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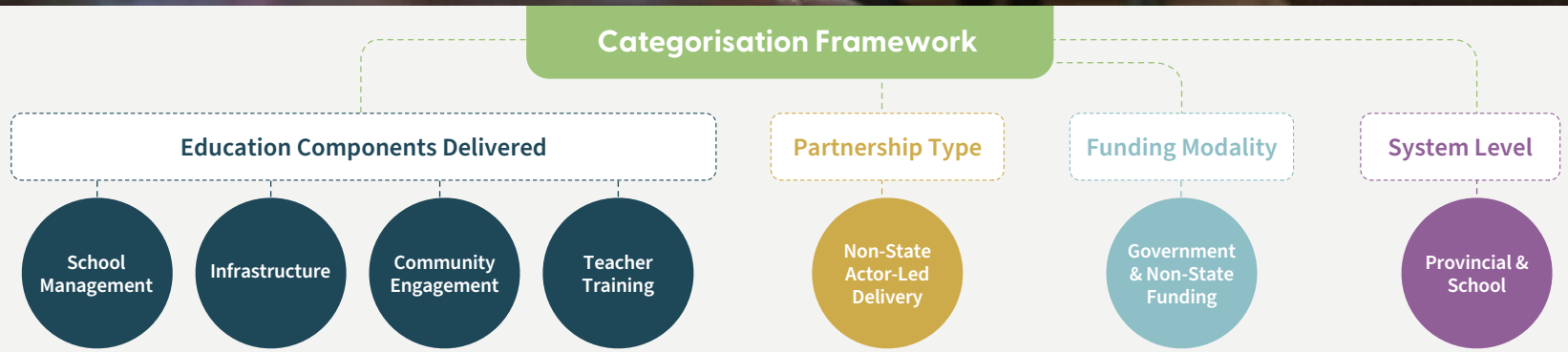
United World Schools, Cambodia



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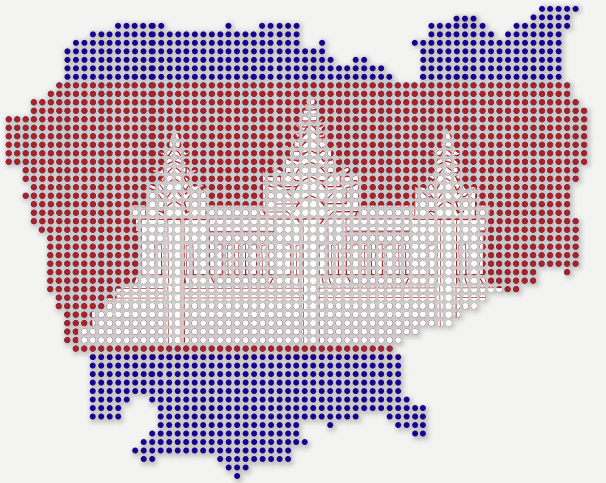
CAMBODIA

~17 million
population



13,681
Number of public schools[2]

94,718
Number of public school teachers[2]

3,277,076
Number of primary students in public schools[2]

Glossary

BOT	Build Operate Transfer
DoEYS	District of Education, Youth and Sports
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
PoEYS	Provincial Department of Education, Youth and Sports
PPP	Public-Private Partnerships
SDR	School Development Report
SMC	School Management Committees
UWS	United World Schools
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Timeline of the Partnership Development

2008 onwards

UWS set up in Cambodia. Need analysis study and discussion with government were conducted.

MoU signed between UWS and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS), allowing for building of schools

2020

Pilot to transition the schools was started

2023

UWS expanded to 250 schools across the 3 countries, reaching 43,000 children.
Of 136 schools in Cambodia, 40 have been transitioned to the government

2024

UWS announced plans to transition 26 schools

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Background of the Partnership

The Ratanakiri Province in northeast Cambodia is home to indigenous communities who speak many different languages. However, these languages have contributed to an adult literacy rate of just 45.9%.[3] The civil war in 1975 caused long-term damage to education; even 30 years later, remote provinces lacked not just school infrastructure but access to education too.

