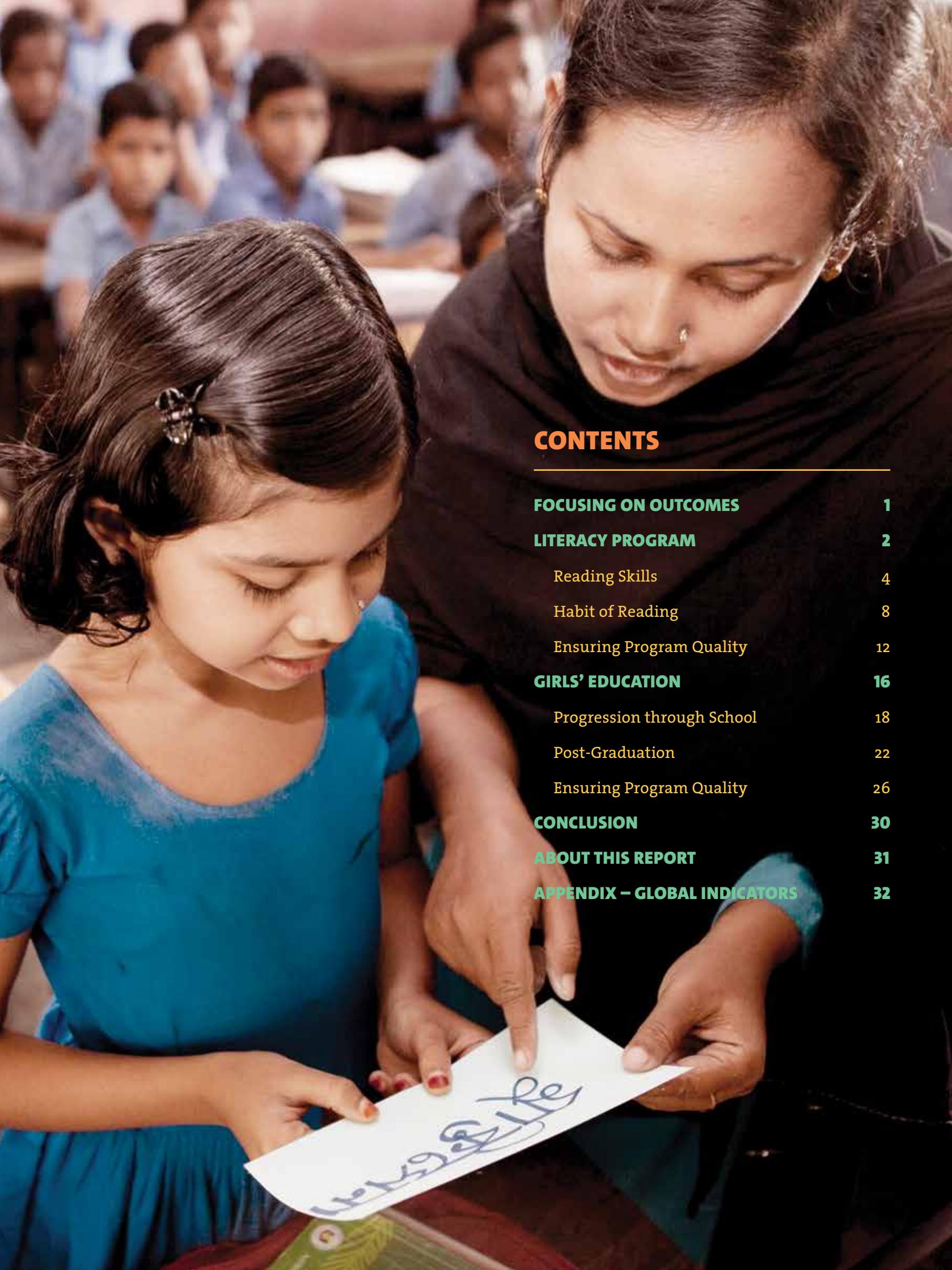


# Global Monitoring Report 2015



A photograph showing a young girl with dark hair tied back, wearing a blue t-shirt, looking down at a piece of paper she is writing on. A woman with dark hair, wearing a black sari, is leaning over her, pointing to the paper and providing guidance. In the background, other students are visible in a classroom setting.

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# Focusing on Outcomes



Dear Friends,

I am excited to have the opportunity to introduce Room to Read's eighth annual *Global Monitoring Report*.

When I joined Room to Read earlier this year, I was immediately struck by the organization's commitment to data. Room to Read continually strives to improve the effectiveness of our programs through an objective assessment of the data we collect, while also enabling others to hold us



**"HOLDING OURSELVES ACCOUNTABLE TO OUTCOMES IS CHALLENGING. THESE INDICATORS ARE USUALLY HARDER TO MEASURE THAN OUTPUTS, AND ARE FAR MORE LIKELY TO BE INFLUENCED BY FACTORS OUTSIDE OUR DIRECT CONTROL. BUT ULTIMATELY, THESE ARE THE INDICATORS THAT MATTER MOST; ONLY BY LOOKING AT OUTCOMES CAN WE TRULY KNOW WHETHER WE ARE SUCCEEDING AS AN ORGANIZATION."**

accountable by making our data transparently available to our stakeholders.

As a further commitment, each year we reflect on our research, monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure that we're focusing on the data that matter most. In the early years of this report, most of what we reported was output data — for example, the number of libraries established, the number of books published, or the number of girls who received support.

While these kinds of indicators remain important, and we will continue to report them, we have increasingly been focusing our data collection and reporting on outcomes — such as children's reading skills and girls' progression through secondary school and beyond. With outcome data, we are moving beyond simply tracking what we do, looking instead at what happens as a result. What are the real benefits of our work for children's lives?

Holding ourselves accountable to outcomes is challenging. These indicators are usually harder to measure than outputs, and are far more likely to be influenced by factors outside our direct control. But ultimately, these are the indicators that matter most; only by looking at outcomes can we truly know whether we are succeeding as an organization.

This report provides evidence that we are doing just that. In it, we detail numerous examples of our growing focus on collecting and reporting outcome data, and describe the results to date. I hope that the results presented in this report will generate questions, spark dialogue and inspire others in the global education community so that we can all strive to create better educational outcomes for children.

Sincerely,

Heather Simpson  
Chief Program Officer



# Literacy Program

Being able to read and write is essential. Written words are gateways to knowledge and opportunity that are only accessible to those with the ability to decipher them. Yet 250 million children, almost 40% of all primary school-age children in the world, are not learning basics like reading and writing.

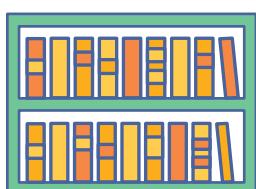
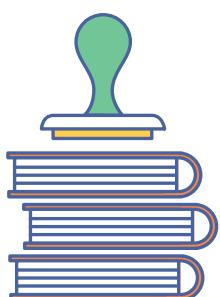
Our Literacy Program aims to tackle this challenge and help children become *independent readers* — with not only reading skills but also a habit of reading that will serve them throughout their lives.

## 2015 RESULTS<sup>1</sup>



**9,232**  
TEACHERS &  
LIBRARIANS TRAINED

**7.8**  
**MILLION**  
BOOKS CHECKED OUT



**1,127**  
NEW LIBRARIES  
ESTABLISHED



**1,222**  
SCHOOLS IMPLEMENTING  
ROOM TO READ LITERACY  
INSTRUCTION

## CUMULATIVE RESULTS



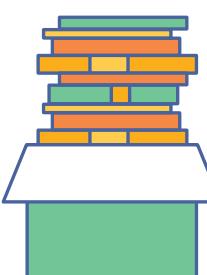
**9.9**  
**MILLION**  
CHILDREN BENEFITED

**18,699**  
PARTNER SCHOOLS



**1,300**  
ORIGINAL CHILDREN'S  
BOOK TITLES PUBLISHED

**18**  
**MILLION**  
BOOKS DISTRIBUTED



<sup>1</sup> For complete 2015 and cumulative results, please see data tables in the Appendix.



# Reading Skills

Room to Read helps build children's reading skills by partnering with education ministries to supplement gaps that exist in the standard reading and writing curriculum — providing resources, in-service teacher training and classroom enhancements.

Room to Read supported literacy instruction in 10 languages in 2015. **In all these languages, children in program schools showed statistically significant gains in reading fluency when compared with their peers in nearby schools.** On average, children in schools supported by Room to Read were reading nearly twice as fast.

The fact that we have so consistently observed these improvements in children's reading skills is hugely encouraging. Even so, many children continue to struggle. Local challenges can be significant: in many regions, parental illiteracy rates are high, families keep few or no books at home, and the surrounding environment may have few written signs or other text that would give children a chance to practice.

Globally, 40 percent of the children we have assessed in program schools are reaching our target reading fluency of 45 words per minute by the end of second grade. This target is derived from a rule-of-thumb estimation of the minimum reading fluency required for effective comprehension, based on research in high-income countries.<sup>2</sup>

In 2015, we introduced a new "emerging reader" benchmark of 20 words per minute. Sixty-seven percent of second-graders we assessed were reading at or above this fluency level. Tracking children's reading skills against these two benchmarks helps us understand our progress. Our goal is to see more and more children establishing the firm foundation of literacy skills they need to thrive.

To reach this goal, we have worked to simplify and standardize our teacher-training curriculum over the past several years, so that teachers can focus on approaches with proven benefits for children's reading. This includes a focus on five critical components of literacy: phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension.

