

2009



# Girls' Education Yearbook



World Change  
Starts with  
Educated Children.



*“I used to envy those who were on the program and would cry because I was not on it. Now, my whole life has changed! Sometimes I pinch myself just to make sure I am not dreaming.”*

*—Sharon, age 13, Zambia*

“There is no policy for progress more effective than the empowerment of women and girls. A nation that neglects its children, especially girls, is a nation that neglects its future and development.”

—Former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan

## Dear Friends,

When we started Room to Read’s Girls’ Education program in 2001, we focused on providing a need-based, girls-only scholarship program to keep girls enrolled in primary and secondary school. It was our first venture into the terrain of girls’ education, and the result of our intervention has meant that thousands of girls are now pursuing their dreams of an education.

Through the years, however, we have learned that the barriers to girls’ education and empowerment extend past household economic conditions and material costs. As a result, our Girls’ Education program has naturally evolved into a more holistic approach that focuses not just on assisting with the costs to support a girl through secondary school, but also on developing the skills she needs to negotiate key life decisions. In 2007, we added life skills education to our program and counseling on issues such as physical health and career guidance. Room to Read also added a mentoring component in which local women are trained and coached to provide ongoing support to the girls in our program, because research shows that women teachers and role models make a critical difference in encouraging girls to stay in school.

Now operating our Girls’ Education program in eight countries, we’re proud to report Room to Read has provided more than 26,000 years of education to more than 9,000 girls and allowed them the opportunity to learn in a positive environment and to thrive as strong and educated women in the future.

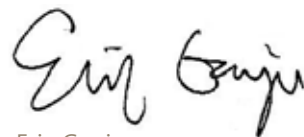
While our success has been remarkable and the impact measurable—for example, in 2009, 96 percent of our scholars advanced to the next grade level—there is still much work to be done to close the gender gap in education in the developing world. In 2009, Room to Read undertook a strategic planning exercise to reflect on our strengths as an organization over the last 10 years, and to define who we want to be in our second decade. During this process, Room to Read reaffirmed

its commitment to work towards gender equality in education through a program focused on girls. We clearly defined our Girls’ Education program objectives to ensure the investment we are all making is having the greatest possible impact.

Beginning in 2010, we will focus on enhancing and building upon the existing Girls’ Education program components to make sure we continue to provide the support and life skills development that each girl needs to succeed in the classroom and beyond. We will continue to target girls making the transition to secondary school, a sensitive juncture prone to high dropout rates among female students. In addition, we will focus our work in areas where there is significant gender disparity in education and where our Girls’ Education program can have the greatest impact. We feel that this approach, in tandem with community and government partnerships within the countries where we operate, will best position us to affect systemic and sustainable change in closing the gender education gap.

Education is critical to improving the status of women around the world and is considered the best investment you can make to address global poverty in the developing world. That is why Room to Read remains committed to supporting girls in their equal access to education and why we are so thankful that you have joined us in this commitment. From all of us at Room to Read and on behalf of the 9,000 girls who you have helped support to become tomorrow’s global, empowered citizens, thank you.

Warm regards,



Erin Ganju  
Co-Founder and CEO

# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

9,074 Girls Enrolled
96% Advancement Rate
4% Drop Out Rate
69 Program Graduates
4,400 Girls Attending Life Skills Workshops
91% Parents Participating in Room to Read Activities
61% Girls Receiving Additional Academic Support

*All data from our 2009 program results.*

## Education: The Best Investment

There are a multitude of reasons why girls in developing nations are unable to access and pursue an education—cultural bias, gender discrimination, and economics have all contributed to a widening gender gap in education. Even when girls are able to overcome those hurdles and enroll in school, they face additional challenges within the classroom such as teacher bias and methodologies geared toward male learners; gender bias in the curriculum and textbooks; lack of role models and women teachers; overall poor quality of instruction and unsafe school environments.

Underpinning all of these roadblocks is a pervasive under-appreciation for the value of educating girls and women. Due to the common practice of gendered division of labor, girls are often responsible for more household and care-giving work; this means their schooling can be cut short (or never start) due to economic hardship. Moreover, two-thirds of out-of-school girls are twice as disadvantaged either by their membership in a minority ethnic group or by having a first language that is not the language of school instruction.

### BENEFITS TO EDUCATING GIRLS

IN ADDITION TO HONORING THE RIGHTS OF GIRLS TO EQUAL EDUCATION, EDUCATING GIRLS IS, ACCORDING TO THE WORLD BANK AND OTHERS, SIMPLY AN EXCELLENT INVESTMENT. WHEN GIRLS LEARN, THEIR FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, AND SOCIETIES ALL BENEFIT.

“Girls’ education yields some of the highest returns of all development investments, yielding both private and social benefits that accrue to individuals, families and society at large.”  
—World Bank

## Room to Read’s Promise

Room to Read believes that our greatest chance for systemic and sustainable change is by working with the largest supplier of schooling: governments. By increasing the quality of education offered in government schools and working with these schools to offer girls a more encouraging environment, we affect the educational opportunities for current students and for future generations.

As we move into our next decade, we will continue to focus on seeing girls through secondary school because the additional years of educating girls during adolescence yields some of the highest returns of all development investments. It is also during the transition from primary to secondary school that girls’ enrollment tends to drop most precipitously.

The Girls’ Education program is designed to holistically support girls and create a more conducive and enabling learning environment for them. Access alone is not the final solution. Therefore, Room to Read is prioritizing a set of essential program strategies that will then be localized by each country team for their specific contexts. Some of these programmatic strategies include:

- Providing financial assistance (e.g. school fees, uniforms, books, stationery, or medical insurance) to ensure girls stay in secondary school longer.

- Offering tutoring and remedial academic support to help girls keep up with their classmates.
- Creating life skills activities and workshops to provide girls with extra support to develop key skills (e.g., problem solving skills, awareness of choices, confidence building).
- Supplying female mentors to act as positive role models for girls and support them as needed.
- Supporting teachers with professional development opportunities to promote gender-sensitive teaching methods and practices that foster a girl-friendly school environment.
- Delivering infrastructure support to schools as needed, such as additional classrooms or toilets.
- Fostering parent, community and government engagement, awareness and involvement.
- Enhancing partnerships with government and other NGOs to support program implementation and growth.
- Continuing to invest in research, assessment, monitoring and evaluation to improve the design of effective programs and demonstrate results.

- INFANT MORTALITY DECREASES BY EIGHT PERCENT FOR EACH YEAR A WOMAN STAYS IN SCHOOL.
- MOTHERS IN AFRICA WHO RECEIVE FIVE YEARS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION HAVE CHILDREN WHO ARE 40 PERCENT MORE LIKELY TO LIVE BEYOND AGE FIVE.
- EDUCATED MOTHERS ARE ABOUT 50 PERCENT MORE LIKELY TO IMMUNIZE THEIR CHILDREN THAN ARE UNEDUCATED MOTHERS.