Registered in 2008, United World Schools (UWS) in partnership with the Cambodian government started its school building project. The goal was to provide education to children from marginalised communities in Ratanakiri, in a Build Operate Transfer (BOT)[4] Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. The project was later expanded to Stung Treng, Modulkiri, Koh Kong, Kratie, Preah Vihear and Uddor Meanchey provinces.The role of UWS was to build and run these schools according to national guidelines. While the community provided the land, the government was responsible for providing trained teachers; eventually, the schools aim to become part of the mainstream system.

Over time, based on field surveys to identify community needs, UWS went beyond building schools to grow local, multilingual teaching capacity, giving more children access to engaging learning experiences. It also began hosting community workshops to tackle some of the cultural barriers stopping children from attending school. However, the focus was always on building capacity, not dependency.

So far, of the 136 schools UWS has built in Cambodia, 40 have transitioned into the national education sector. UWS continues to keep track of the emergence of the partnership as well as lessons on how transferring to government ownership can be facilitated more promptly

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Overview of the Programme

Implementation Timeline

2008

Research & need analysis

UWS began research by conducting a need analysis of the remote communities. Governments were initially unaware of the challenges faced by students in remote areas, particularly among minority groups including children with disabilities and ethnic minorities. UWS took the necessary steps to address these needs, collecting evidence to formulate solutions. Engaging with these rural communities, UWS assessed their requirements and sentiments regarding educational opportunities, collaborating with government and local authorities.

2008 - 2020

Building of schools

UWS initially focused on constructing schools, but their work evolved to encompass broader systemic changes. This included training of teachers and conducting community workshops aimed at addressing cultural obstacles hindering children's access to education. With the support of the communities, UWS built 136 schools in Cambodia between 2008 and 2020.

2020 - now

Transitioning schools

Beginning in 2020, UWS has transitioned 40 schools to the government so far: 5 schools transitioned in 2020, 15 schools transitioned in 2021, and 20 schools and 4 dormitories transitioned in 2022. In 2024, UWS has planned to transition 26 schools into the national education system.

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Design of the Programme

UWS addresses the challenge of providing education to remote communities through a sustainable, cost-effective model. It builds community schools in remote villages, ensuring accessibility to education. It actively involves local communities by recruiting and training indigenous teachers and forming parent-led committees to oversee school operations.

1 **Access**	UWS established an agreement with the government to get the community's support to not only build schools, but also provide materials and labour.
2 **Quality**	Due to teacher shortages, UWS recruited community teachers to teach in target schools. It also provides training to enhance teacher capacity.
3 **Inclusion**	UWS proactively embedded inclusive practices across its programmes, with a particular focus on removing barriers for girls to attend school.
4 **System strengthening**	UWS collaborated with the government at all levels to implement its activities such as teacher and school leadership training, material support, and advocacy.
5 **Sustainable community**	UWS strengthened community engagement through meetings and trainings for school management committees (SMCs), mother groups, and girl clubs. It promotes school accountability in strengthening SMC involvement on school operation and budget planning.

UWS created a school management structure to ensure there were enough teachers, and to better support them with teaching. As the government struggled to find teachers willing to teach in remote areas; UWS found recruits from within the communities, especially for children from ethnic minority areas and those that did not know the local language, Khmer. UWS programme operates in line with national education guidelines and policies set by the MoE and is aligned with SDG 4. They work with schools and communities for at least five years, then transition each school to the government; meanwhile, each school is registered in the MoEYs system, that then takes ownership of the programme.

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School Transition Initiative

The school transition initiative began with a timeline of five to seven years, from building to transitioning schools to the government. UWS emphasises on a sustainable transition process.

The primary concern was the lack of engagement with stakeholders, including local government entities and communities, which is crucial for the sustainability of the transitioned schools.[5] However, prior to transition, UWS has engaged the governments at national and sub-national levels to discuss stakeholders' preparation to ensure a smooth and successful transition.

