



READ India
Inspiring Rural Prosperity



READ India

SUMMIT 2023

Excerpts from the Event



Background

The world is talking about inclusivity, gender balance, women empowerment, quality education, access to and learning of ICT tools, cyber safety and security and so on. Efforts are made to make women more resilient, enable them to reach the higher ladder of official positions. All efforts are being done to realise

these ambitions by all the stakeholders, government, non-government organizations, universities, researchers, and experts etc., aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The strong cultural practices and the mind-sets are quite different. Expectations of the family, their own commitment to the family first; lack of confidence are a few among many which need to be understood and addressed keeping in view the impact of the pandemic and shift in the priorities of individuals and families.

Gender discrimination and exclusion of women is the reality in India, more so in rural India. With changing times, we cannot say that women are not empowered, but do not get platforms to express themselves and realize their inherent potential and more so, leading to social and economic empowerment.

Community First, is the thought which resonates now with national and international stakeholders. The old paradigm that puts individual leadership at the centre does not work in this interdependent world. We must put our shared humanity at the centre and embrace new leadership qualities such as moral values and ethics for collective action.





This is what READ India has been doing for the past 16 years, engaging, empowering, educating, and enabling women and youth to be entrepreneurs and admirable human beings. Scaling slowly but strongly, manifesting its presence in 16 States, covering approximately 300 villages, and providing needed knowledge resources with requisite

infrastructure for holistic development to almost 100,000 unique youth and women.

Every year READ India recognises the leaders from the grassroots who are the advocates and practitioners of the READ model of connecting communities and empowering people.

Inaugural session - Creating opportunities for learning

READ India, while reaching the unreached and creating opportunities for learning at the doorsteps of those who need us the most, takes pride in felicitating many amazing women for not only enhancing their own skills but enabling other women to join the stream of self-empowerment with self-respect and self-dignity.

The Mahila Saksham Samman brought together these women amongst the Trustees, Advisory Board Members, experts, partners and invited guests. The event began with the lighting of the lamp by the dignitaries Ms. Shashanka Ala, Dr. Geeta Malhotra, Mr. Jai Vikram Bakshi, Major General Surat Sandhu, Ms. Kalpana Dasgupta, Mr. Ashis Sanyal and the guests from the Embassy.





Mr. Jay Vikram Bakshi, Founder Trustee, READ India was then welcomed to address the gathering. He began with wishing Happy International Women’s Day to all. Mr. Bakshi proceeded by telling three stories. The first story was how they started. It happened with an accidental conversation with Dr. Antonia Neubauer, Founder READ Global, when she visited India in 2007 and desired to see computer labs in rural areas. Incidentally, Mr. Bakshi had set up first computer lab in 2001 in

village Carterpuri, Gurgaon. The second story involved Mr. Bakshi, Dr. Geeta Malhotra and Ms. Smita Rai in the middle of the first lockdown where they decided to connect with everybody via video links. The third story is to do with Geejgarh, focusing on how to build something which lasts and, in that context, they came up with the thought to set up library because it is something which is a community asset.

Mr. Bakshi concluded with the lessons which he learnt. Firstly, any change if it is driven at the community level will sustain. Secondly, when women get together and do something then the results are sustainable. Lastly, is the courage and passion that were demonstrated. READ India projects are not only for literacy, they are to take the journey from literacy to livelihood.





Dr. Geeta Malhotra, Country Director READ India was called upon to say a few words on the role of READ India in Building Resilient Communities. It was International Women’s Day, but she decided to call it as Mahila Saksham Samman. She said, “because women are very precious, they are doing excellent work and we must love ourselves and the work we are doing. The power is within us and we have to use it with positive energy”. She explained the 15 years journey in three steps (a). Why we did this, (b). What we are doing, (c) How we are

doing. Libraries are not only books but libraries are togetherness of human beings and their minds. She highlighted that this year she named the annual report as ‘Community First’ because READ India believes in collective power of the community. She spoke about focusing first five years on building like-minded human force to define the existence and the need of the people who not only understand the READ India model but understand ‘Us’. Another thing she talked about is to imbibe values, the READ India culture is very important to take the organization forward. READ mission is not only the mission of READ India, READ India trustees, the Country Director and the team, the READ mission is derived from each one of us.

