



EDUCATION IN CRISIS AND CONFLICT NETWORK: Mid-term Evaluation

September 2017

This publication was produced at the request of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

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September 2017

USAID Contract No. AID-OAA-M-14-00007
MOBIS # GS-10F-0406P

DISCLAIMER

The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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ACRONYMS

ADS	USAID's Automated Directives System
AEP	Accelerated/Alternate Education Programming
AG	Advisory Group
APS	Annual Program Statement
CO	Contract Officer
CoP	Community of Practice
COR	Contracting Officer's Representative
C&C	Conflict and Crisis
Dexis	Dexis Consulting Group
DC	Washington, DC
CIES	Comparative and International Education Society
ECCN	Education in Crisis and Conflict Network
E3/ED	Office of Education in the Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment
EDC	Education Development Center
EiCC	Education in Crisis and Conflict
FCR	Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations (matrix)
FSO	Foreign Service Officer
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
IRB	Institutional Review Board
IP	Implementing Partner
KII	Key Informant Interview
LOE	Level of effort
PD	Professional Development
PMP	Performance Management Plan
RERA	Rapid Education Risk Analysis
RFA	Request for Applications
RFP	Request for Proposals
SOW	Statement of Work
SG	Steering Group
ST	Support Team
TOC	Theory of Change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose and Objectives

Dexis Consulting Group (Dexis) was contracted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Education in the Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and the Environment (E3/ED) to perform a mid-term evaluation of the USAID Education in Crisis and Conflict Network (ECCN). The ECCN is a five-year-long E3/ED initiative implemented by the Education Development Center (EDC), focused on five inter-related objectives or work streams: 1. Develop and support a community of practice (CoP); 2. Build and disseminate evidence for the field; 3. Test, disseminate and use guidance, tools, metrics, and theories of change; 4. Apply tools in crisis and conflict; and 5. Develop, implement and assess training. EDC's contract for implementing this initiative began on July 28, 2014 and is intended to run through July 27, 2019.

This purpose of the mid-term evaluation was to assess the progress made towards the ECCN's stated objectives, as well as to serve as a source of learning for the EDC ECCN Support Team (ST) and E3/ED more broadly. Specifically, the evaluation team sought to answer the following five evaluation questions:

1. What progress has the ECCN ST made in carrying out the five work streams and advancing towards the objectives outlined in their work plan?
2. What successes and challenges has the ECCN ST encountered in carrying out their five work streams and meeting their objectives?
3. What is the nature and extent of member engagement and how is it supported by the ECCN ST, Steering Group and Advisory Group?
4. To what extent are the priority areas and the themes within the ECCN project relevant to USAID's Office of Education and the ECCN member community?
5. To what extent does the ECCN, as a Community of Practice, meet the evolving needs of USAID's Office of Education?

Based on findings and conclusions from the evaluation, this report provides E3/ED with a comprehensive set of lessons learned and actionable recommendations to inform decision-making in ECCN and, more broadly, within USAID's Office of Education.

Evaluation Methods and Limitations

This mid-term evaluation used a mixed-methods, utilization-focused approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. This was done through three data collection streams: 1. a desk review of available background and reporting documents; 2. key informant interviews (KIIs) with the ECCN implementation team, USAID staff directly involved with the implementation of the ECCN contract, and a sample of USAID Education Staff based in Washington, DC, and USAID missions globally; and 3. an electronic survey distributed to all registered ECCN members ($n=629$). The evaluation team conducted 36 KIIs; and the survey produced a total of 93 responses, a 14.79% overall response rate, and 67 (10.65%) complete responses. The evaluation team used multiple sources of data to address each evaluation question and triangulate across the relevant sources to develop comprehensive and evidence-based findings, conclusions, and recommendation.

The primary limitation of this evaluation is that the evaluation team was not able to collect perspectives from a truly representative sample of the ECCN member community. While the key

informants were purposively selected to elicit the most relevant information for the evaluation questions, they were focused on USAID-affiliated stakeholders. In order to mitigate this, the survey was intended to reach a broader sample of the network. However, the survey response rate was low.

