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CENTER FOR EDUCATION

# PROMISING PRACTICES IN PROVIDING PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING, AND ACCESS TO PROTECTION SERVICES IN THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

SNAPSHOTS FROM ASIA, AFRICA, AND EUROPE

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## COVID-19 CONTEXT

By April 2020, 1.5 billion children and youth in 194 countries—over 85% of the world’s learners—were affected by closures of education institutions (UNESCO, 2021). Early concerns about the negative impacts the pandemic would have on both learning continuity and learning loss have in many instances been shown to be true. On average **students lost about a half years’ worth of learning**, negatively affecting **the most vulnerable students** worst. In many countries, **sizeable portions of the school-age population chose not to return to school when they reopened**. Beyond this, school closures led to **many children and youth** losing access to essential protection, health, nutrition, and mental health services, putting millions more at risk of child labor, early marriage and pregnancy, malnutrition, abuse, and exploitation. This was particularly true for the most marginalized learners, including those in poverty, girls/young women, learners with disabilities, and those already affected by pre-existing crises.

To respond to the pandemic, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Missions, implementing partners, and others designed and adapted educational programming and activities to prevent drop out and ensure all learners would return to learning; mitigate learning loss and support learning outcomes; ensure the wellbeing of learners, teachers, and educational personnel; and build the resilience of education systems to better respond to future crises. While there is now a sizeable body of global tools, guidance, and evidence helping USAID and partners to continue to respond to COVID-19 educational disruptions, evidence on why and how certain responses were able to mitigate learning loss and support learning continuity and wellbeing throughout the pandemic is only now beginning to emerge.

# PROVIDING PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING, AND ACCESS TO PROTECTION SERVICES DURING COVID-19

This thematic case study explores **promising practices in providing psychosocial support (PSS), social and emotional learning (SEL), and access to protection services** during and after the COVID-19 response. Of [USAID's six priority areas for COVID-19 response](#),<sup>1</sup> this theme falls under priority area 3 toward ensuring a safe return to learning, especially for the most marginalized. The theme has been expanded to include SEL services. USAID prioritizes this area as education disruptions “not only impede academic learning, but also have a devastating impact on the wellbeing and safety of learners and educators.” USAID supports education “as a hub for social services and has invested in local education systems to provide psychosocial support and protection services, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized populations, especially girls and women” ([USAID COVID Factsheet, 2020](#)).

Prior to the pandemic, evidence on the contribution of PSS, SEL, and protection responses in, or accessible through, the classroom toward maintaining physical and emotional wellbeing, and contributing toward safe and quality schools was already well-established ([USAID, 2018](#); [INEE, 2018](#)). Evidence of these types of interventions in supporting student readiness for learning, and learning outcomes in the Global North, was also well-documented ([Mahoney et al., 2018](#); [CASEL](#)).

However, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, evidence linking PSS, SEL, and access to protection responses to learning outcomes in contexts of crisis and conflict ([INEE, 2016](#)), and across the humanitarian-development continuum ([INEE, January 2020](#)), was only beginning to emerge. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has provided an opportunity to continue to grow the evidence base on these themes, to which this case study contributes. Additionally, as children and young people were subject to social isolation measures under public health policies during the pandemic response, demand increased from education stakeholders, government education actors, and decision-makers for PSS, SEL, and protection services that could be delivered at a distance, indicating an acknowledgement across the sector that supporting wellbeing was fundamental to supporting learning continuity.

This thematic case study draws on snapshots from three interventions (see Box 1) to understand how

## BOX 1: FEATURED INTERVENTIONS

**Intervention:** 4Ts: Trace, Track, Talk & reTurn

**Organization:** Population Council, Kenya

**Location:** Kenya

**Overview:** 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

**Intervention:** Colors of Kindness

**Organization:** Amal Alliance

**Location:** Bangladesh, Greece

**Overview:** A play-based EdTech SEL intervention for primary school children that helped bridge learning gaps and support children to gain life skills critical for academic success, while improving overall wellbeing

**Intervention:** Teacher development

**Organization:** STiR Education

**Location:** Uganda

**Overview:** A radio program building teacher SEL competencies to maintain their wellbeing, motivation, and retention in the system during the pandemic, and to support learner wellbeing during the pandemic and returning to in-person learning.

