



2019 Year in Review

Thank you for supporting Room to Read. Together, we are transforming the lives of millions of children through education, creating a world free from illiteracy and gender inequality. For our organization, 2019 was a year of expansion and innovation. We implemented our programs in additional geographies. We invested in new technologies, like our digital library, [Literacy Cloud](#). We began working in more languages including isiZulu, Filipino, and simplified and traditional Chinese. We explored new areas in thought leadership and research, contributing to the sector in meaningful ways. And we established impactful partnerships with incredible organizations like the Obama Foundation and Sesame Workshop.

This growth has enabled us to benefit more than 18 million children around the world and change education systems dramatically. And as we mark our 20th anniversary in 2020, we have set even bigger goals for our future.

There are many children who still need our help. In low-income countries, one in three young people still cannot read¹ and 66 female students complete upper secondary education for every 100 male students.² That's why Room to Read has committed to benefiting 20 million children by the end of 2020, and 40 million children by 2025, doubling the number of children we have served in just five years. We are confident in our ability to reach this audacious goal with the help of supporters like you.



¹ UNESCO Institute of Statistics, "Learning in Your Own Language, Vital for the World's Literacy Goals," (2019)
² UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Global Education Monitoring Report, "Meeting Commitments, Are Countries on Track to Achieve SDG4?" (2019)

OUR REACH

18 Million+
children benefited to date

2 Million+
new children benefited in 2019

39,000+
Partner communities

17.8 Million+
Literacy Program participants

114,000+
Girls' Education Program participants

16
Countries of operation



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LITERACY HIGHLIGHTS

Through our Literacy Program, we train and coach teachers in reading and writing instruction and library management, create quality books and curricular materials, and establish libraries filled with children's books in local languages that can be enjoyed at school or home.

2M+
NEW CHILDREN
REACHED

1,100+
NEW LITERACY
PROGRAM SCHOOLS

11,700+
NEW TEACHERS
TRAINED

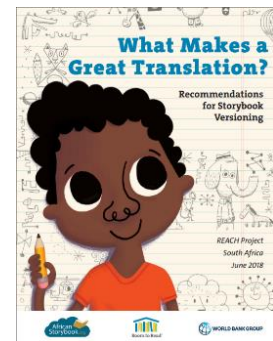
130
NEW CHILDREN'S
BOOKS PUBLISHED

1.9M+
NEW CHILDREN'S
BOOKS DISTRIBUTED

SOUTH AFRICA: PROMOTING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE CHILDRENS' BOOKS

Through our Results in Education for All Children (REACH) project, Room to Read partnered with the World Bank to build the capacity of the local language children's book publishing industry in South Africa. With this initiative, we increased the supply of high-quality indigenous language storybooks across the regions of Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Kwa-Zulu Natal. We also published our guidelines for creating quality storybooks that were endorsed by the Ministry of Education, so that more books will be created to align with these guidelines.

Over two years, we worked with five local publishers to create early-grade storybooks in five indigenous languages: isiZulu, Tshivenda, Siswati, Xitsonga and Sepedi. The books created through this initiative are openly licensed and free for anyone to use. We provided training on our best practices in local language publishing to these publishers and encouraged them to continue publishing in other indigenous languages. Through this project, we distributed more than 46,000 copies of these titles to government schools and more than 16,000 copies to the public.



INDIA: NATIONAL READING CAMPAIGN

Room to Read held a three-month reading campaign in India to raise awareness of the importance of literacy and to build a culture of reading. This "India Gets Reading" campaign launched on August 15th and received a very high level of engagement from community members, teachers and government officials. We encouraged the public to "pledge reading time" and share that pledge on social media. We also held events throughout the campaign, including a reading marathon across nine states on the eve of International Literacy Day. The campaign ultimately reached more than 2 million students in more than 30,000 schools.



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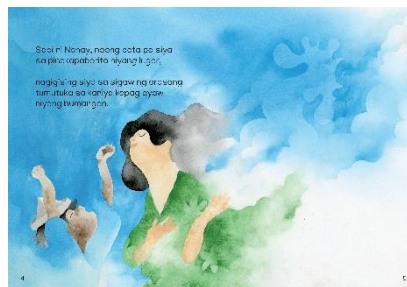
MIDDLE EAST: READING MATERIALS FOR REFUGEES

We partnered with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit educational organization behind “Sesame Street,” to provide storybooks and educational materials to Syrian refugees in Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. We also held author and illustrator workshops in Jordan to build local capacity and produce new book titles. Through this project, we created and published 16 storybooks using Sesame characters along with 112 worksheets to be used in reading and writing instruction.



BOOK PUBLISHING IN NEW LANGUAGES

Room to Read expanded our book publishing work to include three new Asian languages in 2019: Filipino, traditional Chinese and simplified Chinese. In October, Room to Read staff led author and illustrator workshops in Manila and Beijing. The project will produce 32 books in Filipino, simplified and traditional Chinese, 28 of which were completed by the end of 2019. The books all focus on diversity and inclusion, touching on topics like disabilities and poverty, that are often challenging for children to understand. This project is helping to build the capacity of the children’s book publishing industries in these countries as we collaborate with local publishers, authors, illustrators, designers and editors. With the addition of these three languages, Room to Read has developed children’s book titles in 42 languages to date!



