COULD LISTEN TO ME TELL A STORY.”
Milimo

CHOMA DISTRICT | ZAMBIA | FIRST-GRADE STUDENT

There’s no denying the proud smile of nine-year-old Milimo as he checks out his first book from the new library at Batoka Primary School.

He has been anticipating this moment since his teacher, Ms. Muwemba, promised him he could take a book home if he kept coming to class.

“My favorite book is called Ncinzi cili mucibbokesi [What is in the Box?]” Milimo says as he takes the book from the shelf. “It’s about a box full of rats and everyone is wondering what’s inside. It’s very funny!”

There was a time when Milimo only came to class once a week. He would wake up in the morning when his mother called, but then he’d run off with his friends in the village to play soccer. And he wasn’t the only one. Ms. Muwemba had just started her teaching job and she was frustrated by how few students came to her class or showed an interest in learning.

Teaching became easier after Ms. Muwemba took Room to Read’s teacher training workshops that spring. “I was able to plan my lessons in advance, which made it easier for me to plan for pupils like Milimo,” she said. “I could take the time to make him comfortable enough to be hungry to learn.”

After that Ms. Muwemba noticed in Milimo a potential for learning she hadn’t seen before. She started encouraging him to come back the next day and the next. “Little by little he started showing up for class every morning,” she said.

Ms. Muwemba even came up with fun ways to encourage Milimo to stay in school. One day she promised to let him check out his favorite book from the new library Room to Read had just established with the help of the community.

“Even before then, I would prepare simple stories to share with the class every day,” she said. “This so ignited Milimo’s passion for storytelling that he ended up being the first one to get to school every morning just so he could listen to me tell a story.”

What came next surprised everyone. “Milimo’s grades at the end of the first term were not good at all, but by the second term Milimo made such an improvement that even the head teacher was and still is amazed at his performance!” said Ms. Muwemba, adding that Milimo is now intent on becoming a teacher.

“The boy you have just met checking out his first book in the library is nowhere close to the boy I met in first term.”

And what does Milimo, now proudly holding the first book he’s ever checked out of a library, have to say about it all?

“Thanks to education I am able to love school and I refuse to play soccer when I should be in class!” he says with a smile.
Thanks to Education
THE EARTHQUAKE DID NOT TAKE AWAY OUR HOPE

THE CHALLENGE:
35,000 CLASSROOMS WERE DESTROYED AND 15,000 WERE DAMAGED ACROSS NEPAL IN THE 2015 EARTHQUAKES

RESULTS: NEPAL
ONLY 7% OF THE 399 ROOM TO READ-BUILT CLASSROOMS LOCATED IN THE EARTHQUAKE IMPACT DISTRICTS SUSTAINED MAJOR DAMAGE

RESULTS: GLOBAL
100% OF ROOM TO READ’S INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN 2014 WERE COMPLETED WITH COMMUNITY CO-INVESTMENT
As the land trembled beneath my feet, people started running.

In a few seconds the house in front of me collapsed, releasing a plume of smoke in the air. I thought the building I was standing near would bury me. I cannot express how horrifying this was. When the ground stopped shaking, the streets filled with chaos. Some of us tried to get home to see our families. Others of us ran into the open spaces, away from anything still standing.

It was a Saturday when the earthquake struck Nepal. When I got home, I found my house, which I had grown up in, flattened to the ground. Thankfully, my family was not hurt. We went through the ruins of our house to salvage anything we could—ornaments, important documents, and tin sheets that we could reuse. All the while I thought about my school, fearing it too was destroyed.

I hurried through the chaotic streets to see the school where I had spent so many years of my life, first as a student, then as a teacher and now as a librarian. I braced myself for the worst.

All my efforts to prepare myself were useless. My beloved school, which I had left intact yesterday, was gone. In its place was a pile of dust-covered desks and rocks. The blackboard where I had written yesterday’s lecture had a gaping hole down the middle, as if it had opened up and swallowed the lesson. As I wandered through the rubble I was overcome by a thousand questions: How will we overcome this? What will happen to our students and their futures?

To my surprise and utter joy, our library was still intact. My community had built it just last year with Room to Read’s support. I was now witnessing the profound difference this makes: the library was practically the only building left standing.

I thought back to when we inaugurated the library. It was one of the happiest moments at our school and our entire community had come together to celebrate. I was overjoyed to see the change in my students—not only were they excited to spend time in the bright room filled with colorful books, but the library was developing in them the habit of reading. Parents were also drawn to the library where they would check out books and read the newspapers.

Now we all came together again—this time to clear the rubble that was once our school. When we started our first school session a month later, following the government’s announcement, many students came. We spent the first few weeks under the open sky doing fun activities—singing, dancing and storytelling to assuage our students’ fears of the aftershocks.

