

Annual Empowerment Report

Creating Lasting
Impact Together



2017

Dear Friends,

2017 was a milestone year for READ Global. In close partnership with rural communities in South Asia, we celebrated the opening of the 100th READ Center, which means we are now bringing transformative programming and educational resources to nearly 2.4 million people in rural South Asia. We could not have reached this incredible milestone without your partnership – thank you for helping us Create Lasting Impact Together!

As we reflect on this milestone and what it means to Create Lasting Impact Together, we want to celebrate much more than the number of centers and hundreds of thousands of people now being reached. At READ, we know that our real measure of success is how sustainable each READ Center is. Sustaining enterprises help fund Centers' ongoing operating expenses but – perhaps more importantly – communities co-invest to establish the Centers and then take ownership over them, deciding how each Center can best serve the evolving needs of a particular community – this community-driven approach is where the real, sustainable impact happens.

In 2017, we were also proud that READ Centers served as platforms for countless partnerships that brought programs and trainings to 92,459 rural villagers – on topics as diverse as sexual and reproductive health to literacy classes to livelihood skills to technology courses – programs and services that equipped people to know more, to earn more and to improve their daily lives in tangible ways.

In this year's report, you will find several stories about people whose lives have dramatically changed because of programs and services they accessed through their READ Centers, in addition to the support networks they found within those safe spaces. While READ Centers serve everyone in a community – men, women, and children of all ages – we chose to feature stories of women because we know that they are usually the most marginalized members of rural society – but also the most powerful agents of change when they have equal access to education and opportunity. They are the embodiment of our belief that we can Create Lasting Impact Together.

I hope you'll enjoy learning a bit more about what it takes to get a READ Center up and running, how they are empowering hundreds of thousands of people each year, and how you have helped shape the lives of the women whose stories we're honored to share with you.

In service,



Tina Sciabica
Executive Director

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Ed Lhee
Board Chair

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READ believes **empowering** rural communities is critical to alleviating global poverty. We envision a world where **individuals, families and entire communities** have access to the knowledge, resources and opportunities necessary **to build more prosperous futures.**



Together, we've established over
100 READ Centers!

In 2017, READ Global hit a major milestone. We celebrated the opening of the 100th READ Center located in Sindhupalchowk District, Nepal. The 100th Center was opened in a new district for READ in Nepal – one that was devastated by the 2015 earthquakes. This makes it very special for two reasons. Our 100th Center represents the significant impact that **READ Global has made in over 25 years** of partnering with rural communities in South Asia. Now, we are now serving nearly 2.4 million people! It also represents a **resilient, sustainable future for communities** that rallied to rebuild in the wake of unimaginable suffering and destruction. These communities prioritized creating a READ Center – a new community institution that will bring education and opportunity to everyone; even as most community members struggled to rebuild their own homes.

We could not have reached this major organizational goal without the phenomenal support of all of our partners and donors. **Thank you!**

Thokarpa READ Center inauguration event, Sindhupalchowk District

So, what makes a READ Center?

With the opening of our 100th Center, there's no better time to review what exactly makes up a READ Center. Centers differ depending on the country, available space, and other considerations. However, we strive for all READ Centers to have the seven components shown here. READ Centers should also promote a sense of shared community and inclusiveness, striving to serve all people in a community.

Audio visual section



Library



Children's space



Meeting hall



Technology lab with internet



Women's space

provides a safe space for women and girls to gather, attend classes, and receive medical exams

Sustaining enterprise

for-profit business created by community to fund the ongoing costs of Center operations and programming



