



How twenty libraries in Bangladesh became vibrant community literacy hubs

In 2015, IREX and Save the Children in Bangladesh began a partnership as a part of the Beyond Access initiative to help community librarians modernize their libraries into vibrant child-friendly spaces that would expand reading opportunities outside the classroom. The project included two evaluations. The findings of both evaluations reflect the valuable role libraries play in supporting community literacy and improving reading performance.

What did we learn?



Libraries provide a safe learning space outside of school



Libraries help to fill a time and text gap for kids



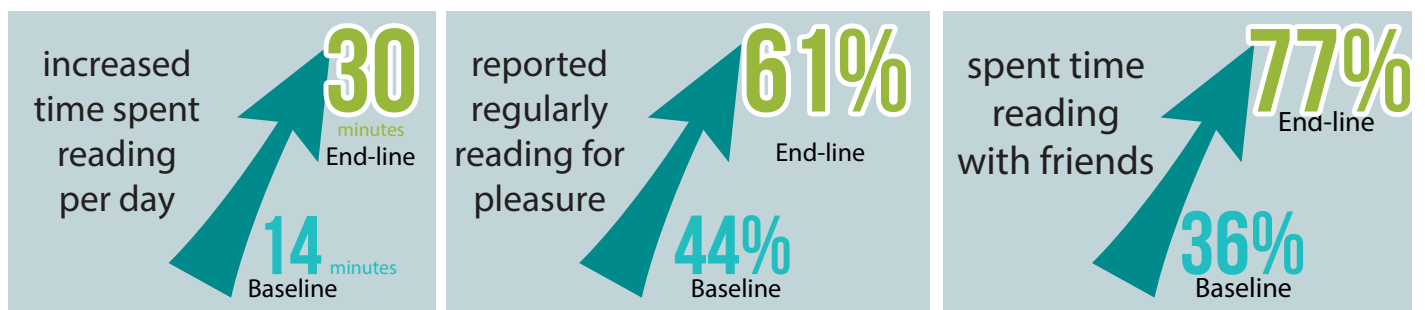
Libraries evoke community support for literacy



Libraries help improve reading practice and performance

Key Results:

Over 1.5 years of the project, kids that visited the community library...



Background

In Bangladesh only

1%

of Grade 2 students in newly nationalized primary schools could comprehend what they read and 45% couldn't read at all by the end of Grade 2.¹ And yet, 97% of primary aged students are enrolled in school. High enrollment has led to overcrowded schools. A large portion of primary school students go to school in split shifts, spending at best 3 hours per day in classrooms with 60-70 kids.

In short, kids are in school but they are struggling to learn. Learning to read takes time and practice, and kids aren't getting enough of either in school.



Supporting learning outside the classroom

In order to address these gaps, IREX looked to an existing community institution that was well positioned to support community literacy. IREX partnered with Save the Children and a coalition of other stakeholders including the Department of Public Libraries (Ministry of Cultural Affairs) to incorporate 20 public libraries into the USAID-funded READ program in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has over 5,000 public libraries, but they are typically seen as places for secondary students and adults that already know how to read. So, this partnership harnesses IREX's over 10 years of experience modernizing public libraries with Save the Children's experience improving literacy education throughout Bangladesh, in order to address the need for greater community support for early grade reading efforts.



¹Save the Children, READ Data, 2016



How did we create a network of community literacy hubs?

Stage 1

Train librarians to create child friendly spaces and form partnerships with local schools

Train librarians to manage and use technology as a tool to engage early grade readers

Equip libraries with tablets preloaded with early grade reading materials and age-appropriate books and games

Build a community of practice for libraries to share best practices and lessons learned

Stage 2

Librarians transform spaces in their library to be child friendly and print rich

Librarians offer ongoing literacy activities that engage children in reading outside of school

Librarians coordinate activities with local schools and serve as a link to parents and community members

Stage 3

Children have greater access to reading materials and spend more time reading outside of school

Community demonstrates increased support for early grade literacy efforts

What did we learn?



