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EDUCATION CRISIS RESPONSE (ECR) NIGERIA

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ACTIVITY BACKGROUND

Between October 2014 and January 2018, Creative Associates International and its sub-awardees, International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Florida State University, implemented the Education Crisis Response (ECR) activity. The project aimed to expand access to quality and relevant non-formal education (NFE) opportunities for out-of-school children ages six to 17 who were from both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities in five states of northeast Nigeria, a region affected by various crises, including the Boko Haram attack. The activity was initially implemented in Adamawa, Bauchi, and Gombe states but expanded to Yobe and Borno states towards the end of the activity. A total of 80,341 out-of-school children and youth benefited from the nine-month alternative education intervention, providing structured literacy, numeracy and SEL lessons in 1,456 non-formal learning centers (NFLCs). Additional life skills training and psychosocial support was also provided. At the end of the activity's 3-year lifespan, 38% of learners were mainstreamed into formal schools.

KEY FINDINGS

DESIGN AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

ECR's Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is built on IRC's *Healing Classroom* approach, which provides crisis-affected children and youth with safe spaces and supportive relationships with the aim of building relational, emotional, and resilience skills to help individuals succeed in life. In addition, based on the lessons from IRC's *Learning in a Healing Classroom* (LHC) intervention, which trained teachers in how to *infuse SEL principles into reading and math instructions* in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the ECR activity also developed explicit 30-minute scripted play-based and student-centered SEL lessons and embedded SEL instructions in literacy and numeracy lessons. SEL was explicitly referenced in the ECR activity's theory of change as it was necessary in increasing crisis-affected learners' well-being, resilience, and ability to function productively in conflict environments. ECR's SEL approach was designed to foster five competencies: executive function, emotional regulation, positive social skills, conflict resolution skills, and perseverance.

Based on the IRC's SEL competency framework, ECR undertook a formal curriculum design workshop to generate locally derived and contextually relevant examples for SEL curriculum and lesson plans. Before the workshop, the ECR team also mapped out existing Nigerian formal education curriculum, religious education curriculum, and UNICEF's psychosocial support manual. Workshop participants included national-level stakeholders such as representatives from the

BEST PRACTICES

- ECR's SEL approach had explicit, stand-alone student-centered SEL lessons along with SEL-embedded literacy and numeracy lessons. SEL was intended to build skills necessary to cope with adversity and recover from trauma.
- Grounded in IRC's global SEL competency framework, ECR's SEL framework was validated and contextualized with existing competencies in the Nigerian curriculum. Local play-based pedagogical examples of songs, dances and stories were also included in ECR's SEL scope and sequence and the facilitator training guide.
- SEL was a key component that enabled activity reach and benefited marginalized populations, including displaced children, girls, and children with disabilities.
- ECR built strong partnership with local government, NGOs, and community coalitions in its implementation.
- Learning facilitators with less professional training but from crisis affected communities benefited from the scripted SEL lessons, which offered a variety of play-based innovative pedagogies.

Nigerian Ministry of Education, a national curriculum agency, professors at colleges of education, as well as international stakeholders such as, IRC, Creative International, and Florida State University. During the workshop, the five proposed SEL competencies were validated by comparing those with relevant existing skills and competencies in the Nigerian curriculum. Out of the five competencies, conflict resolution was identified as one of priority competencies that was contextually important. To make the curriculum culturally and contextually relevant, local songs, stories and dances were included in the scripted SEL lesson plans.

