Achieving Self-Sustaining Development in Rural Communities:

A Case Study of the READ Model in Nepal

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction: The Challenge of Rural Development

There is an ongoing and urgent need to improve education, livelihoods, health, and the cohesion of families and communities in rural areas worldwide. Despite great reductions in poverty over the past decades, more than two billion people still live on less than $2.50 a day. People continue to migrate in droves from villages to cities each year but lack the necessary skills to secure decent jobs upon arrival. Families become fractured and struggle to survive as key family members head overseas to find work, often falling victim to human trafficking. Communities are left more susceptible to stressors such as political divides, violence, and natural disasters. Women and girls continue to be left behind as technological and other advancements disproportionately bring opportunities to others.

While these challenges are global, there is a growing recognition that local solutions to social and economic problems have more enduring impact than those imposed by international aid groups with minimal community buy-in. **This study presents READ (Rural Education and Development) Global's model for sustained rural community development, describes how the model works in practice, and details the outcomes it produces.** Lessons learned from this study can be applied to other contexts to reduce isolation of rural communities while enhancing their capacity to lead social and economic transformation.

READ Global has been partnering with rural villages in Nepal, India, and Bhutan for the past 25 years to empower individuals with skills, knowledge, and support systems to find solutions to local challenges so they can thrive and prosper in their own communities.

Overview of READ Nepal

This report presents the findings from a case study conducted in 2017 of READ's model as it is being implemented in Nepal. The READ model evolved from a simple idea of establishing a library in the remote village of Junbesi (population 1,575) in the Solukhumbu District to establishing a current network of 66 locally-operated READ Centers that are hubs of community outreach, information and resource access, women's groups, livelihood training, savings co-ops, computer literacy training, and health and agriculture programs. The development of each Center is facilitated by the READ Nepal country team, which monitors the operations, reach, and outcomes of the Centers and offers assistance as needed. However, it does not oversee or have another formal role in Center operations. Each READ Center is governed by a Center Management Committee (CMC) composed of 7 – 12 members and managed by a small team of staff and volunteers. An evaluation commissioned by READ Global documented significant community-and individual-level outcomes in villages where READ Centers had been established.[1] These outcomes include:

- **Increased access, use, and exchange of information and resources;**

- **Increased economic opportunities;**

- **Educational advancement;**

- **Increased autonomy, confidence, and opportunities for women;**

- **Increased social inclusion and decreased discrimination; and**

- **Increased income for Center users as a result of livelihood trainings.** [2]

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1 READ Global is a US-based nonprofit established in 1991 to fund and provide an external support to READ Nepal.

2 Learning for Action (2014). READ Global 2013 Evaluation Report.

In addition to this, all the READ Centers established since 1991 are still in operation. Despite these successes, there is a lack of empirical evidence on how the READ approach supports the outcomes of the Centers and what has ensured their sustainability. The case study was designed to investigate the practices, strategies, and structures that comprise the READ model and how the model leads to individual- and community-level outcomes.

The READ model evolved from a simple idea of establishing a library in the remote village of Junbesi (population 1,575) in the Solukhumbu District of Nepal to a current network of 66 locally-operated READ Centers that are community-owned and operated.

Kathmandu

Junbesi
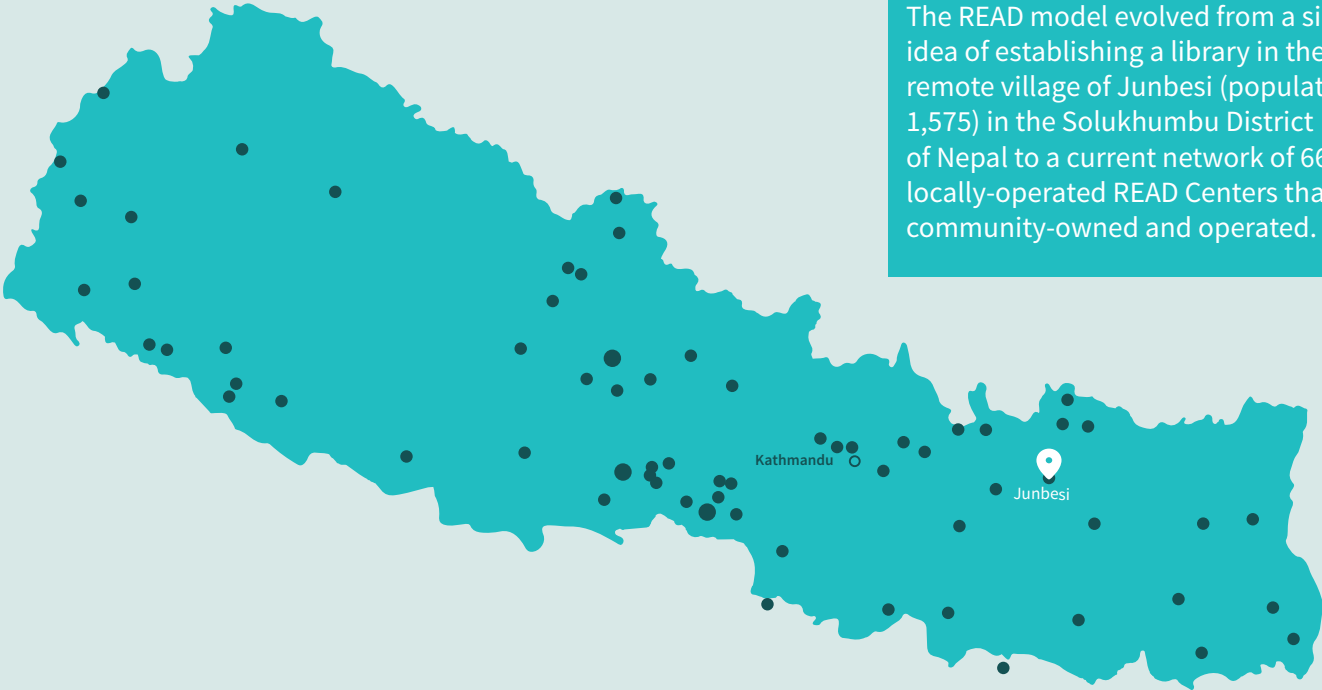
Framework for the Study

Research Questions

By examining the following research questions, this study aimed to better understand the practice of the READ model, how READ Centers operate, what kinds of community capacity and development outcomes have taken place in villages where READ Centers have been established, and what makes them effective platforms for sustained community development:

1	How do the READ country staff facilitate the development of a READ Center?
2	How are READ Centers managed and operated, and how are services delivered?
3	How are community development outcomes created and what allows READ Centers to be sustained?

Since the READ model began in Nepal and has been operating there for over 25 years, this study focused primarily on READ's practice and the outcomes generated in Nepal. Please see Annex A: Methodology for the methodology used for conducting the study.

Framework for Community Development

We drew on the research literature on community development to develop a framework to guide the analysis of the interview data.[3] The research literature use the term "community capacity" to describe the potential that exists within a community to solve common problems and create positive change. "Community capacity" is both an outcome and a causal factor leading to a wide variety of community outcomes. Community capacity is characterized by the following four attributes, which were used throughout the study:

Sense of Community	Shared Commitment	Ability to Solve Problems	Access to Resources
The degree of connectedness among community members and a recognition of shared circumstances and experiences	Willingness among community members to help each other and volunteer/contribute to the greater good	The existence of mechanisms for problem-solving through which the community's commitment can be translated into action	Access to economic, human, physical, and political resources within and beyond the community

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3   Interviewees were READ and READ Center staff and volunteers, community members (both participants and non-participants in READ Centers), and the members of other community organizations in the same village. See Annex A for a breakdown of interviewees by stakeholder type.

Sense of community refers to the feeling of connectedness, shared experience and circumstances, a sense of trust, ownership, support, and belonging.[4] This was described by interviewees as increased connections, trust, and teamwork among community members as a result of the process of establishing and operating the READ Center.[5] In some cases, the heterogenous groups that in the past used to be socially divided because of class, caste, or politics reported increased connectedness and sense of community through working together to establish a new READ Center. Community members described gaining a sense of ownership, belonging, and trust in the READ Center itself along with a shared vision that the Center is a resource for future generations. Centers were described as "safe spaces" where "everyone feels welcome" and "the separate sections [women, youth, computing] are not isolated but connected so that everyone is exposed to everyone else."

Shared commitment refers to the willingness among community members to help each other and volunteer/ contribute to the greater good.[6] Case study results show a willingness among community members to invest specifically in a common goal. This includes participating in income-generating activities needed to support READ Centers, involvement in co-designing the READ Center building, contributing a small amount of money and even the bricks toward building the Center, volunteering in Center operations and community outreach roles, and taking part in numerous other community engagement activities. Once operational, READ Centers institutionalize the commitment by community members that was initially developed through the process of community mobilization in building the Center together.

Ability to solve problems refers to mechanisms for problem-solving through which the community's commitment can be translated into action.[7] READ Nepal staff familiarize community members with prioritizing and decision-making at an early stage to help them ensure the Center is open to all members of the community. Once the residents decide to work together to build the Center, they form a sub-committee to select and manage income-generating activities that will fund the construction and ongoing costs of the Center. This and other sub-committees related to each of the Center's programs and activities, along with the Center Management Committee (the Center's primary operational decision-making structure), are formed to make decisions, identify priorities, and solve problems. Both community members and READ staff described the problem-solving and decision-making capacity of the Centers' various committees as critical to reinforcing the community's trust in the Center as well as promoting its ability to create and adapt programming to address the needs of the local population over time.

Access to external resources refers to access to economic, human, physical, and political resources within and beyond the community.[8] Community members reported that READ Centers have been able to access resources in the broader community, such as other local organizations, government agencies, experts, and funders in support of services at the READ Center. READ Centers were described as the "bridge" between the local community and district government offices, which has resulted in ongoing mutually beneficial collaboration as well as financial resources for some Centers. A particularly striking example of this ongoing collaborative capacity occurred in the aftermath of the devastating 2015 earthquake. READ Centers in affected villages immediately became hubs for disaster relief and recovery where residents registered for government benefits. Non-governmental organizations (e.g., UNICEF) provided funds and services. READ Centers were places where rebuilding efforts were coordinated. READ Centers helped establish temporary learning centers so that classes could be held even though local schools had been destroyed or damaged. This combined benefit of collaboration and access to resources within and beyond the local area was also documented for local non-profits, hospitals, schools, other READ Centers, local Village Development Committees (VDC), government services, political groups, and national networks such as the human rights network and the library network.

4   McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of community psychology*, *14*(1), 6-23.

5   Chaskin, R. (1999). Defining Community Capacity: A Framework and Implications from a Comprehensive Community Initiative. University of Chicago: The Chapin Hall Center for Children.

6   Chavis, D. M., & Wandersman, A. (1990). Sense of community in the urban environment: A catalyst for participation and community development. American journal of community psychology, 18(1), 55-81.

