

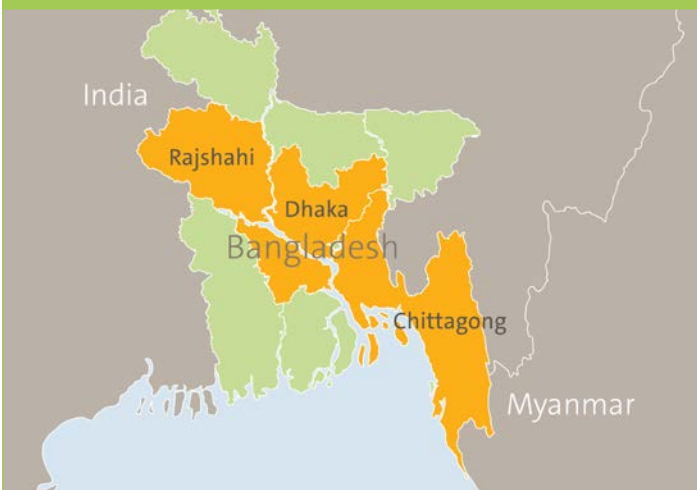


50%

of students who enroll in first grade don't reach grade 10.



Our Presence in Bangladesh



Country Information

Population	161.3 million
Land area	147,600 km ²
Languages of instruction	Bengali
Launch of operations	2008
Room to Read offices	Dhaka

Country Overview

Bangladesh is a rapidly growing and dynamic country. In the nearly 50 years since gaining independence from Pakistan, Bangladesh has made incredible strides to grow its economy and decrease poverty. In recent years the GDP has averaged 6.5 percent growth. Since 1991, the World Bank reports that the percent of Bangladeshis living in poverty went from 44.2 percent to 14.8 percent. In 2018, Bangladesh fulfilled all three eligibility criteria for graduation from the UN's Least Developed Countries list for the first time and is on track for graduation in 2024. This economic success has brought with it increases in life expectancy, literacy rates, per capita food production and has seen the country's garment industry rise to become the second largest exporter of textiles in the world.

While Bangladesh has much to celebrate, it still faces significant roadblocks. With 161 million residents, it is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Most of the population lives in a river delta that is susceptible to frequent flooding, pollution and erosion. This creates challenges for maintaining infrastructure, housing and agriculture. Climate change will only exacerbate these problems with some experts predicting that sea levels could rise to submerge 20 percent of the country and displace tens of millions. Additionally, Bangladesh is playing host to some 900,000 Rohingya refugees, more than half of whom are children.



Educational Landscape

The government of Bangladesh has made primary education a high priority since passing the Primary Education Compulsory Act in 1990, which made education through Grade 5 mandatory and free for all children. In 2010, the national education policy took it one step further to extend the policy through Grade 8.

Despite strong policies, students in Bangladesh still face barriers to education. 24 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, largely in rural areas where educational access is particularly poor, schools are scarce or difficult to get to and children are expected to work to contribute to the family income. Many classrooms remain overcrowded and dropout rates are high with nearly 20 percent of students not completing elementary school and 38 percent not completing secondary school in 2016 alone. The student to teacher ratio in government primary schools is 34:1 and many students only attend class for four hours per day, creating a challenging environment for children and teachers alike.

Girls in Bangladesh are enrolled in school at equal or higher numbers than boys through Grade 5, and are performing better. Unfortunately, female dropout rates skyrocket at the secondary level with 42 percent of girls leaving school before grade 10. The barriers to education increase dramatically for Bangladeshi girls during this time period, and include risks associated with leaving the home unaccompanied, expectations to contribute to the household and pressures to marry early. Despite progress in recent decades, 59 percent of girls in Bangladesh are married before their 18th birthday, and 1 in 3 girls are mothers before the age of 18. There is little opportunity for girls to develop relevant life skills within schools, limiting their potential for success in secondary school and their participation in society.

History and Results

Room to Read Bangladesh was officially established in 2008, and program operations launched one year later. Our work initially focused in rural areas—particularly the sandbar islands of the Sirajganj District, the low-lying terrain of the Brahmanbaria district, and the remote plains of the Natore District. We have made great strides in these districts and have forged strong relationships with the local communities while meeting a great need for support for primary school students and for girls battling longstanding cultural barriers.

In 2015, we expanded our programs beyond rural areas and began working in Dhaka. Enrollment in government primary schools in Dhaka is poor and there is a large need for reading and writing support. In 2016, we also launched our Girls’ Education Program within the city. Room to Read believes we can impact the lives of many children with this new endeavor given that Dhaka is one of the largest cities in the world with an estimated population of over 17 million people and is growing rapidly.

Additionally, with the influx of Rohingya refugees to Cox’s Bazar since 2017, we have adapted technical assistance programs to support the region and its refugee population. We are helping to assess students’ literacy in English and Myanmar and develop teaching and learning materials to use in the more than 300 learning centers located in the district’s refugee camps. We are also focusing on capacity strengthening to improve school enrollment, attendance and literacy. Combined, these projects will reach more than 180,000 children, 2,900 teachers and train 20 government officials.

Our Results in Bangladesh	
Literacy Program	
New children benefited in 2018	90,237
Children benefited cumulatively	476,283
New schools in 2018	236
New books distributed in 2018	395,875
Books distributed cumulatively	1,247,817
Girls’ Education Program	
New participants in 2018	800
Number of participants cumulatively	4,287
New secondary school graduates in 2018	226
Secondary school graduates cumulatively	521