One country that has already implemented many elements of the updated program design is Sri Lanka. During our recent assessment in Sinhala-language schools, we saw some of the highest fluency scores we have recorded to date.

## India & Sri Lanka



**GRADE-TWO CHILDREN** in Hindi- and Sinhala-language program schools showed some of the strongest results we have ever recorded,

**READING MORE THAN**

**50**

**WORDS PER MINUTE**  
on average.

## South Africa

In Tsonga-language schools,  
**GRADE-TWO CHILDREN IN PROGRAM SCHOOLS READ APPROXIMATELY**

**2X**

**AS FAST AS THEIR PEERS**  
in comparison schools.



## Nepal

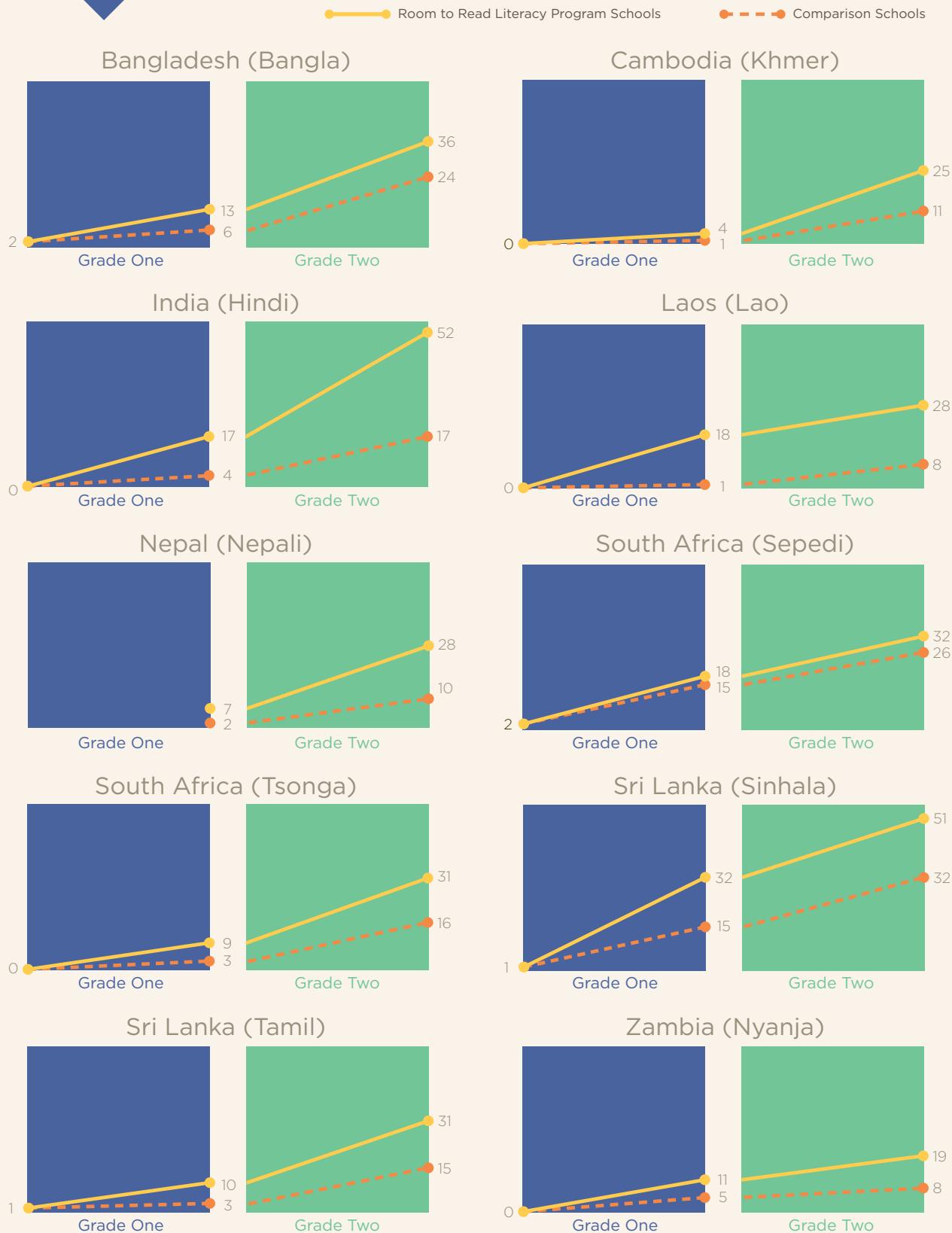


In Nepali-language schools,  
**GRADE-TWO CHILDREN READ NEARLY**

**3X**

**AS FAST AS THEIR PEERS**  
in comparison schools.

## FIGURE 1: AVERAGE READING FLUENCY (WORDS PER MINUTE)



<sup>2</sup> Because word length and grammar vary among languages, we also have efforts under way to set specific second-grade fluency targets for each language in which we support literacy instruction.

## Sri Lanka Soars in Words Per Minute



**“Who wants to read out loud?” asked Indrani, a second-grade teacher at Kumbukwewa Nimalasiri Primary School in the Anuradhapura district of Sri Lanka.**

Little hands shot in the air. “Teacher, teacher, me!” said seven-year-old Sithija. At 134 words per minute, he was the fastest reader in class, far outpacing the standard of 45 words per minute for his age group.

Room to Read had established its Literacy Program at Kumbukwewa only a year before and already students were achieving high reading scores and the confidence to read aloud. But this hasn’t always been the case in Sri Lanka.

Although Sri Lanka has a long storytelling tradition and a high literacy rate, rural schools like Kumbukwewa have been at a distinct disadvantage with their lack of access to quality reading and instruction materials. With only government-issued textbooks devoid of illustrations to rely on, teachers have often been at a loss as to how to get their students excited about reading. As a result, Sithija, like many of his classmates, struggled to read.

As part of our comprehensive Literacy Program, Room to Read focuses on training teachers in literacy instruction techniques and fun library activities, such as reading aloud. The program also provides teachers with illustrated workbooks designed to appeal to young students while ensuring there’s a school library stocked with colorful children’s books.

“The techniques Room to Read taught me have been extremely helpful,” said Indrani. “I’ve been teaching for 20 years and this is the first time I’ve seen such improvement in my students’ reading fluency and comprehension.”

What’s more, Indrani’s students have started reading on their own for fun, “going over passages sometimes 10 times or more at home,” she said. Sithija’s literacy skills

improved so quickly that he was soon reading and writing faster than any of his classmates.

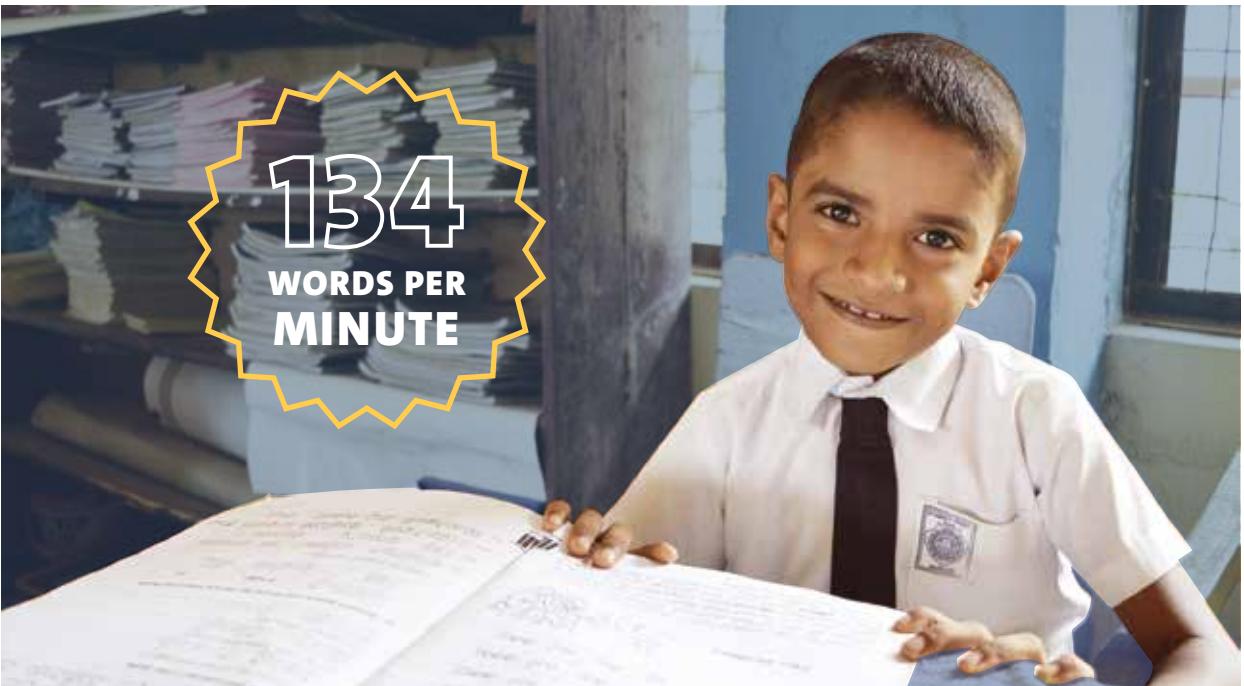
“When Room to Read stepped in, the biggest impact we saw was on children whose parents have no formal education,” noted school principal A.M. Disanayaka. “These kids wanted to learn but lacked the resources. Suddenly Room to Read was there to fill that gap and their reading scores soared.”

