USAID/EL SALVADOR

SUPPORTING LEARNING AND WELL-BEING THROUGHOUT AND BEYOND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

GOOD PRACTICE BRIEF

December 2022

CONTENTS

USAID/MALAWI

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Commonalities of evidence-based responses to the COVID-19 pandemic that have both supported learning and well-being outcomes, and strengthened the overall resilience of education systems include:

- Recognizing the importance of addressing the immediate needs of learners, communities, and institutions most acutely affected by the pandemic, while also embedding any response with a wider commitment to strengthening the education system of a whole—for instance by strengthening capacities for using and deploying remote learning technologies, monitoring and analyzing data on the impacts of response measures, or building systems and structures around educational policies to support learner (re)entry into schooling.

- Demonstrating a commitment to localization by building on the embedded knowledge, expertise, and capacities present within education systems, and using this as a platform to both understand local priorities and policy commitments, and then strengthen capacity in areas of demand and identified, shared need. Often this meant building on pre-existing working relationships and partnerships with caregivers, communities, educators, and government institutions to collectively work together to address immediate needs and identify and work on system strengthening efforts.

- Having an organizational culture, processes, and resourcing that embraced adaptive management approaches. This includes creating opportunities throughout the design and implementation stages of responses to pause and reflect, as well as using learning and evidence to continuously adapt and reprogram efforts.

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic tested the resilience[1] of education systems globally to respond to a significant and far-reaching shock turned long-term stressor. It became increasingly difficult for education systems in both the Global North and South to maintain student learning and well-being outcomes terms throughout extended disruptions to learning continuity. In many cases, the weaknesses of systems were revealed regarding their lack of preparedness for such a wide-scale emergency. Both the return to learning process and a system's capacities to address learning and well-being loss remain challenged in many contexts, and global concern remains about the long-term impacts of the pandemic in terms of educational access, equity, and inclusion.

Since the start of the pandemic, USAID's investments have sought to build more resilient, equitable education systems with the capacity to better manage future shocks and prevent development backsliding. This has been done by supporting action in six priority areas: 1) partnering with Ministries to safely and responsibly re-open schools; 2) utilizing distance learning platforms; 3) providing psychosocial support and access to protection services; 4) building emergency preparedness and response capacity; 5) institutionalizing remedial and accelerated education; and 6) engaging youth and higher education as leaders. As part of this, the Center for Education, alongside other actors, has produced a range of tools and guidance to support action across these areas. It has also prioritized generating knowledge and evidence of what has both supported the safe return to learning and strengthened education sector resilience, building on a white paper, which USAID commissioned in 2019 to outline how resilience-focused programming should function and operate within education systems.

This good practice brief highlights common features of effective COVID-19 educational responses that supported the immediate needs of learners, households, school, communities, and institutions affected by the pandemic. Beyond this, it reveals some key lessons to be learned in terms of preparedness, response, and recovery efforts to educational disruption, including how this evidence provides greater insight into how education systems resilience is both demonstrated, but also can be enhanced during and beyond a crisis. Specifically, it captures key learnings from the extensive work carried out in 2022 to the research questions below:

1. To what degree and how have globally produced resources, tools, and guidance to support COVID-19 responses[2] shaped the actions of USAID Missions and partners, and what does this suggest about the utility, relevance, and appropriateness of these materials?
2. Within USAID's six priority areas for COVID-19 response, what are examples of promising practices to mitigate learning loss and/or sustain learning outcomes?

---

[1] USAID defines resilience as the capacity to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth.

[2] These are resources developed at the global level, largely by bilateral and multilateral organizations as well as non-government bodies, to support mitigating learning loss and/or maintaining learning outcomes. Those included technical tools/guidance, policy guidance/advocacy documents, and evidence both on the impact of the pandemic and on responses to the pandemic. The research excluded resources that were targeted primarily for professionals outside of the education sector, developed prior to the pandemic, or were not specific to the pandemic. Included resources were text-based, and excluded webinars, social media, networks, and communities of practice. Classroom and home support resources were excluded, as were national education responses and plans. Resources were collected from a review of repositories on INEE, USAID-Edulinks, UNESCO, and the World Bank, as well as using a snowball method.

3. What have been some of the common enablers and barriers to mitigating learning loss and maintaining learning outcomes?
4. How are lessons learned through these responses informing and/or being embedded within longer-term education programming in the context?

The specific methodology employed to explore each of these questions is described in Annex B.

USAID Center for Education staff should use this brief to consider the forms of guidance, support, and knowledge exchange required moving forward, and for USAID Missions and Bureaus to better understand how to design, support, and monitor interventions that support preparedness, response, and recovery efforts to current and future shocks and stressors on education systems. For USAID's implementing partners, this brief provides useful considerations for how to (re)program activities and actions in a way that put the needs of learners at the fore, while rethinking "business as usual" approaches in a more sustainable fashion. Ultimately, while the pandemic has and will continue to have ongoing impacts on learners, communities, and educational institutions, it also provides an opportunity to learn, adapt, and transform actions moving forward.

PROMISING PRACTICES ON SUPPORTING LEARNING AND WELL-BEING IN THE PANDEMIC

This section highlights four features of programming that supported and enhanced learning and well-being during and beyond the pandemic:

1. Leveraging and building on existing networks, actors, institutions, and expertise.
2. Experimenting, learning, and adapting based on evidence.
3. Thinking beyond the immediate response from the start.
4. Responding to localized needs and priorities.