<sup>1</sup> USAID's six priority areas for COVID-19 response are: 1) partnering with ministries to safely and responsibly reopen schools and higher education institutions; 2) creating or utilizing distance learning platforms; 3) providing psychosocial support and protection services; 4) building emergency preparedness and response capacity; 5) institutionalizing remedial and accelerated education; and 6) engaging youth and higher education institutions as leaders in COVID-19 response.

they leveraged their expertise and positioning within their contexts of operation to respond to this increased and unique demand, and to pivot and mobilize existing PSS, SEL, and protection interventions toward supporting learners and teachers throughout the pandemic. Specific attention is given to the evidence, which stands behind the effectiveness and impacts of this support.

This report closes by considering what we can learn from these interventions about building and demonstrating resilience in education, both by mitigating the impacts of the immediate emergency and identifying opportunities to have these responses embedded within longer-term education programming in the context. Key to this is how each of these responses was able to identify and mobilize existing resilience capacities within their contexts and identify and address the needs of those disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

## METHODOLOGY

To identify interventions for inclusion in this research, a [call for promising practices](#) was put out through USAID's three learning networks: the Education in Crisis and Conflict Network (ECCN), the Global Reading Network (GRN), and the Higher Education Learning Network (HELN). Of the total 79 valid responses to the call, five were relevant to the theme of this report,<sup>2</sup> of which three were identified as having sufficient "promise" in terms of both their evidence-base and approach to systems strengthening. This case study is part of a set of three separate case studies highlighting promising practices across three different USAID priority areas.<sup>3</sup> The author of this case study undertook an extensive review of program data and documentation as well as interviews with key informants.

Research into the theme of this report also included facilitation of a global webinar in August 2022 on [promising practices](#) with the [ECCN](#). This webinar served as a point of further data collection, by generating additional perspectives from ECCN Learning Network members about what they saw of value about this case study and interventions. Further details about the methodology of this research can be found in the associated synthesis report.

### BOX 2: PROMISING PRACTICES

**"Promising" practices** are defined as those that enable learners to remain engaged with and participate in learning opportunities throughout the pandemic, address the psychosocial impacts of COVID-19, and/or seek to minimize or address learning loss in some way. These practices have an evidence base that indicates the impacts of their actions and where they have sought to move beyond immediate response measures toward strengthening education systems more broadly.

2 Respondents were able to select up to two priority areas. Additionally, although interventions aligned themselves (or have been aligned) with one of USAID's priority areas for the purpose of this study, most interventions are in fact aligned with more than one priority area as, in many cases, priority areas were cross-cutting. For example, priority area #2, Creating or utilizing distance learning platforms, features across many interventions, even though they were not categorized as such.

3 Two other case studies were conducted on promising practices in Providing Psychosocial Support (PSS), Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), and Access to Protection Services during COVID-19 and Implementing Accelerated and Remedial Education in the COVID-19 Response.

# THE INTERVENTIONS

Prior to the pandemic, **Population Council** was well-established in developing education evidence and research products and providing technical support to the Kenyan Ministry of Education (MOE) at both sub-national and national levels. This meant that, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Kenyan government's implementation of nation-wide school closures, **Population Council** was well-placed to draw on its existing research base to identify: 1) groups most likely to be adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic based on previous crises; 2) the common barriers keeping them out of school as a result of crisis; and 3) the policy pathways to support them going back to learning. In this instance, they identified an opportunity to operationalize the new school re-entry policy guidelines<sup>4</sup> for out-of-school (OOS) children to support pregnant and/or parenting girls who had dropped out of school to get back to school.

