



**Bangladesh  
Annual Report  
2023**

An aerial illustration of a rural landscape. A winding yellow river flows through the scene. On the left bank, there is a small village with several buildings, including a large thatched-roof structure and a smaller blue-roofed building. A person is walking on a path near the buildings. The right bank features a large, dark brown field, possibly a rice paddy, and a person is riding a bicycle on the riverbank. The background is filled with green fields and trees. The title text is overlaid on a dark green, rounded rectangular shape in the upper right corner.

# World Change Starts with Educated Children®

‘Gollachut,’ written by Mumin Musabbir and illustrated by Tonmoy Hasan

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# Envisioning a world where all children

have a room to read, learn and grow, and can use their skills to accelerate positive change.

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# Message

## from country director



It brings me immense joy to look back on 2023, a remarkable year for Room to Read. We made more room for more children to read, learn and grow in both Primary and Secondary schools in Bangladesh.

We equipped children with reading skills and reading habits to raise ‘independent readers’ – a vision of the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) we supported to chart into a national framework. We supported girls to receive the education they deserve for a brighter future. We also supported rebuilding schoolteachers’ capacity in-person and online.

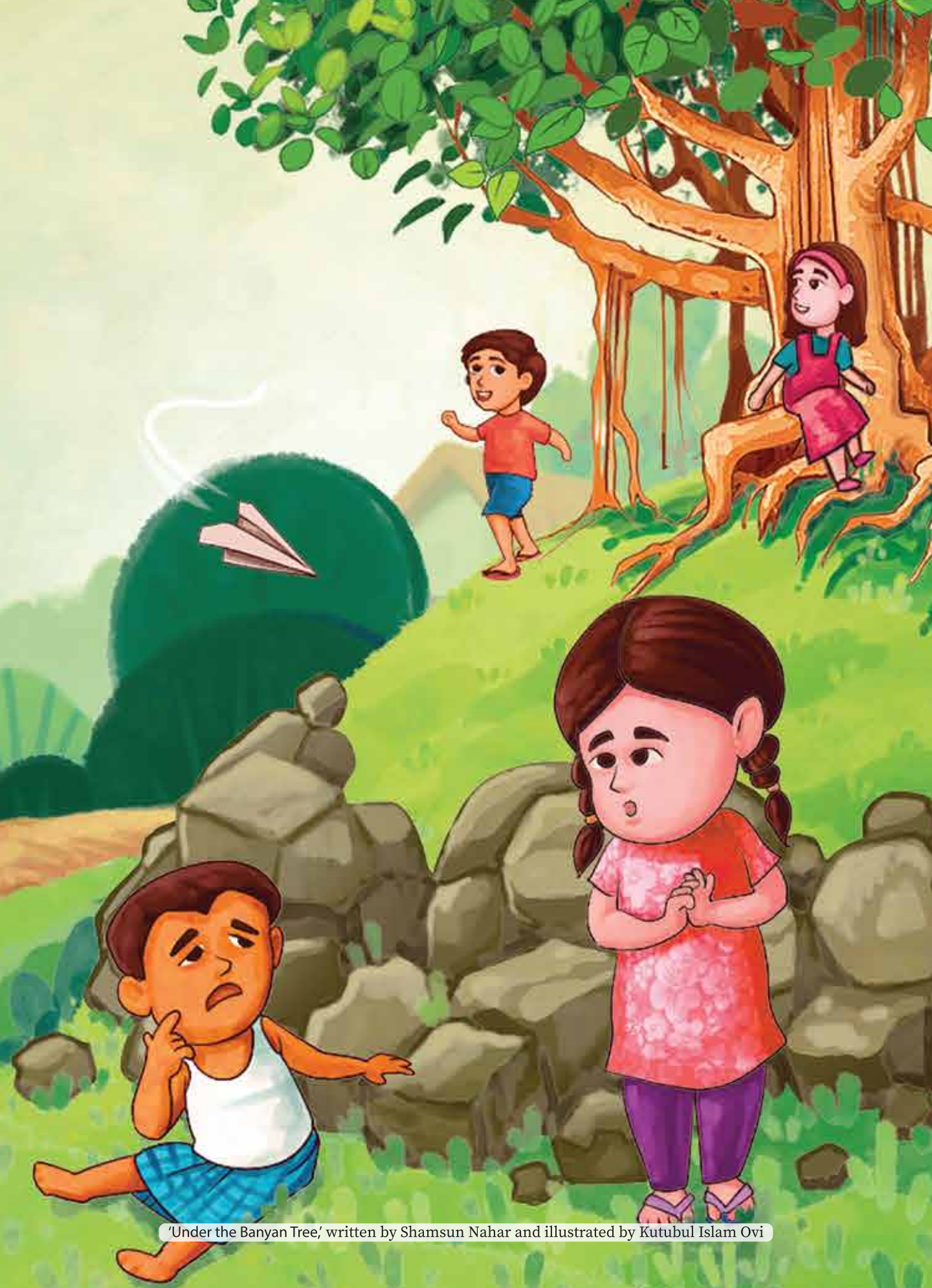
**As the key technical partner, we extended support to DPE and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) highlighting early-Grade reading and classroom library as government priority.**