These features were identified from an analysis of the evidence gathered across the nine interventions (see Annex A) investigated in depth.

Leveraging and building on existing networks, actors, institutions, and expertise

Evidence from several of the interventions highlights that, in a time of crisis, the capacity to quickly pivot or (re)program existing activities depends on the ability to leverage pre-existing partnerships, experiences, and expertise. In many instances, this included long-standing relationships that partners had built with national education authorities.

Prior to the pandemic, **Population Council** was well-established in generating education evidence and research products and providing technical support to

> **USING M&E FOR LEARNING AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT**
>
> USAID is giving increased focus to strategic collaboration, continuous learning, and adaptive management approaches across the program cycle. A key element of this is to ensure that monitoring and evaluation activities are leading to real-time improvements about both program design and implementation using complexity aware monitoring. Approaches described here are excellent examples of how stakeholder feedback and process monitoring activities can be used to adapt program design.

the Kenyan Ministry of Education (MoE) at both sub-national and national levels. As a result, Population Council was well-placed to draw on their existing knowledge and expertise of groups likely to be most adversely affected by the pandemic, as well as on knowledge of the policy landscape in the country, to support pregnant and parenting girls to re-engage with education through its 4T's intervention,[3] in close collaboration with the MoE.

Partnerships with community level stakeholders also proved important in supporting effective and timely responses to identified needs. For example, **Geneva Global** was able to mobilize existing relationships with community facilitators, caregivers, and local education authorities to pivot its Speed School initiative to a home-based and, later, hybrid-delivery learning program throughout Uganda's two-year school closure period.

Experimenting, learning, and adapting based on evidence

Promising practices that emerged were predicated on a willingness to use the pandemic as an opportunity to experiment or trial a new approach to programmatic activity, acknowledging a need to fundamentally rethink "business as usual approaches" due to the scale and scope of educational disruption. The need to deliver programming, which had been previously delivered in-person and often in classroom settings, into homes and communities meant shifting modalities, approaches, and even target populations.

A common feature across most of the responses was an ability to be flexible and act rapidly to identify needs and respond to emerging programmatic concerns. Often responses shifted as the pandemic and its impacts evolved, but kept the core objectives and target populations for the intervention as a focus throughout. For example, **Educate!** used an Agile approach to transition their in-school entrepreneurship training in Uganda into a Virtual Bootcamp program through a series of two-week cycles of program development, testing, monitoring/learning, and further (re)development. They developed a rapid impact assessment to

THINKING DIFFERENTLY ABOUT EVIDENCE

Throughout their COVID-19 responses, interventions often had to take a "good enough" approach to generating evidence that would allow them to rapidly answer questions and revise their interventions. Evidence wasn't generated primarily for accountability, but rather for learning and refinement. This required a rethink on "what counts" as evidence, and when this data should be collected. In some instances, such as for the featured Providing Psychosocial Support/social-emotional learning initiatives, it led to using new and/or undertested tools and systems that only now can be further refined and validated for more rigorous impact assessments.

STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY

Resilience is and should be a commonly shared outcome in both humanitarian and development contexts given the overall ambition is the same: to maintain and ideally improve learning and well-being outcomes. While humanitarian responses are often directed toward preventing erosion of education gains, there is also an opportunity to use such times to begin to more permanently strengthen systems so they are better set up to manage current and future adversities. In the longer term, development-focused programming is then able to build and leverage on these strengthened capacities. USAID strives for greater coherence across the humanitarian-development continuum.

---

[3] Trace, Track, Talk and reTurn Initiative

understand how decisions about the design and delivery of the program affected the long-term objective of supporting youths' economic and social outcomes. Data generated from this have helped Educate! to make swift modifications to its activities and overall design in order to increase engagement and participation and strengthen overall impact.

Equally important was recognition of the need to use data being generated about the effectiveness and relevance of initial responses to then redirect action as needed. In most instances this required shifting the frequency with which—and how—program monitoring activities occurred, including considering constraints to best collecting data amid a pandemic. **World Vision**, for instance, used a measurement tool new to them—the Diagnostic and Proficiency tool, which is an adapted version of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) tool—to measure their beneficiaries' numeracy and literacy skills. This tool helped World Vision to design a catch-up program in three different operational contexts, screen students for inclusion in the response, place students into the right level of support, and then assess their progress at the end. The tools' simplicity allowed teams in each country to use data more readily for programmatic adaptation and learning.

Thinking beyond the immediate response from the start

In several instances, the forced pivot of activities prompted by COVID-19 provided an opportunity for partners to fundamentally rethink how they can best support learning and well-being in a time of crisis, and also strengthen and transform education systems beyond the pandemic. Often, this required both a commitment and willingness on the part of the implementers, their funders, and Ministry partners to use the pandemic as an opportunity to truly "build back better."