There are two key components in the transition process

1. **The engagement with stakeholders,** acknowledging significance of their involvement in the transition for successful outcomes and ensuring school management committee (SMC) are aware and engage in the process.

2. **The quality of education delivered to schools,** with a 'pre-transition school development report' aimed at assessing and ensuring schools meet a certain standard before transitioning.

The programme is measured through internal monitoring tools, such as the School Development Report (SDR), which evaluates criteria from level 1 to 3. A level 3 indicates that the school meets established standards, allowing for negotiations and transition planning. Post-evaluations and ongoing monitoring of transitioned schools, ensure their continued success.

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UWS' 5-Year Transition Strategy Timeline

Year 1: School opening

- Need analysis study and building partnership with the government
- UWS signs an MoU with Ministry of Education
- UWS begins school construction and WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) installation

Year 2: School development support

- Teaching and learning resource support
- Capacity building for teachers
- Mobilising community and school management committee engagement (SMC) for school support
- Stakeholder mapping (local government and NGO) on school area

Year 3: School development support

- Teaching and learning resource support
- Capacity building for teachers and school leadership team
- Strengthening school leadership (meeting and school planning)
- Community awareness raising
- Local government and stakeholder connection (commune and district meeting)

Year 4: Strengthening on government engagement

- Capacity building for teachers
- Community awareness raising
- School leadership support on school planning
- Strengthening government engagement (meetings and school inspections)

Year 5: School transition

- Coordinating on school exchange visits
- School leadership support and school planning
- Local government engagement on school support and inspection

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Roles & Responsibilities of Partners

United World Schools

UWS identifies the location of the school (in collaboration with the local community and the government), recruits local teachers, and manages the ongoing maintenance of the schools.[6] It also ensures coordination to facilitate the proper functioning of schools, including providing sufficient materials and supporting and training the community teachers. The organisation does not dictate pedagogy; instead, it works within the framework established by the government, focusing on coordinating processes to ensure effective learning support, particularly for students from ethnic minorities.

Provincial Department of Education, Youth and Sport (PoEYs), District of Education, Youth and Sport (DoE), District Administrative and Commune Council

These government bodies provide land and government teaching staff at no cost to work alongside UWS local teachers.[7] After the transition of each school to the government, the District/Commune provides land and PoEYS/DoEYS take care of the local teachers.

Community

UWS establishes an agreement with the community, allowing for mobilisation of resources with local support to build schools. Communities contribute materials and labour, actively promoting schools and enrolling nearby children. UWS then assumes the responsibility of providing education resources and necessary support for school operations. Informed by field evidence, UWS constructs schools to empower rural communities.

Funding Breakdown

UWS primarily contributes to infrastructure construction costs, educational resources, teaching materials and maintenance of schools, and the upgradation of WASH facilities. The government is responsible for providing salary support for teachers in target schools, with the local authority at the commune level allocating funds from the government budget for teacher salaries.

Additionally, it establishes partnerships with schools in affluent countries for ongoing funding support. The ultimate goal is to transition schools to local and government ownership, ensuring a sustainable model that guarantees continued service for generations.[6]

Key Success Factors of the Partnership

Government and community participation

The active collaboration between the government, communities, and UWS, has been the most critical measure of success of this partnership so far. In response to challenges encountered during the school transition phase in the last year of the programme, a new approach has been adopted – it involves engaging stakeholders at different levels, including the community, school, and government (both local and national) levels, from the programme's outset. Government involvement begins at the programme's initiation, with government counterparts now integral to ensuring the successful realisation of the mission and vision. UWS is actively engaging stakeholders to cultivate collaboration among governments, schools, and communities throughout the entire process, thereby ensuring the continued operation of schools post the transition.

Teachers from local communities

Another pivotal factor contributing to the partnership's success has been the recruitment of local community teachers. By employing local teachers who can instruct in both the students' mother tongue and Cambodian, UWS is able to help students, strengthen the partnership with the government and enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of their educational initiatives.

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Impact of the Programme

A significant impact of the programme has been the government and communities collaborating actively with UWS to identify priority areas, select target schools and assume responsibility of school management.

