



the *India* Chapter

Room to Read India's Quarterly Newsletter | January - March 2026



From the Leadership

Dear Readers,

As we step into a new year, I'm pleased to present our first newsletter of the year. At Room to Read India we are gearing up for fresh challenges and broadening our horizons. We continue to strengthen our focus on delivering high-quality, relevant and cost-efficient programming that reaches more children.

Working in partnership with government systems across 12 states, our efforts remain aligned with the National Education Policy 2020. We are focused on embedding core competencies in literacy and life skills education to support sustained learning outcomes at scale.

This year, we are deepening our emphasis on learning outcomes and strengthening data-informed decision-making. We are also investing in demonstration models that generate evidence and inform system-level change.

This edition highlights key program outcomes, partnerships and our engagement across national and international platforms. A standout example of foundational literacy at scale is the Cluster Library Program in Ballari, Karnataka, launched in 2023 with support from JSW Foundation. Across 1400 schools, children habit of reading scores improved by 7% from baseline to endline, storybook access has reached 94% and structured reading sessions have jumped from 24% to 94%. This reaffirms our belief that when children are given the right environment, learning doesn't just happen, it thrives.

We are also pleased to announce the fourth edition of the Children's Literature Awards 2026, celebrating outstanding books in Hindi and Kannada. Through this we celebrate stories and storytellers that help build strong reading habits among children.

We thank our partners for their continued collaboration in this journey. Together, we are enabling more children to build the skills they need to shape their futures.

Happy reading!



Poornima Garg
Country Director



Spotlight

Gender Equality Summit UN Global Compact Network India

At the Gender Equality Summit 2026, organized by the UN Global Compact Network India on March 6, 2026, Poornima Garg and program alumna Reshma represented Room to Read India. They contributed to discussions on advancing gender equality, highlighting the role of education, agency and life skills in enabling women and girls to lead change within their communities.



CIES Conference 2026

At the Comparative and International Education Society Conference 2026, Room to Read India shared insights on foundational literacy and numeracy and life skills education for gender equality. Held from March 29 to April 1, 2026, in San Francisco, the team contributed to four sessions, demonstrating how implementation evidence is informing program design, strengthening delivery and embedding effective practices within public education systems.



International Conference on Life Skills Education (ICLSE 2026)

Poornima Garg, our Country Director, delivered a special address at the 11th International Conference on Life Skills Education (ICLSE 2026) from Feb. 5–7 2026 at KIIT-KISS, Bhubaneswar, Odisha. She emphasized the importance of embedding life skills within education systems and responding meaningfully to youth voices. The conference was held under the theme “Life Skills Beyond 2030: Learning to Live Together in an Interconnected World.”



Read more:

<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7427969870002081792>

Programs

Scaling Foundational Education with SCERTs

- Room to Read India signed an MoU with SCERT Maharashtra to support the adoption, printing and statewide distribution of **52 books and 9 reading cards** across **Marathi, Hindi and English** for Grades 1-3, 4-5 and 6-8. The reading materials will be distributed across **61,343+ government primary schools**.
- In collaboration with SCERT Rajasthan, we co-developed 38 cards and 80 graded reading cards in Hindi for Grades 1-5. These materials were distributed across **45,000 schools**, reaching over **3 million children** in Grades 1-5, providing levelled, engaging content to build fluency and comprehension. The materials were supported with classroom practices such as read-aloud, paired, and independent reading.



Libraries Transition to Local Ownership

In March we completed the phase out of over **100 Literacy Program libraries in Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Rajasthan**. Across 100 schools, the libraries were handed over to schools, Gram Panchayats and communities for long term ownership. Across the phase out events, students and staff reaffirmed the value of these libraries and committed to sustaining them for future learners.

College Education Access for GEP Alumnae

In partnership with Buddy4Study, we are supporting 100 meritorious first and second year GEP alumnae from Room to Read through graduation. This is under the **U-Go University**, which supports young women from low-income backgrounds with scholarships to complete undergraduate studies. **75 scholars** have been selected; 25 are under verification.