- IN INDIA, GIRLS WITH A SECONDARY EDUCATION ARE 70 PERCENT LESS LIKELY TO BE MARRIED AS CHILDREN THAN ILLITERATE GIRLS IN THE SAME COMMUNITIES.
- DOUBLING THE PROPORTION OF WOMEN WITH A SECONDARY EDUCATION REDUCES AVERAGE FERTILITY RATES FROM 5.3 TO 3.9 CHILDREN PER WOMAN.
- FOR EVERY YEAR A GIRL IS EDUCATED BEYOND THE AVERAGE, HER WAGES INCREASE BY 15 PERCENT.



# BANGLADESH

2009  
Program Launched

234  
Girls Enrolled

100%  
Advancement Rate

0%  
Drop Out Rate

*“Every day when I return from school or the reading learning session, my father asks what I learned that day.”*

## Fuara

AGE 11 • SCHOLAR SINCE 2009 • SIRANGANJ, BANGLADESH

### SCHOLAR PROFILE

The first quality one notices about Fuara is her shyness. It’s difficult to make eye contact, but once you break down the initial barriers, you’re treated to her large, contemplative, chocolate-colored eyes and glimmering smile.

Fuara is one of 234 girls living in the remote Siranganj area who have been selected to participate in Room to Read’s Girls’ Education program in Bangladesh. Growing up in a household of 10, including five sisters and one brother, Fuara has gained a bit of celebrity status because of her educational support. This elevated position means fewer household chores and more time to focus on her school books.

“Every day when I return from school or the reading learning session, my father asks what I learned that day,” reports Fuara with excitement.

Since seeing his daughter flourish in school, Fuara’s father, Mohammed, has shifted his opinion about early marriage and now encourages his daughters’ education and wants them all to be literate. “As long as they want to go to school, they can continue to do so—so long as we have some support to pay for books and materials.” A poor fisherman, Mohammed fishes well into the night and then, after a short rest, walks to town with his nightly catch to sell at the local market.

Fuara’s mother, who works from dawn to dusk to feed and clothe her family, has a very practical wish for her daughters—employment, of any kind. “I want my daughters to have an education so they can earn money for themselves and their families,” she explains. One of Fuara’s elder sisters had to stop school when she married at a young age and when the marriage ended in just a few years, she came home. Too old for school, but not educated enough for formal employment, Fuara’s sister has a hard time contributing to the family

income. Mohammed says that this experience has taught him a great deal and that he believes his children should all complete school before being married.

Both parents have noticed a remarkable change in their shy daughter since her enrollment in Room to Read’s Girls’ Education program. Prior to being selected, her school attendance was spotty. Now that she attends weekly reading sessions and learning camps as part of the Girls’ Education program, Fuara is not only improving in school, but also exudes a self-confidence that wasn’t there in the past. She is more engaged in all aspects of her life, including housework and personal hygiene. Her father describes this new quality as “sparkle,” and is obviously very proud of her progress.

Unfortunately, that “sparkle” has also contributed to a marked increase in the number of marriage proposals for Fuara. But her focus is clearly on her education. Her father supports her dream to become a doctor, though, without continued financial support, he isn’t sure how that can or will happen. Fuara looks forward to being able to nurse patients back to health, a role that is currently unfilled in her village. She would be the first in her community to attend and finish college, so the dream is a lofty one. But with the encouragement and assistance of her parents and Room to Read, it’s a dream that can and will be achieved.

# BANGLADESH





“The whole community needs to be boosted up with the dreams of new days, days of change and hope.”

## SHARP

THE ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNER

BEYOND THE GIRLS



As residents of a country that carries the infamous distinction of being one of the poorest in the world, the people who inhabit the Char areas of Bangladesh have the added challenge of having to rebuild their homes and livelihoods over and over again. Living on unstable silt islands, the Char people know that the inevitable time will come when the waters of the Jamuna River will erode the temporary land holding their makeshift homes and force them to move.

Being a woman in this land of silt puts one on the bottom rung of social status and opportunity. Few girls complete primary school, and even fewer continue past 5th grade. The reasons are both cultural and physical; girls traditionally marry very young, so education is deemed of little practical use. And, for those fortunate enough to continue onto secondary school, traveling the long distances to high school is both difficult and dangerous. Plus, acts of violence against girls and women, both in the home and by strangers, are too-common occurrences. When Room to Read began working in Bangladesh in 2009, we quickly identified Sirajganj as a district ripe for the Girls' Education program and selected SHARP, the Socio Health and Rehabilitation Team, as its NGO partner.

SHARP's charismatic founder and current director, Showkat Ali, was born and raised in Sirajganj, and after leaving the region to attend school, was determined to return home to make a

difference. He started the organization in 1992 and focuses on education and improving the lives of those living in Sirajganj.

The trust SHARP has gained in this community goes a long way when trying to convince families to allow their young daughters to take a dramatically different path than their ancestors. Mr. Ali explained, “It is important that we involve the whole community in the efforts to educate children, especially the girls, and help overcome the vicious cycle of poverty and illiteracy.” Currently, SHARP provides the implementation for the 234 girls that Room to Read supports through its Girls' Education program in Bangladesh. Each SHARP social mobilizer is responsible for approximately 40 girls, providing important mentoring, tutoring and connection with families. The mobilizers travel by boat and foot to get to the villages where the girls live. Ismatara, a young woman who works with SHARP, doesn't mind the long journey and says she literally and figuratively “dances” her way through the sand to reach the girls.

While there is certainly undeniable need in this community, Room to Read Bangladesh and SHARP wanted to avoid the appearance of providing charity. They creatively delivered basic school supplies to students such as notebooks and pens through weekly reading sessions. In addition, the girls were provided other basics such as school bags, uniforms, and shoes during a special ceremony which recognized their completion of primary school or advancement to the next grade at secondary school.

SHARP also works with Room to Read's other programs and has established more than 75 libraries, over half of which are located within the schools the girls attend. SHARP's holistic approach and commitment to collaboration is best summed up through their statement of purpose, “The whole community needs to be boosted up with the dreams of new days, days of change and hope.”



# CAMBODIA

2003 Program Launched	1,827 Girls Enrolled	90% Advancement Rate	10% Drop Out Rate
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*“Now my parents don’t dare stop me from going to school... they understand the importance of girls’ education.”*

## Champey

AGE 17 • SCHOLAR SINCE 2008 • SIEM REAP, CAMBODIA

SCHOLAR PROFILE

It’s morning along National Road 6, 20 miles outside of Siem Reap, Cambodia and the Puok High School is already buzzing with activity. The voice of a confident young girl, Champey, vibrates through the hallways as she responds to her teacher’s question with a torrent of answers.