Dr. Geeta Malhotra concluded that firstly we inculcate the habit of understanding the community, working for the community and then, the mission – one woman, one family, one village was initiated. The second power is the power of listening and the third power is the power of engaging. We use libraries as a platform for reaching up to this level.





Ms. Shashanka Ala, IAS – Special Secretary, Delhi Government, was invited as the honorable Chief Guest to address the participants. Congratulating READ India on this special day, she shared a thought that why 50 percent of the population needed this day. She emphasized that many women do not even understand the meaning of equality and never stood for the same to imbibe

them due to structural barriers, societal norms and various other factors. Lack of formal education, according to her, is the barrier along with clarity and confidence. Access to the opportunities where and when are required is another challenge these women always have in front of them. Concluding her thoughts, she said that the most important thing we need at home is respect. “We have to earn respect; we will get it when we respect ourselves first then we imbibe ourselves with skills. Eventually we have to create a happy environment for our family, for us and for a happy mind so that our next generation is also happy.”



Ms. Deepa Menon, Senior Vice - President PVR NEST, talked about the project initiated at Garima Grih. Since 2006 PVR NEST has been focused on addressing a very wide spectrum of challenges prevailing to the marginalized and the under privileged communities which includes educational disparities, nourishment deficit among children and inadequate access of sanitation facilities to women. Further she said that PVR NEST is absolutely privileged to partner with READ India. The exceptional contribution READ India has made to many villages, many States in India by community libraries and providing various resources and tools and making them accessible to the community. Dr. Geeta Malhotra has a deep empathy and dedication towards community and deeper understanding to the problems which community faces and how they can be addressed, and that's how READ India partnered to this very special Garima Grih. She concluded by saying Garima Grih today is a temple for the communities. Through this we have leveraged each other's expertise and we are trying to bring a huge difference together.



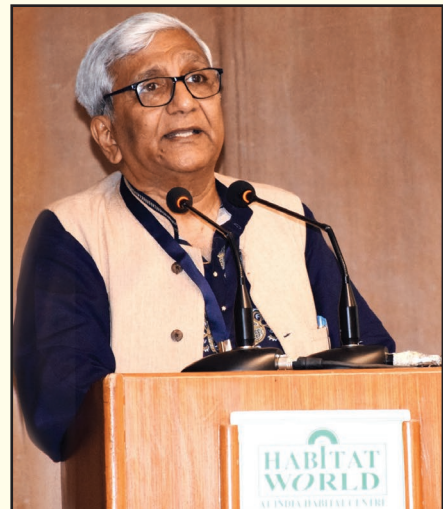


Major General Surat Sandhu, Founder Trustee, READ India, while conveying thanks to the dignitaries and the participants, recognized the transformation among the women who were present from READ India Community Library & Resource Centres by handing over the trophies and listening to their empowered stories.

Role of ICTs in holistic rural development

A short film was presented to the gathering on READ India interventions on Technology usage and training.

Mr. Ashis Sanyal, Trustee, READ India shared his views on the role of libraries and ICTs for holistic development. He began with the statement 'Change is the only constant'. Information and Communication Technology is a revolution bigger than the Industrial revolution because it has changed lives in a way we cannot imagine. The library is a storehouse of information. We gain knowledge from information and through information there is empowerment and there are choices in empowerment. We must figure out how we must take our lives forward, what we want to do and what we want to become. ICT has played an important role in providing women to explore the possibilities of suitable positions for themselves. And, in the context, women can use technology in abundance for connecting the community and creating their own online spaces while being present where they are.



