



# Impact Assessment: Radio Education Programme (Nepal)

July 2020

**United World Schools (UWS) works in some of the world's poorest regions with a mission to give every child access to free education.**

We invest in education by working in partnership with governments, local communities and supporters around the world. This enables us to teach the unreachable. To date, we have supported over 35,000 children across Cambodia, Myanmar and Nepal, empowering them to reach their full potential and break out of poverty. UWS has been working in Nepal since 2015, and now runs 38 schools educating over 4,500 children.

## Adapting to covid-19: radio education programme

Since March, all schools in Nepal have been closed owing to covid-19. At the time of writing, there is no firm indication when schools will reopen.

The government instigated a lockdown in March that only began easing in late June. Cases of covid-19 continue to rise and many UWS schools have been temporarily repurposed as quarantine centres.

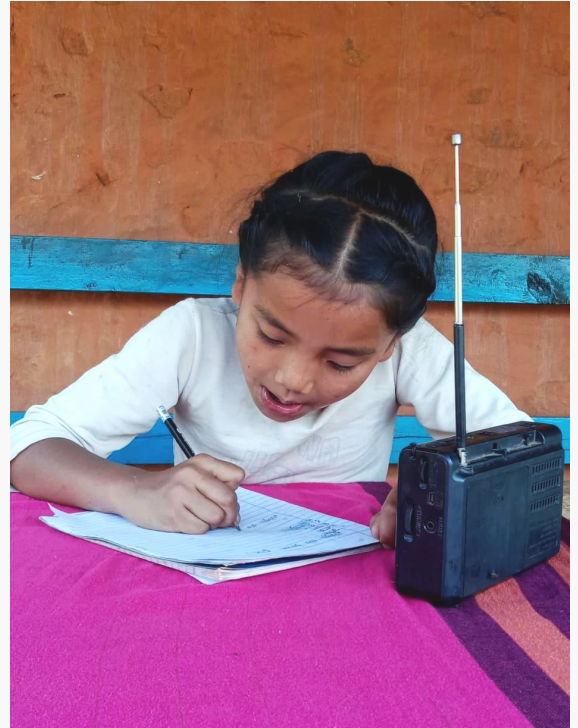
Covid-19 poses a grave risk to education. Months of school closure is leading to severe learning loss. There are also concerns some children will never return to school, especially the most vulnerable. The culture of education in the remote communities served by UWS is new and, as a result, fragile.

To sustain learning in this period, in April, UWS Nepal began a radio education programme - titled 'हाम्रो कक्षा' ('Hamro Kakshya'). Radio broadcast figures suggest around 10,000 children listen to the radio programme daily. The radio programme has reached far beyond UWS' students - ¾ of listeners are not UWS students - serving the wider districts in which UWS operates, and reaching remote areas.

## How does it work?

The radio programme is a daily lesson for the children. It is broadcast through 10 local FM radio stations across the two districts in which UWS operates. It provides learning aligned to the national curriculum, plus prompts for further homework. This might be written work or a science experiment. Topics covered range from story-telling, to everyday science, to history. All lesson scripts are written and recorded by a UWS fellow: young graduates who (under normal circumstances) teach in a UWS school.

Five minutes is dedicated to messages explaining how to maintain positive well-being during covid-19, plus vital awareness information on the virus. This includes advertising that the school handwashing facilities are open for the community to use during this time. UWS has adapted and opened its school handwashing facilities for community use throughout the pandemic.



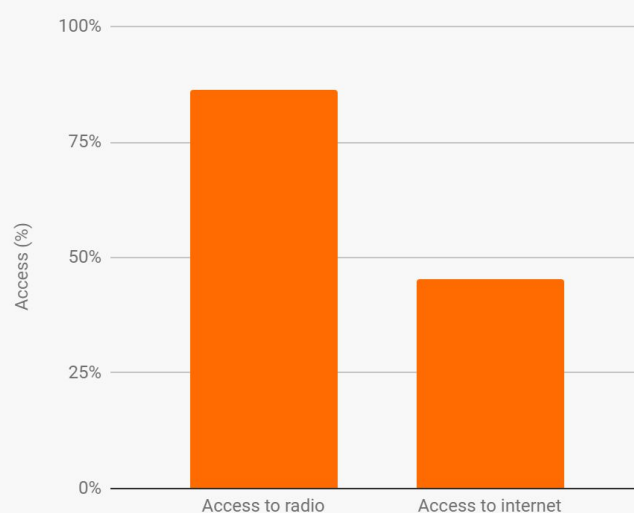
# Assessment Approach and Findings

Initially the radio programme was for 45 minutes per day. However, the pandemic quickly escalated and the prospect of lengthy school closure became apparent. Owing to successful engagement and encouragement from partners and government, UWS decided to invest further in the radio programme. To inform development into this second phase, UWS conducted a beneficiary survey:

- 616 households interviewed - parents/guardians plus their child(ren) - between 8 June and 19 June 2020
- Interviews in 35 communities in the two districts where UWS works (Sankhuwasabha and Gulmi)
- Interviews conducted by UWS community teachers, in line with social distancing regulations, usually lasting 30 minutes
- Interviews comprised a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions

## (i) Access to radio is significantly higher than access to internet in rural Nepal

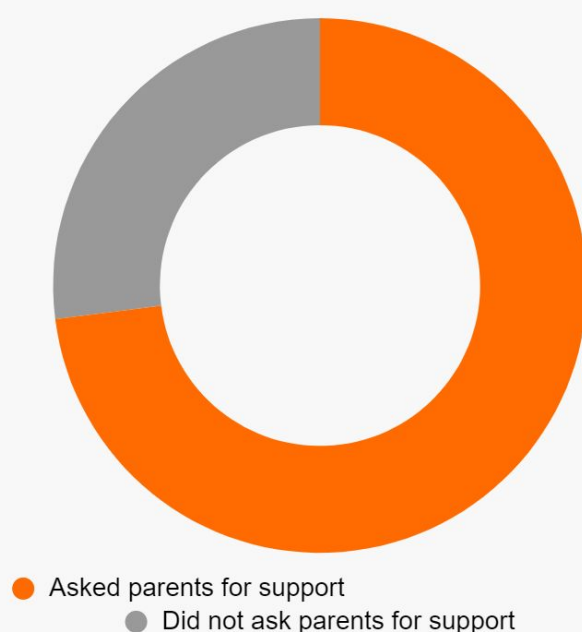
86.4% of those households surveyed reported they listen to the radio. In contrast, fewer than half (45.3%) surveyed have access to the internet. The utilisation of internet-based solutions in the current context would be inequitable. Radio has a far greater reach, and ensures children from some of the poorest backgrounds remain able to access education.



## (ii) Most children understand and engage with the content, but some struggle

72.7% of children surveyed responded that they understand the content broadcast during the radio programme. As an indicator of engagement, the survey asked parent if their children requested support after listening to the programme: 73.4% responded that their child(ren) asked for support. This suggests radio is an effective medium through which to provide education, and the lesson content remained pedagogically effective despite the alternative medium.

However, it is clear some children struggle to gain understanding without the interaction provided by the teacher. Most UWS children are first-generation students, so the learning support parents can offer may be limited. The qualitative analysis of parental answers suggests younger children (grade 1-3) struggle more than older children. As discussed later, UWS is addressing this by delivering other alternative education initiatives.



### **(iii) Radio content should be grade-differentiated and targeted**

Children must expect to receive well-pitched content daily if they are to engage the following day, and so on. In conversations with parents/guardians, it emerged that some younger children (grades 1-3) struggled to engage with the generic 45 minute education programme. They reported the content was sometimes too challenging. Informed by this survey, since late July UWS Nepal moved to a grade-specific 30 minute daily programme, one programme per grade per day (primary grades are 1-8 in Nepal). This differentiation should improve understanding and engagement.

### **(iv) Broadcasts must account for parents' working hours, rather than replicate the school day**

We have changed broadcast times to the morning and evening, around parents' working hours, to improve accessibility. We initially broadcast the programme during normal school hours, to create a sense of familiarity for the children. However, many parents told us they take their mobile/radio to the fields during the day (4 in 5 of the households surveyed are farmers). Many children stay at home, and those who accompanied their parents to the field reported they struggled to engage with the programme in that environment.

Nevertheless, parents suggested a sense of routine is important for children so the new timings will remain consistent.

*"Though schools are closed, we are happy that our children are not deprived of education: they are learning via the radio programme" - parent in Nagidada community*

*"The programmes being broadcast on FM are not only applicable to children but also we as parents are learning new things. My wife and I never went to school, but we have learnt many new things from the radio programme. Not only the children, we also love listening to the radio programme" - parent in Gufa community*

## **Conclusion**

This assessment suggests radio is an effective mechanism through which to deliver alternative equitable education for most children. Education over the radio is clearly not as effective as education provided in a classroom. This is not surprising. Given the restrictions imposed by lockdown and limited internet access, it is a valuable instrument to bridge the gap to school reopening.

To maximise inclusivity, radio should be one part in a suite of interventions. We know circa 14% of households cannot access the radio. We also know a minority of children, mostly younger children, struggle to understand and engage with radio lessons. As lockdown restrictions ease in a community, UWS delivers physical 'takeaway' education or small outdoor classes, in line with social distancing restrictions. This complements learning for children listening to the radio lessons and reaches those who cannot or struggle. Currently, restrictions allow UWS Nepal to operate these additional programmes in 12 out of 38 communities and we will expand this as lockdown eases. Over 500 children have engaged with these programmes so far, 2/3rds of whom have not engaged with the radio programme.

We cannot understand the full impact of covid-19 on learning and drop out until schools return. UWS has developed recovery programmes in all our territories: including identification of vulnerable children, intensive early monitoring of retention rates, and rapid engagement strategies to address drop out. UWS is committed to the aim of 100% retention when schools reopen: our Every Child Counts campaign supports this work. To this end, prevention too is key. Radio is a valuable tool to mitigate learning loss and sustain the routine and culture of education for children and their communities.