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EDUCATION & RESILIENCE: TRANSFORMING SYSTEMS IN ADVERSITY

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With some 80 percent of countries where USAID has programs affected by acute crisis, recovering from crisis, or experiencing smaller-scale upheaval (USAID, 2019), the way USAID designs, implements and monitors programs is evolving. In 2019, USAID released the [USAID Policy Framework](#) (2019), highlighting the critical role strengthening resilience plays in USAID's efforts to help prevent, mitigate, and recover from crises. This new programmatic focus on resilience aims to ensure Agency investments, across all sectors, are not eroded or undermined in the face of complex crises, conflicts, and natural disasters. In response to this shift, USAID's Office of Education published [Transforming Systems in Times of Adversity: Education and Resilience White Paper](#) (Shah, 2019). This Policy Brief provides a summary of the evidence and recommendations for applying resilience to USAID's work in the education sector.

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

USAID defines resilience as the ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth (USAID, 2012).

Programming for resilience focuses on identifying, supporting, and enhancing a range of capacities, assets, networks, and resources, otherwise known as "resilience capacities," that support well-being outcomes, including learning, in times of adversity. It is an inherently strengths-based approach and seeks to capitalize on opportunities for innovation, adaptation, and existing capacities already present in contexts of adversity.

A resilient education system ideally continues to provide safe, equitable access to quality education services that help reinforce or grow literacy, math, or social and emotional skills of learners in the face of conflict or crisis.

WHY RESILIENCE MATTERS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR?

The imperative for resilience programming at USAID comes from the human and financial cost of conflicts and crises: millions of deaths, tens of millions of people affected, and recurrent US Government investments of tens and sometimes hundreds of millions of dollars.

An analysis of FY18 budget data show that in the education sector, USAID makes 50% of our basic education investments and 25% of our higher education investments in countries affected by conflict and crisis. To prevent the erosion of gains made in learning and education access, quality, equity and safety over time, countries must strengthen the resilience of the education system to shocks and stresses at all levels. Applying a resilience approach to education programming in a context affected by conflicts or crises is a critical step in advancing the journey to self-reliance.

RESILIENT EDUCATION SYSTEMS ACHIEVE USAID EDUCATION POLICY AND STRATEGY GOALS

Building and supporting the resilience of the education sector is vital to ensuring that USAID can achieve its policy priorities and ensure that all children have access to safe, equitable, and quality education in times of adversity.

The [U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education](#) (2018) notes that given the dynamic and fluid nature of conflict and crisis-affected environments, U.S. Government education programs will collaborate to respond to short-term educational needs while also working with stakeholders from partner countries to address long-term, systemic reforms needed to mitigate future crises and build individual, community, and institutional resilience.

The [USAID Education Policy](#) (2018) notes that in order to improve learning and education outcomes, education systems in partner countries must have the capacity to withstand shocks and stresses. It recognizes education as a critical tool to build resilience and reduce radicalization in times of conflict and crisis.

EDUCATION SERVES A FOUNDATIONAL ROLE IN STRENGTHENING THE RESILIENCE OF LEARNERS, SCHOOLS, COMMUNITIES, AND INSTITUTIONS

When education is provisioned in a way that is risk-informed, conflict-sensitive, and equitable, it strengthens resilience at multiple levels:

1. Education can support and **strengthen social capital**, an important safety net for individuals and households:
 - Education may strengthen trust, tolerance, and empathy between and among various communities, improving levels of civic engagement, and increasing civic skills for citizens to support inclusive institutions (Reyes 2013; Rose and Greeley 2006; Smith et al. 2011; INEE 2012; Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2015; World Bank, 2018b).
 - Opportunities within and outside the classroom for intra- and inter-group dialogue and cooperation—explicitly in teaching and learning approaches and implicitly through participation in school-based governance and decision-making processes—are important mechanisms for strengthening relationships and trust within communities (Shah et al. 2016).
2. Completing a primary or secondary education **raises the human capital of individuals**, a critical foundation for resilient people, households, and communities.

- Educated populations, particularly those with a secondary level education and beyond, are better able to adapt or transform their behaviors and livelihoods because they have higher capital assets, better earnings, improved productivity, and greater opportunities for paid employment (UNICEF 2015; World Bank 2018b, 2018a).
 - Higher levels of education of mothers has a strong influence on the likelihood of children being fully vaccinated and on reductions in child mortality and growth stunting (Forshaw et al. 2017; Fernald et al. 2012).
 - Households with more educated parents, have been found to be more likely to keep their children in school in the midst of adversity (Sabates, Hossain, and Lewin 2010; USAID 2018b).
3. **Disaster risk education** plays a critical role in strengthening community knowledge about responding to natural disasters and climate change, health emergencies, and future armed conflict.
 4. Education can strengthen the **self-efficacy, aspirations, and confidence of individuals**, also known as social and emotional or soft skills, reducing the likelihood of negative coping strategies and enhancing the abilities of individuals to recover from shocks (USAID 2018b).
 5. Education can improve **women's empowerment and gender equality**, which are strong predictors of whether households can escape and remain out of poverty in the face of shocks and stressor (USAID 2018b).

USAID'S EDUCATION SECTOR CAN IMPROVE THE REACH, ACCEPTABILITY, AND EFFECTIVENESS OF OTHER TYPES OF RESILIENCE PROGRAMMING

Education services have three critical characteristics that endure during conflict and crisis, that other USG or USAID resilience programming can leverage:

Education remains a valued, in-demand service. Numerous examples exist of communities setting up non-formal learning opportunities for their children in the midst of a crisis, as well as demanding the quick resumption of educational services from the state (Rohwerder 2015).

