



Room to Read®



BRINGING EDUCATION TO CHILDREN IN EMERGENCY

Room to Read Bangladesh
Annual Report 2020

© 2021 Room to Read Bangladesh

GUIDANCE

Badruzzaman Khan
Zillur Siddiki
Moinul Haque
Ruksana Sultana
Mazhar Alam
Zakir Hossain

IDEAS & STORIES

Zoynal Abedin
Shykhuluzzaman Minar
Ratan Chakraborty
Chittapriya Acharjya
Mani Mistry

DRAFTING

Eshita Tarafder

EDITING

Rakhi Sarkar
Amiruzzaman Tamal

DESIGN

Amiruzzaman Tamal

ILLUSTRATIONS

Adopted from *Bulu and the Tiger*, a
storybook illustrated by Ariful Islam

PHOTOS

Page iii: Eshita Tarafder; Page 12: Room to
Read; Page 13 (top): Room to Read; Page
13 (bottom): Eshita Tarafder; Page 17:
Room to Read; Page 18 (bottom):
Amiruzzaman Tamal; Page 19 (top and
middle): Room to Read; Page 19 (bottom),
23-24: Amiruzzaman Tamal

PRINTER

Creative Hands Ltd.

+880 2 2222 71275, 2222 71201

+880 2 2222 70952

bangladesh@roomtoread.org

roomtoread.org/countries/bangladesh

facebook.com/RoomToReadBangladesh

youtube.com/RoomToReadBangladesh

linkedin.com/company/room-to-read-bangladesh

World Change Starts with Educated Children.®



Dear friends,

2020 was a distinctive year for everyone. The year taught us several lessons and gave us many wake-up calls. The COVID-19 pandemic forced children to stay indoors, disrupting education with prolonged school closures – ultimately creating a apprehension that many of the children would drop out and never return to school.

As an organization, we tried to mitigate the immediate impact of school closures, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, and to facilitate the continuity of education through remote learning. We collectively embraced the new normal and invested our energy and passion to address the challenges during the pandemic. We went above and beyond to bring educational support to children where they were.

Through our many innovations, we reached children in new ways, ensuring their education did not stop just because schools had closed. We quickly adapted and strategized our outreach via remote, digitized, low-tech, multi-format resources and channels for girls and boys to access education resources while stuck at home. Our efforts were no longer restricted to our direct beneficiaries but reached thousands of boys and girls across the country.

The pandemic put us in a situation where we were compelled to think and act differently, and crossed several milestones as a result.

We were elated to witness how the government opened space for Room to Read. To address the learning loss in primary school children, we developed a ‘remedial package’ in consultation with NAPE and NCTB. And our video resources on life-skills became a huge hit on government-run TV channel.

Year 2020 was also special as it marked Room to Read’s 20th anniversary. Two decades of

program milestones and operational impact provided us with optimism and unveiled a roadmap for the future.

We have been rewarded with the positive responses we received from children, parents and the government on the work we delivered. The reward is also in knowing that we have survived, and in realizing that we have actually flourished.

These accomplishments would not have been possible without the support from the government, our donors and my colleagues who worked tirelessly day and night in achieving the “impossible”. I look to your continued commitment, hard work and resourcefulness to take us to the next level.

It is important that we continue to support each other, the organization, the community and ultimately the children that we work for.

Let’s keep our sleeves rolled up!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rakhi Sarkar".

Rakhi Sarkar
Country Director
Room to Read Bangladesh

WHO WE ARE

Founded in 2000 on the belief that

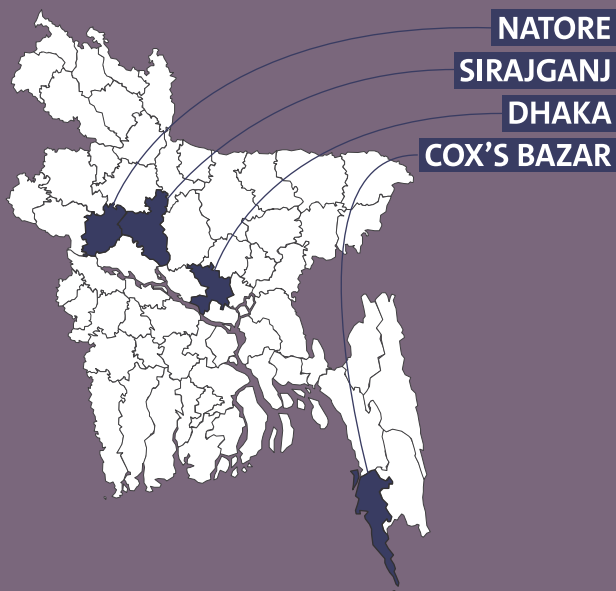
World Change Starts with Educated Children.®

Room to Read is a global organization transforming the lives of millions of children in low-income communities by focusing on literacy and gender equality in education. We envision a world in which all children can pursue a quality education that prepares them to be fulfilled and make positive change – in their families, communities and the world.

We target deep and systemic transformation within schools during two time periods that are most critical in a child's schooling: early primary school for literacy acquisition and secondary school for girls' education. Room to Read has benefited more than 23.8 million children in over 48,000 communities across 20 countries.

Our Literacy Program (LP) combines the science of learning to read with the magic of loving to read, and helps develop a generation of independent readers who are breaking the cycle of illiteracy within their own families.

Our Girls' Education Program (GEP) gives girls the tools to self-advocate and find power in their voices to chart a path that they choose for themselves.



In Bangladesh, we have directly benefited more than 0.4 million children since 2009.

We implemented programs focusing literacy and girls' education in Cox's Bazar, Dhaka, Natore and Sirajganj. In Sirajganj, program was implemented in partnership with a local NGO.

Aiming at the sustainability of our program mandates, we provided technical support to local government, head and assistant teachers, and SMC to build their capacity on issues such as literacy, school governance, stopping child marriage etc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS



05 2020 – a year of the pandemic

07 The numbers that count

09 Our efforts for children's literacy

15 Increased focus on girls' education

21 Financials and stewardship

22 Leveraging the media scene

23 Our workforce and leadership

26 Core values at work

THEORY OF CHANGE

An updated, robust theory that is global and yet accommodates rural context was at the heart of our thinking and action throughout 2020. It helped us reflect on the relationship between our programs and the implementation strategy. Following inputs that range from building skills of teachers to sharing teaching-learning resources, working with the school management, family & community to instill a zeal for education as well as informing and empowering adolescent girls, we liaise with policy makers about what we can do jointly.