As a grantee of UNHCR's Humanitarian Education Accelerator, **Amal Alliance** was able to build internal capacity, and identify and mobilize a collection of strategic partnerships to support implementation of pilots in

USING EXISTING TOOLS, RESOURCES, AND GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT EDUCATION SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING POST-COVID

As per a mapping of 222 global tools and resources produced since the start of the pandemic, only 4% are explicitly focused on supporting education system preparedness or resilience to future crisis.
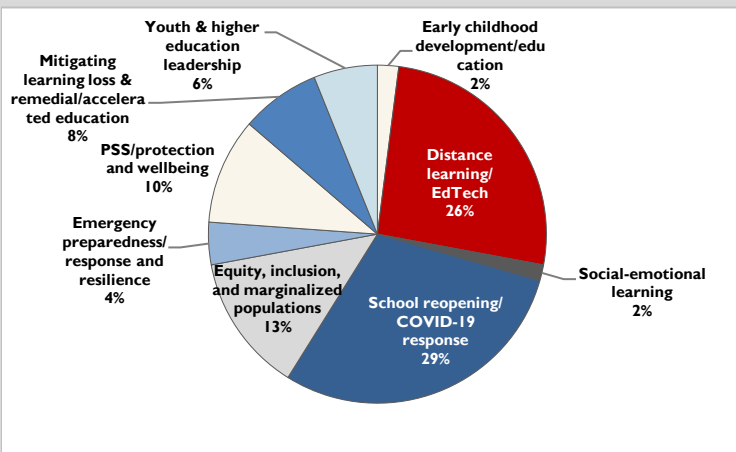
Figure 1: Analysis of the 222 global tools, resources, and guidance produced to support COVID-19 responses in terms of their main areas of focus

Yet, many resources produced in other areas have ongoing resonance both in terms of identifying the need for, and specific approaches within, each of these domains. These materials should continue to be used by USAID and partners through processes of contextualization, adaption, and adoption, in order to support program and activity design and to strengthen the overall resilience of education systems to future crises.

Bangladesh, Uganda, and Greece. These partnerships not only provided immediate support to marginalized learners (and their caregivers) in these settings during the pandemic, but also helped to design, deliver, implement, and gather evidence for further scaling and systems strengthening beyond the acute emergency. It was these pilots, and the evidence and learning generated from it, which allowed Amal Alliance to then partner with the Ministry of Education in Greece, following adoption of a new policy requiring social emotional skills be taught to learners in schools across the country. Subsequently, the Colors of Kindness program was adopted nationally. What attracted the MoE in Greece to this initiative was both the program's accessibility and simplicity of use, given its design as a series of social-emotional learning (SEL) podcasts for teachers/facilitators, and the evidence base established on the effectiveness of this EdTech solution.

Responding to localized needs and priorities

Many of the evidence-based promising practices were effective because they were designed and adapted in ways that responded to the identified needs and priorities of the target populations they sought to serve, and the systems they were embedded within.

AIR and RedLEI's webinars on Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) for university teachers was developed in response to a prescient need to improve the quality of online instruction early in the pandemic. **AIR/RedLEI** looked to colleagues with open educational resources in Africa and adopted a series on ERT for the Central American context based on needs highlighted in the survey. AIR/RedLEI, however, recognized that there was a need to significantly adapt the African model (which had been adopted from Finland). With inputs from both a specialist and teachers from the region, the ERT was suitably contextualized to the needs of the university educators as signaled by course evaluations where participants agreed that that the course content, themes, and

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXTUALIZING GLOBAL TOOLS, RESOURCES, AND GUIDANCE

Stakeholders surveyed about the utility, strengths, and limitations of the tools, guidance, and evidence produced to support COVID-19 responses identified resources that were most useful as those that:

1. Were contextually relevant, which meant that often, respondents looked more to "home grown" resources or those produced in similar contexts to their own because lessons learned were more transferable.

2. Relevant to the target population, with specific acknowledgement of how to address the constraints, needs, and demands.

3. Were adaptable or flexible enough to be easily taken up and used.

To date, however, most tools, resources, and guidance produced globally have not served this function. This suggests a critical need moving forward for USAID to support partners to, firstly, be more aware of the material available, and then to contextualize, adapt and modify these materials to address the specific needs and demands of the populations they serve.

resources were pertinent to them. This approach acknowledged that what works in one Global South context may not work in another and that contextualization of programming to serve both the situation and the needs is an ongoing process.