Champey is 17 years old and currently in 11th grade at Puok High School. She tells her story, “I was born to a poor family of farmers with 12 children in Chuo Chakrey village.” After questioning the number of siblings she confirms laughing, “Yes, 12 children! My parents are very productive.”

Because her family is so large, Champey lived with her uncle until he could no longer afford to pay her educational fees and then transferred into her aunt’s abandoned hut. Her one passion now is school, and she is a natural student and learner — so much so that she skipped from 4th to 6th grade.

Despite her educational achievements, Champey often argued with her parents about her education. She laments, “I am really vexed with my parents who undervalue girls’ education. They really don’t understand and they often asked me to give up my study.” Showcasing her beautiful smile she continues, “Once I even promised my parents that I would abandon my study if I had failed the lower secondary examination (grade nine). They agreed without realizing I tricked them because I knew already that I had passed! Although I knew this would not always work and one day I would have to stop school due to a lack of finances. Fortunately, I got the scholarship.”

Before receiving Room to Read’s support, in order to earn money for her family and her studies, Champey helped her neighbor with her harvest and planted her own vegetables to sell at the village market. Her savings from her small business of vegetable sales not only supported her study but allowed her to buy a used bicycle that eased her long travel to school.

Upon receiving her scholarship from Room to Read, however, Champey was able to turn her focus from work to school and is currently living in a boarding house with other girls supported by Room to Read.

When asked about her life now that Room to Read helps support her education she replied, “Room to Read provides me with many things such as a school uniform, study materials, a bicycle, a boarding room and many other services. It’s a new life now and it almost seems that I forgot all hardship that I went through because here, I have everything. The only thing I have to do is to study hard to get good results.”

The support from Room to Read changed her parents’ attitude toward Champey’s studies as well.

“Now, my parents don’t dare stop me from going to school because they understand the importance of girls’ education. I am very happy to see this change.”

When thinking about the future, she has a vision: “My dream after my graduation is to work for a NGO. This job will enable me to work with poor people and help them live better. I want to be involved with community development.”

# CAMBODIA



“I knew I could rely on myself and make good decisions due to my education. These girls did not have this option.”

## Nead Bunna

THE DEDICATED STAFF

BEYOND THE GIRLS



Soseihaknead or “Nead” as she is called by her friends and family, was lucky growing up because her parents—even her mother—completed secondary school. At that time in Cambodia, this was unusual. Nead recognized her fortunate situation at an early age.

“I was thankful each night when my mother helped with my homework because I knew my friends had illiterate parents who could not help them,” says Nead. “I went to a rural primary school, and with my hard work and my parents’ support, I finished at the top of my class.”

Unlike her mother who was forced to stop school after 10th grade due to the Khmer Rouge regime, Nead was encouraged by her family to continue on to university. The big question for Nead, however, was what to do with her life.

With no career counseling available, Nead struggled to find her own professional path. Almost by chance, she applied to the Royal University of Phnom Penh in Applied Psychology and was accepted. During school she worked for a local NGO counseling children who had survived sex trafficking and needed psychological attention. After graduation, she continued helping girls who had been involved in sex trafficking, along with victims of rape or those addicted to drugs, addressing with them issues of health and disease prevention.

In 2007, she discovered Room to Read’s Girls’ Education program. The program resonated with her immediately since through her past work, Nead realized that the common factor between the girls she counseled was that they all lacked an education. Room to Read’s Girls’ Education program was what these Cambodian girls needed to help prevent them from

becoming victims in the first place. Nead said it best herself, “At times when my family did not support me, at least I knew I could rely on myself and make good decisions due to my education. These girls did not have this option.”

Now that Nead is managing the Girls’ Education program in Cambodia, she makes sure the girls have advocates for their education within the community. To Nead, this means making sure our program develops strong partnerships with the local department of education, cooperative partnerships with local NGOs, and positive relationships with parents. Nead also serves as an excellent role model for the girls by embracing life-long learning. Recently, she returned to school to get another master’s degree in international relations because she one day hopes to represent her country abroad.

Nead is starting to see a change in the Cambodian girls she is working with—particularly among the older girls. She is continually inspired by how confident the girls are in their ability to advocate for themselves and plan for their future. She credits the Girls’ Education program’s life skills activities with helping the girls develop strong decision-making skills. “The girls in our program come from families that live totally hand-to-mouth, day to day, but even in 10th grade they are already starting to think about their future and what to study in university.”

Nead continues to explain, “These girls are also changing their parent’s minds about the importance of education and thinking broader about their future—it’s not just about what can they do in their local community anymore but what they can do in Cambodia. They have a much broader perspective than I did at that age.”



# INDIA

2004 Program Launched	2,058 Girls Enrolled	97% Advancement Rate	3% Drop Out Rate
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*“I know how empowering a good education can be.”*

## Hema

AGE 20 • PROGRAM GRADUATE • UTTARAKHAND, INDIA

SCHOLAR PROFILE

Hema is a soft spoken and shy 20-year-old from a village close to Nainital in Uttarakhand, India. The moment she steps across the threshold of her classroom, however, she is poised and in absolute command. Hema has been a teacher at the Shishu Mandir School in her home village for almost one year and although the position does not pay her much, she has a passion for the job which the low salary cannot deter.

“I value this opportunity because I know how empowering a good education can be,” she says. “This job not only allows me to teach others but also to learn, and I am able to pay for my college education with my salary.”

Hema is one of the graduates from Room to Read Girls’ Education program. In 2005, Hema finished 10th grade and was unfortunately forced to give up her studies because her parents, who work as farmers, could not pay her school fees. With five children to feed, Hema’s father felt that educating his two daughters was not a priority and only allowed Hema to complete the 10th grade because she was such a good student and he didn’t have the heart to ask her to stop. Continuing with her schooling, however, was out of the question because beyond 10th grade, students needed to pay additional school fees—something that her family simply could not afford.

Fortunately for Hema, that was the year Room to Read entered Uttarakhand and began their Girls’ Education program so that girls like Hema and her sister could complete their education. Determined to give her family a better life, Hema worked hard as a student in the program and in 2007, passed 12th grade with high marks.

But Hema wasn’t finished—she was happy with her education but knew she still wanted more. Although her Room to Read support ended after graduation, she began to scout for new

ways to support her studies, eventually landing a job as a tutor for younger students in the Girls’ Education program.

For months, Hema worked as the “Remedial Tutor” during workshops organized by Room to Read’s partner NGOs. At the same time, Hema enrolled for her B.A. to continue her studies.