Public policies and practices that focus appropriate resources toward achieving literacy outcomes and delivering gender-transformative life skills at scale.

INNOVATION AND DEMONSTRATION APPROACH

Room to Read partners with governments and other stakeholders to test and implement innovative models that help children succeed in school by achieving positive literacy outcomes and gender-transformative life skills.

Informed policy uptake for early-grade literacy and gender-transformative life skill outcomes create an enabling environment for wider and stronger education and its management. In this design, children and their families from direct program support acquire the necessary skills and attitude toward positive change. Alongside the teachers and education sector officials of the government, they contribute to developing and accessing equitable solutions to the most pressing challenges the communities face in the longer term.

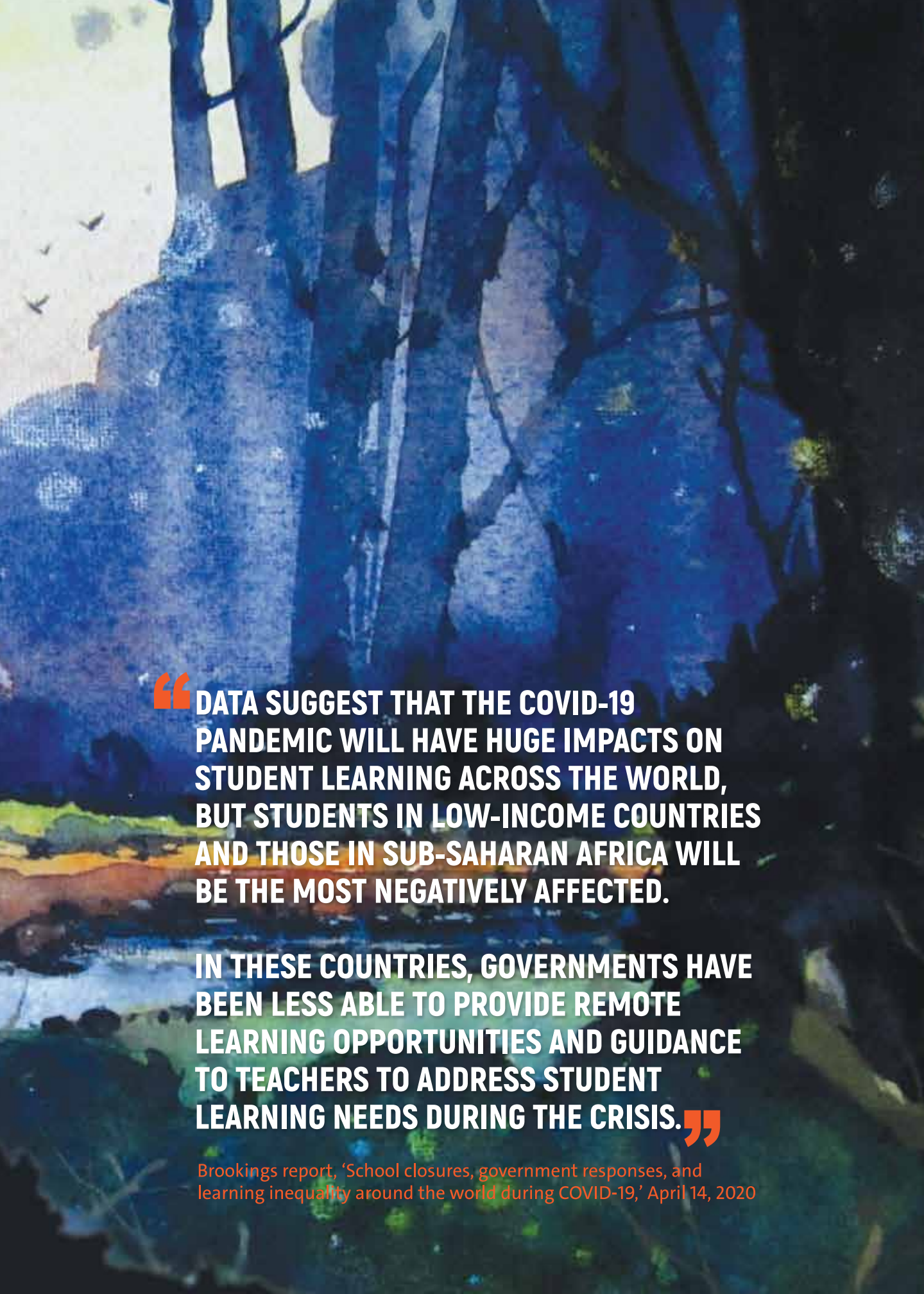


All children are fulfilled and have the necessary skills to make positive change and contribute equitable solutions to the most pressing challenges—in their families, communities and the world.

COLLABORATION AND EXPANSION APPROACH

Through targeted technical assistance and increased cost-share, Room to Read leverages our practical experience and operational excellence to partner with governments and other stakeholders, integrating best practices into the education system in order to maximize positive outcomes for children at scale.





“ DATA SUGGEST THAT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WILL HAVE HUGE IMPACTS ON STUDENT LEARNING ACROSS THE WORLD, BUT STUDENTS IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES AND THOSE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA WILL BE THE MOST NEGATIVELY AFFECTED.

IN THESE COUNTRIES, GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEEN LESS ABLE TO PROVIDE REMOTE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND GUIDANCE TO TEACHERS TO ADDRESS STUDENT LEARNING NEEDS DURING THE CRISIS.”

Brookings report, 'School closures, government responses, and learning inequality around the world during COVID-19,' April 14, 2020

2020 – A YEAR OF THE PANDEMIC

Starting 17 March, a nation-wide school closure was enforced to tackle the spread of COVID-19 in Bangladesh. Formal education of 17.3 million primary school-going children came to a halt. Literacy rate among primary school children was feared to be affected. With over 8.3 million girls (UNESCO) in Bangladesh's secondary education level now away from school, generational poverty that the country was reversing was feared to rise. The first generation of learners created in many families were at risk of never returning to school. This was a huge blow to the country's effort towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, it is crucial that children gain the skill to read by the time they complete grade 2 so that they become confident readers and do not lose interest in going to school. Beside children's sustained access to rich reading materials and their scope to discover the 'mirrors' and 'windows' in storybooks, they also need continued support to learn reading skill before they reached the crucial junction in their journey of life-long learning.

Girls aged 11 to 17+ years (grades 6-12) in Bangladesh's low-income communities have always been at a constant risk of dropping out of school, of child marriage and sexual harassment. COVID-19 heightened these challenges. Adolescent girls, acknowledged as a crucial demographic but still neglected and marginalized, were at risk of losing the scope to chart a secure path in life through education and life skills.

