

Room to Read is proud to partner with Books for Africa, our work would not be possible without your support. This past year was pivotal with the COVID-19 pandemic and keeping children learning around the world. In 2020, Books for Africa shared over 116,000+ books to our libraries in South Africa with an additional 320,000+ books on the way to Tanzania and Uganda this year! On behalf of all of us here at Room to Read and the millions of children and their communities we reach each year, thank you for your dedication to ensuring every child has the literacy skills they need to succeed and live a fulfilled life.

LITERACY PROGRAM UPDATE



Room to Read combines the science of learning to read with the magic of loving to read. Through our Literacy Program, we train and coach educators, create quality children's books and curricular materials, and establish libraries filled with diverse children's books that can be enjoyed at school or at home. We encourage each child to become a fluent, engaged, and independent reader with love for a variety of books, genres, and styles. We partner with local communities, governments, and the publishing industry to test

and implement innovative models that help children succeed in school and develop a love of reading. Having the operational expertise to translate program design into practice allows us train others how to integrate our approach into public education systems to achieve literacy outcomes at scale.

In the first few months of 2020, schools were open in Cambodia, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Tanzania. Our teams were able to carry out our planned Literacy Program activities without interruption until early March. We trained teachers, librarians, and school administrators on a range of topics from library management to grade level instruction. We also distributed books to Room to Read libraries



and conducted library reading periods, providing children with structured time to read in school as well as books to take home. During this time our staff continued to meet with local government officials to strengthen our working relationships in each country and ensure continued support for our Literacy Program. We are pleased to share the following highlights from early 2020.

In January and February, our team in **Cambodia** met with the Ministry of Education to develop a library **partnership to scale Room to Read libraries across the country**. As a result of these meetings, the Ministry agreed to initiate a formal partnership and to begin setting up a National Libraries Working Group, chaired by Room to Read. We are looking forward to kicking off this partnership in 2021.

In **South Africa**, we celebrated the successful completion our Results in Education for All Children (REACH) project. We **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**.

In **Sri Lanka**, we were invited to be a **technical partner of the government's library training program for primary schools**. This was the first time the government acknowledged and requested technical assistance for this nationwide program and we were the first partner to support the library trainings. Room to Read was invited to conduct a read-aloud activity and a session on "The Benefit of reading activities." Mahesh Pathirathna, Associate Director of Room to Read's Literacy Program for South Asia, led the 'Benefit of Reading activities training (pictured right).



In **Tanzania**, we saw an increased number of students improve their reading skills since the establishment of libraries in their schools. Around **85% of students who advanced to grade two at the beginning of 2020 had fully mastered their reading and writing skills**. The remaining students had an intermediate mastery of their reading and writing skills. This is a marked improvement on children's skill levels prior to the establishment of Room to Read libraries and library programming.

COVID-19 PIVOTS

Though we had an exciting start to 2020, the year ultimately brought challenges we could not have predicted. Starting in March, we quickly began to pivot our programs to reach children at home. Because many of the children in the communities we serve do not have reliable internet access, we implemented a range of no tech (book and literacy packet distribution), low tech (radio and TV content) and high tech (our digital learning platform [Literacy Cloud](#)) ways to reach students. We have tailored our approach by each country, region and community to ensure we are reaching students in a way that works for them and their families. Whether that's via hard copy learning materials, radio broadcast of read-alouds and literacy instruction, specialized TV episodes, or even sharing resources and lesson plans with parents via text, we have adapted and will continue to adapt our programs as needed to ensure every child has the chance to develop a lifelong love of reading and learning.

The needs of each child and community we serve have never been so varied. This breadth of student experiences has made programmatic flexibility crucial. Especially for children who might be experiencing fluctuations between learning at home, in the classroom and then back home again, it is critical that we adapt to the changing local conditions and provide as much consistency as possible. Below are a few highlights from our Literacy Program that demonstrate the range of ways that we are reaching students and educators.

- **Strategies to Reinforce Classroom Learning in Cambodia:** Since September, the government in Cambodia has been facilitating an interim semester, whereby schools help children pick up where they left off in their learning. Even though schools are now open, the government is still taking precautions and facilitating three categories of implementation based on class size (i.e., the higher the class size, the fewer days students go to school). This categorization has made it challenging for teachers to pace content as well as make sure that all children are supported to get ahead of any learning loss. To support children who are not attending school every day, our Cambodia team is training teachers and principals to organize and facilitate at-home group learning. This approach relies on older children or parents to work with Grade 1 and Grade 2 children in small groups, conducting read-aloud activities using books from the school library and reinforcing what children learn in the classroom using Room to Read's supplementary workbooks. The Cambodia team is setting the foundation for implementing this same approach next year, as the team expects some children will still have limited access to in-person classroom learning in 2021.
- **Read-alouds on Community Radio in South Africa:** This year, our South Africa team began broadcasting read-alouds in Sepedi, Xitsonga, isiZulu, Siswati and English in five districts across three provinces, to reach students at home. We will expand upon this work in 2021 and will broadcast read-alouds on six community radio stations at least twice a week. The team will use stories available on our digital platform [Literacy Cloud](#) and, during the radio broadcast, will encourage children to either find these stories on Literacy Cloud, if they have access to a digital device, or visit their school or community library to find books for their level. These read-alouds with accompanying virtual or physical books are a key part our strategy to engage the broader communities we work in as well as the parents of the children we serve. We are working to get the word out to parents via

phone calls, texts and email and are partnering with community libraries to promote the radio programs as well.

- **Workbook Distribution and Radio Programming in Sri Lanka:** We partnered with the government of Sri Lanka to develop and distribute workbooks that cover core subjects for early primary learners. The objective was to reach out to approximately 665,000 children in vulnerable communities who have limited access to the internet to ensure their learning continued uninterrupted during the lockdown period. We also joined Sri Lanka's leading radio network, Sirasa, to provide reading development instruction segments in both Sinhala and Tamil to children across the country. Due to popular demand, the program was extended to a second season. The first season focused on supporting parents, while the second spoke to children directly about how they could improve reading with comprehension. The radio networks also supported us by sharing our read-alouds on their Facebook pages.

YOUR SUPPORT



We cannot thank you enough for partnering with us in 2020. In kind supporters like you provide us with critical resources, allowing us to free up flexible funding for other needs, including unforeseen costs brought on crises such as the one we faced this year. Your support allowed us to ensure our school libraries are stocked with high quality children's books, a resource that children in many communities have continued to access through special distribution even during school closures. You have played a critical role in ensuring that children around the world have the opportunity and the tools to continue their education during this pandemic.

In our 2020-2024 strategic plan, we set a goal to benefit 40 million children by 2025. Challenges brought on by COVID-19 have made that goal more challenging than anticipated, but **we are not giving up on the millions of children who need our support and we hope you won't either.** Looking ahead to 2021 and beyond, we know that the road to recovery from this pandemic may be long, especially for the children and communities that Room to Read serves. Even amidst so much change, we know one thing for certain – **children need books to develop a love of reading and a love of reading is the foundation of a lifetime of learning.** Thank you for all you have done. Only through education can people build the skills and resources they need to best respond to crises like the one our global community is facing.