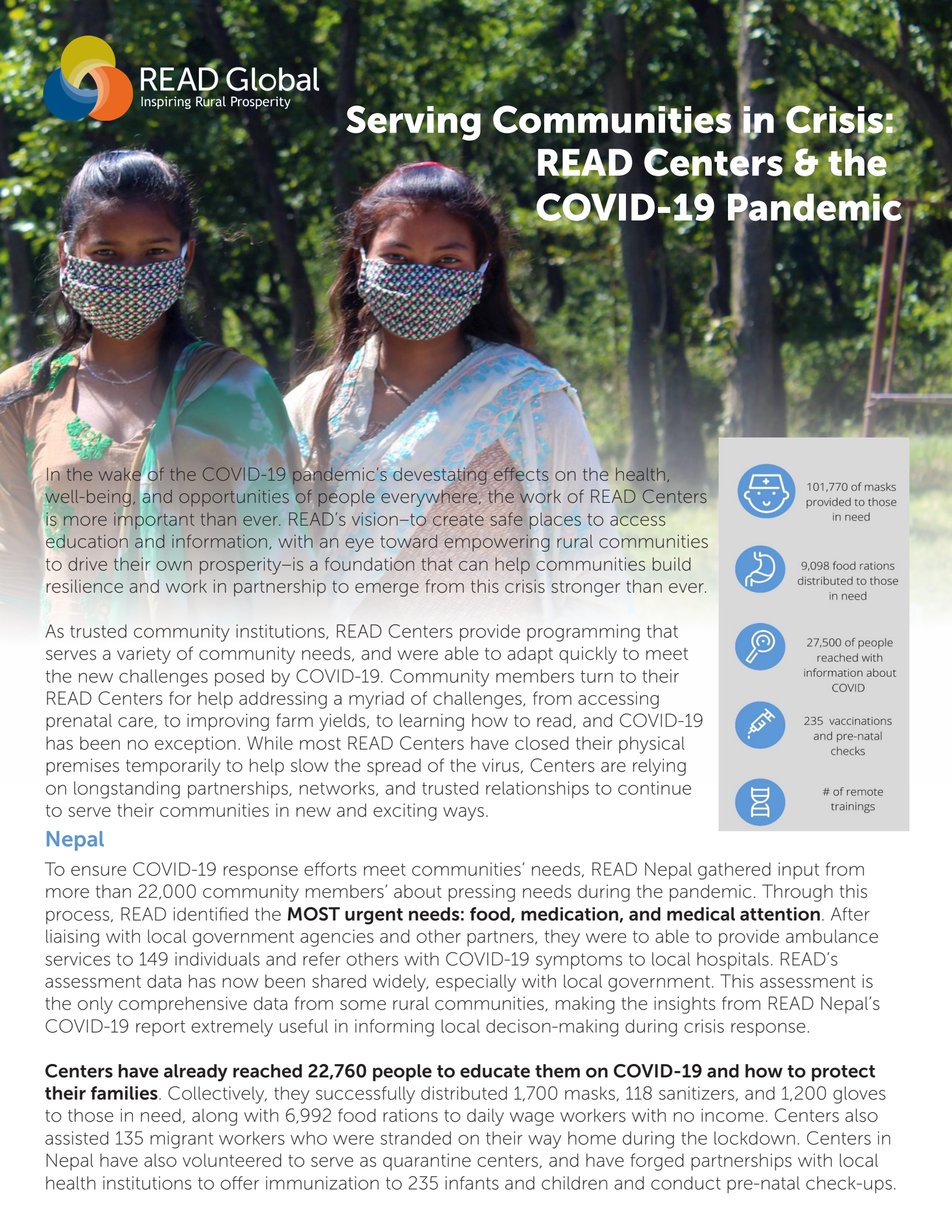


Serving Communities in Crisis: READ Centers & the COVID-19 Pandemic



In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic's devastating effects on the health, well-being, and opportunities of people everywhere, the work of READ Centers is more important than ever. READ's vision—to create safe places to access education and information, with an eye toward empowering rural communities to drive their own prosperity—is a foundation that can help communities build resilience and work in partnership to emerge from this crisis stronger than ever.