This then allowed **Population Council** to advocate to the MOE for targeted support for this vulnerable population to return to learning. It also allowed the council to leverage its long-standing partnership with the MOE to provide the technical expertise required at a national level to start to operationalize the policy, namely through the **4Ts intervention**. Operationalization included supporting the MOE in the development of national technical tools, indicators, and other resources<sup>5</sup> for tracking, tracing, and talking to the affected populations in order to support them in returning to school. It also included sensitization of education personnel on the school re-entry policy guidelines through strategic partnerships with national school heads associations and the media.

The 4Ts intervention and the school re-entry policy guidelines were operational by May 2021, with government officials engaging School Heads, community leaders, caregivers, and vulnerable girls in dialogue and campaigns to return to school. **Population Council** provided outreach and coordination support to MOE officials in the field. Field visits were conducted in partnership with School Heads, and Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government officials,<sup>6</sup> whose contextual leadership increased the perceived legitimacy and importance of the visits to the girls and their families, by reportedly instilling in them a sense of worth and pride that their government cares for them. **Population Council** also leveraged the sensitization and monitoring visits with the targeted girls and their families to relay back-to-school campaign messages, particularly about unconditional school re-entry opportunities for all OOS children, and other health messages during the pandemic.

**Amal Alliance** also responded to the need for targeted services for vulnerable groups—in this case, Rohingya refugee children in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh—during the pandemic by pivoting an

## BOX 3: EVIDENCE INFORMED SCHOOL RE OPENING

The data and evidence that **Population Council** gathered through the 4Ts program on the number of OOS girls planning to return to in-person learning supported the MOE to more strategically re-open schools and ensure sufficient space for re-entry of both children in school pre-pandemic and OOS children. The information gathered through the intervention also helped prepare the teachers—upon the return to in-person learning—to better understand and respond in the classroom to the needs of pregnant teens/teenage mothers who had previously been OOS. Teachers gained greater insight into the flexibility and support these girls would need upon returning to school, especially when accessing counseling, and child-care, and when breastfeeding.

<sup>4</sup> Released in December 2020

<sup>5</sup> Tools and resources included presentations for sensitizing MOE officials and School Heads to the national school re-entry guidelines, a sub-national database of vulnerable out-of-school girls, monitoring tools, and advocacy messaging, among other resources.

<sup>6</sup> Local administrators such as Village Elders, sub-Chiefs, and Chiefs.

existing crisis response to an adapted response. By September 2020, **Amal Alliance** had rapidly adapted its formerly classroom-based SEL program from an in-person intervention to become a remote, podcast-based program—accessible both on- and off-line—to support facilitators and caregivers in their contexts in order to deliver play-based SEL activities to children. Prior to the pandemic, caregivers had not been engaged as facilitators in program delivery but, during the pandemic, proved advantageous in reaching the children in their homes. The SEL program helped maintain the children’s sense of wellbeing and readiness for learning during the crisis, including feeling empowered and setting goals.

#### BOX 4: PARTNERSHIPS DURING CRISES

At the onset of the pandemic, **Amal Alliance** strategically identified a range of actors and partnerships to mobilize and leverage during program design, implementation, and refinement. Working together with partners allowed **Amal Alliance** to strengthen program quality and measurement, extend its reach, and access marginalized populations. **Amal Alliance** noted that the benefits of the engagements were often bilateral, with the SEL interventions supporting the wellbeing of the partners, as well as the learners.

The adapted program, **Colors of Kindness**, was initially conducted as a pilot, designed for a potential scale-up for education in emergency (EiE) contexts through [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ \(UNHCR\) Humanitarian Education Accelerator \(HEA\)’s COVID-19 Challenge](#). As a pilot, **Amal Alliance** developed systematic mechanisms for learning from the pilot and for continuing to adapt and respond to the context as the pandemic persisted. The HEA award helped build internal capacity and resources to rapidly deliver and learn from the pilot. It also included mentorship from leading experts to enhance program design, and monitoring and evaluation tools. Through the HEA, **Amal Alliance** was supported to identify and mobilize a collection of strategic partnerships<sup>7</sup> for implementation of the pilot in Bangladesh. In 2022, results from the initial pilot informed a secondary pilot in Uganda and a pilot that led to a nation-wide scale-up in all formal schools in Greece at the invitation of the MOE. The expansion to Greece was, in part, enabled by newly drafted (off the back of COVID-19) national policy in that country demanding skills-based learning that included social and emotional skills for all learners.

