

Our Work in Bangladesh



56%
of children don't complete primary school.



Our Presence in Bangladesh



Country Information

Population	159 million
Land area	147,600 km ²
Languages of instruction	Bengali
Launch of operations	2008
Room to Read offices	Dhaka

Country Overview

Bangladesh became a nation in 1971 after a bloody war of independence that separated it from Pakistan. In the years following the war, natural disasters, famines, political turmoil, and military coups plagued the fledgling country. In 1991, Bangladesh established a system of parliamentary democracy, which has helped bring relative stability and economic progress to the country. Despite these advancements, Bangladesh continues to face many challenges today.

Home to 159 million residents, Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. While poverty is in decline, 31.5 percent of the population still lives below the poverty line and the country remains 142nd out of 179 countries on the Human Development Index. Many children between the ages of 5 and 15 are engaged in child labor to help contribute to family incomes, which makes it difficult for them to attend school. In part due to this reality, Bangladesh has one of the lowest adult literacy rates in Southeast Asia.

Educational Landscape

The government of Bangladesh has made primary education a high priority since passing the Primary



Education Compulsory Act in 1990, which made education through Grade 5 mandatory and free for all children. Nonetheless, the country’s education system is still lacking in quality and accessibility. Bangladesh has one of the largest primary education systems in the world, with an estimated 18 million primary school aged children. The student to teacher ratio in government primary schools is 59:1 and students only attend class for four hours per day, creating a challenging environment for children and teachers alike. Access to resources is also a problem, with no formal library system in schools.

School completion rates and academic achievement in Bangladesh remain low, with 56 percent of all students dropping out before secondary school. Just over 25 percent of students achieve the expected minimum competencies of primary school by age 11.

As in many other developing countries, educational access is particularly poor in rural areas, where schools are scarce and children are expected to work to contribute to the family income. This divide is reflected in the stark contrast between literacy rates in rural and urban areas—a nearly 30 percent difference.

Girls in Bangladesh are enrolled in school at equal or higher numbers than boys through Grade 5, and are performing better. Unfortunately, female dropout rates skyrocket at the secondary level with attendance decreasing by roughly 18 percent for girls ages 13-17. The barriers to education increase dramatically for Bangladeshi girls during this time period, and include risks associated with leaving the home unaccompanied, expectations to contribute to the household, and pressures to marry early. Between 2005 and 2013, 29 percent of girls in Bangladesh were married before the age of 15, and 65 percent of

girls were married before the age of 18. There is little opportunity for girls to develop relevant life skills within schools, limiting their potential for success in secondary school and their participation in society. There are 1.5 million girls out of school in Bangladesh, most of whom have dropped out.

For girls in Bangladesh, the barriers to education are even greater than those of their male peers, with cultural norms and early marriage often preventing young women from fulfilling their academic potential.

History and Results

Room to Read Bangladesh was officially established in 2008, and program operations launched one year later. Our work has focused in rural areas—particularly the sandbar islands of the Sirajganj District, the low-lying terrain of the Brahmanbaria district, and the remote plains of the Natore District. We have made great strides in these districts, and have forged strong relationships with the local communities while meeting a great need for support for primary school students and for girls battling long-standing cultural barriers.

In 2015, we expanded our programs beyond rural areas and began working in Dhaka city. We piloted our Literacy Program in 30 schools and plan to expand to 60 percent of the city’s schools in the near future. Enrollment in government primary schools in Dhaka is poor and there is a large need for reading and writing support. In 2016, we also launched our Girls’ Education Program within the city. Room to Read believes we can impact the lives of many children with this new endeavor given that Dhaka is one of the largest cities in the world with an estimated population of over 15 million people and is growing rapidly.

2018 Bangladesh Targets

Literacy Program	
Schools supported	435
Children benefited	54,160
Reprinted language titles	5
Girls’ Education Program	
New participants	800
Total participants	4,040



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