With the support of the District Education Office and help from the community, we soon built a temporary learning center out of tin sheets. This gave our students a place to study and reconnect with the school. The additional books Room to Read distributed to all the affected schools were a big help too, since many of my students had lost theirs in the earthquake.

Now that several months have passed, I can say that we have seen hard times and we have overcome them. Room to Read has been instrumental in this, visiting us regularly to provide support and counseling. We had to stop our literacy instruction due to a lack of classrooms, but we are hopeful that we will be able to resume it once we get the support we need to rebuild our school.

We have lost many things but not our dreams. Thanks to education, the earthquake took away our school but not our resolve.
Thanks to Education:

I CAN USE MY SKILLS TO ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO READ

“THIS WAS A CHANCE FOR ME TO GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY I GREW UP IN AND TO HELP MAKE LEARNING FUN FOR CHILDREN.”

THE CHALLENGE:

10,000,000 STUDENTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA DROP OUT OF PRIMARY SCHOOL EACH YEAR

RESULTS: SOUTH AFRICA

65% OF STUDENTS IN ROOM TO READ SCHOOLS CHECKED OUT BOOKS FROM THEIR LIBRARIES IN 2014

RESULTS: GLOBAL

IN 2014, ROOM TO READ PROVIDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING FOR LIBRARIANS AND OTHER SCHOOL STAFF IN OVER 4,200 LIBRARIES
Inside, boys and girls dressed in maroon uniforms sit around 24-year-old Thabang, who is reading from a large, colorful book. His voice drops and the students watch wide-eyed as his words take an ominous turn. Suddenly his expression snaps into a smile and they break into laughter again. They love it when he brings a story to life.

Thabang had just returned home from his studies in Pretoria when he learned that his former primary school was looking for a volunteer to help manage its library, one it had established with Room to Read’s support. The teachers were too busy to take full advantage of the library and Thabang jumped at the opportunity to help out. To him this was “a chance for me to give back to the community I grew up in and to help make learning fun for children.”

To prepare Thabang for the role, Room to Read’s Library Management Facilitator Nomonde Timakwa trained him in essential library duties such as book processing, classification and leveling; shelving; and book checkout. From the start Thabang was creative and passionate about his new responsibilities.

For instance, he began changing the displays every second day and he identified the best books for reading aloud. Thabang also started a reading club for the students and even came up with his own program.

“Every week he reads a story to the first and second graders,” said Nomonde. “He understands it’s not just reading, it’s a kind of dramatizing that makes the children curious to learn more. They love it when he reads to them.”

With Thabang’s help, the Redibone library plays a vital role in the community. “He has been a great inspiration, not just to the students but to the teachers and the volunteers,” Nomonde said. “He has really embraced his role. We are so happy to have him.”

Not surprisingly, one of Thabang’s greatest rewards has been encouraging the children of Redibone to read.

“I’m happy to wake up each morning knowing there are kids who look forward to coming to school just to access the library. They are very motivated to read and I am just here to ensure they have everything they need to excel,” he said. “I’m also proud they look up to me.” Thabang has high expectations for the children, too. “I know they will make this community a better place.”

As a child who loved to read and learn, Thabang knows firsthand the power of learning. “I believe that with Room to Read’s help, the rate of school dropouts will significantly decrease—and that, in turn, will benefit the entire community.”
Thanks to Education

I can create books to inspire many generations

The challenge:

Only 0.5% of homes in poor areas of Laos have books

Results: Laos

144 participants have attended author and illustrator trainings

Results: Global

>1,100 original local language children's books have been published by Room to Read across Asia and Africa.
Nivong Sengsakoun
CHANTHABOULY DISTRICT | LAOS | CHILDREN’S BOOK AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

When I was a child, my mother read to me every night from the only two Japanese children’s books translated into Lao. They took me to another world. I was amazed at how someone could write and draw such impressive stories.

One book, *Tale of a Strange Planet*, always inspired me. I would see the illustrations in my head—they so fascinated me! I begged my mother to read the stories every night and she agreed, but only if I finished my homework.

I soon fell in love with books. I was even inspired to draw and write stories for myself. My father taught me easy techniques so could I draw characters. At the time I never shared my stories with anyone, but sometimes I would think, “One day, you will have your book published!”

I come from a rural village 40 minutes outside Vientiane, the capital of Laos. My mother is a primary school teacher and my father is a farmer, though he once dreamed of becoming an artist. They were happy I went on to higher education, which is not common in the rural villages of Laos, and they were supportive of my desire to study art.