Nuwakot READ Center, Nuwakot District

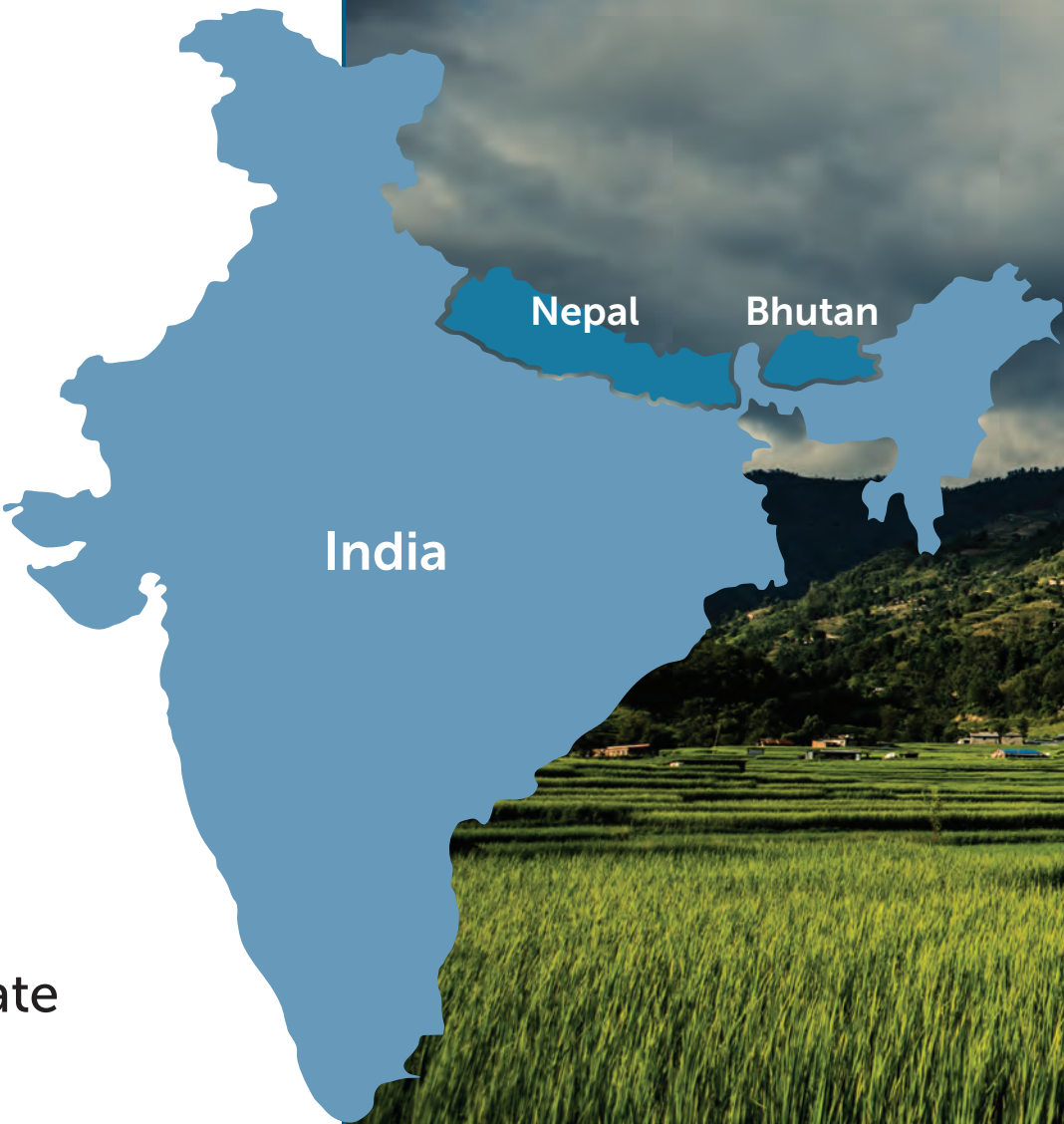
Our results to date

Creating Lasting Impact Together in 2017, we broadened our reach to:

104
READ Centers

2.4
million people
with access to
centers

162
sustaining
enterprises
launched to date



How many people were empowered through training at READ Centers in 2017?

92,459
65%

Together, we change thousands of lives across South Asia through unique trainings and resources tailored to each community's specific needs.

people reached through specialized trainings

of all training participants were women and girls

Our most popular trainings

Participants		Topic
	21,392	Advocacy & Empowerment
	8,969	Health
	26,567	Non-Formal Education & Literacy
	4,070	Business & Entrepreneurship
	18,064	Livelihood/Vocational Skills
	5,534	Information, Communication & Technology (ICT)

What is the impact of a READ Center?

We've talked about the power of creating lasting impact, but what exactly do we mean when we talk about impact? READ Centers are vibrant community institutions that work to achieve outcomes across four key areas. In 2017, impact data were collected from a number of communities to evaluate how READ Centers are driving change and how we can continue to do better. Data were collected from a variety of Center users – specifically sampling women, youth, teachers, and livelihood training participants – as well as from Center Management Committee members. For more details about our impact measurement efforts, please reach out to impact@readglobal.org.



