

**Exploring Community Ownership, Women's  
Empowerment, and Dynamic Partnership  
Development in Nepal: The Executive  
Summary**

Prepared by the Lipman Family Prize Fellow  
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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
Lipman Family Prize

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Overview

READ Global, founded by Dr. Antonia Neubauer in 1991, is a non-profit organization that addresses global poverty through education, community, and enterprise initiatives. Its mission is to “partner with communities in rural Asia to create vibrant places to live and thrive” (READ Global, 2013). To achieve this, READ partners with rural villages to build Community Library and Resource Centers (READ Centers) that serve as epicenters of social and economic transformation. To date, over 69 READ Centers have been established in India, Bhutan, and Nepal, and over two million individuals have access to READ Centers. Although READ Centers serve entire communities, READ Global places special emphasis on serving women, children, and marginalized castes. The library component allows the center to become a respected community hub, a safe place where women can go freely without permission, and a location where opportunities for partnerships, entrepreneurship, and community programming exist (READ Global, 2012).

### Purpose and Audience

The purpose of this case study is to:

1. Capture the field experiences of READ Global staff and stakeholders to provide a rich, clear, and thorough narrative of READ’s work in Bhutan, India, and Nepal.
2. Highlight best practices across several READ Centers in Nepal, emphasizing three key themes to illustrate the Model’s success: community ownership, partnerships, and women’s empowerment.
3. Produce a learning document that can be understood and shared by multiple stakeholders.

While READ Global received the Lipman Family Prize as a reflection of its innovative work across India, Bhutan, and Nepal, this case study will focus largely on READ’s work in Nepal. READ has been operating in Nepal for over twenty years, providing an opportunity for the Lipman team to observe READ’s long-term effects.

Four students at the University of Pennsylvania, who are serving as Lipman Family Prize Fellows, authored this case study.<sup>1</sup> The study is targeted at the following stakeholders for the following reasons:

1. READ Global, and their current and potential funders and partners: to better understand the organization’s model and work in Nepal.
2. The Lipman Family Prize, The Wharton Leadership Program, and their partners: to build institutional knowledge about the work of READ Global, foster student learning for Fellows, and serve as a foundation for future Field Application Projects.
3. Global organizations invested in international development: to increase their own impact by learning about READ’s sustainable and transferable model.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Lipman Family Prize Fellow Team, see Appendix A.

## Methodological Context

The methodology implemented in this study is the case study qualitative research approach, as described by Joseph Maxwell (2005). There are several strengths associated with conducting qualitative research studies, many related to the inductive nature of the research (Maxwell, 2005). A case study is a particular qualitative research methodology in which researchers explore a single subject in depth by collecting data from multiple sources (Creswell, 2007). Ranging from explanatory, to exploratory, to descriptive, the case study approach is appropriate when researchers establish clearly identified cases and seek to augment understanding around them (Creswell, 2007).

Ethnographic methods best fit the needs of this study, since they allow for the use of many data collection methods in order to study a single circumstance (Goulding, 2005). As such, data were collected from the following sources:

1. Background research on READ Global and READ Nepal through available materials including READ website, Lipman Family Prize Application, READ Nepal Facebook page, and “Community Libraries: Key Vehicles for Community Development” a paper prepared by READ staff in 2011.
2. In-person and telephone interviews with various READ Global and Nepal staff, including:<sup>2</sup>
  - a. Tina Sciabica, Executive Director, READ Global
  - b. Antonia (“Toni”) Neubauer, Founder, READ Global
  - c. Sanjana Shrestha, Country Director, READ Nepal
  - d. Chin Kaji Shrestha, Pratima Sharma, Raju Shrestha, READ Nepal Staff
  - e. Mohan Man Sainju, Manohar Bhattarai, READ Nepal Advisory Board Members
3. In-person and telephone interviews with various partners and funders of READ, including:
  - a. Darren Hoerner, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
  - b. Upendra Man Shrestha, Practical Action
  - c. Tap Raj Pant, UNESCO
4. Field visits to meet with Library Management Committees, Women’s Cooperative members, and general library members at the following READ Centers:<sup>3</sup>
  - a. Panauti READ Center
  - b. Jhuwani READ Center
  - c. Agyauli READ Center
  - d. Deurali READ Center

The review of relevant literature assisted the Fellows in composing initial interview questions. Interviews are a vital part of qualitative research, as they ensure that multiple perspectives are reflected in the case study (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2009). Thus, under the guidance of a trained qualitative researcher, the Fellow team developed interview questions and guides for both phone interviews and in-person interviews. Additionally,

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B for interview instruments.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix D for full profiles of the Jhuwani, Agyauli, and Deurali Community Library Resource Centers.

interview questions were also composed collaboratively with Tina Sciabica and other members of the READ Global team. Qualitative research is an iterative process, and while in the field, Fellows adjusted interview questions based on context and geographic location. In addition to the creation of interview instruments, Fellows also took field notes during site visits. Field notes and participant observations are consistent with ethnographic research methods (Goulding, 2005; Creswell, 2007), and thus are an important tool for researchers conducting qualitative research studies.

