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# Education Systems Strengthening Research in sub-Saharan Africa

## FINAL REPORT

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## ACRONYMS

ADS	Automated Directives System
AES	Alternative Education Systems
AIDE	Djibouti Assistance to Education Project
BESO	Basic Education System Overhaul
CDC	Curriculum Development Center
CEC	County Education Center
CHANGES	Communities Supporting Health HIV/AIDS Gender Equity and Education in Schools
CSO	Curriculum Support Officers
DFID	Department for International Development
DGESC	Directorate of Gender Equity and Social Change
EGAT	the USAID Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade
EGRA	Malawi Early Grade Reading Activity
EQUIP	Education Quality Improvement Program
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESN	Education Support Network
ESP	Education Sector Plan
FARA	Fixed Amount Reimbursement Agreement
FORECAST	Focus on Results: Enhancing Capacity Across Sectors in Transition
G2G	Government to Government
GEE	Gender Equity through Education Program
GES	Ghana Education Service
GESP	Gender Equity Support Program
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HICD	Human and Institutional Capacity Development
KII	Key Informant Interview
LTTTP	Liberia Teacher Training Program
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MoGEI	Ministry of General Education and Instruction
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PAD	Project Appraisal Document
PRIMR	Primary Math and Reading Program

QUIPS	Quality Improvements in the Primary School
RISE	Research on Improving Systems of Education
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
SBEP	Small Basic Education Program
SMoE	State Ministries of Education
SSIRI	South Sudan Interactive Radio Instruction
SSTEP	South Sudan Teacher Education Program
TAP	Technical Assistance Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

The USAID Bureau for Africa commissioned this Education Systems Strengthening Research Activity, a retrospective of education systems strengthening measures, to inform programming decisions that influence the development of effective and coherent systems. Strong systems support the foundation upon which stable and resilient societies can flourish, paving the way for host countries to “become self-reliant and capable of leading their own development journeys” in alignment with USAID objectives and vision— “The purpose of foreign assistance should be ending its need to exist” (USAID, 2017). This research is intended to inform discussions on strategic directions and approaches under the Reinforcing Education Accountability in Development (READ) Act<sup>1</sup>.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to research and synthesize key patterns of effective institutional strengthening of host countries in sub-Saharan Africa to scale up and sustain USAID investments between 2000 and 2017 and 2) to develop recommendations that will inform future USAID education programming as to how it can strengthen education systems and provide insights into what gaps exist and what additional data and research are needed to close the gaps.

### Definitions

In the absence of a USAID education sector definition for “systems strengthening,” the research team developed definitions for the purposes of this report with information gleaned from a global literature review (common education components), key informant interviews, and a review of USAID documents, including those from the health sector, which has a clear definition of systems strengthening.

*What is an education system?* An education system consists of all people, institutions, resources, and activities whose primary purpose is to improve, expand and sustain education outcomes. For purposes of this research, we defined five core education system functions: governance, workforce, finance, service delivery, and information (research and monitoring and evaluation).

*What does it mean to strengthen an education system?* Strengthening an education system means initiating activities in one or more of the five core function areas with the aim of ensuring effective and quality education delivery to improve access and learning outcomes.

### Methodology

This study employed a “complementary design,” collecting data through systematic document reviews and semi-structured key informant interviews. The overall product is enriched by using the results (key themes) of the document review to illustrate and enhance those of the key informant interviews (Greene, 1989).

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<sup>1</sup> The READ Act, legislation that will help millions of vulnerable children and youth around the world access quality education, was signed into law on September 8, 2017

Key research questions included:

1. What practices promote or negate (i.e., reduce the effectiveness of) basic education systems strengthening in sub-Saharan Africa?
2. How can effective interventions or reforms be scaled up and sustained politically, institutionally and financially?

### Global Systems Strengthening Efforts

The initial stage of this activity briefly synthesized the key elements of the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE), The World Bank Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER), and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) systems work and identified how USAID activities could potentially coordinate with these works (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Opportunities for coordination**

Organizational Focus	Opportunity for Coordination
The DFID systems research (RISE) “seeks to gain understanding of what features make particular systems coherent and effective in their contexts, and how the complex dynamics within a system allow a policy to be successful.” (Pritchett, 2015)	Research topics, such as addressing high levels of mobility among teachers and other education staff, indicators to assess learning outcomes, and development of system diagnostics are potential areas of collaboration.
The World Bank SABER initiative collects and disseminates comparative data and knowledge on education policies to help countries systematically evaluate and strengthen their education systems.	The analytical framework for each domain <sup>2</sup> can act as a basis for policy dialogue, which can identify key entry points for operational support to develop stronger policies and improve the capacity to implement them.
The Global Partnership for Education, the singular global fund dedicated to education, focuses on strengthening developing countries’ national education systems to expand education opportunities, particularly for basic education, as well as improve learning.	GPE grant discussions provide a forum for development partners to align their organizational, technical and financial assistance with host-country education systems learning outcome objectives/activities. The third GPE grant funding requirement, i.e., availability of data or data strategy plan, provides an opportunity for USAID projects to collaborate with development partners and the host-country education ministry on identifying country-specific indicators to track learning outcomes, as well as identify how and what data/information projects may contribute to relevant indicators.

<sup>2</sup> The domains cover: 1) levels of education (early childhood development, primary and secondary, workforce development, tertiary education), 2) resources and support for providing quality education (school finance, teachers, school health, and school feeding), 3) information (student assessment, education management information systems), 4) governance (school autonomy and accountability, private sector engagement), and 5) complementary inputs and crosscutting themes (education resilience approaches, equity and inclusion, information and communication technologies).

The Global Review was followed by a review of USAID contributions to systems strengthening with a review of the USAID health sector systems strengthening framework, Human and Institutional Capacity Development (HICD) Handbook, USAID Local Systems Framework, and Technical Note for the 5Rs Framework for the Program Cycle and Government-to-Government (G2G) funding.

### **Systems Strengthening in USAID Education Programs/Findings**

1. An initial round of interviews with key informants and a review of USAID documents conducted to frame the research revealed there is no clear education sector definition of “education systems” or “systems strengthening”
2. Evaluations contained limited evidence of systems strengthening. Evaluations in crisis and conflict settings (e.g., South Sudan) noted that weak systems and severe resource limitations severely affected systems strengthening opportunities.
3. ‘Listening’ to understand the capacity of the system is critical. From the beginning, establishing a forum for dialogue, information-sharing, and decision-making that involves host governments is essential for programming success.
4. Human capacity development without requisite institutional capacity/strengthening has limited impact.
5. Mobility of teacher and other education staff impedes human and institutional capacity development.
6. Evaluations and key informants highlight the importance that G2G funding incorporate and consider technical and financial components.
7. Resource allocation and how host countries are engaged were consistent challenges throughout the study’s timeframe.
8. USAID activities can act as a ‘system steward’ to help an education system transition from the actual system as it currently is to the system that is needed to produce desired development outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

1. Develop a collective vision and common strategy for education systems strengthening to follow the Agency’s focus on fostering local institutional and individual capacity-building initiatives that ensure all children and youth are in school and learning. There is also a need to fund and analyze evaluations and analyses that include larger system uptake actions that go beyond the direct management interest of USAID projects to provide evidence-based support for sustainability, scale and larger system change efforts.
2. Review and validate existing and develop additional assessment instruments to evaluate education system challenges and opportunities, with a focus on improving access to education and learning outcomes.
3. Develop an integrated strategy and approach to support the building of institutional and individual capacity for systems strengthening with a focus on improving access and learning outcomes.
4. Further research is needed on the impact of education workforce recruitment, deployment, migration, and retention on USAID investments in capacity building.
5. G2G funding in the education sector that targets systems strengthening to support improved access and learning outcomes may require its own retrospective study.



6. Develop new approach and design guidance that addresses issues of sustainability, institutional capacity, and government commitment to, and ownership of, USAID-supported systems strengthening technical assistance early and throughout the project cycle. Host governments should be meaningfully involved in design phases of the project.
7. Create conditions that enable host country ownership. Key informants overwhelmingly cited the importance of host-country engagement and ownership throughout the program cycle. They indicated “listening” to host governments is imperative to understanding gaps and barriers that prevent education teams from effectively engaging with host-country governments.
8. Develop approach for donor and sector partner collaboration in the area of education systems strengthening. Global Partnership for Education grants provide an opportunity for wider consultation and identifying how development partners may coordinate and leverage activities to promote coherence toward key outcomes.

## **SECTION I: INTRODUCTION**

### **I.1 Background**

The 1990s produced a plethora of research on systems strengthening and institutional capacity building, leading to the development of indicators and instruments that could measure these subjective organizational components. Building on this work, the USAID Bureau for Africa commissioned this Education Systems Strengthening Research Activity; the purpose was to review systems strengthening measures from 2000 to 2017 and provide a resource for informing programming decisions that influence the development of effective and coherent systems. These systems support the foundation upon which stable and resilient societies can flourish, ultimately paving the way for host countries to “become self-reliant and capable of leading their own development journeys” in alignment with USAID’s objectives and vision—“The purpose of foreign assistance should be ending its need to exist” (USAID, 2017).

### **I.2 Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of the USAID Education Systems Strengthening Research Activity is to research and synthesize the key patterns of effective institutional strengthening of host countries in sub-Saharan Africa to build and sustain their education systems between 2000 and 2017. The research is intended to contribute to the literature on progress that has been made toward achievement of sustainable development in the field of education, what further work needs to be done in terms of identifying and understanding how systems strengthening was undertaken, and why activities, interventions, and/or practices were and were not successful. This research is intended to inform discussions on strategic directions and approaches under the READ Act.

To understand the impact of USAID education activities in this area, the research study reviewed education programming that spanned a 17-year timeframe. The research team wanted to 1) learn how factors such as the program context and key players at multiple levels influenced activities and results, 2) discern trends, and 3) identify opportunities for coordination.

The Introduction to the study (Section I) includes a discussion of the purpose and methodology. It is followed by a review of efforts in education systems strengthening that have been undertaken

by three global institutions active in this area—DFID, World Bank, and Global Partnership for Education (Section 2). Then, it presents a review of USAID contributions to systems strengthening, including findings and analysis of USAID programs evaluations that address these issues (Section 3). Finally, it presents recommendations drawn from the analysis (Section 4).

Key research questions included the following:

1. What practices promote or negate (i.e., reduce the effectiveness of) basic education systems strengthening in sub-Saharan Africa?
2. How can effective interventions or reforms be scaled up and sustained politically, institutionally, and financially?

### 1.3 Definitions

To undertake this study, it was necessary to understand how the USAID education sector defines “education system” and what it means to “strengthen an education system.” A review of the USAID website and documents and interviews with key informants (USAID Senior Education Officers) revealed the USAID education sector had no consistent definition or common approach. In the absence of an agency-wide and USAID education system definition, the research team developed definitions for the purposes of this report, using information gleaned from the global literature review, key informant interviews, and a review of USAID documents, including those from the health sector, which has a clear definition of systems strengthening<sup>3</sup>.

*What is an education system?* An education system consists of all people, institutions, resources, and activities whose primary purpose is to improve, expand and sustain education outcomes. For purposes of this research, the team defined five core education system functions: governance, finance, service delivery, workforce, and information (research and monitoring and evaluation).

*What does it mean to strengthen an education system?* Strengthening an education system means initiating activities in one or more of the five core function areas with the aim of ensuring effective and quality education delivery to improve access and learning outcomes. Key informants identified a strengthened system as a system that “ensures resources are safeguarded” and deliver “quality results.”