“The contextualization really took a departure point of first looking at where social-emotional skills existed within the current Nigeria education system, either formal or non-formal, and looking at what were the core competencies that were already being required. What I worked with our local social and emotional learning specialist, was that he reviewed that curriculum, and was then asked to crosswalk those skills with IRC’s social and emotional learning framework within the Safe Healing and Learning Spaces toolkit. To first understand where we already have shared values, and shared alignment on the skills that young people need in this context.” – Senior Education Coordinator for Emergency Response

Internally displaced girls and young women, and children and youth with disabilities were identified as marginalized groups. While SEL was initially envisioned as an add-on intervention for literacy and numeracy lessons, SEL soon became a full and independent component after the need for conflict-affected children and youth to heal and recover was emphasized during the design workshop. To ensure girls’ safety and protection, ECR established 234 girls-only centers to avoid the risk of gender-based violence and to promote girls’ access to quality NFE. Children and youth with disabilities received life skills training opportunities, where they learned skills such as leatherwork, sewing of pillows, and carpentry in addition to the regular 9-month activity.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASUREMENT

Training of learning facilitators and mentor teachers, development of curriculum and lesson plans, and sensitization of family and community members were used as key entry points to incorporate SEL into the ECR activity. ECR was successfully implemented through its strong partnership with local government, NGOs and community coalitions. Community coalitions identified appropriate and safe NFLC locations, as well as competent learning facilitators from conflict-affected communities, who were not formally trained, but were more relatable among displaced children and youth. After an initial five days of training on learner-centered pedagogy, establishment of safe classroom, and literacy, numeracy and SEL teaching materials, ECR then supported learning facilitators through teacher mentors working in local education departments. Scripted SEL lesson plans and scope and sequence were perceived to be helpful for these newly trained learning facilitators. ECR also formed and inaugurated the NFE Technical Working Groups that were vital in verifying and approving local relevance of the SEL facilitators’ manual and trainers’ guide. Such locally grounded partnership ensured not only successful implementation of the activity, but also sustainability of its impact.

“Making government take ownership and be inclusive, even though they might not have all the necessary skills and competencies to run education in an emergency was critical to achieving the success. But we train them and build their capacity. We make the government be in the driver’s seat. Also, building on existing structure and working around mobilization of communities through community coalition was crucial.” – Chief of Party

Currently, the successor of ECR—Addressing Education in Northeast Nigeria (AENN)—built on ECR’s SEL-integrated materials and is working closely with Nigerian Education Development and Research Council to adopt ECR’s SEL-integrated NFE curriculum into the Federal-level Accelerated Education Program curriculum and institutionalize it for national use.

“The bedrock of what we're doing, the bedrock of the design came from the ECR work around the SEL. And so, we moved on with that working in a conflict-sensitive environment, we knew that we would need to incorporate the SEL into our curriculum. And, it's been so far so good. But, the legacy we're trying to leave, even though we work in two states, Nigeria is a federation, we're trying to leave a legacy for the whole country in terms of SEL as part of an accelerated education program. So, Nigeria, for now, we don't have a curriculum, we don't have centralized materials for AEP, Accelerated Education Program, so the activity is currently working closely with the federal agency in charge of research and curriculum development. And, we're trying to adapt materials with that of the federal government at some basic and post-basic level. The unique thing for us is that we are the only ones among the partners working around this process bringing the social-emotional learning concepts to play, so that will feature prominently in the post basic materials that will be adapted for Nigeria.” – Education Office Director

LIMITATIONS

First, ECR's SEL measurement approach was identified as one of the key limitations of the activity. Rather than developing a SEL measurement tool specific to ECR, the team decided to use the already translated and adapted Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which did not measure SEL competencies and skills that were being taught through ECR's lesson plans. Moreover, although the tool was initially designed to be used as a diagnostic instrument, it was applied to measure changes in social and emotional outcomes among children and youth overtime.

“I'm going to tie it back to the SDQ, the strengths and difficulties questionnaire. One of the challenges is that's actually very deficit focused, and it only focuses on certain competencies, you could say. So, you weren't really seeing the growth through that measure. You were just seeing a decline in the negative, which is different than the increase in the positive.” – Technical Advisor for Education

Second, while there was extensive effort to contextualize SEL contents with local education stakeholders during the inception phase, actual scripted lessons relied heavily on U.S.-based SEL evidence and technical expertise. There was limited validation of scripted lessons and individual SEL activities in local classroom settings.