As part of the data analysis process, Fellows met at the end of each day to discuss interviews, identify themes that arose from data, and highlight other relevant information. While the researchers already developed certain a priori codes, they also employed inductive coding for themes during data analysis. According to David Thomas (2003), inductive coding allows qualitative researchers to analyze data in a straightforward way; it lets the research establish themes that are inherent in the raw data. As such, inductive coding has fewer restraints than more traditional methodologies (Thomas, 2003). Following field work, fellows then organized their data by theme in a series of data analysis sessions, utilizing white boards to visualize themes present in the data. These sessions were guided by the case study specific data analysis process highlighted by Creswell (2007), which included performing a holistic analysis of the entire case featuring a deep analysis of themes.

Finally, throughout the data collection and analysis process, the Fellow team reflected on their subjectivity (Peshkin, 1988). As Maxwell (2005) indicates, the relationship that a researcher forms with participants may not only influence the design of the project but also the data that is collected. Therefore, it is important for the researcher to understand their own reflexivity, or relationship between themselves and what they are studying (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). In the spirit of researcher reflexivity and validity, the Fellow team recognizes that one limitation to this case study was the language barrier (Golafshani, 2003). Interviews were conducted in the field through a translator from the READ Nepal staff, since none of the Fellows spoke the local language.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

After careful research and extensive fieldwork, the Fellow team identified several key areas that illustrated READ Global's success. The following statements identify the research team's key findings:

1. One of the fundamental reasons for READ's success is the degree of ownership that villagers feel over their libraries. READ Global has a proven ability and method for mobilizing communities through Library Management Committees (LMC) and an inclusive style of leadership.
2. READ has demonstrated a particular aptitude for forming dynamic partnerships, for they are a critical element of the model's success. Partnerships are initiated locally by LMCs and nationally by READ Nepal, and are integral to many of the libraries' core programs. In fact, the LMC is expected to receive a written commitment from local partners before the construction of the library is even completed. Programs and partnerships ultimately evolve out of the natural needs of the communities – which are self-identified – and the strengths and expertise of local organizations.

Strong partnerships with dynamic programs ensure that the libraries are hubs of community development, contributing to health and prosperity in villages.

3. The READ model has successfully created a safe space for women's empowerment. READ's women's empowerment programs, which include Leadership Development, Savings and Loans, Skills Training, and Gender-Based Violence Education, are not only initiated from within the community, but also designed and led completely by women. In fact, the local Library Management Committee's (LMC) membership must also be at least one-third women. READ's women's programs provide an opportunity for women to lead their peers while harnessing their newly gained literacy skills. They create a platform for women to find a voice in community decision making, realize their goals for their families, and tap into their own – and their entire community's – latent capacity.
4. The "READ" Effect is a key feature of the model. When READ partners with a community, the community does not simply receive access to books. Rather, the READ Center sparks a literacy and economic revolution that can transform an entire community. The organization calls this long-lasting ripple effect the "READ Effect" (READ Global, 2013). READ observes this multi-generational effect again and again in its work. As Tap Raj Pant, the National Program Officer at UNESCO, explained, for READ a "library is not just organized books...It's something you can use to empower your community."<sup>4</sup>

In light of these findings, the Lipman Fellow team also identified five key recommendations for READ Global as they continue their work:

1. Explore the modernization of READ Centers through e-libraries and virtual management systems.
2. Improve Metrics and Evaluation by using an iPad application to collect all data and sync it live with the backend content management system that READ Nepal can use.
3. Increase in scale and inter-library network communication through training LMCs in grant management and creating and distributing a monthly newsletter.
4. Explore the possibility of youth training by creating a Youth Council and encouraging youth to participate in the READ Center and in the community through leadership training.
5. Increase READ's public visibility through community engagement in social media, particularly as part of an Information Communications Technology (ICT) class, as well as through aggressive local, national, and international media campaigns.

## **Conclusion**

The READ model is incredibly successful, scalable, and transferable. Since the impetus to work with READ to construct a library must first come from the community, there is a greater commitment to sustainability. READ works with the Library Management Committee to assess the needs of the local community and create a microenterprise that will both be sustainable and fill a real gap in the village. These enterprises underscore the community ownership of the Center: from inception and construction, to the ongoing management and funding, the local village truly feels that the Center belongs to them. In

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<sup>4</sup> Tap Raj Pant, Interview, May 21, 2013.

the words of founder Toni Neubauer, “If it’s a good library, it’s got your names on it. If it’s a bad library, it’s got your names on it.”<sup>5</sup> Moving forward, READ’s global impact will continue as they both harness their myriad of strengths and engage and train new generations of community leaders.

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<sup>5</sup> Toni Neubauer, Interview, April 9, 2013.