As trusted community institutions, READ Centers provide programming that serves a variety of community needs, and were able to adapt quickly to meet the new challenges posed by COVID-19. Community members turn to their READ Centers for help addressing a myriad of challenges, from accessing prenatal care, to improving farm yields, to learning how to read, and COVID-19 has been no exception. While most READ Centers have closed their physical premises temporarily to help slow the spread of the virus, Centers are relying on longstanding partnerships, networks, and trusted relationships to continue to serve their communities in new and exciting ways.

Nepal

To ensure COVID-19 response efforts meet communities' needs, READ Nepal gathered input from more than 22,000 community members' about pressing needs during the pandemic. Through this process, READ identified the **MOST urgent needs: food, medication, and medical attention**. After liaising with local government agencies and other partners, they were able to provide ambulance services to 149 individuals and refer others with COVID-19 symptoms to local hospitals. READ's assessment data has now been shared widely, especially with local government. This assessment is the only comprehensive data from some rural communities, making the insights from READ Nepal's COVID-19 report extremely useful in informing local decision-making during crisis response.

Centers have already reached 22,760 people to educate them on COVID-19 and how to protect their families. Collectively, they successfully distributed 1,700 masks, 118 sanitizers, and 1,200 gloves to those in need, along with 6,992 food rations to daily wage workers with no income. Centers also assisted 135 migrant workers who were stranded on their way home during the lockdown. Centers in Nepal have also volunteered to serve as quarantine centers, and have forged partnerships with local health institutions to offer immunization to 235 infants and children and conduct pre-natal check-ups.



101,770 of masks provided to those in need



9,098 food rations distributed to those in need



27,500 of people reached with information about COVID



235 vaccinations and pre-natal checks



of remote trainings

India

Across India, where smart phone penetration is relatively high, READ India began to offer its regular trainings remotely within weeks of the pandemic's rise; **they have already reached over 4,700 people with remote training**. While READ India Centers hope to re-open for in-person training in small groups soon, they plan to continue to offer remote learning possibilities to expand their reach to those that are not able to visit Centers.

READ India distributed over 2,100 packets of essential food and 16,490 hygiene kits. They have reached over 2,200 people with information about protecting their mental and physical health during the pandemic.

Leveraging a key strength of our network in India, the stitching and sewing groups that were previously organized through READ Centers pivoted to making face masks and PPE at the behest of READ India, employing women artisans across many states of India. As READ India continues to help women artisans adapt their trade in light of the pandemic, they enhanced their support by organizing remote trainings about social media marketing to help trainees build a market for their goods while physical sales opportunities are limited, and to expand sales to a broader base of customers.



Bhutan

Our teams continue to bring books and learning material to children who are out of schools and adults through a newly organized mobile library program. They reach their communities through social media outreach, providing free online content and fun educational activities for kids and their families - such as book reviews, storytime videos, and more. READ Bhutan is collaborating closely with local schools to plan activities at READ Centers in small, socially-distanced groups, in the event that schools do not reopen soon.

The Khotakpa READ Center actively broadcasts their own children's educational content as well as content produced by the Ministry of Education, reaching over 2,500 rural villagers regularly. These public service announcements are often the only way rural communities receive official information that is vital during crisis.

Next Steps

As READ and its network of 107 READ Centers adjust to a new normal, we are preparing for reopening, identifying creative ways to continue engaging the community in smaller, socially distanced groups, while continuing to offer core programs in new ways. In the coming months, Centers will emphasize programs related to health and hygiene, educational activities for children and youth, literacy (adult, digital and financial), economic empowerment, and agricultural support. **Centers will also place a renewed emphasis on programs to address gender-based violence and access to mental health resources.**

Through this crisis, we are raising funds to support new program ideas to be able to reach more communities and will need your help more than ever. New COVID-19 response programs include:

- Expanded mobile libraries and other outreach activities
- Information hotlines in partnership with the government to answer COVID-19 and related queries
- Opening washing and sanitation stations at READ Centers in communities where unavailable
- Radio stations to increase broadcasting of educational content & expansion of remote offerings
- Supplying emergency food and essential items for those in need