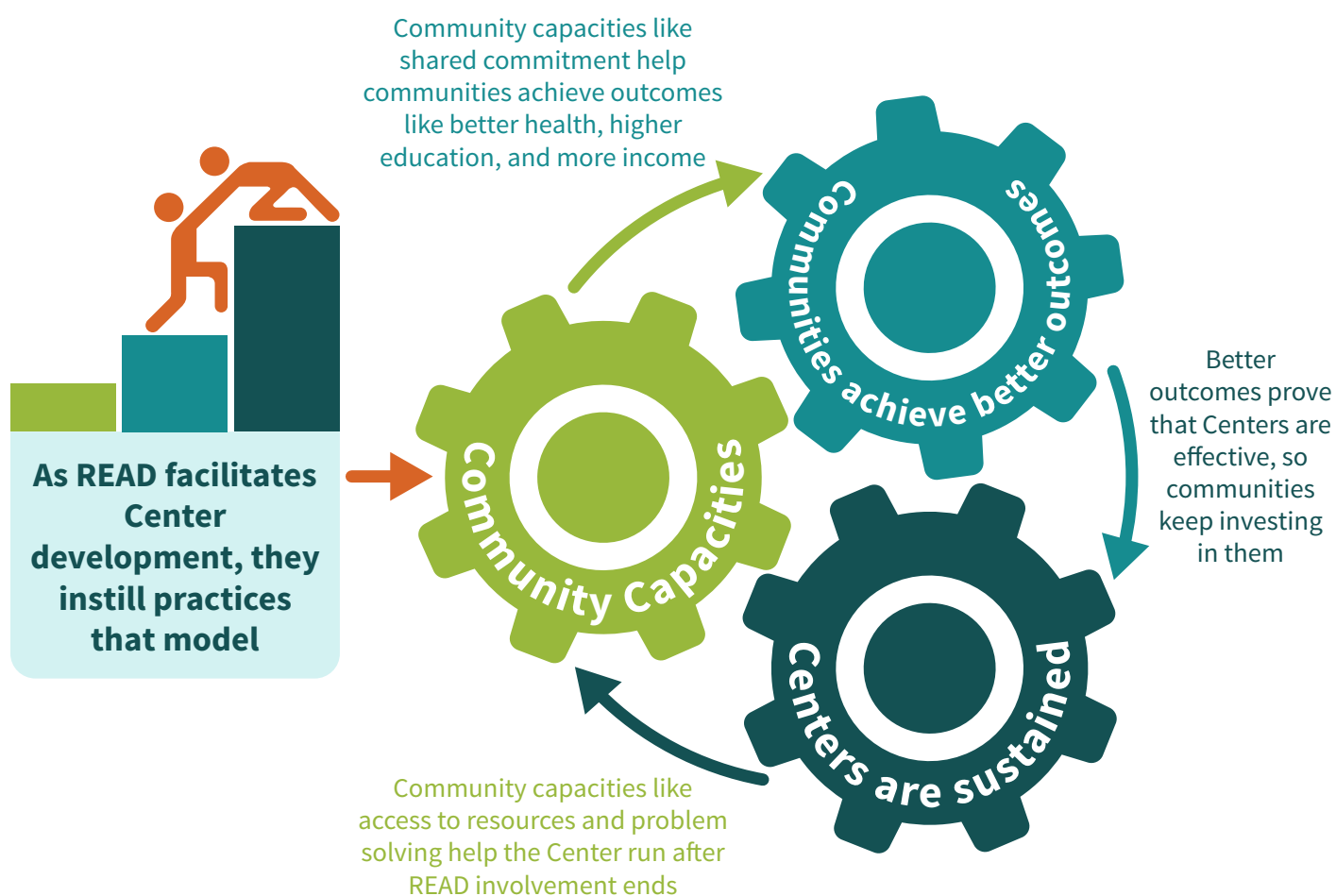7   Ibid.

Findings

The case study results suggest that several specific elements of the READ model are responsible for achieving community capacity outcomes that in turn lead to development outcomes such as better health, improved livelihoods, and sustainability of the Centers. These elements include:

1 The practice of the READ country staff in facilitating and mentoring the development of each Center;

2 The opportunities to develop community capacity that are intentionally created during the planning, construction, and startup phases; and

3 The design of the structures and processes used to operate the Center and deliver services.

The combination of these key elements appears to put READ Centers on a course toward generating the range of community development outcomes that have been documented by the external evaluation and ongoing program monitoring and evaluation efforts. The following sections will explore READ's methods of developing the Centers and how they lay the groundwork for strengthening community capacity; how management and operations of the Centers integrate practices that foster community capacity; and how READ Center communities then apply community capacity to achieve the outcomes they need.

Community capacities like shared commitment help communities achieve outcomes like better health, higher education, and more income

As READ facilitates Center development, they instill practices that model

Community Capacities

Communities achieve better outcomes

Better outcomes prove that Centers are effective, so communities keep investing in them

Centers are sustained

Community capacities like access to resources and problem solving help the Center run after READ involvement ends

READ Instills Foundations for Community Capacity

This section explores the relationship between READ Nepal's approach to partnering with communities as they begin the process of constructing the READ Center and developing community capacity. **Building community ownership, engagement, and management is central to the READ model to ensure that READ Centers are sustainable.**

To be sustainable, the Centers need to be owned and genuinely led by community members, connected to partners, have resources available in their communities/regions, *and* be financially viable. The analysis found that the process used by the READ country team to facilitate the development of READ Centers cultivates community capacity to address economic, educational, and health challenges as

> READ defines sustainability more broadly than just financial sustainability.

well as building more cohesive families and communities. The READ Nepal team's approach to guiding communities through the READ Center construction process aligns with the principles of "creative placemaking," a community-based process that capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, and results in quality public spaces that contribute to people's health, happiness and well-being.[8] Research in the U.S. has shown that effective creative placemaking efforts result in *stronger economic opportunity* for all community members; *increased civic engagement* by providing a sense of community identity and agency that connects community members with one another as stewards of shared space; *greater resilience* by helping to establish normalcy and providing psychosocial relief following traumatic events; and ultimately *more vibrant and livable places* that serve all community members.[9]

The process of creating and supporting the sustainability of the READ Centers starts from the very beginning of READ's engagement with the communities. **READ Nepal staff acknowledge that the most important factor in determining the sustainability of a READ Center is the community's ownership and commitment to the Center and their belief in this community-based platform to help them positively transform their lives.** Once the READ country team secures that commitment and belief, they guide the community carefully through each phase of building a READ Center, making sure that the community learns how to take into account and respond to the needs of all community members, particularly the most vulnerable individuals, resolve disputes or challenges that may arise, and ensure that the READ Center remains owned by all community members and not by only a particular group or organization. This occurs as the READ country staff model these practices and engage community members, and while Center leaders develop above mentioned skills themselves.

The phases below outline the major steps that the READ Nepal team takes to partner with a community and establish a READ Center that is eventually managed and operated by the community. Because each community is different, READ Nepal sometimes modifies and/or adds to the activities outlined below and adjusts its approach to respond to different challenges. For example, in very remote villages characterized by extremely limited resources but with an established READ Center in the region, READ country staff will work with the established hub to support the creation of a satellite READ Center. The satellite READ Center is usually smaller than the hub and uses an existing building that is remodeled into a READ Center for the project. These are the nascent stages of building a stronger sense of community, a shared sense of commitment, and planting the seeds of agency that later develop into the ability to solve problems and ensure the Center has the resources it needs. **This mindset change - the widespread sense in even very poor and rural communities that it is possible to influence their own futures if the whole community works together - is among the most important outcomes of a READ Center.**

PHASES OF ESTABLISHING A READ CENTER

Phase	Main Activities
Phase 0: Identification	▶ Introductory community meetings
Phase 1: Community Member Mobilization	▶ Expression of interest ▶ Proposal development ▶ Operational capacity development

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8   https://www.pps.org/reference/what_is_placemaking/
9   http://www.frbsf.org/community-development/files/creative-placemaking-in-community-planning-and-development-an-introduction-to-artplace-america.pdf

Phase 2: Social Mobilization	▶ Intensive Center Management Committee capacity building
	▶ READ Center construction
	▶ Identification of income-generating activities
	▶ Procure supplies and staff for READ Center
Phase 3: Launch of READ Center and Services	▶ READ Center inauguration
	▶ Setting up READ Center operations
	▶ Launch of services at READ Center
	▶ Strategic planning
	▶ Peer-to-peer learning

Phase 0: Partner Community Identification

The READ Nepal team conducts in-person outreach to any community that expresses significant interest in establishing a READ Center and the willingness to volunteer time to develop a proposal. READ Nepal identifies leaders who are involved in community service activities and works with them to convene large community meetings during which READ Nepal staff present the model as well as requirements and responsibilities of the community for leading and managing a READ Center. The READ Nepal staff supports the community to ensure that all types of community members, including but not limited to youth, women, the elderly, people with disabilities, and members of various ethnic groups, are able to attend and participate in the convening. The READ Nepal staff also identify and meet with potential stakeholders, such as local government representatives, health post staff, school teachers, local agriculture development actors, and others who can potentially provide services, donate funds or materials helpful in establishing the Center, recommend staff and trainers who can work for the Center, and/or contribute with other types of resources.

READ Nepal and READ Global staff reiterated repeatedly that identifying the right community leaders at the outset was critical to building a successful Center for several reasons. First, it raises awareness among community members that a READ Center is indeed a community platform for all and not just for certain segments of the community. In addition, community members and stakeholders have an opportunity to provide input on community needs and local assets. Finally, during this process, the READ Nepal team begins to build trust with the community, which helps to better understand community dynamics and challenges that need careful consideration, especially if staff decide to move forward with establishing a READ Center. It also ensures that these stakeholders have a vested interest in seeing the READ Center succeed, and many of them will ultimately donate or contribute in some way to launching the Center or ensuring it has what it needs to succeed. As one READ Nepal staff member shared, "We ask about [the community members'] interests, objectives, and have discussions and this usually reveals community investment. [The community members we talk to] are usually people working in positive social change – teachers, volunteers, etc. They might also be religious leaders or political leaders, but we just focus on those without a vested interest in building a Center. If we tap them, then they will be good [CMC] leaders later."

If the community is interested in establishing a READ Center, the READ Nepal team gives an overview of the proposal process to a selected group of community members. During this process, READ assesses their commitment and whether they are the right stakeholders to undertake the establishment of a Center. READ staff explained that the process can take up to one year, during which the community must demonstrate their commitment to constructing or reconstructing an inclusive community-owned space, managing and sustaining the Center, and ensuring that the Center responds to the needs of all community members.

To demonstrate their commitment to the READ Center, communities must provide 10-15% of the costs needed to establish the Center. Given high levels of poverty in rural communities in South Asia, community members can donate their time to help construct the Center, bags of rice or other goods, and can seek donations from the local municipality or other institutions. Typically, in Nepal, the majority of households in the village donate – even one or two cents – to show their support for the READ Center and to underscore that the Center belongs to everyone.

Phase 1: Community Identification and Mobilization

Phase 1 is critical to READ's approach to supporting sustained rural community development. **This phase is focused on community outreach, mobilization, and engagement, and can take up to a year to complete.** By the end of this phase, the community will have submitted an expression of interest to READ, undergone a comprehensive feasibility study by the READ Nepal team, collaboratively developed a full proposal for a READ Center, conducted a baseline needs assessment in their community, and agreed and are committed to building and sustaining a READ Center via a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with READ. The analysis showed that this is another important step in building a stronger sense of community as well as shared commitment, while helping communities prepare to access external resources through mapping exercises.

Expression of Interest Process

The READ country staff issues a call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) from communities interested in establishing a READ Center. The EOI requests demographic information about the community, literacy levels, and information on the local economy, infrastructure, transportation options, health services, educational institutions, and libraries, laying the groundwork for stakeholders to know who is in the community and furthering a stronger sense of community. This information often collected through community discussions. One READ Center participant shared that this process often takes several rounds of community conversation. He shared, "I heard about the Center and that a community library would be established as part of the Community Safe Space […] from the leader of the Center who gathered a mass discussion. The leader had expressed this idea, but we had several discussions about it and the community agreed in the end. [We] concluded that the Center would be for everyone regardless of their education level, caste, and political beliefs."

The EOI also asks communities to outline community needs, land availability for a potential READ Center, any preliminary ideas for income-generating opportunities, potential local funding sources to support the construction costs of a READ Center, and the community's ideas on how they will manage and sustain a READ Center. This process introduces practices of partner and resource mapping that help build the community's ability to solve problems, raise awareness and gain access to resources. The READ country staff has a list of criteria for evaluating EOIs, including demonstration of community commitment to the READ Center, proposed percentage of women involved in managing the Center, and availability of land. One READ staff member explained the reasoning behind this.

> "We consult with local people for the local model. If we had just discussed this in Kathmandu, we wouldn't have gotten there. The Center's importance of serving the community should come first, and local stakeholders can give input in this. We tell them, 'This is for you, your child, your son, not for us.' Therefore, people are ready to contribute because they know it affects them."

Proposal Development Process

After a community is shortlisted based on the EOI process, the READ country staff travels to the community and meets in person with previously identified community leaders. The team also visits households in different parts of the community to build trust and share more information about what a READ Center can do for a community. The staff tries to understand community dynamics, assess community needs, identify leading individuals within the community, and determine who might have the potential to initially manage the Center. During these visits, the READ country staff works with community leaders to select individuals who have the time and skills to lead the proposal process and initially manage the Center. These individuals comprise the first Center Management Committee.

