

## United World Schools USA

### Capacity Statement for Inclusive Programming: Gender Equality and Gender Equity

#### Introduction

United World Schools (UWS) has implemented low-cost primary education for out-of-school children (OOSC) in **remote and marginalized communities** in South and Southeast Asia since 2008. Starting with Cambodia in 2008, field operations extended to Myanmar and Nepal in 2013 and 2015, respectively. To date, we have built and operated a total of 280 schools providing access to education for 48,000+ children across Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, and Madagascar. We operate in communities who have historically been left behind, recognizing that the **hardest to reach children** often face multiple layers of exclusion due to factors such as gender, disability, poverty, ethnicity, religion and language.

As part of the **UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize (2020)**, UNESCO's expert judges praised UWS' inclusion of children from ethnic minority groups who have been chronically excluded across the world by curriculums taught in the national majority language. The employment of local people to teach an innovative hybrid model in local and national languages helps to ensure the inclusion of all children.

UWS has ambitious plans to support **250,000 girls and boys by 2030** to continue our commitment to improve education for all and using the vehicle of education to break the cycle of poverty.

#### Our Theory of Change

We have developed a model of educational provision that is **robust, sustainable and scalable**. Our **Theory of Change (ToC)** strives to achieve the **long-term impact** where children from the world's poorest communities have better opportunities and brighter futures. We do this by ensuring all our programs achieve **three primary impacts**. Firstly, communities gain structures, increased capacity and skills to effectively govern schools, which in turn, enables them to support the provision of quality, inclusive education. Secondly, quality education enables children to gain literacy and numeracy skills and develop improved life and social skills. Thirdly, children, including the most vulnerable, attend school regularly and complete primary level education.

**Three secondary impacts** form the foundation of our partnerships with communities and governments. Through this work, we aim for lasting social change in communities by improving health and livelihoods and reducing inequalities. We strive to influence national education systems through our policies, practices and training, and use our network of legacy schools to leave a lasting asset to the sector.

**Inclusive Education: teaching the unreached by including the excluded** Inclusion is at the core of UWS' mission to transform the lives of children through education. This is embedded in our **Inclusive Education Global Policy, 2020**.<sup>1</sup> We believe that all children, including the most marginalized, should have access to quality, inclusive education. To achieve this, we work in some of the world's poorest regions, operating in remote communities to provide previously OOS children with access to primary education. We work in areas where children have little or no access to a government education and where the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unitedworldschools.org/Blogs/safeguarding-and-education-policies/our-inclusion-policy>

local community is committed to sending their children to school. We teach the unreached by including the excluded.

### **Gender Sensitive Programming: achieving gender equality and equity**

UWS are committed to equitable, gender inclusive education. We believe that addressing gender discrimination and promoting gender equality is critical to achieving our vision of a world where all girls and boys have the chance to go to school. As a result, our programs seek to challenge the root causes of gender inequality by addressing harmful gender norms, actively engaging girls, boys, women and men in culturally sensitive policy and programs, and integrating gender analysis into our research and projects, among other approaches.

We recognize that 'gender' is not synonymous with girls' education: girls and boys – and individuals with different identities - have different needs and face different barriers. For example, for girls, early marriage is one of several risks, particularly in remote areas with significant ethnic minority populations. In Nepal, an estimated 18% of 20–49-year-old women were married before the age of 15, and 48.5% were married by 18. Girls who are married are 11 times more likely to be out of school. In Cambodia rural poverty intersects with gender, impacting both boys and girls, but in different ways. For boys in Ratanakiri and Mondulakiri Provinces, seasonal harvesting directly links to drops in student attendance; government figures show boys are particularly likely to leave school during the later years of primary education because their families expect them to be breadwinners.

Adopting a holistic approach, our programs ensure that gender related risks such as **harmful gender norms at home and/or in the communities, gender stereotypes in teaching and learning, school-related gender-based violence, drop-out due to early marriage or pregnancy, and inadequate WASH facilities that support menstrual hygiene practices**, are addressed. Policy frameworks (e.g., Child Protection Policy) and integration of specific program design (WASH facilities including gender segregated toilets) and community agreements to send girls and boys to school are core program approaches to promote girls' education. The creation of **Girls' Club** is also an important activity integrated in many of our projects, a model which provides a safe space for girls to learn about the importance of schooling and education, menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and early marriage, for example. The Clubs also provide an important forum to promote girls' rights and voices within communities, providing a safe space to share experiences and build confidence.

