GENDER, DISABILITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

For the purpose of this policy:

- 'CRSF' means the Cambodia Rural Students Foundation.

- 'CRST means the Cambodia Rural Students Trust.

This policy outlines the CRSF commitment to ensuring the safety and protection of all children to ensure that all children in its care are safe from harm and abuse regardless of the child's race, religion, indigeneity, disability, age, displacement, caste, gender, gender identity, sexuality, sexual orientation, poverty, class or socio-economic status.

1. COVERAGE

Unless the context otherwise applies, this policy applies to the CRSF Board and its directors, team members, advisors and mentors, the CRST management team and leadership team, all teachers, all CRSF and CRST volunteers, guests and visitors, all CRST students and all children and young people involved in CRST activities.

2. OBJECTIVE

This policy outlines the CRSF commitment to take a cohesive and coordinated approach to gender equality and disability inclusion.

The purpose of the policy is to:

(a) define and communicate clear commitments and consistent messages within CRSF and with others;

(b) continue to strengthen efforts to promote gender equality and disability inclusion in our organisation, increasing CRSF's integrity and credibility amongst donors, partners and allies as a leader in the gender equality space, in both programming and advocacy;

(c) establish commitments for our development and humanitarian programming;

(d) enable us to work as an organisation and with others building on each other strengths, experience and lessons learned; and

(e) promote inclusion, equity, and equality across all levels of our organisation.

3. POLICY

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

Our aim is to reduce inequality within and among countries by empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all, including persons with disabilities.

CRSF puts gender equality and disabled people in the center because we know that we cannot overcome poverty and social injustice until all people have equal rights and opportunities.

CRSF recognises that women and girls and all disabled people are over-represented amongst poor and marginalised people. Addressing this inequality and injustice is a priority for CRSF. We also recognise that these situations will not be addressed successfully unless the attitudes and behaviours of both women and men change. Consequently, we seek to support work that addresses gender and disability inequalities and the contributing attitudes and behaviours, appropriately engage both women and men in the development process and promote gender equality, justice and empowerment throughout the development cycle.

Through this policy, CRSF commits to ensuring that gender equality and disabled people are able to participate as fully as they choose. CRSF seeks to promote equal realisation of dignity and human rights for all genders and ages, and the elimination of poverty and injustice.

CRSF recognises that gender is not binary, and that terms and definitions related to gender and sexuality are diverse and continue to evolve. To facilitate ease of reading within this policy we refer to 'all genders and ages' throughout. This demonstrates our recognition of and ability to work with adults and children and individuals of all sexual orientations, gender identities and/or gender expressions. We recognise that rigid gender norms limit people of all genders and sexual orientations by creating and reinforcing assumptions and systems of privilege (sometimes organised in laws and policies), about their recognition in society and the range of roles and opportunities open to them. These not only limit individuals who identify as girls, boys, women and men as well as identities beyond the binary, but also individuals whose sexual orientations do not conform with dominant norms and expectations of heterosexuality. While rigid gender norms can limit all of us, CRSF also recognises that gender norms and hierarchies are constructed by people and systemically privilege some groups over others. Throughout this policy when reference is made to all genders and ages this includes cisgender and transgender women and girls, men and boys as well as people who identify beyond the binary; and people of all sexual orientations.

4.   **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

Priority will be given to projects that:

(a)   endorse and promote the rights of women and girls;

(b)   endorse and promote the rights of all people with disabilities;

(c)   actively and equitably involve women and disabled persons in determining development objectives, planning activities and assessing results;

(d)   expand women's social and economic opportunities, resulting in improved livelihood security, health outcomes, access to higher education and improved well-being;

(e)   expand disabled persons social and economic opportunities, resulting in improved livelihood security, health outcomes, access to higher education and improved well-being;

(f)   address violence and abuse towards women and disabled persons;

(g)   increase women's and disabled persons roles as decision-makers in family, community, society and organisational governance;

(h)   promote culturally appropriate community-driven responses that challenge cultural values and practices that oppress women, disabled persons (or any other marginalised group); and

(i)   do not marginalise men and boys, but seek their appropriate participation in projects intended to address the situation of women and girls.

5. CRSF'S COMMITMENT

In order to enact these principles, CRSF will fulfil the following commitments and ensure that they are monitored, evaluated and reported on as part of CRSF's responsibility of transparency and accountability.

(a) Incorporate participatory gender and disability inclusion data disaggregated by sex, age, and other relevant diversity factors to inform actions across the program/project cycle.

(b) Engage men and boys in support of gender equality and women's empowerment when in line with programming and/or organizational objectives.

(c) Identify potential programming risks throughout the program/project cycle and take steps to do no harm and mitigate unintended consequences of backlash and gender-based violence, regardless of sectoral focus.

(d) Ensure evaluations and reviews do no harm, are participatory and assess progress towards gender equality and disability inclusion outcomes.