Under these circumstances, the government introduced distance learning as an alternative to classroom-based instruction. Room to Read stepped in with digital resources.

To counter the prolonged school closure and the uncertainties looming large, we adapted to the “new normal” in continuing to bring education resources to learners and teachers as well as to coach and mentor girls remotely so that children did not lose hope – rather continued with education at home.

To continue to reach children stuck at home due to COVID-19, Room to Read Bangladesh adapted its education resources and program outreach. Distant education support in the form of both digital and print resources helped children continue learning. These were expected to compensate for the learning loss in primary school-level children and keep the secondary school girls engaged in education:

A major part of the “new normal” required digitization of Room to Read's existing print resources and development of new print materials – especially for children whose parents did not have access to the internet. Room to Read also sourced its televised version of storybooks from a children's TV to make it readily accessible online. Links to playlists were shared via text messages.

It was crucial that girls had access to equal opportunities. We adapted our outreach strategies to ensure that girls or their families did not consider stopping education or resort to child marriage. All of our regular individual and group mentoring support was doubled and delivered remotely. We stressed on mental wellbeing of the girls' by engaging them to take up creative activities at home.



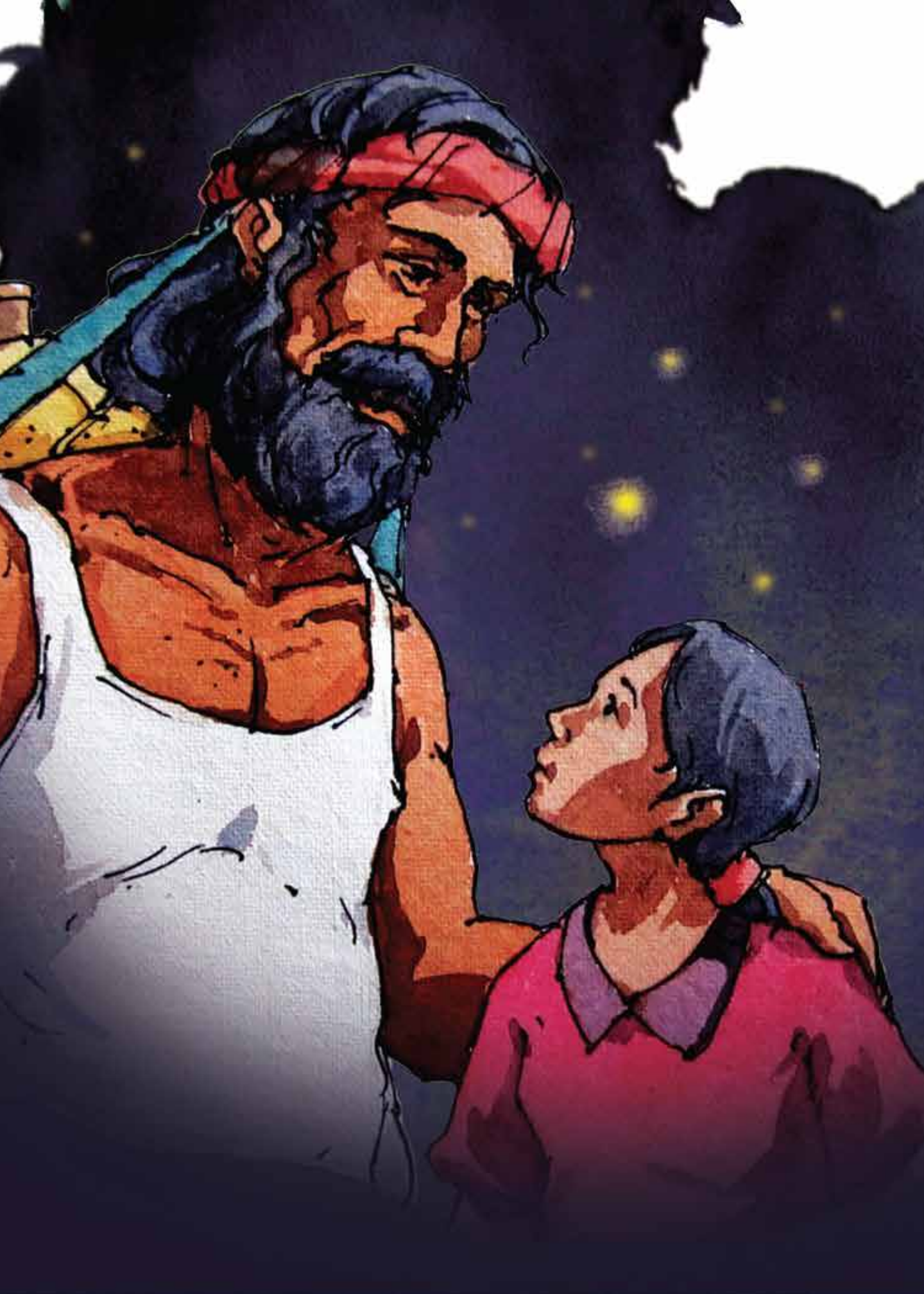
THE NUMBERS THAT COUNT

At the end of 2020, we have benefited more than 23 million children and have worked in 20 countries. That includes 4.9 million new children benefited in 2020 alone. Many of the 4.9 million children benefited in 2020 were reached through innovative program interventions that we designed to overcome the many challenges of the pandemic.

Through our interventions in Bangladesh, we were able to reach children in new ways while ensuring their education did not stop just because schools closed. This included both children enrolled in our programs and those who were not active Program participants pre-pandemic. ‘New’ children were able to benefit from our digital 1:1 outreach, content delivery via Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS), television programs, and mass distribution of print materials and stationary items that were replenished frequently.

Estimating reach (i.e., children benefited) was conservatively calculated based on variables unique to each activity. We determined error-proof ways and methods of counting direct and indirect beneficiaries. Together, we focused on obtaining clear, consistent and detailed information about regular activities as well as our COVID-19 inputs in both the program streams: Literacy Program (LP) and Girls’ Education Program (GEP).

