



Room to Read®

Inspiring Change in Education

Room to Read Bangladesh
Annual Report 2018

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**World Change Starts
with Educated Children.®**



Dear friends,

Bangladesh is making considerable strides toward the SDGs. To complement the development actions of the Government and contribute to improving the education landscape, Room to Read Bangladesh made conscientious efforts in 2018 and the year was remarkable in a number of ways. The organization delivered on long-term and short-term program commitments and strengthened ties with the Government and development partners. Together, we secured encouraging results.

We have seen the initiative and commitment of local communities and SMC to launch independent library in school premises. We expanded our program focusing adolescent girls in the host communities of Cox's Bazar, a district experiencing massive influx of Rohingya people. This was besides our first ever literacy-focused work in an emergency context in the same district. In collaboration with the Education Sector in Cox's Bazar, we contextualized a survey tool for a competency baseline of Rohingya children to support the Sector and Government in formulating a comprehensive education intervention along with developing supplementary reading materials for children in the learning centers.

Additionally, we reached out to 146 Government Primary Schools and Madrashes located in Ukhiya and Kutubdia - two sub-districts of Cox's Bazar aiming toward implementing literacy and enrollment related activities specially designed to achieve quality education.

The immense support we received from the District Education Offices, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, and the Directorates of Primary and Madrasah Education expedited successful delivery of programs. Parents and teachers were huge inspirations. A zeal for education surviving various challenges which exist in the low-income communities matched the immensity of their heart and exemplary dedication.

We are appreciative of the acceptance that we received from local communities. Helpful guidance from our global office and immense support from the Government were absolutely instrumental to strengthening and delivering our programs.

I welcome you to read the annual report of 2018 and look forward to sharing more in the coming year.

Rakhi Sarkar
Country Director
Room to Read Bangladesh

we

CLARIFY
SOLVE
COLLABORATE
EMPOWER
TRAIN
PRIORITIZE
CHALLENGE
BALANCE
GSDR*

R
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RESPECT
CHALLENGE
BALANCE
GSDR*

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who we are

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. Founded in 2000 on the belief that World Change Starts with Educated Children®, we target deep, 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.



how we work

We work in collaboration with local communities, partner organizations, and governments to develop literacy skills and a habit of reading among primary school children and ensure girls complete the secondary school with the skills necessary to negotiate key life decisions.

By focusing on the quality of education provided within the communities and ensuring these outcomes are measured, we have created a model that can be replicated in the local context and are sustainable.

We design, implement and institutionalize effective and efficient models for achieving quality learning outcomes related to literacy and gender equality.

We do so in a manner that governments and other NGOs can adopt, integrate and scale-up the best approaches within education systems in the interest of the remote and low-income communities.

We combine the science of learning to read with the magic of loving to read, developing a generation of independent readers who are breaking the cycle of illiteracy within their own families through our Literacy Program.