The READ Nepal team is mindful of the composition of a community and power dynamics when selecting the group of initial leaders and makes efforts to be inclusive in this process. For example, in communities where political tensions are high, the READ Nepal team will make sure that there is a representative of every political party in the initial group that leads the proposal process. The team also tries to include marginalized ethnic groups (like the Tharu in the Terai areas of Nepal), and requires that one third of committee members are women. This focus and emphasis on inclusion demonstrates practices that lead to a stronger sense of community and shared commitment as the Center develops. As one READ Nepal staff member shared, **"Marginalized community members are engaged from the agreement, to construction, etc. […] All community members are reached through program outreach; and the most important thing is to visit these households and talk to them about the library. [During this process, other**

community members] first see the marginalized communities as library beneficiaries, then they involve them in the sub-committees, and then the Center Management Committees."

After the READ Nepal team conducts household visits and one-on-one meetings with key community stakeholders, the team hosts a *community engagement and planning session,* typically during a weekend so that more community members will be able to attend. READ Nepal staff take public holidays, crop harvesting schedules, and other community-related events into account when scheduling community engagement and planning sessions. This important to maximize participation, particularly for traditionally marginalized groups. Over the two-day period, READ Nepal conducts the following activities that build specific components of community capacity:

HOW PHASE ONE ACTIVITIES BUILD COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Activity	Capacity modeled	
Orients the community on the READ model, summarizes the community's responsibilities with respect to constructing and managing the READ Center, and receives feedback from the community on how to tailor the READ Center to fit the local context and meet needs specific to the community.	Sense of community	
Works with the community to choose a locally-appropriate name for the READ Center, which is key for community ownership (the READ Centers are not known as "READ Centers" within the communities where they operate).	Sense of community	
Map all available local resources such as schools, health posts, municipality office, ministry offices, NGOs, etc.	Access to external resources	
Discusses the operational structure of the READ Center, including who should comprise the CMC, and selects relevant programmatic and needs-based sub-committees that all have representation during monthly meetings; and which local stakeholders (e.g. local municipality head, head of local village savings and loans association, head of local school, etc.) will take part in the Coordination Committee that will provide strategic guidance to the CMC.	Shared commitment	
Discusses initial ideas for revenue-generating activities that will sustain the basic operations of the READ Centers.	Access to external resources, ability to solve problems	
Secures the community's commitment to providing financial and/or in-kind support for the establishment of the Center in writing.	Shared commitment	
Develops a high-level community action plan based on community needs.	Shared commitment	
Meets with local stakeholders to get feedback on the high-level community action plan and finalize the plans, coordinate efforts, and secure their commitment to supporting the READ Center in writing.	Sense of community; shared commitment	
Works with the community leaders to complete the written application for a READ Center.	Shared commitment	

Signs agreement letters with the communities committing to the process of establishing a READ Center, especially owning and managing it into the future after READ's initial support, during a community-wide gathering with action items read out loud to the public.	Sense of community; shared commitment

Following the community engagement and planning session, READ Nepal staff works with the community members to register the READ Center as an independent non-governmental organization owned by the community so that the Center is recognized by the government as an official entity.

Operational Capacity Development

After the proposal process has been completed, READ Nepal coaches the community leaders in conducting a baseline needs assessment that will provide the community with a comprehensive process that they can use to continually assess community needs. The READ Nepal team also works with the community leaders to develop relevant operational policies and procedures including goals and objectives, board composition, commitments to inclusion, maintaining accountability and transparency, and monitoring and evaluation processes, as well as monthly, annual, and five-year budgets for the READ Center.

Phase 2: Social Mobilization

Intensive Center Management Committee Capacity Building

After the community engagement meetings, the READ country team spends the majority of time providing intensive coaching, mentoring, and training to the CMC to prepare them to lead and manage the READ Center. With READ Nepal staff's support and close facilitation, the CMC members learn how to be inclusive community leaders, identify community needs through formal needs assessments and careful listening and outreach practices, facilitate productive community dialogues on important issues, mitigate conflicts that arise, and work with community members to address collective problems. During Phase 2, the community gains greater ownership of the READ Center as the construction and fundraising process begins, and they prepare for the launch of needed services. The READ country team will coach and train CMC members on topics including but not limited to:

- » **Social mobilization training** covers what the READ model and holistic community libraries are, an overview of what social mobilization is, the role of community leaders, challenges and benefits of building networks, best practices in coordinating partnerships. It also includes an overview of the READ Center management structure (CMCs and sub-committees), monitoring and evaluation, resource mobilization and management, transparent communication and documentation, and fostering social inclusion. Through this process, there is a strong emphasis on inclusion of the entire community, which builds a stronger sense of community in the CMC and the rest of the community.

- » **Familiarization of reporting requirements**, including an overview of the financial, monitoring and evaluation, and progress reports that READ Nepal requires and that need to be available to the public. These transparent reporting requirements contribute to building a shared commitment in the CMC to be accountable to the community.

- » **Group formation** to coach the CMC on how to ensure active community participation and social inclusion. As part of this process, the READ Nepal team trains READ Center staff and volunteers on collecting and managing data on READ Center beneficiaries (including collecting profiles of households and household needs), facilitating the effective delivery of services, ensuring inclusive participation in the READ Center's development, and unifying communities divided by social and other structures.

- » **Conducting a baseline survey** on community needs and services accessible to community members. The READ Nepal team coaches READ Center staff and volunteers how to professionally administer surveys and ethical data collection and analysis processes.

READ Center Construction

After the community completes its proposal for a READ Center, READ Nepal works with the CMC to map out how the construction of the Center will happen, and establishes a community construction committee who will manage and oversee the construction of the READ Center. Overall, we observed that the construction of the Center is strongly linked with the capacities of shared commitment, access to external resources, and the ability to solve problems.

The construction committee and READ Nepal work together to decide on whether to use locally-available or outside contractors, where they will source building materials, and how the community members will contribute to the construction (e.g. by contributing materials, donating their labor, etc.). Next, the READ Nepal team works with community members to discuss the design of the READ Center to ensure that the space is seen as part of the community and is safe, welcoming, and accessible to everyone.

By this time in the process, READ has usually secured funds for the construction of the READ Center and for the initial capacity building costs. READ works with the construction committee to mobilize fundraising efforts, and secure financial and in-kind donations. Many community members shared how they contributed to the construction of the Center themselves, either with their own labor or through other in-kind donations, and how this contribution instilled a stronger sense of community and a shared commitment to making the Center a community-owned, accessible space for all. One community member recounted, **"I supported the construction of the Center because I had the feeling that we shouldn't be dependent on foreign donors. So, I felt that I must contribute, and others should too. Support from outside [our community] is okay, but it should be initiated here."**

To ensure that contributions are collected transparently and to mitigate any potential conflict, the READ Nepal team trains community members on basic record keeping and how to publicly disseminate information on revenue collected and READ Center construction expenses. As the construction begins, READ Nepal works closely with the community to host participatory monitoring sessions or social audits to get the community's feedback on the Center construction process and to monitor its progress.

Identification of Income-Generating Activities

While the funds raised during the initial period will cover the costs to construct the READ Center and launch basic programming there, the READ model requires that the Centers cover their own operating expenses after three to five years. The READ country staff trains the CMCs in business skills including identifying income-generating opportunities, developing business plans, conducting market research, and testing and adapting business ideas, thus building the CMC's ability to solve problems and access external resources later on. READ provides small pools of seed funding to work with the communities to test a variety of ideas, such as women's and agricultural cooperatives, renting out the READ Center's training hall to local organizations or for events, providing space for local storefronts, tractor and/or ambulance rental, hosting a mobile phone charging station, renting out catering supplies and sound system equipment for festivals, and engaging in other similar income generating activities. Each READ Center typically has more than one income-generating activity to cover its basic operating costs. Revenue from these activities and READ Center expenses are displayed at the READ Center and updated regularly to maximize transparency and build community trust.

Once the CMC has identified potential income-generating activities, READ Nepal works with them to vet each idea and determine which ones are feasible, keeping in mind that each activity should support the ongoing operating costs of the READ Center, create jobs for local community members, and have development potential as the READ Center grows. Once the most viable options are chosen, READ works with the CMC to establish the income-generating activities with oversight from the READ Center finance committee, which ensures that the revenue generated is used for its intended purpose. The finance committee continues to monitor the viability of the income-generating activities into the future and makes recommendations to the CMC on any changes that need to be made.

In one of the interviews, a READ Nepal staff member shared a story about the process that one commnity went through to solve the problem of what sustaining enterprise might be feasible. "During that time, finding a sustaining enterprise was difficult. We had many rounds of meetings, and we finally had one local stakeholder meeting where we did some

brainstorming about what could be done. Finally, one of the schools from that area was ready to give land where we could do fish farming and lease it to the Center for 30 years. That meeting ended up this way because a head teacher who gave us this land was at the meeting. It was the community members who found the solution - if we find the right stakeholders, we can find a solution. We took the lease, made a pond, and established the business. One year, [the Center] did [the farming] themselves, then they rented it out and that is how they are now sustaining [the Center]."

Procurement of Supplies and Staff for READ Center

As the READ Center construction nears completion, READ Nepal helps the CMC hire staff, identify and procure relevant books and materials for each of the required sections of the Center, and purchase comfortable and durable furniture. READ Nepal works with the CMC to create sub-committees for each of these procurements to ensure that the community has an opportunity to provide input on the design of the interior, selection of staff, and materials available, which further instills a sense of ownership.

Phase 3: Launch of READ Center and Services

By Phase 3, the READ Center is ready to launch services and host an inauguration event to celebrate the community's work, commitment to the READ Center, and raise the profile of the Center among local stakeholders. During this last phase, READ Nepal works with the community to build their capacity to implement and manage READ Center services and operations using data and information that they collect through surveys and regular meetings, and develop a three-year strategic plan.

READ Center Inauguration

When the construction of the READ Center is completed, the READ Nepal team works with the community to host the Center's inauguration ceremony, to celebrate the efforts of the community and mobilize and engage community members and key stakeholders in the READ Center. Given the level of community ownership, commitment, and engagement for the READ Centers, most members of the community attend the inauguration, along with prominent local government, education, and civil society-related actors to raise the profile of this community-led effort among critical partners. **The interview analysis revealed that the community sees the inauguration of the READ Center as a tangible outcome of a year-long intensive effort to establish an inclusive, community-led, and vibrant platform where all community members can seek benefits.**

Setting Up READ Center Operations

In addition to finalizing the procurement of books and materials for the READ Center, the READ Nepal staff trains the CMC members, librarian and Center staff, and volunteers on managing each of the services offered at the Center, and adapting services according to user needs collectively.

To ensure that each section of the READ Center is managed properly and continues to meet the needs of all community members, the READ Nepal team coaches the CMC and READ Center staff to collaboratively develop standard operating procedures, refine policies and procedures, and define management and delegation mechanisms for each section of the READ Center as well as for the organization overall. **The READ Nepal team also trains the CMC and READ Center staff in collecting data to improve or adjust the services offered so that the READ Center continually adapts and responds to evolving community needs.**

Launch of Services at READ Center

After the inauguration, **READ Nepal works with the community to ensure that there are sub-committees that represent each type of service at the Center so that the community can provide feedback to the CMC on Center services.** The READ Nepal team extends the intensive capacity development process that it started with the CMC to READ Center staff and sub-committee members to build their skills in overseeing and providing productive input on services, conducting transparent record-keeping, collecting and displaying basic data on services and visitors, and hosting regular participatory community meetings.

Strategic Planning

Throughout the previous phases, the READ Nepal team coaches the community to envision the READ Center as their hub for educational, economic, and social development. After the launch of the READ Center and during the strategic planning process, READ Nepal works with the community to define the READ Center's mission, vision, and values, and strategic goals. The READ Nepal team then helps the community develop a concrete three-year action plan with assigned roles and responsibilities, along with key performance indicators that allow community members to know whether the READ Center is achieving its goals.