Libraries provide a safe learning space outside of school

Child-friendly spaces are rare and valued within the community

The libraries' newly created children's corners quickly became valued public spaces in the community. Kids valued a place they could be with friends and play with engaging materials. Teachers valued a place outside the classroom that encourages ongoing learning for their students. Parents valued a safe public place for their children to learn and play.

Librarians serve as literacy mentors

Librarians model and guide children in reading and learning. They facilitate the process by organizing children into small groups and guiding tablet use, directing children to various reading activities and games available at the library, and leading more formal activities like storytimes. Librarians also serve as another literate adult that children have access to.



“ If I go home after school hour, immediately after reaching my home I shall have to be engaged in household works [chores] with my mother. I don't like it; rather, I feel very interested and feel safe to come to the library to play games, read books, use tabs, and I very much enjoy my time here with my other friends.
– Female Child ”



“ It is a so brilliant idea to fix a corner for the children within the main building of the library, which undoubtedly attracts the children to sit there and concentrate on their study. When I visit the library, I see the children full of joy and happiness. If possible, I will also try to allocate a separate space for the children in my own school to perform extracurricular activities. – Head Teacher ”

What did we learn?



Libraries help to fill a time and text gap for kids

At the outset of the project none of the participating libraries offered activities for primary grade students and had few to no children using the library. Through the incorporation of technology, librarian training, and parental engagement the project was able to change this.

Project data collection began in November 2015. Data for the 20 month period between November 2015 and June 2017 show rapid increase in children's attendance and participation in library events. End-line studies show that students that visited the library reported increases in time spent reading outside of school and improved reading outcomes.



100,000

Children visited the libraries 100,000 times

The monthly average number of children visiting the library increased by

60%



60,000

Children used tablets 60,000 times

Each month, at each library:

Tablets are used

150+

times in the library

Children's books are checked out over

90+

times for use at home



1,700

Libraries hosted over 1,700 community reading events

The monthly average for children participating in reading events increased by

50%



“ After school, we can't get hold of our pupils anymore ... some pupils whose houses are near the library just run to attend the library. This is really a good sign of the pupils' interest in attending library activities.

– Teacher



What did we learn?



Libraries evoke community support for literacy

Building school-library partnerships essential to success

Because of the intervention, schools and libraries started working together. Librarians use schools as a place to promote and engage children in library activities, while teachers play an important role in encouraging children's engagement in the library. Teachers have become strong advocates of the project overall, and believe that the children participating in library activities are having more success in learning to read.

Parents are supportive of library activities

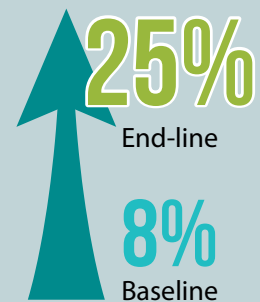
Parent engagement is critical to program success. Parents play the critical role as gatekeepers for their children's participation in the project. Many parents go beyond tacit approval of their child's attendance and escort their child to the library. In general, for every 3 children that attend a library activity, there is 1 adult that also attends. Parents have enthusiastically supported their children's involvement, and some specifically note improvements in their child's performance at school after the child started going to the library.



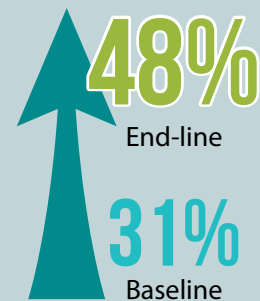
Parents changed reading behaviors at home

Over a 1 ½ year period more children report having access to storybooks at home and reading aloud with their parents.