Our *Removing Barriers to Girls Entering Education in UWS-Supported Communities in Nepal* (2019/20), supported by the British and Foreign School Society (BFSS), provides a successful example of how UWS works to directly increase the number of girls attending school whilst also working towards changing gender norms which recognized the importance of educating the girls in supported communities. The project's successes led to 150 - 200 girls achieving average monthly attendance levels of 70%+ and 80%+ retention rate for girls in the program across one year. Among the BFSS supported students, 91% students were able to return to regular schooling thus far i.e., have been 'retained' for the new academic year with 100 parents agreeing to continue to send their daughters to school. In 2016, UWS partnered with the *Educate A Child Program (EAC) of Education Above All* on a 3-year project to provide access to education for 30,000+ OOSC in Nepal, Cambodia, and Myanmar.

By the end of the project (December 2019), UWS had enrolled 27,923 OOSC into education across 134 new schools and established 47 Community Learning Sites across the three countries. Reflecting the program objective to provide access to education to both boys and

girls, there was almost total gender parity, with 0.99 girls in attendance for every boy, with very promising attendance rates, averaging 94% attendance by the close of the month.

The achievements and lessons learned from the above EAC project has informed a second EAC supported program which UWS is currently being implemented. The EAC three-year (2020/2023), US\$1 million program,<sup>2</sup> which aims to increase attendance and retention of 5,200 girls and boys at risk of dropout in **Cambodia, Nepal and Myanmar**. Close monitoring and targeting by School Retention Teams and Education Officers help to keep those at particular risk stay in school.

### **Supporting the most at risk**

The EAC project also addresses the specific needs of girls aged 11+ through specific targeted approaches. Girls and boys from families **living in extreme poverty** face additional barriers to access education. Girls are especially impacted through pressure to perform onerous household tasks/look after younger siblings, although boys are also required to undertake paid work to supplement the family income. The project also addresses **stigmas and taboos associated with menstruation** that lead to a range of exclusionary practices and beliefs that impact girls' school attendance. Poor private WASH facilities, lack of education and limited access to menstrual hygiene products resulting in stigma and exclusion have been one of the key reasons cited by older girls for missing school every month. Menstrual hygiene education is, therefore, a key project component and is delivered by appropriately trained Education Officers alongside access to menstrual hygiene products. In Nepal, 'Mother Meetings' between mothers and **School Support Committees** help to improve knowledge of key factors that directly impact girls' school attendance. The **physical safety of girls on the journey to and from school** can also be a major barrier to regular school attendance leading to poor academic performance and/or drop out. A combination of distance, geography (dense forestation, mountainous terrain) and climatic risks (annual monsoon floods) are significant barriers to school attendance for girls in all three countries. There is additional risk to the physical safety of girls: UWS commissioned research (Nepal, December 2019) has shown that not only are girls at risk of sexual assault on the journey to and from school, but this risk often continues into the school premises and classrooms. School Retention Teams monitor school attendance of girls and identify and support those at additional risk of dropping out for reasons of safety and protection.

Finally, UWS is excited to have secured recent FCDO support through the UK Aid Match funding vehicle for our [Happily Ever Smarter](#) campaign (2021-2024) and Girls Empowerment campaign (2023-2025). These campaigns will enable UWS to strengthen access to education in **Nepal** to 8,000 girls in 120 remote and rural communities using contextually and culturally appropriate curriculum using gender responsive pedagogy and train 143 local Community Teachers to deliver an inclusive, quality education.