Peer-to-Peer Learning

The Panauti READ Center has proven to be one of the most active peer learners (and teachers) in the library network. During their community stakeholder meetings, READ facilitated an exposure visit to the Lungdung library for the youth driving the process. As one CMC member recalls, "Before, people thought that libraries are only for literate people and students. But READ Nepal gave some information about what else the library can do. We were young then, so we made a visitation program to see other READ libraries. After that visit, we wanted

READ recognizes that the communities have the most insight on challenges they face and resources to develop contextap-propriate solutions. To that end, READ Nepal facilitates peer-to-peer in-person and virtual exchanges, connecting new CMC and READ Center staff with more experienced Centers so that they can see how the READ model works in practice, under-stand what is possible when you have a genuinely communi-ty-owned and inclusive platform for community development, and share ideas on how to overcome common challenges.

to create a library like that." Panauti has gone on to share what they have learned from their own operations as well. **They conducted a local youth-led fundraising campaign in partnership with READ Nepal called Nepalis Can that raised nearly $90,000. The Panauti youth then inspired an earthquake-affected community in Sindhupalchowk to do the same thing, which raised $30,000 for the construction of a new READ Center.**

Community Management of Centers Expands Community Capacity

Interview data spoke to the central role of READ Centers in building and/or strengthening community capacity after READ staff's involvement tapered off. Descriptions of operational structures and procedures illustrated that community capacity continues to be strengthened after Centers are established through the way Centers are managed and programs are operated. The operating structures of a READ Center integrate processes that facilitate the development of community capacity, that then generates important development outcomes. Interviews with READ Center participants, volunteers, and staff revealed that social ties and shared commitment to improving the wellbeing of the community are increased through participation in programs and committees.

The analysis of the interview and field observation data was aimed at describing the practice and outcomes of READ Centers in terms of the components of community capacity. READ practitioners, local community members, CMC members, READ Center staff, and local actors described how the READ Centers impacted the lives of individual community members and led to community-level transformation, most strikingly by giving communites a sense of agency over their future despite the marginalization of

The process used to establish READ Centers generates the four characteristics of community capacity - a sense of community, a shared commitment among community members over what happens in their community, the ability to solve problems, and building access to resources - which is an important outcome in and of itself. READ's gradual, carefully facilitated approach equips communities with the tools, practices, and confidence they need to bring community members together to collabo-rate and solve common challenges to improve their lives.

rural communities in Nepal. The following sections describe the findings from the field research for the four areas of community capacity.

A Sense of Community

READ Centers provide a safe space that is welcoming for everyone. The Centers are designed with input from a broad range of members of the community - men, women, people with disabilities, people from minority ethnic groups and marginalized castes, youth, the elderly - so that they are welcoming and inviting spaces for everyone. Coupled with the collaborative process for visioning, fundraising, and constructing, each Center provides a space in the village where community members have the opportunity to connect to one another, develop a sense of belonging, and gain ownership over the activities of the Center. A long-time READ Center participant in Jhuwani described the READ Center as "a place that serves everyone. The [READ Center] has books for everyone, services for everyone.

> One community member remarked that the READ Centers are "trusted places for every member of the community."

Children can access toys and books at the library too. This is very important for those who can't afford these things." One community member in Thokarpa, an area heavily affected by the 2015 earthquake added that, "The [READ Center] is a space for stress relief in the community."

Several community members and READ Center beneficiaries noted how the READ Centers were welcoming and safe spaces for women, unlike other community spaces such as tea shops that are dominated by men. Women at the Jhuwani READ Center make concerted efforts to reach out to newly married women who have moved to their village, "and invite them to join the women's cooperative. We also give new mothers piggy banks from the cooperative to encourage them to join and create a culture of saving money."

To sustain broad ownership for each Center's community-based platform, READ promotes broad representation of the community in the READ Center. One of READ Nepal's leading community mobilizers emphasized that given the tense political situation in Nepal, READ ensures that every political party is represented in the CMC. He noted that "[the READ Centers] are a safe space for all political parties. Two months ago in Panauti, one political leader said that he was really surprised because he saw for the first time all the political leaders together in one space." Community members in formerly Maoist controlled regions repeatedly shared how the READ Centers continued to be safe spaces even under Maoist rule as the Maoists were part of the READ Center management and their families benefited from the READ Centers' services along with other community members.

The collaborative construction of a READ Center builds bonds among community members and provides mutuality and shared experience. The READ Nepal Country Director stated, "Constructing a building is so important. This process builds trust, engages people together." Community members echoed the READ Nepal Country Director's observation. A CMC member in Thokarpa reflected, "The community raised money for [the READ Center] from the Village Development Committee,[10] and others who donated solar energy panels. The community donated their time to create earthquake-safe bricks. All of this created a sense of community ownership and a sense of togetherness." A community member in Deurali who helped establish the READ Center talked about how fundraising for the READ Center brought everyone together, "the whole community was engaged in raising funds for the [Center], initially through a turmeric farm."

READ Center programs support relationship building and trust. Because the READ Centers not only create programs aimed at addressing the needs and interests of the local population, the programs engage them in ways that provide opportunities to build relationships and trust. Savings cooperatives, agricultural trainings, health programs, and youth development activities provide the opportunity for community members to build bonds and reinforce a sense of shared experience. A READ Center beneficiary in Jhuwani commented, **"The [READ Center] has created connections among community members [Tharu and Pahadi communities] that used to be divided. Because the [READ Center] has programs for everyone, people have come together and built trust and relationships."** Another beneficiary in Deurali similarly highlighted, "The [READ Center] has changed social relationships among community members. It has given us a greater sense of togetherness thanks to savings cooperatives and programs at the Center."

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10   The Village Development Committee is the most localized unit of local governance in Nepal.

Finally, to broaden a sense of community, READ coaches the READ Center management and staff on how to make concerted efforts to reach out, listen to, and engage those who are typically hard to reach. In addition to having READ Center management and staff conduct door-to-door outreach to every home in the village, the READ model's flat management structure builds in time for both formal and informal time for learning and listening, helping the CMCs and READ Center staff create a culture of listening and foster safe, productive conversations across different subgroups of residents.

Shared Commitment

READ only invests in communities that need holistic community centers and are willing to invest time and resources in creating a thriving community space for all. In other words, a shared commitment by a representative group of community members is a prerequisite for building a READ Center. READ's approach of having CMC members reach out to every household in a community to raise awareness of the opportunities provided by a READ Center and to collect donations for its establishment creates a shared commitment and responsibility of the whole community for the success of the READ Center. The joint READ Nepal and Panauti READ Center's *Nepalis Can Campaign* that raised close to $90,000 for the READ Center not only raised significant capital for but also solidified community ownership of the Center and its goals. A community member in Thokarpa remarked, "We witnessed how the community came together to build the library, and how much we all struggled and worked together to build it, especially during the monsoon season when the roads are very difficult to access." A CMC member in Thokarpa added, "Establishing and managing programs at the library has been challenging – we have a lot to do with limited staff. The staff who are involved are very active and dedicated and committed to the community."

READ's approach encourages everyone - including historically marginalized groups - to invest time and energy in the Center's activities, which creates an inclusive shared commitment to community development efforts. READ's inclusive approach to community engagement is critical in creating a commitment over what happens in their community. With READ's support, members of the community devise different tactics for everyone to participate in the establishment of a shared community space. As a result, more community members share a dedication to ensuring that the Center meets the needs of everyone. The predominantly youth-led READ Center in Panauti provides a noteworthy example of how young people are invested now more than ever in their community's development because of the READ Center. One young CMC member remarked, "We [youth] feel more recognized in the community as a result of the library. We are changing perceptions of youth and social work in the community."

READ Centers build trust with community members by delivering results. READ's approach recognizes that it is important to continually secure commitment to the Center by adapting to changing contexts and responding to new needs that emerge. This community-needs centric approach and operating principle of the READ model ensures that the READ Centers remain relevant platforms that serve community priorities. Local government partners frequently commented on the READ Centers' ability to be agile and responsive. In Jhuwani, one local government partner described what makes the READ Center successful. "Collaboration with the [the READ Center] is effective because the [the READ Center] has built trust with community members, can organize trainings and mobilize people quickly, and maintains relationships with the community and sustains programs." By consistently delivering results, the READ Centers garner new partnerships and renew commitments from community stakeholders and build a culture of volunteerism and shared leadership and power.

The READ Centers' ability to deliver results poses challenges, however. As one READ Center CMC member highlighted, "The community has high expectations. Clear communication is key to mitigate this challenge. The [READ Center] is already doing so much, but people want more materials and technical support. We need to be clear about the resources we have, the services we're able to provide, and the goals for each of our programs."

Ability to Solve Problems

READ's approach builds a culture of collaborative decision-making and problem-solving. In addition to responding to community needs, the READ model creates collaborative decision-making processes within communities that allow a variety of community members to be involved. For example, in Nuwakot, a CMC member explained, "inclusive sub-committees include people from different parts of the community, so they can easily share what services are available and take requests for needed services. As a result of this structure, the number of sub-committee members and READ Center users is increasing, especially among people with disabilities. Due to geographical difficulties, it's hard to include everyone; not everyone can participate in every meeting. However, people can have their voices heard by talking to sub-committee and CMC members."

In Panauti, READ Center beneficiaries identified the need to address pollution levels in their river, which was impacting the health of community members. The beneficiaries came together at READ Center where they were able to mobilize a group of like-minded peers to organize successful river clean-up activities and campaigns. The READ Center in Panauti, led by young people, describe the importance of collaborative problem solving. We are changing perceptions of youth and social work in the community. "Teamwork is the most important thing for us. We are mentored by more senior community members on how to address problems, and in turn, we mentor volunteers who aren't as confident." In the Terai region of Nepal, the youth sub-committees have been initiating and implementing public education campaigns on sanitation and environmental protection with mentorship from more senior READ and READ Center staff who have helped them design and monitor effective campaigns.

READ's use of visits to neighboring Centers and peer-to-peer learning also facilitates practical learning, leadership development, and problem-solving capacity among READ Center staff and CMC members. When one READ Center team is struggling with a particular issue, they meet their peers in another village to brainstorm solutions. A senior READ Nepal staff member recalled, "When [the READ Center in] Agyauli wanted to figure out how to increase women's participation at the library, I recommended that Sita, who started the women's cooperative in Jhuwani, visit Agyauli and share her experiences."

The Practical Answers program, developed in partnership with the NGO Practical Action, provides a systematic way for READ Centers to assess and respond to community needs. Practical Answers provides a vehicle for communities to listen to its members to learn about their needs. The program is led by a social mobilizer at the READ Center who visits households close to and farther away from the Center, asking the residents about the challenges they are facing, collecting their queries, and then connecting them with knowledgeable individuals or resources that respond to their needs. Community members noted repeatedly that the Practical Answers program allowed them to feel heard and gave them a framework to identify issues and come up with ways to respond.

In Deurali, community members noted how the continuous outreach through Practical Answers "helps the community understand that [the READ Center] is for everyone." Practical Answers has also helped residents, particularly women, access health services and treat specific issues such as uterine prolapse. The READ Nepal Country Director noted differences in Centers that use Practical Answers to identify community needs. "There is a big difference between [READ Centers] that have Practical Answers and those that don't. Partnerships with community members aren't as strong in the Centers that don't have it. READ Centers that have Practical Answers have one staff member completely dedicated to reaching out to [and collecting information from] the community members."

> **Practical Answer program queries span a variety of topics. Specific queries have included:**
>
> » *My buffalo is not giving milk, how can I treat that?*
>
> » *What kind of vegetables would be suitable to plant during the raining season?*
>
> » *Why is there is stomach pain during menstruation?*
>
> » *How can we grow vegetable seedlings in a proper way?*
>
> » *What kind of locally available food provides proper nutrition to cattle?*
>
> » *What should I do if I have uterine prolapse?*
>
> » *How can we prevent ourselves suffering from uterine prolapse?*

Access to Resources

The READ Centers' ability to serve the community attracts outside funding. After the 2015 earthquake, the READ Centers' ability to serve their communities and act as distribution hubs for relief to hard-hit regions attracted international donor funding. For example, in Nuwakot, UNICEF gave the READ Center money to build child-friendly safe spaces where schools could temporarily hold classes, and children and families could gather. The CMC in Thokarpa shared how their success providing safe spaces where community members could gather and access critical services just after the earthquake demonstrated to outside donors the potential impact of a READ Center on the surrounding community. "That [community safe spaces] program was really effective. District and national government, along with a Taiwanese organization, funded those temporary shelters. After that, I proposed to [READ Nepal] to build a community library. Community ownership and participation was very strong. Lots of media covered the news of what we were doing. Through that outreach, Beautiful Store [a South Korean philanthropy] decided to support us."