In Uganda, **STiR Education** also responded to the increased demand for PSS and SEL responses at the onset of COVID-19 by pivoting an existing program. In partnership with the MOE, it adapted its formerly in-person, continuous professional development program for government education officers to become a national radio-based program focused on maintaining teacher and head-teacher wellbeing, motivation, and engagement in the system during the pandemic. Program content prepared education personnel to care for and support both teacher and learner wellbeing during the pandemic, and in the return to in-person learning. This programming pivot leveraged a [developing global discourse](#) around the importance of maintaining teacher wellbeing during crises.

#### BOX 5: DEMAND FOR SEL DURING THE PANDEMIC

During social distancing measures, the national demand for PSS-based interventions heightened, as reflected in Uganda’s National COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan. Focus group discussions of listeners who tuned into **STiR Education’s** radio program reported that, of all the content discussed on radio shows and in conference calls, the most appreciated content was about having a “growth mindset,” and how to respond to the SEL needs of children and teachers during a pandemic.

<sup>7</sup> The intervention was designed with [IDEO](#), scripted with [Global Dignity – Bangladesh](#), powered by [UstadMobile](#), funded by [Education Cannot Wait \(ECW\)](#), and piloted by [Friendship](#).

**STiR Education's** training activities were already embedded within the system at the onset of the pandemic, which meant that, at the release of Uganda's national [COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan](#) in 2020, it was well-positioned to rapidly adapt its existing programming at the invitation of the MOE. Bi-weekly, radio-based sessions, coupled with a one-page handout per session and conference calls, offered coaching, capacity development, methods for stress relief, coping skills, and other psychosocial skills to reinforce teachers' individual resilience during social isolation measures and school closures. During social distancing measures, radio programs allowed teachers to maintain a sense of connection with each other and their work by inviting them to call in to the radio program with questions and answers, with education officials and teachers available to discuss the topics live on air.



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## OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

The imperative in all three contexts during the pandemic to pivot activities and approaches included also having to pivot data collection methods and adapt tools. These were often then administered by new actors—not always well-experienced in data collection for PSS, SEL, or protection activities—in new, often remote contexts. In all contexts, this demanded a rapid period of exploration with new tools and approaches, often iteratively adapted in the pandemic context. All three interventions prioritized the collection of data to inform the ongoing adaptation of their COVID-19 responses. In all cases, it helped them build the wider evidence base on the connections with their work, learner and teacher retention, and wellbeing.

**Amal Alliance's** Colors of Kindness data demonstrates that, despite the adaptation of the program to remote delivery, children continued to strengthen their social and emotional competencies and ensure readiness for learning because of participating in the program. Measured through pre/post questionnaires developed specifically for the adapted program, on average participants improved their SEL competencies<sup>8</sup> and wellbeing by 16.5%<sup>9</sup> from the start of the program. These results were also monitored and measured by **Amal Alliance** through qualitative means, including weekly review of both the facilitator/caregiver notes in their weekly implementation logs, and an “emotion thermometer” completed by children at each session. These were designed to be collected through a learning management system that works offline, enabling ready data collection even in contexts with little/no connectivity. Results were validated through a formative feedback tool in the form of pre- and post-program surveys completed by facilitators, caregivers, and children, and an endline parent observation survey. Ninety-nine percent of caregivers confirmed that their children's behaviors and moods had improved since program participation.