Seeing her dedication, her local school offered her a job that she accepted without hesitation. Hema is now in her second year of undergraduate studies and has plans to enroll for a teaching degree after her graduation which will grant her a more official teaching status.

“I am here today as a teacher because Room to Read helped me when I needed that support most,” Hema says as her class files in. “I would like to thank this wonderful organization for helping me, and other girls like me to get the opportunity to change our lives.”

Turning to look at the cheerful faces of her noisy class she happily adds, “Teaching is indeed one of the best careers. There is so much satisfaction in helping children to learn. I am adopting the campaign slogan ‘each one, teach one’ and taking it to a new level by teaching so many at once!” Facing her class, Hema grows suddenly serious and indicates that it is time for her to start her lesson.

**INDIA**





“We now realize that educating girls will help the family and the community in the long run.”

## Mirzapur, India

### THE LOCAL COMMUNITY



Nestled in the foothills of the Aravali hills on the fringes of two prosperous Indian states—Haryana and Rajasthan—is a small village called Mirzapur. In this 5,000-person rural village lives a community

of dalit Muslims known as Ahirs who traditionally have never encouraged their girls to go to school.

Huddling on the ground under a tree to meet the village leaders, the pecking order is clear. Men are seated on raised mud platforms while the women sit discreetly on the floor with their heads covered. But the fact that women are in this meeting at all and have a voice shows a dramatic change.

“We now recognize the value of education and feel more comfortable with girls attending school. We realize that educating girls will help the family and the community in the long run. Before, we were not comfortable sending our daughters to the village school where there was a male teacher,” says Shahbuddin, the village head. He adds with some pride, “Now, we are recognized as a good model of change.”

It is obvious that after Room to Read made inroads into this village with the support of its partner organization, the Alwar Mewat Institute of Education and Development (AMIED), there has been a wave of change in the attitudes of community leaders and that’s spread to several other villages.

“It took several months of tactful lobbying to even get a foothold in this village,” says Noor Mohammed, Director of AMIED. “I knew I had to win over someone influential from the community. Over endless cups of tea with Shahbuddin, we discussed village development plans which talked about

everything else except education. Health, sanitation, livelihood issues were all discussed, and inevitably almost everything boiled down to the lack of education!”

Once Shahbuddin understood the need, he assembled the village elders, including the local District Magistrate, and they concluded that educational change meant that they would need to build a new school with trained teachers and that every child would be required to attend.

“While the community heads agreed in principle, there was still contention about girls studying with male teachers, but AMIED then offered to send ‘female teachers’ for the girls,” says Taj Singh another community member.

To get the project started, Room to Read offered financial support, bridge courses for the girls, and encouraged the female teachers and social mobilizers hired by AMIED to be flexible so girls could more easily attend classes. Classes allowed girls to bring their younger siblings who were under their care, and lunch hours were extended so that the girls could go home and cook lunch for the family.

Skepticism and distrust was slowly replaced with a sense of community pride and ownership. In fact, one year later an Education Committee was established to monitor the children’s education throughout the village. This committee helped ensure that children went to school, teachers were punctual and curriculums were being taught and completed on time.

Today, the same village has 575 children in school—275 of them girls – and boasts the first girl from this area to ever have passed 8th grade! The village is touted as a model in community-based education and with the fantastic recognition it is receiving, more communities are trying to follow their lead of educational change.

# LAOS

2007  
Program Launched

832  
Girls Enrolled

99%  
Advancement Rate

1%  
Drop Out Rate



*“I would have done anything just to attend school.”*

## Kaison

AGE 13 • SCHOLAR SINCE 2008 • XAYABOULY, LAOS

SCHOLAR PROFILE

At the Xayabouly Ethnic Minority Secondary School in Laos, Room to Read’s Girls’ Education students are huddled in the shade of a tree discussing a new dance. All the girls have their eyes glued to the instructor’s hand movements as they twist and turn gracefully.

Kaison is no exception. But, while some girls giggle and whisper to each other, Kaison refuses to be distracted. It pays off because the minute she steps forward, Kaison repeats the movements in perfect rhythm with her eyes following the teacher’s every move.

“I enjoy dancing,” Kaison says between deep breaths. “I can pick up dance movements very easily,” she adds with great pride.

Kaison or “Kai,” as her friends fondly call her, is 13 years old and in 5th grade. She comes from a large family—six brothers and nine sisters—and though her family owns rice fields and livestock, their life is a struggle.

Kai is the eighth child in the family, so with that many mouths to feed, her parents never saw education as a priority. Instead, it was viewed merely as a way to keep the younger children safe and out of trouble. The moment the children were old enough to work, they were expected to leave school to work the fields. In addition, after 5th grade, school becomes an expensive proposition as students are expected to pay tuition fees and as a result, no one in Kai’s family is educated beyond grade five.

Kai is determined to break her family’s tradition and graduate since she loves school. But, when she was selected as a participant in Room to Read’s Girls’ Education program last year, although she was thrilled, her parents needed convincing. With special attention by Room to Read’s social mobilizer in addition to Kai’s vociferous pleadings, her parents acquiesced

on one condition: Kai would continue to help with the household chores.

Kai agreed even before her father could complete the sentence. “I would have done anything just to attend school,” says a happy Kai.

Determined to live up to her word and help around the house, Kai walks two hours each day to reach school by 7 a.m. She explains, “It is tiring. I get up at the break of dawn and help with routine housework and cook. It is a marathon in the mornings—run... run... run!” She laughs, but this is what she is committed to in order to remain in school.

When school ends at 4 p.m., Kai walks home with other girls. “This is the best part of my day,” giggles Kai. “We walk leisurely and sing. We also share tips on cooking and beauty, or clothes and movies. You know, it is girl talk and it is such fun!”

Once she’s home, she drops her school bag, slips out of her school uniform and begins the evening meal. But none of this bothers Kai. “I am a lucky girl,” she explains. “I get to live with my family and go to school. And I have the opportunity to study without feeling guilty about the expenses weighing on my parents. My working at home is not unusual for girls in this part of the country. Almost all of the girls in my school or village have to do similar work at home. But not everyone gets a chance to study.”

# LAOS



“When I enter the school, I see happy students...and plenty of girls in my classroom. That gives my day a big kick start and motivates me to excel as a teacher.”

## Mrs. Khemphone Pangasy

THE COMMITTED TEACHER

BEYOND THE GIRLS



Khemphone Pangasy became the head teacher at the Le Primarire de Nalengluang school in Laos when she was posted there two years ago. When she took over as head teacher in 2007, Room to Read had just started its project within the community—establishing a library and building

four extra classrooms as well as providing a girls’ restroom so that their female students were more comfortable. “When I was updated about this project I was very excited about this radical shift in schooling facilities. A new school building with a separate library filled with books was like a dream coming true!” says Mrs. Pangasy excitedly.