An existing track record of community support for READ Centers has also translated into greater access to resources. In Panauti, a CMC member described how local government stepped in: "At the last moment, we discovered we needed an additional $5,000 to complete the construction of [the READ Center]. We all discussed together what we could do, and decided to take out a loan from the local savings cooperative. Because of our positive relationship with the local municipality, the municipality decided to reimburse the loan."

READ's approach to cultivating partnerships gives communities access to outside resources. READ's approach prioritizes engaging local partners to provide services at the READ Centers instead of having each READ Center create new services. By doing so, the READ model helps build ongoing connections between READ Center communities, often marginalized, and their local government, schools, health posts, and other locally-available service providers. One community member noted, "The local municipality has a long history of working with the Center on legal rights education. When they wanted to set up a municipality information point at the library where community members could get information on other services available through the municipality, as well as on weather and climate change, they donated one lakh [NPR 100,000] for construction of the information point at the library."

Community members and READ Center staff repeatedly cited how beneficial these partnerships are to their communities. A CMC member in Jhuwani highlighted the value of trainings conducted by the district education office. "The district education office trained 1,100 people how to read [at the READ Center], and is now setting up more advanced training on how to use technology." Others in Thokarpa, Panauti, Jhuwani, and Deurali echoed the impact of the benefits of the agriculture trainings that the local district agriculture offices have been providing. A community member in Thokarpa shared that he took part in a vegetable farming training hosted by the local government. As a result, "last year, we made a profit of NPR 12,000. We learned about organic pesticides and how to use local materials to improve our crop yields."

Based on the case study findings, we hypothesize that the ability to solve problems and access resources beyond the community are strengthened over time as community members gain experience in managing the Centers, conducting community outreach, and delivering programs with the mentoring and support of READ country staff.

Community Capacity Leads to Community Development

The evidence from the case study suggests that the READ model's focus on building community capacity plays a critical role in the success of the Centers in achieving development outcomes. As the core strategies of the READ model for building a Center and making it operational are implemented, communities develop a stronger sense of community, shared commitment, ability to solve problems, and access to external resources. These components of community capacity then support gains in a range of community development outcomes. The outcomes across READ Centers include community-level changes that contribute to long-term economic and social transformation.

The case study data also suggests that community capacity supports a set of community-level outcomes that contribute to the long-term economic and social transformation of communities. These outcomes include:

- Increased social cohesion, or greater tolerance, inclusion, trust, and well-being across a community; [11]

- Greater collective efficacy, or a community's shared belief in their collective power to produce specific changes; [12]

- Resilience to disasters and crises;

- Women's empowerment;

- Cultivating Community Leaders;

- Stronger performance of local institutions;

- Positive economic, education, and health outcomes; and

- An increased ability to learn, innovate, and improve services and programming that meet community needs.

The following sections describe the findings from the case study for the community-level outcomes created by the READ model in Nepal.

Increased Social Cohesion & Tolerance

READ's approach builds social cohesion among community members through inclusive participation and shared experience. As noted earlier, the READ model requires that the whole community participate in the design, construction, and management of a READ Center. In Jhuwani, one interviewee shared that long-time divisions between Tharu and Paharu ethnic groups were improving because of the Center. "The Center has brought inclusiveness," he said. "The Center makes sure that everyone comes together for different programs, so we have built relationships with one another."

> Through the collaborative process of building a holistic community space, reaching out to various community members to identify needs, and then having a space where everyone can meet and come up with solutions to the community's problems, the READ Center provides a safe and positive environment for community members to interact, bond, and participate in problem-solving and activities that improve their lives.

A community member from Kumari described how villagers bonded with each other over a shared experience. "People come to the Center to share their problems, solve their problems, which builds positive relationships. When the earthquake happened, community members gathered in front of [the READ Center] to charge their mobile phones, since the library had solar panels, to communicate with relatives in Kathmandu and abroad." A villager in Panauti reflected on her experience at the READ Center, "When we come to the library, we have the opportunity to meet people from different parts of the community. Before, we didn't interact with them, we didn't think about their needs. Now things have changed. Now we have become friends with many other people and feel that they are part of our community. For example, someone who participated in a first aid training at the library taught me how to bandage my foot, and now we have become friends."

11   OECD, Social Cohesion, https://www.oecd.org/dev/inclusivesocietiesanddevelopment/social-cohesion.htm
12   Community Development Toolbox, Collective Efficacy https://communitydevelopmenttoolbox.weebly.com/strategies-of-community-organization-collective-efficacy.html

Community members highlighted how the READ Centers cultivate cohesion particularly among women. One villager remarked, "As women, we participate in different trainings - incense-making, bamboo tool-making - and the trainers ask us to share the knowledge with others who cannot participate. I trained other women in my village in incense-making and bamboo tool-making too. In this way, [the READ Center] creates connections among women in the community."

READ's gradual approach to fostering tolerance and mitigating marginalization creates lasting change. READ's approach to inclusion recognizes that social transformation and cohesion takes time, patience, and careful listening and facilitation. The READ Nepal Country Director remarked, **"Minority inclusion is hard. A lot of times, people [from marginalized groups] aren't confident to participate in the CMCs. It takes a lot of time, lots of travel, and lots of outreach."**

As a testament to this level of effort to improve inclusion, many of the interviewees who shared their experiences through the interviews were persons with disabilities who have accessed new opportunities as a result of participating in a READ Center. The social mobilizer at the Deurali READ Center, who is physically handicapped himself, explained that he goes door-to-door to every household in the village to collect information on community needs to connect individuals and families with services, and to help raise awareness of and support for programs at the READ Center. As a result of similar door-to-door outreach in Panauti, the READ Center social mobilizer identified the need for livelihood opportunities for people with disabilities beyond farming, which can be impossible for people who have physical impairments. The READ Center now offers trainings on beekeeping, candle-stick making, and other livelihoods opportunities that can be done without hard manual labor. One participant shared that she has attended several of these trainings, and, as a result, she is now employed at a candle-making factory. She is earning NPR 6,000/month, which is a substantial amount in terms of supporting her family. In Thokarpa, one CMC member, also a person with physical disabilities, shared how she conducted three awareness-raising activities about persons with disabilities in the community. A participant in one of these activities shared that, as a result, she had learned quite a bit about her own rights as a person with disabilities and about services the government offers. She has gone on to start her own organization that continues this awareness raising work and coordinates with the district government to get people with severe disabilities to register in order to receive their allotted allowances. Thus, social cohesion generated by the READ Centers is transforming the lives of populations that would otherwise be isolated at home with no or limited earning potential, including gaining leadership positions in the community.

Greater Collective Efficacy

READ builds collective efficacy, a community's shared belief in their collective power to produce specific changes, by coaching and mentoring communities in how to reach out to all members, identify and track their needs on a continual basis, and understand how to secure the right kinds of services and resources to respond to those needs.[12] Community members repeatedly described ways that the READ Center is a place where they go to solve their problems. In Panauti, a villager shared, "Before when we faced problems, we didn't know how to communicate with others about the problems or where to go. But now, whenever we have problems, we have a group of peers to discuss these problems with and come up with solutions."

The READ Centers change community perceptions of women, youth, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and others by providing a safe space where all community members can productively interact, build trust, foster greater tolerance, and work together to solve common problems. For example, in Nuwakot, female community members shared how they gathered together to start an anti-gambling campaign. They reflected, "Our community is male-dominated so it wasn't easy for females to come out of the home, and males were involved in gambling. So, in 2012, we started a campaign through the READ Center to stop men from playing cards and gambling, and [instead] provide more support at home so that women could participate in social activities at the library. This campaign was quite successful. We took part in women's empowerment and legal rights training at the library and we learned about women's equality at home. This encouraged us to hold and organize the campaign. As a side effect of our efforts, men started coming to the library more to gather instead of going to gamble. They read books, use the audio-visual section, particularly those who are illiterate."

Resilience to Disasters and Crises

READ Centers create community-based platforms for coordinated action during natural disasters and other crises. Thokarpa Village in Sindhupalchowk District, one of the most hard-hit areas following the 2015 earthquake, provides a compelling example of how the READ model serves as a space for collective action, particularly during a crisis. Immediately following the devastating earthquake, READ worked with the village to establish Community Safe Spaces (CSSes) in Thokarpa where community members could gather, seek shelter, and coordinate relief efforts. The CSSes served as safe spaces for all community members and started providing valuable services, including livelihood trainings, to help the residents rebuild their lives. As the head of the CMC noted, "The CSSes brought community members together, those who don't normally share space and survive together." The community quickly realized that they needed more than the CSSes to respond to increasing community demands for services and resources, and, thus, worked with READ to establish a READ Center. Even in 2017, two years after the earthquake, the majority of families still had not received aid from the government to rebuild their homes, and many were still living under tarps that were set up immediately after the earthquake. Despite the lack of resources available to them, the community came together and raised over $30,000 to help construct a community library that would serve everyone.

The Thokarpa READ Center launched its services in January 2017, providing important agriculture trainings to help farmers cope with the impacts of climate change, awareness raising sessions on disability rights and government allowances for the disabled, basic education and literacy skills for all ages, ICT skills training, and many more services that respond to community needs.

> One community member whose sons are working as laborers abroad shared her vision for why investing in this shared community space is more important than even rebuilding homes, "Rebuilding my home would give me nothing. My sons have left; I am alone with my buffaloes. A community library represents opportunity. Perhaps my sons would not have left if we had such space."

READ Centers serve as first responders in times of crisis. Recently, READ Centers have been first responders during natural disasters. The Kumari READ Center in Nuwakot District, also highly impacted by the 2015 earthquake, served as a hub for relief work. The READ Center worked closely with their local VDC to provide mosquito nets, mother-baby survival kits, emergency lights, and temporary shelter. Since the READ Center had already built relationships throughout the community, they were able to mobilize volunteers, distribute relief, and reach remote areas quickly while outside groups struggled to travel to Nuwakot as roads were destroyed and conditions remained unsafe. One community member commented, "When [the READ Center] was damaged [by the earthquake], we felt reconstruction was an urgent need. We were afraid we would lose our resource for knowledge and support for our livelihoods. The library is a resource through which the community can coordinate support from a variety of organizations, including the local government."

Women's Empowerment

The READ Centers have been particularly transformational for women. A formerly illiterate woman from a marginalized ethnic group in Agyauli describes her experience at the READ Center, "The library taught me literacy skills, and the confidence to start my own farm and bangle-making business. I am now able to speak to my father-in-law." Other women at the Agyauli READ Center noted that they not only benefited from the trainings at the library but also are perceived as leaders in the communities. Men are now asking them to participate in community activities outside the READ Center, and one of the women is now the vice president of a satellite READ Center in a nearby village.

READ Centers create meaningful leadership opportunities for women and girls by strengthening their voice and influence at home and in their communities while mitigating any potential backlash. This is a sensitive path to navigate, as cultural norms in Nepal are still quite restrictive around women's participation in public life. As mentioned earlier, women, youth, and other marginalized groups develop their voices and leadership skills by participating in various sub-committees that provide feedback to the CMC, and leading and participating in activities at the READ Centers that build leadership skills (e.g. women's cooperatives, youth development committees, social mobilization). Several women in Nuwakot shared how it took them some time to understand the extent to which the READ Center could benefit women. One community member shared, "We knew of [the READ Center] at the very beginning, when it was only a

structure, even when there was nothing going on. When the reconstruction process started, people knew that the library would benefit children and youth but they didn't imagine that there would be a space for women. When the library was opened, we were surprised that men and women were working together. My friends and I would wake up early to finish our tasks at home so that we could come to the library. Sometimes we would lie to our families and not tell them that we're going to the library to participate in different programs. Now it's much easier."

In Agyauli, a young woman who is an active member of the youth sub-committee shared how [the READ Center] has made her more confident, "My family and community noticed that I'm not as shy anymore. They are supportive of this change." A community member in Panauti observed, "We've seen changes in women who previously only stayed at home. They now develop skills and become entrepreneurs."

> A female community member remarked, "I feel more supported and more confident than others [who don't have a READ Center]. When I came to Panauti when I got married, people knew me as the wife of my husband. But when I started to come to the library and became an active participant, people started knowing me by my own name. Now, I'm the president of the Practical Answers group in my community. People see me as a community resource. People see me as a leader in the community."