Increase access to, usage of, and exchange of, knowledge, information, and resources

Center users reported that they would not have access to some or all of the information that they do if it weren't for the READ Center.

Bhutan 100% – India 86% – Nepal 84%

In Nepal, **78%** of users said their reading habit increased very much. With their increased literacy levels, **72%** said they can participate more in training programs at the center and **65%** reported that they can continue to further their education.

Trainings include legal rights, health education, adult literacy, and community radio.



Increase economic opportunities

Center users surveyed after attending livelihood trainings reported that what they learned in the training would be somewhat or very beneficial to them.

Bhutan 89% – India 95% – Nepal 81%

Center users reported that their income increased moderately or very much as a result of increased access to information, knowledge, and skills at the READ Center.

Bhutan 21% – India 63% – Nepal 30%

In 2017, READ Centers offered trainings to empower over 18,000 people economically, including courses in agriculture, entrepreneurship and business, textile production, job skills for the service industry, and computer training. 74% of economic empowerment training participants were women.



Increase women's empowerment

Women report that they are more able to speak in front of groups because of the programs and services at the Center.

Bhutan 75% - India 70% - Nepal 88%

Women report that their confidence has increased moderately or significantly since coming to the READ Center.

Bhutan 68% – India 68% – Nepal 69%

Women's autonomy and social networks are dramatically increased by engaging in the activities of the READ Centers in Bhutan, India, and Nepal

In Nepal, **88%** of women reported they are able to speak in front of groups; **87%** have more power to make decisions at home; **85%** indicated that they can travel outside of their homes more often; and **82%** said they are more able to express their ideas and opinions in public or in their homes.

In 2017, over **3,500 people** participated in trainings held explicitly on women's empowerment. Regardless of topic, gender equality was a theme woven throughout most trainings.



Increase in community ownership and engagement

Center users believe that their opinions have influence over decisions about their READ Center's programming and resources.

Bhutan 75% – India 59% – Nepal 31%

A large majority of Center users feel a sense of belonging to their local READ Center.

Bhutan 91% – India 77% – Nepal 81%

In 2017, over **5,000 Center** members (**57%** women) participated in trainings to build their READ Center's capacity on library management, social mobilization and sustaining enterprises for the Center

While the data are impressive, more powerful still are the stories of the many lives being changed for the better through their local READ Centers. That's why we're excited to introduce you to just a few of the remarkable women who have been empowered through READ Centers. Their stories inspire us to keep striving to Create Lasting Impact Together.



Together, we increase access to, usage of, and exchange of, knowledge, information, and resources

Rural communities in Bhutan, India, and Nepal typically have limited access to information. Resources such as books, newspapers, computers and internet access are scarce in many villages, or too expensive for community members to afford. READ Centers provide access to knowledge and information through these tangible library resources and also provide practical trainings on relevant topics like media literacy, health, agricultural programs, and more. READ Centers create opportunities for rural villagers to use their new knowledge to work toward a more prosperous future.

Giving women a voice over the airwaves in Bhutan

In Bhutan, the majority of people do not have any way to access news or information outside of their immediate communities. Of the 41% of the population that has internet access, the vast majority live in urban towns or the district headquarters. This leaves the rural parts of Bhutan – where the majority of Bhutanese still live – without access to information that is relevant to their daily lives. READ Bhutan established a community radio station to promote access to, and exchange of, information. The radio station, established with funding from the Swiss Development Corporation and in partnership with the government of Bhutan, is in the remote village of Khotakpa in Pemagatshel. It can be heard in nine otherwise isolated villages and serves as a source of information on health and hygiene, agriculture, local governance, and many other topics. The station also provides the opportunity for community members to build broadcasting and communications skills. In January 2017, READ Bhutan and Bhutan Broadcasting Services (BBS) produced a program developing the skills of youth reporters at the Khotakpa Community Radio Station. Now they have the ability to share valuable information with the rest of the community over the airways.

“

Being part of the radio station is a confirmation that I have the capability to be a journalist. Aside from the experience and the lessons learned, this has also built my confidence.