The education system consists of multiple levels and actors and is ever changing, responding to the emerging political, social and economic environment. Figure 2 (on the following page) represents an initial effort by the research team to align some of the key elements of the education system core function areas with the USAID Local System Framework 5Rs—rules, resources, roles and responsibilities, and results. The 5Rs are identified in the USAID Technical Note—the 5Rs Framework in the Program Cycle<sup>4</sup> as dimensions that “...can serve as a lens for assessing local systems and a guide for identifying and monitoring interventions designed to strengthen them (p. 1).”

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<sup>3</sup> The analysis for this study was framed using the definition developed for the purposes of this study. The research team acknowledges that the definition developed and codified by USAID for USAID programming may be different, and as a result, the findings presented here may not necessarily be in alignment with the Agency definition.

<sup>4</sup> [https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/5rs\\_techncial\\_note\\_ver\\_2\\_1\\_final.pdf](https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/5rs_techncial_note_ver_2_1_final.pdf)

The core function areas and elements are applicable to the timeframe (2000 – 2017) of this research. While the technical lens through which USAID programming may have shifted, e.g., from a focus on access to quality education to early grade reading, the core function areas and elements have not. The purpose of the abbreviated matrix (below) is not to offer a definitive description of an education system, but to serve as an initial framework for an education sector dialogue on developing a definition and a collective vision for systems strengthening.

**Figure 2: Education System Building Blocks and 5Rs**

Core Function Areas	Elements
<p><b>Governance:</b> national and decentralized levels</p>	<p><b>Rules:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Policy</b> (e.g., policy briefs, national guidelines, or other technical briefs that contribute to policy; operationalization of policy)</li> <li>▪ <b>Feedback loops:</b> Engage with ministry/development partner sector working group and ministry-sponsored technical working groups to experiment (innovate) and integrate activities</li> <li>▪ <b>Partners:</b> Other government agencies/ministries, civil society, private sector, and traditional and religious organizations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Finance</b></p>	<p><b>Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Budget (education financing):</b> Identify budget lines that support or complement proposed project appraisal document (PAD) activities; identify development partners budget lines that may be leveraged to complement USAID-funded activities</li> <li>▪ <b>Long-term and middle-phase financing:</b> Long-term year budgets and medium-term expenditure frameworks; critical to identify Ministry of Education (MoE) commitment, e.g., one-time or recurrent expenditure</li> </ul>
<p><b>Service Delivery</b> (interaction between education system and implementer): Includes products such as reading materials, books, infrastructure, etc.</p>	<p><b>Roles/Responsibilities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Project implementation:</b> Integrate USAID-funded activities into ministry annual work plan(s) and strategic plans to demonstrate how activity is helping MoE achieve goals/results</li> <li>▪ <b>Capacity building:</b> Training programs (pre-service and in-service, educational tours, etc.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Workforce</b> (teachers and other education personnel)</p>	<p><b>Roles and Responsibilities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Job descriptions, promotion system, work conditions, transfer/placement system</li> </ul>
<p><b>Information</b> (Education Management Information System(EMIS), monitoring and evaluation and research)</p>	<p><b>Results</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Project monitoring</b> Integrate project data into education M&amp;E plan, demonstrate how USAID activity contributes to host-country results</li> <li>▪ <b>Evaluation (culture of R&amp;D):</b> Collaborate with Ministry Planning and EMIS departments on data collection so project data may contribute to education systems research agenda and advocacy.</li> </ul>

## I.4 Methodology

This study employed a “complementary design” by collecting data through systematic document reviews and semi-structured key informant interviews (Greene, 1989). The overall product is enriched by using the results (key themes) of the document review to illustrate and enhance those of the key informant interviews.

The global literature review identified key development partner activities that contribute to systems strengthening and briefly synthesized the key elements of these programs— Department for International Development Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE), The World Bank Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER), and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)— and identified how USAID activities may potentially leverage opportunities, that is, utilize or take advantage of existing development partners resources to improve systems strengthening elements within USAID programs. Following the global review, the research team conducted a review of USAID systems guidance, including the USAID health sector systems strengthening work, Human and Institutional Capacity Development (HICD), USAID Local Systems Framework, and G2G funding.

USAID Education evaluations were reviewed through the lens of the five core function areas (governance, finance, workforce, service delivery and information) to identify types of systems strengthening activities and evidence that project activities produced system improvements. This included a search for other proxy factors to determine if a project was strengthening the system. For example:

- Was the project embedded (co-located) in the ministry or education agency to provide opportunities to influence the work?
- Were activities institutionalized? Did the project have a sustainability plan?
- Was the education system/ministry a major implementer of the project activities?
- Were the activities funded by the host country, e.g., a dedicated budget line for the activity?
- Were project activities included in the ministry/district education office annual work plan?

The 5Rs Framework in the Program Cycle Technical Note is rooted in the USAID 2014 Local Systems Framework paper, which establishes that the achievement of sustained improvements in development results depends on the contributions of multiple and interconnected local actors. The Technical Note demonstrates how the 5Rs Framework— results, roles, relationships, rules, and resources—can be applied to strengthen local systems and promote sustainability.

This document review was further informed and complemented by key informant interviews (KIIs) with senior USAID Education Officers who provided a broader contextual understanding of working with, and within, host-country education systems. These exercises provided valuable information and lessons learned across Goal 1 (early grade reading) and Goal 3 (education in crisis and conflict settings). Additionally, Kenya *Tusome* and multiple South Sudan education projects were reviewed, based on their focus on systems strengthening activities, environment (stable and crisis and conflict), and USAID investments to provide greater context and a more detailed narrative on practices and resources involved in affecting systems changes.

In total, the research team conducted interviews with nine (9) key informants (Senior USAID Education Officers), a review of USAID systems-strengthening documentation (including 18 evaluations and three major final reports), and a global review of systems strengthening activities conducted by several major international organizations.

*Evaluation Gap:* This study's focus on G2G funding is limited due to a lack of available evaluations. The USAID Knowledge Service Center conducted a search of the Development Experience Clearinghouse for G2G education evaluations but failed to locate an evaluation. After an extensive search, the research team identified one G2G sub-Saharan African education evaluation: Performance Evaluation of Public Works Construction Activities to Increase Access to Education in Ghana.

*Limitations:* Project evaluations focused primarily on the performance of USAID projects per se; therefore evidence for sustainability, scale and larger system change efforts is limited. ADS 2015Rs Framework in the Program Cycle Technical Notes reinforces this point, with the statement that the “Agency’s experience in applying systems practice to development problems is limited at this point and has focused more on up-front assessment of systems than it has on engaging systems through projects and activities (p.2).”

Given the timeframe and resource limitations of this study, the research team<sup>5</sup> did not conduct an exhaustive review of all education projects in sub-Saharan Africa with systems strengthening elements. Instead, evaluations initially considered for review were taken from those that already had been reviewed by the African Bureau’s Education Team and deemed relevant for the purposes of this activity.<sup>6</sup> This list was augmented by additional projects recommended for review by key informants and a few based on the Synthesis of Findings and Lessons Learned from USAID-funded Evaluations Education Sector 2013 – 2016 (hereafter referred to as Education Evaluation Synthesis). See Annex I for a complete list of evaluations and major final reports.

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<sup>5</sup> Team included two part-time researchers.

<sup>6</sup> The Africa Bureau Education Team reviewed 133 evaluations of USAID education programs 2000 – 2015. Of the 133 evaluations, nine (9) were identified as relevant to systems strengthening. (All nine projects were developed prior to the 2011 Education Strategy.) The criteria used by the Africa Bureau Education Team to identify potential systems strengthening evaluations were based on the type of program design. Any program that aimed to improve the ability and capacity of host governments to tackle various constraints to delivering quality education was flagged. This included programs that were completely or partially designed to help strengthen the capacity of a nation’s education system, regardless of the specific focus of the systems strengthening elements.

## SECTION 2: GLOBAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING

### 2.1 Overview

The intention of this section is to provide an overview of the key elements of each organization's systems strengthening focus and how USAID could potentially leverage opportunities to strengthen USAID programming.<sup>7</sup> The review also provided background and helped to inform the study's definitions.

*How are global organizations contributing to systems strengthening?* The research team reviewed three key global organization efforts in strengthening education systems:

- The World Bank Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER), a diagnostic tool that may be applied in multiple ways, e.g., program design, implementation and research.
- Department for International Development's (DFID) multi-country Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE), which focuses on gaining an understanding of "How education systems can be reformed to deliver better learning for all."
- Global Partnership for Education (GPE) grants to developing countries to expand education opportunities through strengthened national education systems.

### 2.2 Global Organizations Contribution to Systems Strengthening

**The World Bank Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER):** Guided by the Bank's 2020 Education Strategy, which argues that effective action to promote learning requires a balanced analysis of the entire education system, the Systems Approach for Better Education Results collects and disseminates comparative data and knowledge on education policies to help countries systematically evaluate and strengthen their education systems. SABER utilizes a systems approach that recognizes that learning depends not only on resources invested in the school system (inputs), but also on the policies and institutions that manage the inputs and the quality of policy implementation.

Using diagnostic tools and detailed policy information, SABER provides education stakeholders with actionable and detailed information on their education system policies and institutions and evaluates the quality of those areas against evidence-based global standards. By strengthening the knowledge base for evidence-based policy-making in education, SABER helps countries to understand their own systems better and make informed decisions to strengthen their systems.

SABER provides detailed system frameworks and benchmarking of a country's capacities in a range of education policy domains across the education system. The domains cover:

- *Levels of education* (early childhood development, primary and secondary, workforce development, tertiary education)

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<sup>7</sup> The organizations selected for review were identified and selected in agreement with the USAID Activity Manager.

- *Resources and support* for providing quality education (school finance, teachers, school health, and school feeding)
- *Information* (student assessment, education management information systems)
- *Governance* (school autonomy and accountability, private sector engagement)
- *Complementary inputs and crosscutting themes* (education resilience approaches, equity and inclusion, information and communication technologies)

*How does SABER contribute to strengthening education systems?* SABER examines the whole system through the application of multiple domains to gather policy intent information instead of focusing on individual inputs. This allows for the development of a more comprehensive analysis of the education system that seeks to understand how factors such as resources, accountability, governance, information and service delivery function together as a system.

While SABER focuses on measuring the quality of formal policies and institutions adopted by the education systems, the World Bank recognizes that how policies are actually implemented often differ from the original policy design due to a number of factors, including the political economy of the reform process, lack of capacity of the organizations tasked to implement the policies, and/or the influence of contextual factors. SABER's core data-gathering work integrates the institutional frameworks that are needed for implementing the existing policies and implementation indicators, with additional tools being tested and utilized by domain teams for evaluating how well policies are being implemented. Since SABER collects limited information on policy implementation, an assessment of policies should be complemented with detailed information describing the actual configuration of policies on the ground.

*What opportunities exist for coordination?* SABER provides a knowledge base for stakeholders to identify areas where a country's policy framework can be improved and "where international experience shows that strengthening is possible" (*overview paper*). The analytical framework for each domain can act as a basis for policy dialogue, which can identify key entry points for operational support to develop stronger policies and improve the capacity to implement them.

Donors and other partners can draw upon the country reports produced to-date, including the reports from the 32 sub-Saharan African countries that have applied the SABER tool.

***DFID Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE)***<sup>8</sup>: Recognizing that while the number of years of schooling has significantly expanded across the spectrum at roughly the same levels, learning levels have not, the RISE research initiative "seeks to gain understanding of what features make particular systems coherent and effective in their contexts, and how the complex dynamics within a system allow a policy to be successful" (Pritchett, 2015). The theory of change is that: (1) it is not currently known what it takes to improve learning outcomes at the speed and scale required to meet sustainable development goals, (2) there is a strong evidence base on certain interventions, but it points to what isn't known about how to achieve scale and sustainability, (3) doing research on these issues will increase knowledge on what it takes globally as well as influence policy reform nationally in countries where research is being done.