Another female leader in Agyauli shared how her life transformed because of the READ Center. "I became engaged in [the READ Center] after participating in literacy classes. Now I can read and have benefitted from various trainings, including poultry farming. I now own a poultry farm. I'm a very busy member of the Agyauli READ Center, and am the vice president of a satellite READ Center nearby. People are asking me to participate in all sorts of community activities. The library has given me new light. I want to work hard and inspire other women."

Cultivating Community Leaders

The READ Centers support community leadership development at all levels. In addition to cultivating community members who see themselves as stakeholders in the collective well-being of the community, the READ model identifies community members who are willing to take an active role in working on behalf of the community.[13] READ Nepal identifies natural leaders and supports them to develop the leadership skills and tools they need to be effective as leaders. When equipped with the right leadership skills, these committed and active adult and youth residents can guide their communities to new levels of development.

The various sub-committees provide the opportunity for new leaders to strengthen their voices and give them channels to provide input on READ Center services and the management of the Centers. Over time, the flat management structure of the READ Centers shifts community perceptions of inclusion as community members see the value of different perspectives and the contributions various community members make to improving everyone's lives. A youth CMC member in Panauti describes his experience at the READ Center, **"So many changes as a result of participating. So much social prestige. We are recognized by kids on the street as Center Management Committee members. Previously, youth engagement wasn't a big focus, but we are changing minds. If we can make time for the library, we can do social work also. Families used to scold us for doing this social work, thinking we weren't developing our careers. But now that the library has taken off, our parents are bragging about us. It's an example for us that even youth can establish a library at this age. It was so great for us during the inauguration to be there, giving speeches, and having our parents there. It was a really proud moment for us that we had done something great."**

Stronger Performance of Local Institutions

READ Centers improve the performance of local governing institutions. Throughout the field research, local actors cited how the READ Centers were improving their ability to deliver services and become stronger institutions. In Nuwakot, a CMC member highlighted, "Per the library's policies, the leadership must change every three years. Now, the government also has adopted a provision through which they are creating inclusive committees." A member of the district agriculture office remarked, "The library is the most effective way to reach community members. We provide training opportunities

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13   http://www.instituteccd.org/uploads/iccd/documents/chaskin-defining_community_capacity.pdf

based on the recommendations of the library. The library identifies farmers to participate in the trainings we offer. We also get seeds and supplies from the library's store [sustaining enterprise]." Another local government representative echoed his colleague's reflections, "I work in the district livestock service center. We coordinate with the library on two topics: livestock and animal health, particularly on programs for animal nutrition, health management, and treatment. We have technical discussion and interactions with community members at the library whenever the social mobilizer says we need to come. We even host animal health camps at the library."

A local government representative from Jhuwani similarly noted, "We see that working with the library is mutually beneficial. The library helps us achieve our goals and the trainings we provide meet community needs." He went on to describe how the READ Center helps local government reach its goals. **"We have limited human resources for a huge coverage area. Because the library can organize and bring people together, we can deliver services much faster. The library acts as a bridge. It wouldn't be possible without the library. If we had to organize one interaction on our own, it would take three to four days. But now we can reach farmers much more easily. It's a mutually beneficial relationship. We are very happy that participants feel that these trainings are beneficial too. The library helps us meet our goals."** A member of the local municipality in Panauti explained how easy it is to work with a READ Center: "The library and the municipality have a close relationship. There aren't really any challenges. It's simple to coordinate. After coordinating with the library, we see that the results of our services are going directly to the community. Behind other NGOs, there aren't such active members or youth teams. The library is one of the best teams."

Increased Economic, Educational, and Health Outcomes

READ Centers provide community members with opportunities to increase their education, economic opportunity, and overall well-being. In addition to creating greater cohesion, trust, and efficacy among community members, the READ Centers have generated economic benefits, education, and health outcomes that help transform communities in Nepal. A CMC member of the Agyauli READ Center describes the ripple effects that the Center has on community members, "The library has ripple effects within the community. Community members come for one type of training, for example, ICT training, but then also take part in other trainings and reap the benefits. Community members bond more with one another. Those who gain agriculture skills, for example, are role models and help other people. [The READ Center] creates a culture of helping each other."

A community member in Nuwakot explained how the READ Center has created a culture of education in their community, "As a result of the library, now children have developed their capacity to communicate positively with people, including their parents. Most young men used to sit at tea shops and gossip but now they have changed their habits. They come to the library, read, and discuss serious issues. Women who used to sit at home are starting to gather at the library and engage in different types of trainings. They are more confident. They have developed entrepreneurship skills."

For youth, access to the internet and computer training gives them important employability skills that they would not otherwise be able to access. A local government representative in Nuwakot described, **"[READ Centers] are gateways and platforms that connect people to the world.** Thanks to the library, we can get updates on what is going on in the world and gain agriculture-related knowledge. Youth can access technology. Previously, youth went fishing during their leisure time but now they access knowledge. Women can come together and discuss their problems and can get support if they are vulnerable." A READ Center staff in Nuwakot added, "The library provides computer training. Schools from different surrounding areas come here once a month so children can learn these new skills. We coordinated our training with a technology skills training in Kathmandu to help youth access electrician courses. These youth are now getting jobs as a result of their technology and electrician skills." In Jhuwani, a community member also highlighted the importance of technology skills training to youth employment: "Computer services and training at the library have been important for young people. It helps them find jobs."

The READ Centers have been sources of economic opportunity for adults in addition to young people. Men and women have been learning better farming techniques and increasing their economic opportunities. A community member in Panauti highlighted, **"The library trainings have resulted in increased confidence, stronger self-identity, and income through commercialized farming and modern farming trainings. Many community members had other jobs but quit them as using modern farming techniques has proved to be more profitable."**

Given the levels of marginalization of the communities where READ operates in Nepal, communities traditionally have limited access to health care. The READ Center, however, serves as a platform where health care providers can reach remote villages much more easily. A CMC member in Panauti shared, "Now, the library provides needs-based services for health, including breast cancer screening, and vaccinating dogs to prevent rabies." In Jhuwani and Agyauli, the READ Centers worked closely with the local health posts to provide series of services at the READ Centers so that community members would not have to travel long distances to access care, including child health check-ups and uterine prolapse detection for women. A female community member in Jhuwani describes how the READ Center helped her through her pregnancy: "When I was pregnant, I received information on maternal health at the library. I used the library's ambulance services to go to the hospital to give birth [instead of giving birth at home]. My baby is now three years old. I cannot afford toys but now my child can access toys and books at the library for free."

Increased Ability to Learn, Innovate, and Improve Services

READ's approach provides a vehicle for communities to practice learning, innovating, and improving programming and services. By giving community members the skills to listen to community members, identify their needs, and receive their feedback to improve services at the READ Center, READ provides a channel for the Center staff and community members to learn, innovate, and improve the services and programs they provide. A youth CMC member in Panauti explains, "Before, people thought that libraries are only for literate people and students. But READ Nepal gave some information about what else the library can do. We were young then, so we participated in an exchange to see other READ Centers. After that visit, we wanted to create a Center like that. We launched a program around empowerment, health campaigns, a street dog neutering campaign, and breast cancer screenings for 142 women in the community. We organize these programs based on the needs of communities. We communicate with lots of organizations, as well as Panauti Municipality because they feel like this library is their library as well."

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One of the founding members of the Jhuwani READ Center shares how her contributions helped make the women's section and the Center much more vibrant. "I had just gotten married to my husband, crossed two rivers to move to Jhuwani, given birth to my first son, and there was nothing to read. No women at the library. So even if they had books, you had to wait to get it. It really affected me. I was told that I needed to go lead the women's section. I was thinking long and hard about it because I also wasn't sure about leaving the house. I spoke at the Center's inauguration and at that time decided to lead the women's section. If you throw a pebble in the river, it will ripple. That day I threw the stone on the river. At the last general assembly of the women's section, there was a line of women out the door. It's all people's contribution."

Another founder of a READ Center shared how he learned and adapted his approach to increase community engagement. "While repairing the local bridge, community members were hesitant to participate. We thought the way we were working was not good. We thought if we had a READ Center, we could discuss education and what to do, and other matters important to community. We thought if we make a READ Center, we'll use it to address our different needs – gender, health, skills. At the beginning, we had lots of toys from Europe that we distributed to the kids to borrow. They started then coming back with their parents to exchange the toys so that way we got the parents to come with their kids. We also built a special section for newly literate people and their kids. That was mother and children's section together. That section was overused. We held a dental camp and over 1,000 people came. Slowly, people began to think that the READ Center is for them. We ran a mobile library, found groups in their settlements, and provided books that were taken to the communities and could be exchanged. That was one way to do outreach."

Elements that Sustain READ Centers

The case study results raise the question of the role that community capacity plays in the long-term sustainability of READ Centers. How do a strong sense of community, shared commitment, ability to solve problems, and access to resources support sustainable rural development? Furthermore, how have the key elements of the READ approach (the practices used by READ country staff, engagement opportunities designed to develop community capacity, and operating structures and practices) played a role in the ongoing adaptation of READ Centers? For instance, READ Nepal staff mentored one of the early Centers to help broaden inclusion from all groups in the community. This problem-solving process led them to start children's activities, which had been identified as a need across the community. The women who brought their children to participate in these new activities then developed a sense of community, which led them to ask for women's programs on issues such as health, literacy, and livelihood skills development. Now this area of programming has proven to be both extremely popular and effective for advancing community development and has spread across all READ Centers. Programs for women are now integrated into READ Centers, which has resulted in an enhanced role for women as decision makers and leaders in READ Centers, their own families, and their broader communities. As a result, women who participated in leadership programming began serving on the Centers' operating committees, agreeing to share responsibility for the success of READ Center programs. As members of those committees, women became part of the problem-solving and decision-making process involved in operating programs, doing community needs outreach, and adapting programs to meet those needs. These leadership experiences have enabled women to have greater voice and decision-making authority in their households and communities. This example suggests that the interplay between community capacity and community development is the engine for increasingly greater participation, resilience, impact, and long-term sustainability.

Discussion

The findings from this qualitative study demonstrate how the READ model in Nepal has generated three main sets of community-level outcomes. These outcomes are generated through a slow, carefully facilitated, and inclusive process that provides communities with the opportunity to create a community-owned and -led platform through which they can identify and respond to local needs and challenges. READ country staff emphasize *that this process takes time*, and *careful facilitation by community development practitioners* who are willing to spend many months and years listening to and coaching communities on how to create, sustain, and adapt their READ Centers that respond to community needs.

- ▶ **Through its design, operations, and startup phases, READ generates <u>community capacity,</u>** both an outcome in itself and a driver of community development outcomes. Evidence for increased community capacity as a result of READ was found in the following areas:

  - ▷ Strengthened sense of community among community members that they share common needs and concerns, and feel a sense of belonging through their involvement with the READ Center;

  - ▷ Greater commitment among community members over what happens in their community such that they are willing to volunteer or contribute tangibly in other ways to the READ Center;

  - ▷ Ability to solve problems, through the participation in READ Center's structures and processes; and

  - ▷ Gaining access to resources within and beyond the village through partnerships with local groups, government officials, and funding/technical assistance partners.

- ▶ **Through increased community capacity, READ Centers lead to a variety of gains in <u>outcomes linked to development</u>:**

  - ▷ Increased social cohesion through participation in programs, committees, and other opportunities available through READ Centers;

  - ▷ Greater collective efficacy, a shared belief in collective power to produce positive changes as a result of working together to build the READ center and creating programs to fulfill needs;

  - ▷ Resilience in the face of stressors such as the earthquake, fuel shortages, and other unpredictable and unpreventable threats to Nepal's vulnerable and remote villages;

  - ▷ Gains in community leadership through acting on a commitment to be part of the READ Center and having opportunities to fulfill leadership roles;

  - ▷ Increased women's empowerment due to the READ Center providing safe and socially acceptable spaces for women to meet and learn;

  - ▷ Stronger performance of local institutions resulting from READ Centers' seeking local solutions to needs expressed by community members;

  - ▷ Increased positive economic, educational, and health outcomes; and

  - ▷ Increased learning, innovation, and improvement of services and programming that meet community needs.

- ▶ **READ's approach to community development builds <u>sustainability</u>** by ongoing strengthening of community capacity alongside gains in community development. The model effectively opens the door to community agency by building community ownership of their own development and ensuring ongoing participation, adaptation, and impact.