LESSONS LEARNED ON BUILDING EDUCATION SECTOR RESILIENCE

With COVID-19 responses now entering another phase and seeking to address the longer-term impacts of multiple years of educational disruption, it is vital to think beyond the immediate crisis and consider how these good practices can be taken forward. USAID continues to advocate for programming that protects, maintains, and advances learning and well-being outcomes for all learners in countries around the world, especially the most marginalized. The global COVID-19 pandemic has tested this and highlighted the importance of strengthening education sector resilience. Findings from the research carried out on both the use and utility of the support that was provided through global tools, resources, and guidance, as well as evidence-based good practices, reinforce several key messages on resilience, localization, and working across the humanitarian-development nexus, which are reflected in current USAID strategic priorities. Using Figure 2, taken from the _Education and Resilience White Paper_, these key messages are indicated below through the four questions in the visual.
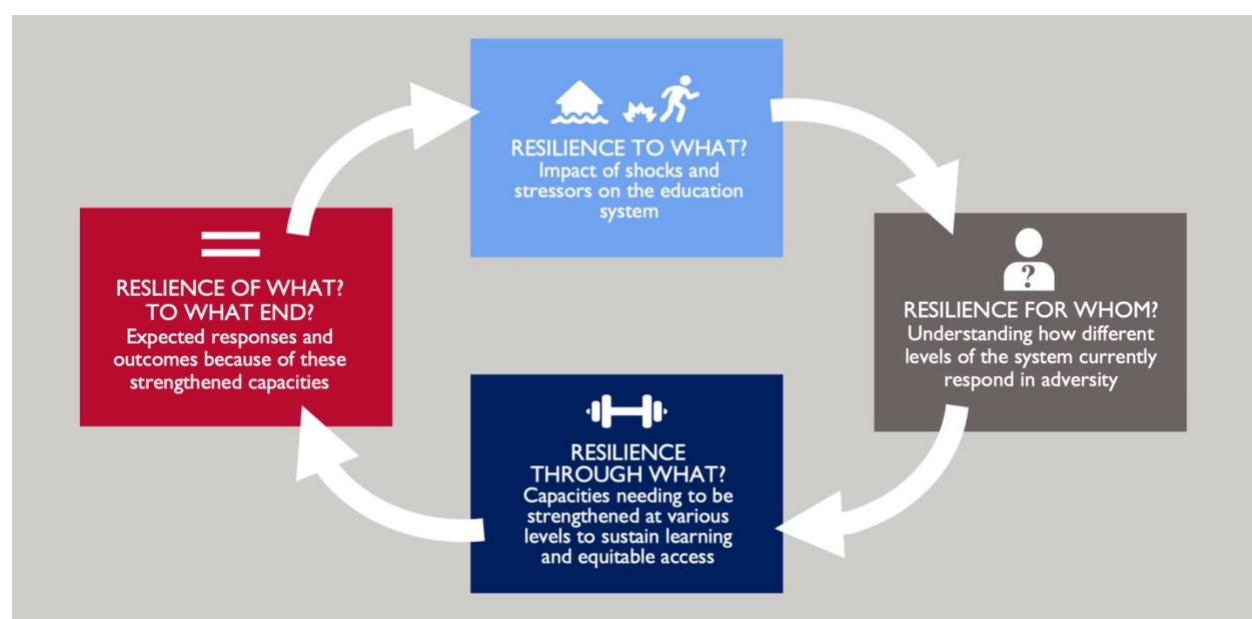
Figure 2: Strengthening resilience across the program cycle

Resilience to what? Resilience for whom?

Evidence from the interventions featured in the three case study reports undertaken as part of this research, as well as separate USAID-funded research on the Return to Learning Process During COVID-19, make clear that in any context, there is always the risk of shocks and stressors with varying severity and impact on segments of the population. It highlights the need, irrespective of whether a context is typically classified as "crisis and conflict affected" or not, to ensure that when sudden, unpredictable events occur—such as a health pandemic or a natural disaster—education systems have sufficient capacities to quickly pivot in response, and to support and maintain learning and well-being outcomes for all.

Doing so firstly requires capacity for those supporting responses to understand the context and the specific risks and vulnerabilities facing the education system at that time, for example, specific groups of learners and teachers unable to sufficiently engage in remote learning and teaching, or how out-of-school learners may face heightened protection risks in times of acute crisis. The (re)design of existing activities and programs highlighted across the nine interventions was built on rapid but evidence-based needs analyses, and on tools, resources, expertise that were sufficiently grounded in the context. Attention was given to responding to new and pre-existing risk factors, and specifically the confluence between them—for example rural setting/lack of basic infrastructure along with learner disengagement.

Secondly, addressing these risks requires layering support across learners, communities, and institutions, recognizing that action at one level alone was unlikely to strengthen the overall

RESILIENCE CAPACITIES
Absorptive resilience capacities – The ability of learners, schools, communities, or institutions to minimize exposure and sensitivity to shocks and stressors through preventative measures and appropriate coping strategies to avoid long-term negative impacts.
Adaptive resilience capacities – The ability of learners, schools, communities, or institutions to make informed choices and changes in response to longer-term social, economic, and environmental change.
Transformative resilience capacities – The ability of communities and institutions to establish an enabling environment for systemic change through their governance mechanisms, policies and regulations, cultural and gender norms, community networks, and formal and informal social protection mechanisms.
From USAID's Education and Resilience framework

capacity of a system to respond to the current and future crises. An important element in this process was to identify ways that the immediate support and response to learners and communities could be used as an opportunity as well to strengthen institutions and improve their preparedness to future shocks and stressors—through for example, strengthening data and information management systems, improved digital infrastructure and capacity, and institutionalizing more flexible modalities of educational delivery. In doing so, the (re)design of the interventions embraced not just an understanding of the immediate problem/need but also some of the root causes and challenges precipitating the issues that specific learners, educators, and communities encountered during the pandemic, such as inequitable access to digital technologies across populations.

When thinking about the questions "resilience for whom" and "resilience to what," both the consequences and underlying causes of the problem were thought through together by these interventions.

Resilience through what? To what end?

