This Brochure provides highlights from a synthesis report commissioned by USAID’s Office of Education related to USAID’s Education Strategy Goal 3 “increase equitable access to education in crisis and conflict environments for 15 million learners.” For this particular study, the Office of Education was interested in findings and lessons learned related to access to education from all evaluations. This review synthesizes the results for 28 evaluations covering 18 activities related to Goal 3.

**Study Objectives**

Review of findings and lessons learned of topics of interest to the Office of Education.

**Topics of Interest**

- Strengthened institutional capacity
  - Types of capacity building
  - Beneficiaries of capacity building
  - Methodologies employed to improve institutional capacity
- Violence prevention and countering violent extremism
  - Beneficiaries of violence prevention and CVE activities
  - "Push-Pull" factors related to individual Radicalization and recruitment
  - Core programmatic principles for activities Targeting violent extremism
  - Combination of youth empowerment/social integration and WfD components
- Improved programming
  - Situational analyses
- Safer learning environments for children and youth
- Equity
- Social and emotional learning
- School dropout prevention

**Crosscutting Themes** – Gender, disability, information and communications technology, innovative financing, and scaling up/sustainability.

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Inclusion Criteria

As determined by the Office of Education, evaluations to be reviewed in this study were:

- USAID-funded evaluations of education interventions;
- Published between 2013 and 2016;
- Performance or impact evaluations (and a small number of research studies that did not evaluate a specific intervention);
- Relevant to the Education Strategy;
- Single, latest published reports (in case of reports for multiple phases of an evaluation);
- Evaluation reports from multiple countries (in case of a multicountry education intervention);
- Of acceptable quality based upon minimum evaluation quality criteria set in the synthesis phase.

Sample

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<th>Region</th>
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<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
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<td>Europe and Eurasia</td>
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<td>Latin American and the Caribbean</td>
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<td>Middle East</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pilot intervention</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No intervention</td>
<td>18%</td>
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Key Findings

Synthesis results parallels extant evidence of education programs in crisis and conflict contexts. Reports such as *What Works to Promote Children’s Education Access, Quality of Learning and Wellbeing in Crisis* (Burde et al., 2015) and *Education in emergencies and protracted crises: toward a strengthened response* (ODI, 2015) were used to cross-reference findings from the current synthesis with existing reviews of education programs in crisis and conflict contexts. Consistencies were found with respect to equity, SEL and gender. Neither consistencies nor inconsistencies were found with respect to safer learning environments, improved programming, strengthened institutional capacity building, and VP-CVE.

1. Strengthened Institutional Capacity to Provide Services

Strengthened institutional capacity at local and national levels leads to improved access to basic education. The most effective method is skills training to improve pedagogical approaches and school management. Least explored in the reviewed evaluations were public-private partnerships.

2. Violence Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism

VP-CVE programs are complex and uniquely tailored to diverse political, social, cultural and economic contexts. VP-CVE programs target a range of groups including at-risk youth and other vulnerable populations (e.g., survivors of sexual and gender-based violence [SBGV]), and government partners. The most effective and sustainable VP-CVE programs were cross-sectoral in approach.
3. Situational Analysis of Emergency/Conflict-Affected Regions

Situational analyses of emergency/conflict-affected regions provide real-time, nuanced data to improve program design and implementation. A majority of the situational analyses focused on understanding how conflict/violence within the community has influenced access of primary school-aged children to basic education. Such analyses relied on similar data collection approaches to gain perceptions of a range of school, community and national-level stakeholders to ensure program design and implementation remained relevant to target populations.

4. Dropout Prevention

School dropout prevention programs require a comprehensive, contextualized suite of interventions to significantly increase student attendance and grade promotion, and to reduce dropout. USAID’s SDPP (School Dropout Prevention Pilot Program) focuses on academic and social support, combined with additional enrichment activities for at-risk students and changes in teacher practices to improve student attitudes and behavior, translating into increased student engagement and reduced school dropout. SDPP demonstrated varying success in increasing teaching capacity (effectiveness in dropout prevention, teachers’ sense of responsibility and self-efficacy), school administration capacity, and student outcomes (i.e., attendance, drop out, and grade promotion).