She goes on to admit, “But what really impressed me is Room to Read’s commitment to support young girls with their education. I know of so many bright young girls who give up on schooling because of poverty. Now with this support from Room to Read, I am sure there will be a generation of educated women raring to make careers of their own.”

Mrs. Pangasy recalls many times when she called parents to find out why their daughter had stopped coming to school and inevitably the answer each time was that they could not cope with the costs of books and other school-related expenses. “It is heart breaking when you see promising students having to give up on their studies,” she says. “As a teacher, you feel helpless and defeated.”

Mrs. Pangasy has been a teacher for more than 20 years, admitting that she had almost begun to take for granted that school was all about children attending classes with the teachers reading from prescribed text books. “I grew up

attending schools made of tin sheets and thatched roofs. In fact, I celebrated the fact that as a girl, I could attend school and get an education because I knew I was among the lucky ones. But now there is a whole new experience for these children. I did not realize that a better building could make schooling such a happy experience!” says Mrs. Pangasy with a big smile.

According to Mrs. Pangasy, the Girls’ Education program, in addition to the school’s library established by Room to Read, has changed the attitude of the students and the teachers. “The students as well as their parents are enthusiastic about reading and there is so much collective pride about this new addition that everyone is willing to volunteer to clean the library.”

“On a personal note,” says Mrs. Pangasy, “Each morning when I enter the school, I see happy students and happier parents and plenty of girls in my classroom. That gives my day a big kick start and motivates me to excel as a teacher.”

# NEPAL

2000  
Program Launched

1,621  
Girls Enrolled

97%  
Advancement Rate

3%  
Drop Out Rate



*“The support from Room to Read is my lifeline.”*

## Pabitra

AGE 14 • SCHOLAR SINCE 2005 • KATHMANDU, NEPAL

SCHOLAR PROFILE

At 14, it seems Pabitra has almost forgotten how to smile. Her face masks all emotions, and though she hardly speaks, her eyes betray an intense pain.

Life has certainly not been kind to this young girl. Eight years ago, she lost her mother. She was just six years old and did not really understand what death meant. “Of course I missed my mother,” she says, “but my father was there to comfort us. I shadowed him everywhere because I was scared to let him out of my sight.”

Just when Pabitra’s family had adjusted to life without their mother, her father fell ill and within one week, he too had passed away. Pabitra’s eyes were brim with tears as she walks away and her aunt struggles to explain the plight of the family now. It has been seven months since her father’s passing, but it is obvious that Pabitra is still struggling to come to terms with this tragedy.

“Pabitra has withdrawn into a shell and does not seem to be interested in anything around her,” says her aunt Devimai, who now acts as her guardian. “She hardly speaks or eats, but she gets up early in the morning and does all the household chores like a robot. It is almost as if she is guilty for having added to our problems.”

It certainly is not easy for her uncle and aunt to have three additional mouths to feed.

Pabitra’s uncle is the only bread winner in the family and earns 1,000 NPR each day (\$13.50 USD) after working eight hours as a municipal cleaner. Apart from their own three sons, they now have to scrounge to feed Pabitra along with her younger sister and brother. There are days when dinner is rationed and Pabitra, along with her aunt and uncle, go to bed after just a cup of black tea.

“Pabitra is a very sensible and sensitive child,” says Ramesh Raj Lawat, the principal of Shree Bajrajyogini Secondary School, where Pabitra is enrolled in 5th grade. “She is acutely aware that she, along with her brother and sister, are orphans with nowhere to go. She is also conscious that her kind uncle and aunt really cannot afford to feed the three of them so she often comes to school without any food. During recess when other children are eating, she buries herself in her books.”

But the cheerful aunt is not complaining. “Where else will these poor children go? Whatever we have, we share with them and although it is not easy, we just have to face it.”

Pabitra is indeed a hard worker and a good student, spending her free time studying with a vengeance.

Pabitra’s teacher told us, “Room to Read’s Girls’ Education program for Pabitra and her younger sister has been a blessing for these girls. The only time I see a spark in her is when she is studying. She seems to be driven to finish her schooling and to take up a job.”

“I cannot squander this opportunity and I see to it that my sister also studies,” comments Pabitra to underscore to us how much she values this support. She then adds with an inkling of a smile on her face, “The support from Room to Read is my lifeline.”

# NEPAL





“Unless I took charge of my life, my fate was not going to change.”

## Joshina Tharu

THE ENCOURAGING MOBILIZER

BEYOND THE GIRLS



Joshina Tharu knows how it feels to be left out. She was just six when her parents sold her to be a Kamlari, a bonded laborer. Year after year, thousands of girls like Joshina, now 22, are either sold, traded or promised into the Kamlari system—a tradition that while

banned by the government, is still practiced among the Tharu community in western Nepal.

“My main task was to care for a one-year-old child,” recalls Joshina, “By the time I was 11, I was working over 12 hours each day cooking for a family of nine.”

Joshina recalls the days when she would cry quietly but did not know whether it was because of hunger or anger. “I remember feeling unloved and helpless,” she says. “The problem was I had no one to complain to because even my parents were not concerned.”

When Joshina was 15, following a brutal lashing by her landlord, she gathered all her courage and ran.

While her family welcomed her back, she knew it was so that she could help with child care and chores.

“I, of course, had other plans. I was old enough to understand that unless I took charge of my life, my fate was not going to change.

“When my family went out to work the fields, I secretly joined an educational ‘bridge-course.’ I learned how to read and write and soon tested to join the 5th grade but I did not have the money to pay the fees.”

“While I was agonizing about paying for school, I heard that a local NGO, Kamaru Vikas, needed field data-collection and they hired me for 4,500 NPR (\$60 USD) which changed my life. This money gave me the freedom to decide what I wanted to do with my life.”

“I continued with school and set aside 1,300 NPR each month for school fees and other expenses. I opened a savings account and put away the rest of the money for future studies.”

Joshina remembers that it was not easy managing work, studies and the responsibilities at home. “What kept me on track were the memories of my days as a Kamlari. I used to think of the hardships I had to endure and I knew that by educating myself, I would move away from that period.”

Her diligence paid off. This year, Joshina completed her 12th grade exams and is enrolling in college. She continues to work to support her education and she has big dreams for her future. She also encourages participants on the Girls’ Education program to dream big. As a social mobilizer, Joshina guides and supports girls on the program. She follows up with them at school to make sure that they are attending and keeping up academically and advocates for them as needed with the school administration. Joshina works to ensure they have the school supplies that they need and meets with their parents and other community members to promote the value of sending girls to school.