	LP		GEP	
REGULAR ACTIVITIES	907	schools and <i>ebtedayee</i> madrasahs supported	3,964	adolescent girls supported
	274K	early-grade children benefited	1,061	girls received education materials
	230K	children in refugee camps benefited	178K	SMS delivered with edu materials
	20	children’s non-/fiction storybooks developed	143	child marriages prevented
COVID-19 INPUTS	2.6K	primary school teachers trained	2,970	girls engaged with creative/arts
	471K	SMS nudges sent to parents/guardians	2,353	girls watched distance learning
	41K	children received print materials	3,964	girls received individual mentoring remotely
	432	hours of virtual training delivered using 13 videos	89K	individual mentoring sessions delivered
	446K	50 storybooks distributed as printed Story Cards	3,822	girls joined group mentoring remotely
	7,080K	nudges on 3 national TVs reached parents	3,806	parents attended virtual workshops



OUR EFFORTS FOR CHILDREN'S LITERACY

Room to Read's 'Literacy Program' helps students develop the reading and writing skills that provide a foundation for all future learning. In order to promote literacy, we support reading and writing instruction, publish and distribute high-quality reading materials and establish child-friendly learning spaces.

According to UNESCO, half of the total number of students out of school due to the COVID-19 pandemic did not have access to a household computer and 43% had no internet at home. In low-income communities, the disparities became more pronounced.

A breakthrough in education:

Unfettered by the challenges from closure of schools, which are central to our literacy and girls' education programs, we adapted our strategies and innovated the deliverables. We braved through the challenges to align with the "new normal" in keeping students now out-of-school in touch with the learning process and continuing education at home.

We built human connection at a critical time. Our distance learning programs served as an essential lifeline to Bangladesh's most vulnerable children. Our educational inputs did not depend on internet connectivity solely because this was largely unavailable or unaffordable in the localities we served.

To facilitate learning in this environment, we provided connectivity via channels that were most accessible to children (through parents), including audio contents via regular mobile phones, videos on TV, text messaging and hard copies of learning materials. This filled a critical gap by helping learners where they were.

Our distance learning programs became an essential lifeline for children. We utilized EdTech to reach children, parents and teachers during the crucial time. We developed classroom instruction videos on letter learning for grade 1 students, and read-aloud videos to bring the joy of reading to them. Our partnership and collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) supported us to disseminate the digital resources widely. We partnered with Aspire to Innovate (a2i) – flagship program of the Digital Bangladesh agenda operating under the Prime Minister's Office – to contribute our teaching-learning resources focusing literacy to the pool of digital contents being hosted on GoB's Education Hub.



An impossible breakthrough

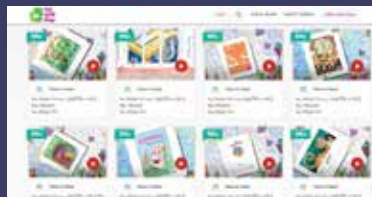
A. K. Fazlul Huq admitted in 'MA in English' after obtaining BA degree with triple Honours in chemistry, mathematics and physics. Just six months before MA final exam, a friend of his father teased him saying that he was weak in mathematics. Huq opposed the idea strongly and took up the challenge. He passed Master of Arts in mathematics!



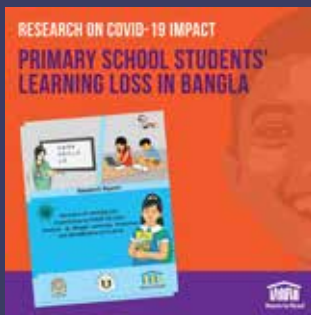
Additionally, 52 episodes of our previously televised storybooks were also made available widely via the a2i website. To keep children interested in reading, the series were aired again on Duronto TV during the pandemic. Notifications about the airing and the availability of the videos on YouTube were regularly posted on social media platforms.

Besides developing and disseminating digital content, we continued working with the government. We reviewed education strategies and explored ways to integrate a ‘Social & Emotional Learning’ (SEL) aspect into the shifting paradigm of literacy teaching-learning and the defined COVID-19 pedagogy, and to solidify our roles as thought leader. Children benefited from SEL resources.

To prioritize attainable learning competencies for students in the primary school level, we conducted a study in collaboration with the National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE) and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB). The study was titled ‘Analysis of Learning Outcomes and Identifying Potential Areas of Content to Recover Learning Loss due to COVID-19’.



Through the study, we determined students’ learning outcomes and a prioritized list of contents to develop a remedial package that can potentially reduce the learning loss in students from grades 1 to 5. The learning outcomes were listed in three categories as per three potential categories of situation: Must Learn, Should Learn, Nice to Learn. The research report was unveiled during an online conference in presence of all tiers of primary education – ranging from school teachers to Thana-level education officials to Director Generals of three government entities, academics and development workers.



The Director General of DPE was present as the chief guest of the conference. Director General of NAPE and Chairman of NCTB were present as special guests in the virtual event jointly organized by Room to Read, NAPE & NCTB. Education experts from the University of Dhaka presented the research findings and explained grounds for targeting ‘Must Learn’ competency in a mixed-model approach to teach at the right level using focused pedagogies and selected contents by blending face-to-face and remote teaching. One of the recommendations was to develop Bangla remedial package.



We organized a webinar with #NextGenEdu powered by a2i. The webinar was followed by an interactive breakout session that brought together international thought-leaders, policymakers, government’s education departments as well as a host of development practitioners who came together to explore critical gaps and opportunities and cocreate reimagined models and ideas that could be tested and scaled to address emerging challenges. The joint venture and recommendations helped us to propose integration of SEL in the primary education curriculum.

To support policymakers with a ready reference to potentially help learners achieve grade-wise competencies within the span of a limited time when schools would reopen, we prepared an essential ‘remedial package’ and developed worksheets (for grades 1-2) as well as detailed instruction routines for primary school teachers. The resources were developed in consultation with NAPE and NCTB. Through several online trainings, we built capacity of the teachers in our working areas in Cox’s Bazar, Dhaka and Natore on how to implement this package. The training sessions were made relevant with facilitation by the officials and experts from government’s education sector.

It is important to mention that several adaptations of existing literacy activities or resources were part of our literacy focused project funded by USDA/WFP for the host communities of Cox’s Bazar, where more than 44K children were supported. As part of the project titled ‘McGovern-Dole International Food for Education & Child Nutrition Program’, we distributed storybooks as Story Cards, supported to develop teachers’ capacity online, reminded parents via SMS nudges on increasingly support children learning at home. We also worked with Imams of local Masques to deliver important messages.

We engaged renowned Bangladeshi celebrities to read aloud from children’s storybooks. A total of 40 videos were produced with engaging performance by celebrities from film and TV media. All of these videos were based on storybooks published by Room to Read under its regular program and also the said project. Equipped with these resources, read-aloud video episodes were aired on a popular national TV channel with a ‘*Boi Pori Jibon Gori*’ title on prime time during weekends. To increase viewership, we made sure to spread the word via social media and SMS in bulk quantities.