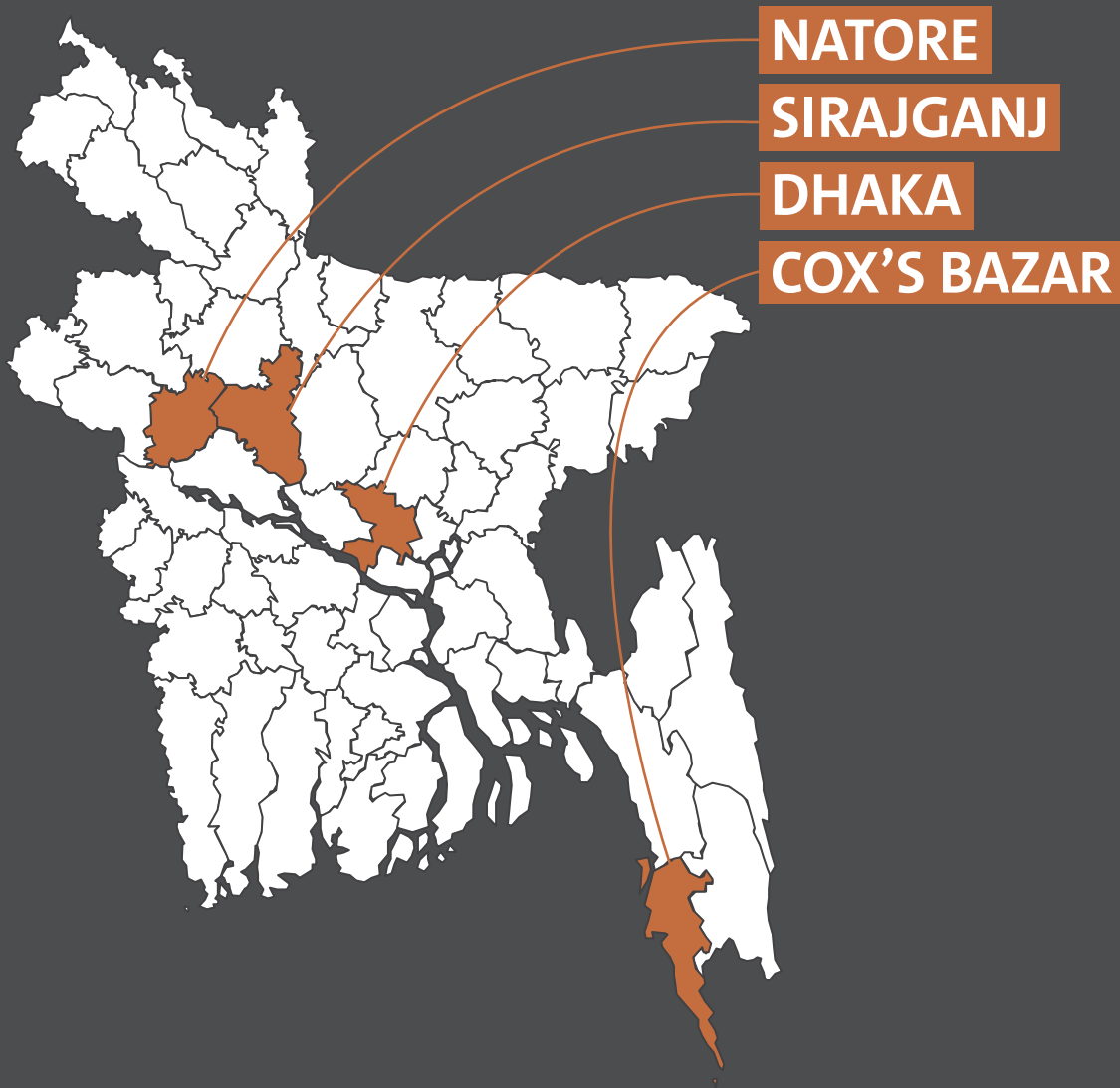
Through our Girls' Education Program, we give girls the tools to self-advocate and find power in their voices to chart a path that they choose for themselves, rather than one forced upon them.

where
we
work

Room to Read has benefited 16.6 million children in more than 30 thousand communities across 16 countries.

In Bangladesh, we implemented programs focusing literacy and girls' education in Cox's Bazar, Dhaka, Natore and Sirajganj.

In Dhaka and Natore, the implementation of programs were carried out directly by us. In Cox's Bazar and Sirajganj, we delivered programs in partnership with local NGOs.

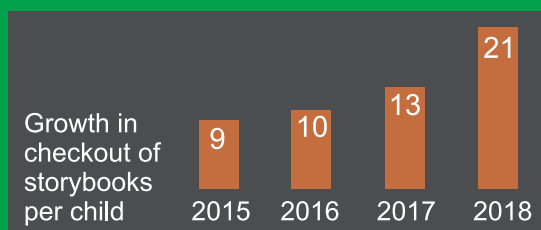
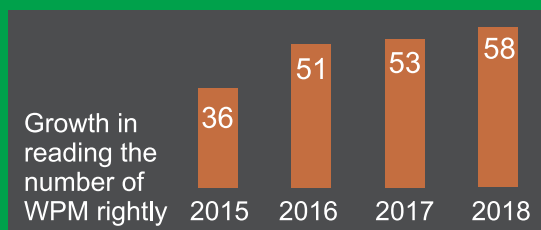


literacy program

Our work relating developing quality reading materials, support for teachers, child-friendly learning environment and community engagement helped children become independent readers. Learning alphabets and words through our instructional package helped children read systematically and confidently.

