2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

Adaptive Management to Understand Tolerance Education in Lebanon

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Summary:

Lebanon is facing ongoing political and economic crises which have compounded challenges from periods of unrest and violence and the 2020 Port of Beirut Explosion. Inflow of refugees from neighboring countries is adding to the burdened economy and education system. In addition, tensions between different socio-religious groups in Lebanon have been compounded by the recent crises, further exacerbating these tensions. Amidst these challenges and rising tensions, USAID commissioned an assessment of tolerance education in Lebanon to learn how to advance tolerance education opportunities across the country.

The assessment team used participatory data collection methods to expand the technical evidence base through a World Café workshop approach and visual mapping activities to engage with local stakeholders across the country, including students, parents, teachers, and school directors. The team incorporated adaptive management to adjust the workshops to ensure that every participant felt comfortable and was actively engaged. When the team observed students' lack of engagement and discomfort engaging with the teachers, parents, and school directors, the team adjusted the workshops. This adaptation led to stronger engagement by students in the subsequent workshops. As a result, school community groups were so engaged in the World Café workshops, that they asked that this type of cross-community engagement activity be part of future tolerance education efforts. Students conveyed their interest in meeting students in other communities in a similar forum. If the team had not applied the adaptive management approach, the technical evidence would have been missing the voices of key potential beneficiaries as the students would not have felt comfortable enough to share their interest in meeting other students or participating in community service.

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?**

Lebanon has experienced periods of unrest and violence, exacerbated by protests, the 2020 Port of Beirut explosion, COVID-19, and ongoing political and economic crises. Tensions between different socio-religious groups in Lebanon have been compounded and exacerbated by these recent crises. Significant inflows of refugees from neighboring countries add to the burden on Lebanon's struggling infrastructure, services, economy, and education system. Amidst these challenges and rising tensions, USAID commissioned an assessment to learn how to advance tolerance education opportunities across the country. The assessment goals were to understand how "tolerance" and "tolerance education" are understood and valued in Lebanon and to learn what tolerance education looks like and could look like in Lebanon. Since this assessment was exploratory in nature, the team was able to use participatory data collection methods to engage local stakeholders in a collaborative and iterative process to expand the technical evidence base in tolerance education with a focus on local knowledge. The team decided to apply a visual approach called Mind Mapping, where participants use sticky notes to add ideas about tolerance education to a word cloud created from the definition of "tolerance" on a flip chart. This was done in World Café forums in multiple regions of Lebanon, where potential beneficiaries including students, parents, teachers, and school directors collaborated with the team to generate evidence about what tolerance education can look like in the country. The team incorporated adaptive management in the assessment design since participatory methods require constant adaptation to adjust to the context so that the knowledge generation process is appropriate and results in useful, contextually appropriate evidence. Between each World Café session, the team met to discuss the workshops and adapt the approach in each subsequent World Café. Local stakeholders were actively engaged and excited about the process and the team was able to develop a report centered on local voices.

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

Adaptive Management

Technical Evidence Base

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

The team designed participatory, open-ended data collection instruments, focusing on group engagement with visual mapping exercises. To get as much direct beneficiary input as possible, the team held multiple data collection workshops across the country, bringing together students, parents, teachers, and school directors from multiple school communities. Workshops were held in four regions in Lebanon. Each workshop included representatives from four schools from diverse geographic and religious communities per region. The participants included male and female students, parents, teachers, and school directors from each selected school. The team applied a World Café technique to the workshops to ensure the process would adapt to stakeholder dynamics and emerging ideas.

The workshops began with a plenary session, in which all participants were invited to define “tolerance” and “tolerance education”. Participants were then split into homogonous groups (students with students, teachers with teachers, etc.) to ensure everyone felt comfortable speaking openly and participating actively. The groups used colorful sticky notes to map out how the various components of “tolerance” discussed during the plenary are addressed in schools and how they should be addressed in schools. Then, during the World Café process, groups rotated tables while a designated group member remained at their original table with their group map. The designee presented their map to the other groups, and the groups discussed the similarities and differences to their own maps. Each group then had the opportunity to adjust their maps. The workshops concluded with a plenary in which participants discussed what they learned.