(e) Ensure that we document best practices and challenges, and create mechanisms for cross-learning within communities, within CRSF and with partners.

(f) Ensure all our policies and practices are developed with a gender lens.

(g) Report on gender and diversity balance in all of our governance structures.

(h) Implement targeted strategies to redress any evidence of gender inequality in gender and diversity balance.

(i) Recruit and retain volunteers with a commitment to gender equality; build partner capacity and skills in gender equality and diversity, and ensure all annual operating plans, job descriptions and performance plans reflect CRSF's commitment to gender equality.

(j) Regularly report to program participants, donors and the public on progress on gender equality and disabled persons inclusion in CRSF's work.

(k) Take all measures to prevent and respond to all forms of sexual harassment and violence, and sexual exploitation and abuse of children and vulnerable adults and disabled persons and promote awareness and training, and effective systems for reporting and monitoring.

(l) Ensure external marketing, fundraising, advocacy and communications respect and uphold our commitment to social justice, gender equality and disability inclusion including being respectful, using inclusive and positive language and images and avoiding stereotypes with particular attention to those based on gender and ethnicity.

In order to effectively promote gender equality, girls' rights and disability inclusion, CRSF will:

(a) design, implement, monitor and evaluate quality gender transformative and inclusive development and humanitarian programs and influencing. Implement long-term strategies of social norm change to end injustice, challenge unequal power relations and address the root causes of discrimination;

(b) integrate gender equality and disability inclusion measures that align to and complement the work that we do with our values and behaviours into our business process and the way that we conduct our work. We do not tolerate practices that result in gender-based or disability-based discrimination, exclusion or inequality based on gender or other forms of identity or disability;

(c)   strengthen and build partnerships that promote respect for gender equality, diversity and disability inclusion.

(d)   engage partners in joint approaches to promote gender equality, girls' rights, and disability inclusion;

(e)   strengthen and scale up our efforts to influence decision makers at all levels to embrace gender equality, girls' rights and disability inclusion;

(f)   mobilise and dedicate the appropriate/necessary human, technical and financial resources in line with and to meet our commitments to gender equality, girls' rights and disability inclusion; and

(g)   monitor and evaluate all of our work from the perspective of achieving gender equality, girls' rights, and disability inclusion, in order to improve the quality of our program and influencing work, contribute to continuous learning, provide an evidence base to inform decisions, and ensure accountability to the people we work with and for.

6.   RESPONSIBILITIES

All Board and team members and volunteers, regardless of function and location, are responsible for the implementation of the requirements outlined in this policy.

7.   DEFINITIONS

7.1   Disability

Disability is the interaction between an impairment and barriers in an environment – that is, that it is barriers (physical, attitudinal, systemic, or environmental) which may limit those with an impairment from being fully included in society.

The term "persons with disabilities" is used to apply to all persons with disabilities including those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments that, in interaction with various attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers, hinder the full realisation of their rights as well as their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

7.2   Diversity

Diversity acknowledges that each individual is unique. It means recognising, accepting, celebrating and finding strength in individual differences such as gender, age, nationality, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.

7.3   Empowerment

Empowerment is a strategy to increase girls' agency over their own lives, and their capacity to influence the relationships and social and political conditions that affect them. Lack of power is one of the main barriers that prevent particularly girls and young women from realising their rights. This can be overcome by a holistic and sustainable strategy of empowerment, involving girls, boys, and young people in changing gender norms to the benefit of all. Gender-based empowerment focuses on promoting simultaneous change in: norms, attitudes and behaviours; social and economic resources and safety nets; as well as policy frameworks and budgets. It is a core strategy of any effective work promoting gender equality and inclusion. While empowering girls and young women is key in promoting their rights, it is also essential to engage boys and young men as partners and co-beneficiaries in the realisation of gender equality. Gender norms and stereotypes often privilege boys and young men; however, their behaviours and decision-making are also constrained and shaped by rigid social and cultural expectations. Men and boys can play an important role in overcoming gender inequality and discrimination both as power holders and as beneficiaries of change.

7.4   Exclusion

Exclusion is the process that prevents certain individuals or groups from fulfilling their rights. Exclusion is caused by inequality in the distribution of resources and power, by inequality in the value assigned to different groups, and by the social norms that perpetuate these differences. These causes are interlinked and compound each other. It is most often those that are not valued whose rights are not realised. For example, girls, boys and youth with disabilities are often stigmatised and not valued; schools are not designed to be accessible and teachers are not adequately trained which means that their specific needs are not addressed and subsequently their right to an education is denied.