In 2018, 61% early-grade students read more than 45 words per minute (wpm) - a reading fluency benchmark that we promote in Bangladesh. At the end of Grade 2, children were reading 58 wpm. In non-Program schools, the result was 24. Moreover, the average number of books checked-out by a child rose from 13.3 in 2017 to 21 in 2018.

We developed training packages on instruction and classroom library. The adoption of the government textbook contents and language skills in Grade 2 part 2 workbook was highly welcomed by teachers. A new teacher guide was developed with detailed instruction routine and day-wise lesson plan to help deliver new lessons in classroom.



A total of 1890 teachers of Grade 1 and 2 received Bangla reading instruction training and 2796 teachers received training on library management and reading activity.

Storybooks are the best way to help children decode letters and words.

We developed storybooks based on local culture and language with the help of local authors and illustrators.

In 2018 alone, we distributed 497,750 copies of storybooks to the classroom libraries that we established in a total of 581 Government Primary Schools.

These books contain stories in decodable language aligned with letters and sounds that children are taught in their classes.

A total of 4,250 Book Captains were orientated on managing library activities and have been supporting with the book checkout and the reading hour activity in schools.



Every week, I can't wait for the storybooks reading period to start. I feel happy to help my friends in checking out books. I also support them in spelling difficult words, understanding their meaning and also describing the story.

Tasrif (right), a Book Captain and Grade 5 student in a government primary school in Dhaka

For the storybooks and the teaching-learning materials that we developed, we secured Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). We received copyright certificates of 61 storybooks and 5 Teacher Guides and Workbooks from Bangladesh Copyright Office of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

We regularly assessed the literacy status of students and analyzed data to plan remedial actions in consultation with the SMC and parents. We maintained report card for each student. In 2018, we assessed the literacy status of 53,113 students in two phases and increased program support.

Consultation with community is an activity we conduct round the year. A total of 1,174 SMC meetings and 1,108 parents meetings were organized. We discussed ways to increase attendance of students and to maintain classroom libraries while ensuring that the literacy-focused activities are sustainable and increase continuously.



To promote literacy and a habit of reading, we organized the annual 'Read Play' festival in 436 Government Primary Schools that we worked with. Exciting sports included sentence making, read & run, paragraph reading while responding to questions, drawing, poem recitation etc. Community contributions and the turnout were remarkable.

We continued to strengthen ties with GoB and development actors. The observance of the International Mother Language Day was jointly organized with the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE). We launched 4 new and 5 adapted storybooks published for children in 2017. While attending the inauguration of 321 classroom libraries at 40 GPS in Dhaka, Md. Mustafizur Rahman, Minister of Primary and Mass Education, said,



I like Room to Read's child-friendly storybooks. It's amazing that children have access to so many storybooks. Room to Read is making tangible contribution toward achieving SDG4.



Mr. Abul Kalam, hon'ble Member of Parliament (MP) and Member of the Standing Committee of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, inaugurated 274 classroom libraries that we established in a total of 50 Government Primary Schools located in Natore district.



girls' education program

It is absolutely vital that investment are made for girls' education to help girls brave through social challenges such as school dropouts and child marriage. For gender equality in education, we implemented long-term, holistic programs so that every girl we work with completes secondary school and have the skills to make informed choices.

We delivered programs focusing life-oriented skills that help girls take informed decision. In 12 girls' clubs that are a platform for girls to learn life-skills and build network, we also introduced information on sexual and reproductive health rights.



When I passed junior certificate exam, my father was adamant that I register for humanities [wing of education]. But I was confident that I can study science [like boys in my community]. So, I made use of my learning from life-skill club and convinced my parents. Yes, I registered for science subjects!

Suraiya reads in Grade 9 in a government secondary school in Natore.



We work closely with individual girls and their families to ensure that the girls stay in school, participate in life-skills activities, and navigate the challenges prevalent in adolescence with the ability to make their own life choices, both personally and professionally.

More than 260 members of the school management committees pledged to protect children from all forms of abuse, violence and negligence. They took this stand after receiving orientation on the Child Protection Policy in 9 Program schools in Natore district.

Out of 241 GEP participants who appeared at the HSC Exam in 2018, 241 students passed. The overall success rate is 93.77%, which is higher than the national pass rate 66.64%. About 68% girls secured A+ to B grades and 92 girls got A grade.