“I want to educate other Kamlari girls and I am well on my way. As the Room to Read social mobilizer, I meet these young children who have been rescued by our partner organizations. And to motivate them, I tell them my story and also tell them that they can change their destiny.”

# SRI LANKA

2006  
Program Launched

1,200  
Girls Enrolled

99%  
Advancement Rate

1%  
Drop Out Rate



***“We are truly grateful to Room to Read for having faith in our child even though we had given up on her.”***

## Subavani

AGE 15 • SCHOLAR SINCE 2008 • HATTON, SRI LANKA

### SCHOLAR PROFILE

It is difficult to be heard when you are the fifth female child in a poor Sri Lankan family. The struggle is compounded even more if you are physically challenged.

So while it was easy for Subavani’s father to wake up one morning and casually announce that Subavani need not continue with her studies. For Subavani, the words were ominous. It meant the end of her dreams.

Sadly, Subavani could not even protest because this 14-year-old girl has a congenital hearing impairment that has caused her speech to be hindered. Subavani could do little else but cry softly and take refuge in her painting or needlework—hobbies at which she excelled, although the expensive paints and canvas were often cut from the family’s shopping list.

Subavani’s father, Ramiah, was let go from the tea plantation where he worked and now is rarely home. Her mother, Kolamma, is his second wife, and in addition to Subavani’s older sister and two step sisters, the family just added four more people when Amarawathy, the family’s eldest daughter, moved home with her three children following a dispute with her husband.

When Subavani’s teacher noticed her missing from school, she stopped by Subavani’s home to check in. Her sisters told the teacher that the family could not afford the additional expense, adding that in any case it was futile teaching a child with a hearing impairment.

Subavani’s eyes filled with tears on hearing how casually the family had dismissed her. The teacher however could do little except give her a hug before turning to leave.

It was during this time that the Room to Read Girls’ Education program entered Watawala Tamil Medium Vidyala to conduct a “needs assessment” in the area. When teachers were asked

to identify bright students from disadvantaged families, Subavani’s teacher submitted Subavani’s name.

Subavani was soon enlisted in the program but the team wanted to ensure she had the support she needed to succeed and for Subavani’s situation, this meant tutoring classes and, more importantly, a hearing aid. Much to her delight, Subavani is no longer shut out from the world and through additional help, she even started articulating words.

Of course Subavani has a long way to go, but her tenacity and enthusiasm to attend classes and keep pace with the other students is encouraging.

Says her mother, “I never dreamt that I would ever hear Subavani calling me ‘amma’. Now I realize that despite her hearing problem she will be able to cope with the other children. We are truly grateful to Room to Read for having faith in our child even though we had given up on her.”

Subavani’s teacher is also delighted with her marked improvement: “Subavani might have difficulty getting the right words out,” she says happily. “But she has little difficulty in expressing herself. She can share her feelings very effectively with actions. Academically she still has to catch up with her classmates, but she is ahead of the others when it comes to extra-curricular activities like dancing or drawing.” She adds almost in the same breath, “Room to Read is doing a commendable job of reaching out to children who would otherwise never have this opportunity. I want to take this opportunity to thank Room to Read for supporting students like Subavani.”

# SRI LANKA





Wilgamuwa village in the Matale district of Sri Lanka is just 10 hours away from the capital of Colombo by road, but this village lives in the shadows of development without any educational or health amenities. Almost 70 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and for

many of the children, school is still a distant dream since most parents are uneducated farm hands struggling to earn a living.

Mr. Mahagedara, the director of Zonal Education, is acutely aware of this gap which is why he was thrilled when Room to Read approached him four years ago with their request to work in Wilgamuwa. Mr. Mahagedara explains, “Wilgamuwa’s educational zone had the worst examination board results and to compound matters the percentage of girls graduating from school was dismal. When Room to Read applied for permission, I did not think twice about supporting the project.”

Room to Read’s research revealed that this area had a high drop-out rate and school attendance was poor. Sixty percent of parents believed that education was not important and school was used by many for a free lunch meal which was sometimes the only meal the child received. Equally alarming was the fact that early marriages were the norm, and domestic violence as well as substance abuse and alcoholism were high. Added together, this made girls more vulnerable and in need of immediate help.

Room to Read supports approximately half of the 46 schools in the area. “The support from Room to Read was a boon to many students and is undeniably a help to the Sri Lankan educational sector,” said Mr. Mahagedara. “Room to Read

“I hope Room to Read continues to work for the Sri Lankan children for a long, long time.”

has helped the children of this region to evolve into confident students. Today, these young ones can articulate their views and opinions without any hesitation.”

Much of this was possible because of Mr. Mahagedara’s strong interest and his assurance that his department would provide full support to the Room to Read team. “He offers hands-on support,” says Priyanthi Chandrasekara, Room to Read’s Girls’ Education Program Manager. “He regularly visits our projects and despite his packed schedule, he never misses the ‘stakeholder’ meetings. He supervises the teacher selection process for our tutoring camps, accompanies the staff on field trips and even visits the scholars’ homes to monitor the progress.”

Mr. Mahagedara, who spent his childhood in the village, empathizes with the struggle of the children in these areas. “Most people here work as farm hands and are less educated. When I evaluated this program after a few months, I was impressed with the change in the level of awareness among the parents. Now there is a pronounced realization of the importance of education and I think this has opened up the possibilities to help them.”

Says Glenfrey De Mel, Room to Read’s Country Director in Sri Lanka, “Mr. Mahagedara has been our supporter from the very beginning. If we have managed to bring about change in this area it is because of the unstinting support we received from the education department.”

Mr. Mahagedara smiles and sums it up best, “Room to Read has proved their commitment to social welfare and we are happy to support them at all times. I hope Room to Read continues to work for the Sri Lankan children for a long, long time.”

# VIETNAM

2002  
Program Launched

1,097  
Girls Enrolled

96%  
Advancement Rate

4%  
Drop Out Rate



***“I have been given so much and I want to do my best so that I can give back and help other people in my life.”***

## Dung

AGE 18 • PROGRAM GRADUATE • HO CHI MINH, VIETNAM

SCHOLAR PROFILE

Growing up caring for her sick and elderly parents, it felt almost natural for Dung to look at a future career in healthcare.

Since her own childhood, Dung’s mother has suffered from a leg disability that makes it difficult for her to walk. In addition, her father suffers from asthma which is only made worse by his job as a bricklayer. Dung, along with her two sisters, care for their parents and Dung, who is determined to pursue a degree in public health, has shown a remarkable gift as a caregiver.

Explains Dung, “I always wanted the added knowledge to take care of my parents and help other families as unlucky or even worse off than mine.” She was chosen for Room to Read’s Girls’ Education program in 2004 soon after her parents decided they could not afford the costs to keep her in school.

