

Communities Thrive: Achieving Lasting Impact



The Challenge: Two billion people still live on less than \$2.50 a day

Despite billions of dollars spent and countless organizations working to alleviate poverty, 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 when they get there. Families are fractured, struggling to survive as key family members head overseas to find work, often falling victim to human trafficking. Technological advances continue, yet billions of people are still not connected to the internet, and the majority left behind are women and girls.

It is time to rethink international development. There is a growing recognition that local solutions to social and economic problems have more enduring impact than those imposed by outsiders – but local efforts often lack the resources to scale up their impact. Too often, organizations that can offer effective solutions compete for limited resources rather than collaborate. Funders want bold new ideas but also expect proven return on investment. All the while, billions of people remain trapped in poverty.



Our Response: Bring READ's locally-driven solution to scale—helping millions to achieve greater prosperity and strengthen their communities

IREX and Rural Education and Development (READ) Global have joined forces to improve the lives of millions of people while making international development more sustainable, locally driven, and impactful.

At the heart of our partnership is READ's scalable, cost-effective approach. Developed over the last 25 years, this proven model establishes community-owned and managed READ Centers as a platform for rural social and economic transformation that is led by the communities themselves.

READ Centers are safe spaces serving entire communities with a

library, training hall, information and communications technology (ICT) center, and designated women's and children's activities.

READ Centers have revenue-generating businesses to help fund the operating costs of each center—an approach that reduces dependency on external aid. And because communities are deeply engaged in the process of establishing a READ Center at every step along the way, they are invested in its long-term success. A one-time investment in a READ Center and the co-investment by the community will yield returns for decades to come, proving to be more cost-effective than traditional development.



Communities Thrive: A partnership to launch 100 new centers

IREX and READ Global are coming together through Communities Thrive to dramatically reduce poverty in South Asia and beyond, combining IREX's decades of experience strengthening and scaling grassroots initiatives across the world with READ's

sustainable model for inclusive community development. As IREX studies the READ model and helps to address community needs through new programs, it will apply what it learns elsewhere in the world.

- Open **100 new READ Centers**, providing access to life-changing resources for more than 2 million people and giving these communities control over their futures
- Establish **100 businesses** to sustain those Centers and support the local economy
- Launch the **Tech Age Girls** program in South Asia, positioning 2,500 young women as tech-savvy trainers who will empower **60,000 youth** in their own communities

Our goals for the next 5 years

- Equip **50,000 women and youth** with entrepreneurship skills and market linkages
- Introduce cutting-edge localized programs to empower **100,000 youth** through leadership development and employability and life skills
- Study and then share lessons regarding effective, low-cost, community-led development that can be replicated elsewhere in the world, at a time of shrinking aid budgets

About READ Global and IREX

Since 1991, READ has established 100 READ Centers in South Asia – providing more than 2.3 million people with access to much-needed educational tools and resources, and no Center has ever closed.

IREX has nearly 50 years of experience working in more than 100 countries, honing the art and science of human-centered development. Its mission is to build a more just, prosperous, and inclusive world, by empowering

youth, cultivating leaders, strengthening institutions, and extending access to quality education and information. IREX's approach is to invest in human potential and strengthen local institutions so communities can more effectively drive positive social change. IREX works with local partners to meet community needs long after IREX's role has ended.

An Enduring Solution: Communities Taking Action



When earthquakes violently shook Nepal in 2015 it took months for international aid to reach much of the country. But in areas with locally run READ Centers, it took just hours for villagers to coordinate disaster relief, help neighbors begin rebuilding homes, and ensure that education and entrepreneurship continued. Children who had lost their homes and schools had a safe place to go and keep reading, writing, and learning. Shop owners had a community hub where they could rebuild their businesses, surrounded and supported by other entrepreneurs.

Why It Matters: Impact of a READ Center

Om Prakash and his wife Sheela Devi raised three daughters and a son in the rural community of Geejgarh, in Rajasthan, India. There were no educational resources nearby except for underfunded public schools, where books and computers were rare. They wanted their kids to learn skills to earn a living, but the only opportunities to do so were in a town two hours away by bus. Like most parents, they were scared of sending their daughters to the city alone, because it wasn't safe.

When a READ Center opened in their village, the whole family was excited to join. "It is a safe place for my daughters and wife to visit because it is close by, and it's community owned and operated," Om Prakash says.

Their daughter Anuradha was the first to join the local READ Center. She took trainings in English, computer skills, and radio, where she created programs on health and women's rights. Anuradha and her mother both took sewing training. Today, they save money by sewing clothes for their family, and earn incomes selling clothes to their neighbors. Their daughter Archana started an online college program, and uses the books and computers at the Center for school. Their son Pankaj is applying for government jobs using skills from the computer trainings at the Center. Mahima participated in beautician training at the Center, and now she plans to become a makeup artist and open a beauty parlor of her own.

Om Prakash is thankful that the Center has provided each of his family members with an opportunity to learn so many skills. "I can see a change in my children now," he says, "Especially my daughters - they have become strong. It is important that we educate our daughters, so that they can stand on their feet and be independent." Anuradha says there has been a change in social norms in her community because of the Center: "Earlier, villagers were totally against letting their wives and daughters work, but now many of them have changed. They see women with respect, and they value their opinions."



For more information on how to become part of Communities Thrive, please contact Tina Sciabica, Executive Director of READ Global at tina@readglobal.org, or Swathi Balasubramanian, Technical Advisor at IREX, at swathi@irex.org.