Following on initial design of the interventions featured in these case studies, implementation and action began by identifying and strengthening existing assets, resources, and networks within the education system. Firstly, **what made many of these interventions effective was that they had a good awareness of the local systems' strengths and capacities, the relationships between actors, and the rules, incentives, and norms that could incentivize or inhibit change. Based on this, partnerships (new and existing) were bolstered and strengthened, with a high degree of intentionality in ensuring that the capacity development work that was undertaken had a**

level of ownership and commitment behind such efforts. As specified in USAID's _Education and Resilience White Paper_, resilience is strengthened when programming gives explicit attention to strengthening relationships, trust, and partnerships. These practices also highlight two key points from _USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening Policy_—specifically the need to start with the local system and align action with local priorities, appreciating and building on local capacities and strengthening diverse capacities through diverse approaches. The fact that all interventions were able to do this during a global pandemic suggests such action is tenable across the humanitarian-development continuum of action.

Secondly, **actions supported both the systems' capacity to mitigate learning loss and maintain well-being (also known as _absorptive resilience capacities_), alongside its capacity to better respond to longer-term endemic issues facing education systems (both _adaptive and transformative resilience capacities_).**[4] There was a joint commitment to both improving immediate service delivery for those most acutely affected by the pandemic and also to finding ways that any response could be sustained and further built on beyond the pandemic. As noted in the _Education and Resilience White Paper_, long-term resilience of education systems can only be built if absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities are strengthened concurrently. Many transformative capacities are critical for supporting, enhancing, and sustaining absorptive and adaptive capacities at the institutional and community level.

Thirdly, **the outcomes and objectives of all nine interventions remained grounded in a commitment to maintaining and enhancing learning and well-being outcomes. This was a commitment all partners had prior to the pandemic and one they maintained throughout their COVID-19 responses.** Yet, all partners recognized the importance of significantly pivoting action and reconsidering typical entry points, interventions, and even target groups due to a significant changed context and set of needs. This was enabled in part by a willingness to experiment with new solutions, continuously reflect on the impact of experience, and integrate learning into future efforts to adapt and transform systems. Ultimately, it is this adaptive management approach that supported and strengthened the resilience of the education systems targeted by these nine interventions. Within _USAID's Education Policy_, the need to test new technologies and seek new partners, experiment with collaborative forms of activity design, and embrace adaptive and flexible implementation mechanisms remains a key priority. The ways these nine interventions experimented, assessed, and refined action are critical to strengthening education systems resilience.

---

[4] See A Map of Resilience Capacities for the Education Sector: Absorptive, Adaptive, and Transformative Capacities for Learners, Schools, Communities, and Institutions for examples of actions in support of learners, schools, communities, and institutions that span this range of capacities.

ANNEX A: SUMMARY OF NINE PROMISING PRACTICES

FEATURED INTERVENTIONS

Providing Psychosocial Support (PSS), Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and Access to Protection Services

- Population Council provided technical expertise and support to the Kenyan government to assist and prepare marginalized out-of-school pregnant/parenting girls to return to in-person schooling.

- Amal Alliance designed and scaled a play-based EdTech SEL intervention for primary school children that helped to bridge learning gaps, and to support children to gain life skills critical for academic success, while improving overall well-being in Bangladesh, Greece, and Uganda.

- STiR Education developed a radio program in Uganda to maintain teachers' well-being, motivation, and retention in the system during the pandemic, as well as to strengthen teacher SEL competencies in support of learner well-being, during the pandemic and in the return to in-person learning.

Engaging Youth and Higher Education Institutions in COVID-19 Response

- Educate! pivoted an in-person entrepreneurship training and mentorship for youth to a virtual bootcamp model in Uganda.

- School the World engaged university and secondary students to tutor primary students over the phone or in-person in Guatemala and Honduras.

- AIR/RedLEI developed a six-lesson series of trainings to university teachers on emergency remote teaching that was later adapted into a full course for secondary and primary teachers across Central America and the Caribbean.

Accelerated and Remedial Education

- World Vision piloted a community-based program to support children ages 6-9 to catch-up on fundamental literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills, in order to support their successful engagement in formal education at their grade level in Cambodia, Zimbabwe, and Ghana.

- FHI 360 provided technical support to the Government in Ghana to roll out a nation-wide radio-based early grade reading program for remedial literacy support to children in and out of school.

- Geneva Global adapted its existing Speed School program in Uganda to be delivered through both home-based and in-person learning during COVID-19, providing out-of-school children a pathway into primary school via a condensed curriculum.

ANNEX B: METHODOLOGY FOR RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN

Understanding use of available tools, resources, and guidance

An online survey of USAID Missions, implementing partners, and others (re)programming education activities in response to COVID-19 was administered in August 2022. The survey asked respondents to identify which global education resources—mapped by the same research team earlier in 2022—were being used to support efforts in (re)designing education activities and programming throughout COVID-19. The survey consisted of 12 closed- and open-ended questions, plus sub-questions.[5] A set of demographic questions asked participants to provide information about themselves/their organization, their role in (re)programming education activities in response to COVID-19, and the type of education activities they worked on during COVID-19. The remainder of the survey was divided into two parts:

- **Part 1 focused on utilization of resources.** In this part, the responses to demographic questions triggered up to two questions that asked respondents to identify which (if any) of a set of global education resources (tools, guidance, and evidence) they used to support their efforts in (re)designing education activities during COVID-19, and what other resources they used. This is included in Part 1 of the findings. These questions also served to prime respondents to further understand what was meant by "resources" so they could respond appropriately in Part 2.