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<sup>8</sup> Supplemental funding provided by Australian Aid for the India research.



*How does RISE contribute to strengthening education systems?* The research examines two key features: 1) the contextually relevant changes that would lead to greater learning and 2) the politics associated with adoption and implementation of changes to the overall system.

RISE research areas included the following:

1. Teaching/education workforce
2. Equity in the system
3. Roles and responsibilities: accountability
4. Innovation in the system
5. Private provision

The first phase, a diagnostic assessment, was conducted in the six research countries: Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Tanzania, and Vietnam. Research on sub-Saharan Africa is outlined in Figure 3 (below). open

**Figure 3: RISE in sub-Saharan Africa**

<b>Ethiopia</b>	<b>Tanzania</b>
<p><b>Description:</b> The five-year research project will study the government’s General Education Quality Improvement Package, a multi-pronged package of interventions aimed at improving learning equity in a diverse and low socio-economic setting. There has been rapid expansion of access to primary education, but learning levels remain limited.</p>	<p><b>Description:</b> The six-year project focuses on ‘what works’ to look at what forces sustain or impede reform and to understand the underlying mechanisms that bring about improved learning that might be transferable to other contexts.</p>
<p><b>Research Questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do reforms raise student-learning outcomes, and do reforms make learning more equitable by improving outcomes for the most marginalized populations?</li> <li>2. How and why do reforms succeed or fail? What forces facilitate or impede the success of reforms?</li> <li>3. How can the successes or failures of reforms inform the development of effective educational initiatives in Ethiopia and in other countries?</li> </ol>	<p><b>Research Questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What makes nationwide education reforms possible, and how can they be sustained?</li> <li>2. Does a shift toward learning-based incentives for schools and teachers lead to improved student learning?</li> <li>3. What lessons can Tanzania’s experience offer to other countries seeking to make meaningful educational reforms?</li> </ol>

*What opportunities exist for coordination?* The DFID RISE research focus offers several potential opportunities for collaboration. Common research areas could include the impact of education workforce issues, such as deployment, attrition, transfer, and incentives on education development investments. Also, possibilities exist for the development of an education diagnostic system that is validated and used by the global education community. In addition, DFID RISE is receptive to collaborating with other development partners in any of the five research themes listed above.

**Global Partnership for Education (GPE):** The Global Partnership for Education, the singular global fund dedicated to education, focuses on strengthening developing countries’ national education systems to expand education opportunities, in particular for basic education, as well as improve learning. GPE has a three-part theory of change:



1. Countries need a plan, money, and good data, especially with respect to system/sector changes in equity, efficiency and learning outcomes.
2. Countries need to design a grant program to implement part of the plan.
3. Countries implement the plan and program, including the results-based part, which is designed to incentivize progress toward sector results.

*How does GPE contribute to systems strengthening?* Over the next three years (2017 – 2020), US\$ 2.6 billion in funding will be allocated to more than 60 countries, approximately half in fragile settings, to develop credible education sector plans. Government ownership of the sector plan and a firm commitment to provide complementary domestic funding underpin the grant provided by GPE.

GPE determines countries' 'readiness' to access GPE funding against their progress on three funding model requirements:

- Requirement 1. Credible, endorsed Education Sector Plan (ESP): GPE offers a \$500,000 grant over 9 – 12-month period to facilitate sector planning.
- Requirement 2. Evidence of commitment to the ESP and its financing (Is domestic funding sufficient to promote universal access to education?)
- Requirement 3. Availability of data (or a strategy to obtain data): plan needs to have a reasonable EMIS system and data planning, including a plan on how to measure learning outcomes if measurements are not in place

These are system-level requirements, with specific sub-requirements, which, when met, make countries eligible to submit for grant funding. The Education Sector Plan Implementation Grant is oriented toward country implementation of the education sector plan. In most cases, 30 percent of the grants (or more, if the country chooses) are programmed as sector-level, results-based financing against equity, efficiency and learning outcomes targets.

*What opportunities exist for coordination?* GPE grant discussions provide a forum for both the host country government and development partners to align their organizational, technical and financial assistance with the host-country education system learning outcome objectives/activities. The third GPE grant funding requirement, i.e., availability of data or data strategy plan, provides an opportunity for USAID projects to collaborate with development partners and ministries on the identification of country-specific indicators to track learning outcomes as well as how and what data/information projects may contribute to relevant indicators. Coordinating with GPE on this component offers potential for a coordinated and streamlined approach to metric identification and analysis.

## SECTION 3: USAID CONTRIBUTIONS TO SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING

USAID has made significant contributions to systems strengthening through the development of tools, resources, and frameworks: Human and Institutional Capacity Development Handbook, G2G funding, and USAID Local Systems Framework. This section highlights USAID health systems strengthening as a model for embedding activities within host country systems.

### 3.1 USAID Health Systems Strengthening

For more than two decades, the USAID health sector has embedded its activities within host countries systems. Using the USAID Local System Framework as a key resource, the sector further articulated its vision in the USAID *Health Systems Strengthening Vision Brief*. In line with the framework’s definition of a local system, the health sector defines a health system as “a local system made up of all people, institutions, resources and activities whose primary purpose is to promote, restore and maintain health (p. 10).” Following the Local System Framework sustainability lens, the vision statement further explains how health system activities work to strengthen country ownership “so governments and country stakeholders will have the commitment, resources, and capacity to continue life-saving interventions without our continued support (p. 11).”

#### Health Sector core function areas for systems strengthening

1. human resources for health
2. health finance
3. health governance
4. health information
5. service delivery
6. medical products, vaccines and technologies

Drawing from the global system health-strengthening arena, the USAID health sector aligns with the World Health Organization (WHO) system building blocks to articulate the core health system functions areas. A diagnostic tool, USAID’s Health Systems Assessment Approach: A How-to Manual, provides guidance in assessing the host-country health system and designing programs accordingly.

### 3.2 Human and Institutional Capacity Development (HICD)

Human and Institutional Capacity Development (HICD) is a “USAID model of structure and integrated processes designed to identify fundamental causes of performance gaps in host country partner institutions, address those gaps through a wide array of performance solutions in the context of all human performance factors, and enable cyclical processes of continuous performance improvement through the establishment of performance monitoring systems (HICD Handbook, p. 7).” In 2011, the USAID Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade (EGAT) developed the HICD Handbook to help USAID integrate HICD into its development assistance programs. As a model for sustainable performance improvement, the handbook provides methodologies and tools designed to assist USAID in efforts to deliver long-term development programs that build the capacity of host-country partner organizations to provide quality services and products.

Methodologies and tools for HICD were adapted from the field of Human Performance Technology (HPT) and applied to organizations operating in developing countries. The main HICD features include the following:

*Viewing organizations as adaptive systems* that are pushed to constantly evolve with the changing environment in which they operate. An organization consists of functions that are interrelated and that are affected by, and respond to, changes in other parts of the organization. Under HICD, an organization's optimal performance is only possible when all three levels of performance—organizational level, process level, and the individual performer level—are in alignment.

*Employing a systematic approach to analyze organizational performance:* Describe the desired performance state, compare it to the organization's current performance in specific areas, and understand the performance gap between the two. The gap is analyzed through the lens of the six primary factors that affect performance: 1) information, data and feedback, 2) resources, tools and support, 3) incentives, consequences, and rewards, 4) knowledge and skills, 5) individual capacity, and 6) motivation and expectations to determine recommendations for solutions to close the performance gap.

*Focusing on tangible, measurable performance improvement result* that is needed for any initiative to be successful: Performance measures need to be established for all levels of performance and regularly monitored to ensure that the organization's work is achieving success. HICD encourages the integration of performance scorecards into activity design to enable organizations to establish benchmarks for current performance that can be monitored through measures described in the scorecard.

### **3.3 USAID Local Systems Framework and 5R Technical Note**

The Local Systems Framework, developed in April 2014, establishes that achieving and sustaining improvements in development results depends on the contributions of multiple and interconnected actors. Rather than building the capacity of a single actor or strengthening a single relationship, improving outcomes requires a systems approach that focuses on the partner country's system (local system) as a whole, which includes the actors (i.e., governments, civil society, universities, individuals), their interrelationships, and the incentives that guide the actors. Likewise, sustaining development outcomes depends on the sustainability of the local system and its durability and ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

With the understanding that effective and empowered local systems are essential to USAID sustainably fulfilling its mission, the Framework further articulates that USAID must strengthen its systems practice so that it can engage local actors and improve local systems more effectively to achieve sustained results more consistently. The Framework defines clear and practical steps toward achieving results that are locally owned, led and sustained. These steps include the following: 1) adhering to good practices in engaging local systems, 2) modifying the USAID risk assessment process to take better account of risks and rewards and direct resources to where they are most likely to support sustained development, and 3) broadening the results framework to track USAID contributions to the strength and sustainability of local systems.

The 5Rs Framework, introduced in the Local Systems Framework and further elaborated in the Technical Note the 5Rs Framework in the Program Cycle (last updated October 2016), assists with the analytical processes to assess a local system and gain a deep and nuanced understanding of its boundaries, the actors and interrelationships, and its strengths and weaknesses. The 5Rs Framework highlights five key dimensions of systems—results, roles, relationships, rules and resources—and provides a focus for each phase of systems practice. Specifically, the 5Rs Framework helps identify what to listen for, where to engage, what should be discovered, and what interventions should be adapted.

Systems practice is operationalized through the Program Cycle, and ADS 201 indicates that taking into consideration local systems and how best to engage with them should be a priority throughout the Program Cycle. The 5Rs Framework was specifically developed to facilitate the integration of systems practice and the Program Cycle at key junctures where efforts to change system dynamics are planned and implemented—project design, management, monitoring and learning.

The first phase of a systems practice is to **listen to the system** and understand how it is organized, how well it functions, and how relevant are its results. The 5Rs Framework focuses on what to listen for in the “as is” system.

The second phase targets **engaging the system** to promote positive and sustained change, which is most effective when it is locally led and owned. It is therefore imperative that all aspects of engagement be undertaken collaboratively with system actors and stakeholders. During this phase, which focuses on preparatory analytical work, development of the theory of change, activity design, and implementation of specific interventions; the 5Rs Framework provides a way to: 1) describe the future local system (the “to be” system) that is needed to produce a desired development outcome, 2) identify interventions through a common frame to compare the future system with the system “as is”, and 3) prioritize interventions.

The third phase focuses on **discovering how the system responds** to interventions. The 5Rs Framework provides a structure for capturing systems change that promotes learning within projects and activities. The framework also can “provide an organized approach to monitoring that captures information from each dimension of the system throughout project implementation” so that project teams can stay aware of how changes in one part of the system may influence other parts.

The fourth phase of systems practice targets **adapting to what has been discovered** about the effects of the intervention on system dynamics. This may entail modifying, scaling back, postponing or canceling one or more intervention if the effects are negative, or expanding the activity if effects on the system have been positive.

### 3.4 Government-to-Government (G2G)

Under Government-to-Government (G2G) activities, USAID provides funds directly to country partners who will lead the implementation of activities to deliver mutually agreed results and assume responsibilities for reporting on progress and performance. Generally, G2G activities

provide financial assistance rather than technical assistance. In 2009, the Obama administration made G2G assistance programs a point of major emphasis.