5. Safer Learning Environments for Children and Youth

Safer learning environments for children and youth are best maintained through community engagement and mobilization, curricular improvements, and infrastructural improvements. Practically all of the evaluations under Goal 3 pointed to the significant impact that internal, external, and environmental threats posed to creating and maintaining safe learning environments for children and youth. Several programmatic elements emerged as effective: community sensitization to the importance of education as a pathway to peacebuilding, introduction of conflict-sensitive curricula on topics such as gender-based violence and interethnic integration in schools, school rehabilitation efforts, and the selection of community volunteers to address teacher shortage issues.

6. Equity

Equity, defined broadly, is best addressed through cross-sectoral interventions. Equity was most often defined and measured by how vulnerable or at-risk a child was. Vulnerabilities were broadly defined and included geographic location, IDP status, gender, whether a child came from a broken home, whether a child was an orphan or came from a marginalized group, disability status, sexual orientation, and socio-economic (SES) status. The issues most commonly addressed in Goal 3 evaluations included gender and marginalization.

7. Improved Programming

Improved education programming that reflects changing contexts or beneficiary needs is due in part to making immediate use of assessment or evaluation data. Situational analyses of conflict/crisis best represent the subset of studies that attempt to capture—in real time—an honest and accurate picture of how a conflict or crisis is interacting with learners’ access to basic education, and that provide recommendations on how to address these barriers in precarious and ever changing situations. This is likely due to the timing of such assessments (e.g., prior to program implementation) and the design of such assessments, which are intended to be rapid and continuous.
8. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social and emotional learning (SEL) has high anecdotal value among beneficiaries. In an emergency, education serves as a protective mechanism against exploitation and harm, and promotes the wellbeing of learners, teachers and other education personnel. SEL strives to augment academic performance and students’ personal development by building social and emotional skills and establishing a safe, protective learning environment. The SEL approach has shown substantial evidence for positive outcomes in high-income countries. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) and New York University have produced the only rigorous evidence for SEL in a fragile state (Democratic Republic of Congo) which demonstrated mixed results on SEL outcomes and some inconsistent gains in students’ reading and math performance.

Crosscutting

A. Gender

Gender is not yet a key influencer in the design, implementation and evaluation of education interventions. Understanding how gender interacts with different education outcomes, such as learners’ safety, school enrolment and attendance, and student achievement, is key to enhancing intervention results. Most projects evaluated under Goal 3 analyzed results with a gender lens though most did not explicitly design the interventions with a gender-responsive theory of change or results framework.

B. Disability

Disability, defined broadly, was rarely examined in evaluations of Goal 3 interventions. Disability was typically mentioned, if at all, as one risk factor under a broader umbrella of vulnerabilities related to addressing equity through the intervention. Only 5 of the 28 evaluations under Goal 3 made any reference to disabilities in their evaluations.

C. Information and communications technology

ICT has variable impact on learner outcomes. Although the perception of ICT impact among stakeholders is mostly positive, actual ICT impact on learner outcomes varies widely from positive to negative, to no impact at all. Fourteen of the 28 evaluations included in this synthesis made some mention of ICT in the program design. Most these references were to technologies used for instructional purposes to increase beneficiary engagement with the intervention.

D. Innovative financing mechanisms

Innovative financing mechanisms are key to ensuring education program sustainability. Eleven of the 28 evaluations assessed mentioned innovative financing to some extent. Most evaluations, in the recommendations sections of the reports, expressed the need for innovative financing mechanisms to be incorporated into future programming for sustainability.

E. Scaling and sustainability

Scaling and sustainability of education interventions are often blocked due to financial constraints. Most Goal 3 evaluations generally discussed the barriers to sustainability, especially since most evaluated projects were implemented in unstable, low-resource areas, and targeted high-risk children and youth. The predominant barrier was financial sustainability followed by lack of government and community ownership of the intervention. The SDPP interventions addressed sustainability differently, developing cost and sustainability considerations into the program design to increase the likelihood of continued implementation beyond the USAID funding period.
Limitations

The findings in this report should not be considered generalizable across all Goal 3 activities for several reasons:

- This report focuses on a distinct set of priorities for USAID’s Goal 3 team, such as CVE and violence prevention, safer learning environments, and social and emotional learning (SEL). These priorities are not situated within a global conceptual framework, though USAID’s Goal 3 team has indicated this is under development.
- Further, as documented in the evaluation reports, each intervention was contextualized to the conflict setting in which it was implemented. The unique nature of each intervention made it difficult to establish trends in findings across the evidence base.
- Evaluations defined and measured outcomes in unique ways, which also made it difficult to establish consistency across studies.
- While there is a wealth of high-quality qualitative and mixed-methods assessments and studies of Goal 3 interventions, the evaluations were not able to disentangle the value added of specific components in many instances. This makes it difficult to assess the benefits or effectiveness of specific activities within complex interventions, further limiting the generalizability of findings in this report.
- Finally, the Goal 3 evidence base lacks rigorous experimental data such as randomized controlled trials (RCTs). While RCTs are costly, and often there are ethical considerations with implementing such a design in a conflict setting, the absence of larger quantitative evaluations limits the generalizability of findings in this report.

