



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

All Children Reading–Asia (ACR-Asia)

USAID Systems Strengthening Review

November 14, 2022

AID-OAA-TO-16-00017

September 2016 – January 2023

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This document was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development.

Acknowledgements

The review team would like to acknowledge the time and contributions of USAID Missions in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, who facilitated the evidence gathering for this review. We are especially grateful to USAID Missions in Cambodia, Nepal, and the Philippines for participating in the deep-dive case studies, which have contributed valuable evidence to the review.

We would also like to thank government stakeholders and implementing partners involved in the Activities across these countries, who participated in data collection activities for the review, including the online survey and key informant interviews.

We would like to extend our thanks to the USAID Asia [REDACTED] [REDACTED]—for identifying the need for the review and providing invaluable oversight and guidance. Thanks [REDACTED] for helping shape the Analysis Framework for this review.

We are grateful to the ACR-Asia team at RTI, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for their thought-partnership and support throughout the review process, and to their colleagues [REDACTED] [REDACTED] RTI for helping shape the design of the online survey.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge our colleagues [REDACTED] whose input and contributions have made this work possible: [REDACTED], for his leadership and guidance in shaping the review, and [REDACTED], who along with the main authors, served as part of the core review team. A special thanks also to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] whose support at various stages of the review was critical to the work. In addition, we'd like to thank [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for supporting the dissemination of the review findings.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABC+	Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines
ACL	All Children Learning
ACR	All Children Reading
AG	Amber-Green
ALS	Alternative Learning System
AR	Amber-Red
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CRLA	Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment
DepEd	Department of Education Philippines
EdTech	educational technology
EGMA	early grade mathematics assessment
EGRA	early grade reading assessment
EGRP	Early Grade Reading Program
EMIS	education management information system
EQAD	Education Quality Assurance Department
ERO	Education Review Office
G	Green
GESI	gender equality and social inclusion
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
ICT	information and communication technology
IPEA	Inclusive Primary Education Activity
IR	Intermediate Result
LtR	Learn to Read
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MCQ	multiple choice question
MEL	monitoring, evaluation, and learning

MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
MTB-MLE	mother-tongue based multilingual education
NEGRP	National Early Grade Reading Program Nepal
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NIPUN	National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy
NPS	Net Promoter Score
PRIORITAS	Prioritizing Reform, Innovation and Opportunities for Reaching Indonesia’s Teachers, Administrators, and Students
R	Red
R4A	Reading for All
READ	Reading Enhancement for Advancing Development
RRP	Reading Readiness Program
RTI	RTI International
RTR	Room to Read
RWM	Read with Me
SERI	Scaling-Up Early Reading Intervention
SESP	School Education Sector Plan
SMART	specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timebound
SMS	short message service
SRP	Sindh Reading Program
TV	television
UEEP	Uzbekistan Education for Excellence Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government

Executive Summary

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Systems Strengthening Review set out to understand how a portfolio of 20 [REDACTED] Activities to improve learning outcomes for students, implemented over the past decade across 11 countries in Asia, have helped to strengthen education systems in their respective countries. Specifically, the review sought to answer four key research questions:

- What did the Activities set out to do?
- What have the Activities accomplished?
- What were the conditions for success?
- What are the main learnings for future USAID Activities?

To conceptualize and categorize the different facets of “systems strengthening” consistently, the review team created an Analysis Framework, which defines a strong system as one that is capable of

1. setting clear goals and reform strategies to achieve them;
2. driving delivery of these goals by effectively using data, routines, and the power of relationships; and
3. creating an improvement culture by building capacity, using education technology, and promoting equity and inclusion.

The review gathered evidence from three key data sources: a desk review, an online survey, and 37 key informant interviews. These sources were supplemented by deep-dive case studies for selected Activities in three countries (Cambodia, Nepal, and the Philippines).

What did the Activities set out to do?

All Activities had elements of systems strengthening within their stated aims, but this was more explicit for some Activities than others, with a trend toward a greater focus on systems strengthening from 2015 onwards. Despite increasing emphasis on capacity-building and systems strengthening in USAID policy documents over the last decade, interviewees were more likely to describe the aim of their Activities in terms of student outcomes rather than systems strengthening.

Some Activities had a coherent theory of change relating to systems strengthening within their defined results framework, but there was no evidence of a robust or shared basis for measuring whether systems were being strengthened. Except in a few cases, Activity documentation did not clearly articulate the “journey” of systems strengthening (the phased process through which the system would increasingly become self-led and less dependent on external support).

For some Activities, there was strong evidence of coordination [REDACTED] to help the system build on existing efforts, harness the collective impact of investments, and ensure sustainability of reforms. The review also found evidence of platforms for [REDACTED] partner coordination in most countries, in which Activities participated regularly to support streamlining of efforts.

Few Activities demonstrated an intended role for education technology (EdTech) in systems strengthening—most EdTech elements were incorporated as a response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

Overall, references to systems strengthening within the stated aims of Activities tended to mirror the generic language used in USAID policy and strategy documents. This may indicate the lack of a shared framework for diagnosing and prioritizing the specific systems strengthening needs of individual education systems and using these as the basis for Activity design and impact measurement.

What have the Activities accomplished?

Although Activities focused on improving student learning outcomes—and often helped shift systems’ reform conversations to focus more on outcomes—they rarely supported systems to set their own system-wide outcome goals around which to align their reform efforts.

All Activities equipped systems with knowledge of good practices for the design and implementation of reform strategies to improve reading outcomes. However, there was mixed optimism about the extent to which governments have the capacity and will to independently drive these efforts. In a few cases, Activities played a major role in shaping national government policies or were integrated into national policies.