Dr. Amit Ranjan, Assistant Professor, CIET, NCERT shared his views on – “Can technology replace books?”. Mr. Amit talked about the tangibility of paper and a lot of other things, the comfort, and the five hundred years of history we have with paper, will not go away like this and for that we need to understand history. There is a gradual transition.



Talking of books and technology, he expressed that technology is the medium and if there are no books or content on technology then what is the use. Technology democratizes books. Books which were stored in libraries are now available on Google books. We must learn to use the resources right. Now this is a big challenge that the medium keeps changing and due to that our behavior changes, so it is very important to teach the integration of both.

The physical libraries are much more relevant at present than they were earlier because we don't let go of our tradition. Reading is very important for imagination of a child and especially for women to rebuild a different world all together. Technology can make us able, but we need to learn to make the right use of it. So scientifically, and even traditionally and specially to understand history, books are important. So, there is a very big tussle between technology to take over the attention span and this is what we need to be conscious of and educate ourselves that we need to integrate them and not make them at war with each other.





Mr. Kamal Jeet, Kisan Sanchar addressed the participants on the role of ICTs in empowering rural communities on relevant information and knowledge. He shared that in 2007 the Haryana government started a contract farming project and organic farming project. In conversation with the farmers, he got to know that they are unaware about the market. So, it was decided that the prices will be communicated to them through SMS so that they can sell their crops. It was a huge success.

In November 2010 Kissan Sanchar was launched. He worked with Dr. Geeta Malhotra when READ was formed, as he wanted to connect with the farmers associated with READ so that the farmers can get the necessary information and accordingly they can take decisions. In 2022, Kisan Sanchar received National CSR award for their tremendous work.

Reaching the unreached through READ model

Mr. R S Dalal, Former Director General of Police, Haryana talked about the Role of libraries in transforming rural communities. The session started with the movie presentation of the Haveli (READ India, Mehandipur center) donated by Mr. R S Dalal. He also shared how the association with READ India started in the year 2014. The Haveli is now known by the name of Library in the community.



At READ India Mehandipur Library, the community children are engaged in sports- football. Mr. Dalal shared how sports is helping in engaging the community with Library. Through READ India in Jhajjar, an ambiance of sensitivity towards nature, cleanliness, and willingness to learn and grow is observed in the community.





Ms. Sohini Bhattacharya, Trustee READ India, talked about women safety and self- dignity, the prime responsibility of the society as a whole. She further elaborated on the importance of education for the girl child. Ms. Sohini addressed why is women's safety important especially while going to the workplace. Ms Bhattacharya shared a few real-time stories on how the community people can take the initiative of bringing a change in their village. The two stories gave ideas as follows:

1. Safety Audit in a village
 2. Bus arrangement / proper transport
- How the above two can make a difference in the lives of the community members.

She also suggested how one can ask the government for the necessities -

- Street lights
- Transportation
- Legal system
- Women decision making

In the end, she shared the role of men/ boys in respecting the women.

Collaborations and Partnerships for effective use of libraries

While chairing the Panel discussion, **Mr. Jay Vikram Bakshi** spoke about READ India's growth with support of the Corporates contribution. He recalled the CSR initiative supported by Walmart at Geejgarh. In 2012, Walmart extended its support for construction of Training Hall and provided 150 Electronic Machines.

In the coming time, Corporates & NGOs shall collaborate & spend the remaining funds for development. It's time that READ India centers must be stronger. Centers shall look for local partnership, make local connections, expertise are available locally. Networking is very important. The products made by rural women at READ Centres should be marketed within 2-3 days. Mr. Bakshi added that the product quality is also important.

READ India wants to spread support to more new locations based on requirement and connect with local markets for sustainability.