”

Phurba, 19

Khotakpa READ Center, Bhutan



Phurba has been an active member of her local READ Center since it was established four years ago. She volunteers at the Center, participates in many of the training programs, and comes to the center almost every day to read and use the computers. Phurba's parents are farmers, but she wants to become a journalist. Phurba says that growing up in a rural village, she never thought that she would have the exposure and experience to make this dream a reality. Now, she is well on her way! In 2017, while waiting to hear back on her college admission application, Phurba took part in a community radio training at her local READ Center that taught her how to identify stories along with the skills of reporting, interviewing to gather facts, and producing radio programs. Today, Phurba is one of a group of young reporters whose programming is broadcast to thousands of people via the community radio station started by READ Bhutan.





Together, we increase economic opportunities for those living in marginalized communities

In addition to the many different resources available within a READ Center, centers also serve as a platform for a variety of trainings and programs done in partnership with other organizations – ranging from agriculture to livelihood skills to computer courses to business/entrepreneurship - equipping rural villagers with new skills and providing them opportunities to increase their income.

Providing women Skills to Succeed in India

The employment rate for women in India is just 26%, according to The Economist, and this includes jobs in both the formal and informal economies. This is a costly missed opportunity for millions of women, but also keeps the entire country from making progress. This is why READ India has partnered with Accenture's Skills to Succeed program over the last three years to provide thousands of women in READ communities with opportunities to enhance their vocational skills, build their confidence, and develop their entrepreneurial spirits. Vocational skills training has included basic and advanced computer skills, nursing, animal husbandry, tailoring, pre-school teaching, and more. With the 2016-2017 Accenture grant, 5,032 women were trained in 10 READ Centers and 20 READ Center satellite locations across six Indian states. Computer training, to expand employment opportunities and support those pursuing tertiary education, has also been a key offering at READ Centers. The trainings included women from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and religions.

In 2017, READ India established over 10 production groups for women as part of each Center's sustaining enterprise. They have created successful market linkages between these groups and mainstream buyers, so that women can sell their products beyond their own villages. This involves taking traditional skills, such as basket-making, coiling, and hand-looming, and enhancing the design skills of the women so they are able to make higher-end products that appeal to buyers with more purchasing power. Ultimately, the means that women are earning more for their efforts, benefitting not just them but their families too.



I am feeling proud since I am able to take care of my child, family, shop... even with office work. Thanks to READ India Center, I am working successfully and leading an independent and empowered professional life.



Manjula, 32
Bagepalli READ Center, India



Manjula, together with her husband Mallikarjuna Swamy and READ India, has transformed her life. Manjula completed 12th grade, but did not have a job. Sometimes she joined her husband in running a small grocery stand in the local market before and after his hours working as a security guard. Despite their hard work, Manjula and her husband struggled financially. They had to leave their daughter in a free, school hostel because they could not afford to keep her at home. This broke Manjula's heart. When Manjula's husband suggested she take a 3-month computer course at the local READ Center, she took up the challenge and earned a certificate in basic computing. With this, and her newfound confidence, Manjula was able to get a job at a call center. Now, Manjula earns a regular salary and her 11-year-old daughter is back at home. Manjula is an incredible example of the ways in which a woman, when given access to the resources and tools to learn, has the ability to lift up her entire family.





Together, we empower women and girls to unlock potential and unleash hope

READ Centers provide safe spaces for women to access education and opportunities so they can become empowered to take control of their own futures. While READ has a clear focus on providing skills and services to women, men are not excluded and play a critical role in this process. We regularly engage both men and women in community mobilization, volunteering, and in providing trainings. Working with both genders reduces backlash against women and, we believe, is the best way to change negative gender norms. One clear sign of this is the fact that men serve alongside women on the READ Center management committees. This is a practical way to elevate women's voices and issues as part of holistic community development work.

Building girls' confidence through sports in Nepal

READ Nepal, with critical support from Reach Out to Asia (ROTA), now offers sports programs for young women and girls to build their confidence and open doors to new possibilities for their futures. Breaking with societal norms, adolescent girls learn how to play football/soccer, volleyball and other sports through clubs run out of READ Centers. This is remarkable because in Nepal most girls in rural villages are not allowed to be social outside their homes once they reach a certain age, let alone play sports. Child marriage is still quite common and girls are expected to follow a fairly conservative path. To have the opportunity to join a sports team with other girls is golden. They can get exercise and learn the value of teamwork while competing against other teams. This makes girls feel powerful and more confident to break with traditional gender roles. Sports clubs also include life skills activities to build self-esteem and communication skills, provide career development opportunities, and promote a sense of community. READ Nepal, along with co-implementing partner Restless Development, has engaged over 1,250 girls in sports clubs to date.