Education institutions and actors can operate at scale, and also provide a local hub within the community to reach populations by crisis. In many instances, education actors and institutions act as a source of protection and a conduit for individuals and households to access resources and information from the state and/or other actors. Additionally, schools are an important venue for community mobilization, participation, and collective action in anticipating, responding to, and mitigating the impacts of shocks and stressors on individual, household and community welfare (Shah, Henderson, and Couch 2019).

Education as a public institution often retains the trust, faith, and hope of the population. Rapid Education and Risks Analyses (RERAs) done by USAID in El Salvador (USAID 2016) and Bangladesh (USAID 2018c) found that despite risk factors such as endemic violence, corruption, poverty, and inequality eroding general confidence in the state, citizens continued to retain faith and hope in education as a way to overcome such issues. When the education system gives explicit consideration to issues of redistribution, recognition, representation, and reconciliation, it plays a key role in strengthening the social contract and restoring public confidence in the state (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2017).

HOW TO PROGRAM FOR RESILIENCE?

Education programs should answer five key questions when designing, implementing, monitoring, and learning from activities with a resilience approach:

1. **Resilience to What?** To build resilience it is critical to first understand the range of known and potentially complex and compounding shocks and stressors impacting learners, schools, communities, or institutions within the education system. To identify and understand the **shocks** and **stressors** impacting the education system, use robust risk assessment tools like the [Rapid Education and Risk Analysis Toolkit](#) or the [Safer Learning Environments Toolkit](#).

Shocks are typically short-term, acute deviations from long-term trends that have substantial negative effects on people's current state of well-being, level of assets, livelihoods, and safety or their ability to withstand future shocks.

Stressors tend to be chronic, long-term trends, pressures, or protracted crises that undermine the stability of a system and increase vulnerability within it.

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2. **Resilience for Whom?** The impact of shocks and stressors varies within and across the education system. Within the USAID Education Policy (2018) it is the **most vulnerable** that warrant specific attention under a resilience approach. USAID education programs can work at the level of the learner, the school, the wider school community, including parents and other community leaders, and institutions that have relationships to education, such as relevant ministries and non-state actors (e.g. civil society, private enterprise, and religious organizations). To inform the targeting of education programs with a resilience focus, use data from education or protection needs assessments.

The concepts of **exposure**, **sensitivity**, and **vulnerability** help to differentiate the impacts that shocks and stressors have on learners, schools, communities, and institutions within the education system.

Exposure refers to whether learners, schools, communities, or institutions come into physical contact with a shock or stressor. For example, school communities close to the epicenter of an earthquake would be more exposed to its impacts than school communities farther away.

Sensitivity refers to the degree to which a shock or stressors affects learners, schools, communities or institutions. Sensitivity to a shock or stressor can depend on the characteristics of the shock or stressor itself (e.g. severity, scale, frequency, duration), or on physical, social, economic, or environmental characteristics of learners, schools, communities, or institutions within the education system (e.g. poverty, gender, displacement status, disability). For example, while a school may be located close to the epicenter of an earthquake, if it was built using earthquake-resistant construction it may be less affected than a school in the same location built using traditional construction methods.

Vulnerability is the combination of exposure and sensitivity. Learners, schools, communities and institutions that have the highest exposure and are the most sensitive to a shock or stressor will experience the impacts most acutely. For example, analysis from the Deprivation and Marginalization data set illustrate that poor girls living in rural locations are typically most vulnerable to the impacts of armed conflict in terms of a lack of access to education. Meanwhile boys can be more sensitive and exposed to forced recruitment into armed groups or mobilization into armed forces rather than attending school (UNESCO 2011; INEE 2012; Shah et al. 2016).

3. **Resilience of What?** It is necessary to identify the needed assets, skills, knowledge, resources, and networks that can be built through education programming in order to absorb, adapt to, or transform systems in response to shocks and stressors (Béné et al. 2012; Béné, Headey, et al. 2016; Béné, Frankenberger, et al. 2016; Diwakar and Shepherd 2018). USAID refers to these assets, skills, knowledge, resources, or networks as resilience capacities. To identify what resilience capacities may already exist locally, use the [Rapid Education and Risk Analysis Toolkit](#).

On a spectrum, absorptive capacities are deployed to address the consequences of shocks and stressors; adaptive capacities are used in anticipation of future shocks; and transformative capacities are developed to address underlying vulnerabilities to these shocks and stressors (Béné, Headey, et al. 2016).

Absorptive resilience capacities – The ability of learners, schools, communities, or institutions to minimize exposure and sensitivity to shocks and stressors through preventative measures and appropriate coping strategies to avoid long-term negative impacts.

Adaptive resilience capacities – The ability of learners, schools, communities, or institutions to make informed choices and changes in response to longer-term social, economic, and environmental change.

Transformative resilience capacities – The ability of communities and institutions to establish an enabling environment for systemic change through their governance mechanisms, policies and regulations, cultural and gender norms, community networks, and formal and informal social protection mechanisms.

4. **Resilience through What?** In order to best leverage existing resilience in a community or education system, it is important to identify the specific assets that currently exist or can be strengthened to achieve a resilient response. These might be forms of knowledge, skills, or dispositions to strengthen in education programming at the level of individuals and communities, and/or specific institutional capacity and sector reform initiatives at the institutional level.
5. Finally, USAID education programs should identify specific learning or educational outcomes of **Resilience to What End?** interest to learners, schools, communities, institutions, and partner governments. These outcomes can be sector specific, such as learning outcomes (including social and emotional or soft skills), improved equity and inclusion for marginalized populations, or improved safety for all learners, or a sustained education services. The USAID Education Policy (2018) can guide the choice of outcomes. These outcomes can also extend beyond the education sector, linking to other development outcomes of importance, such as health, governance, food security, or economic growth, in line with a Country Development Cooperation Strategy or other strategy document.

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