“Thanks to the program’s focus on phonological awareness, the training we received and the new materials, my students’ reading skills have improved tremendously,” Indrani said. “For the first time I can honestly say that they enjoy reading.”

Since the program began at his school, Sithija has been checking out one book per week from the library Room to Read established at his school. Grasping his favorite book, *“Tall and Short,”* Sithija sat in front of the class to share his story.

“Look how fast I can read!” he grinned.

**“SITHIJA’S LITERACY SKILLS IMPROVED SO QUICKLY THAT HE WAS SOON READING AND WRITING FASTER THAN ANY OF HIS CLASSMATES.”**



SITHIJA



# Habit of Reading

Reading skills are only one side of the equation. Our Literacy Program also aims to help children develop a *habit of reading*. When children truly love reading, when they take their own initiative to seek out books simply because books are interesting or fun, they open endless new possibilities to learn about the world around them.

Together, reading habits and reading skills can be mutually reinforcing — children who love to read will practice and improve their skills, while children with better reading skills will be able to explore new books with ease, encouraging them to read more and more.

Our 2015 Reading Promotion Study<sup>3</sup> presented evidence to support this relationship between reading skills and reading habits. It also showed that **children in schools with Room to Read libraries were significantly more**

**likely to report reading for enjoyment at school and at home than their peers in schools without Room to Read libraries.**

Our primary indicator of children's habit of reading is library book checkout. In 2015 more than 7.8 million books were checked out by students across all Room to Read libraries. This represents an average of 9.5 books for every child enrolled in primary grades in the schools where we work.

## Cambodia

**BOOK CHECKOUT  
INCREASED BY**

**70%**

**AFTER TEAMS  
FOCUSED ON  
TRAINING TEACHERS** to conduct more effective reading activities with their students.



## Tanzania



By increasing the frequency of support visits and strengthening library record-keeping systems,

**COUNTRY TEAMS MORE THAN DOUBLED BOOK CHECKOUT TO AN AVERAGE OF**

**15.1  
BOOKS PER CHILD.**

## India

**IN EVERY GRADE FROM FIRST THROUGH FIFTH, MORE THAN**

**85%**

**OF STUDENTS CHECKED OUT AT LEAST ONE BOOK**

— a major achievement particularly in first and second grades, where encouraging book checkout has historically been a challenge.



Last year's *Global Monitoring Report* also presented results from assessments in three countries to determine the percentage of children who checked out at least one book. Statistics like these help us to understand whether the checkout patterns we observe are representative of the experience of most students, or just a small number of high achievers. This year, we are for the first time able to report that **globally, most children with access to Room to Read libraries do check out books.** This is true even among first-grade students, most of whom are just beginning to understand their languages' alphabets.

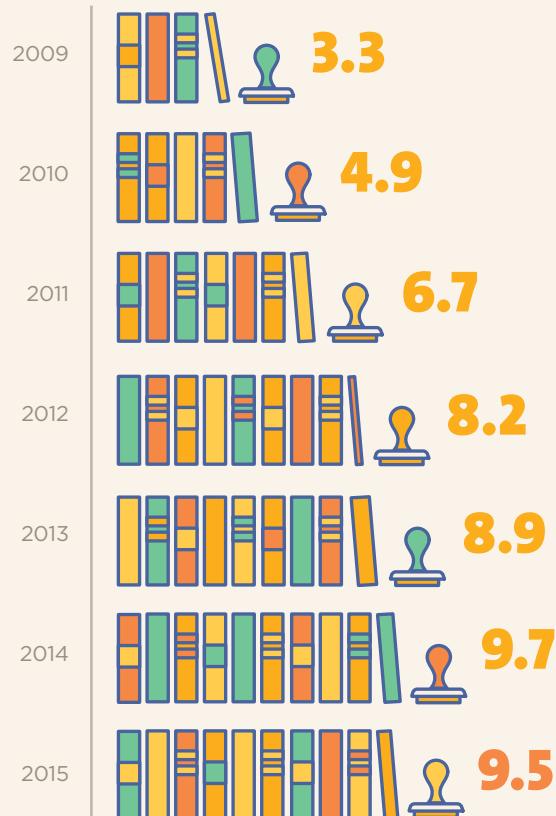
This finding helps to validate our emphasis on providing a range of books tailored to the abilities of children at all reading levels. Challenging or complex texts can intimidate students and discourage their practice. Unfortunately, books for early readers are often limited or nonexistent in the countries where we work.

To remedy this, we create local-language materials that readers at various levels can enjoy. These books cover topics that capture children's imaginations and make reading fun. Our goal is to inspire children to read, expand their minds and develop a lifelong love for reading and learning. As of 2015, we have published 1,300 original children's book titles.

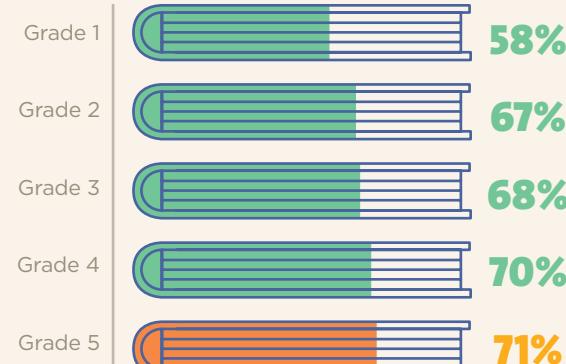
In two countries — South Africa and Zambia — it has been difficult to stock libraries with enough high-quality, local-language books to meet the needs of students. These two countries face some significant operational challenges that are less severe in most other countries where Room to Read works, including school overcrowding, extremely high printing costs and a vast diversity of languages. Perhaps as a result, many libraries in these countries have struggled with low checkout rates.

Country teams are currently developing strategies to address these issues through new partnerships and expanded use of high-quality materials from the public domain. In the meantime, the challenges these countries face make it especially important for Room to Read to continue investing in supporting and enhancing the vital role played by well-trained, dedicated teachers and librarians in helping children to develop a love of reading. Our Reading Promotion Study used evidence from three countries, including South Africa, to show that such educators have a demonstrable impact on children's reading habits.

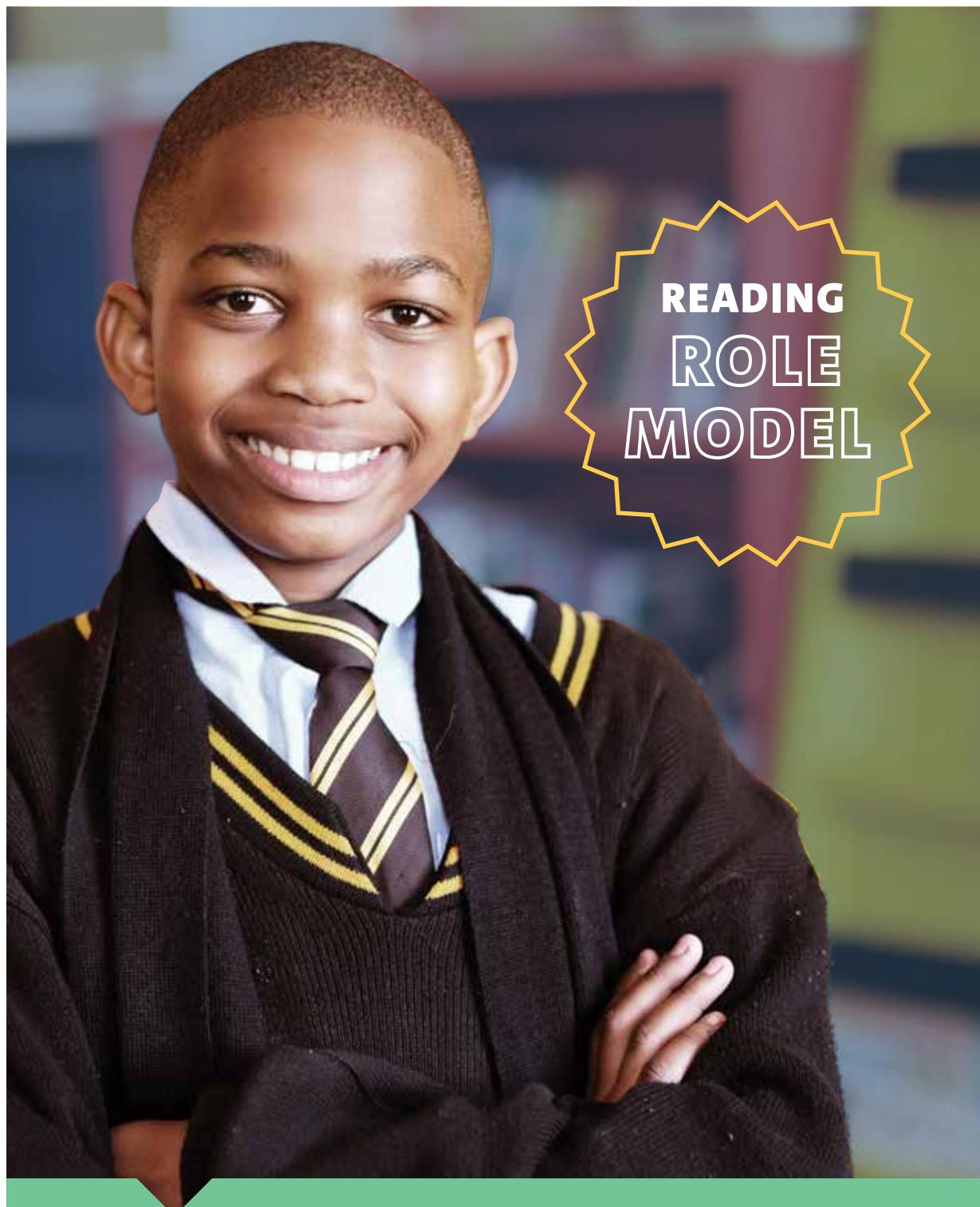
## FIGURE 2: AVERAGE BOOKS CHECKED OUT PER CHILD



## FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN CHECKING OUT BOOKS BY GRADE



<sup>3</sup> Available at [www.roomtoread.org/measuringresults](http://www.roomtoread.org/measuringresults)



GOSIAMA

# Growing a Love of Reading in South Africa



**When Gosiamma was in second grade he didn't much care for books, or school for that matter. "Recognizing sounds and writing sentences was a serious problem for Gosiamma," said Annah Rakau, his second-grade teacher at Refentse Primary School in the Gauteng province of South Africa.**

"He would get easily discouraged and lose focus." Preferring to play, Gosiamma was known for disturbing the other students during class.