In each workshop, Lebanese team members joined the student group to support student understanding and keep students engaged. Other team members observed all groups, providing support as needed based on observed behaviors. For example, when a group was not engaging or was spending significant time asking what they needed to do, a team member would offer guidance using probing questions.

After every workshop, the team met for debrief sessions to discuss what they were learning, the data collection process in these sessions, and proposed ways to address any challenges experienced. Preparation sessions occurred before every workshop, during which the team revisited the decisions made during debrief sessions to ensure everyone was on the same page about any adaptations.

During the first debrief, the team observed that the student group was not engaged during the plenary session. While the parents, teachers, and school directors were eager to share their ideas about the definition of “tolerance” and “tolerance education”, the students remained quiet. The team also observed that the student group required more support to understand the foundational concepts behind “ tolerance”. The team discussed possible adaptations, and decided that the students should not join the plenary session to define “tolerance” and “tolerance education”. Instead, students would work with one of the local team members to understand the foundational concepts and begin the mapping activity with sticky notes while the adult groups were in the plenary session. The students would rejoin the other groups to participate in the World Café process. The modifications were implemented for the second workshop. During the second debrief session, the local team member who worked with the students reported that the students appeared more comfortable with the activity, were more engaged, and produced very detailed maps. The teachers, school directors, and parents even commented that they were impressed with the students’ map. By observing the power dynamics in the first workshop and adapting accordingly, the team increased student engagement and centered local voices. As a result, all participants had the opportunity to collaborate in expanding the technical evidence base about tolerance education in Lebanon.

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

A. DEVELOPM ENT RESULTS

Using participatory workshops resulted in meaningful collaboration with local stakeholders from different parts of the country, which allowed different understanding and perspectives about tolerance and tolerance education to emerge. Through the adaptive management process, the team was able to adjust the data collection process to be more collaborative which resulted in greater participant engagement. In each workshop, each group was actively engaged and consistently shared with the team that they wanted to engage in similar activities again. When the team adjusted the workshop approach for the students, the students became more engaged and the resulting evidence was stronger and more inclusive of different local voices.

By engaging local groups and applying what was learned from the adaptive management approach to ensure that students participated in the generation of evidence, the findings report reflects local interests and goals for tolerance education. The adaptive approach revealed that there are many existing tolerance education programs implemented by local NGOs in Lebanon at a small scale, yet little is known about these activities due to a lack of documentation. The approach also revealed strong student, community, educator, and Ministerial support for tolerance education programming that enables students to engage with different communities and participate in community service activities. The school community groups were so engaged in the World Café workshops, that they asked that this type of cross-community engagement activity be part of future tolerance education efforts. Students in particular conveyed their interest in meeting students in other communities in a similar forum. If the team had not applied the adaptive management approach, the technical evidence would have been missing the voices of key potential beneficiaries as the students would not have felt comfortable enough to share their interest in meeting other students or participating in community service.

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?**

Time was an obstacle to this work, as we only had about two weeks to conduct all workshops. As a result, we had to be highly organized as a team and prepare quickly. While this was a constraint to the workshops, limiting the amount of evidence generated, it enabled us to adhere to our proposed adaptations. Since the workshops were so close together in time, our preparation sessions were less than 24 hours after our debrief sessions and we found it easy to recall what decisions had been made regarding workshop adaptations as well as what challenges during data collection we were trying to remedy.
The biggest enabler was the staff. Our team included educators who worked extensively in Lebanon and were trained in student-centered pedagogy as well as adult learning. This allowed our team to support the school community groups using age-appropriate techniques, identify appropriate guiding questions to spur conversation, and identify challenges that each group was facing during the activity. The staff was also very interested in the activity and the subject matter, which increased their investment in supporting the participants appropriately.