Throughout the year, we continued to enhance teachers’ capacity remotely. In so doing, we converted printed training modules into videos. Several videos on ‘classroom-based instruction’ as well as on ‘library management and activity’ were developed and utilized to help build teachers’ skill. Popular among the primary school teachers, these videos were expected to be helpful in ensuring sustainability of our program. Importantly, we also considered post-crisis condition of young learners and developed a video on ‘trauma-informed teaching’. It would also help teachers incorporate SEL.



For the first time, we incorporated SEL in worksheets. Children’s ability to color people figures (frontline COVID-19 fighters) to their heart’s content made a huge impact on them. Aligned with the NCTB textbook, these worksheet booklets were designed to methodically help children write out letters and complete homework with confidence. Similar to the worksheets, our low-tech print solution Story Cards hugely replenished children’s need of accessing new stories from the safety of their homes. We converted a large number of storybooks into Story Cards that carried level-specific reading comprehension question overleaf. Printed copies of these Story Cards were couriered to learners. Any impact of the lack of access to classroom library or internet was thus minimized.



To deliver early-grade literacy contents regularly, we customized learning resources and provided those on outbound calls via the IVRS. The audio contents focused on both the literacy and numeracy skills. A large number of SMS nudges were sent to inform and inspire families to watch distance learning program, to access videos on both national and local TVs where we purchased airtime, to continue children’s learning activities at home etc.

To inspire parents’ increased involvement in children’s education at home, we developed an animated TV Commercial (TVC) and unveiled it on the Universal Children’s Day. Three prominent TV channels (NTV, Channel i, BanglaVision) aired it on prime time with repeats.

In the beginning of 2020, we developed a competency framework to assess the literacy skills of children in Rohingya camps. This was carried out as part of the Education Sector (ES) and with funding from UNICEF. The literacy content we developed was targeted to support +299K Rohingya children’s education.

ES partners, including Room to Read Bangladesh, operationalized the Learning Competency Framework and Approach (LCFA). We also carried out assessments and the development of supplementary teaching-learning resources after consulting Rohingya children, writers and illustrators. This helped develop storybooks, dialogue charts and decodable books – in both English and Burmese – as well as activity sheets, teacher guides and conversation charts. We also developed audio-clips to help minimize children’s learning gap.

For learning improvement in selected primary schools in Cox’s Bazar’s host communities through strengthening of teaching-learning, school governance & community engagement, we launched a second project with funding from UNICEF. With more than 122,000 children in the primary schools, we carried out program to contribute to achieving government’s Primary Education Development Program (PEDP4): to ensure quality education for all children.





INCREASED FOCUS ON **GIRLS' EDUCATION**

Our 'Girl's Education Program' intervenes at a time when girls are especially vulnerable to falling behind or dropping out of secondary schools. By helping girls to learn important life skills and providing mentoring, we ensure that girls are prepared to overcome obstacles and succeed in their education and their lives.

A UN policy brief about COVID-19 impact on women warned, "Evidence from past epidemics shows that adolescent girls are at [higher] risk of dropping out and not returning to school even after the crisis is over." We rolled up our sleeves and invested to double our efforts.

A journey towards success:

Our program participants typically live in low-income, isolated and remote areas, making them especially likely to be forced to give up their education permanently as a result of this crisis. We worked round the clock to avoid this outcome, pivoted our programs to ensure we continued to cultivate the vital and enduring life-skills that help girls protect their futures.

Because female role models have long been shown to increase girls' aspirations for their own education, mentoring meetings were our key program component in 2020. Held online, these meetings offered safe spaces for girls to share the challenges facing them, such as the pressure to drop out from school, to marry early or to contribute to family income by getting employed – which would have meant an end to their education.

We increased touchpoints with our program participants identified as "at risk." The risk was determined using our 'Risk and Response Tool', a powerful early warning system that helped us identify and immediately act on risk factors that were strongly associated with dropouts. We updated this tool to reflect the risk factors associated with this educational crisis and identified girls who needed more intensive support.

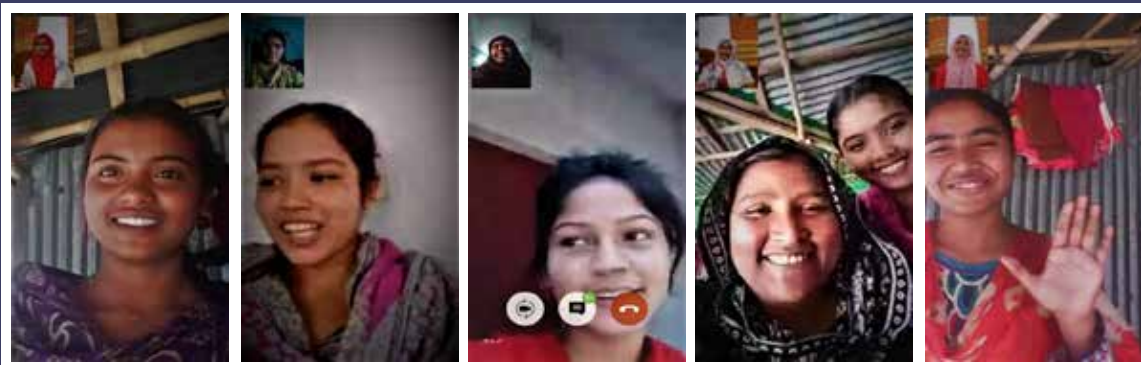
Throughout the year-long school closure, we continued to provide individual mentoring to girls over the phone. We made use of the mentoring sessions to emotionally support girls through the crisis and provided encouragement for continuing their academic study at home. We also referred girls to official sources of information regarding staying safe from COVID-19 and started discussion around navigating the much-expected return to school.



An impossible journey

In a time when women were kept indoors and men sent for education, Begum Rokeya learnt both Bangla and English at home. She realized that women could be freed if they're educated, and started a school with only five students. In spite of hostile criticism and obstacles, Rokeya visited houses and convinced parents to send girls to school. The school kept growing.