In Gauteng, the concern for struggling students like Gosiamma who come from poor homes is that all too often they drop out, with some of the boys becoming substance abusers as a way of coping with the poverty. "It is always our wish to see them become better citizens," said Ms. Rakau. "But often we don't have the resources to give them the support they need."

When Room to Read launched its Literacy Program at Refentse in 2015 and established a library there, the school had no storybooks, much less any resources to encourage reading. A fourth grader that year, Gosiamma checked out just two books from the library. Then in 2016, in the span of only five months, that number jumped to 13 books. Something had changed in this boy.

It started with library period. As part of Room to Read's Literacy Program, the Refentse teachers take their students to the library each week for reading activities. Quickly, Gosiamma noticed his reading skills improve. "I felt excited. It was nice to be able to read in front of the class," he said, adding, "the library encourages us to stay at school because there are a lot of good storybooks we can read."

Then Ms. Rakau chose Gosiamma to be a library monitor and help his classmates check out books. "That really encouraged me to love reading," Gosiamma said. "I saw the different kinds of books other students were checking out, and I started being more interested in reading."

One of his responsibilities is to persuade his classmates to read more. "I have to be a role model," he said. "I tell my friends to read as much as I do because it is nice when we read to one another to see how well we are doing." In response, his friends have begun checking out more books from the library.

"I've noticed a change since Room to Read came to our school," said Ms. Rakau, a teacher for 34 years. "The performance of the class has improved greatly and many students enjoy reading, Gosiamma especially. His willingness to read, even during break time, has made a difference in his studies. Now he asks questions in class and enjoys being challenged."

Ms. Seema, the teacher-librarian, agreed. "Gosiamma has increased the number of books he checks out to two a week. He likes to visit the library even when there's no library period," she said. "I'm not surprised he turned into an avid reader with Room to Read resources at his disposal."

Now a fifth grader, Gosiamma said his interest in reading has impacted his family. "My siblings and my parents also borrow books from the library," he said. Though he plans to become a doctor, Gosiamma wants to continue inspiring others to read. "I tell them that reading is a skill we all need to improve our vocabulary and make our lives better."

**"I TELL MY FRIENDS TO READ AS MUCH AS I DO..."**



## Ensuring Program Quality

In 2015, we provided professional development and in-school coaching to 9,232 teachers and librarians.

This includes more than 2,000 first- and second-grade teachers who received high-quality training on how to teach children to read, based on up-to-date research and international best practices. With our support, these teachers then provided literacy instruction to more than 80,000 students.

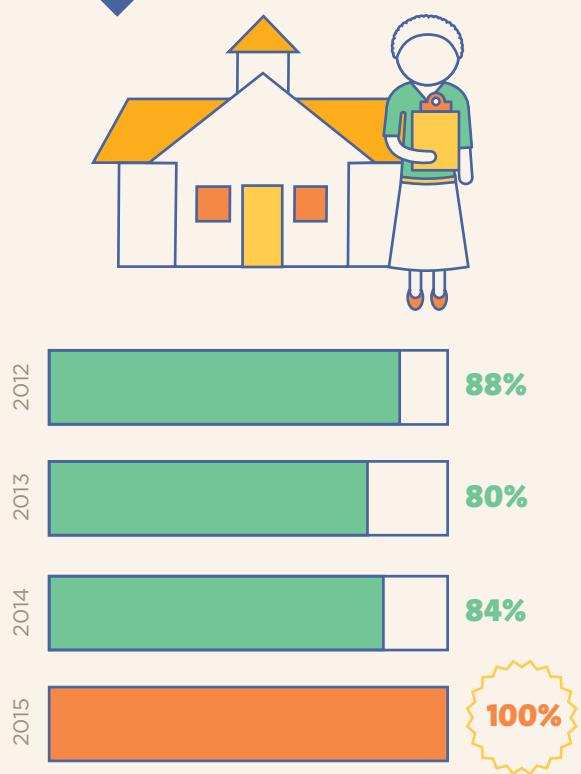
To ensure that these teachers have all the support they need, in recent years we have made a significant investment in strengthening our professional development processes by hiring additional field staff and improving operational systems in each country. As a result of this investment, 2015 was the first year in which 100 percent of the teachers we trained received two support visits or more every month from our literacy coaches.

We also train educators on how to manage a library and how to conduct activities that encourage students to read independently. To ensure that libraries continue supporting the development of children's habit of reading, twice a year we assess each library and assign it a rating based on a checklist of indicators of proper library functioning, providing immediate feedback and support on any areas where improvement is needed. This process leads to rapid improvement: from the first assessment in 2015 to the second, the percentage of libraries receiving the top rating of "Highly Functioning" rose from 23 percent to 41 percent.

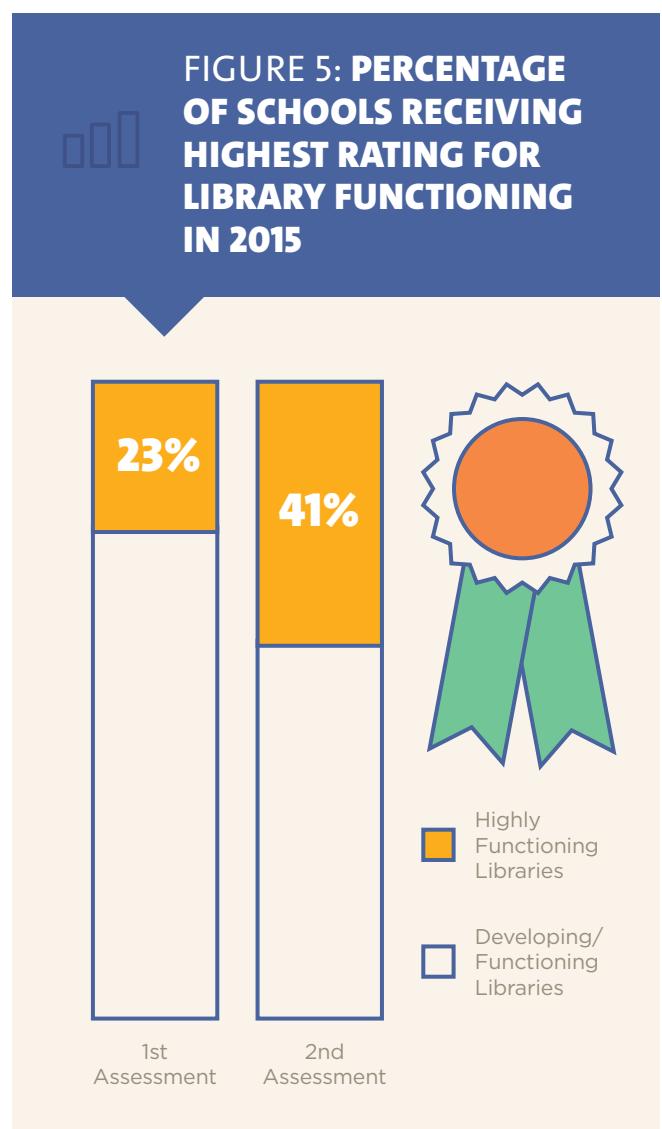




**FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE OF ROOM TO READ-TRAINED TEACHERS RECEIVING 2+ SUPPORT VISITS EVERY MONTH**



**FIGURE 5: PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS RECEIVING HIGHEST RATING FOR LIBRARY FUNCTIONING IN 2015**



## A Veteran Teacher Perfects Her Style



**Khieavanh Khanouthai had been teaching first grade at Nongdern Complete Primary School in Laos for 22 years. Yet students were leaving her class unable to read.**

"No matter how much I tried, at the end of the semester my students could barely read and I had no idea why," Khieavanh said. When teacher trainees arrived from the nearby college to observe her class she was both frustrated and saddened. Her students couldn't read the lessons the trainees brought with them. "People questioned my ability to teach," said Khieavanh.

Last year, Room to Read launched its Literacy Program at her school, which included training the teachers in its literacy instruction methods. Khieavanh was concerned about her ability to follow Room to Read's new instruction method and, said the principal at her school, she considered retiring early and letting a younger teacher take her place. "I assured Khieavanh that we needed her valuable experience," said the

principal. "First grade is a critical time in a child's education."