Mr. Ajay from Avery Dennison introduced himself and gave a brief introduction of his company. He initiated by saying, “Saksham Mahila se hi Saksham desh banta hai”. READ India is doing a great job. He added, if a cooperate is running a business they cannot run without the surroundings itself. He mentioned the visit to READ India Community Library and Resource Centre, Jewar, U.P., on 24th February 2023. He appreciated the positive change READ India has brought in the community in less than a year.

He emphasized on history of Corporate Social Responsibility in India and change in regulations after 2013. NGO & Corporate together can promote more growth of the social development. READ India has changed the environment of the village. Many rural women have already initiated their own business post skill training. He added, corporate’s role is to support the NGO Partner. READ India is a partner, I would like to recommend everywhere.

Dr. Geeta Malhotra shared experience of her first visit to Muradgarhi, Jewar, U.P. She mentioned that Avery Dennison is the First Corporate who established its plant in Muradgarhi Village. Her first visit was to a Govt. Middle school at the village. The Principal shared that they do not have a library in the school; and the Principal provided his personal 20 books in the school for reading. Later, she held discussion with 20 rural women who shared their wish to contribute to the family.

Proposals focusing on key interventions such as Education, ICT and Livelihood are submitted to Cooperates. Over 10+ cooperates collaborating with READ India are now extending their support for community development. Dr. Geeta added that tomorrow, Community will write the proposal & submit to cooperates through us.

Mr. Amitabh Singhal, Founder/Director Internet & Telecom Policy & Regulations, Delhi, emphasized on the role of Cooperate, CSR and its key areas & interventions. He highlighted the initiative promoted by TATA of giving back to the society.



Role of libraries in the changing times keeping community at the first place and providing access to needed resources



Dr. Neeza Singh, T S Central State Library, Chandigarh, addressed about the role of libraries in engaging communities. She started with the presentation on public libraries, and how do they function. Library is – Of the community; By the community; For the community.

She talked about engaging children, youth/adult and women in the library. Kids are important part of library and their participation is important. Parents also need to engage along with their kids and invest time in libraries. Kids make their own books, different plays are conducted by children, storytelling sessions, confidence building workshops, interschool competition, festival celebration, orientation program, Dental checkup program and impromptu quiz are conducted for children.

She further explained about the involvement of youth/adults. There are various motivational sessions conducted for them, competitions, health talks, cultural programs, open mic sessions, Plays, parenting sessions, Tele medical sessions, awareness sessions and Annual prize distribution is organized to mark their contribution in the libraries. The role of women in libraries is also of great importance. Cookery classes, Art and craft, Mother's Day event, Honoring events, Yoga classes, and a reserved comfortable space for senior citizens is also provided. Concept of Digital library for senior citizens has also been initiated.

There is a separate section for Authors and differently abled in the library. She concluded her presentation by explaining how they are supporting transgenders by organizing awareness programs and also providing support to Nari Niketan, juvenile homes, slum areas and also promoting government initiatives.





Ms. Neeti Saxena, from British Council Library spoke about how an individual is important for the functioning of a library. We (people) make the change in the community. Library is about community engagement. She emphasized on working with children and age is no limit. In 1998-99 discussion on the idea of children library was initiated. Library is a place where we teach children through stories, reading etc. Concept of digital learning launched in 2019 in 5 countries, but now it has

been expanded in 40 countries and there are more than 1 lakh users now. That is what one need is connectivity.

Ms. Kalpana Dasgupta, Trustee READ India shared her views on why libraries are important. Library is the backbone of education and READ. Beneficiaries, their siblings, parents and family depend on libraries. It is completely need based, we have to diversify library collection and the thought process that goes in developing these libraries.



Preparing library and the services, understanding the requirement, preparing people of that community for library. Prints, books and digital readings all must be put together to make a library function, no assumptions will work. Indian National Library is the only library in the world that has a children section. She concluded by saying that we need to make sure that every library has a children's section, it is important to catch them young.



The event concluded with the award distribution to the Saksham Mahilas: a journey worth recognition and sharing of their success stories.

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE EVENT





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