

Supporting Community-Driven Responses Against COVID-19



THE ONGOING SURGE IN SOUTH ASIA

As India and Nepal continue to grapple with rising COVID-19 cases, the increasing demand for treatment is pushing the region's already exhausted healthcare system to a breaking point. Even for those communities that have contained the spread in Bhutan and elsewhere, the pandemic has caused prolonged disruption in schools, work, and community-building activities. Adults who lost their livelihoods are struggling to put food on the table. Children, most of whom do not have computer and internet access, are falling behind as online learning is impossible for them. Without immediate relief and sustainable recovery efforts now, it may take years to overcome the long-term consequences of the pandemic.



READ CENTERS AS CRISIS RESPONSE PLATFORMS

READ Global is responding to communities by maximizing the resources available to the 112 locally owned and led resource centers (READ Centers) across regions of Nepal, India, and Bhutan. For 30 years, READ Centers have been established community institutions, serving as safe spaces where community members can support and uplift each other. During times of crises, READ Centers play a crucial role in ensuring that communities get immediate support. By fostering strong local leadership and collaboration with stakeholders, READ Centers serve as important platforms for community leaders to address emergencies and specific challenges rather than implementing a one-size-fits-all model.

READ's experience of responding to emergencies highlights that community-based institutions are often the most effective at dealing with an unfolding crisis. During the 2015 Nepal twin earthquakes—the strongest to hit the country in 80 years—READ's team members and volunteers were among the first on site delivering food, building shelters, and distributing medical supplies. READ Centers also coordinated relief efforts with municipal bodies and INGOs that did not have a direct connection with the communities. As the world continues to face challenges brought by the pandemic, READ is capitalizing on these experiences to respond to community needs.



IMPACT AT A GLANCE as of March 2021

- 216,341** masks distributed
- 11,890** food rations distributed
- 709** people received routine vaccinations & prenatal check-ups
- 38,700** people reached with COVID-related information
- 10,590** students reached with school support

"I feel that READ Centers are always ready to respond to disasters. As my community struggled against COVID-19, our houses were destroyed by fire. Fortunately, our READ Center gave much-needed food, shelter, and financial support."

BALIKA, COMMUNITY MEMBER, GADHAWA RURAL MUNICIPALITY



“READ’s crisis funding support clearly showed that READ Centers are for the community. Due to a shortage of oxygen cylinders, we were unable to save lives. But the Centers in Bhanu, Janata and Tikapur collectively donated funds for an oxygen plant and inspired other local groups to also contribute.”

DEEPAK, CHAIRPERSON, TIKAPUR HOSPITAL

RESPONDING TO OUR COMMUNITY’S EVOLVING NEEDS

At the onset of the pandemic, READ Centers and their communities quickly adapted to meet the new challenges posed by COVID-19. Community leaders mobilized to link communities barely reached by the public health system to medical services. Youth leaders distributed masks and sanitizers, and set up classes for children who cannot go to school because of the lockdown. READ Centers also made it possible for communities to have small, socially distanced meetings with local governments to ensure access to food and health services.

To keep our programs flexible and responsive, READ Global’s Crisis Management Team is working in close coordination with country offices and local READ Centers. In the spring of 2021, when infections surged in South Asia, READ Centers quickly pivoted from efforts to guide recovery to emergency response mode, rolling out crisis management plans which are reviewed on a weekly basis to ensure they reflect up-to-date needs such as access to loans, continuing children’s education, and capacitating villages against another emergency. These plans include:

- Continuing to conduct rapid, real-time assessments of local needs
- Distributing emergency supplies to families and individuals
- Helping local health facilities access urgently needed supplies such as PPEs, thermometers, and drinking water
- Disseminating accurate information about the pandemic and vaccines, countering the spread of misinformation and promoting vaccine confidence
- Creating emergency response structures to coordinate work among local stakeholders to ensure an efficient, coordinated response

HELP RAISE \$500K TO SUPPORT LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND RESILIENCE AMID COVID-19

Together, we can help sustain READ communities’ momentum in continuously building their capacity to respond to the evolving challenges of COVID-19, and driving towards inclusive, sustainable, and resilient futures.

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