Mr. Khonexay, the Room to Read literacy coach who led the training at Khieavanh's school, offered her extra support. "I suggested she post the new instructional steps on the classroom wall for easy reference and repeat inspirational phases to remind her of her love of teaching," said Mr. Khonexay, who also gave Khieavanh feedback after each training.

When the training was over, Mr. Khonexay noticed a significant improvement in Khieavanh's teaching. "She told me it was the first time she felt truly happy with her teaching," he said. After just one semester, she no longer needed to look at the instructions she posted on the wall.

As part of the comprehensive program, Room to Read gave Khieavanh's school quality reading and instruction materials, which helped lead to significant improvement in her students. "Children catch up fast. Now my students can sense how to blend new consonants with simple vowels, even before they open their textbooks!" said Khieavanh. "When we do review lessons, they eagerly remember which letter goes with which lesson and even the page number!"

What's more, for the first time Khieavanh doesn't mind when the teacher trainees come to her classroom. Beaming with pride, she said, "Now they never stop complimenting my students and asking me how I can teach them so well."

**“CHILDREN  
CATCH UP FAST.  
NOW MY STUDENTS CAN  
SENSE HOW TO BLEND  
NEW CONSONANTS WITH  
SIMPLE VOWELS, EVEN  
BEFORE THEY OPEN  
THEIR TEXTBOOKS!”**



KHIEAVANH



## Girls' Education Program

Whether or not a girl stays in school has an astounding effect not only on her quality of life, but also on her future. For each additional year of schooling she completes, her future income increases by an estimated 15-25 percent.<sup>4</sup> In the last decade, the world has made significant gains in primary school enrollment. But girls in low-income countries still drop out of secondary school at an alarming rate.

To thrive over the long term, girls need life skills. Thinking critically, empathizing and relying on themselves help them meet day-to-day challenges and make informed decisions. When girls learn these skills and how use them daily, they become better equipped to handle the challenges they may face, from finding time to study to choosing who and when to marry.

Room to Read's Girls' Education Program changes the equation for thousands of girls, helping them stay in school longer and develop strong life skills that will serve them long into the future.

### 2015 RESULTS<sup>5</sup>

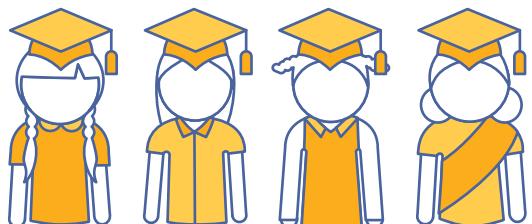
**29,906**

GIRLS SUPPORTED IN 2015



**726**

NEW SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADUATES



### CUMULATIVE RESULTS

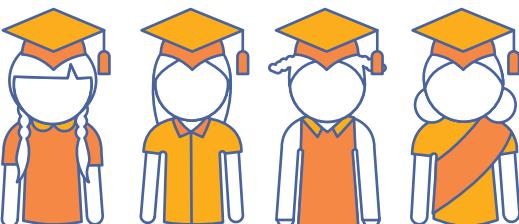
**38,750**

GIRLS SUPPORTED



**2,362**

SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADUATES



4 Schultz, Paul T. "Why Governments Should Invest More to Educate Girls." *World Development* 30 (2): 207-25.

5 For complete 2015 and cumulative results, please see data tables in the Appendix.



## Progression through School

For each girl supported through the Girls' Education Program (nearly 30,000 in 2015), we closely monitor her progress through secondary school.

Understanding which girls have passed their exams, which have had to repeat a grade, and how many have transferred in or out of the schools we support helps us to gauge our own progress toward our goal of helping girls to stay in school and advance toward graduation. This data also enables us intervene quickly with targeted support if any warning signs arise.

Just as in previous years, the vast majority of program participants worldwide remained in school and advanced to the next grade. As shown in Figure 6, nine

percent of participants dropped out of school, and an additional two percent transferred to another school not supported by Room to Read. Ninety-four percent of the remaining girls (i.e., 86 percent of all girls) advanced to the next grade, in line with previous years' results. This consistently high rate of advancement demonstrates that most girls supported by the program continue to make progress toward graduation.

The program has in recent years faced a challenge of increasing dropout rates as more participants enter

### Laos



**OF THE 414 PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS WHO WERE REQUIRED TO TAKE A "GATEKEEPING EXAM" FOR ADVANCEMENT TO THE NEXT GRADE,**

**99%**

**(ALL BUT FOUR)  
PASSED AND ADVANCED.**

### Bangladesh

**LESS THAN  
1%**

**OF GIRLS SUPPORTED THROUGH THE PROGRAM DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL IN 2015.**



### Cambodia



**CAMBODIA CONGRATULATED ITS  
500th  
SECONDARY SCHOOL  
GRADUATE.**



the final years of secondary school. As a girl gets older, she faces growing obstacles including high-stakes exams, increased risk of pregnancy and pressure to earn an income or get married, all of which can derail her educational career.

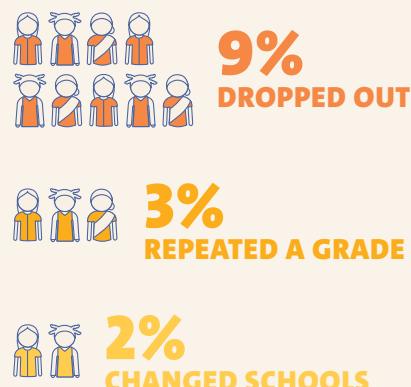
When a girl drops out of school, her social mobilizer (mentor) talks with her to understand the factors that led to this decision. In 2015, economic and academic challenges remained the most frequently cited primary reasons, each responsible for the dropout of 2.2 percent of program participants. Other

common reasons cited included migration (2 percent), marriage (1.1 percent), and the girl's own lack of motivation to continue studying (0.8 percent).

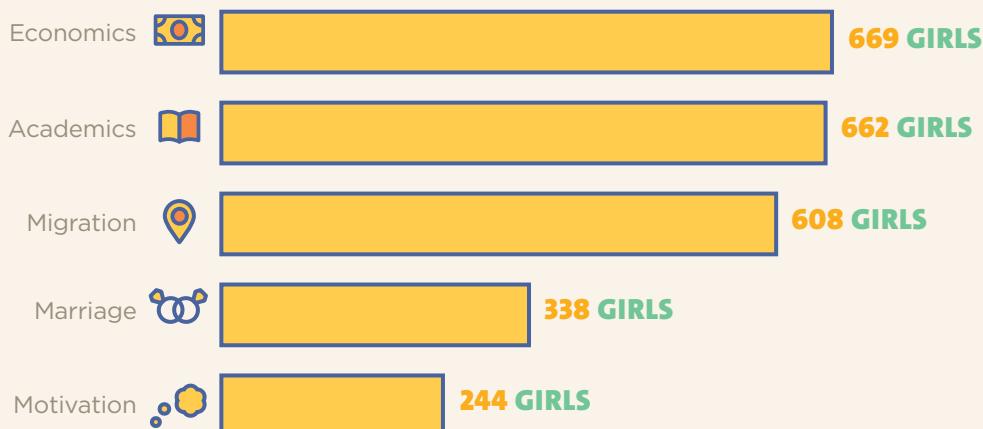
In last year's *Global Monitoring Report*, we previewed some early stage work toward the development of a new system to reduce dropout through systematic tracking of known risk factors. In 2015, Tanzania and Zambia participated in a pilot test of this Risk and Response system, and it is showing signs of success as a way to reduce dropouts.