**Our partnership with the Directorate of Secondary and higher Education (DSHE) evolved around the implementation of a comprehensive life-skills module. We are extremely fortunate to have informed the government on-board several national education committees.**

I am incredibly proud of our entire Room to Read Bangladesh family for an unwavering commitment that served as the cornerstone of all our success. We are brimming with excitement to build on this momentum and make more room for more children, more quickly.

I thank our supporters and partners for camaraderie and support. Together, we can create a brighter future for the children of Bangladesh, where all children have the room they need to unlock worlds of possibilities.

Rakhi Sarkar





# Programs in Bangladesh

## LITERACY PROGRAM

transforms primary schools to enable children to become independent readers and lifelong learners.

Our Literacy Program improves teachers' capacity on early-Grade reading, creates quality children's storybooks and supplementary reading materials, and establishes classroom libraries filled with leveled storybooks in local languages that can be enjoyed at school or home. We partner with local communities, the government and publishing industry to test and implement innovative models that help children succeed in reading and develop a love of reading.

Our approach not only works for all children — it works at scale. By building literacy skills alongside reading habits, and extending support to local & national governments of Bangladesh to use this highly effective reading design, we are cementing the foundation for systemic change in education and making room for quality and inclusive education.



## **GIRLS' EDUCATION PROGRAM**

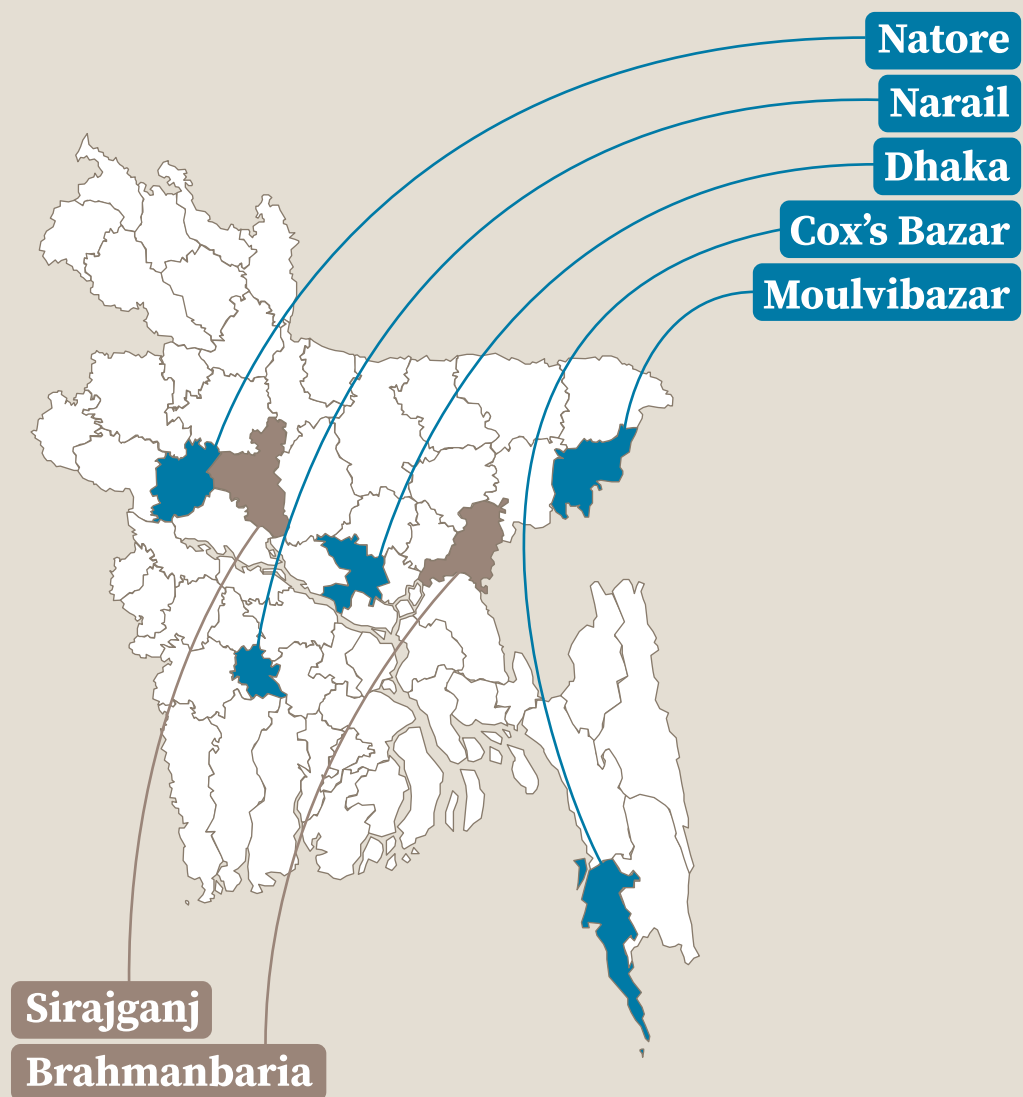
helps adolescent girls build the skills to succeed in school and make key life decisions for a life of dignity.