- **Part 2 focused on perceived utility, strengths, and limitations of the resources.** Respondents were asked a series of questions about what they found useful about the resources they used (if any) and what they perceived as the limitations of these resources. This is analyzed in Part 2 of the findings.

The survey, administered via Qualtrics, was disseminated via an email request from the Director for USAID's Center for Education to USAID staff, as well as through an open invitation to USAID implementing partners and other interested education stakeholders through the LTLGP learning community listservs (ECCN, GRN, HELN). The survey was open for 21 days. The survey design and process followed University of Auckland's (UoA) Guiding Principles for Research with Human Respondents and was also reviewed and approved by USAID to ensure it met U.S. Government privacy and accessibility guidelines. The survey took respondents approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

After the survey was closed, the UoA team downloaded the survey responses into Excel and analyzed the responses in line with the research questions. For the closed-ended questions, descriptive analyses were conducted to show the absolute numbers and percentages of respondents who utilized the various resources and the perceived strengths and limitations of the resources. Thematic analysis was used to analyze open-ended questions, particularly around the other types of resources that were used, how they were used, and any further information provided.

A total of 259 respondents completed the survey, and findings can be found here.

---

[5] See Annex 1of *COVID-19 and Education: Use of Tools, Guidance, and Evidence to Support the Education Sector Response* for the full survey.

Identifying and selecting promising practices

Soliciting promising practices

The first step required a call to LTLGP Learning Network (LN) members via LN list-serves and emails in June 2022 to solicit examples of education responses during COVID-19 that have a solid evidence-base to demonstrate their "promise" or achievements in mitigating learning loss and/or sustaining learning outcomes in some fashion. Members were invited to respond to a brief survey about their response and to self-nominate an action, activity, or program of which they had been a part. The survey was intentionally brief to increase the likelihood of responses. Survey questions can be found here.

After two weeks, the survey was closed, having received 79 submissions. The full list of submissions (which has been anonymized to protect the confidentiality of respondents, in line with UoA ethics protocols) can be found here.

Process of mapping and assessing submissions for relevance to this research

To determine the relevance of each intervention for inclusion in this research, all 79 submissions were reviewed, coded, and assessed against three criteria:

1. Relevance to the topic
2. Apparent existence of data to demonstrate intervention outcomes and/or impact
3. Apparent level of detail, clarity, and systematic collection of data

Relevance to the topic

All submissions were double blind assessed for their adherence to the following criterion: *"Based on the information provided, this intervention appears to be relevant to enabling learners to remain engaged with and participating in learning opportunities throughout the pandemic, through addressing the psychosocial impacts of COVID-19, and/or through seeking to minimize or address learning loss in some way."* Each submission was coded as either "yes, no, or not clear." Responses marked as "Not clear" were followed up by email for more information and then categorized. These have been captured in the 53 submissions.

Fifty-three of the submissions (67% of the total received) were noted as being relevant to the call. Responses removed at this step were those that were either educational responses not designed specifically to address the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on learners or were not specifically an education response. A few responses were also completely unintelligible.

Apparent existence of data to demonstrate intervention outcomes and/or impact

In the survey, respondents were asked first to check boxes to indicate what types of data they have to demonstrate the impact of their intervention (and that they were willing to share if asked). The forms of data that respondents could indicate they had collected included:

- Interviews or focus group discussions with beneficiaries

- Case studies or descriptive studies/evaluations based on observations, interviews, and program data

- Quasi-experimental/experimental evaluation or research

- Program monitoring data

- Anecdotal data from program implementing teams

- Other

In a subsequent narrative-response question, respondents were then asked to describe what impact their intervention has had in terms of either: a) enabling learners to remain engaged with and participating in learning opportunities throughout the pandemic; b) addressed the psychosocial impacts of COVID-19; and/or c) sought to minimize or address learning loss in some way. All responses to this question were double blind assessed, with 58% (n=31) of the remaining 53 submissions indicating that firstly they had some form of data available, and secondly that the data available was outcome, rather than output focused—in other words, demonstrating some level of impact.

Apparent level of detail, clarity, and systematic collection of data available

Each of the remaining 31 submissions was then assessed against a third criterion to establish the depth and quality of evidence available. In making such an assessment, attention was given to analyzing the specified and available data from the respondents against the "Categories of Evidence" outlined in the Building Evidence in Education's _Assessing the Strength of Evidence in the Education Sector_. Most data collected sat somewhere on the continuum of _medium to strong_ (see, pp.37-39). This was determined based on the basis that data sets shared or appearing to be available were systematically collected and with clear relevance to the outcome of interest. At this point, most data available does not show longitudinal change, and this is to be expected given the only recent emergence in most contexts out of emergency response measures. Importantly, consideration was also given to whether the data shared or described indicated how it had then instigated a longer-term change in programmatic approaches or efforts to ensure sustainability of the intervention, i.e., "promise." The strongest data sets were those able to demonstrate impact from pre-COVID-19 to now, often through having a pre-COVID-19 control group.

Of the remaining 31, 61% (n=19) demonstrated having robust, impact-level data.

Respondents who did not pass through this criterion offered either only input data (e.g., number of learning centers established) or output data (e.g., number of times a learning resource was downloaded). While output data demonstrated the uptake or level of beneficiary engagement with an intervention, it did not provide sufficient data or insight into the impact of the action on the outcomes of interest.