### **Partnerships for Sustainability: working together with national and local stakeholders**

The alignment of our programs with the strategies of local and national government is central to the UWS model to guarantee sustainability and good development practice. Our model ensures that, over a period of 5-7 years, national governments take increasing financial and operational responsibility for UWS schools, eventually fully transitioning all schools onto government control. Our goal is to create a culture of inclusive education that is sustained in the long term after UWS exits, whereby our schools are encouraged to remain as part of our network as 'Legacy Schools'. Our Legacy Schools create a community of practice, enabling

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<sup>2</sup> The project titled *Project Targeting 5,000+ Children at Risk of Dropping Out of School in Cambodia, Myanmar, and Nepal* and is being implemented with 50% co-funding from Educate a Child (EAC), a program the Education Above All Foundation.

schools to share ideas, resources and best practice to ensure the continuity of quality, inclusive education. For example, in **Myanmar**, UWS schools move through a seven-year 'nationalization' process, receiving increasing government support over several years.

### **Governance and Management Capacity: ensuring quality education**

Consistent with the recent growth of our operations, we have invested in our team across all three countries of operation as well as in our Head Office. Within our **total global cadre of 615** staff comprising 556 and 59 at country and Head Office, respectively, we ensure there is effective **senior strategic leadership** at both Head Office and in-country level with robust **in country administrative and financial capacity**. A proportionate growth of our implementation and monitoring capabilities ensures effective project delivery. Quality assurance rests with the Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Lead, who is responsible for ensuring that each project includes a comprehensive and suitably resourced and costed MEL component to measure project impact through monitoring, evaluation and end of project learning. The oversight of all country programs rests with the Global Programs Director, providing overall programmatic direction and strategy in line with UWS' goal. These investments mean that we have both the expertise and organizational resources to effectively deliver our current programs whilst also planning for future growth.

### **Safeguarding: keeping girls and boys, and staff safe**

UWS has robust policy and systems in place to safeguard the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of all beneficiaries as well as its staff. Staff, volunteers and partners of UWS are all required to uphold the principles of safeguarding and commit to the implementation of UWS' *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (March 2015). UWS is also an accredited member of the network established by *Keeping Children Safe*, a not-for-profit setting international child safeguarding standards. UWS have designated regional, national and global leaders to ensure that child protection is an organizational priority that is mainstreamed across all aspects of program delivery and organizational functioning. Finally, all data is stored safely and securely, and plans are in place for UWS programs to be accredited by April 2021 with Keeping Children Safe (KCS) Level 1 Certification.

Country office staff, teachers and implementing partners are trained to ensure that a safe and protective environment is created in UWS schools. Students also receive lessons on safeguarding and the role they can play in keeping themselves safe, and action they can take when they feel unsafe. For example, girls and boys are made aware of their rights and learn about 'good touch, bad touch' with an integrated gender lens, developed by the UWS Inclusive Education Working Group. All materials and lessons produced for such classes ensure that gender representation is positive, respectful and highlights the additional risk factors that girls face (UNCRC Article 19).<sup>3</sup> At the wider community level, safeguarding and child protection awareness-raising sessions take place with SSCs along with community workshops.

### **Value for Money: every penny counts**

We ensure value for money (VfM) by using strong financial controls, a school monitoring system for quality assurance and an information management system to ensure accurate monitoring of attendance, interventions and retention.

Using the **4 E's approach** our programs measure **Economy** by optimizing inputs costs through buying school resources and equipment in bulk; **Efficiency** by working with

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

communities to identify all children at risk of not attending school, especially where gender plays a role and implementing specific retention programs for high-risk students; **Effectiveness** by increasing the levels of high quality teacher training and community engagement through our dedicated network of SSCs and EOs. Finally, our programs ensure **Equity** by targeting marginalized groups, targeting girls at greater risk of drop-out throughout their school career, focusing our teacher training on gender and disability inclusion, and by ensuring equal gender representation e.g., nearly 50% of our teachers are women, higher than the national average.

Our success in the area of VfM has been recognized through winning three international awards where we have been identified as providing low-cost, sustainable and effective education outcomes for children and recognized by leading humanitarian education organizations such as UNESCO and WISE.

For more information, visit [www.uwsusa.org](http://www.uwsusa.org).

For UWS' Inclusive Education Policy, visit:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/179N8KYhc2A675cpbJfNSeZrpddy-ZOua/view?usp=sharing>