We support girls as they develop their capacity as positive change agents by providing them critical knowledge, life skills classes, mentorship, peer support as well as engaging with the families and the community. Our program supports adolescent girls to build knowledge and skills with which they can create a gender-equal world. We help governments deliver similar programs through the government's own education systems.

Our research-based life skills curriculum follows girls through secondary school helping them apply key skills and become better equipped to handle challenges. Our social mobilizers, local women working as mentors to support girls one-on-one, liaise with families and the community. We also facilitate need-based material support.



# Locations & 2023 numbers







# Literacy Program

**748K**

Pre-Primary to G5 students supported in 537 schools

**16**

children's storybooks developed

**9,917**

schoolteachers' capacity strengthened

**270K**

copies of children's storybooks distributed

**3,066**

classroom libraries established

**6,176**

students inducted as book captains



# Girls' Education Program

**689K**

girls supported for gender equality

**1,752**

girls received need-based material support

**5,653**

life-skill sessions delivered to girls

**77**

schoolteachers' capacity strengthened

**5,943**

mentoring sessions delivered to them

**94%**

girls advanced to the next tier of education

# Our strengths

## Holistic approach to education

Our 'Literacy Program' combines the science of learning to read with the magic of loving to read to help children become independent readers and lifelong learners.



We supported National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) in developing literacy content for pre-school children. As a curriculum pilot, NCTB adapted 11 of our titles for national textbook content.

Our 'Girls' Education Program' focuses not only on academics - but also on family and community engagement and the development of life-skills girls need for success in school and beyond.



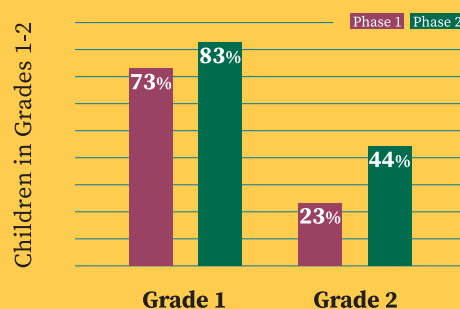
Countering socio-economic hurdles, 625 girls attended SSC and HSC exams. The 2023 pass rate among girls supported by us was 89%, significantly higher than the national pass rate of 79%.

## Our proven effectiveness

Children in our 'Literacy Program' gain reading skills faster, and correctly read 2-3 times faster with greater comprehension than children in comparison schools in similar contexts

We tracked the learning progress of students to support teachers to effectively adjust their classroom instruction and receive customized support from our literacy facilitators.