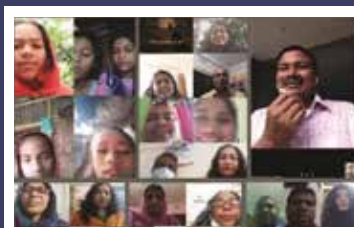




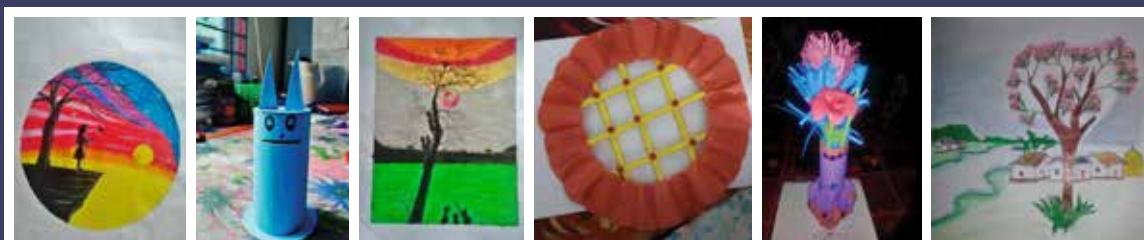
We adapted outreach strategy for girls away from school and tagged their parents to remind about the importance of girls' education. The individual and group mentoring support was doubled and delivered online for girls in Cox's Bazar, Dhaka, Natore and Sirajganj. Moreover, we contacted parents via calls and SMS. As a result of stronger advocacy with them, we prevented 143 cases of child marriage and secured scope of education.

To help girls watch distance learning program on govt.'s Sangsad TV, we spoke with teachers and SMC to inform and influence the parents. Virtually, we liaised with the head teachers, focal teachers, SMC chairs and members to stress on girls' safety and teachers' role in remotely reaching out to parents to support their daughters to continue education. Inspired by us, a few teachers went online to conduct classes.

In partnership with DSHE, we contributed to government's distance learning program on TV. We were entrusted with the 3rd and 4th periods of the weekly class routine. We selected important life-skills topics to develop detailed videos that were aired on *Amar Ghore Amar School*. Support and guidance from DSHE were instrumental to the transformation of the usual face-to-face LSE topic into telecast-ready videos.



Alongside watching distance learning classes and accordingly completing homework, the program participants kept their creative hats on and engaged themselves in artsy handicraft throughout the year. They created beautiful handicrafts, prepared sketches and paintings and wrote creative stories, essays etc. These mediums of expression impacted them positively amidst a growing concern of crisis-induced trauma, and prolonged homestay. The nagging uncertainty of the COVID-19 context was well-managed to not manifest in adverse ways.





We observed the International Day of the Girl Child through a webinar titled 'Future of Our Girl Child in COVID-19 Context.' Hon'ble Minister Dr. Dipu Moni, MP, Ministry of Education, was the chief guest of the event. Mr. Zunaid Ahmed Palak, MP, hon'ble State Minister for ICT, was the special guest. Three GEP girls – Farhana, Marzia and Sanjida – joined the panel.

Panelists included the Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, the Project Director of Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence Against Women at the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, the Director General of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), the Director (Planning and Development) with DSHE, and the Deputy Commissioner at Dhaka Metropolitan Police.



Emphasizing the value of life skills, hon'ble Minister of Education, Dr. Dipu Moni, MP, said, "Government is working to improve women-friendly and inclusive educational infrastructure... We want our students to learn through joy... We want our students to grow up with creativity, values, humanity, problem solving skills... considering life and livelihood."



Endorsing our program intervention, the hon'ble State Minister for ICT, Mr. Junayed Ahmed Polok, MP, said – "... I visited the Life Skill Education (LSE) club of Room to Read Bangladesh. They are making outstanding contributions to our education system. We will launch 'Sheikh Russel Digital Labs' starting in the schools supported by Room to Read."

Before the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh, we organized a badminton tournament for adolescent girls in 13 secondary schools located in the underprivileged communities on the outskirts of Dhaka. Each of the girls who played, shouted and cheered for each other knew it well that the winner is anyone who dreams big despite socially enforced gender roles. Government's education officials extended overall support to the event.



Also before the pandemic, we celebrated International Women’s Day (IWD) in education institutions at the community level. Activities included rally, school assembly, art competition, poster campaign, wall mag, speech against sexual harassment and cultural program. On #EachForEqual theme, we discussed ways to create a gender equal world – because everyone benefits from a world of equality, everyone wins.



“Room to Read is doing outstanding work to minimize negative attitudes toward girls in my community. Throughout school closure, they have been communicating with us, following up with [my daughter] Akhi and informing us about how important education is in Akhi’s life. I’m really thankful to Room to Read because they are doing a lot for my daughter.” – Akhi’s mother



Akhi’s is a story from our Girls’ Education Program directly benefiting from funds raised through Red Nose Day, a campaign run by the nonprofit organization Comic Relief US. Akhi hopes to become a doctor so that she can help her community. For now, she is excited to continue her studies and build the skills and knowledge to make her dreams come true, all with help of Room to Read Girls’ Education Program supported by Red Nose Day.

One of our GEP girls Keya, who hailed from an impoverished host community in Cox’s Bazar that experienced a deteriorating living condition due to fresh influx of the Rohingya population, was featured by Red Nose Day. An inspiring and fearless speaker of sexual harassment against girls, Keya was a powerhouse on camera. She earned a spotlight from our global donor resulting in a follow-up interview organized on video call and then was featured in a blog that went places. Today, Keya is on a path to leave a legacy of change, crediting our life-changing Girls’ Education Program:



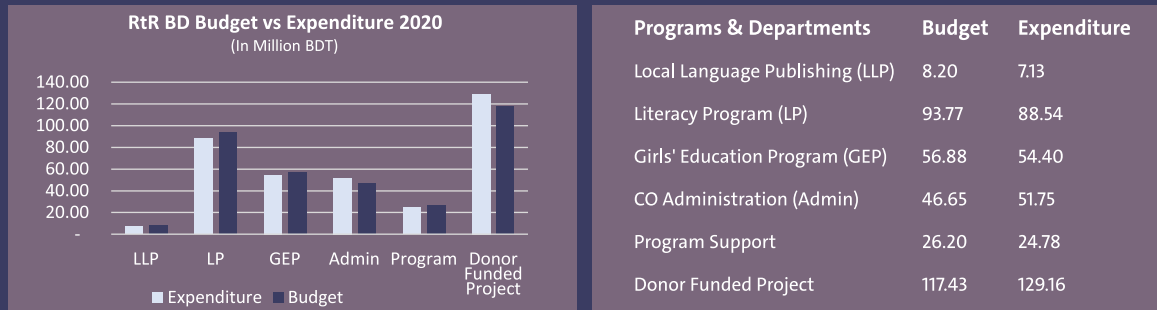
“I have learned here how to be independent, self-sufficient and self-reliant, how to fight and speak up against harassment. I have learned all these things from the life skills education sessions [of Room to Read].”