During the five years Dung participated in the program, she excelled and focused on her future. When she attended a career orientation workshop sponsored by Room to Read, it validated her dreams of becoming a doctor because she saw there were many ways she could apply this degree to benefit those around her. Currently, she envisions herself working in the health field for a local NGO. Beyond the career workshop, Dung credits Room to Read’s life skills training because it gave her a more practical knowledge of how to work in a group setting. The life skills classes offer students real life experiences that are not taught in formal high school curriculum but have proven very useful when entering the work force.

Dung confided, “I was depressed thinking about my uncertain future. But, after the life skills training, I found out that love and good feelings always exist in life. Even though I have little money for transportation to college or for food, I am not

downhearted but encouraged by my future. My goal after four years of college is to pursue a bachelor’s degree with distinction so that I can continue to learn and become a family doctor. I have been given so much and I want to do my best so that I can give back and help other people in my life.”

It is still not an easy path ahead for Dung but she is determined and confident about her vision for her future. Now at age 18, she just passed her entry examination at the University of Medicine and Pharmaceutics for the Faculty of Public Health. Since she is now without Room to Read’s support, Dung is finding ways to support her education and has taken a part-time job as a tutor. University tuition is waived, but she still needs to earn extra income to pay for her meals and bus fees she spends each day to travel the 22 miles to the university. Her parents are fully behind her and have faith she will become a doctor. They even took out a loan recently to help support their daughter’s education. Her father remarked, “Dung chose a major which is useful for her and for society and that is what is most important.”

# VIETNAM





“I wanted to make sure other girls had the opportunities I was given.”

## Michelle Gerevas

THE VESTED DONOR

BEYOND THE GIRLS



Michelle Gerevas had never heard of Room to Read until John Wood came to speak at Qualcomm, the company where she has worked for five years in employee communications. From the minute she heard John’s story and followed up by reading his book, *Leaving Microsoft to Change the World*, she was hooked and wanted to do more.

“I loved the way Room to Read quantifies what each donation supports,” explains Michelle about what she liked about investing in Room to Read and specifically, the Girls’ Education program where she directed her first contribution after attending a San Diego chapter fundraiser.

Since then, Michelle has continued to increase her support of the Girls’ Education program and to date has enabled 75 girls with the opportunity to attend secondary school.

“My parents always placed an emphasis on how education opens so many doors and they always stressed how girls could do anything they wanted to do,” says Michelle. “I wanted to make sure other girls had the opportunities I was given.”

But Michelle was not finished—she wanted to see the programs for herself and in 2009 she traveled to Vietnam to do just that. While she had travelled abroad before, she had never been to Vietnam and she said the overall experience was simply, “AMAZING.” She further explains: “It was amazing...but exhausting. Just to get from one location to the next was hard and our schedule was very aggressive. But, it was the most eye-opening experience and personally rewarding so I would not have changed a thing!”

What was the most rewarding part of her experience in Vietnam?

“On the final day I traveled by both boat and motorbike from Can Tho to Long An Province and was welcomed at the Tan Thanh Primary School,” says Michelle remembering the emotional day. “When we arrived, we were greeted by hundreds of smiling girls and their parents. Each girl had a beautiful bouquet of flowers that they presented to us in thanks. But it was not only the girls, but also their parents who were so appreciative of the support provided to their daughters.”

Michelle was then invited into the homes of some of the girls on the program. “I was moved to tears when I entered the homes and witnessed the utter poverty of these girls,” says Michelle, “This was something I had never seen before.”

Michelle visited the family of a 15-year-old scholar named Luyen who was being raised by her grandparents because her father had passed away and the mother had left, leaving her two children behind. Luyen had just joined the Room to Read Girls’ Education program in 2008 and was in 8th grade. “I was so impacted by the love in the family and the strength they had to support their granddaughter’s education and recognition that this was her chance to have a future different from that of her parents and grandparents.”

Leaving the home of this young girl and her grandparents, Michelle again committed to the Girls’ Education program in Vietnam helping to support more girls with the gift of education.



# ZAMBIA

2008  
Program Launched

205  
Girls Enrolled

98%  
Advancement Rate

2%  
Drop Out Rate

*“I danced, jumped up and down and sang at the top of my voice! I just wanted the whole world to know.”*

## Telezia

AGE 14 • SCHOLAR SINCE 2009 • CHONGWE, ZAMBIA

### SCHOLAR PROFILE

In Chibango Village in rural Zambia, all of the girls look out for one another but not in terms of boys or clothes—they support each other in their studies.

At age 14, Telezia just passed her 7th grade exams at the Chinyunyu Basic School which is a five mile trip from her family’s home. She travels this long road to school each day starting at 5:30 a.m. and picks up her girlfriends once she reaches the main road approximately two miles into her solo trip. By the time she reaches school at 7 a.m., she is ready to start her school day.

Telezia is the fourth child in her family of six—two girls and four boys. All the older children, due to the high cost of school fees, have dropped out of school to work. But Telezia is passionate about her education and dreams of becoming a medical doctor, so dropping out is not an option for her.

“I was so happy when I was placed in the Girls’ Education program!” exclaims Telezia, not trying to hide her excitement. “I danced, jumped up and down and sang at the top of my voice! I just wanted the whole world to know! I love school very much and before Room to Read, I was worried that I would have to quit school this year because of the fees. I did not want to end up like my brothers!”

Her father, Antony Lemekezani Phiri, who dropped out of school when he was Telezia’s age and now works growing maize and vegetables, sees Telezia as a hope for his entire family, especially because she is already acting as a teacher to her siblings.

“When Telezia was accepted to the program, we were so excited because we knew that her life was going to be different from ours and that of her elder brothers. I have

confidence in Telezia because she has great interest in education. When she comes back from school she teaches her younger brother and sister. She even studies in the night by candlelight.”

Telezia was very confident about continuing in school. “At school I have friends who help me with my school work. English, mathematics and social and development studies are my favorite subjects but I find creative and technology studies a bit difficult. So I ask the teacher questions when I am not clear and I depend on my friends, Nellia, Sharon, Juliet and Mary to help.”

Telezia’s friend, Mary, has particularly helped Telezia advance in her reading skills.

“My friend Mary is good at reading, so she helps me,” comments Telezia. “I want to be a good reader so that I can read stories to my young brother and sister. I love reading story books from our school library.” Room to Read established a library at Telezia’s school in 2008 in addition to supporting 82 girls who attend school there.

Her final words were words of thanks—and a little pleading for more assistance for her and others.

“I am very happy that Room to Read is supporting me—I wish my brothers also had this chance. I promise that I will not disappoint Room to Read.” Then she hints with a smile, “Also, we need help building schools near our villages so that we can stop walking long distances to school.”