Let's Learn

Cluster Library Program in Karnataka Drives Outcomes

Room to Read India with support from JSW Foundation, launched the Cluster Library Program in 2023 in Ballari district, Karnataka. In partnership with the government, the model places a central library in one school per cluster, with reading corners distributed across the remaining schools. A two-year evaluation across **90 schools** highlights strong improvements in access, usage and reading habits:

- Children habit of **reading scores improved by 7%** from baseline to endline.
- Storybooks are available in **94% of schools**, with children borrowing five to nine books per quarter
- Weekly structured reading sessions increased from **24% to 94%**



Reading Habits and Literacy Results

In November 2025, Room to Read India study assessed **900 children** across Grades 3 and 5 in **90 government primary schools** across three states, **Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh**. The research examined the association between children's habit of reading and literacy skills. Reading habits showed strong positive associations with 12 of 14 literacy skill indicators. Schools with higher book checkout volumes recorded significantly better reading habit scores, highlighting active library use as a key driver.

Rising Beyond Limits: Madhur Mathur

Madhur Mathur's journey reflects resilience and determination. She joined Room to Read India's Girls' Education Program in 2016 while in Grade 6 and credits the programme with helping her build confidence and find her voice. One of her significant milestones was interviewing the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, in Dehradun. Madhur is currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Journalism and Mass Communication and aspires to become a journalist.



Key Learnings from SERI's Technical Assistance

The six-state SERI technical assistance study from Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh found that scale requires early institutional anchoring, mid-level champions, and local adaptation; materials need teacher ownership; M&E works best inside government systems; outcomes sustain when cadres, coaching, and practice align; partnerships amplify reform via "surround sound"; and embedding in policy, budgets, and routines drives sustainability.

Partner of Choice

LiftEd DEIC Improves Collaboration

Room to Read India is proud to partner with the Government of Jharkhand and JEPC on the LiftEd District Education Innovation Challenge. This 3-year initiative aims to reach **2.4M+ children across 24 districts**, using micro-innovations, data-driven action, and structured support to boost FLN outcomes. Alongside Maitri Trust, Porticus Foundation, British Asian Trust, and Dalberg, we're committed to collaborative, innovation-led approaches that deliver impact at scale.



SPMU Website Boosts Collaboration

Room to Read India's State Project Management Unit (SPMU) page is now live on the JEPC website. This page will also be regularly updated with key developments and activities supported by SPMU around Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN). In collaboration with the Government of Jharkhand, we support system capacity by embedding processes that enable consistent, quality-driven interventions at scale.

Explore: <https://jepc.jharkhand.gov.in/program/about-spmu>



Strengthening Libraries and Teacher Training in Himachal Pradesh

In partnership with Samagra Shiksha, Himachal Pradesh, Room to Read India supported a two-day workshop held from January 22–23, 2026. The workshop focused on strengthening library management, integrating library resources into classroom practices and fostering a culture of reading across schools.



Scaling Literacy Programs in Maharashtra

Since Jan. 2026, with support from Citibank, we have been implementing district-wise scale-up in Palghar and Ratnagiri, Maharashtra. Formal program approvals have been secured from SCERT and both DIETs and **17 Model Libraries** with child-friendly reading infrastructure have been established. The program aims to reach **4310 schools, 157,390 students** and **14,000 teachers**.

Employer of Choice



Board Member Exposure Visit

Ms. Lavanya Ashok, India Regional Board Member, visited St. Joseph A.M. High School in Mumbai, Maharashtra on January 21, 2026 to observe a Life Skills session and discussed program implementation. She also interacted with school leadership, teachers, students and parents.



Global Office Meets India Team

On February 17 and 25 respectively, **Michael Bowers**, Chief Program Implementation Officer, and **Shari Freedman**, Chief Financial Officer, from Room to Read global visited the India office. The visits offered a valuable opportunity to engage in open dialogue on operations, organizational policies and the way ahead.

Announcement



Children's Literature Awards 2026

We're thrilled to announce the fourth edition of Room to Read Children's Literature Awards! This year, the awards will recognize outstanding books in Kannada and Hindi across two age groups (ages 3-8 and ages 8-12).

Publishers are invited to submit nominations by April 30, 2026. The Children's Book Creators' Awards will follow, with nominations opening in May.

Follow for more updates: www.roomtoreadindia.org/childrens-literature-awards-2026/

The Room to Read Children's Literature Awards are back for 2026





Room to Read India is a global nonprofit currently operating in 12 states - Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Telangana, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

Through education, Room to Read is transforming the lives of millions of children to create a world free from illiteracy and gender inequality. We are working with the government, local communities and partner organizations to build a world where all children have room to read, learn and grow and can use their skills to accelerate positive change. We support children in communities experiencing deep educational, gender and economic inequities.



www.roomtoreadindia.org