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SCHOOL-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION ACTIVITY (ASEGURANDO LA EDUCACIÓN) HONDURAS

ACTIVITY BACKGROUND

Asegurando la Educación (ALE), also known as School-based Violence Prevention Activity, is a five-year activity launched in 2017 and is carried out within five target municipalities in Honduras: Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, Choloma, La Ceiba and Tela, especially in communities with high crime rates. The activity is implemented by DAI Global LLC with support from subcontractor Partners of the Americas. Through a holistic integration of violence prevention curriculum, tools, and practices, the activity seeks to address school-based violence (SBV) that undermines the outcome of education and to use education and school processes to contribute to violence prevention in selected communities.

KEY FINDINGS

DESIGN AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

In partnership with education systems and communities in target municipalities, ALE aims to make schools a safer space for students and teachers, and to empower schools to play a larger role in decreasing community violence. To meet this goal, the activity introduced Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) as an essential component of its methodology, in conjunction with 13 other mutually reinforcing components. It is expected that, by equipping educators and students with SEL skills and restorative practices, ALE can reduce certain forms of violence, improve the school climate, and help schools deliver education more effectively. In a broader sense, the improved enrollment retention, and learning outcomes will further contribute to violence prevention in communities and society.

“Social-emotional learning was included because, through a school safety study that we did at our target educational institutions, we saw that the target population had many socio-affective issues, youth with low self-esteem, youth who found no meaning in life, youth who have no clear goals and many social-emotional, socio-affective-related conflicts and problems. So, we saw that to be able to improve school safety, not only should we improve the youth’s physical and safety conditions, but also address the emotional issues of each of the students, which would obviously allow for continuity, would make them stay at the educational institutions.” – Component Lead

The activity focuses on areas of competency suggested by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. CASEL has been chosen for two primary reasons: *first*, mounting evidence suggests that it is one of the most authoritative and adaptable SEL

BEST PRACTICES

- ALE has successfully introduced and mainstreamed SEL into the national, formal education system. GOH is taking ownership and using their own time and resources to implement and adopt some of the ALE activities.
- Instead of treating teachers as a vehicle to advance the activity’s educational goals, ALE views teachers as one of the key beneficiaries of the activity and provides them with psycho-social support to promote their mental health and well-being.
- ALE’s multi-stakeholder approach, the participants’ flexibility to make quick adaptations, their acute awareness of evolving situations, and their ability to find common ground in a diverse agenda (migration, social-emotional learning, education, and violence) are key enabling factors that have facilitated implementation and achieved good outcomes amidst social, political, and economic challenges.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has provided an unexpected opportunity for ALE to reach a wider target audience and improve their emotional well-being by delivering useful information via online video clips, comic books, and social media posts.

frameworks in the U.S., and *second*, some of its sub-competencies directly relate to the expected activity outcomes. As part of the contextualization process, ALE has engaged in frequent internal consultations with teachers, trainers and consultants to identify competencies and skills that need to be prioritized in the target population and emphasized in a culturally sensitive manner. To better adapt activity content to the local context, ALE also conducted rigorous pilot-testing before the full-scale implementation of each intervention, and later conducted focus group discussions with participants, teachers, and staff to evaluate its effectiveness and improve activity content and framework. Besides, the activity has worked closely with government and academic stakeholders to carefully align activity content with the Honduran National Curriculum.

“To this day, we don’t think we have a final product yet, even though it is something that the Ministry (of Education) has clearly approved. But we continue with the process of getting together, getting feedback, and currently even the Sports Office of the Ministry of Education and the Syllabus staff have provided feedback. That helps us assess to what degree each of the sessions follows the national syllabus and contents. So, it has been a learning and adaptation process and we have incorporated knowledge from several areas.” – Component Lead