Although in its Bangladesh pilot it was able to track a child's readiness for learning, **Amal Alliance** acknowledged a limitation of its data collection being the lack of time during the rapid pivot period to design and test measurement tools and systems to track additional cognitive outcomes against wellbeing outcomes. In the subsequent scale-up, it identified and engaged a learning partner, i.e., the **Harvard EASEL Lab**, which specializes in SEL measurement and has supported the evidence-based pilot in Greece and subsequent national scale-up.

### BOX 6: CHALLENGES WITH EVIDENCE GENERATION DURING COVID 19

The evolution and contextual challenges of the pandemic, particularly with social distancing mandates in all three contexts, demanded a rethink of PSS and SEL data collection methods and the creation of new—and oftentimes under-tested or -developed—tools and systems. This has meant that, although significant data has been collected on what has worked in terms of keeping learners and teachers engaged with and connected to learning during COVID-19, the implementation of rigorous longitudinal and impact studies to quantify the impact of this on cognitive learning loss has been impeded.

Looking across the evidence generated thus far, not only through the interventions in this case study, but also through the reported evidence base of the other 70 responses to the initial call for promising practices, and to USAID's **COVID-19 Resource Mapping Tool**, it is clear that the challenge and delay in producing this type of evidence is widespread. However, as evidenced through the interventions in this case study, plans and actions to extend evidence-generation activities on what has worked during and beyond COVID-19 are underway.

<sup>8</sup> The five core competencies of SEL are self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship building, and social awareness.

<sup>9</sup> Students could score a minimum of -20 and a maximum of 30, with higher scores indicating higher SEL competency. (*Project Completion Report of Colors of Kindness Pilot Project for UNHCR's Humanitarian Education Accelerator (HEA)*, 2022. Supplied by Amal Alliance.)

During the pandemic, **Population Council** tracked outcomes of its intervention at both the level of the girls identified for the service, as well as at the level of national and subnational government. At an individual level, of the approximate 1,500 OOS girls and their families reached by the 4Ts intervention in Homa Bay and Narok Counties, about 30% of girls re-entered school during the intervention period. A further 54% indicated they now planned to re-enter school once their home situation permitted; the majority of these girls were either pregnant or parenting (Odwe, G. 2021). **Population Council** acknowledged that a limitation in its data collection to date has been the ongoing capacity to track what happens to the girls once they return to school, or to verify if those who indicated they would return in fact do so. They are currently providing technical support to the MOE to develop a monitoring framework for tracing re-entry.

**Population Council's** efforts at the government level were focused on systems strengthening, involving longer-term visions for change, with reportable immediate-term results. During COVID-19, the government adopted and integrated into its national school re-entry monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan the school re-entry indicators that **Population Council** had supported it to draft. The government also adopted the 4Ts program as its official COVID-19 response / “Back-to-School” campaign. This indicated government prioritization of the issue of supporting OOS children back to learning and is attributable to **Population Council's** evidence-based advocacy and technical support on the issue.

**STiR Education's** efforts during COVID-19 also had a longer-term system strengthening focus, with reportable immediate-term results. Of the 1,029 education personnel<sup>10</sup> surveyed by phone during an internal evaluation study of the program,<sup>11</sup> 43% (n=447) knew about the national radio program, and of those, 53% (n=239) listened to it. More than half of those interviewed reported that participation in the intervention had helped them cope with the stress of COVID-19, the most frequently cited reason for this being that the continuation of programming throughout the pandemic gave them a sense of connection and hope that schools would re-open soon. During key informant interviews (KIIs), most education personnel report that, as a result of the program, they feel more motivated to do their jobs than before the pandemic. Through national COVID-19 response plans and dialogue, **STiR Education** recorded increased national understanding and priority of teacher wellbeing, and an increased understanding of the need for teachers to be able to “show up” for their students, not only physically, but also socially and motivationally.