In 2016, the Education in Crisis and Conflict Network (ECCN) conducted an analysis of the indicators used in performance monitoring and evaluation plans from 25 USAID Education activities implemented in 16 countries between 2007 and 2018. This analysis revealed a lengthy list of indicators used to measure several of the priority topics in this report: access to education (47 indicators), equity (21 indicators), school safety (31 indicators), and education quality (118 indicators).

Most indicators focused on outputs, without clear linkages to outcomes. Indicators related to retention, equity, school safety, and conflict-sensitive education are not standardized, making comparisons across activities difficult. The analysis also revealed that 103 indicators (28 percent of all indicators) covered categories not addressed by interventions’ theories of change.

Clear recommendations have emerged from this analysis that align with the recommendations emerging from this synthesis. Specifically:

- USAID-funded activities should be encouraged to use a balance of standardized indicators, developed from commonly agreed upon definitions of key topics, and customized indicators.
- These indicators should align with activity results frameworks and theories of change.
- Activities should also ensure that theories of change are explicit about the unique value of specific activities toward individual outcomes so that such theories can be evaluated.
Recommendations

Strengthen institutional capacity at local and national levels to ensure improved access to basic education.
Enhancing the capacities of individuals (teachers, school administrators, subnational and national officials) and institutions are commonly used approaches to improve access to education, and education infrastructure and rehabilitation. USAID should provide continuous training to Education Officers and implementing partners on its Human and Institutional Capacity Development Handbook, including the Behavior Engineering Model for effective capacity strengthening. This guidance can then be more explicitly integrated during activity design, and better reflected in activity evaluation plans.

Tailor violence prevention and CVE activities to the unique and diverse needs of target populations.
While this recommendation seems self-evident, there is not a one-size-fits-all solution to violence prevention and CVE. Indeed, the Goal 3 evaluations reviewed for this synthesis demonstrate that the most effective interventions were those uniquely responsive to a range of contexts and cross-sectoral in nature. The evaluations also demonstrated the critical and positive role families, churches, and schools play in ensuring at-risk children and youth stay in school, engage in socially positive activities, and decrease their likelihood of participating in criminal activity. Investigating the connections between access to education and differences in education service delivery (e.g., madrassa versus secular) and CVE outcomes should also continue to be a research priority for Goal 3.

Prioritize situational analyses to assess demand, feasibility, and sustainability for education activities in emergency and conflict-affected settings.
The situational analyses this study reviewed clearly demonstrate the value of rapid assessments, which relied on mixed methods to capture a range of perspectives with enough detail to influence strategy and implementation. USAID should prioritize ongoing, lower-cost assessments to inform program design and management and to augment more traditional evaluation approaches. Scopes of work for future Goal 3 evaluations should require assessments of: (a) flexibility, agility, and procurement speed; (b) intensive program management; (c) innovation, evaluation, and learning; and (d) informed risk-taking, among other variables.

Design school dropout prevention activities as a comprehensive, contextualized suite of interventions to significantly increase student attendance and grade promotion, and to reduce dropout.
While not explicitly categorized under Goal 3, lessons learned about effective approaches to reduce school drop out in the SDPP studies can inform activities designed to increase access to schools in crisis and conflict settings. SDPP demonstrated varying success in improving teacher capacities and student education outcomes such as attendance, dropout and grade promotion. Each dropout prevention program was complex and uniquely designed to the needs of target populations in India, Cambodia, Timor-Leste and Tajikistan. USAID should continue to support interventions grounded in rigorous evidence-based reviews on effective solutions for complex problems such as student dropout for male and female learners in crisis and conflict settings.
Recommendations (continued)

**Maintain safer learning environments for children and youth through community engagement and mobilization, curricular improvements and infrastructure improvements.**

The evaluations reviewed in this synthesis demonstrate that in conflict and crisis contexts, students’ physical and emotional well-being is impacted by a large number of threats within and outside of the school, and male and female students are affected differently by such threats. However, effective solutions to these threats do exist—such as engaging community members to create safe transportation solutions for students and teachers and to manage school rehabilitation efforts, and developing conflict-sensitive curricula. Future studies should investigate whether dissipating cultural and ethnic biases (which contribute to ethnic tension within schools) in turn contribute (directly or indirectly) to safer learning environments in crisis and conflict settings.