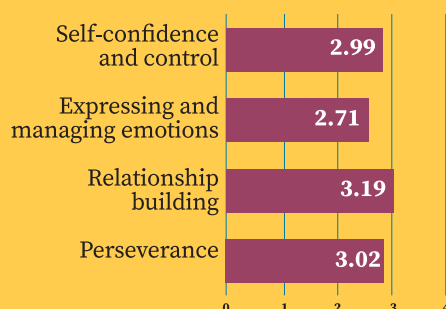
Read  $\geq 75\%$  of letters (G1) and words (G2)



A survey of our 'Girls' Education Program' students in Sirajganj five years after graduation show, 83% were employed or in tertiary level education. Evidently, this surpassed the initial 'baseline' survey score.

We document 'baseline' data to compare with future data sets. In Moulvibazar, most of the girls were found unaware of career options, adhered to regressive gender norms with low life-skill scores.

Life-skills score (in a scale of 4) in year 1





# Making room for literacy skills

## Piloting the Pre-Primary curriculum intervention

We extended support to the government in developing 11 local language titles that they adapted for the Pre-Primary curriculum pilot.



On board the Pre-Primary curriculum committee, we supported to develop teacher manual, supplementary and instruction materials. After the ongoing government pilot, the committee will finalize Pre-Primary content for 2024 and disseminate nationally.

## Piloting library best practices for scaleup

To test our library model for feasibility of national scaleup, DPE invited us to establish our classroom library in 10 PTI schools across eight districts.



Orientation on our library management concepts and guidelines was held with educators. Building on our proven success, government has added a new 'SRM period' (Supplementary Reading Material) in national routine for reading skills and habits.

## Increasing access to diverse reading content

We developed and published ten new children's storybooks aligned to the national 'list of themes' and adapted from six existing international titles.



These titles match children's reading competencies and increase their access to more content on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). We expect a few of our titles will be selected for inclusion in the prestigious 'National Book Scheme' of the government.

## Co-creation to strengthen the publishing landscape

We initiated co-creation of children's picture books with local publishers to influence expansion of readership and reach of publishing landscape.

We secured commitment from 5 Bangladeshi publishers for collaboration and nationwide distribution of picture books. Landscape survey on children's publishing ecosystem, fueled from this collaboration, will analyze the trends and assess storybook standards in 2024.

## Sub-national level leading on program scaleup

District Education Office in Natore directed all Primary schools to hold the SRM class every week. Parents and guardians were very happy.



In line with our sustainability approach, intervention and non-intervention schools in Natore started to take a lead on literacy activities. Schools are dedicating 'School Level Improvement Plan' (SLIP) fund to procure storybooks for the classroom libraries.

## Digitizing content for improved skills and access

As a partner of a2i, the government's digital wing, we have hosted an online course on classroom library management since 2021.



To address the rising need of such courses, we developed six more courses on early-Grade reading. By the end of 2023, over 10 thousand teachers completed these courses. To enhance digital classrooms, we supported NCTB to create audio-visual for G1 textbook.



## Making room for 163 new Primary schools

We brought our 'Literacy Program' support to more than 26 thousand children in 163 Primary schools in Narail district in Khulna division.



We supported teachers with trainings on effective literacy instruction and library activity, making room for more children to have the highly skilled educators they deserve. Early 2024, we established 838 classroom corner libraries in all 163 schools.

## Realtime data for improved monitoring

We piloted a Management Information System (MIS) in Cox's Bazar on hand-held devices to report program performance in real time.



This MIS allows our program colleagues to input data from class observation – enabling immediate analysis and quick coaching tips. It helps track school trends across all major indicators for an improved implementation of a literacy project funded by USDA/WFP.



## Evidence of improved reading skills

We adopted a tool named EGLS (Early Grade Literacy Skills – previously EGRA) to evaluate literacy skills of Grades 1-2 students.

Literacy indicators	all figures in %		
	School types	Baseline	Endline
Grade 1 students correctly identify 45 letters a minute	Project	4	54.8
	Comparison	9	5.3
Grade 2 students correctly read 45 words per minute	Project	1	54.4
	Comparison	0	7.3
Grade 2 students correctly answer 80% of reading comprehension Qs	Project	1	61.0
	Comparison	1	5.9

Data of 1,643 students (50% from comparison schools) in 40 schools showed, students supported by the USDA/WFP project performed better than in comparison school. Growth of reading skills in the 2023 ‘endline’ was also significant compared to 2019 ‘baseline’.

## Growth of children’s reading habits

Our classroom libraries were instrumental to building the reading skills and habits of 110,603 students of Grades 1-5 in 537 schools we supported.