G2G activities typically have three phases: planning, implementation, and M&E. The planning phase entails designing projects that link to USAID missions' country development strategies, assessing and mitigating risks, and preparing planning documents. USAID implements G2G activities according to the terms and conditions established in assistance agreements with partner governments. USAID missions usually select funding mechanisms through which USAID reimburses partner governments for costs related to completion of agreed activities. In addition, consistent with USAID policy, missions employ assistance agreements and corresponding implementation letters to commit funds and set objectives. Finally, the M&E phase includes conducting audits of partner-government entities and assessing the results of G2G assistance activities.

According to a General Accounting Office report (2015), USAID policies guiding the processes that missions follow to plan, implement, and monitor and evaluate G2G assistance generally reflect an international consensus on how best to achieve development outcomes as well as accepted accountability standards. These policies permit USAID to work toward its goals of strengthening local system capacity, country ownership, and sustainability while providing reasonable assurance that U.S. resources are being used as intended. In addition, according to the Overseas Development Institute Report (2013), expert consensus is that using G2G assistance for activities such as systems strengthening will likely be effective.

In response to an immediate need for tools and training materials that will assist the USAID Education Team in designing, implementing and monitoring G2G activities, the E3 Education Office developed the G2G Education Toolkit. It provides a guide to analyze the institutional reforms necessary for partner countries to realize USAID strategic objectives in education. The Institutional Capacity Assessment (ICA) Tool within the G2G Toolkit provides detailed procedures for analyzing the gap between desired, and actual, institutional performance for achieving improvements in early grade reading and should be used in parallel with the Public Financial Management Risk Assessment Framework (PFMRAF). The PFMRAF assesses the risks of financing through partner country public institutions, while the ICA assesses programmatic and technical capacity of host-country institutions to lead and manage activities that will strengthen the quality of basic education.

The Education ICA has two stages. Stage 1 determines whether a host government meets the minimum conditions to produce satisfactory results using G2G assistance by analyzing overall education sector policy, particularly in relation to its commitment of resources for, and management of, early grade reading. Education ICA Stage 2 is carried out if the findings from PFMRAF stage 1 and ICA stage 1 show that acceptable conditions are in place for G2G assistance and the host government and Ministry of Education share this resolve. This stage provides the technical basis for an Approval for the Use of Partner Government Systems (AUPGS) and a Project Approval Document (PAD), which links G2G assistance to institutional capacity development. Stage 2 focuses on the specific departments and offices that will manage the implementation of G2G activities and seeks to understand the most strategic use of G2G financing, the most appropriate modalities for G2G, other strategies and program activities that

are needed to assure institutional reform and strengthening, and factors such as objectives, funding levels, timing and conditions necessary to implement G2G.

The results of the assessment can be used to inform the design of the G2G assistance and its relationship to the overall USAID education project. Education Teams can use the findings to design an institutional capacity development plan, design G2G assistance that is linked to institutional capacity development, and design an M&E system to assess institutional capacity development and the use of G2G modalities.

### 3.5 Finding the right balance: Trends in systems strengthening in USAID education activities.

The following narrative provides an overview of USAID work in education systems strengthening, which has shifted from increased access and quality basic education (2000 – 2011) to targeted goals (2011 – 2018). The targeted goals for 2011 – 2018 are early grade reading (Goal 1), workforce and higher education (Goal 2), and crisis and conflict settings (Goal 3). Key characteristics of each time period (2000 – 2011 and 2011 – 2018) are examined below.

**2000 – 2011:** Key informants identified “contextualization and flexibility” as central characteristics that defined the vast array of education programming implemented during this period. Education programs ranged widely from teacher professional development activities, curriculum development, and model schools to systems strengthening activities in the areas of decentralization, planning, budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation to school-community support and school construction, to name a few.

An analysis of USAID Assistance to Basic Education in the Developing World 1990 – 2005 found that most of the USAID programs and project goals during this period were to increase access and improve education quality in a sustainable manner. “Most projects approached project design from a systems perspective and were designed as multiple interwoven interventions. Projects were grounded in a belief that meaningful education reform depends on simultaneously addressing multiple constraints (p. 11).” The analysis concluded that while USAID project designs were primarily formulated in terms of outcomes, e.g., access or student achievement, most monitoring and evaluation efforts concentrated on project outputs (or system inputs), e.g., number of teachers trained, textbooks printed, etc., or the “what”.

**The How and What:** “the effectiveness of international development activities is determined by the “how,” not the “what.” Development is about people and relationships, building trust and credibility, and helping countries lead their own development processes. By investing in structures, processes, leadership, understanding the political, and institutional complexities of long-term educational reform, USAID has helped governments manage change.” (EQUIP2 Final Report, 2011)

The 2005 Education Strategy had two objectives: 1) promoting equitable access to quality basic education and 2) beyond basic education: enhancing knowledge and skills for productivity. The strategy cited systemic reform as “the foundation of USAID’s work to strengthen education systems....” with a “refined sector-support approach that emphasizes support to sector reforms and capacity-building efforts developed and

led by host-country governments (p. 8).” The strategy was guided by the adoption of a “systemic, sector-wide approach to identify and focus on leverage points within a host country’s education system (p. 13).”

During the 2002 – 2012 timeframe, the three Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP) awards, which were managed by the Education Office in Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade Bureau, became prominent funding mechanisms. *EQUIP 2* (2003 – 2012) focused on systemic elements (policy, systems and management) essential to education reform and sustainability and anchored the other two EQUIPs: *EQUIP1*, which focused on improvements at the school and classroom level both in stable and fragile settings, and *EQUIP3*, which focused on youth training and employment.

The EQUIP 2 Final Report noted that “many EQUIP 2 implementers felt that there was a considerable increase in the use of systems language in USAID documents and Requests for Proposals, including an improved understanding of the complexity of educational policy reform and USAID’s role in it (p. 25),” reinforcing the Education Strategy’s systems focus. A pattern analysis conducted by EQUIP 2 in 2010 found that between 2003 and 2009, the three EQUIPs received 69 associate awards in 41 countries. The second most common theme across the EQUIP projects (83 percent) was “developing and strengthening systems (EQUIP 2 Final Report, p. 28).”

**2011 – Present:** The key informants unanimously reported that the current Education Strategy has brought a much-needed focus and standardization to education programming, with a targeted focus on learning outcomes. Several informants cited the Agency’s comparative advantage in early grade reading pedagogy, materials development, mother tongue instruction, and monitoring and evaluation, which has significantly contributed to the global discussion. Technical assistance is primarily offered through projects, but occasionally is augmented with Government-to-Government (G2G) funding, usually implementation letters, e.g., fixed amount reimbursement agreements (FARAs), with a focus on construction, teaching and learning material procurement, and training.

Multiple informants also noted that this technical focus comes with the challenge of less flexibility to contextualize. As an informant explained, there was a tendency for “adherence to Agency strategy over host-country consultation and input” and provided the example of a host country opting out of mother tongue approach for its first reading project due to capacity issues that did not align with the E3/Education team focus on mother tongue. The Mission Education Office followed the host country’s suggestion. “The government’s voice needs to be respected for sustainability,” the informant stated.

Although the focus of systems work is subsumed under the goal areas as an intermediate result, a couple of key informants noted that there was an assumption that programs would “work towards the goals in a system-strengthening way”. However, this was not always the case. One informant described conversations with different Education Officers who questioned whether they could do systems strengthening, given the need to focus on the goals. If Education Officers view work with the systems through an “either or lens,” the informant elaborated, this becomes an issue. Several key informants noted that the 2011 strategy flipped from a broad system lens to a micro lens on the classroom and teachers. “In my experience, I have noticed a difference



between USAID Education Officers who are able to understand the challenges as they relate to the system” and are part of a larger inter-connected system “and those who have a bunch of projects” (aimed at targeted beneficiaries), an informant stated.

**Finding the right balance:** The majority of key informants indicated that for the next education strategy, it would be beneficial to continue with a targeted focus on improving learning outcomes (characteristic of the current 2011 strategy) combined with more flexibility to contextualize programming (characteristic of the 2000 – 2011 timeframe). A wider lens should also be included, they said, to understand good governance and accountability dimensions as well as technical reforms.

### 3.6 Systems Strengthening in USAID Education Programs: Findings and Analysis

**Finding:** *An initial round of interviews with key informants and a review of USAID documents conducted to frame the research revealed there is no clear education sector definition of “education system” and “systems strengthening”*

While there appeared to be a general understanding among key informants of what systems strengthening entails and examples given of systems strengthening elements on projects, the USAID education sector lacked a universal definition or agreement as to the definition of “education systems” and “systems strengthening” in education.

For the purpose of this study, the research team developed a definition from information gleaned in the global literature review and review of USAID documents, including those from the health sector.

**Finding:** *Evaluations contained limited evidence of systems strengthening.* Evaluations in crisis and conflict settings (e.g., South Sudan) noted that weak systems and severe resource limitations severely limited systems strengthening opportunities.

This finding aligns with the Education Evaluation Synthesis finding (under Goal 1): “Evaluations showed little evidence of government ability to take over reading interventions (p. 24)” and (under Goal 3): “The predominant barrier facing Goal 3 education activities is financial sustainability, followed by lack of government and community ownership of the intervention (p. 93).”

The research team found that evidence for systems strengthening commonly fell into three general categories:

1. Concrete evidence (using proxy systems strengthening indicators<sup>9</sup>) that demonstrated links from the project activities to the system to show improvements;
2. Anecdotal evidence (opinions, viewpoints, impressions, etc.); and
3. Diverging evidence, which may include a proxy systems strengthening element (e.g., contribution to policy reform) but no institutionalization or sustainability elements.

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<sup>9</sup> Proxy indicators described in Methodology Section.



Several evaluations described *proxy systems strengthening indicators*, which provided examples of how the project was strengthening the system. This included: embedding (co-locating) within the structure, integration of activities into national programs implemented by the ministry, host government funding, and inclusion in national strategies or policy-level reforms.

The impact assessment of the USAID Education Program in Ethiopia (1994 – 2009) traced two policy-level initiatives that can be directly attributed to USAID support. “At the national and decentralized levels, the MoE has recognized and adopted the approaches initiated by Basic Education System Overhaul (BESO) to improve planning, budgeting, resource allocation, and M&E to build capacity. In particular, the ministry sees that this assisted with the delivery of education at schools, which has benefitted from improved leadership and supervision, realized through various BESO supported training efforts, along with the provision of school operational guidelines. Also, General Education Quality Improvement Program’s provision of school-level grants is an outgrowth of the School Incentive Awards (SIA) activities pioneered by USAID through its various projects to strengthen community support for the schools (p. 40).”

The Malawi Education Decentralization Support Activity (EDSA) mid-term evaluation noted that EDSA contributed to a major accomplishment in the institutionalization of a national school planning and grants program (Direct Support to School)<sup>10</sup> through the creation of school bank accounts for the disbursement of ministry funds directly to schools. “The successful piloting of the flow of funds from EDSA directly to school bank accounts and the transparent management of these funds formed the basis for the (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology) request to the Accountant General for the approval of the use of these accounts for direct MoEST support nation-wide... Seventeen years after the declaration of free primary education, funds will flow directly from the Central Ministry to schools for the first time – a decidedly major step toward institutionalizing Direct Support to School and fiscal decentralization in the education sector (p. 16).” The evaluation also cited several key internal mechanisms that were put in place to ensure institutionalization of EDSA activities, i.e., “allocated government funding and office space in the MoEST (p. 3).”