In 2005 I was in my third year of art school when I came across a Room to Read advertisement. They were recruiting illustrators for a workshop on children’s books. On a whim, I decided to sign up. Little did I know the impact this would have on my life.

While art school taught me to produce “serious, officially acceptable drawings,” children’s book illustration was not on the curriculum. People see them as cartoons, not as something that requires skill.

But in the workshop I learned otherwise. **You need skill and creativity but you also need the kid in you to understand what it is about a book that inspires a child.**

That’s what Room to Read’s Literacy Program and their book publishing workshops support: creating children’s books that can inspire a child’s imagination and desire to read—just like *Tale of a Strange Planet* inspired me.

I have been growing as an author and children’s book illustrator ever since I began collaborating with Room to Read. Each year the workshops are new, with experts from different countries teaching us new styles and techniques. I’ve now participated in 10 workshops as an illustrator, writer and consultant; and I’ve published over 10 children’s books with Room to Read. It has been so mind-opening.

My education has never ended. I continue to discover new ways of creating children’s books using techniques I never would have learned in art school or anywhere else in Laos. Thanks to education, I can create books that will inspire many generations of children to come.

“MY EDUCATION HAS NEVER ENDED. I CONTINUE TO DISCOVER NEW WAYS OF CREATING CHILDREN’S BOOKS USING TECHNIQUES I NEVER WOULD HAVE LEARNED IN ART SCHOOL OR ANYWHERE ELSE IN LAOS.”
Thanks to Education
WE CAN HELP
OUR CHILDREN
REACH THEIR DREAMS

“I KNOW HOW IT HURTS WHEN YOU HAVE TO STOP YOUR
EDUCATION. WHEN I SAW THE TEARS IN AMBIA’S EYES I
WAS DETERMINED TO DO SOMETHING FOR HER.”

THE CHALLENGE:
NEARLY 2/3
OF ALL ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN
BANGLADESH ARE MARRIED

RESULTS: BANGLADESH
0% OF GIRLS’ EDUCATION
PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS
DROPPED OUT IN 2014

RESULTS: GLOBAL
OVER 1,600 GIRLS HAVE GRADUATED FROM THE
GIRLS’ EDUCATION PROGRAM

73% OF THESE GRADUATES
CONTINUED TO
TERTIARY EDUCATION
Three years ago my second-eldest daughter told me her friend Ambia had not been in school for a month. I knew Ambia well and asked the reason for her absence, but my daughter didn’t know. So I decided to find out for myself.

I walked to Ambia’s home where I found her doing the cooking and other chores. When I asked why she had stopped going to school, she said her father, who worked as a mason, was ill and couldn’t bear her school costs. Suddenly tears appeared in her eyes. “My dream was to become a nurse to help my community and my family, but now that dream is gone.”

Ambia’s sadness reminded me of a time two years earlier when my husband, who is a farmer, and I had been struggling to keep our three eldest daughters in school. One day, a woman named Lovely Khatun came to our door. She was from the Girls’ Education Program at Room to Read. I thought she was going to offer financial help, but Lovely, who is the social mobilizer for our district, approached our problem in a way that surprised me. She met with the leaders of our village and asked them to help my family so that my daughters could continue their studies.

Here’s how Lovely explained her novel approach: “If Room to Read bears your daughters’ educational expenses you will be dependent upon external support. But if your community can help bear the expenses of its own members, that is the best solution.” I am happy to say my community has been able to help.

Ambia also reminded me of myself as a child. My father had arranged my marriage when I was in sixth grade and afterward I could not continue my studies. So I know how it hurts when you have to stop your education.

When Ambia passed the Secondary School Certificate exam she ran to my house with a packet of sweets, her eyes filled with tears of joy. “Thanks to you I’ve taken a step toward my dream!” She has now transitioned to the 11th grade and I know that one day she will become a nurse and serve her community.

I dream of a world where all children can continue their education and collectively bring our society to a better place. I now know that as a community, we can come together to do this. Thanks to education we can help our children reach their dreams.

“I DREAM OF A WORLD WHERE ALL CHILDREN CAN CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVELY BRING OUR SOCIETY TO A BETTER PLACE.”
Thanks to Education

I WOHN'T TAKE 'NO' FOR AN ANSWER

"THE CHALLENGE WAS THAT MY COMMUNITY PLACED NO VALUE ON EDUCATION."