A series of evaluations carried out across 2023 showed, each of the 88,557 children (80% of enrolled) checked out at least 14 storybooks to read at home. They continued reading of the storybooks besides textbooks and active participation in classroom-based activities.





Students elated as the Director General of DPE launches classroom library in the Primary school in Barisal PTI



# Making room for girls' education

## Prioritizing education & life outcome of adolescent girls

Breaking down longstanding gender norms and helping the communities to embrace gender equality requires long-standing initiatives.



Our program is rooted in building the foundations for scale. We raised awareness of gender inequality and focused on an integration of life-skills education in schools. We also broadcast crucial learning content for girls and boys countrywide.

## Engaging government for program review

The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) learned about our Girls' Education Program and also shared detailed feedback.



DSHE appreciated program initiatives and suggested to explore opportunities for collaboration for improved program implementation. We are glad to have received DSHE guidance, which is helping us review program strategies and content.

## Making room for collab on our life-skills clubs

We showcased to DSHE how the Life Skill Clubs (LSC) we established in the Secondary schools we support can keep being useful for girls & boys.



To enrich the Kishor-Kishori clubs government operates nationwide, DSHE expressed interest in the Clubs where we offer hands-on projects for a practical application of the life-skills. DSHE is also keen on supporting the formation and operation of these Clubs.

## Equipping educators to deliver life-skill sessions

We adapted Room to Read's global life-skills manual to Bangladesh context and embedded an approach that transforms gender biases.



The Life-Skills Education (LSE) teacher training manual enriched with practical tools was introduced to build the capacity of 124 educators in four districts. This helped the Secondary schoolteachers started to deliver life-skill sessions independently.



## Sustaining life-skills content in local systems

We held a training session for 27 educators in Natore, a district that – after years of programs – started adopting our literacy components.



Our program focusing girls in Natore is on a phase-out course. For life-skill education to continue, we equipped the educators with a theoretical framework which would help to chart their own pathway toward an inclusive & equal learning environment for all.

## Improving test score for continued education

An educated girl is more likely to land a career, raise an educated family, and also improve quality of life for herself, family & community.

% comparison of girls passing exams in 2023			
Exams	Age in years	Pass rate in %	
		Room to Read	National data
554 girls, out of 625, passed <b>SSC</b>	14-15	89	79
357 girls, out of 421, passed <b>HSC</b>	16-17	85	80

In SSC and HSC – gatekeeper exams in Bangladesh – the pass rate of 911 girls (out of 1,046 attendees) exceeded the country average. Our program is not purely academic. An increase in the pass-rate also indicates girls resisting socio-cultural pressures to drop out.



## Mass dissemination of life-skills content

Given the rising need for our life-skills education beyond the classroom, we organized repeated broadcast of our life-skills video content.



Aired on the state-owned national channel ‘Sangsad TV’, we covered 32 video content. Our continued collab with the national radio station ‘Bangladesh Betar’ reached adolescent girls and boys in remote locations with poor reception of the TV network.

## Radio-based mentoring for adolescent support

Mentoring of adolescent girls was adapted to a radio-based program Amar Mentor to make room for more children to get help from our life-skill content.

Continuing from 2022, we developed 13 new radio episodes disseminated across Dhaka and Cox’s Bazar in 2023. We also broadcast 18 repeat episodes. Again in phase 2, we aired 20 repeat episodes for Dhaka and Cox’s Bazar, and 30 in Moulvibazar and Sylhet.



Nusrat, a Grade 6 student in Cox's Bazar, attends a one-on-one remote session with her mentor Nilufar Yasmin

# The financials

Room to Read is proud to have earned 17 four-star ratings from Charity Navigator, an achievement less than 1% of charities can claim globally. Financial efficiency, transparency and accountability are embedded within Room to Read's values.

Our work is possible because of the generosity of our global network of partners and supporters, and we are deeply committed to leveraging that support for maximum impact and sharing transparently how investor funding is utilized.