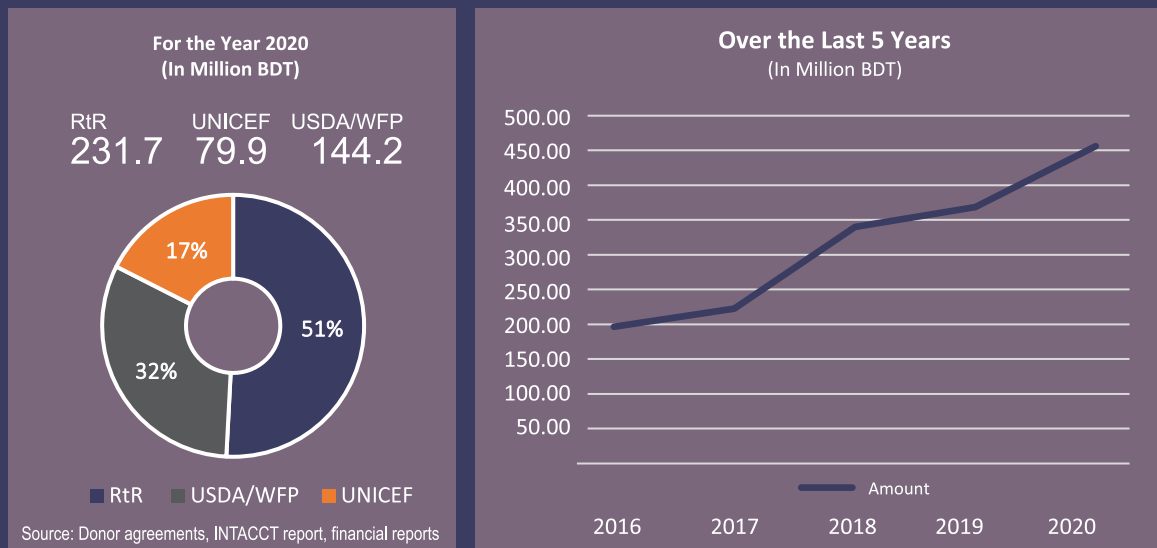
FINANCIALS AND STEWARDSHIP

Room to Read Bangladesh worked relentlessly toward transforming the lives of millions of children by focusing on literacy and gender equality in education.

The financials show the reflection of achievements against targets. The bar chart of each department shows expenditure against the budget that moved closely over the year.



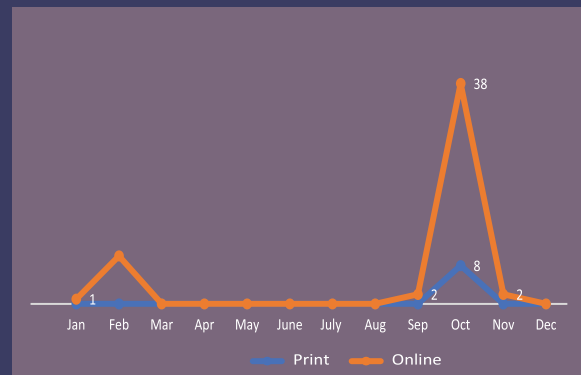
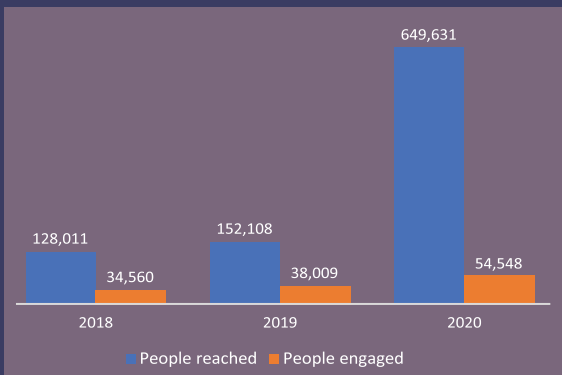
Room to Read Bangladesh implemented three donor funded projects in 2020. The total budget for donor funded project was BDT 224.13 million and the total expenditure was BDT 159.22 million. The chart below shows that funding increased more than 100% when compared to the trend in the last five years.



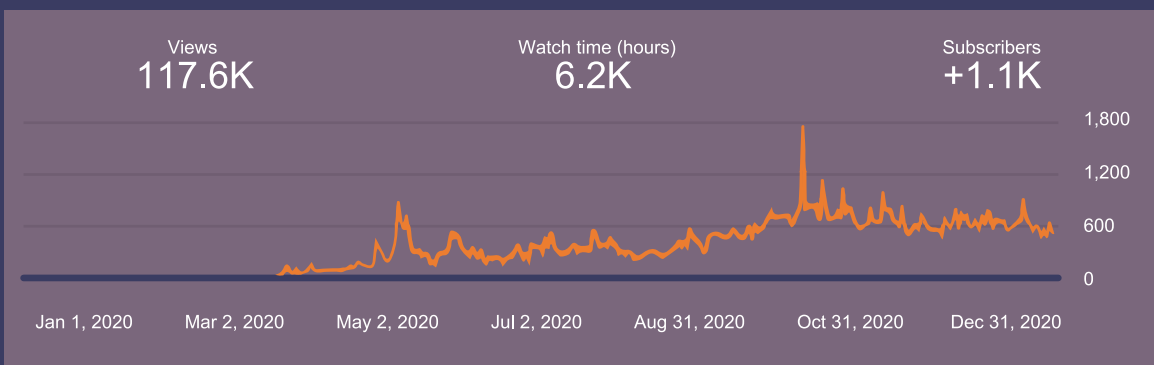
LEVERAGING THE MEDIA SCENE

On Facebook this year we earned a performance badge: 'Very responsive to messages'. The page rating is also all-time high: 5 out of 5. We also reached 5,000 followers milestone. We thank our followers to promote Room to Read Bangladesh on online platforms and inspire us to bring systemic transformation within schools reflected in 194 stories/contents.

Two mainstream media outlets Dhaka Tribune and NewAge ran detailed features on Room to Read Bangladesh's literacy and girls' education initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic to observe Literacy Day and the International Day of the Girl Child.