Of the of the 136 schools UWS built in Cambodia, the programme currently operates 96 schools and 40 have already transitioned with plans to transition 26 schools in 2024. The intention is to scale based on successful transitions, maturity of the school's age, and discussions with local authorities, province and district education departments.

> **UWS has a strategic collaboration with national and sub-national governments, employing a system strengthening approach. They share innovations and foster local ownership to ensure sustainability and alignment with UWS' mission to break the cycle of international aid dependency[8]**

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Challenges & Mitigation Measures

- **Clarity on roles and responsibilities**
  At the inception, an agreement was established between the Ministry of Education and UWS when the schools were constructed. This agreement outlined the commitment of the government, particularly at the sub-national levels, to support UWS' initiatives during the period of their involvement with the schools. However, the agreement lacked specificity regarding the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders, leading to an insufficient level of support for the schools.

- **Finding more teachers**
  The primary challenge with the Cambodian government was in funding additional teachers, as they face resource constraints, and they also struggle to find teachers willing to teach in remote areas. Although the government agreed to the schools, the financial commitments became a major hurdle.

- **Transition challenges**
  Challenges arose during the initial four years (of the 5-7 year transition phase) in engagement with stakeholders at various levels, including schools, communities, and government bodies. The transition strategy unfolded in the final year (year five), with the team informing stakeholders about the impending transition and emphasising the need for ownership post-transition, which was not successful.

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Mitigation Measures

- **Hiring local community teachers**
  To address teacher related challenges UWS recruited teachers to support the learning process especially for children from ethnic minority areas and those who do not know Cambodian languages. The local community teachers can teach them in both mother tongue and Cambodian, providing the required support to the students.

- **Alleviating financial hurdles**
  In order to address the financial hurdles, efforts are underway to work closely with the education department and district-level officers to strengthen local government capacity and decentralise responsibilities.

- **Getting the government involved early on**
  To ensure smooth scaling and expansion of the UWS schools, UWS is now engaging the government early on in the process, registering community schoolteachers as government contract staff, and transitioning them to full state teachers for sustained support. This new strategy aims to rectify past shortcomings, particularly the lack of early engagement, by involving stakeholders from the project's inception. The team is currently in the process of designing and implementing this revised approach, drawing insights from both past experiences and best practices to enhance the effectiveness of the school transition initiative.

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Guidance for Governments & Non-state Actors

Get the government on board at the beginning

It is important to ensure the government's active participation all the way through the partnership and that the contracting process includes sign-off from all partners on their roles and responsibilities with regular checkpoints on their progress.

Enable local communities

Local communities must lead and support the programmes to ensure sustained success.

Engage in policy advocacy

This will help create an enabling environment for the scalability of programmes and services and promote deeper understanding of the local context including cultural, economic, and political factors that may affect the programme implementation.

Be prepared to adapt strategies

There will be a need to change and adapt strategies based on the ongoing assessments and feedback from the community and key stakeholders.

Active inclusion

This is crucial starting from the design stage and in the entire process of planning and implementation. Inclusion is often forgotten in education context especially in remote communities and primary schools.

Endnotes

1. “Cambodia Population (Live).” Worldometer. Accessed May 27, 2024. https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/cambodia-population/

2. Public Education Statistics and Indicators 2021-2022 (English) - Public Education Statistics and Indicators 2021-2022 (English) OD Mekong Datahub. Accessed May 27, 2024. https://data.opendevelopmentcambodia.net/library_record/public-education-statistics-and-indicators-2021-2022/resource/062610f5-45c1-4158-a8cf-503ce874224b

3. UWS. “Cambodia - UWS,” July 6, 2023. Accessed May 27, 2024. https://uwsglobal.net/where-wework/cambodia/#:~:text=In%20Ratanakiri%20Province%2C%20which%20is,access%20to%20engaging%20learning%20experiences

4. Build, Operate, Transfer definition: The private partner provides the capital required to build the new facility. The private operator now owns the assets for a period set by contract - sufficient to allow the developer time to recover investment costs through user charges. More details here

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