THE CHALLENGE:

60% OF SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH CENTRAL PROVINCE OF SRI LANKA HAVE POOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES

RESULTS: SRI LANKA

ROOM TO READ HAS PARTNERED WITH

OVER 1,690 SCHOOLS ACROSS SRI LANKA

RESULTS: GLOBAL

ROOM TO READ HAS PARTNERED WITH

OVER 17,000 SCHOOLS ACROSS ASIA AND AFRICA
J. Wijitha Jayasinghe

ANURADHAPURA DISTRICT   |   SRI LANKA   |   PRINCIPAL

With no access to books or motivated teachers, and lacking in the most basic educational resources, my school was once one of the most neglected, low-performing schools in the district.

I knew I had to do something. I could not let our students grow up without even being able to read a book.

Adiranigama is one of the poorest villages in the district, with many people working on farms. This was the primary reason for the school's neglect. I also come from a poor community but I was lucky. My parents helped me see how much education could change my life.

In fact, it is thanks to education that I have become a leader who is fearless about fighting for a change in my community so that the children in my village can learn.

One day, about three years ago, I was in a meeting with educational officers and principals from the district when I heard about Room to Read's community-based approach to education. I was inspired by their vision that puts schools in a much more empowered position.

I saw immediately how our school could benefit from Room to Read's Literacy Program. However, Room to Read required that I get my community's support. The challenge was that my community placed no value on education, which was the main reason for our low scores. What could I do?

I had a few restless nights pondering this dilemma. Then one morning I woke up, knowing exactly what I had to do: First I would gain the support of my teachers and they would help me mobilize the rest of the community. The next day I drove my motorbike to Mrs. Perera's house, one of the teachers I thought would be on board. She was far from encouraging.

"There are too many problems and there will be many more to come," she said.

But I was not about to take “no” for an answer. “Every problem has a solution," I told her. "We have to start somewhere. I can feel it in my heart. It’s the right thing to do!"

And that is how I got my first advocate. Together we brought on more teachers who helped get the students involved. I spent my days visiting parents to encourage them to send their children to school. Most of them preferred their children stay home to help with the housework or earn additional income for the family. They struggled daily with poverty; that was their reality. But I persevered. I showed them how, as with my own past, education would help their family and our community develop and thrive.

I am proud to say that one year later I returned to Room to Read with my community behind me. When Room to Read agreed to lend us their support we were elated. And one year after Room to Read’s arrival, Sri Parakum Primary School went from being an empty school with hardly any educational resources to a bright learning environment filled with children, books, supplies and a library! We have well-trained teachers and learning materials that are actually working. Children who could barely read a word in Sinhala are now reading full sentences.

Room to Read’s Literacy Program has helped us build a strong foundation for the school. It has not only motivated parents to send their children to school, but it’s also allowed them to see what happens when a community comes together to bring its children out of poverty.

My hope is that our school will encourage other school leaders to fight for a child’s education. With Room to Read’s support, we were able to face the challenges head on. We still have a long way to go, but it has been an amazing year. So I thank education, which has given me my strong willpower to succeed and never take "no" for an answer.
Thanks to Education
I see a future for the girls in my community

"They have seen that a girl is not just marriage material. She has an equal right to education."

The Challenge:
More than 1/5 of illiterate girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are married by age 15

Results: Tanzania
98% of girls’ education program participants who stayed in school advanced to the next grade in 2014

Results: Global
>31,000 girls have benefited from the girls’ education program across Asia and Africa
It started when I realized girls were for the most part considered useless in my community. They were viewed solely as marriage material that only benefit their husbands’ families. 

Sending a girl to school was considered a waste of time and resources. My female classmates would miss two or three days of school a week to herd cattle and milk cows at home. And the pregnancy rate at my school was high since many girls were forced to marry while they were still in school.

It was an exciting moment for me the day I saw the advertisement for a Program Associate in Room to Read’s Girls’ Education Program. I was very impressed with their work supporting and guiding girls through secondary school.

That was three years ago. I’m now a Program Officer in the Tanzania office in Dar es Salaam. I’m very happy to be able to help the girls in my community stay in school and complete their secondary education with the life skills they need to negotiate the important decisions in their lives.

In my job I prepare budgets, implement program activities, and make sure the social mobilizers—or mentors—have the necessary skills and training to effectively do their job.

I also identify gaps, provide capacity building, and train community leaders to educate others about the importance of girls’ education, because Room to Read cannot educate a girl alone without parental involvement and community support.

Since I began working here, I have already seen a dramatic change in my community. They are starting to put more importance on girls’ education and parents are now sending their daughters to school. They have seen that a girl is not just marriage material. She has an equal right to education.

Education is everything to me. Thanks to education, I was able to become the person I am today. And thanks to Room to Read I can use my education to help the girls in my community overcome the obstacles that hinder their own access to education.

Soon we will be witnessing girls in the community say, “Thanks to education, I am what I am today—a success!”