There are some context-specific challenges regarding equity and inclusion in the region where ALE operates, such as prevalent gender biases, stigmatization of LGBTI community, segregation faced by ethnic minorities (in Northern Coast, mainly Afro-Caribbean’s and Miskito), and exclusion of children from gang-associated and economically disadvantaged families. The activity has been explicit in their inclusion efforts, not only by including children from marginalized groups in the selection process, but also by inviting participants to reflect on their experiences. The activities, materials and training sessions have been intentionally designed to foster a sense of tolerance, acceptance, self-awareness, and empathy among students. While a single project cannot significantly change deeply embedded cultural norms, ALE’s unique design introduces equity and inclusion-related concepts. Children who would have dropped out of school now have a greater chance to participate because they are more empowered and their teachers have a better understanding of their unique conditions and have paid more attention to their growth.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASUREMENT

ALE adopts a school-wide approach to incorporate SEL components into implementation through 14 sub-activities. Key entry points include improvement of school climate, teacher training, parental engagement, principal leadership program, counselling services, and disciplinary approaches. Outside of school, ALE also collaborates with the Ministry of Education (MOE) of Honduras to develop training sessions and materials. By engaging with diverse stakeholders, ALE has made significant progress in raising awareness and acceptance of the importance of SEL within the entire education ecosystem in Honduras, and has paved the way for teachers to apply its principles in their day-to-day teaching.

While many in-person activities were paused in response to the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ALE made several adaptations to continue its implementation. Teachers who participated in the activity have created videos about physical education activities and shared them with students via WhatsApp or Facebook. The COVID-19 pandemic has also provided an unexpected opportunity for ALE to expand its reach and include a wider range of learners and educators throughout Honduras. Using the expertise from many of its SEL-related interventions, ALE now delivers useful information and tools through various platforms to improve their emotional health, such as online video clips, comic books, and social media posts.

“I think it has been now easier, as a result of the pandemic, for central level authorities to recognize the importance of wellbeing and good mental health, and how SEL can support that as a precursor to learning. A child won't be able to learn if he or she is too upset. And now those emotions are out there, right? Very raw. And same with teachers, they can't teach effectively if they're too preoccupied with high levels of stress because of uncertainty, or overwhelmed by their living conditions, whatever that may be.”

– Technical Director

The activity has been developing sustainable transition plans since its inception to ensure the continuity of SEL approach and activities after the activity ends. On one hand, through meaningful and iterative collaboration with different stakeholders of the education system, ALE has developed training models and materials that are widely accepted and closely aligned with the national curriculum. On the other hand, both ALE's partner education centers and the MOE (particularly, General Sub-directorate of Physical Education and Sport) have made some commitment to providing sustainability to the SEL methodology. In this way, ALE has successfully introduced and mainstreamed SEL into Honduras's formal education system. The MOE is adopting the activity for potential expansion into hundreds of schools.

The activity has undergone a few evaluation activities, using tools such as Youth Services Eligibility Tool, Change Measurement Tool (*Herramienta de Medición de Cambios*, HMC), interviews, and case studies. Positive effects have been reported on teacher-student and peer relationships which are directly attributed to ALE's SEL component. Other metrics, such as increased school security, improved school attendance and retention rates, and academic performance, also indicate varying levels of positive impact. However, evidence is still limited in some aspects: *first*, there are no rigorously designed evaluation methods to measure the individual-level social-emotional impacts; *second*, nationwide public protest, teacher strikes, and school closings within the past two years created significant delays in any data collection activities; *third*, as a result of the suspension of FY2018 funds and associated contractual and programming modification, the activity faces resource constraints which prevents them from conducting a thorough assessment of changes across different sub-activities and beneficiaries.

LIMITATIONS

In addition to measurement related limitations outlined above, there are some other areas of improvement identified for the ALE activity.

First, not every educational institution has sufficient resources or infrastructure to carry out certain activities recommended by the activity. For example, in schools where PASE (learning social emotional skills through sports) is applied, one of the activities requires footballs and other basic sports equipment, but teachers couldn't replicate what they learned from the training due to the shortage of resources.

Second, the current training curriculum mandates a fixed number of days and hours to satisfy the training requirement, and teachers often find it difficult to attend the sessions in their entirety because of their other commitments. This has negatively impacted activity implementation because teachers are unable to attend training sessions without interruption, resulting in high attrition rates of training activity participants.