Children that live in a household with storybooks



Children that have parents who read to them out loud



“ We feel the library [is] a safe place for our girls ... in this library they know more, outside their textbooks in school. ”
– Parent

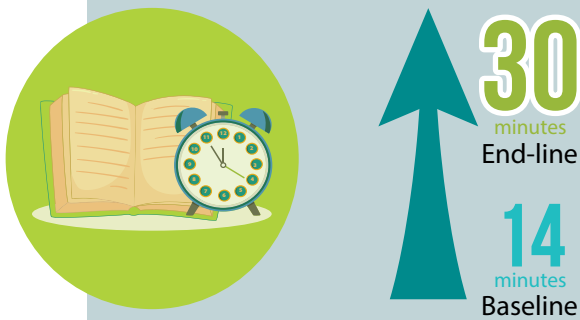
What did we learn?



Libraries help improve reading practice and performance

Reading practices of children community library users

increased time spent reading per day



reported regularly reading for pleasure



reported reading with friends



Library and non-library user's reading performance

Number of letters correctly pronounced (out of 50)

Grade 2

90%

Beyond Access-Supported Library User

85%

Non users

Number of words read aloud correctly from most frequently used words (out of 20)

Grade 2

86%

Beyond Access-Supported Library User

75%

Non users

Reading comprehension: Total correct comprehension answers (out of 10) (only reader)

Grade 2

72%

Beyond Access-Supported Library User

67%

Non users



Recommendations

Place a greater emphasis on community-based literacy programming

This program has shown the strong potential for existing community-based institutions — community libraries — to play a critical role in supporting the learning and practice outside the classroom that children need if they are going to succeed inside the classroom. Save the Children's Literacy Boost approach has similarly shown the impacts community-based programming has on learning.

While there is often discussion of the impact of the home environment on learning, far less attention and investment has been given to community based organizations and their role in supporting those home-environment factors such as access to text and time spent reading. Strategic investments into sustainable community based organizations that can serve as links between school and community literacy support have the great potential of increasing community engagement and improving reading outcomes.

Develop research tools designed for community-based programming

The most commonly used evaluation tools for early grade reading programs are designed specifically for classrooms and formal education systems. These tools have not only refined the ways programs measure impact, but also served as a mechanism for discussing impact across projects. Tools also exist to capture specific home-environment factors. Similarly robust tools are needed to capture and communicate the impact of community based programming. These tools should mirror school-based approaches, but must account for the more porous nature and the broad impacts of community-based programming.

These tools should help answer the following questions:

- ✓ What types of community institutions are best suited for effective and sustainable programming? And what types of support are needed to help librarians serve as effective community literacy advocates?
- ✓ How does community based programming help shift parents attitudes towards their children's learning outside of school? And how does it change the ways they actively support their children?
- ✓ How does community based programming increase the amount of time children spend reading outside the classroom? And how does it improve their reading outcomes?



About IREX

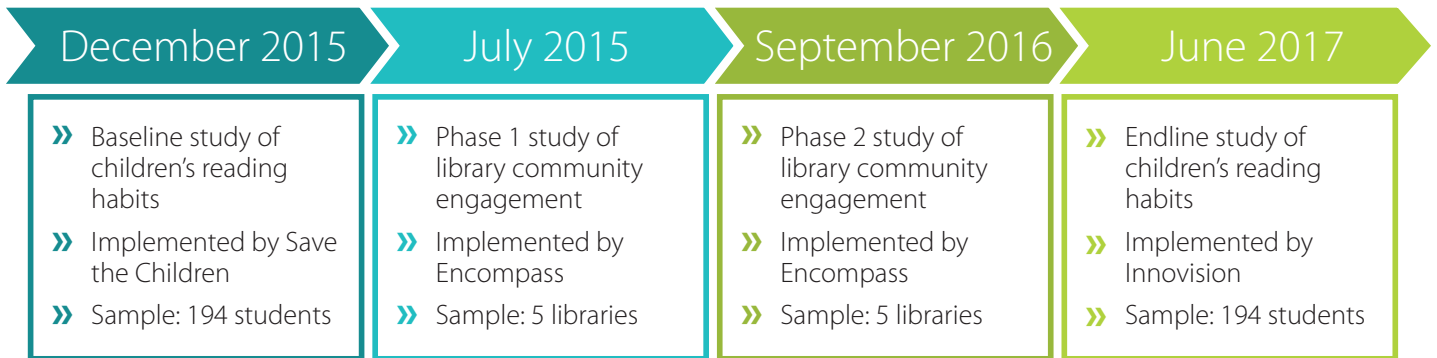
IREX is an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to building a more just, prosperous, and inclusive world by empowering youth, cultivating leaders, strengthening institutions, and extending access to quality education and information.