7.5   Gender Equality

Gender equality means that all persons, regardless of their gender, enjoy the same status in society; have the same entitlements to all human rights; enjoy the same level of respect in the community; can take advantage of the same opportunities to make choices about their lives; and have the same amount of power to shape the outcomes of these choices. Gender equality does not mean that women and men, or girls and boys are the same. Women and men, girls and boys, and individuals with other gender identities have different but related needs and priorities, face different constraints, and enjoy different opportunities. Their relative positions in society are based on standards that, while not fixed, tend to advantage men and boys and disadvantage women and girls. Consequently, they are affected in different ways by policies and programs. A gender equality approach is about understanding these relative differences and intersecting identities, appreciating that they are not rigid and can be changed. It is important to keep these differences and intersecting identities in mind when designing strategies, policies, programs and services. Ultimately, promoting gender equality means transforming the power relations between women and men, girls and boys and individuals with different gender identities in order to create a more just society for all. One part of a strategy to achieve gender equality is gender equity. A gender equity approach is the deliberate process of being fair in order to produce equal and measurable outcomes.

7.6   Gender Identity

Gender identity refers to how an individual feels about their own gender. Individuals may identify as male, female or as something else and their gender identity may or may not be the same as the sex that they were assigned at birth. Everyone has a gender identity and expresses their gender in a unique and personal way.

7.7   Gender Justice

The concept of gender justice underlines the role of duty bearers for the rights of women, men, girls and boys. Gender justice is the ending of inequalities between females and males, which result in women's and girls' subordination to men and boys. It implies that girls and boys, women and men have equal access to and control over resources, the ability to make choices in their lives, as well as access to provisions to redress inequalities, as needed. A commitment to gender justice means taking a position against gender discrimination, exclusion and gender-based violence. It focuses on the responsibility to hold duty bearers accountable to respect, protect and fulfill human rights, including of girls and women.

7.8   Girls' Rights

Girls everywhere face significant barriers to rights simply because they are young and female. To effectively support girls and achieve equality, it is essential to recognise that girls as a cohort represent one of the largest excluded social groups. Yet, as a group they have the potential to achieve collective agency and work together as a movement for change and achieve common strategic interests. Girls are rights holders in their own right and not only a sub group of 'women' or 'children'. CRSF believes that securing the rights of girls is the critical social justice issue of our time, and that girls' rights are human rights.

7.9   Inclusion

Inclusion is about bringing people into a process in a meaningful manner. It is the process of improving

the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society and to fully enjoy their rights. It requires addressing the root causes of exclusion and understanding how intertwined the roots of different forms of exclusion are. Inclusion involves improving the opportunities available to girls, boys, youth, in particular those who are vulnerable and excluded, including children with disabilities, who are excluded on the basis of the social groups they identify with or are associated with, as well as respecting their dignity.

7.10 Intersectionality/Intersecting Identities

People do not fall neatly into single social groups. Each individual can have many identities that impact on how they interact with and are viewed by society. Unpacking these intersecting identities is key to understanding discrimination and exclusion because a person's experience of exclusion is often greater than the sum of all parts. For example, to understand the experience of a girl from a minority ethnic group, we must invest in understanding how these two identities interact, frequently reinforcing each other in creating greater barriers to her rights and perpetuating even greater experiences of discrimination.

7.11 LGBTQI

This includes those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex (LGBTQI) or those who have questions about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Q). The full term – LGBTQI – respects that while some people have a clear sense of 'who and what they are' and are able and comfortable to define their status, many others may be uncertain. In reality, sexual orientation and/or gender identity is a spectrum of identities, characteristics, expressions and behaviours. Please note that while the term LGBTQI is increasingly understood and used in different regions in the world, in many countries other terms may be preferred by LGBTIQ persons to self-identify.

7.12 Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is a continuum that refers to each person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and/or intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender.

7.13 Social Norms

Social norms are a pervasive feature of all our lives. Norms are shared beliefs about what is typical and appropriate behaviour in a group of people, including women, girls, men and boys. Social norms are like informal rules, which also influence (and are influenced by) formal rules such as laws and regulations. Norms shape expectations and attitudes and can sustain and prescribe gender inequality. Around the world, social norms on gender shape the unequal status of women and girls and the expectations of their role in society.

8. SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

8.1 Understanding Barriers to Inclusion

We are committed to identifying and addressing barriers that limit participation, especially for people with disabilities and other marginalised groups. To do this, we:

(a) Consult with affected individuals and groups to understand local barriers.

(b) Use inclusive assessments and discussions to explore how gender, disability, poverty, or location impact access.

(c) Work with local partners who have lived experience and community knowledge.

8.2 Participation in Decision-Making

We ensure all people, especially those often excluded, have a voice in decisions that affect them. We:

(a)   Involve marginalised groups in program design, planning, and review.

(b)   Create inclusive spaces for community input and shared decision-making.

(c)   Partner with local organisations that represent underrepresented voices.

8.3   Monitoring Inclusion and Empowerment

We track how well our work supports inclusion and empowerment. This includes:

(a)   Using indicators that reflect participation, voice, and access.

(b)   Disaggregating data by gender, age, disability, and other factors.

(c)   Seeking regular feedback from communities and adapting our approach accordingly.