Sunita, 17

Kalika READ Center, Nepal



Without football, I would already be married and my future would be very dim.

Sunita's family struggles financially, a circumstance that has put her educational goals in jeopardy. She wanted to complete secondary school, but it was unclear how her family would pay for it. This was Sunita's situation when she joined a football/soccer training program run out of the READ Center in her community. She and her teammates practiced regularly and received expert coaching along with the materials required to play. The girls at each READ Center began by challenging each other to friendly games and were soon playing regional and national matches. They have inspired other girls in their communities as well as their parents who are seeing their daughters in a new light. Sunita's football skills attracted the attention of the renowned private school, Deep Jyoti Higher Secondary School, which offered her a full scholarship through the 12th grade. This opportunity to further her education has been a game-changer not just for Sunita, but for her entire family. She is also setting a positive example for other marginalized girls in her village and surrounding communities who can now see that a different future is possible for them too. All eyes are on Sunita as she continues to overcome barriers and prove that girls, when given the chance, can surpass all expectations.

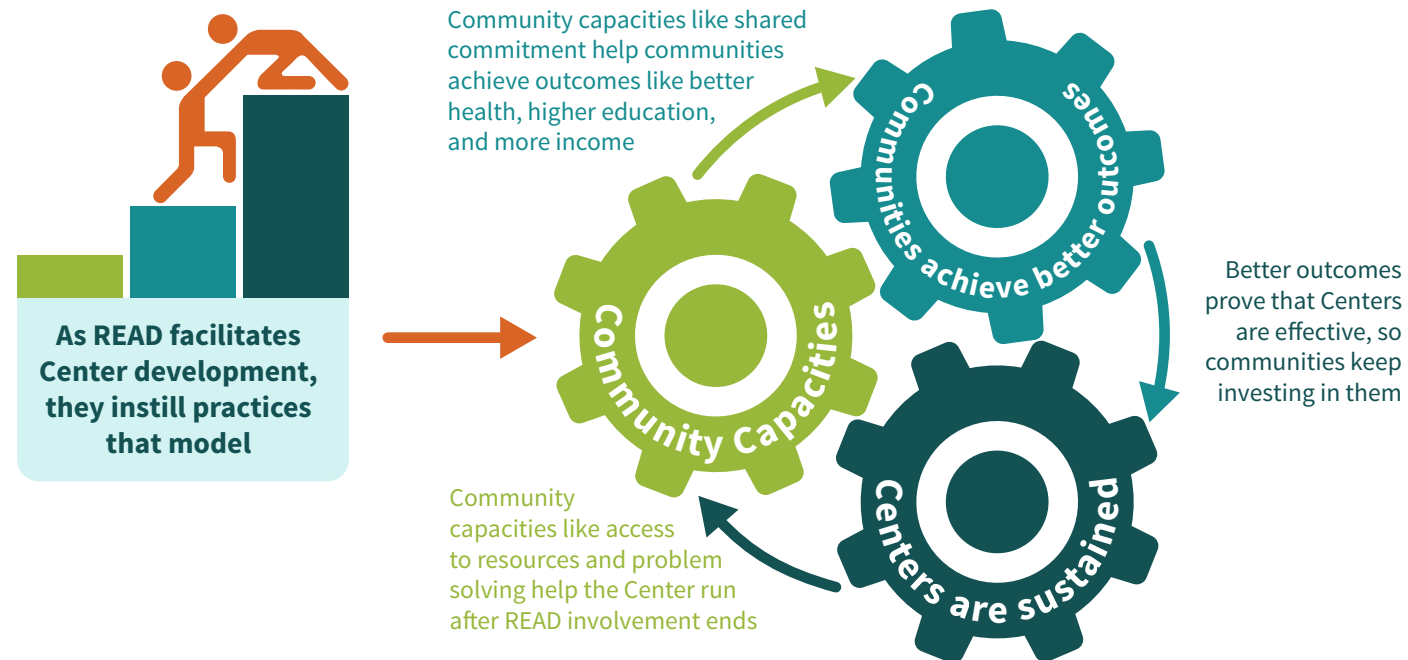


Together, we increase community ownership and engagement, putting communities in charge of their own development and decreasing reliance on external aid

Proving the model for self-sustaining development in rural communities

In 2017, READ launched an exciting new strategic partnership with IREX, a 50-year old global development and education organization that has worked in over 120 countries around the globe. The goals of the partnership - called **Communities Thrive** – are to scale up READ’s work, explore new countries where the READ model can benefit marginalized communities, and tap into IREX’s technical expertise in technology, youth development, gender equality and inclusion, and tackling complex social issues such as human trafficking.