*Projects embedded in weak and nascent systems faced overwhelming challenges.* This was most notable in South Sudan, where a good project had little chance of sustainability due to the broader enabling environment (economic, social and political) impediments. The Gender Equity through Education (GEE) performance evaluation team found “clear evidence” that GEE had effectively increased the capabilities of government and school staff. “Not only is staff confident about its ability to train others, but also, it has utilized these capabilities to directly confront many of the factors that cause girls to drop out of secondary school... many and complex challenges in the education sector in South Sudan will not only limit, but also potentially diminish, the gains achieved by GEE. It is a relatively well-designed and executed project embedded in a very weak system (p. 27).”

The South Sudan Interactive Radio Instruction (SSIRI) Performance Evaluation came to a similar finding; it concluded, “By design and by intent, over the last seven years, the SSIRI project has

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<sup>10</sup> The first national school planning and grants program, i.e., Direct Support to School (DSS), was later renamed the Primary School Improvement Program (PSIP).

progressively embedded itself in the Alternative Education System (AES) Department of the General Education Directorate of the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI), albeit with mixed results (p. 19).” “While in nominal terms, there is ownership of the SSIRI project at the MoGEI, in practical terms, the MoGEI has not yet taken responsibility for the majority of project support activities. While expressing enthusiastic support for the project and a desire to take it over eventually, education officials at the payam, county, state, and national levels have also expressed with certainty that the MoGEI is not ready to do so at this time (p. 23).”

The End of Project Review Southern Sudan Technical Assistance Project (2011) also found that the Technical Assistance Project (TAP) advisors “embedded directly in SMOEs, placing the program in a unique and distinctive position vis-a-vis its multiple partners. The relationship between TAP and state ministry staff has been, with few exceptions, strong and productive. Solid and respectful relationships between advisors and ministerial staff have been foundational to capacity gains. TAP actively facilitates the relationship between multiple partners and the SMOEs, contributing directly and significantly to improved sectoral coordination. TAP has played a significant role in building capacity at the state level to coordinate donor relations (p. ix).” Like GEE and SSIRI, the project faced overwhelming challenges due to near absence of operational funds.

Evaluations also provided *anecdotal evidence of systems strengthening*, often gathered through focus group and key informant interviews or what the evaluation team witnessed. The Liberia Focus on Results: Enhancing Capacity Across Sectors in Transition (FORECAST) Final Evaluation Report found that there was a general impression that all institutions were better off with improved technical and managerial skills and that over time, these should have a positive impact on the performance of the organizations.

The Guinea-Program Evaluation for USAID Guinea Basic Education Program Portfolio 1997–2006 indicated that an important achievement to which USAID contributed was the revitalization of a decision-making culture based on a systematic participatory process, which was a shift from the centrally-driven practice. “An example of a successful participatory process was the development of quality criteria.... The definition of the quality criteria through a broad national consensus, and the resultant “ownership” that the evaluation team witnessed is certainly a major achievement. Nearly all education authorities at various levels of the system cited quality as an important USAID contribution (p. 30).”

Similarly, the Djibouti Projet AIDE Performance Evaluation stated, “There is clear evidence that the project has contributed positively to achieving USAID and Ministry main goals and there are some indications that its impact will be sustained in the future (p. 34).” However, the evidence is primarily anecdotal, and the evaluation indicates the project needs more concrete evidence to prove the cause and effect of interventions. The evaluation described the monitoring and evaluation system as having “very few and very limited indicators (p. 10)” and that while the project has many accomplishments, details are not sufficient to explain the “how and why” of those achievements (p. 35).

Finally, some evaluations provided *diverging evidence* about system-strengthening activities, i.e., activities were considered to be successful in strengthening the system but did not have an

institutionalization plan. The performance evaluation of the Malawi Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA) cited improved reading outcomes among Standard 1 – 3 students and an improving policy environment with the EGRA approach “entrenched” in national documents, i.e., the Education Sector Implementation Plan II and the 2014 MoEST National Reading Strategy. “If USAID pulled out tomorrow, elements of the program would continue (p. 43).”

The evaluation went on to note that the sustainability component (Local Capacity Development), which focused on improving the capacity of Malawian structures and organizations to carry forward early grade reading activities once the project closed, did not target the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST). “The lack of targeting of the MoEST under LCD in the design is however, surprising in the context of addressing sustainability...and a missed opportunity—this would have allowed the program to address some capacity issues affecting MoEST in a more comprehensive way as part of efforts to achieve sustainability of early grade reading (p. 33).”

The Nigeria Education Initiative (NEI) mid-term evaluation found that “amongst other activities, the NEI project strengthened the government of Nigeria capacity by improving connections and communications between the state level and communities and school. NEI project activities also increased the capacity of local governments and community organizations to participate in these forums (p. 4).” However, the evaluation found that the project lacked an institutional sustainability plan and needed to identify “a government team and community group structure that can operate sustainably to reform and improve the education sector after the NEI project has closed out (p. 21).”

**Finding:** *‘Listening’ to understand the system’s capacity is critical.* From the beginning, establishing a forum for dialogue, information-sharing, and decision-making that involves host governments is essential for programming success.

Multiple key informants said that “listening” is the most critical component of program engagement (from design to implementation), with the host country (i.e., Ministry of Education) leading the process. Keeping “everyone close” and promoting dialogue, several informants confirmed, is essential in “building trust” among the various players to work together to achieve a common goal. The finding aligns with the first two principles of the USAID Local Systems Framework: 1) recognize there is always a system and 2) engage local systems everywhere.

The informants said that setting up national-level committees headed by host country officials is critical for promoting successful dialogue. For example, the new USAID education strategy design committee in Ghana is co-chaired by the Deputy Minister of Education with host-country engagement integral to every step and decision made. The *Tusome* Early Grade Reading activity established a steering committee and technical working group to provide oversight to the government of Kenya national reading program.

Several key informants noted that USAID, donor partners, and implementing partners can create conditions that enable host-country ownership by building trust through regular and meaningful dialogue and collaboration. As one key informant explained, it is important to “understand the bandwidth of the ministry and who will take on the work” to ensure project success.

It is imperative to understand the gaps and barriers that prevent Education Teams from effectively engaging with host country governments as a first step toward removing or addressing these challenges.

**Finding:** *Human capacity development without requisite institutional capacity/strengthening has limited impact.*

As noted in the HICD Handbook, “strengthening institutional capacity is one of the greatest challenges faced by USAID as it works to fulfill its development assistance mandate worldwide (p. 5);” understanding the broader enabling environment and responding to the changing environment is essential. Capacity constraints not fully understood or taken into consideration by the program design diminished a system’s ability to meaningfully benefit from the interventions, e.g., skills training.

The Education Evaluation Synthesis found that “strengthened institutional capacity at local and national levels led to improved access to basic education (p. 65)” and that “the most popular methodology used by interventions to improve institutional capacity (specifically to improve teaching or school management capacity) is skills training (p. 70).” Multiple evaluations (both in stable and fragile environments) found that skills trainings often were not effectively utilized by the host-country institution due to the broader enabling environment, within the control of the ministry/education system and outside the ministry’s control (political, economic or social).

Under Goal I, Education Evaluation Synthesis cites limited evidence of a system’s capacity to absorb and support implementation activities. Issues of budget constraints, lack of incentives, as well as transportation and logistical challenges plagued multiple projects. For example, The Mid-term Assessment of the Liberia Teacher Training Program Phase II clearly found that the capacity of the MoE to “capitalize on the LTTP’s resources and implement an improved service delivery program was overestimated. Consequently, progress in future service delivery programs will be similarly jeopardized until the MoE strengthens its institutional capacity and planning, management, human resource, and financial systems (p. 3).”

The Liberia Focus on Results: Enhancing Capacity Across Sectors in Transition (FORECAST) Final Evaluation Report found, “The capacity challenges in Liberia are huge and span all sectors, particularly the public sector and institutions, where there are less competitive recruitment practices and very little access to training and other skills-building opportunities. While the FORECAST Project represented a tremendous effort to address the problem, the needs still abound (p. 8).” The evaluation also found that over time, the training should have a positive impact on organizational development; in the immediate term, the training assisted the staff in gaining the appropriate knowledge and skills needed to take on their responsibilities, but the lack of resources prevented the staff from putting into practice what was learned.

The Mid-term Evaluation of Basic Education Strategic Objectives (BESO) II Project discussed the importance of understanding constraints (internal and external) to activity implementation and identifying which constraints are directly within the education system’s control. External

challenges, such as drought conditions and political unrest, were outside the control of the Ministry of Education, but internal constraints, e.g., frequent transfers within the education department resulting in a high turnover rate and lack of incentives, were a direct reflection of the MoE's capacity, or lack of capacity, to provide effective service delivery. The evaluation recommended BESO II work with the ministry to adequately address constraints within the MoE's control; in other words, address institutional pressure points negatively affecting project implementation to determine if the MoE had the requisite institutional capacity.

The Malawi EGRA, GEE, and South Sudan Interactive Radio Instruction projects, among others, also cited limited resources and other broader environment issues as challenges to activity implementation.

**Finding:** *Teacher and other education staff mobility is a persistent factor impeding human and institutional capacity development.*

Throughout the timeframe of this study, high turnover of teachers and other education staff negatively affected institutional strengthening at both the central and decentralized levels. The LTTP II evaluation found that the series of “White Papers” and analysis outlining policy options aimed at providing the foundation for the MoE to improve teacher policy and procedures made relatively little progress due to the turnover of ministers, deputy ministers and assistant ministers. The Zambia Communities Supporting Health, HIV/AIDS, Gender Equity, and Education in Schools (CHANGES) evaluation noted that the restructuring of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health resulted in people being moved into different positions or new people appointed. This undermined the capacity-building efforts already undertaken at the ministry and required the retraining of multiple officials to ensure effective implementation.

The Mid-term Evaluation of BESO II found the major constraint to sustainability was the continual turnover of education personnel throughout the country, making it difficult to sustain capacity within the various institutions when personnel left and new, untrained personnel were hired. The Impact Assessment of USAID's Education Program in Ethiopia (1994 – 2009), echoed a similar finding. The high turnover of trained staff at Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) created large gaps in the ability of the TTC to implement the entire program. Moreover, primary school teaching staff was also quite transitory. “Those who took part in only one or two training workshops knew more than they did before, but did not know all they needed to successfully implement what was designed...it is unrealistic to expect that a project will provide training over and over again to teachers and administrators who voluntarily leave or who are transferred. While the argument can be made that those who have been trained might still be “in the system,” it is also unrealistic to believe that they will transfer those skills to whatever position they next secure (p. 32).”

The Ghana Quality Improvements in the Primary School found high rates of mobility among teaching staff in schools in the northern part of Ghana and cited the need to also work directly with Ghana's formal teacher training system to legislate policy for reform. “The overwhelming conclusion to be drawn is that where QUIPS teachers were no longer available in schools, the short-term benefits of QUIPS . . . were not sustained (p. 86).” When QUIPS-trained teachers left,

the QUIPS-targeted instructional practices disappeared in schools.

**Finding:** *Evaluations and key informants highlight the importance that G2G funding incorporate and consider simultaneously both technical and financial components.*

Although a request to the USAID Knowledge Service Center for G2G evaluations yielded no results, the research team located one G2G education evaluation: Performance Evaluation of Public Works Construction Activities to Increase Access to Education in Ghana.

Understanding a system's capacity constraints applies to assistance through projects and G2G funding. With USAID's focus on supporting countries to resource and manage their development on their journey to self-reliance, understanding G2G funding takes on increased importance. As the Ghana Public Works<sup>11</sup> evaluation highlighted, it is important to understand host-country agency technical as well as financial/procurement capacity prior to the disbursement of funds. The evaluation found that the implementing mechanisms, supervision processes, and quality control activities were not effective enough to ensure activity outcomes in a timely and cost-effective manner. This reinforced the need for ministries to be supported in multiple areas, including monitoring budget, oversight of implementing partners, quality of construction, and ongoing maintenance to enhance the sustainability of education structures.

