2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

Two Activities Consolidated for Better Results

Name:

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Organization:

USAID/Yemen

Summary:

USAID is addressing the urgent educational needs of conflict-affected children in Yemen, where the ongoing nine-year conflict, economic decline, and crumbling education infrastructure have hindered access to education. USAID partnered with Save the Children International (SCI) on two education activities: Education in Emergencies and Gateway to Education. However, overlapping interventions, budget reductions, and coordination issues prompted the need for a streamlined approach. To resolve these challenges, virtual and in-person meetings were held between USAID, SCI, and the Yemeni Ministry of Education (MoE). These discussions focused on resolving concerns related to coordination, activity overlap implementation costs, and declining results. The meetings allowed for open discussion, identified challenges, and developed a shared vision.

USAID and the MoE committed to increased collaboration through monthly bilateral meetings to enhance communication and trust. Budget reductions led USAID to consider options such as reducing both awards, terminating one early, or merging them into a streamlined implementation structure. Merging the awards was seen as the best way to maximize impact. USAID worked with the MoE and SCI to integrate the two activities and developed a joint program description to ensure uninterrupted services for children. The integration avoided gaps in vital services provided by USAID. The consolidated approach improved organizational effectiveness, streamlined interventions and reporting, and optimized resource allocation. The adoption of this sustainable model helped obtain MoE buy-in and created a greater impact at the school and classroom level. In the upcoming 18 months, the consolidated activity will directly support an estimated 201,300 beneficiaries, including 195,000 grade 1-6 formal education students and 5,000 non-formal Grades 1-8 students, train 1,497 teachers and head teachers, support 2,700 parents and community members, and build the capacity of 600 Ministry of education staff.

1. **WHAT: What is the general context in which the case takes place? What organizational or development challenge(s) or opportunities prompted you to collaborate, learn, and/or adapt?**

USAID education programming responds to the immediate need for education service delivery that can meet the complex learning needs of conflict-affected children in Yemen. The ongoing nine-year conflict, declining economic situation, and deteriorating education infrastructure have made it harder for children, including internally displaced populations, girls, and children with disabilities, to access and remain enrolled in education services. USAID has been working in the Yemeni education sector to increase education access in this volatile and complex context. USAID had two education activities implemented by Save the Children International (SCI): Education in Emergencies (EiE) working on non-formal education, and Gateway to Education (Gateway) focused on formal education, remedial education, and community engagement.

In 2020, US Government restrictions on USAID's work in northern Yemen led to both activities shifting towards covering a similar geographic footprint in two governorates in the south. Further, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing economic hardships faced by families, both EIE and Gateway narrowed their focus on overlapping interventions centered on: remedial education; access to education for girls and children with disabilities; engaging parents and community members; socio-emotional learning and pyscho-social support for teachers and students; and the development and provision of teaching and learning materials.

The overlap between the two activities created confusion between the Ministry of Education (MoE) and USAID. The two award models prevented USAID from leveraging the implementing partner's expertise, staffing, and resources between the awards. USAID/Yemen basic education funds have been significantly reduced in recent years, leading to a projected budget shortfall and creating the need to streamline

2. **What two CLA Sub-Components are most clearly reflected in your case?**

Adaptive Management

External Collaboration

3. **HOW: What steps did you take to apply CLA approaches to address the challenge or opportunity described above?**

First, the Mission organized a week-long series of virtual meetings with both award leadership teams to pivot the awards away from low performing interventions and address performance issues. This did not, however, adequately resolve issues of overlapping interventions and MoE concerns. In person meetings were then planned in Amman and Cairo between the months of June and September 2022 (as USAID personnel cannot travel to Yemen). Here, USAID, SCI, and the MoE met to identify and co-develop solutions to resolve concerns around coordination, activity overlap, increasing implementation costs, and declining results on the ground. These issues stemmed from a lack of clarity and delineation of interventions and delays in reporting and information sharing with the MoE that resulted in MoE project approval delays. This, in turn, decreased the MoE's confidence in the activities' ability to achieve their objectives. The in-person meetings followed a semi-structured agenda that allowed for frank and open discussion amongst key partners, recognized challenges and constraints, and created a shared vision for moving forward.

USAID and the MoE also committed to increased direct collaboration to reinforce the relationship and rebuild direct communication and trust through monthly bilateral meetings. These meetings facilitated early notification of challenges, joint solution development, and recommendations for enhancing USAID assistance in the education sector. During this period, USAID was informed of significant budget reductions for the Yemen Mission, resulting in programmatic cuts to the originally designed awards. USAID then convened meetings with the implementing partner and the MoE to discuss three options: 1) reducing both awards to core activities within the new budget constraints; 2) early termination of one award and funding only the other; or 3) merging the two awards into a streamlined implementation structure, focusing on core activities for formal and non-formal education. This allowed USAID/Yemen staff, the MoE, and SCI to assess the current activity implementation, identify priorities, and explore a way forward. Merging both awards was identified by all three parties as the best way to maximize impact. The USAID/Yemen education team worked with the MoE and partners to integrate the two activities. They then collaborated with Mission support offices to identify the best contractual process to integrate these two awards administratively. Once a clear path was agreed upon with the Mission, USAID organized a co-creation meeting with SCI, involving the country team, home office leadership, and technical experts from sub-awardees. During this meeting, a joint integrated program description was developed to ensure uninterrupted services for children. By integrating the awards, gaps in vital services supported solely by USAID, such as textbook provision and access to education for out-of-school children, were avoided. USAID communicated the proposed approach to the MoE, which welcomed the shift to streamlined programming and the focus on enhanced communication, coordination, and programmatic sustainability.

4. **RESULTS: Choose one of the following questions to answer.**

We know you may have answers in mind for both questions; However please choose one to highlight as part of this case story

B. ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Managing activities remotely in a non-presence operating environment poses a significant challenge, and short virtual meetings are inadequate for fostering strong working relationships with key partners. Investing in in-person meetings focused on co-creating solutions over several days resulted in an immediate turnaround in mutual trust and confidence. The adoption of a consolidated activities approach has also enhanced organizational effectiveness. Interventions, measurement tools, reporting, and collaboration with government counterparts have become more streamlined and clear. Resources are now more effectively allocated to areas of need, reducing the time USAID staff spend trying to understand what is taking place on the ground.

5. **ENABLING CONDITIONS: How have enabling conditions - resources (time/money/staff), organizational culture, or business/work processes - influenced your results? How would you advise others to navigate any challenges you may have faced?**

The political and operational context in Yemen poses many challenges but also encourages creativity and flexibility. With support from our Acquisition and Assistance Office, Program Office, and Financial Management Office, the technical team efficiently assessed the feasibility of merging the awards into one operational mechanism and promptly communicated the findings to the MoE and SCI. The team regularly engaged with MoE stakeholders to validate different aspects of the approach and to ensure their continued support and buy-in. Having a team member based in Cairo with frequent access to MoE counterparts who are often there made this significantly easier. While exploring different models to solve these challenges and agree on the integration/consolidation model, the technical team also discussed how USAID can best make use of the current activities to develop lessons learned that inform future designs. Finally, integrating more sustainable models helped USAID, the MoE, and SCI prioritize the current activities to achieve the greatest technical impact and increase the cost effectiveness of USAID investments in the Yemeni education system.