As part of our work together last year, IREX conducted a case study of the READ model in Nepal to better understand how READ Centers produce sustained positive impact. The IREX study found that the READ model increases (1) a sense of community, (2) shared commitment amongst community members, (3) the ability to solve problems together, and (4) a community’s access to resources. These benefits are mutually reinforcing and promote self-sufficiency and lead to development outcomes such as better health, improved livelihoods, and sustainability of the centers.



The case study suggests that the following elements are key to generating community capacity, community development, and sustainability:

- ⚙️ Careful targeting of communities so that READ establishes centers where there is real need, demand, and commitment to establishing and sustaining inclusive platforms for community development
- ⚙️ Demonstration of progressive community commitment to the READ Center to ensure that the whole community values the center, its services, and the positive results it generates within the community
- ⚙️ Community commitment to inclusion of marginalized religious and ethnic groups, women, and persons with disabilities, engaging all community members in the establishment and operations of the READ Center, and providing services to meet the needs of all, especially marginalized groups
- ⚙️ Cultivation of needs-driven, inclusive community leadership who can create and sustain the READ Center as a safe community space that all community members can access and gain benefit from
- ⚙️ Collaborative partnerships with local civic and governing institutions that connect the READ Centers’ communities with services and resources they would not otherwise be able to access
- ⚙️ Financial independence through sustaining enterprises that generate income to fund basic operating costs of the READ Centers so they can provide needed services for the community
- ⚙️ Collaborative construction or design of the holistic community space that builds bonds and trust among community members, and gives them a platform to improve their lives
- ⚙️ Flat management structure of the READ Center so that all community members can provide input on the management of the READ Center

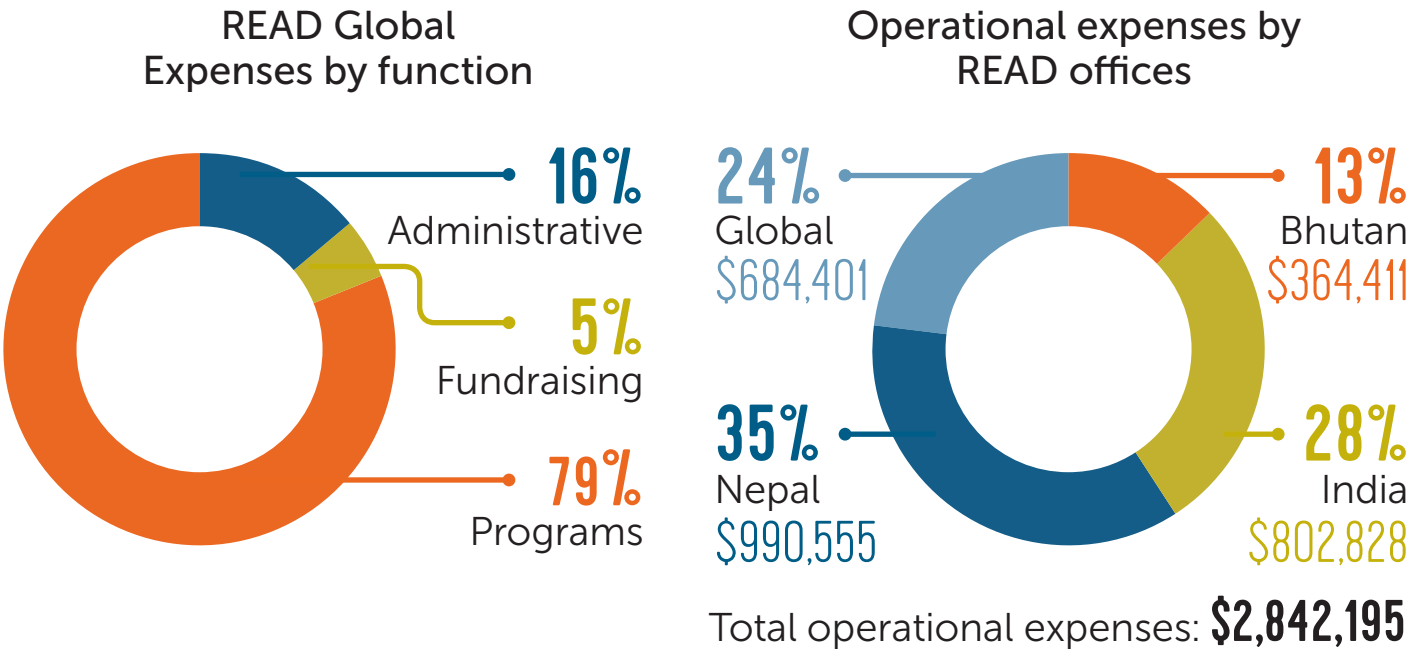
To read the full case study, please visit <https://www.irex.org/resource/achieving-self-sustaining-development-rural-communities-case-study-read-model-nepal>