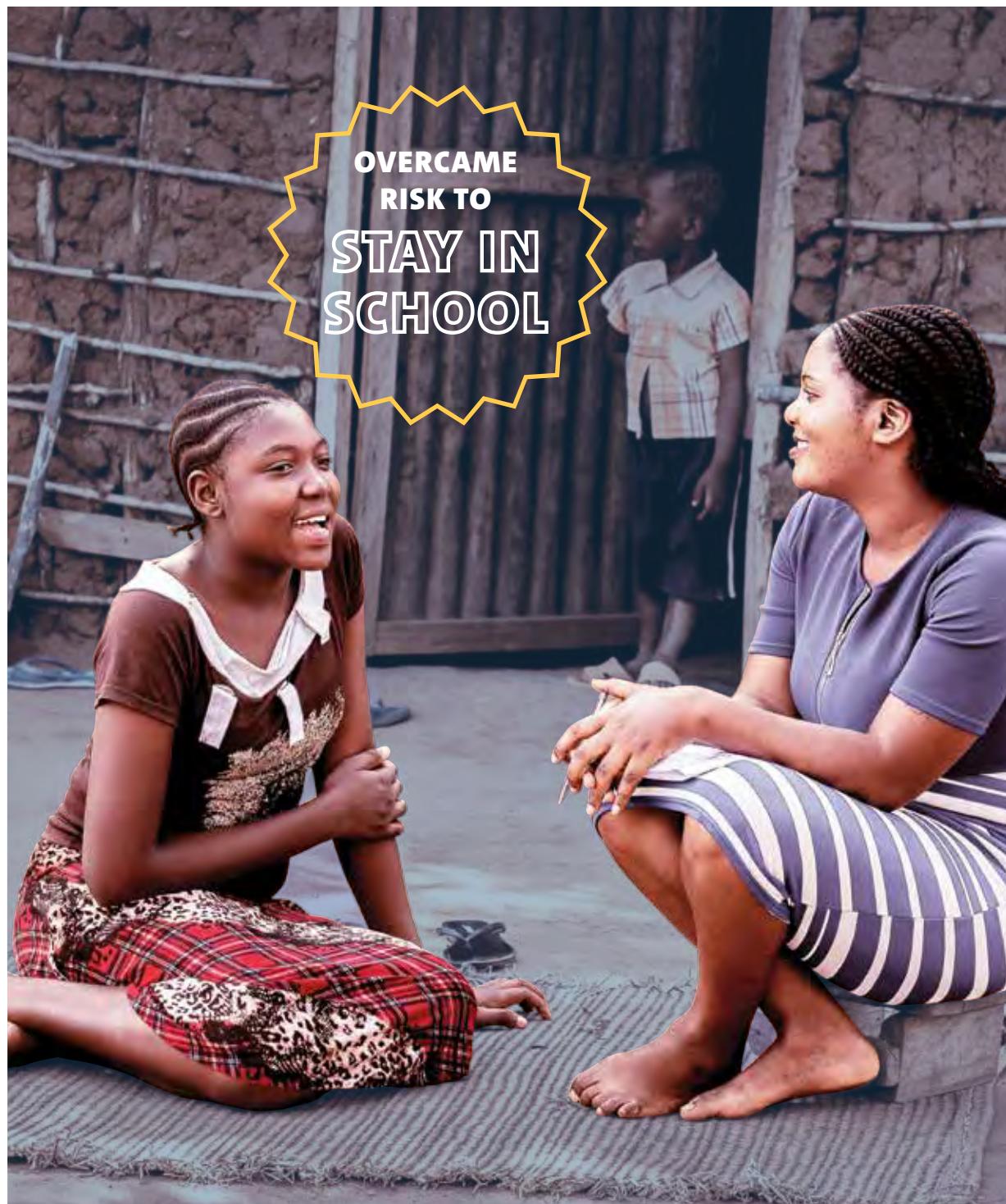
## FIGURE 6: PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS' ADVANCEMENT THROUGH SCHOOL IN 2015

29K GIRLS



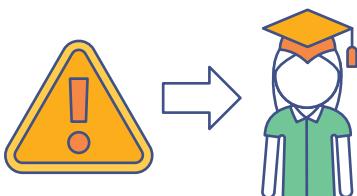
## FIGURE 7: TOP FIVE REASONS FOR DROPOUT IN 2015





WARDA & RACHEL

# An Early Warning System in Tanzania Helps Girls Succeed



Rachel Mbushi works as a social mobilizer in Tanzania, mentoring students in Room to Read's Girls' Education Program.

When she participated in the Risk and Response pilot test in early 2015, she was asked to pay particular attention to four risk factors that Room to Read had shown elsewhere were strongly associated with dropout: repeated school absences, failure to attend life skills education sessions, low performance on exams, and parents' absence from parent meetings. Whenever a girl exhibited one or more of these risk factors, Rachel would follow up with her (and sometimes her parents) with additional guidance and support to try to keep her coming to school.

One of these girls was Warda. At age 16, Warda was an eleventh-grade student at Lugoba Secondary School when she started missing school days. "I am one of six children in my family, and only two of us have attended secondary school," Warda said. "The other was my brother, and he dropped out before graduation. My parents are small-scale farmers, and they cannot always provide for our basic needs. Sometimes we manage to have one meal a day, and sometimes none."

Although Tanzania has abolished school fees for high school students, attending school takes time that a girl like Warda could otherwise use to help her family. In such a situation, remaining enrolled seemed like a luxury she could not afford.

Rachel noticed Warda's repeated school absences, so she responded according to the training she received as part of the pilot: she visited Warda right away and talked to her about the issue. "When my social mobilizer visited me and asked me about going to school, I refused. I was worried.

"How could I do that when my family was under such financial pressure? I thought there was no way for me to go back, so I decided to quit," Warda said.

Rachel didn't give up. She continued to explain to Warda the long-term benefits that an education could have for her future and her family. She also explained the material support Room to Read can sometimes provide to girls like Warda in order to alleviate some of the financial barriers to education.

Once Warda began regularly attending Room to Read's life skills education sessions, her attitude really began to shift. "Before joining the Girls' Education Program, I thought a good thing would be to get married, like some of my other friends whose parents did not send them to secondary school. Room to Read has made me realize the importance of school and who I am today. Thank you for everything that you are doing to support me and take me to a right path."

**"ROOM TO READ HAS MADE ME REALIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL AND WHO I AM TODAY."**



## Post-Graduation

Since our first cohort of Girls' Education Program participants graduated in 2007, one of the most frequent questions we have heard from our external stakeholders is: "Where are they now?"

The question is an important one: knowing what happens to our alumnae after they complete the program helps us understand the longer-term benefits of our program in these women's lives, and gives us an idea of whether our program has done everything it can to prepare them for the challenges they will face as adults.

In the past, we have often profiled the lives of particular alumnae<sup>6</sup>, and we have also conducted periodic surveys to understand particular kinds of life outcomes. In 2015, we introduced a new annual survey that will check in with alumnae one year after graduation to track their post-completion decisions

in a systematic way. This survey will form one part of an overall strategy to assess short-, medium-, and long-term program outcomes, which is currently under development.

Out of the 399 alumnae who teams were able to contact, two-thirds were continuing their studies in some form of tertiary education. Of these, 75 percent were enrolled in colleges and universities, with the remaining 25 percent in vocational schools.

Nearly 90 percent of the girls contacted were either enrolled in school or employed, many of them pursuing careers in the fields of teaching, healthcare/nursing, business and social work.

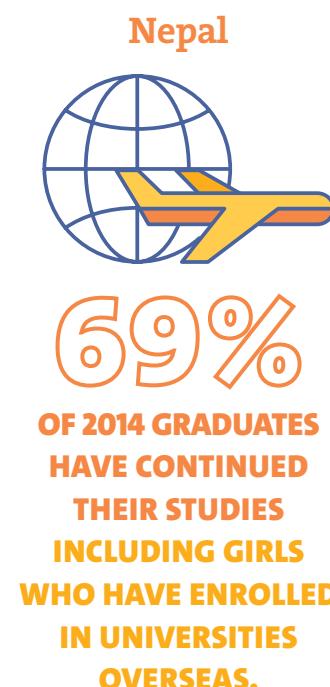
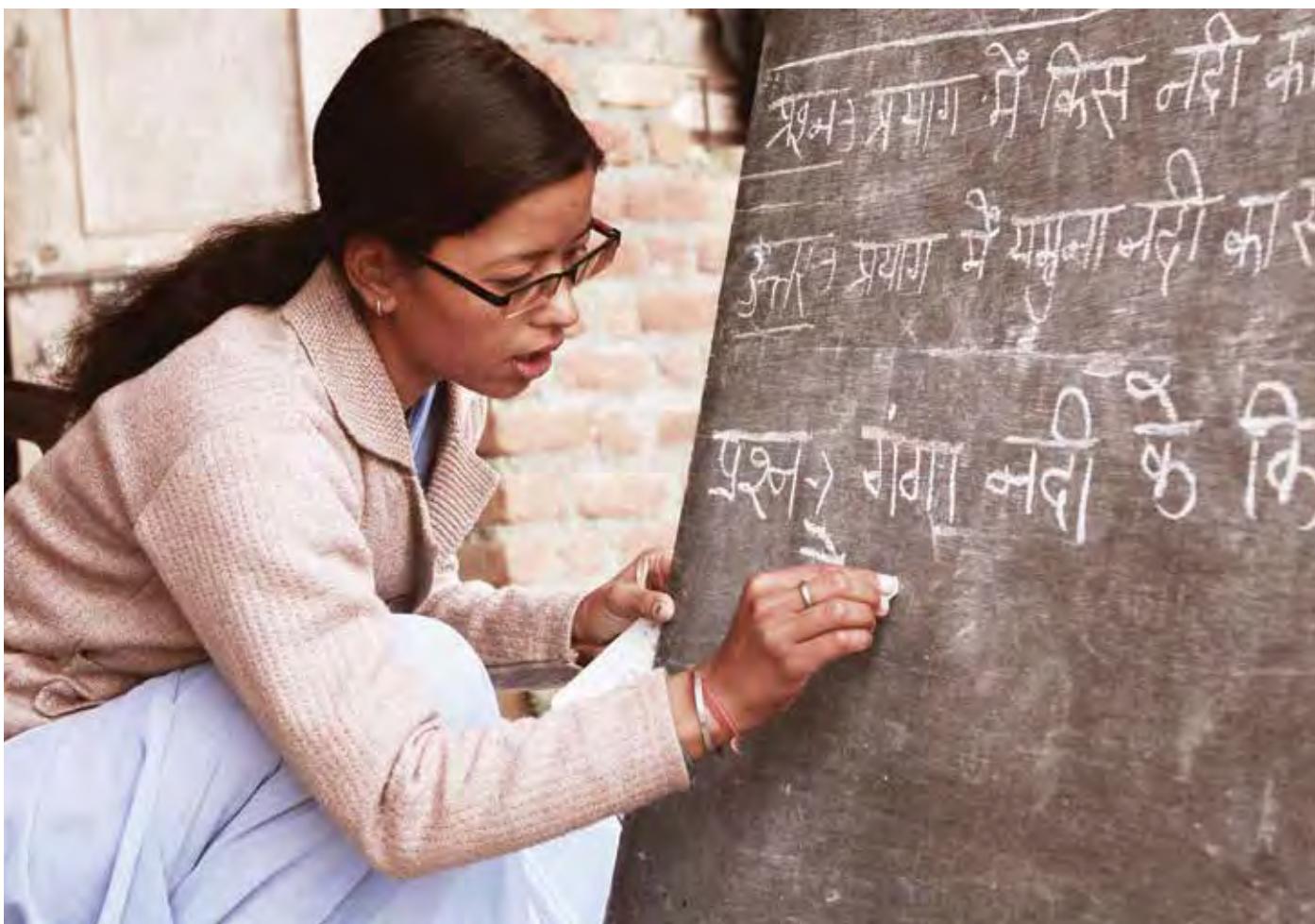




FIGURE 8: CURRENT STATUS OF THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 2014

**442 TOTAL  
GRADUATES**

**43 UNABLE  
TO CONTACT**



6 For one notable example, see our 2011 report “Through Their Eyes, In Their Voices” at [www.roomtoread.org/2011TertiaryEducationReport](http://www.roomtoread.org/2011TertiaryEducationReport)

# Vietnam's Girls' Education Class of 2014: Where Are They Now?



**Shortly after her second birthday, Tram was left to live with her grandparents in a remote village in the Long An Province of Vietnam.**

Tram's mother had given birth to her at age 18 after marrying a compulsive gambler. Two years later they divorced and ran off to different cities, hoping to escape poverty.