Summative Findings and Conclusions by Evaluation Question

1. What progress has the ECCN ST made in carrying out the five work streams and advancing towards the objectives outlined in their workplan?

The ECCN ST has made steady progress advancing all five objectives defined in their contract. This includes:

- Registered ECCN members increased from 162 members at the end of Year 1 to 701 members at the end of Year 3.
- The ECCN Resource Repository has steadily grown, with 268 separate items now; approximately 25% is original content and 75% is from other sources.
- Survey responses showed the conflict sensitivity checklist and RERA are the most-utilized resources; the least-consulted resource was costing guidance.

Outreach, communications, research, and professional development programming are evolving and may benefit from further clarity and consideration. While the process of development and implementation of training/professional development receives staff and funding support, the objective's progress is less than other areas.

- Some informants noted ECCN research resources, notably ECCN-produced reports and articles, were not always practitioner-oriented or easy to draw on for field staff.

In terms of the degree of uptake and use of opportunities, concepts, evidence, tools and guidance across each of ECCN's five work streams, this evaluation assessed ease of access, degree of utilization/application, and changed practice as reported by survey respondents.

- Ease of access and utilization of research and resources are positive across respondents. However, changed practice is less so, with a heavier emphasis on resources serving as occasional inputs rather than long-term changed practice inputs.

2. What successes and challenges has the ECCN ST encountered in carrying out their five work streams and meeting their objectives?

The ECCN ST has faced both process and product oriented successes in carrying out the five work streams and meeting project objectives. These include adaptive management, member identification and network growth, website launch and participation, tools and resource development, and a highly qualified and responsive ST. The ECCN ST has been flexible and effective in adapting to strategic shifts and incorporating lessons learned into implementing the five work streams. Despite logistical challenges, the ST has been successful in generating a steady increase in the number of members accessing and using ECCN resources and continues to see a steady increase in member growth across all web-based platforms.

- Successes: Adaptive management; growing the CoP; improved timeliness; interactive website; tools and resource development; management by ST

44.9% of total respondents and 48% of USAID affiliated respondents reported finding the CoP very well managed.

The ST also faced numerous challenges.

- Challenges: Staff turnover and delays early in the project; lack of clarity on ECCN’s mandate and coordination between E3/ED and EDC; outreach and engagement; SG and AG engagement
- Lack of time, resources, and awareness/availability were cited as primary reasons for limited active participation of ECCN community members in knowledge sharing and training opportunities offered through ECCN.
- Overall, it seems that dual roles are expected of the ST: 1) content/technical drivers and 2) outreach, engagement, and communications managers for the CoP. Less than ideal communications and coordination between EDC and E3/ED, especially in programmatic vision, continues to be a challenge in meeting objectives.

3. What is the nature and extent of member engagement and how is it supported by the ECCN ST, Steering Group and Advisory Group?

Although member engagement is positively evolving into a more multi-directional process that combines both push and pull approaches, it is still primarily unidirectional, with the CoP passively receiving quality and curated information from ECCN. Field representation and engagement continues to be a challenge.

- 52 of 78 survey respondents felt that the ECCN offered either adequate or many opportunities for engagement.
- 51 out of 78 survey respondents reported regularly engaging through the newsletter, followed by website (30 respondents), webcasts (15 respondents), and face-to-face events (10 respondents).
- The newsletter has an opening rate of 35-40%, with a 30% click through rate.
- 20 of the key informants mentioned that the ECCN is US-centric, while less than five individuals mentioned that Implementing Partner (IP) and/or field involvement is improving. Of the 20 Mission staff contacted for KIIs, three declined to be interviewed citing lack of any awareness of ECCN. Additionally, of the six individuals interviewed, half of them reported only limited familiarity with the ECCN.
- Multiple KIIs mentioned the lack of field representation in the SG.