The findings suggest that the approach used by the Nepal country team during READ Center development is aimed at generating community capacity, which then is activated and strengthened through ongoing operations of the Center. Participation by a broad segment of the community population in Center operations leads to a range of community development outcomes and ultimately to long-term sustainability.

Key Elements of the READ Approach

The following factors appear to be particularly important for the success of the READ model:

▶ **Careful targeting of communities**: The READ country team works with communities that demonstrate enough demand and commitment to establishing a holistic, inclusive, and community-driven platform. Communities must have enough need for a READ Center's services; willingness to work across gender, ethnic, and other divides; and commitment from the whole community to own and participate in the READ Center's activities to generate community capacity, community development, and sustainability.

▶ **Demonstration of community commitment to the READ Center**: As highlighted throughout this study, community ownership of the READ Center is paramount to the success of the model. Genuine community ownership of the READ Center and its values ensures that the Center continually responds to residents' needs, provides the right kinds of services, and remains an inclusive space for all members of society. The READ Nepal team facilitates the development of this commitment at the outset. Community members representing various groups that comprise the community (women, men, youth, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, etc.) attend community engagement meetings and participate in all phases of establishing a READ Center. A majority of households must contribute financially or through in-kind donations to the construction of the READ Centers.

▶ **Community commitment to inclusion**: READ acknowledges that building genuinely inclusive societies takes time and careful facilitation. Communities that READ country teams engage thus need to be committed to reaching out to and serving the needs of all residents. This commitment is the first step to creating understanding and building bridges among community members who would otherwise not interact because of social divides. Without this commitment to engage the whole community in the establishment of the READ Center, the READ Center risks being perceived as owned by and serving only certain segments of the population, rather than a safe welcoming space where all community members can gain benefits and add value.

▶ **Cultivation of needs-driven, inclusive community leadership:** The establishment of a needs-driven and inclusive CMC with representation of all groups that comprise the community, including women, is essential to the success of the READ model. The READ Center's purpose is to provide a safe space for all community members to gather and come up with solutions to the problems they face. The READ Center leadership must create and sustain that positive environment and ensure that the READ Center is a vibrant space with services that meet community needs. Fostering inclusive and needs-driven leadership takes time and coaching from READ. A senior member of the READ Nepal team explained, "Inclusive Center Management Committees and inclusive sub-committees are good, but you need to start building their leadership skills by having them participate in READ Center activities, then engaging them as volunteers, and gradually as members of Center Management Committee or sub-committee. That way you can bring them into the READ Centers more and more…raise their awareness of what the READ Center is doing, and then slowly build their capacity to lead. This creates genuine participation and leadership."

▶ **Collaborative partnerships with local institutions:** Partnerships with local institutions such as local government offices, the local municipality, schools, and health posts, connect rural communities to services that they would otherwise not be able to access, and raises awareness among government actors of rural communities' needs. These partnerships are not only critical to the long-term sustainability of the READ Centers but also to reducing the overall marginalization of rural communities where READ operates.

▶ **Financial independence:** The ability for the communities to generate enough revenue to support the ongoing costs of the READ Centers gives communities decision-making authority on services provided at the Centers, which would be more difficult to do if the communities were financially dependent on external donors and aid agencies that may only support certain kinds of activities. Having a consistent stream of income also allows the CMC and READ Center staff to focus on identifying and responding to community needs, and building partnerships with organizations that can address those needs.

▶ **Collaborative construction or design of the holistic community space:** As the READ Nepal Country Director explained, "Constructing a building is so important. It builds trust and engages people together." The process of constructing or rehabilitating a building for a shared community space through which the majority of households

contribute money, donate their time to fundraise, or contribute their labor to build or reconstruct the READ Center brings the whole community together for a shared goal of improving their communities.

▶ **Flat management structure of the READ Center:** An inclusive CMC along with sub-committees that allow other members of the community to provide input on the services provided at the READ Center, and communicate any challenges that arise, creates broad community ownership of the READ Center. The READ Nepal team acknowledges that building the community's capacity to maintain this transparent management structure is challenging but crucial. "Most Centers want to include their friends on the CMC, so we use dialogue to convince the president [of the library] to use a democratic process. We also conduct community discussions to make sure that those being elected to the CMCs are not just friends of the president and coach community members on CMC member criteria and what their responsibilities should be. This is a very sensitive process for READ Nepal - we need to be careful about remaining facilitators."

Applicability to Other Contexts: India, Bhutan, and Beyond

In 2008, with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, READ began replicating its model from Nepal in neighboring India and Bhutan. In both contexts, READ has adapted its approach to each country's context, while maintaining key elements of READ Nepal's practice, including working in communities where there is enough demand and commitment, mobilizing the whole community, engaging everyone in the establishment and management of the READ Center, providing needs-based services, and establishing sustaining enterprises to support the basic operating costs of the READ Centers. **In both India and Bhutan, community members cite the value of the services that the READ Centers provide for all residents and how the Centers create safe spaces for all community members to gather and gain benefit, particularly women. In each of these contexts, while the essential structure and READ Centers services have been preserved, there have been significant challenges and adaptations.**

In India, READ has been able to leverage private sector partnerships to establish READ Centers. READ formed partnerships with Indian and multinational corporations through India's recent corporate social responsibility (CSR) law, which requires companies of a certain size to invest two percent of their net profits in charitable activities.[14] These companies often request to establish READ Centers in communities where they have sourced labor or other materials. While this approach is a departure from READ Nepal's practice (working only with communities where there is enough need and demand for a READ Center), READ India must identify villages within the regions where the corporations want to invest. These villages typically are resource-deprived but show potential for genuine community engagement. READ India's engagement with private sector partners has also been beneficial for the sustaining enterprises of the READ Centers. For example, through READ India's partnership with Accenture's *Skills to Succeed* program, women have been able to sell the products they make through the READ Centers' sustaining enterprises by connecting with relevant markets.

In Bhutan, while READ Centers have been able to deliver important social benefits, ensuring the sustainability of the READ Centers is a primary challenge for several reasons. First, establishing viable sustaining enterprises in rural communities has been difficult. Similar to Nepal, READ Bhutan provides initial seed funding for the sustaining enterprises, and works closely with the community to test and strengthen their business ideas. Unfortunately, many of the business ideas fail due to a lack of entrepreneurial skills, and the absence of a vibrant market economy in Bhutan. The businesses that survive typically do not generate enough funds to support READ Centers. Additionally, according to the READ Bhutan Country Director, fostering genuine community engagement and ownership to manage and sustain the READ Centers has been challenging because communities are accustomed to the government providing services for them. Changing this mindset requires a great deal of time and resources. READ Bhutan is currently in the process of reevaluating their approach to sustainability and are considering ways to involve the government in building and mobilizing communities to manage and sustain the READ Centers. READ Bhutan anticipates that greater government buy-in and involvement will encourage communities to take more ownership of their READ Centers.

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14 https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/apr/05/india-csr-law-requires-companies-profits-to-charity-is-it-working

If the READ model is to be successfully propagated and scaled across new countries and cultural settings, READ's existing theory of change should be updated to describe the critical role that community capacity appears to play in generating intermediate and long-term outcomes. More importantly, as the READ model is adapted to new contexts, the key elements of the approach should be of primary importance in transferring the model. These adaptations would benefit from fully articulating and translating the practices used by READ Nepal staff, which could help to facilitate the development of a Center into a training and mentoring process. This should include the practice of intentionally creating opportunities to develop community capacity during each phase: planning, construction, and operational startup. Finally, the design of the structures and processes used to operate the Center and deliver services is also an important factor in generating community capacity. Attention to the articulation and preservation of these core elements of the READ model is likely to be important to successful propagation across varied social, political, and cultural contexts.

Future Evolution of the READ Model

Interviews with READ Global, READ Nepal, and READ Center staff and volunteers included a number of important ideas for how the model should evolve in the future to have greater development impact and sustainability.

▶ **More carefully monitor READ Centers' business plans and sustaining enterprises.** A senior READ Nepal staff member suggested, "We need to better assess the development of business plans and how they are being implemented. Currently we develop a plan and how much money each Center needs but we don't do this continuously. When the CMC changes, that knowledge and business plan lose continuity." Another senior READ Nepal staff member echoed this need, "The old Centers don't have sufficient resources. About ten Centers are having big problems [with financial sustainability]."

▶ **Strengthen the CMCs' ability to strategize and fundraise.** READ Nepal staff suggested that the READ Centers should start developing more comprehensive strategic and annual plans to ensure that they are meeting community needs in more impactful ways. A CMC member in Panauti suggested that "We also need to work more with local government. Centers should submit our annual plans to local government to get their resources and coordinate with them more, particularly with government line agencies, agriculture and livestock departments, for example." READ Nepal staff repeatedly noted that READ Nepal needs to work more closely with communities on exit strategies. After READ Centers complete phase three of the READ model, they still rely on READ Nepal's mentorship and coaching, particularly on proposal-writing and marketing their work to garner partnerships and additional funding.

▶ **Further expand inclusive programming for marginalized religious and ethnic groups, women, and persons with disabilities.** Following the 2015 earthquake, several READ Centers have expanded their programming and services for people with disabilities. The READ Nepal country team along with many of the READ Centers want to strengthen their engagement with this often hard-to-reach population. A senior READ Nepal staff member noted, "The READ Centers need to be more inclusive - CMCs, training participants. They've started discussing this but it's very important now that all Centers are inclusive. They really need to think about how to engage people with disabilities. Many Centers don't have ramps and aren't accessible to everyone."

▶ **Continue to support community-led adaptation of the READ model.** Innovations and adaptations of the READ model have been primarily driven by the communities, notably, the addition of women's and children's sections, innovative fundraising campaigns, and successful sustaining enterprise ideas. As one of READ's most experienced community mobilizers reflected, "The READ model has evolved based on community needs. So, there are no risks to dilute this model. As the READ Centers grow, they may add more activities to respond to community needs, for example, adding a section for senior citizens. The READ model isn't the 'READ model'[…] it's the 'community library model.' So, the biggest risk is if we take that level of ownership and responsiveness away."

Directions for Future Research

While this study has made an initial effort to document the practices of READ Nepal and understanding the contributions of community capacity to sustainable development, additional research is needed to address questions such as:

- What is the best way of measuring longer term impacts (e.g., READ Center sustainability and resilience to stressors) and what is their relationship to intermediate community development and community capacity outcomes?

- Can existing tools measuring community capacity be adapted to the rural village environment?

- To what extent does community readiness correlate to community capacity and development outcomes?

- How do management practices modeled by READ Centers touch other organizations and local institutions? Do READ Centers' commitment to accountability, transparency, and financial independence impact local government?

- What can be learned from the current adaptations of the READ model, for example in India and Bhutan, and what are the differences in the development of community capacity and increases in community development outcomes?

Conclusion

Through its design, operations, and startup phases, READ generates community capacity, both as an outcome in itself and a driver of community development outcomes. Evidence for community capacity was found in developing a sense of community, the feeling by members that they share common experiences and have a sense of belonging through their involvement with the READ Center; a commitment among community members to thinking through what can be done in their community and their willingness to volunteer or contribute tangibly in other ways to the READ Center; ability to solve problems through the READ Center's structures and processes; and access to resources beyond the village itself.

The study also shows that through the process of generating capacity in rural communities in Nepal, the READ model also results in key community development outcomes including: increased social cohesion; greater collective efficacy, a shared belief in collective power to produce positive changes; resilience to disasters and crises; gains in community leadership; increased women's empowerment; stronger performance of local institutions; increased positive economic, educational, and health outcomes; and increased ability to learn, innovate, and improve services and programming that meet community needs.

Finally, READ's approach to fostering community capacity and rural community development in Nepal acknowledges the need to sustain community capacity and community development by building the following three factors from the outset: community ownership, linkages with local resources and partners, and financial sustainability.

Lessons for Effective Community Development

Analysis of the qualitative data collected and READ's practice of partnering with rural communities to establish READ Centers reveals 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 enough 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 READ Center, the services it provides, 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 maintenance of the READ Center; and providing services that meet the needs of everyone, particularly historically 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 provides enough income to accommodate basic operating costs of the READ Centers and allows the Centers to continually 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; and

- ▶ **Flat management structure of the READ Center** that allows all community members to provide input on the management and future of the READ Center.