Mrs. Dinh Thi Kim Thoa, Teacher, Laos

“I can see that my students have become more confident because of the knowledge and skills they have gained from reading library books.”



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GIRLS' EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS

Through our Girls' Education Program, we ensure that girls build the skills to succeed in school and make key life decisions. We provide life skills education, mentoring, material support, and family and community engagement.



VIETNAM: MICHELLE OBAMA VISITS OUR GIRLS' EDUCATION PROGRAM

Room to Read entered into a new partnership with the Obama Foundation's Girls Opportunity Alliance to advocate for girls' education around the world. To celebrate this partnership, we hosted former First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, at one of our partner schools in Vietnam, so she could see our Girls' Education Program in action. Mrs. Obama brought with her a delegation of inspiring women, including Julia Roberts, Lana Condor, Ngo Thanh Van, YouTube star Liza Koshy, and Jenna Bush Hager along with the TODAY Show crew. Our visitors had the opportunity to witness the powerful impact of our Girls' Education Program firsthand, as they met with program participants and alumni. Room to Read Vietnam representatives also participated in the Obama Summit in Chicago and the Obama Foundation's Asia-Pacific Leaders Program conference in Malaysia, where they actively engaged in important discussions about the future of girls' education around the world.



Photo Credit: the Obama Foundation



BANGLADESH: EMPHASIS ON CHILD MARRIAGE PREVENTION

The prevalence of child marriage in the communities where we work in Bangladesh continues to be an obstacle for girls trying to complete their education. In 2019, Room to Read collaborated with government leaders and educators to address child marriage through grassroots initiatives. Four program schools in the Natore Province organized community conferences, during which program participants led discussions about ending child marriage with their parents, local leaders, teachers and other stakeholders. As a result, over the following six month period, we helped to prevent 58 cases of child marriage.



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CAMBODIA: PARTICIPANTS EXCEED NATIONAL PASS RATE ON EXAMS

In 2019, a total of 549 Cambodian Girls' Education Program participants in Grade 12 took the national graduation exam. Of these girls, 471 successfully passed the exam. This pass rate was more than 17 percent higher than the national pass rate of 69 percent. The high pass rate resulted from exam preparation, which we facilitated through the program and peer "study clubs," a unique feature of our program in Cambodia.



We found that the Girls' Education Program made a positive and statistically significant impact on life skills, including:

- Decision-making
- Relationship-building
- Creative problem-solving
- Communication

LEADERS IN THE GENDER EQUALITY FIELD

In 2019, Room to Read strengthened our role as a thought leader in gender equality by sharing our expertise and conducting high-quality research projects and studies. Members of our Girls' Education Program team delivered presentations at major conferences including the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Conference and the Global Gender Summit. Our leadership also published many articles, including, "[A Woman's Place in a Digital World](#)" in *The Hill* by Lucina di-Meco, the Senior Director of our Girls' Education Program.

Additionally, we partnered with independent researchers to conduct an evaluation of the effects of our life skills education on girls' lives. The [Life Skills Evaluation](#) found that girls who participated in our program had a 25 percent lower dropout rate in just two years and showed higher levels of grade progression than girls in control schools. The evaluation is providing invaluable information to Room to Read and to the global education community and marks the first time that a program of this scope is being evaluated by an implementing organization in the context of low-income countries.



Yashodha, Girls' Education Program Alumna, Sri Lanka

"Today, I am an inspiration to all the brothers and sisters in my village because they witnessed how I overcame my challenges. Today, they too want to get an education and pursue their dreams. I am very happy about that. Due to Room to Read's support, I am very proud of where I am in life today."



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ORGANIZATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

CELEBRITY AMBASSADOR ENGAGEMENT

Miss Universe Sri Lanka, Ornella Gunasekara, and Disney Channel star Callan Farris became Room to Read celebrity ambassadors in 2019. We hosted another Room to Read ambassador, television and YouTube personality Lilly Singh, at a Girls' Education Program partner school in India. Lilly helped share our story and advocate for girls' education through her social media platforms. H'Hen Niê, Miss Universe Vietnam and Room to Read ambassador, joined program participants in Grade 12 at their life skills camp in Tra On. She delivered an inspiring speech to motivate the girls to aspire to their dreams.



NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

As 2019 came to a close, Room to Read launched our [Global Strategic Plan: Vision 2025](#) to guide us through the next five years. Our focus for this plan is to increase the scale and quality of our work. We will do so by assessing and refining our programs to facilitate strong learning and life outcomes for individual students and through system-level integration; enhancing operational excellence and digital transformation; and leveraging our brand to mobilize resources and strengthen influence.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

In 2019, we welcomed three new members to our Global Board of Directors: Mike Cannon-Brookes, Sabine Chalmers and Stasia Obremsky. They bring with them valuable experience and dedication to Room to Read's mission.

We also launched our ninth regional board in California this past Spring with 19 members.

HIGHEST REVENUE TO DATE

In 2019, we surpassed \$60 million in revenue for the first time. Thanks to our generous donors, partners and volunteers, these funds will provide millions of children with our life-changing programs.



Geetha Murali, Room to Read CEO

“We are committed to ending the impossible and preparing children with the skills they need to design their own destinies and solve immediate challenges in their families, communities and the world.”



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