We maintained communication with our alumni to encourage them to continue their studies. In 2018, we hosted an alumni get together alongside a recognition ceremony for the class of 2016 and 2017.



We observed the 'International Day of the Girl Child' with more than three thousand girls, their guardians, teachers, development actors and the Government. Girls engaged Government delegates in a discussion on how investing in girls is a win for all and made demands for a safer, girl-friendly education environment. Throughout October, participants of our Girls' Education Program made their presence felt by organizing and attending signature campaigns, circulating posters and expressing their demands in public events.



We provide materials to girls who cannot afford to purchase basic education materials such as grammar book, geometry box, dictionary, school uniform & bag, classroom supplies, umbrella etc. This support helps girls living in low-income families to continue education. In 2018, we supported more than 2,083 girls with education materials.

Moreover, 421 girls who live in remote communities availed our 'boat to read' and human hauler van support to reach school safely and on time.

We reached out to 3,903 girls through 1,750 group mentoring sessions. Besides, we also organized one-to-one coaching, and encouraged girls to prioritize education over marriage. We were successful in preventing 204 girls from dropping out of school and together stopped 78 cases of child marriage.

I was heartbroken to hear about my marriage proposal. I informed the head master and [Room to Read's] field worker. They informed local admin office and together called it off.

Mitu reads in Grade 8 and lives in Natore.



Through campaigns, we sensitized communities about the importance of girls' education. The 'International Women's Day 2018' message was -

It's time to press for progress by transforming life of women in rural and urban areas.

To draw attention to girls' innate right to a life of dignity and their potential, we organized a wide range of activities such as human chain, rally and public forums, and took part in the 'Women Development' fair organized by the Government of Bangladesh.

our projects

We use a combination of direct implementation of program and technical assistance to maximize our impact. As part of the technical assistance program, we partner with organizations & governments to implement and build capacity for effective programs that are locally relevant, easy to scale and cost-effective. In 2018, we launched two such projects in Cox's Bazar.

To assist the Government in meeting SDG4, UN World Food Programme (WFP) is implementing their 'School Feeding Programme' that includes literacy component for children in pre-primary and primary schools.

We helped improve the literacy status of children in two sub-districts of Cox's Bazar. To build the capacity of teachers in delivering an expert classroom instruction and supporting head teachers and local Government officials with governance, transparency & management practices etc., we delivered engaging, relevant, and evidence-based trainings throughout 2018.

Funded through WFP and by USDA's 'McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program,' the project spans over three years and was launched by the Director General of the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) in March 2018. We also worked with the Directorate of Madrassa Education (DME). With local NGOs as implementing partners, we led technical assistance targeting 135 government primary schools and 11 Ebtedayee madrasas. Besides conducting trainings for 1,005 teachers, we developed 10 children's storybooks and distributed 233,867 storybooks to 855 classroom libraries we established in the 146 education institutions.

We also supported a project targeting the children of the displaced population from the Rakhine State of Myanmar staying in Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar. This is the first time that Room to Read Bangladesh worked in a humanitarian context.

Titled 'Providing Student/Teacher Assessment & Supplementary Teaching and Learning Materials for LCFA Levels I-II,' the one-year project with UNICEF targets to build a baseline of the literacy status of the Rohingya children and to develop supplementary reading materials such as storybooks, conversation charts etc. These teaching-learning materials are expected to help children with their transition from mother tongue to a formal medium of instruction.

The project started taking shape in the last quarter of 2018. We contextualized the existing survey tool named ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) and assessed capacity of potential surveyors. The assessment will help categorize children as per their learning skills aiding development partners to provide skill-level specific literacy inputs.

Recently I issued a storybook titled *Porir Deshe* (In Fairy Land). I met many fairies in the book and got to know about them. The way they introduced their countries was interesting. I loved the fairies. I loved reading the story.

Sumaiya (left) reads in Grade 3 in a government primary school in Cox's Bazar.