As a key informant noted, G2G in many countries cannot be a stand-alone as the governments do not have the requisite capacity. When undertaking G2G funding, it is critical to include a technical assistance component.

**Finding:** *Resource allocation and how host countries are engaged has been a consistent challenge throughout the study's timeframe.*

One key informant explained that donors do not consult the government enough and instead, set up project coordination units in the ministry for quarterly consultations. However, this results in "trying to play catch-up versus strong ownership." Another informant felt that the ability of USAID to exercise host-country engagement is attributable to the "commitment and bandwidth of the Mission Education Team. Where we have been committed, I think we have done well, both before and after 2011. Where we are understaffed or overly focused on service delivery or managing our implementing partners, we have not."

Several key informants and evaluations found that the design stage should, but does not always, take into consideration the needs and capacities of the ministry as the implementer.

The USAID/Ghana Quality Improvement in Primary Schools (QUIPS) Program indicated that "the main obstacle for QUIPS, like other USAID-funded projects, was implementation modalities that reinforced ownership by USAID and put little emphasis on government or district ownership. An approach to implementation that allows more diversity and flexibility in national and district

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<sup>11</sup> G2G funding provided in the form of Fixed Amount Reimbursement Agreements (FARAs).

decision-making could make projects such as QUIPS more sustainable and more accepted by host-country institutions, particularly by governments that are moving toward sector-wide programming and encouraging their partners to help support a collective vision (p. 123).” The evaluation noted, “Trust and understanding among partners are critical. It is important to invest time and resources to ensure that all involved are expressing their views and listening to each other. For example, while QUIPS program personnel reported excellent working relationships with GES, GES officers did not always report so. An officer in the Basic Education Division described it this way: The relationship was often difficult. QUIPS was in the driver’s seat (p. 146).”

Several studies, including the South Sudan Gender Equity through Education (GEE) End of Project Performance Evaluation Report, Nigeria Northern Education Initiative (NEI) Project Mid-term Performance Evaluation, and Djibouti Projet AIDE Performance Evaluation, cited the need for an exit or sustainability plan. The Gender Equity and Empowerment Program performance evaluation indicated “capacity, sustainability, and exit strategies should be established before a project begins and required in all quarterly and annual work plans from the very beginning. In the design phase, this can be accomplished by backward mapping from an expressed vision of what should be left after a project has ended and revised each year to better adapt to changing social, economic and institutional realities of the project setting.” This echoes findings from the Education Evaluation Synthesis, which emphasized the need to focus on sustainability early in the project cycle.

An exit or sustainability plan developed and implemented in coordination with the host government and with the involvement of the appropriate entities gives all parties a clear understanding of the roles, responsibilities and resources needed for effective implementation and handover. A well-developed strategy cannot address system capacity as an afterthought; it should be informed by a mapping of the existing system’s capacity to coherently function, consider gaps in capacity, resources and other areas that prevent it from fulfilling its objectives; and address those barriers in the program design and during implementation. Planning for sustainability can ensure that internal mechanisms are in place for institutionalization and adequate transfer of responsibilities.

**Finding:** *USAID activities can act as a ‘system steward’ to help transition an education system from the actual system as it currently is to the future system that is needed to produce desired development outcomes.*

The USAID ADS 201 5Rs Framework in the Program Cycle Technical Note outlines various ways USAID-funded activities can facilitate system change. “One way may be through acting as a system steward to help move the system from ‘as is’ to ‘to be’ state by providing new information or coaching. Success is dependent on being “perceived by others as impartial (p. 16).”

Acting as a system steward and ensuring integration of activities into Ministries of Education plans and budgets is one way to underpin national scale-up and commitment. USAID/Kenya’s recent partnership with the government of Kenya on the national reading program, *Tusome*, is another example of a project serving as a system steward to put in place the system scaffolding (political buy-in and strengthened institutional and human capacity) to roll out a national reading program.

## USAID/Kenya: Serving as System Steward for Early Grade Learning

From 2011 to present, USAID/Kenya and the Kenyan Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MOEST), has acted as a system steward, initially through the PRIMR pilot program, and currently through the Tusome Early Grade Reading activity. System scaffolding has been put in place to support political buy-in and strengthen institutional and human capacity. The results have been an education system that has demonstrated dramatic improvements in early grade reading. Under Tusome, the percentage of second graders reading at the benchmark of 65 correct words per minute in English rose from 12 to 48 percent.

To date, USAID has controlled and disbursed resources to ensure timely implementation. The absorption of the activities into the Ministry of Education budget, sufficient and timely release of funds, and appropriate usage will be critical. Tusome's continued success will depend on receiving resources from the Government of Kenya/Ministry of Education.

## SECTION 4: RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** *Develop a collective vision and common strategy for education systems strengthening to follow the Agency's focus on fostering local institutional and individual capacity-building that ensures all children and youth are in school and learning.*

The new education policy offers an opportune moment for USAID to develop an education systems strengthening concept note that clearly articulates a theory of change rooted in a systemic approach that incorporates governance and accountability along with specific programmatic activities. The concept note would provide an opportunity to articulate the manner in which the Agency will support systems strengthening in both stable and conflict- and crisis-country environments.

As part of this concept note, the education section should develop and come to an agreement on a clear definition of: 1) what is an education system, and 2) what does it mean to strengthen an education system. USAID's *Vision for Health Systems Strengthening*<sup>12</sup> is a resource document that provides a potential roadmap for the education concept note.

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<sup>12</sup> USAID's *Vision for Health Systems Strengthening*: [www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/global-health/health-systems/usaid-vision-health-systems-strengthening](http://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/global-health/health-systems/usaid-vision-health-systems-strengthening).



The Agency also should undertake evaluations and analyses that include larger system uptake actions that go beyond the direct management interest of USAID projects to provide evidence-based support for sustainability, scale and larger system change efforts.

**Recommendation 2:** *Review and validate existing and develop additional assessment instruments to evaluate education systems challenges and opportunities, with a focus on improving access to education and learning outcomes.*

The Education Evaluation Synthesis references multiple activities that would benefit from further investigation/research, e.g., decentralized coaching models or training in pedagogy or school management to strengthen human and institutional capacity development.

Programmatic activities are not independent of other activities/functions within an education system. As indicated in the Education Evaluation Synthesis recommendations, enabling elements, such as budgetary constraints, logistics or transportation impediments, often contribute to programmatic impediments. Broadening these elements and analyzing core function areas (governance, workforce, finance, service delivery, and information) are recommended as first steps to laying out a systemic roadmap before further investigations are conducted on specific USAID focus activities, e.g., decentralized models of coaching and textbook procurement and distribution.

**Recommendation 3:** *Develop an integrated strategy and approach to support the building of institutional and individual capacity for system strengthening across the five functional areas (governance, workforce, finance, service delivery, and information) with a focus on improving learning outcomes. Greater emphasis should be placed on understanding institutional capacity before human capacity development takes place. While human capacity contributes to institutional strengthening, multiple other factors influence both stable and fragile settings.*

As the South Sudan snapshot illustrates, programs that have implemented human capacity development activities without addressing institutional strengthening have seen the inability of the institutions to utilize the newly developed capacity among personnel. As the South Sudan Gender Equity and Empowerment evaluation states, “Projects must consider the broader enabling mechanisms, such as transportation and maintenance, operating budgets, equipment, communications, and information management in planning for sustainability since absence of these items can limit the effects of any individual or institutional capacity improvements. Building capacity of individuals is not the same thing as building institutional capacity if these institutions cannot enable individuals to utilize new capacity.”

**Recommendation 4:** *Further research is needed on the impact of education workforce recruitment, deployment, migration, and retention on USAID investments in human and institutional capacity development.*

Throughout the timeframe of this study, high turnover of teachers and other education staff undermined capacity building and institutional strengthening. Identifying ways to leverage and/or collaborate on research opportunities within the RISE research project and GPE would be advantageous.

**Recommendation 5:** *G2G funding in the education sector that targets systems strengthening that supports improved access and learning outcomes might require its own retrospective study.*

As the Ghana Public Works indicate, G2G funding is not just about ensuring competency in financial and procurement functions; it also must consider the technical capacity of the host country agency to develop a performance monitoring plan and effectively carry out sustainable programmatic activities, such as generating community ownership of schools to ensure ongoing school maintenance and conducting community-level advocacy on the need for transparent and accountable school budgeting. When implementing G2G funding, it is critical to include a technical assistance component in order to be effective.

**Recommendation 6:** *Develop new approach and design guidance that requires a focus on addressing issues of sustainability, institutional capacity, and government ownership of USAID-supported systems strengthening technical assistance early and throughout the project cycle. Host governments should be meaningfully involved in design phases of the project.*

It is recommended that a process for capturing the progress of capacity building and sustainability measures throughout the life of the project be sufficiently integrated into a sustainability plan. This should include qualitative indicators or benchmarks against which to monitor progress at regular intervals to ensure that areas of weakness are identified and that the exit or sustainability plan is being implemented and improved. The indicators should go beyond taking an inventory of what resources are in place (e.g., budget and staffing) and measure how those resources are being utilized, managed and developed.

Further, it is important to capture in these plans the “how” and “why” of project achievements in the form of snapshots, case studies, scenarios or other small studies that can provide the perspective as to specific context and input that enable success. As indicated in the Djibouti Project Aid Performance Evaluation, “This documentation is essential for sustaining interventions, whether the stewardship for project components is taken over by [the Ministry], NGOs, other donors or, potentially, a follow-up project.”

To ensure operationalization of an exit or sustainability plan, it is essential for USAID, donor partners, and implementing partners to create conditions that enable host country ownership throughout design and implementation. As one key informant emphasized, donors cannot “go to

the table with the solution” or, as another informant explained, the greatest impact can be made if “the ministry [is] driving from the beginning.”

**Recommendation 7:** *Create conditions that enable host country ownership.*

Key informants overwhelmingly cited the importance of host country engagement and ownership throughout the program cycle. This can be accomplished by establishing a forum for “listening” and dialogue with host country governments throughout the project cycle.

**Recommendation 8:** *Develop approach for donor and sector partner collaboration in the area of education system strengthening.* The Education Evaluation Synthesis cites the lack of financial resources in crisis and conflict settings as one of the major obstacles to sustain and scale activities. The option of a Global Partnership for Education grant in these settings provides an opportunity for wider consultation and to identify how development partners may coordinate activities and leverage to promote coherence toward key outcomes.

## Snapshot: USAID/Kenya: serving as system steward for early grade learning

**Background:** In 2010, Kenya faced a severe learning challenge. While education received significant funding (23.7 percent of the government expenditure), the majority of funds went to salaries. Supplies of teaching and learning materials, designed with a heavy focus on grammar and challenging text for early grade learners to decode, were insufficient to meet classroom needs. Teacher professional development was limited; the majority of teachers (80 percent) had not received in-service training since 2009.<sup>13</sup> As a result, “less than 5 percent of first- and second-grade children met government literacy benchmarks.”<sup>14</sup>

**Laying the foundation through a rigorous pilot:** In response to this challenge, USAID/Kenya worked with the Kenyan Ministry of Education to put in place the political, institutional and financial scaffolding to improve, expand and sustain early grade reading outcomes. Jointly, the Ministry of Education and USAID developed the Primary Math<sup>15</sup> and Reading Program (PRIMR) pilot, which provided different combinations of in-service professional development, instructional support, and teaching and learning materials in the most effective combination or approach. PRIMR was implemented in 1,300 primary schools in four (out of 47) counties considered representational of Kenya’s various educational settings.

