

READ Global awarded major grant

\$3 million grant to fund libraries across the world

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With the help of a \$3 million dollar grant from the Global Development Program of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Incline's READ Global plans to double the number of world-wide libraries it helps create.

"For us it's a real statement of faith," said Antonia Neubauer, READ Global founder. "We are just blown away."

READ, which stands for rural education and development, has created 44 libraries in Nepal and India since its inception in 1991. With this new grant, the program hopes to double that number, serve three more countries and quadruple the number of people impacted by the program. READ Global takes a "bottoms up" approach to foreign aid by encouraging communities to come to them to initiate the project. The community must also submit a viable concept for an income-generating business to sustain the library.

But a library isn't just a library to some of these communities, Neubauer said. Often they become an economic and social hub of the community. "We're talking about something so much bigger," Neubauer said. "Its really development and totally sustainable development."

The idea for READ began in the late 1980s when Neubauer was on a trip in Nepal and her Nepali guide said the one thing he wished for most was a library. To date, READ has assisted in the establishment of 44 libraries in Nepal and is working on two more in India.

The program's goal is to create a library that the village can sustain, instead of one that needs to be bolstered by constant donations. "Sometimes instead of empowering communities, donations emasculates them," Neubauer said. "It's not a hand out to the villagers."

In addition to coming to READ with a proposal, villagers must also provide the land and at least 20 percent of the start-up costs. Each library costs about \$54,000, Neubauer said.

In one village, she said, a man donated his former home; in another an illiterate woman gave land so her grandchildren could learn to read.

Each library reflects its particular community, but all include a collection of between 3,000 and 5,000 books and periodicals written in the native language(s), an adult reading area, a women's section, space for teens and young adults, a multimedia center with computers and Internet access and a children's room with educational books, games and toys.

This is the second honor bestowed on READ by the Gates Foundation, which gave the \$1 million Access to Learning Award to READ Nepal in 2006.