In photo (left) are children enrolled in the learning centers located inside the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar.

program reach: literacy



581

**SCHOOLS & MADRASAHS
WERE SUPPORTED**

145K



**EARLY-GRADE CHILDREN
REACHED IN 18 UPAZILAS**



2905

**PRIMARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS TRAINED**

2163



**LIBRARIES ESTABLISHED
INSIDE CLASSROOMS**



10

**CHILDREN'S STORYBOOKS
DEVELOPED & PRINTED**

498K



**COPIES OF STORYBOOKS
GIVEN TO SCHOOLS**

program reach: girls' education



3903

GIRLS REACHED IN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS

100%



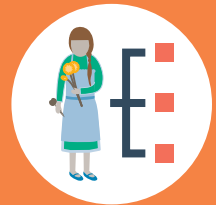
GIRLS RECEIVED
MENTORING SUPPORT



94%

GIRLS PASSED HIGHER
SECONDARY EXAM

100%



WERE TRAINED TO
DEVELOP LIFE-SKILLS



2083

GIRLS WERE GIVEN
EDUCATION MATERIALS

78



CASES OF CHILD
MARRIAGE STOPPED

advocacy action

Our engagement with family and community is crucial in achieving and sustaining the program goals. When local community members engage with schools, program impact deepens and its ownership becomes stronger. Children make bigger achievements, education infrastructure improves ultimately benefiting the entire community. In the national platform, we collaborated with policy makers.

The School Management Committees in the schools we worked with mobilized funds to arrange different sports and cultural events focusing literacy and a habit of reading. Our contribution to help arrange literacy events at schools was matched threefold by the contributions of the communities in organizing 196 literacy events.

Parents usually gather at school premises two times a year to get to know about their children's progress; but in 2018, many of the parents came to school frequently and assisted teachers to conduct classes. They also helped develop print-rich classrooms and assisted teachers with book checkout process and the reading hour activity.

We utilized these half-yearly platforms to also organize 'Special Parents Meeting' at 9 schools to together plan on providing rigorous support to adolescent girls. We discussed with nearly 500 parents about the measures to take in the event of child marriage, sexual harassment and family conflict that may affect child's wellbeing.

Our strong relationships and partnership with government help to ensure community buy-in for the transformation of learning environments and their long-term success. We continuously advocate locally and nationally to adopt our innovative models.

Local government officials visited program sites and encouraged teachers to follow our teaching-learning standards. They showed strong ownership of our literacy program and supported the teachers with feedbacks on how to make an improved literacy instruction. Also, a period focusing supplementary reading materials was accommodated in weekly class routine.

As a result of our advocacy around girls' education, 9 schools provided separate rooms to establish our life-skills education club. Moreover, school teachers made home-visits in averting potential dropouts and motivated the parents against child marriage. As a result, 78 cases of child marriage and 204 potential dropouts of girls were prevented.

We organized workshops on developing competency-based exam paper for Grade 1 by following NCTB guidelines. Bangla teachers and *thana*-level education officers identified a gap in practice that exists between NCTB guideline and Bangla question pattern.

I am impressed with [Room to Read's] girls' education program and expect that all the schools of Singra sub-district would launch this activity in their schools.

I promise that Government will continue its support.

Mr. Zunaid Ahmed Palak, honorable State Minister with the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), visited our girls' education program sites and events, and encouraged the girls.



Influenced by our innovative literacy instruction model for Grades 1 and 2, Upazila Education Office (UEO) of Singra sub-district invited us to facilitate a training for 110 teachers of 28 government primary schools outside of our program coverage.

Post training, teachers expressed commitment to adopt and replicate the innovative literacy practices we innovated and contextualized.