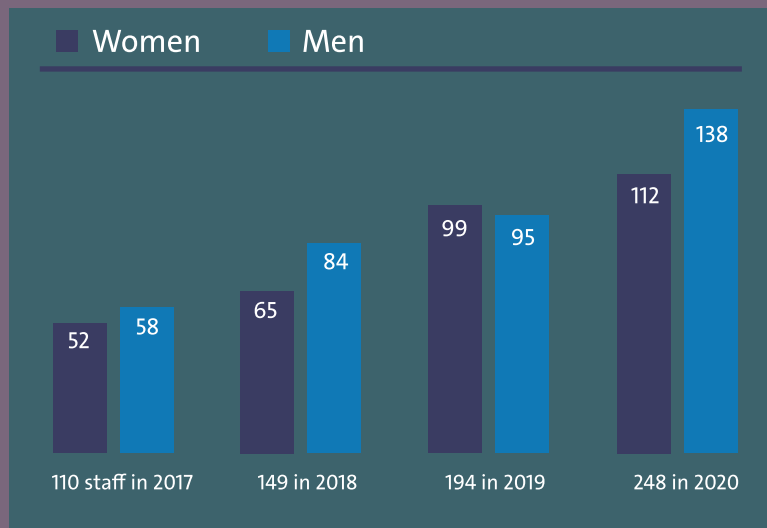
This year, our visibility in YouTube channel rose hugely. We started with 83 subscribers that increased to 999 at the end of 2020 with 'organic' post. Our video content was viewed 117.6K times and a total of 6.2K hours of video were played. This year all the digital learning resources were hosted and aired by our YouTube channel under several playlists. Besides these learning videos, we disseminated video contents that highlighted our achievement and stories of success via all our online channels leveraging benefits from cross-posting. Insights from analytics:



OUR WORKFORCE AND LEADERSHIP

Our commitment to creating a gender-sensitive organization is based on decades of experience from implementing our Girls' Education Program and on the inherent respect for women and girls as well as for their freedom, voice and leadership. We published culturally relevant books that feature strong female protagonists and men in non-traditional gender roles across compelling stories and genres.

Bangladesh team implemented gender sensitive policies as well as programs. We made active efforts in achieving gender balance in teams. In 2020, recruitment for large scale staffing showed our effort towards the balance in numbers. The 4-year comparison also stands testament to our sustained growth as an organization and a diverse, competent workforce.



As COVID-19 continued to affect widely – and we survived an unusual year – we spoke with our leadership team about what they thought of the year past and what kept them optimistic.



The COVID-19 pandemic has brought so many changes and challenges to our personal and working lives... It changed the world of work – workplaces, programs, practices have had to adapt. I would say, we did exceedingly well in adapting to the new conditions and managed to overcome the difficulties and thrive in these trying times.... I am amazed that how we as a team overrode the challenges and turned them into opportunities and brought in changes that we aspired for.

- RAKHI Sarkar, Country Director



[2020] has been filled with a multitude of both challenges and victories. Every year is different but this one was filled with more change than normal. It has been reassuring to see how we have risen to meet every roadblock, while always reaching out for all our beneficiaries and stakeholders. The endless hours we spent working, and the professionalism we showed was really impressive... No matter what the situation was, we persevered as a team and came out stronger.

- BADRUZZAMAN Khan, Director – Program Operations



I am impressed with [our] relentless effort to organize and facilitate continuous professional development activities for the teachers and staff... development of the capacity building videos, life skill videos, worksheets, read-aloud videos, instruction videos, and even IVRS audio contents... [These] will be playing a significant role... in the coming years! We have also achieved remarkable progress in collaboration with... NAPE, NCTB, DPE, a2i and DSHE.

- ZILLUR Rahman Siddiki, Director – Literacy Program



For more than 6 months, we were under lockdown and even now most of the staff members are working from home. In spite of that, we are expecting an expenditure of BDT 35 crore in 2020, which is around 10% higher than last year and the highest budget implementation in the 10-year life span of Room to Read in Bangladesh. This was possible because of [our] hard work, sincerity, passion to do better and obviously because of [our] commitment.

- MOINUL Haque, Director – Accounting and Finance



[As part of a] strategic partnership with the government,... we were able to air “Amar Ghore Amar School”. We were able to take the time to communicate with the parents and raise awareness about COVID-19 and its safety measures. We were also able to communicate with the girls and [provide] individual and group mentoring support which [helped] them to be able to identify their problems and find the solutions. All of this was achieved because of [our staff]. I thank you all.

- RUKSANA Sultana, Sr. Manager – Girls' Education Program



We were baffled at the beginning of the lockdown with a lot of anxiety and fear. Room to Read was thinking about how to work in an alternative way and keep the organization afloat just when all was coming to a standstill due to fear and apprehension. From that thought we started the new journey of working virtually. In the beginning, it was challenging for us to adjust but after a while we got used to [it]. We have crossed several milestones...

- MAZHAR Alam, Sr. Manager – People Operations



In this year, we have missed some important opportunities for showcasing the impact of our interventions through assessments. [We] also missed regular tracking, data and program quality measurement related activities as school were closed due to COVID-19 pandemic. However, we have invented alternative procedures to measure our innovative work and relaying our accomplishments to our stakeholders including our global offices to uphold country contributions.

- ZAKIR Hossain, Sr. Manager – Research, Monitoring & Evaluation





CORE VALUES AT WORK

Collaboration:

We value partnership.

Action:

We take ownership
to achieve positive outcomes.

Respect:

We find joy in celebrating
accomplishments together.

Education:

We are a learning organization
with a passion for education.

Scale:

We focus on benefiting
the most children possible,
as quickly as possible.

Join us!

If you believe, just like we do, that -

World Change Starts with Educated Children.®

INVEST IN EDUCATION

Contact our head office to get involved.
Donations can be made globally.

JOIN GLOBAL NETWORKS

To get involved in our global network of
volunteers and campaigners, visit
roomtoread.org/take-action

FOLLOW US ONLINE

Want to see how we are making literacy
and gender equality work in Bangladesh?

- roomtoread.org/countries/bangladesh
- facebook.com/RoomToReadBangladesh
- youtube.com/RoomToReadBangladesh
- linkedin.com/company/room-to-read-bangladesh

Head Office:
465 California Street,
Suite 1000, San Francisco,
CA 94104, United States of
America

Bangladesh Country Office:
House 31 (3rd - 5th floors)
Road 4, Block F, Banani
Model Town, Dhaka 1213
+88 02 2222 71275

Cox's Bazar Field Office:
303 ANS Village (1st - 3rd floors)
Maddam Baharchora, Abdus
Salam Road, Cox's Bazar
+88 03416 4131, 025106 0151

Dhaka Field Office:
AGI Business Center (6th floor)
House: 81/B-1, Hosne Dalan
Road, Chankarpul, Dhaka 1211
+88 02573 00697

Natore Field Office:
Zamzam Tower (1st - 2nd floors)
Holding # 327-05, Mollah Bazar
Road (opposite WAPDA), Natore
+88 0771 61040