Based on our study of READ Centers in Nepal, we believe there is much to be learned for development efforts more broadly in focusing efforts on building community capacity, then transitioning to applying these capacities for desired outcomes that in turn are driven by the communities themselves.

Annex A: Methodology

Sites Visited

IREX visited seven sites across Nepal in April of 2017. The sites visited are listed below.

Village Name	District	Date Center Established	Center Affected by Earthquake?
Agyauli	Nawalparasi	2011	No
Deurali	Nawalparasi	2011	No
Divyajyoti	Chitwan	2010	No
Jhuwani	Chitwan	2002	No
Kumari	Nuwakot	2012	Yes
Panauti	Kavre	2014	Yes
Thokarpa	Sindhupalchowk	2017	Yes

Interviewee Sampling

Interviewees consisted of several stakeholder groups and were selected by READ Nepal staff as well as Center staff based on availability of interviewees.

Stakeholder Group	Number of Interviewees
READ Nepal Staff	5
READ Global Staff	3
READ Global Founder	1
Center Participants (people who regularly visit the Centers or participate in Center activities)	45
Center Non-Participants (people who have not visited the Center or participated in activities at the Center)	29
Center Management Committee Members and Staff	34
Center Volunteers	2
Local Actors (government partners, partners from other local organizations)	13

Analysis and Coding

During the interviews, IREX staff took detailed notes of interviewees' responses, which were translated by a READ Nepal staff member. Coding of the notes was done in two phases:

1. A collaborative data analysis process, in which READ Nepal and READ Global staff read a summarized version of the notes that IREX staff created, as well as highlighted sentences, phrases, words that stood out to them about the READ model.

2. Inductive qualitative coding of the notes in the software platform Dedoose. The inductive coding resulted in a set of codes, represented in the word cloud below. Size of the code represents the frequency with which the code was applied, with bigger codes being applied more frequently. The codes were developed based on the phases of the READ model, and three types of capacity observed during data collection: community capacities, outcomes of community capacity, and development outcomes.

Annex B: Interview Protocols

Nepal Country Staff

Time per interview
30-60 min

Introduction: We are interested in learning about your work with READ and about how the READ model works.

Disclosure/Informed consent: We are asking questions to learn about people's experiences. We would like to write down what you say but won't include your name, so you can be honest.

Background questions:

Age, gender

Interview Questions

Part 1. Context and evolution (45-60 min)

1. How long have you been with READ Nepal?

(If present at the start of READ Nepal)

2. What do you remember the most about the start of READ Nepal?
3. What did you think were the most important parts of the READ approach at the beginning? Why?
4. Now what do you see as the most important parts of the READ approach? Why?
5. What made it challenging to start up the first READ center(s) in Nepal? What helped facilitate it?

(general)

6. What have been the biggest changes to the approach used by the READ centers? What led to that change?
7. Have any centers had difficulties? If so, give 1-2 examples. How have those difficulties been addressed?
8. How is (or would) the decision to close a center be made, and by whom?
9. What would you like to see the READ centers do to improve or expand their work? Give an example. How would that make the centers more successful?

Part 2. Model components and processes (45-60 min)

(for staff involved with start-up of centers)

1. Give an example of a center you helped when it was starting. What were you responsible for? Who else was involved?
2. What stands out in your mind as the most important things that were done to start that center?
3. Was there help from a more mature center in starting the new center? If so, how did it help?
4. What did the center do to get marginalized groups involved? Who were those groups?
5. What were the biggest challenges to starting the center?
6. What helped the center to overcome those challenges?

(general questions)

7. How does a center get community members involved? Why do they want to get involved?

8. What do community members expect from a center? What do community members need to do for a center?

9. How do community members tell a center if the center is not doing what the community needs?

10. What else is important for the success of a center? (government, partners, READ country office, community, other centers)

Part 3. <u>The practice of working with READ centers</u> (30 min)

1. What is your responsibility in helping or working with READ centers in Nepal?

2. Give an example of what you have done to work with a one of the centers. What stands out in your mind as the most important things you have done to help that center in the past month?

   a. Be specific: Who have you worked with? What did you do? How did you do it? Why did you do it that way?

3. Give an example of a challenge you have experienced in working with one of the centers. What was the challenge? What did you do to work with the center to respond to it? Why did you respond that way? What happened as a result?

4. What did you learn from that experience? Is there a way for READ staff to share their learning with each other? If so, how?

Part 4. <u>Center operating model</u> (30-45 min)

1. Do you have a list of the different roles that are needed to operate a center? How many people does it take?

2. Who are the leaders/library management committee members of a center? How are they selected?

3. What makes a good center leader?

4. How are decisions made at a center?

5. Who hires the staff for a center? What are the most important qualities for staff members to have?

6. How are volunteers chosen? What are the most important qualities for volunteers to have?

7. What is the reason behind the centers operating this way?

Local Actors

Time per interview
30-45 min

Introduction: We are interested in talking with local organizations in this community to learn about how they help people in this community.

Disclosure/Informed consent: We are only asking questions to learn about your perspective and experiences on the community. We will not write down your name, but we would like to ask you a little bit about yourself so that we can keep track of the different types of people we're talking to. [We are not giving any rewards to anyone.]

Background questions:

What is your age

[Record gender]

Interview questions:

Local Actor Perspective

1. Do you know what [name of center] does? (if so, describe) What do you think is good about the work [name of center] is doing? What do you think is not good about [name of center] is doing?

2. How does your organization [or "do you" if individual leader] work with [READ center]?

3. Is this beneficial to your organization's work? If so, how?

4. Do you believe this partnership also benefits [the READ center]? If so, how?

5. Do you believe your partnership with [the READ center] benefits the community? If so, how? Are there plans for additional ways your organization and [the READ center] will benefit the community?

6. Have you seen any changes in the community because of [name of center]? (if yes, describe)

7. Are there problems or needs in the community that [name of center] should be helping with but is not? (if yes, describe)

Non-Participants

Time per interview
30 min

Introduction: We are interested in talking with people to understand more about this community and to learn about organizations that try to help people in this community. We have a few questions to ask you if you have time.

Disclosure/Informed consent: We are only asking questions to learn about people's experiences. We will not write down your name, but we would like to ask you a little bit about yourself so that we can keep track of the different types of people we're talking to. [We are not giving any rewards to anyone.]

Background questions:

What is your age

[Record gender]

Interview questions:

1. Do you know anyone who attends [name of center]'s programs?

2. Do you know what [name of center] does? (if so, describe) What do you think is good about [name of center]? What do you think is not good about [name of center]?

3. Do you know whether [name of center] works with any of the schools in the village? If yes, which one(s)? Do you know what they do in their work together? (describe)

4. Do you know whether [name of center] works with any of the other organizations in the village? If yes, which ones? For each, do you know what they do in their work together? (describe for each)

5. Who (else) does [name of center] work with?

6. Have you seen any changes in the community because of [name of center]? (if yes, describe)

7. Are there problems or needs in the community that [name of center] should be helping with but is not? (if yes, describe)

8. Do you have any desire to participate in any programs or activities at the center? If so, why don't you currently attend those programs/activities?

Participants

Time per interview
15-60 min (option to split out each set of questions)

Introduction: We are interested in talking with people who have participated in [name of center]'s programs. We are interested in learning about this community and about organizations that try to help people in this community.

Disclosure/Informed consent: We are only asking questions to learn about people's experiences. We will not write down your name, but we would like to ask you a little bit about yourself so that we can keep track of the different types of people we're talking to. [We are not giving any rewards to anyone.]

Background questions:

What is your age?

What languages do you speak?

What activities/program do they participate in (could group by type of program involved in)?

[Record gender]

Interview questions:

Part 1. Participant experience: (45 min)

1. How did you first hear about the center? What did you hear about it? (what it was doing, who was participating, etc.)

2. When did you first go to the center? Why did you go? What was your reason for going the first time?

3. What activities (programs) have you participated in at the center? What activities (programs) are you currently participating in?

4. For each activity (program) OR pick most important one:

   a. When did you start? Why did you want to do that activity? How much time does it take? How often?

   b. What has been most important for you in your time doing this activity? Describe what happened. Why was that important?

   c. What has changed for you from participating in this activity?

   d. What do you hope will change from continuing to participate in this activity?

Part 2. Community building benefits (15-20 min)

(for participants who were involved at the beginning)

1. How have your relationships with other community members changed since the center started? Give an example of how your relationships have changed. How was the center involved in helping to make those changes?

(general questions)

2. Do you and other center participants feel more supported or have more social connections than community members who don't participate?

3. Have you and other center participants ever worked together toward a common goal (to solve a problem or respond to a need)? If yes, give an example. What helped you be able to work together?

Volunteers

Time per interview
30-45 min

Introduction: We are interested in talking with people who volunteer with [name of center]. We are interested in learning about [name of center] and about this community.

Disclosure/Informed consent: We are only asking questions to learn about people's experiences working with the center. We will not write down your name, but we would like to ask you a little bit about yourself so that we can keep track of the different types of people we're talking to.

Background questions:

What is your age

[Record gender]

Interview questions:

Volunteer practice (30-45 min)

1. What is your volunteer role with the READ center? How long have you been volunteering with the READ center?

2. What do you do as a volunteer?

3. How did you become involved with the center? What do you like about volunteering with the center? Have you volunteered with other organizations? If yes, what's different about volunteering for READ?

4. Think of a time when you felt your volunteer work really helped someone. What did you do? How exactly did you do that? Why did you do it that way? How did this help that person?

5. Give an example of a time that there was a difficult situation or a challenge in your volunteer work. What was the situation/challenge? Why was it difficult? How did you respond? Why did you respond in that way? What happened as a result? What did you learn from that situation?

6. Have you received mentorship from anyone (country staff, another center, etc.)? When? Do you have ongoing mentorship? Have you ever been a mentor for other volunteers?

Center Staff

Time per interview
45 min staff; 30-45 min leadership

Introduction: We are interested in talking with people who work with [name of center]. We are interested in learning about [name of center] and about this community.

Disclosure/Informed consent: We are only asking questions to learn about people's experiences working at the center. We will not write down your name, but we would like to ask you a little bit about yourself so that we can keep track of the different types of people we're talking to.

Background questions:

What is your age

[Record gender]

Interview Questions:

Part 1. READ center practice (30 min)

1. What is your job with the center? How long have you been with the center?

2. What activities are involved in doing your job?

3. How did you become involved with the center? What do you like about working with the center?

4. Think of a time when you felt your work really helped one or more people. What did you do? (if response is not specific:) How exactly did you do that? Why did you do it that way? How did this help that person/those people?

5. Give an example of a time that there was a difficult situation or a challenge in your work. What was the situation/ challenge? Why was it difficult? How did you respond? Why did you respond in that way? What happened as a result? What did you learn from that situation?

6. Have you received mentorship from anyone (country staff, another center, etc.)? When? Do you have ongoing mentorship?

Part 2. Community building benefits (15-20 min)

(for staff who were involved at the beginning)

1. Thinking back to the beginning, why did members of this community want to start the center? How did they think it would help the community?

2. How have relationships among community members changed since the center started? Give an example of how relationships have changed. How was the center involved in helping to make those changes?

(general questions)

3. Do center participants feel more supported or have more social connections than community members who don't participate?

4. Have center participants ever worked together toward a common goal (to solve a problem or respond to a need)? If yes, give an example. What helped them be able to work together well?

5. How does having a library help the community? How is it different than other local organizations?

Part 3. Center operations (30-45 min)

(leadership)

1. How many people does it take to operate this center? What are the different kinds of duties that are needed (managing the center, budget, running programs, etc.)?

2. Who are the leaders of the center? How are they selected?

3. Why do you want to be a leader of this READ center? What keeps you going?

4. How are decisions made about management and operations?

5. How are decisions made about which services are offered at the center, and to whom?

6. Who hires the staff for this center? What are the most important qualities for staff members to have?

7. How are volunteers chosen? What are the most important qualities for volunteers to have?

8. How are the Library Management Committee members selected? What are the most important qualities for LMC members to have?

9. What are the reasons behind the center operating in the way you have described?

10. Does this center/library support any other centers/libraries? If so, which one(s)? What kind of support do this center provide?

11. Is this center/library supported by any other center/library? If so, which one(s)? What kind of support does the other center/library provide?