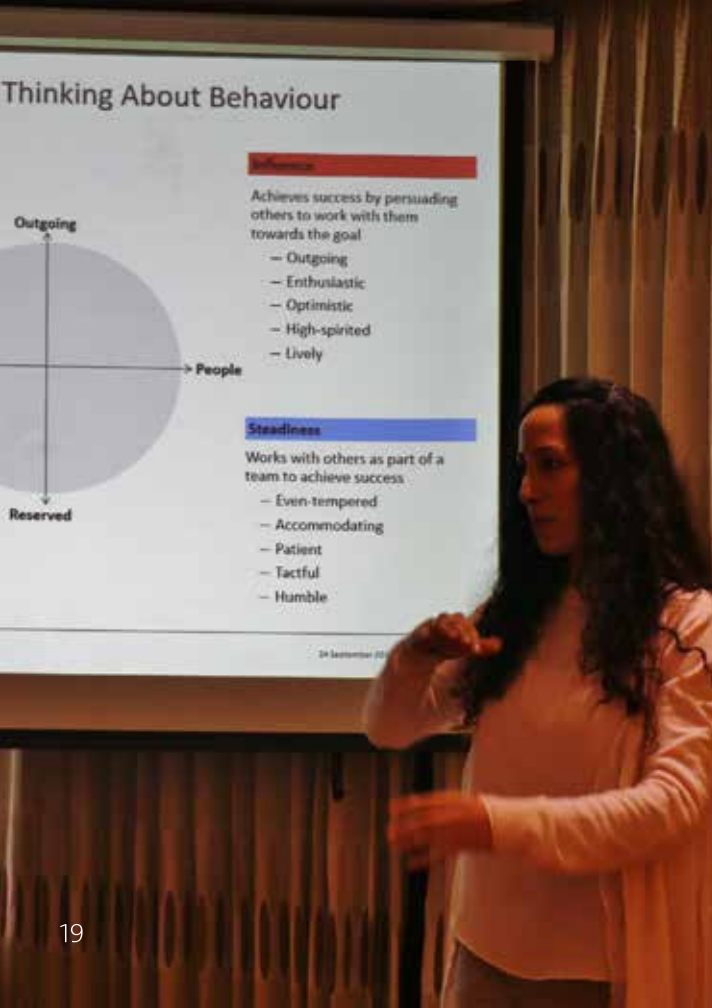
We organized our first ever study tour for adolescent girls in 2018. A total of 427 girls from sandbar region of Sirajganj went to visit Rajshahi University - one of the renowned public universities in Bangladesh. They interacted with faculty members and the Pro Vice-Chancellor and were inspired to reach tertiary level of education. Post visit, Shefali said,

I feel that this [university] is the place of my dreams!

donors & partners

One of our donors STUDY FOR TWO celebrated International Women's Day in a school we work with in Dhaka and interviewed 3 girls for a documentary. One of the visitors Mr. Haruki stated,

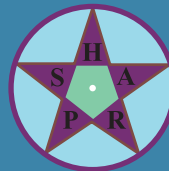
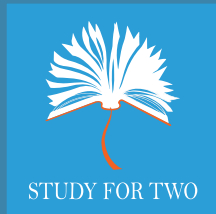
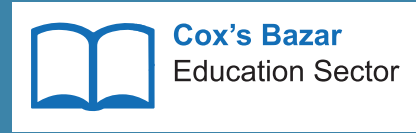
When our PR movie is complete and circulated, STUDY FOR TWO will be in a position to support Room to Read in a larger capacity. See you soon!



Credit Suisse was impressed with our program focusing girls' life-skill. Visiting Luna Zaman, who co-facilitated a training on strategic and sales pitches, said,

If I received life skill mentoring, I would have performed much better in life. Room to Read is doing a great job for the girls.

Overleaf are development partners we received support from and worked with in varying capacities in 2018.



in the media

Our Country Director Rakhi Sarkar and Literacy Director Zillur Rahman Siddiki spoke live on Jamuna TV's *Sokaler Bangladesh* program about the importance of storybooks and child-friendly classroom library. The Literacy Director also appeared on BBC Bangla radio and talked about why mainstreaming classroom library program is instrumental to improving literacy status in Bangladesh.

Our advocacy with the electronic media has paid off. Stories from the children's books we developed were converted to an electronic production titled *Rong Beronger Golpo* on Dুরonto TV – the first cable channel exclusively aired for children in Bangladesh. The program telecast 26 episodes in 13 weeks reaching an estimated 8.7 million people.



In 2018, our events and program mandates focusing literacy and girls' education were featured in local and national media. We earned 158 mentions in mainstream media. On social media, we reached 128 thousand people organically and engaged over 27% in different capacities. Nearly 2,685 minutes (45 hours) of our videos were watched online.



Team on International Women's Day



'Let's Play for Change' video with IKEA



Santo invites all to the Int'l Literacy Day



Children enjoyed the Read Play festival



Fariha's eventful journey to university



TV news on Int'l Day of the Girl Child



Sumaiya - an avid reader in the making



Book Captain checking out book for Rani



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