To ensure appropriate evidence was collected, PRIMR conducted three studies—a baseline study (2011), midline study (2013), and the end line (2014)—that provided the Ministry of Education and education development partners with rigorous evidence-based information to engage in the development of a national reading program. The literacy findings provided the ministry with evidence for the development of the *Tusome* national reading program.

**Historic partnership for systems strengthening and sustainability.** Kiswahili for “Let’s Read,” the *Tusome* program (2014 – 2019), funded by USAID with additional funding by the Department for International Development from 2014 – 2015, is a flagship partnership between USAID/Kenya and the Kenyan Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) to jointly scale up and implement the program nationwide. In addition to service delivery in the form of instructional support and teaching and learning materials, *Tusome* has focused on ensuring sustainability by addressing gaps in the system.

To align the multiple stakeholders and promote host-country ownership, *Tusome* assessed the larger education ecosystem, identified key stakeholders, and established forums for ongoing political and technical conversations. The *Tusome* Steering Committee is chaired by the Minister of Education and includes the Principal Secretary, Director General, and other key department directors and provides governance and management oversight; the *Tusome* Technical Committee focuses on pedagogical and instructional elements.

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<sup>13</sup> Piper, B, Zuilkowski, S, Dubeck, M, Jepkemei, E, and King, S. *Identifying the essential ingredients to literacy and numeracy improvement: Teacher professional development and coaching, student textbooks, and structured teachers’ guides*. World Development 106 (2018) 324 – 336.

<sup>14</sup> Piper, B., & Mugenda, A. (2012). The Primary Math and Reading (PRIMR) Initiative: Baseline report. Retrieved from [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pa00hx75.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00hx75.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Global Partnership for Education funded the math component.

Identifying appropriate roles and responsibilities to ensure workload is aligned with job description is critical. Curriculum Support Officers (CSO) play an important role in the support of the pedagogical component, and curriculum support to classroom teachers had long been a part of their job description. Increasingly, however, an inordinate amount of time was being devoted to administrative tasks. The importance of realigning their work to match job description expectations was a critical activity under PRIMR. Toward the end of the program, the ministry recognized the crucial contribution of the CSOs in providing instructional support to teachers and hired additional administrative staff to fill gaps and allow CSOs to fulfill their proper role, supporting teachers in classrooms.

***Transitioning to full host-country management:*** The government's financial commitment—release of funding in a timely manner and appropriate usage—is the vital underpinning of the program. Since the inception of PRIMR in 2011 to the present, USAID has managed and disbursed the funds for activities under the projects. Currently, USAID/Kenya is working closely with both the Planning Unit and Administration Office, which supervises the Finance Unit, to share and track activity unit costs for budgeting purposes. Starting in 2018, the government of Kenya has gradually taken over the funding of *Tusome*; the government partially funds grade one activities, including the printing and distribution of 2.25 million books and management of some *Tusome* classroom activities. USAID is continuing to cover the teacher professional development costs. Resource transfer will continue in the next few years with the government funding grades one and two in 2019 and fully funding grades one to three in 2020.

## **South Sudan Snapshot: HICD and Adaptive Systems in a Conflict and Crisis Setting**

*“The problems of fragile relationships between people and institutions are related to, and compounded by, deficits in the political development of the country: unclear divisions of power and emergent political institutions. The advent of peace brings unrealistically high expectations by the people, and this contrasts with the low capacity of the state to deliver.”<sup>16</sup>*

*“Education systems do not function in a vacuum; they are part of broader economic, political, and social institutions (World Development Report, p. 44).”*

The purpose of the South Sudan Snapshot is to provide a mini-case study of various USAID education programs implemented in South Sudan (including pre-independence southern Sudan) 2002 – 2015 to assist with the education sector dialogue on human and institutional capacity development in a crisis and conflict setting. This mini-case study demonstrates how high expectations and a broader enabling environment characterized by severely limited resources and weak systems affect human capacity development activities and, in turn, affect institutional strengthening. In other words, even though a project may be able to build capacity of individuals, the system may be too limited or resource-poor to effectively utilize and sustain these individual capacities, which highlights the need to better understand: *how to support a country in crisis and conflict on its journey to self-reliance?*

### **2002 – 2004: Support to non-state actor: preparing for interim government**

In 2002, USAID initiated the Sudan Basic Education Program (SBEP) to promote the USAID strategic objective, enhanced environment for conflict resolution, and increased equitable access to quality education in southern Sudan and lay the ground work for support to the southern Sudan education system with the advent of peace.

### **2005 – 2011: Support to interim Government: nascent institutions**

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) in January 2005 ended decades of civil war, which had devastated the education sector and saw education infrastructure targeted for destruction and occupation by armed groups. The end of the war created favorable conditions in southern Sudan for the rehabilitation and development of basic social services, including education. Education institutions and systems started to be in put in place in 2005 with support from the international community. According to the United Nations’ Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA), school enrollment rose after the CPA from 0.7 million in 2005 to 1.4 million in 2009.<sup>17</sup> Still, more than half of school-aged children were not enrolled in school<sup>18</sup>.

The scale of institution building required in southern Sudan was enormous. There was no comprehensive education system and there was little, if any, institutional memory. All levels

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<sup>16</sup> War-Torn Societies Project. 1999. *Rebuilding After War: Lessons from WSP*. [www.wsp-international.org](http://www.wsp-international.org)

<sup>17</sup> The World Bank. (2012). *Education in the Republic of South Sudan: Status and challenges for a new system*. Retrieved from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/787661468302991853/pdf/705950PUB0EPI0067902B09780821388914.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> USAID. (January 29, 2015). USAID, BRAC launch project to reach out-of-school children [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/usaid-brac-launch-project-reach-out-school-children>.

(central and decentralized) lacked personnel with the appropriate skills and training. The education system was required to establish systems of governance<sup>19</sup>, a civil service with human resource policies, remuneration scales, and service delivery capacity with defined roles and responsibilities and a resource base.

Reconciliation and reintegration were key elements of the new education system. The selection of national and decentralized level education staff required the balancing of human resources, e.g., returning members of the diaspora and refugees with technical skills and knowledge as well as former combatants, whose expectations of some acknowledgement of their loyalty and extended service to a liberation movement needed to be satisfied by a nascent state with limited financial capacity. Decisions on staffing involved defining new roles for these various groups and building trust between emerging political institutions and populations.

In 2005, USAID through the **Sudan Basic Education Program** (SBEP) provided technical assistance to the Secretariat of Education in restructuring to create an interim Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST). The ministry's departments, grouped according to function to encourage a coordinated approach to education service delivery with clear lines of communication and information-sharing, focused on developing a unified system of education with interim policies to guide the schools in mediums of instruction and curricula.

Given the limited capacity of the interim Government of southern Sudan, development partners and non-government organizations continued to be at the forefront in education service delivery. Major USAID education programs included the following:

***The South Sudan Interactive Radio Instruction*** (SSIRI) (2004 – 2012) was designed and implemented to enhance the achievement of an increasingly stable South Sudan in the immediate post-CPA period. SSIRI, using a mass delivery system, provided a means to quickly deliver education services to a geographically scattered population.

The original plan also envisioned the SSIRI technical team producing radio programs in a studio based in Maridi, which was the historical home of the ministry's Curriculum Development Center. Maridi was located hundreds of kilometers from the central ministry in Juba and lacked the most basic infrastructure, i.e., electricity and very limited telecommunications. Given the need for high-quality audio and print materials, the project made the decision to relocate and maintain its production facilities in Nairobi. This had implications for both the ownership and sustainability of the program, as SSIRI was not able to build a viable educational media production in South Sudan.

SSIRI activities represented a large share of the Alternative Education Systems (AES) Department, and by design and intent, SSIRI progressively embedded itself in the ministry's Alternative Education System department and engaged ministry counterpart staff (e.g., AES inspectors) with the goal of eventually handing over the program to the ministry. Strong working relationships were established at various levels, but this was not enough to overcome the multiplicity of

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<sup>19</sup> Governance was a mixture of authoritarianism (based on its military heritage) and budding pluralism (rooted in the interim Government of southern Sudan pledge for democracy).<sup>19</sup>

challenges, such as the lack of resources to facilitate communication and capacity building. At the end of the program, the ministry was unable to take ownership of the work.

The first two years of the **Technical Assistance Program** (2005 – 2012) was spent primarily working at the central level, providing targeted technical assistance to develop foundational documents: policies, plans and budget. Increasingly, the education system was facing pressure to exist not just on paper but to deliver on the widely anticipated “peace dividends.” Communities demanded the restoration of viable education opportunities. However, the national ministry realized a significant roadblock to building the capacity of schools was the very limited capacity of the State Ministries of Education (SMoE).

TAP focused on meeting the immediate needs of the SMoE and developed capacity to create plans and programs in addition to improving implementation capacity. The End of Project Review Southern Sudan Technical Assistance Project (2011) found the TAP advisors “embedded directly in SMoEs, placing the program in a unique and distinctive position vis-a- vis its multiple partners. The relationship between TAP and state ministry staff has been, with few exceptions, strong and productive. Solid and respectful relationships between advisors and ministerial staff have been foundational to capacity gains. TAP actively facilitates the relationship between multiple partners and the SMoEs, contributing directly and significantly to improved sectoral coordination. TAP has played a significant role in building capacity at the state level to coordinate donor relations (p ix).”

Internally, the most serious threat to sustainability was the high turnover of TAP staff. “The TAP model is deeply dependent on the competence of its Technical Advisors and the quality of relationships they develop with their counterparts at SMoEs. Externally, TAP faces the same broad and persistent challenges faced by all capacity building efforts in South Sudan. These include high turnover among ministry staff, creating a constant need to train a new set of individuals, a lack of computers, even where these are essential to the performance of the job; older staff members who block efforts at change, and a lack of transport to conduct essential tasks. Additionally, vast distances, seasonal inaccessibility, and persistent security concerns make work at the county level where schools are managed very difficult. The most serious threat, however, derives from the near absence of operational funds at the state ministry level (p 31).”

The **Gender Equity through Education Program** (GEE) (2007 – 2012) built on and expanded the accomplishments under the Gender Equity Support Program (GESP), 2002 – 2007, which promoted gender equity in secondary schools and teacher training institutes throughout southern Sudan by reducing financial, infrastructure, social and institutional barriers that prevented females from attending secondary school and becoming teachers. The program encouraged girls and disadvantaged boys to complete secondary school and mentored women to enter the teaching profession through the provision of stipends, mentorship, small school improvement grants, and technical assistance to the MoGEI and the State Ministry of Education. GEE focused on minimizing institutional barriers to girls’ education in South Sudan through the provision of technical assistance and training to the MoGEI/Directorate of Gender Equity and Social Change (DGESC) and SMoEs.



While the mentoring component of GEE had positive effects on school retention and had great potential to be sustained, the MoGEI and SMOEs lacked the logistical capacity to carry on the mentor training. Specifically, the lack of institutional capacity and finances acted as a barrier for ministry officials to utilize the capabilities they acquired through GEE. As articulated in the End of Project Performance Evaluation Report (2012), “Projects must consider the broader enabling mechanisms such as transportation and maintenance, operating budgets, equipment, communications, and information management in planning for sustainability, since absence of these items can limit the effects of any individual or institutional capacity improvements. Building capacity of individuals is not the same thing as building institutional capacity if these institutions cannot enable individuals to utilize new capacity (p 11).”