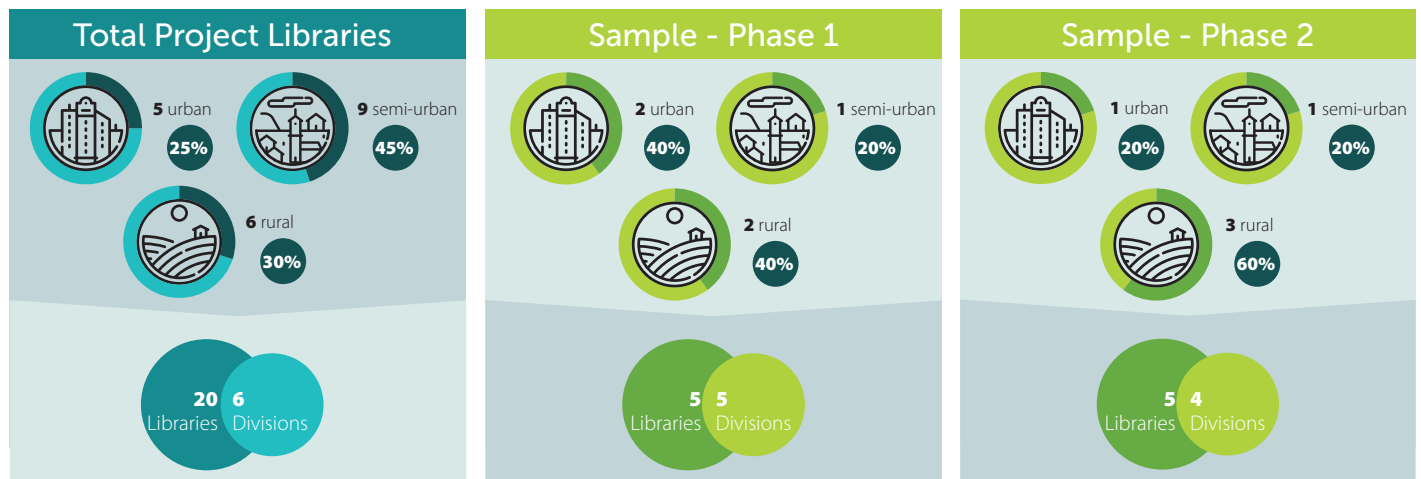


Study Approach

In order to better understand the impact of this approach, IREX and Save the Children conducted two complementary evaluations. One study assessed the effectiveness of Beyond Access Bangladesh in increasing library services to promote community engagement and support early grade students. The second study assessed the extent to which the intervention improved reading habits and performance for children.



To better understand the effectiveness of the intervention, IREX worked with an external evaluator, EnCompass to conduct a two-phase evaluation. The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, and was conducted in two phases with evaluation trips in July 2015 and July 2016. During these trips evaluators used key informant interviews and focus groups to capture qualitative data on project impact.



IREX and Save the Children also commissioned Innovision to explore increased exposure to text, reading opportunities outside the classroom, and improve reading performance for Grade 2 and 3 students. This endline evaluation also included the administration of EGRA tools to compare reading performance of children that participated in Beyond Access activities compared with children that did not participate in the project. The EGRA results are based on a sample of 236 students.

EGRA demographics

236 Total Sample	54% Girls	41% Grade 2	52% library users
	46% Boys	59% Grade 3	48% non-users