



HONG KONG

Room to Read — Transforming lives through the power of books



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In Hong Kong, children of low-income, minority families often face learning challenges due to low reading and writing proficiency in Cantonese. The results have long-term effect on the children's ability to shape a better future for themselves.

Room to Read and the Julius Baer Foundation are working to transform the lives of thousands of children by developing and providing bilingual children's books, so that they can build foundational literacy skills. Written in Cantonese and their native

tongue, the books present a first reading experience free from language barriers.

The bilingual books are designed and created by local authors and illustrators from the selected migrant communities and backgrounds. The collection represents a diverse range of stories, with heartfelt and powerful statements of children from minority communities living in Hong Kong. Mirroring the lives of children from minority backgrounds, these books bolster their confidence while developing their reading habit, helping them unfold their full potential in education and society.

Quick facts

- China, Hong Kong
- Project support: 2022–2024
- Grant amount: CHF 100,000 per year
- Developing bilingual children's books through which immigrant children feel represented and enticed to read.
- Goal: Children from low-income minority communities will develop reading habits which will give them the foundational skills to succeed in school and beyond.

From insufficient literacy ...

Children from low-income, minority communities often lack reading materials to practice reading and build sufficient literacy skills in Cantonese. As a result, many fall behind, unable to pursue higher education and improve social mobility.



... to academic and social proficiency.

With bilingual children's books mirroring the life stories of young learners from migrant families, the children's literacy and confidence level is improved, allowing them to unfold their potential academically and socially.





“As a migrant worker in Hong Kong who has overcome many challenges and a difficult start in life to get to where she is today, I hope to use my own story to connect with migrant children and inspire them to empower themselves by creating a safe space for self-love, resilience, courage, and the confidence to take root and grow.”

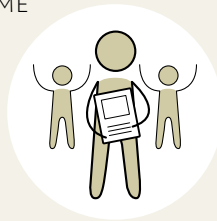
Eny Bawse, Author of Room to Read Storybook

OUTPUT



20 bilingual books are being developed, featuring stories in Cantonese and Hindi, Urdu or Filipino. Ten books feature original stories, ten are adaptations from Room to Read’s international collection.

OUTCOME



Over **2,000 children** from low-income, minority backgrounds will have greater access to high quality books in their homes, that can be used to engage with parents, caregivers and community members.

HIGHLIGHT



In the **Writers and Illustrators workshop**, local creators from Hong Kong and those with migrant backgrounds gathered to jointly create powerful stories with high quality illustrations that they wished they had as a child.

Connecting communities through children’s stories

- In high-income communities, every child has an average of 13 books; in high-poverty communities there is one book for every 300 children.
- Hong Kong has one of the top five public education programs worldwide. Yet, children from low income, minority backgrounds face learning challenges due to language barriers, which exclude them from life progression.
- While Hong Kong’s main language, Cantonese, is spoken by 88% of the population, the large majority of children from non-Cantonese speaking families cannot speak the language.
- According to a recent Room to Read research, two thirds of children from minority families do not read by themselves on a weekly basis. 20% have reported to never read by themselves. 80% of parents have rarely or only occasionally read to/with their children.
- Room to Read has identified three initial target groups for their books: children from Hindi-, Urdu- and Filipino-speaking communities.
- The project also aims to raise cultural awareness amongst the established Chinese population by making the books available to their children too.
- Beyond connecting through the stories, the project further aims to bridge the gap between native and migrant communities through in-person events, such as the creators’ workshops, book distributions, and read-aloud events.

About Room to Read

Room to Read is a global non-profit organization that designs and implements literacy and girls’ education programmes around the world to improve access to quality education for children in marginalised communities. Room to Read has benefited more than 39 million children and has worked in 23 countries to help young learners unlock their full potential through education.



More information about Room to Read and their project in Hong Kong: roomtoread.org

Do you feel inspired by the Room to Read project and would like to support it?

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us! foundation@juliusbaer.com



Learn more about our mission and our projects on the Wealth Inequality Initiative platform.

Julius Baer Foundation

Established in 1965 by Walter J. Bär (1895–1970), the grant Foundation of Bank Julius Baer is focused on reducing wealth inequality. It convenes leading thinkers and actors on the topic and supports projects around the globe where the privileged and disadvantaged work together towards a world of equal opportunities.

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