4. To what extent are the priority areas and the themes within the ECCN project relevant to USAID Office of Education and the ECCN member community?

While the range of USAID and ECCN member community may interpret relevance in different ways, the vast majority of survey respondents reported that all four priority areas and the themes within them are very relevant.

- A majority of overall survey respondents indicated that all priority areas were considered “very relevant” to E3/ED and the ECCN member community.
- Priority area 1 (Learning Environments are Safer) received the most “very relevant” ratings and priority area 4 (Local Institutions are Stronger) received the least number of “very relevant” ratings from USAID affiliated respondents.
- Priority areas 2 (EiCC Programming has Improved) and 4 (Local Institutions are Stronger) received the most “very relevant” ratings from IP respondents.
- Most respondents found all themes within priority areas to be “very relevant.” Two slight exceptions were “Advanced program and activity costing guidance,” and “Knowledge

related to ICT application in EiCC,” which had a significant proportion of respondents selecting “not relevant” or “somewhat relevant.”

- The priority areas developed are very relevant to E3/ED because they were developed by the USAID EiCC team and reflect the major outcomes outlined in the USAID Education Strategy for Goal 3.

5. To what extent does a Community of Practice (CoP) in general, and ECCN in particular, meet the evolving needs of USAID’s Office of Education?

The ECCN largely meets the evolving needs of E3/ED, however, it does not yet function as a traditional CoP with multidirectional engagement, as envisioned by the educational theorist Étienne Wenger.

- Various elements of the ECCN network and its resources were considered by E3/ED informants in leadership positions to be applicable to other areas of the USAID Education Strategy.
 - The Safe Learning Environment work of ECCN seemed to some respondents to be useful for USAID’s Goal 1 of successfully addressing the advancement of early-grade reading.
 - The evidence gap tool and other research and tools developed by ECCN were also deemed by some as applicable to other programming areas that the E3/ED office was promoting.
- ECCN is meeting evolving needs through potentially higher demand for the addressing of education needs in crisis and conflict-affected settings, which themselves are increasing due to growing global unrest, and therefore demanding more emergency education and the potential resources for it.
- ECCN was often discussed and considered as a network by interviewees, without a particular assumption by respondents beyond E3/ED and the ECCN ST that it involved robust multidirectional sharing and collaboration.

Recommendations

While the report presents a set of recommendations tailored to each evaluation question, below are a list of overarching recommendations that are cross-cutting.

- *Clearly define the scope of the ECCN mandate and the priorities within it.* This includes agreement between the ECCN implementation team and USAID on the target audience and the subsequent purpose of the content and activities developed and the allocation of effort and resources across work streams. While there has been a strategic shift in focus from process-oriented to content-oriented work-planning, there remains lack of clarity on what requests, expectations, and activities fall within or outside the scope of the contract, as well as which tasks or areas require prioritization.
- *Streamline processes and communications.* While key ECCN implementation stakeholders have been flexible and adaptive throughout the first two years of the project, the project would benefit from instituting clearly defined processes that streamline planning and approvals. This includes clear understanding of roles and structured communications that facilitate efficient decision-making and more timely execution of outputs and activities.

- *Revisit LOE allocations across team members.* At this point, the focus is shifting from ‘push’ to ‘pull’ strategies that require more active outreach and communications efforts. Consider strategies to create flexibility in staffing levels and expense caps by category and function and assess whether the current staffing for communications is sufficient for anticipated needs.
- *Conclusively decide whether ECCN needs to focus on engaging USAID field staff in activities.* If the ST and USAID decide that this is the direction they would like to pursue for ECCN, going forward seek ways to emphasize engagement in the field and consider whether outreach should especially target field-based staff (or education teams) through direct interactions with key USAID individuals to broker relationships between DC and missions, as well as within Missions/in-country.

For further information concerning this publication, please contact the Office of Education (E3/ED) at USAID (add contact information here)

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