Financials

In 2017, READ launched the Communities Thrive initiative in partnership with IREX. This initiative facilitated a learning agenda about the READ model and its potential for growth and expansion globally to new countries.

READ Global also further developed the capacity of country office teams from Bhutan, India and Nepal deepening their expertise on international fundraising, program development, organizational enhancements and community mobilization. These efforts all supported READ's sustainability vision of 100% local-office generated funding for each READ country office. Detailed below is a breakdown of READ Global's expenses by function and by country office.



Please note that READ Global's and READ Bhutan's standalone FY17 financials have been audited. READ Nepal and READ India's standalone financial statements are currently being audited locally, but were not final as of READ Global's annual report publication date.

Partnering together

READ would like to thank all of our institutional partners for joining us in inspiring rural prosperity. Leading corporations, foundations, international NGOs, and government funders have partnered with us to further our mission through monetary contributions, program partnerships, in-kind support, and employee engagement. These partnerships have enabled us to provide nearly 2.4 million people with access to vital resources and life changing programs across South Asia.



Looking ahead together

We remain committed to empowering women, men, and communities in rural South Asia in 2018 by establishing new READ Centers, offering high-quality programs, and providing access to cutting-edge resources and trainings.

- We will continue to mobilize and empower communities globally through our **Communities Thrive partnership with IREX**. Our bold vision is to replicate the READ model in new geographies through partnerships with other organizations. Cote d'Ivoire will be our first country outside of Asia where we seek to replicate the READ model in partnership with IREX.
- We will continue our work to **empower women** and truly move the needle in expanding women's roles in society. Our approach is to engage men and boys in this process so that women's skill-building, improved financial standing and increased leadership will come in partnership with men.
- We will expand our evolving portfolio on **Safe Migration** to include anti-trafficking awareness activities and offer targeted services for children and women across our network of READ Centers in Nepal.
- We will continue to innovate along with communities to create **thriving sustaining enterprises** for all READ Centers. A new model of setting up pre-schools as sustaining enterprises in India is just one of these new initiatives.
- We will make additional progress in **READ countries becoming locally and self-funded** and diversifying READ's overall funding base.
- We will continue to work to achieve the post-2015 **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** through our programming. READ Centers explicitly work toward a world with no poverty, quality education for all, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, and peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Leadership

U.S. Management Team

Tina Sciabica, Executive Director

Naita Saechao Chialvo, Deputy Director

Megan Volk, Asia Regional Director

Sanjana Shrestha, Senior Program Specialist

Asia Management Team

Karma Lhazom, Bhutan Country Director

Geeta Malhotra, India Country Director

Pushpa Bhadel, Nepal Country Director

Board of Directors

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Strategy Planning Manager, Wells Fargo

Melissa Anderson

Child Psychologist

Deborah Jacobs

Director, Global Libraries Initiative, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Shyam Lal

Senior Partner Emeritus, McKinsey & Co.

Ed Lhee (Board Chair)

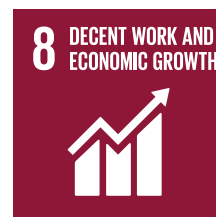
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