Tram's grandparents were among the poorest in the village. When Tram was ready to start secondary school they couldn't afford to buy her a bicycle. Since it wasn't possible to walk 14 kilometers (8.7 miles) each way, Tram had to drop out of school. She was 11 years old.

"Every morning I cried when I saw the kids going to class," said Tram.

Today Tram is in college. Of the girls in the village who are her age, Tram is the only one who graduated secondary school. Two things happened to change the course of her life: her grandmother borrowed money to buy a bike for Tram to go to school, and Tram joined Room to Read's Girls' Education Program.

Of the 116 Vietnamese girls in the Girls' Education Program class of 2014, 96 percent graduated and 42 percent went on to college. Room to Read checked in with Tram and a few of her classmates to see how they've been doing post-graduation.

When asked about the impact of her participation in the program, Tram said she'll never forget the first lesson she received. "I learned about the physical differences between boys and girls, how to take care of myself and not get into early marriage like my parents did," Tram recalled. "It has been one of the most useful lessons I ever received and it's something my family never would have taught me."

Tram has since transformed from a shy girl into a confident young woman. "My social mobilizer Ms. Ha encouraged me to practice my public speaking and problem solving skills," said Tram. "And I threw myself into a variety of activities — from performing in fashion shows to volunteering for events."

Ngoc, who graduated the same year as Tram, also benefited from the program. "I used to have a quick temper about anything that irritated me," said Ngoc. "The life skills lessons taught me to manage my anger and become more resilient. Now I think before I speak and I take time out to prepare myself." Ngoc is pursuing Business Administration at Ho Chi Minh Industry and Trade College.

Likewise, Linh remembers the life skills activities that helped her become more empathetic. "Learning to understand what other people think and not taking things personally turned out to be really important when I moved into an apartment with strangers, who have now become my friends!" said Linh. "It's also helped in dealing with a diverse range of people during my time at university. Today Linh is a student at Dong Nai University of Technology.

Tram is pursuing a degree in tourism at Van Hien University in Ho Chi Minh City. She keeps busy with a part-time supermarket job and travels throughout Vietnam as part of her program.

"Tourism is not supposed to be for girls because you travel constantly and girls are supposed to stay home,"

Tram said. "Most village girls would prefer a stable career, like becoming a teacher or a doctor. If I hadn't attended Room to Read's career orientation where I learned more about this profession, I never would have chosen this major.

"Thanks to Room to Read, I'm able to climb out of poverty to be one of the few girls in my village to get an education."



PURSUING A  
UNIVERSITY  
DEGREE IN  
**TOURISM**

**TRAM**



## Ensuring Program Quality

The heart of our Girls' Education Program is our local mentors (also called social mobilizers), who act as role models, advisors and advocates for girls in our program.

In addition to serving as examples of educated, strong women in the community, they support girls emotionally and guide them through both individual and group mentoring sessions. Critically, they also lead our life skills education sessions, where girls learn and practice critical thinking, creative problem-solving, communication and other essential skills. Through classes, workshops and extracurricular activities, girls learn how to create a new and different path from the one that might otherwise be forced upon them. They discover their own strength, advocate for themselves and develop their life skills.

Our life skills curriculum is based on cutting-edge research and emerging best practices related to socio-emotional learning and gender. As we reported in last year's *Global Monitoring Report*, our analysis of trends in our own data suggests that participation in life skills education is associated with a higher rate of academic advancement and a lower school-dropout rate. This is one reason we try to ensure that as many girls as possible participate fully in life skills education sessions.

In 2015, 85 percent of the girls in the program attended at least the minimum number of life skills sessions.

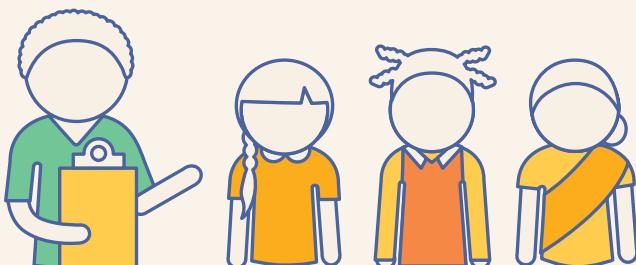
Nevertheless, our growing focus on life skills presents a challenge. Many of our program's indicators of success, such as graduation and retention, are relatively straightforward to measure. But how can we measure — objectively and reliably — an outcome as abstract and complex as our program's impact on girls' life skills? We have made this question a major focus of our recent work.

For girls in low-income countries, many of whom are pressured to leave school early to work or to get married and have children, we believe life skills are as important as academic skills, if not more so. They help girls stay in school longer, marry later and pursue fulfilling careers. But just as we rely on hard data to inform our Literacy Program, we need to establish objective measures for our key Girls' Education Program goals in order to understand and improve our effectiveness.





**FIGURE 9: PERCENTAGE OF GIRLS PARTICIPATING IN LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION**



# Measuring the Effectiveness of a Life Skills Education



In 2015, Room to Read launched its Girls' Education Program evaluation in India, funded in part by the U.S. Department of Labor, Echidna Giving and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Besides aiming to measure the effectiveness of the Girls' Education Program in improving a range of outcomes, including academic performance and the time participants invest in education and work, the evaluation seeks to fill a critical gap in our knowledge by rigorously assessing girls' development of life skills, which include confidence and self-esteem as well as such competencies as decision-making and perseverance.

"A focus on non-cognitive or life skills is an area that has received a lot of attention in the U.S. because we're realizing these skills can have a significant impact on a student's welfare," noted one of the evaluation's principal investigators, Williams College assistant professor of economics Jessica Leight. "But this is a relatively new concept in the developing world. There isn't a lot of evidence beyond the anecdotal, so our aim is to contribute solid research to it."

Using a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design, considered the gold standard in scientific research, the evaluation compares girls from two different groups of schools in India. Schools were randomly assigned to either the program or control group in order to allow for unbiased comparisons. The program group comprises 60 schools whose female students are enrolled in Room to Read's Girls' Education Program. The control group is a different set of 59 schools nearby whose female students are not in the program and are not receiving any kind of life skills training.

But how exactly does a scientist measure life skills? Leight's team faced a number of challenges. "Compre-

hension is a problem. Different girls will perceive a particular question in different ways," she noted. "Another challenge was to develop concrete questions that the girls can relate to their daily experiences. It's not easy to probe their aspirations around careers, for example, when they have typically only been exposed to a small number of women working."

The team also needed to ensure that the questions asked by the study generated a range of responses. "If we simply ask how the subject feels and everyone answers positively, then we haven't learned much from that question," Leight explained. "We want to structure questions in such a way that the girls feel comfortable selecting any one of a number of options to reflect their own personal experiences."

An additional challenge was developmental. In India and most other Room to Read countries, lower secondary school (and our program) starts in the sixth grade, and abstract concepts like self-esteem and perseverance can be hard for 11- and 12-year-olds to grasp. "When you ask a girl, 'How do you react when you encounter an obstacle?' it may be hard for her to understand the question," said Leight. "Questions needed to be made as concrete as possible, so that girls can relate them to specific circumstances or behaviors in their own lives."

Finally, Leight's team needed to ensure that they are measuring what they intended to measure. "In answering the questions, the girls may just repeat what they learned in the life skills lessons," she explained, "while the girls in the control group didn't hear the lessons so they would

not be able to repeat them. That means we may just be picking up on exposure to life skills education." The team's solution was to supplement the questionnaire with more objective measures, which is how they came up with the mirror task and the scavenger hunt.

In the mirror task the girls are asked to draw a series of shapes by following their reflection in a mirror. The shapes become progressively harder to draw with the last shape being nearly impossible to reproduce accurately. "We see how long she is willing to do this, testing her perseverance," said Leight. In the scavenger hunt the girls receive a list of things to obtain, such as an item of clothing or food. "She's encouraged to borrow them or find them at home," Leight explained. "The girls might ask family, friends, or others they know. It shows how well girls can advocate on their own behalf."