As demonstrated in Figure 3, 19 of 79 (24%) total responses met the main three criterion, deeming them relevant to this research.
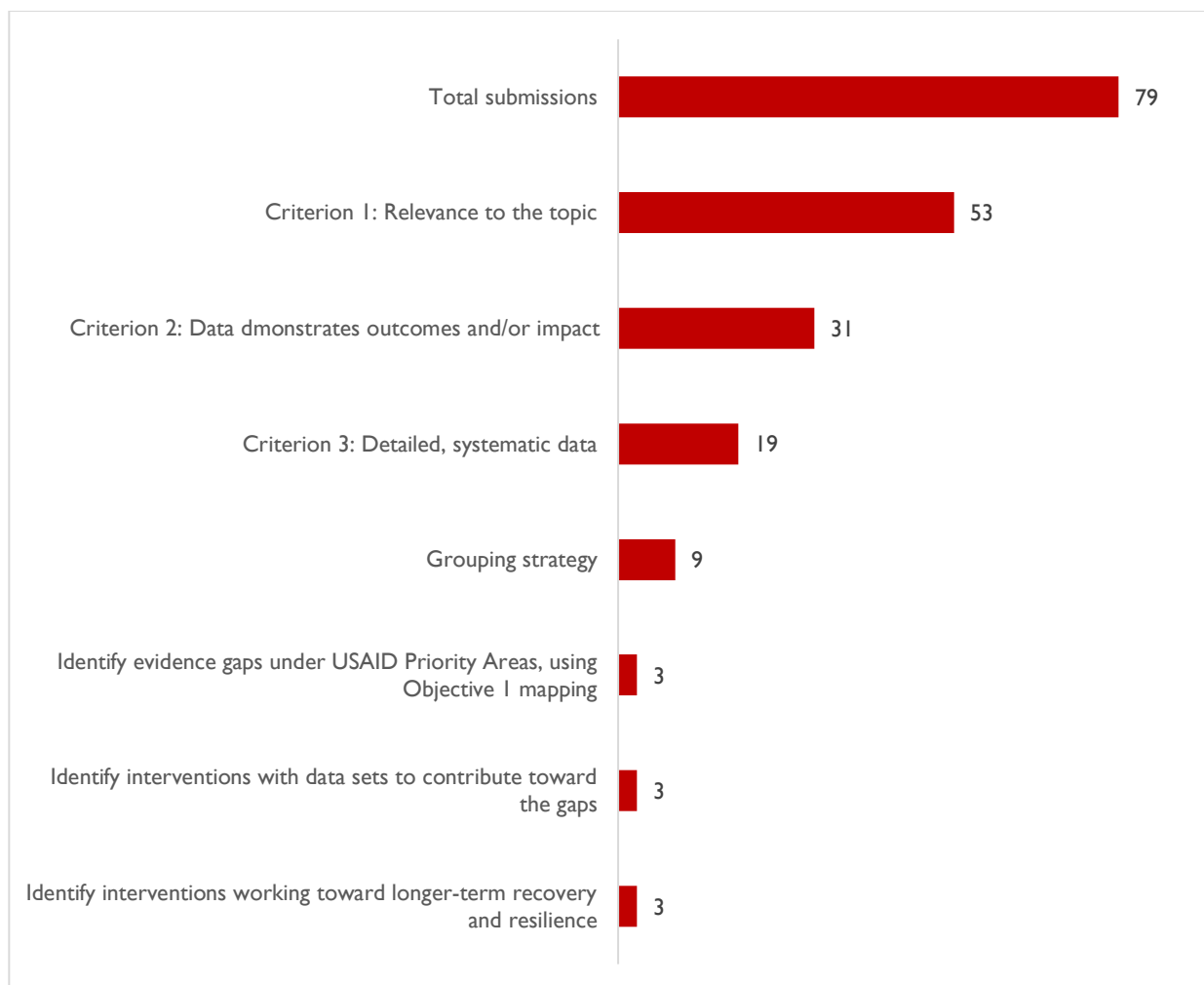
Figure 3: Responses meeting criteria

Process for narrowing and grouping the interventions

The next stage of the process involved grouping the 19 responses into three groups, with up to three interventions/promising practices in each, as this was what was agreed to in the research workplan. This meant selecting only nine of the remaining 19 interventions as those that could be developed into three separate case study reports.

To make such a decision, the placement of each intervention under the six USAID priority areas was analyzed. This is depicted in Figure 4.[6]