One challenge that **STiR Education** faced in understanding the nuances of the impact of its national-level program was that, although its sample size for quantitative phone surveys was large (1,029) and conducted across various regions of Uganda, time and resource limitations during the pandemic meant that a total of only 196 education personnel was engaged in KIIs or focus group discussions, during which differentiated impacts were assessed. This small sample size did not allow for a representative range of qualitative impacts to be captured and analyzed. **STiR Education** also noted a challenge in engaging secondary and head teachers in both quantitative (16% of sample size) and qualitative (5%) exercises. Reasons for this included that hierarchical structures within local education systems meant that secondary teachers were less likely to be recommended for interview by local authorities. They were apparently also less likely to agree to participate in the data collection.

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<sup>10</sup> Including district officials (n=20), head teachers (n=191), and teachers (n=818).

<sup>11</sup> *Impact Evaluation Findings of STiR Education's Programme in Uganda: Year 2-3 Evaluation Report* (June 2022). Supplied by STiR Education.



## PROMISING PRACTICES

This section of the report considers the factors that have allowed the interventions to identify and mobilize existing assets, resources, networks, and knowledge in the education system—otherwise known as resilience capacities (see Box 7)—to move beyond simply absorbing the impact of COVID, to becoming more adaptable and embedded in longer-term education programming and policies in the context.

At the onset of COVID-19, all three interventions reported being able to build off the increased visibility and demand for supporting wellbeing, which the pandemic highlighted for national and global education stakeholders, evidenced in education COVID-19 response plans and policy. As already entrenched experts on these topics in their contexts, these organizations **identified relevant, existing knowledge and evidence products to capitalize on the increased interest, and to operationalize policies that were already in place but where, previously, there had not been sufficient momentum on which to act.**

**Population Council** drew on its existing research into OOS children disproportionately affected by crises in Kenya to remobilize a latent policy for re-entry to school that would include and protect the marginalized group of concern during and after COVID-19. Both **STiR Education** and **Amal Alliance** also presented evidence-based responses to respective MoEs in Uganda and Greece using evidence they had generated in previous projects: **STiR Education** in previous in-person teacher training programs, and **Amal Alliance** in its Bangladesh pilot. This has contributed toward operationalizing the respective governments' COVID-19 response and recovery plans. In all cases, the evidence-based responses strengthened policy pathways for action.

All three interventions also readily **identified relevant stakeholders and networks to leverage, support, and/or establish strategic partnerships** within their pandemic response. Interventions worked across sectors and levels of education ecosystems, noting the comparative strengths of different actors in context, to mitigate learning loss at scale. The responses all leveraged existing partnerships with respective MoEs to enhance the alignment, effectiveness, and reach of their interventions. **Amal Alliance** engaged a strategic collection of partnerships across the education and humanitarian space in seeking to increase the quality and reach of its intervention and strengthen its institutional capacity to design and maintain the subsequent nation-wide scale-up.

All three also **engaged in their responses actors who are not traditional in education response but, in the COVID-19 context, presented comparative strategic and pragmatic value** and helped address different contextual constraints. For example, **Population Council** understood that ensuring access, contextuality, and safety within its protective response demanded a multi-sectoral

### BOX 7: 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.

*Source: USAID's Transforming Systems in Times of Adversity: Education and Resilience*

response, including alliance with community leaders and officials from ministries beyond the MOE. These alliances allowed it to build trust and legitimacy in context rapidly and bolster the overall protective nature of the response. **Amal Alliance** engaged caregivers in its response to extend the reach of the program to children in its homes during social distancing measures. Adaptation of the **Colors of Kindness** program took this new “user” into consideration in podcast design, noting that the audio nature of the content was vital for accessibility to caregivers with low literacy levels.

All three interventions rapidly **identified internal and contextual capacities through which to adapt their responses and instituted mechanisms to capture the learning to continue to inform adaptation**. This included periods of rapid and iterative exploration and experimentation with measurement tools and approaches in the learning and adaptation processes. **Amal Alliance** constructed its initial intervention in Bangladesh as a dedicated pilot, from which to learn and adapt for scale in other contexts. **Population Council** supported the MOE to establish a monitoring database to start to understand the efficacy of its response. **STiR Education** capitalized on regular conference calls with education personnel to engage in joint reflection on the ongoing wellbeing needs of teachers and then used the reflections to plan future radio sessions.

## LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT BUILDING RESILIENCE

This final section of the report considers what we have learned from these interventions with regard to adapting to crisis, building and demonstrating resilience, and moving beyond addressing an immediate emergency to being embedded within longer-term education programming, particularly for marginalized groups.

These interventions have **embraced the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for programmatic adaptation, which would not have otherwise occurred**. All three have reflected on how being forced to adapt during crisis—and, indeed, embracing the adaptation process—can result in improved response. **Amal Alliance** admits that being pushed to move its SEL program to an EdTech modality, although more labor intensive in its creation with the exploration of new technologies and platforms, has allowed **greater accessibility**. Program adaptation has allowed a wider range of users (including caregivers), with a wider range of skills (including limited literacy), in a wider range of contexts (including camps, urban settings, shelters, and schools). **Amal Alliance** also notes that adaptation to EdTech has increased the national appeal of the program in the Greek context, where the education system does not afford regular professional development opportunities for teachers who are spread across more than 200 islands. In this case, a **ready and accessible** SEL podcast has been valuable.

**STiR Education** also has admitted that, despite radio instruction being initially regarded as a constraint when compared with face-to-face instruction, given that radio reach is nation-wide, its response **reached a much wider audience than it otherwise would have**. In some cases, it even reached caregivers and provided them **critical insight into the challenges and burdens that teachers faced** during COVID-19. For this reason, **STiR Education** has plans to continue with radio instruction for some components of the program moving forward. It also reports that, in various ways, moving forward with a hybrid approach to programming, including both in-person and radio-based instruction, has proved to be a more **cost-efficient model**.

The three interventions also have reflected on the **value of maintaining connections during a crisis** that mandates social distancing. All invested time and resources in maintaining connections across the scales of the education ecosystem—for example, teachers connected with other teachers, learners

with teachers, learners with caregivers, and government officials with communities—and note that this contributed toward **keeping actors engaged and invested in education and committed to returning to in-person learning**. Teachers reported one of the greatest outcomes of **STiR Education’s** radio program was their **understanding that they were not alone in their challenges during COVID-19 and that they were still connected to, and valued within, the greater system**. They also reported that this reinforced their sense of moral purpose as teachers, and a sense of hope that the effects of the pandemic would soon come to an end.

**Population Council** reported that the collective visits—including villages’ chiefs, and MOE and Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government officials—to the vulnerable girls and their families, also made them **feel valued and still worthy of being included within education**. These multi-sectoral visits also demonstrated the **endogenous qualities of education** in bolstering support to achievement of outcomes beyond just education to include protection and health.

The interventions emphasized the role that **partnerships, particularly with the government**, played in their responses, toward building their confidence and legitimacy in, and alignment with, national priorities. That components of all three interventions were eventually adopted at national levels and **embedded within longer-term programming** is testament to the influence and value of these national-level partnerships. Partnerships with other actors also have proved to be advantageous in all three interventions, particularly in **increasing program scope, and in better identifying and accessing populations disproportionately affected by the pandemic**.

## CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has proven to be beyond a short-term disruption to the system and to instead be an ongoing stress to learning and wellbeing outcomes, the effects of which are likely to be felt for years to come. In their various ways, these three interventions have moved from simply acting to minimize negative impacts to improving wellbeing and learning despite the pandemic and creating enabling conditions for systemic change through shifts in policy, priorities, and processes.

PSS, SEL, and access to protection responses have found a unique platform during COVID-19, which has seen their relevance to education—for both learners and teachers—amplified. The pandemic has bolstered a growing global understanding of the important links and reinforcing nature between these responses and sustaining learning outcomes. COVID-19 has highlighted that education remains a valued and in-demand service during crises.

*A synthesis of the findings of this and the other two case studies in the set is available.*

*This case study was prepared by Julie Chinnery, Kayla Boisvert, and Ritesh Shah under the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Leading Through Learning Global Platform (LTLGP) project.*