**Address equity through cross-sectoral interventions.**

Evaluations of activities such as the CARSI and SDPP interventions point to the value of intensive cross-sectoral interventions in addressing equity issues. USAID should continue to emphasize and provide guidance on the importance of detailed analysis strategies (i.e., subgroup analyses) to help Education Officers and implementing partners better understand the differential impacts of an intervention on a range of beneficiaries. For example, evaluators should identify and define dimensions of equity (based upon USAID’s definition and the activity’s theory of change) and the composition of the population within the country context. Next, disparities in key education and other outcomes between individual children and youth, as well as broader groupings of children (controlling for observable student characteristics) within the population, should be analyzed. The analysis should include distributions at aggregated levels, such as school, community, district, region and national. If an impact evaluation is being conducted, program impacts should be estimated overall and for each subgroup.

**Conduct further research on SEL and its effective integration into education interventions.**

Currently, SEL has high anecdotal value among beneficiaries. Previous research demonstrating the value of SEL exists primarily in high-income countries. IRC and New York University have produced the only rigorous evidence for SEL in a fragile state (DRC). USAID should prioritize further research on how SEL can be used to enhance children’s well-being in crisis and conflict contexts.

**Emphasize the role of gender in the design, implementation and evaluation of education interventions.**

Understanding how gender interacts with different education outcomes such as learners’ safety, school enrollment and attendance, and student achievement and empowerment is key to enhancing intervention results. Goal 3 evaluations did not demonstrate whether activities were designed with a gender-responsive theory of change in mind. USAID should support program implementation and independent evaluation teams to understand and integrate Agency guidance on gender-sensitive theories of change.
Recommendations (continued)

Increase focus on disability (defined broadly) for Goal 3 interventions and their evaluations.
Only five of the 28 evaluations under Goal 3 made any reference to disabilities in their evaluations. Only one, the Indonesia OVC intervention, directly focused on disabilities (specifically hearing impairment and learning, intellectual, and multiple disabilities). Others, like the DRC OPEQ and Ghana Public Works interventions, indirectly addressed equity in access to education for students with disabilities through infrastructure work like building disability ramps. USAID should conduct a systematic and in-depth review of the degree to which education activities implement inclusive education approaches in crisis and conflict settings. USAID should further support implementing partners and independent evaluation teams to understand and integrate Agency guidance on addressing the needs of students with disabilities in conflict and crisis contexts.

Leverage innovative financing mechanisms to enhance sustainability.
In crisis and conflict contexts, USAID should collaborate with national governments, other donors and implementing partners through the Education Cluster and Protection Cluster platforms to tackle program sustainability through innovative technical and financial mechanisms. USAID should support rigorous and systematic evaluations of public-private partnerships that refurbish or enhance school infrastructure, including the different level of education inputs that are necessary, and the cost-effectiveness of such partnerships in conflict and crisis settings. USAID should consider longer-term evaluations that involve visits to activity sites and with beneficiaries one or more years after the activity has concluded, to assess effectiveness of sustainability mechanisms and activities.

Evaluate the value added of ICT as a means to improve access to education in crisis and conflict settings.
In particular, the usefulness of ICT-based approaches versus face-to-face trainings and interventions should be examined (this was a learning question for this synthesis that could not be answered due to lack of evidence).

Employ a balance of standardized indicators developed from commonly agreed upon definitions of key topics, and customized indicators.
These indicators should align with activity results frameworks and theories of change. Such indicators should also be realistic and suit the difficult and resource-constrained contexts in which Goal 3 activities are implemented.

Ensure that theories of change are clear about the unique value of specific activities toward individual outcomes so that such theories can be evaluated. USAID should provide ongoing professional development opportunities for USAID Education Officers and implementing partners focused on the aforementioned technical topics as well as processes to strengthen activity monitoring and evaluation systems and activities.