The **South Sudan Teacher Education Program (SSTEP)** (2011 – 2014) focusing on improving policy frameworks and management systems, access to and quality of teacher training, and access to teaching and learning materials grew out of previous activities, including SBEP and SSTAP. The original program design reflected the need to upgrade teacher skills by addressing a range of teacher training, performance and certification concerns. The program was intended to work within the existing structures in South Sudan to create and build the capacity of an Education Support Network (ESN)<sup>20</sup> and subsequently work with the ESN to address policy gaps, provide in-service and pre-service teacher training, and finalize a teacher training curriculum and materials. By project startup, the situation on the ground was vastly different. During this period, the MoGEI was in the process of developing its Education Strategic Plan, and its views on how and where the project needed to support its priorities were shifting. The austerity budget limited funding to key infrastructure, e.g., the Curriculum Development Center (CDC), Teacher Training Institutes, etc., hampering maintenance of key teacher training infrastructure. The ministry prioritized allocating resources into Country Education Centers (CECs) and training programs rather than policies and procedures that would sustain the overall system of training.

### **2015 – Present: Adaptive systems: return to non-state actors**

Ongoing instability in South Sudan directly undermines an already weak Ministry of General Education and Instruction and makes it difficult to effectively provide basic education services. Beginning in 2015, Congressional restrictions made it illegal to work with the government of South Sudan. Due to conflict, displacement and a worsening economy, the out-of-school rate soared, reaching the world’s highest rate of 72 percent of primary age children (UNICEF 2017). As of 2018, 2.2 million children in South Sudan are out-of-school (UNESCO 2018). USAID reoriented its approach to provide emergency education services through projects with UNICEF beginning in 2014, including the current three-year Integrated Essential Emergency Education Services project. Over the last four years, UNICEF increasingly has expanded its sub-grantees to 37 non-governmental and local community-based groups, providing country-wide access to literacy, numeracy and psychosocial support for 465,000 girls and boys. Capacity has been built within this non-state education system to conduct training for teachers, deliver conflict-sensitive materials, and conduct ongoing early grade reading and math assessments alongside risk analyses to discern continuous needs and inform flexible response as the conflict continues.

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<sup>20</sup> ESN is a system that outlines interactive links among the ministry at the national and state levels, the Curriculum Development Center, teacher training institutes, county education centers and schools to provide flexible training and instructional support to communities and teachers to improve the quality of education.

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## ANNEXES

### Annex I: Evaluations and Major Final Reports reviewed

Project	Project Dates	Evaluation
Ethiopia Basic Education System Overhaul (BESO) <sup>21</sup>	1994 – 2001	Impact assessment of USAID's education program in Ethiopia, 1994 – 2009 (2010)
Ghana Quality Improvements in the Primary School (QUIPS)	1997 – 2005	A look at learning: The final evaluation of USAID/Ghana's Quality Improvement in Primary Schools (QUIPS) program (2005)
Guinea basic education program portfolio	1997 – 2006	Program evaluation for USAID/Guinea basic education program portfolio (2006)
Zambia Communities Supporting Health, HIV/AIDS, Gender Equity, and Education in Schools (CHANGES) Program	2001 -- 2005	Evaluation of the Communities Supporting Health, HIV/AIDS, Gender Equity, and Education in Schools (CHANGES) program (2005)
Ethiopia Basic Education Strategic Objectives (BESO II)	2002 – 2007	Mid-term evaluation of Basic Education Strategic Objectives (BESO) II project (2004)
Education Quality Improvement Program 2 (EQUIP2)	2003 – 2012	EQUIP2 Leader Award final report: Nine years of experience in education policy, systems, and management (2012)
South Sudan Interactive Radio Instruction (SSIRI)	2004 – 2012	South Sudan Interactive Radio Instruction (SSIRI) performance evaluation report (2012)
Technical Assistance Program (SSTAP)	2005 – 2012	Southern Sudan End of Project Review: Technical Assistance Program (2011)
Sudan Health Education and Reconciliation (HEAR)	2006 – 2011	Health Education and Reconciliation (HEAR) Project Mid-Term Evaluation
Gender Equity through Education (GEE)	2007 – 2012	Gender Equity through Education end of project performance Evaluation Report (2012)
Focus on Results: Enhancing Capacity Across Sectors in Transition (FORECAST) Liberia	2008 – 2011	Focus on Results: Enhancing Capacity Across Sectors in Transition (FORECAST), final evaluation report (2011)
Malawi Education Decentralization Support Activity (EDSA)	2009 – 2012	USAID/Malawi Education Decentralization Support Activity (EDSA) mid-term evaluation (2011)
Djibouti Projet AIDE	2009 – 2013	Projet AIDE performance evaluation 2009-2013 (2013)
Nigeria Northern Education Initiative (NEI)	2009 – 2014	Northern Nigeria Initiative (NEI) project mid-term performance evaluation (2013)
Ghana Public Works Construction (PWC)	2010 – 2015	Performance evaluation of Public Works Construction activities to increase access to education In Ghana (2015)
Liberia Teacher Training Program Phase II (LTTP II)	2010 – 2015	Mid-term assessment of the Liberia Teacher Training Program Phase II (2013)
South Sudan Teacher Education Program (SSTEP)	2011 – 2014	SSTEP final report (2014)

<sup>21</sup> Included as part of the evaluation count.



Malawi Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA)	2012 – 2015	Performance evaluation of the USAID/Malawi Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA) (2015)
South Sudan Room to Learn (RtL)	2013 – 2016	Lessons Learned in Addressing Access to Education in South Sudan (2017)
Mozambique Aprender A Ler (ApaL)	2012 – 2015	Impact evaluation of USAID/Aprender A Ler project in Mozambique (2016)
Synthesis of education evaluations <sup>22</sup>	2018	Synthesis of Findings and Lessons Learned from USAID Evaluations: Education Sector 2013 – 2016

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<sup>22</sup> Included as part of the evaluation count.

## Annex 2: Education Systems Strengthening Tools and Guidance Matrix

Education Systems Strengthening Tools and Guidance Matrix					
Technical Focus	Name of Resource	Description	When/How/Why to use this resource	Published by	Link
Education in Crisis and Conflict	Education and Fragility: An Assessment Tool	Intended to help identify the links between an education and fragility in failing, failed or recovering countries	For USAID Missions and Bureaus to assist with programming decisions	USAID	<a href="http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1036/Education_and_Fragility_an_assessment_tool.pdf">http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1036/Education_and_Fragility_an_assessment_tool.pdf</a>
Education in Crisis and Conflict	Rapid Education and Risk Analysis (RERA) toolkit	Provides tools and methodology to better understand the situation of education systems and learners in countries affected by conflict and crisis, as well as their complex and volatile contexts	Supports all stages of USAID program cycle and can be used to inform USAID strategy and programming	ECCN	<a href="https://eccnetwork.net/wp-content/uploads/RERAToolkit_508.pdf">https://eccnetwork.net/wp-content/uploads/RERAToolkit_508.pdf</a>
Capacity Development	Capacity 2.0	Provides understanding of how USAID and partners can effectively strengthen organizations by improving their fit with local systems		USAID Learning Lab	<a href="https://usaidlearninglab.org/20library/capacity-20">https://usaidlearninglab.org/20library/capacity-20</a>
Capacity Development	Capacity Development in Practice	Designed to professionalize and increase effectiveness of capacity development to achieve development goals by drawing upon experiences from civic, government and private sectors, and showing how capacity also stems from connections between different types of actors and the levels in society at which they operate		SNV Netherlands Development Organization	<a href="http://snv-website-2015.live.dpdk.com/public/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/capacity_development_in_practice.pdf">http://snv-website-2015.live.dpdk.com/public/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/capacity_development_in_practice.pdf</a>
Capacity Development	G2G Education Toolkit: Institutional Capacity Assessment	Provides detailed procedures on analyzing the gap between desired and actual institutional performance for achievement improvements in early grade reading	To determine if acceptable conditions are in place for G2G assistance and to assess specific organizations and activities within the host country's education sector to inform strategy and modalities on use of G2G financing	USAID	

Education Systems Strengthening Tools and Guidance Matrix					
Technical Focus	Name of Resource	Description	When/How/Why to use this resource	Published by	Link
Capacity Development	Capacity, Change and Performance Study	Provides perspectives on the topic of capacity and its development by highlighting indigenous perspectives (i.e., how capacity develops from within, rather than focusing on what outsiders do to induce it) The study addresses the key questions: What does capacity look like? How does capacity develop indigenously? What is the driving force behind successful capacity development? Does better capacity necessarily lead to better performance? What can outsiders do to support capacity development?		European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM)	<a href="http://ecdpm.org/capacity-change-and-performance-study/">http://ecdpm.org/capacity-change-and-performance-study/</a>
Capacity Development	Human and Institutional Capacity Development Handbook	Provides information on the evolution of HICD, guidance on implementation, and tools for implementing HICD initiatives to help USAID integrate HICD into its development assistance programs		USAID Learning Lab	<a href="https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/HICD%20Handbook%202011%20-%202008.pdf">https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/HICD%20Handbook%202011%20-%202008.pdf</a>
Context Assessment	Opportunity to Learn	Examines time-loss factors as they relate to school management, time on task, and achievement of USAID education goals; suggests five key areas that donors and host countries should address to support learning opportunities for students: ensuring schools are open all day, guaranteeing teachers are present, ensuring students are present and ready to learn, minimizing time loss in schools, and strengthening teacher ability to manage class time and improve pedagogical practices	Can be used by host governments and development partners for program and policy design	FHI360 Educational Quality Improvement Program 2 (EQUIP2)	<a href="https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EQUIP2%20OTL%20Book.pdf">https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EQUIP2%20OTL%20Book.pdf</a>
Context Assessment	Snapshot of School Management Effectiveness (SSME)	Offers cost-effective, systematic, standard and adaptable method to quickly assess the quality of school management functioning and performance in primary	Can be used by host governments, development partners,	RTI	

Education Systems Strengthening Tools and Guidance Matrix					
Technical Focus	Name of Resource	Description	When/How/Why to use this resource	Published by	Link
		schools and classrooms; can be applied at the national and decentralized levels	others to assess levels of educational quality		
Systems assessment	The Health System Assessment Approach: A How-to Manual	Assesses the interactions between the system functions, and the policies and regulations behind those functions, to identify interventions that change how the system works		USAID	<a href="https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00k4fs.pdf">https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00k4fs.pdf</a>
Systems assessment	Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER)	Initiative to produce comparative data and knowledge on education policies and institutions, with the aim of helping countries systematically strengthen their education systems and the ultimate goal of promoting learning for all	Used by host governments to get a detailed, objective, up-to-date and easy-to-understand snapshot of how well their country's education system is oriented toward delivering learning to inform strategy and programming	The World Bank	<a href="http://saber.worldbank.org/index.cfm">http://saber.worldbank.org/index.cfm</a>
Political Analysis	Applied Political Economy Analysis Field Guide	Provides a field-research methodology that describes how and why things happen in aid-recipient countries; used to develop written recommendations for USAID mission's Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS), project, or activity design, or course correction during implementation	Intended to be used by Mission to inform design of aid interventions during any phase of the program cycle and at any level of effort	USAID Learning Lab	<a href="https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/applied-political-economy-analysis-field-guide">https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/applied-political-economy-analysis-field-guide</a>
Political Analysis	Everyday Political Analysis	Introduces political analysis framework designed to help frontline development practitioners make quick, but politically-informed, decisions		Development Leadership Program (DLP)	<a href="http://www.dlprog.org/research/everyday-political-analysis.php">http://www.dlprog.org/research/everyday-political-analysis.php</a>