These two tasks may seem like pure fun and games—and from what we've seen so far, girls have a good time completing them! But there is more here than may initially meet the eye. Because these measures ask girls to put key skills like perseverance and negotiation into practice, they are objective in a way that simple self-report questions can't be. There is no way for a girl to make it up, or to simply tell her interviewers what she

thinks they want to hear. And thanks to our rigorous RCT-based design, we can make a compelling case that any systematic difference we find between program participants and non-participants in the performance of these tasks is the result of our program.

In 2015 the team piloted the evaluation and selected the schools for the sample. Interviews with all 2,500 girls participating in the study began in early 2016. The evaluation will be ongoing through 2018.

Room to Read has already begun adapting the measures that Leight and her team developed in order to create a life skills assessment tool for our own ongoing use outside the evaluation and after it ends. Developing this internal tool presents additional challenges: it will need to be adjusted to meet the needs of a wider range of ages, and across a wider variety of cultural contexts. Certain particularly time-consuming or costly elements that work well in a large-scale evaluation will also need to be reduced or eliminated for use in ongoing monitoring, but this must be carefully balanced against the need to retain the reliability and objectivity of the evaluation tool. We have initiated our first phases of pilot testing for this work, and will report on our progress in next year's *Global Monitoring Report*.





# Conclusion

This report summarizes data through 2015 on the functioning of Room to Read programs across the 10 countries in which we work.

Most important, in this report and in our work, we increasingly focus on outcomes, the true measure of our success. Only by focusing on the outcomes of our programs — children's development as independent readers, and girls' progression through school and development of life skills — can we know what we are doing well, what can be improved and steps we can take to make that improvement.

The overall data on our outcomes provides compelling evidence that our programs are achieving their goals. Children's reading skills are improving rapidly, and our most recent results are some of our strongest to date. The majority of our Girls' Education Program alumnae

are enrolling in tertiary education within their first year after graduation. Where we have identified gaps, new outcome-focused initiatives such as our Girls' Education Program evaluation in India will provide critical information that will enable us to continue strengthening our programs, so the benefits we are able to deliver to children are greater each year.

We are pleased to share this information with external audiences as part of our commitment to remaining transparent about our work and accountable to our beneficiaries, donors and other key stakeholders. We look forward to continuing to share results of our work in next year's *Global Monitoring Report* and beyond.

# About this Report



## Data Collection

This report is based on data collected by our country-based staff. Most of the figures presented come from our Global Indicators process. The Global Indicators are a set of key metrics we collect on an ongoing basis across all 10 countries where we work and report publicly each year. Although we revisit and update these indicators periodically, most remain the same from year to year, enabling us to report on trends over time.

As part of this process, we collected data on every book we published, every building we constructed, and every girl, classroom and library we supported in 2015. We also collect more in-depth information on grade-wise checkout, book title popularity and reading skills on a sample basis. Our country teams upload data collected through ongoing monitoring and support visits into a common web-based database. In the first quarter of the following year, each country's Research, Monitoring and Evaluation team leads a reflection process, reviewing both programs to examine trends in the data and identify areas for improvement. The team documents these discussions and ensures that they feed into the next programmatic annual planning cycle.

## Acknowledgments

Many individuals contributed to this report. The report was produced by the Global Research, Monitoring and Evaluation team led by Peter Cooper. Ryan Hebert led worldwide data collection and analysis and managed report development. Editorial feedback

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Our worldwide Research, Monitoring and Evaluation team led in-country data collection, entry, analysis and reflection. The team includes Kala Adhikari, Md. Sarwar Basher, Peter Cooper, Rehema Dulla, Padmanav Dutta, Ryan Hebert, Chanthou Heng, Mini Joshi, Victor Kabwe, Harmeet Kaur, Badruzzaman Khan, Bidhubhusan Mahapatra, Abdullah Mamun, Geetha Mayadunne, Pradeep Mishra, Khanthanouphone Mixaykone, Zukiswa Nee-Whang, Dilumi Perera, Khanyisa Phaweni, Thinh Nguyen Quang, Annika Rigole, Tonin Seoun, Mayank Sharma, Viet Ta, Prashanta Thapa, Bunthan Tray and Soulinthone Vilayphanh.

Finally, we would like to offer a special thank-you to the staff of our Literacy and Girls' Education Programs around the world for providing us with the opportunity to report on your excellent work. We are grateful to all of you.

## Feedback?

We welcome your feedback on this report. Please e-mail your questions and comments to [info@roomtoread.org](mailto:info@roomtoread.org) with "2015 Global Monitoring Report" in the subject line.

# Appendix – Global Indicators

## Literacy

	2013	2014	2015
New Literacy Program partner schools	1,341	1,014	1,099
Cumulative Literacy Program partner schools	16,583	17,597	18,696
Schools implementing Room to Read literacy instruction	1,046	1,206	1,222
New school libraries established	1,457	984	1,127
Cumulative school libraries established	16,550	17,534	18,661
Children benefiting from Room to Read literacy instruction	62,597	84,958	81,321
Children with access to school libraries under active support	1,173,036	1,001,393	843,890
Percentage of grade-2 children reaching fluency benchmark	-	-	40%
Percentage of grade-2 children reaching emerging reader benchmark	-	-	63%
Total number of books checked out	10,104,899	9,514,469	7,848,939
Average number of books checked out per student (all grades)*	8.9	9.7	9.5
Grade 1	-	-	3.0
Grade 2	-	-	3.8
Grade 3	-	-	4.1
Grade 4	-	-	4.3
Grade 5	-	-	4.6
Percentage of children checking out books*			
Grade 1	-	-	59%
Grade 2	-	-	67%
Grade 3	-	-	68%
Grade 4	-	-	70%
Grade 5	-	-	71%
Percentage of supported libraries with functional checkout systems	99%	98%	96%
Total teachers and librarians trained	11,567	10,830	9,232
Teachers trained in literacy instruction	1,749	2,316	2,288
Percentage of teachers attending all required training sessions	-	-	99%
Percentage of literacy classes receiving two support visits monthly	80%	84%	100%
Percentage of literacy classes receiving materials on time	-	-	91%
Percentage of supported school libraries where staff received training	93%	97%	97%
New children's book titles published	155	129	142
Cumulative children's book titles published	1,029	1,158	1,300
Room to Read-published books distributed to partner schools	1,194,362	720,980	477,249
Room to Read-published books distributed to other organizations**	155,449	119,892	599,824
Total books distributed	1,814,637	702,114	2,501,513
Cumulative books distributed	15,014,400	15,716,514	18,218,027
Average number of books provided per student per year	2.09	2.11	2.25
Room to Read-published book titles in top ten for checkout frequency	-	-	6.4
Classrooms and libraries constructed	464	405	324
Classrooms repaired/renovated	-	197	124
Percentage of infrastructure projects with community co-investment	100%	100%	100%
Percentage of rooms constructed in past three years still in use	96%	98%	93%
Percentage of infrastructure projects with major structural damage***	<1%	<1%	4%

\* Gradewise checkout indicators cover three months of data only; all other figures are annual.

\*\* The increase in books distributed to other organizations was driven by Nepal, where we distributed more than half a million books in the immediate aftermath of the April 2015 earthquake.

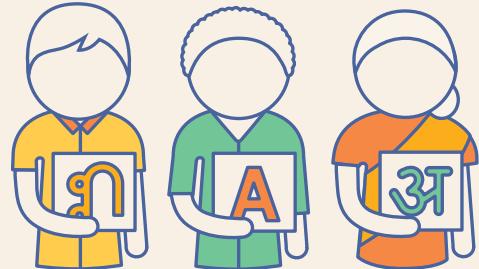
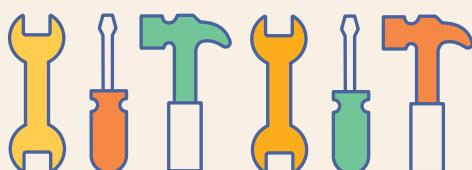
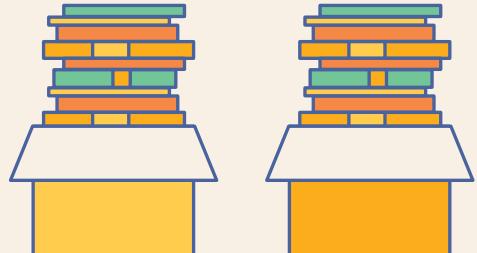
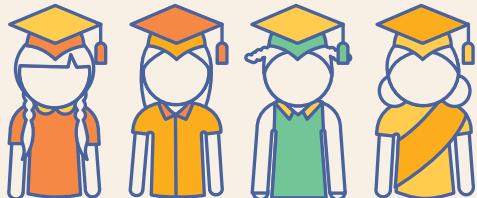
\*\*\* The increase in major damage is also a result of the earthquake in Nepal.

## Girls' Education

	2013	2014	2015
Girls supported during calendar year	21,792	26,016	29,821
Cumulative girls supported	25,830	31,733	38,503
Dropout rate	4%	7%	9%
Advancement rate (among girls who remained enrolled)	94%	95%	94%
Advancement rate (among all girls)	-	-	86%
Pass rate for gatekeeping exams	-	-	66%
New secondary school graduates	399	441	727
Cumulative secondary school graduates	1,195	1,636	2,363
Percentage of graduates enrolling in tertiary education within one year	-	-	67%
Percentage of program participants who participated in life skills education	88%	87%	85%
Percentage of program participants whose parent/guardian(s) participated in program meetings	86%	82%	82%
Percentage of program participants who received material support	52%	38%	45%



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