We are glad to share the audited 2023 Bangladesh budget:

Support and Revenue	2022 (BDT)	2023 (BDT)
Foundations/Institutions	421,021,195	437,463,321
Other Income (Bank Interest adjustment)	(997)	
<b>Total Support and Revenue</b>	<b>421,020,198</b>	<b>437,463,321</b>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Salary and benefits	250,012,011	272,470,926
Legal and consultancy fees	221,942	1,047,355
Office accommodation	13,048,407	12,427,285
Travelling and perdiem expenses	11,495,257	10,465,009
Program expenses	147,134,924	130,882,141
Other expenses	28,485,482	19,179,546
Office equipment	4,013,396	2,039,804
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>454,411,419</b>	<b>448,512,066</b>
<b>Excess of Expenditure over Income (Fund Account)</b>	<b>(33,391,221)</b>	<b>(11,048,745)</b>



# 2023 in photos



- 1: At the Education Summit
- 2: Global Leadership in Natore
- 3: Workshop on storybook themes
- 4: Int'l Mother Language Day
- 5: PR event with our donor Boeing
- 6: Prog consultation in Moulvibazar
- 7: Testing supplementary content
- 8: Observing Int'l Women's Day
- 9: SB2S members convene on ToR
- 10: Onboarding of new joiners





- 1: Celebrating Spring at work
- 2: Independent Reader Framework
- 3: DG DPE observes library model
- 4: Collab prog approach in Natore
- 5: Workshop with PTI leads
- 6: Fraud risk awareness orientation
- 7: Staff on 5 & 10-year anniversary
- 8: Prog sustainability in Cox's Bazar
- 9: Launch of 1st library of PTI pilot
- 10: Brand refresh and new logo





- 1: PTI library pilot in District level
- 2: ToT in Barishal and Rangpur PTIs
- 3: Library for independent reader
- 4: DPE officials after library launch
- 5: Capacity-building of teachers
- 6: Launch of online course with a2i
- 7: NCTB Chair at Narail prog launch
- 8: Concept of library research, DPE
- 9: Family Day event in Narayanganj
- 10: USDA & WFP in Cox's and Dhaka





- 1: DSHE suggests program review
- 2: Chief of 'People & Tech' visits
- 3: Dedicating a plaque to Boeing
- 4: Launch of girls' alumnae group
- 5: Girls' edu team in prog review
- 6: Equipping educators on life-skills
- 7: Support function teams convene
- 8: Writer and illustrator workshops
- 9: Bertin F. Foundation in Natore
- 10: Ms. Rebecca Brosnan in Dhaka







# Our leadership

**Mazhar Alam**  
Sr. Manager  
People Operations

**Iffat Jarin**  
Manager  
Girls' Education Program

**Badruzzaman Khan**  
Director  
Program Operations

**Moinul Haque**  
Director  
Accounting & Finance

**Mazharul Karim**  
Director  
Literacy Program

**Zakir Hossain**  
Sr. Manager  
Research, Monitoring  
and Evaluation

**Rakhi Sarkar**  
Country Director







# 2009-2023 numbers \*

\* Cumulative data includes our direct Program participants, as well as indirect participants reached via electronic and/or digital means

## Literacy Program



**7.9M** Pre-Primary to G5 students supported



**28,371** teachers of Primary schools trained



**13,568** classroom libraries established



**15.3M** copies of 187 storybooks distributed



**10.2M** storybooks were read by children

## Girls' Education Program



**11.3M** adolescent girls' supported



**722K** individual remote mentoring delivered



**24,487** life-skills sessions engaged 89% girls



**94%** pass rate in SSC and HSC exams



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# Abbreviation & credits

DPE	Directorate of Primary Education
DEI	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
DSHE	Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education
EGLS	Early Grade Literacy Skills
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
GPS	Government Primary Schools
HSC	Higher Secondary Certificate
LSC	Life Skill Club
LSE	Life-Skills Education
MIS	Management Information Systems
NCTB	National Curriculum and Textbook Board
PTI	Primary Teachers Training Institute
SLIP	School Level Improvement Plan
SMC	School Management Committee
SRM	Supplementary Reading Materials
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WFP	UN World Food Programme

<b>Review</b>	Country Management Team
<b>Draft &amp; design</b>	Amiruzzaman Tamal
<b>Photos</b>	Abdullah Al Kafi, Fahad Kaizer, Amiruzzaman Tamal, Afzal Siddique, Mushfiqur Rahman, Shubharanjan Tripura, Room to Read
<b>Printer</b>	Tithy Printing & Packaging

+880 2 2222 70322  
+880 2 2222 70952  
roomtoread.org.bd  
bangladesh@roomtoread.org  
RoomToReadBangladesh  
RoomToReadBangladesh  
company/room-to-read-bangladesh

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