# ZAMBIA



“It is very important to send girls to school because when they get education, their life changes.”

## Theresa Daka

THE PROUD PARENT

BEYOND THE GIRLS



Theresa Daka remembers the day she had to quit school. She was in the 5th grade, and her father, who never believed education for girls was necessary, made the decision that would ultimately determine the path of her life. Theresa’s mother felt anguished that she wasn’t able to pay the school fees

for her young daughter, because she knew that Theresa’s life would follow a similar path of her own—marry at an early age and have several children to care for with very few resources.

At age 30, she is still young in terms of years, but in a country with a life expectancy of 33, Theresa’s face is worn and her body feels the burden of having lived a very difficult life. Once forced to leave school, she married a Malawian man and quickly produced two daughters and six sons. The large family lives in the village of Mulamba, in the Chongwe District of Zambia. Their home, like their neighbors, is small and constructed of mud bricks with a thatched roof.

Daily life was already difficult—finding enough food for 10 people each day was incredibly challenging. To make matters worse, Theresa’s life took another dramatic turn when her husband died suddenly, leaving her a young widow responsible for the well-being of her sizable family. Theresa now supports the family by raising and selling fish on a pond her husband had built before he passed away.

Her two older sons left school in 8th grade because the family couldn’t afford the school fees. The eldest works as a lorry boy in Lusaka, and his younger brother lives at home, making charcoal to help support the family. Theresa’s first daughter,

Stella, seemed destined to follow in her mother’s footsteps, forced to leave school and marry young. But then Room to Read stepped in, and just as Theresa remembers the day she was forced to leave school, she also marks the day that Room to Read selected Stella to be one of 108 girls sponsored to attend Lukwipa Basic School. “I cried with Stella, because I knew that God had heard my prayer at last!”

Because of the distance from her school, Stella is a full-time boarder, coming home only on holidays. She gleams when she talks about how much she enjoys being in school, “Education is very important for me to have a better future. I learn new things that can help me achieve my future dreams. I am not happy with the life my mother is leading. I don’t want to end up like her.”

Theresa is very proud to see her daughter have an opportunity at a life better than her own. “It is very important to send girls to school because when they get education, their life changes. They have freedom to do what they want. They are not forced to do things they don’t agree with. If my parents had sent me to school, I would not be suffering like this. It would have been easy for me to look after my children and pay for their education.”

# Thank You.

The lives of the girls profiled in this Yearbook are being changed forever by the commitment our supporters have made to the transformative power of education. With your help, in 2010 we will reach 10,000 girls across eight countries in Asia and Africa with an education through secondary school. The multiplier effect of this gift will impact women, their families and their communities for generations to come. Your continued investment ensures this.

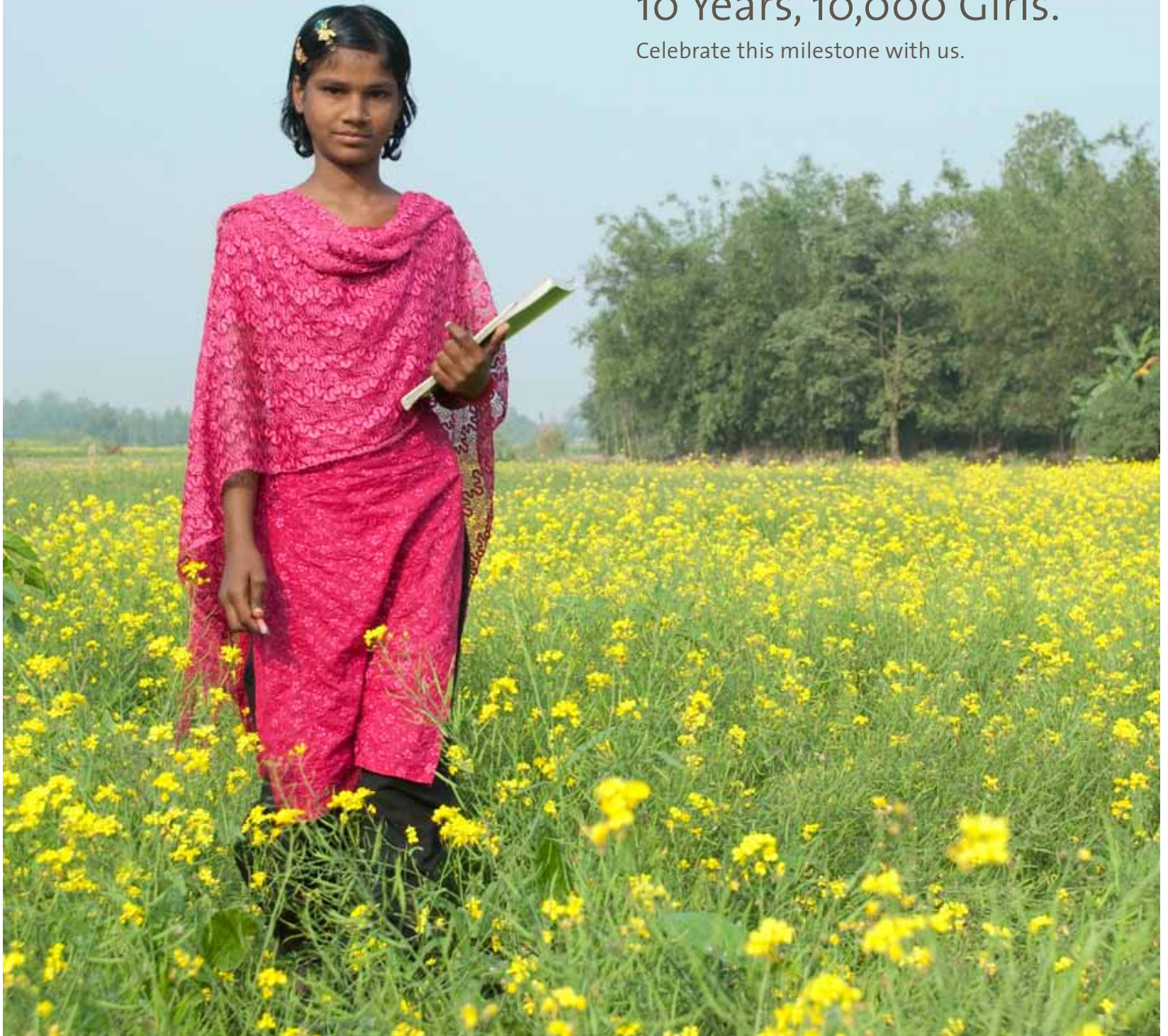
We thank you for your partnership and hope you will continue to support our ambitious goal to reach ten million children by 2015 with the lifelong gift of education. One child, one family, one village at a time, we can change the world! To learn about how you can help transform more lives, please visit us at:

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