---

[6] Respondents could indicate that their response fit into more than one of the six priority areas (they could choose up to two).
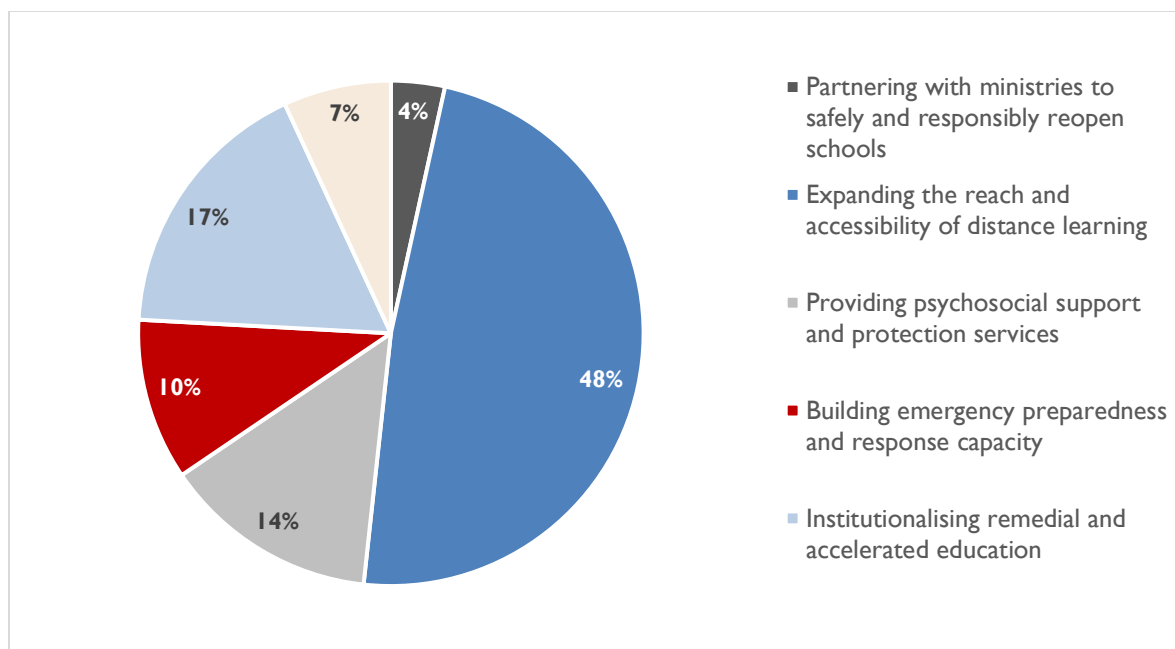
Figure 4: Alignment of responses to USAID priority areas

As Figure 4 indicates, very few of the responses were linked to Priority Area 1 - *Partnering with ministries to safely and responsibly reopen schools* and only two aligned their intervention with Priority Area 6 - *Engaging youth and higher education institutions as leaders*. On closer review of the actual interventions, however, five interventions were identified that engaged with either higher education institutions and/or with youth. Conversely, there was a sizeable mass of responses geared toward Priority Area 2 – *Expanding the reach and accessibility of distance learning*.

Secondly, responses were eliminated where a partner organization was represented amongst the 19 more than twice, for fair representation of partners. In selecting which of the responses from the same partner to keep, the one eliminated was where there were other similar responses of other partners and/or whether researchers felt the quality of the data set from the same partner was weaker than another intervention.

Thirdly, the underlined resource mapping tool produced as part of this research to identify evidence gaps within USAID's six priority areas was consulted. This indicates that the evidence base is weaker or less developed in three of these areas: Priority Area 3 - *Providing PSS and protection services*; Priority Area 5 - *Institutionalizing remedial and accelerated learning*; and Priority Area 6 - *Engaging youth and higher education institutions as leaders*. The summary also notes an evidence gap for interventions working with marginalized populations and for SEL. As this call for promising practices attracted strong responses in these areas, it was clear that this research could contribute toward building the evidence base for these areas. For this reason—and that interventions in these three areas are of direct relevance to the three LNs in the LTLGP, i.e., the ECCN (area 3), the GRN (area 5) and the HELN (area 6) —interventions in these priority areas were prioritized, but the focus of each was either slightly expanded or slightly narrowed, specifically:

- Priority Area 3 was expanded to "*providing PSS, SEL, and protection services,*" as SEL also presents an evidence gap where various responses was received.

- Priority Area 5 was narrowed to "*implementing accelerated education and remedial services,"* as few responses identified with the institutionalization component of the priority area at this stage in COVID-19 response.

- Priority Area 6 was narrowed to "*engaging youth and higher education institutions,"* as few responses identified with the leadership component of the priority area, but clearly work with youth and/or higher education.

Fourthly, and to maximize the diversity of types of responses in featured in the case studies, the research team considered where there was a significant critical mass, and how to purposefully seek examples beyond this critical mass. It was found that:

- In terms of modalities of delivery, the predominant forms of response were either online (n=5, 26%) or face to face (n=4, 21%).

- The majority of responses (n=11, 58%) were classified as either remedial or retention responses (in other words, focusing on learners already in the education system).

- The majority (n=10, 53%) supported formal education systems.

- The majority (n=10, 53%) had Africa as a region as their primary geographic scope.

In selecting specific programmatic interventions within each of the three priority areas specified above, examples of actions were purposefully selected that were outliers to this critical mass, but interventions that fit within this critical mass were also included.

Fifthly, given the COVID-19 pandemic is now at a different stage and moving out of the acute emergency and into a process of recovery and systems-strengthening, a resilience-focused lens was applied to the selection of cases. Drawing on the *Education and Resilience White Paper*, interventions that demonstrated some level of evidence toward strengthening the adaptive or transformative capacities of education systems (at whatever level), and how their actions could be sustained and further leveraged moving forward were sought.

Finally, responses that had already been featured or had a case study written up about them within USAID and/or other learning communities were excluded.

Based on this, three groups of three distinct responses in each formed the basis of the case studies, which are available here.