Across systems, the review found that Activities supported monitoring and evaluation—particularly through generating new or more robust student assessment data. However, building governments’ capacity to independently and sustainably use data to identify and solve problems proved more challenging, and fewer Activities demonstrated progress in this respect. There is limited evidence of Activities’ establishing effective routines to review progress and solve problems early or developing “feedback loops” to monitor implementation progress.

Although Activities often created or actively participated in stakeholder groups to help drive strategy and coordination—especially in early grade reading—the review found a mixed picture on whether systems were able to leverage these structures independently to support reforms beyond the life of the Activities. For some Activities, the review found evidence of the Activity helping the system better understand the chain of actors through which implementation must occur and work with these actors in new ways to support reform efforts.

There was limited evidence of Activities’ creating a shared and systematic understanding of capacity in the systems in which they worked or supporting government partners to regularly review their own capacity. However, almost all Activities moved beyond “doing things for the system” to a more collaborative approach to building system capacity. Nevertheless, Activities had varying degrees of success in building the capacity of systems to independently replicate and scale up reform efforts as Activities progressed.

Evidence of long-term impact was strongest where Activities were able to influence the national policies of the government. There was also evidence of longer-term impact in strategic approaches to reading reform, teacher training capacity, and sensitization to data, and a few outstanding examples of Activities’ establishing transferable models for stakeholder engagement (discussed in the deep-dive case studies in Chapter 7). The tendency of interviewees to focus on policy achievements—rather than on other aspects of long-term impact on system capacity—may be related to the lack of a shared framework for observing and measuring progress in less tangible aspects of systems strengthening, such as behavior change.

Interviewees tended to talk about equity as a discrete feature of Activities, rather than as a fundamental design principle. The strongest progress of systems strengthening in relation to equity and inclusion was observed in Activities that purposefully incorporated specific equity-based interventions into their overall project design. There was limited evidence of Activities’

building system capacity to address the digital divide or to use the EdTech Ecosystem Framework to exploit digital learning opportunities.

What were the conditions for success?

Activities that had an explicit focus on systems strengthening in their stated aims were more likely to have an impact on system capacity, especially in relation to the elements of capacity included in their aims, and especially when expectations on capacity-building were shared and understood by system leaders from the outset. In particular, greater clarity on how support would be phased and the pace at which responsibilities would transition from the Activity to system leaders (“systems strengthening journey”) were associated with stronger impact and vice versa.

Activities were less effective in building sustainable capacity when they failed to “meet systems where they were at”—where there was a mismatch between the support provided to systems and the technical, financial, or human resource capacity of systems to receive that support. This was especially true for EdTech interventions, which were often not sufficiently well-matched to the maturity of countries’ EdTech ecosystems to scale effectively.

Conversely, Activities that aligned with systems’ existing reform priorities tended to benefit from increased system ownership, which was associated with greater impact on systems strengthening. Sometimes, this alignment was brought about by co-designing reforms with systems, syncing with national programs, [REDACTED]. Activities tended to have most impact when they were part of a sequence of Activities that built on each other over several years, offering implementing partners the opportunity to understand and begin to address structural barriers to sustainable capacity-building.

Champions in top government leadership were a powerful condition for success, but Activities often struggled to adapt to changes in system leadership. [REDACTED]

What are the main learnings for future USAID Activities?

Based on our review, the review team has identified a series of recommendations for structuring Activities to enable them to maximize their impact on education systems’ capacity to implement effective reforms.

Recommendation 1: Specify clear systems strengthening objectives as part of the results frameworks of Activities, and agree on these with the system.

Being clear and specific about the capacity an Activity is trying to build is a key first step in aligning partners (including system leaders themselves) behind an effort to build it. Systems strengthening objectives can be defined in terms of specific capacities to be built in system actors or units—for example, according to those we interviewed, “*The government effectively leads [REDACTED] coordination in the sector through an established [REDACTED] working group,*” “*The monitoring unit independently analyzes assessment data quarterly, shares [them] with districts, and uses [them] to make evidence-based decisions on where to target support.*” This sort of specificity is preferable to more vague references to “capacity-building,” which can be interpreted differently by different partners.

Systems strengthening objectives can also help partners locate the work of the Activity within the overall systems strengthening journey, whether the aim is for the system to sustain, replicate, or scale up the reform effort (or a certain component of it) independently. This, in

turn, supports a more specific conversation about the capacities that are needed for system actors to play their intended future role. Baseline assessments of system implementation capacity conducted collaboratively with government partners (see Recommendations 2 and 8) provide a strong basis for identifying the system’s capacity-building priorities and setting these as shared objectives for the Activity. This approach is also likely to create greater buy-in and a sense of shared responsibility for capacity-building between the Activity and relevant system leaders.

Recommendation 2: Embed ongoing measurement of systems strengthening progress in Activity monitoring and evaluation, including baseline, endline, and external evaluations.

Capacity assessments at the beginning of Activities allow partners to identify areas of focus and create a baseline measurement from which to measure progress. They can also ensure that reforms are ambitious but achievable given the system’s current capacity, and that system strengthening efforts are targeted at specific identified needs. Ongoing measurement of these capacities can allow Activities to measure progress and adapt strategies as needed. Endline assessments can allow a structured reflection on what strategies were effective at building specific capacities.

Measurement of systems strengthening is potentially most useful when it is expressed as progress in terms of outcomes—skills developed, practices adopted by government, successful handover to system leaders—rather than outputs. Using common evaluation tools across Activities has the potential to build a shared language and allow easier comparisons across ██████████ Activities. Since many elements of capacity-building are somewhat subjective, and hence difficult to measure, external moderation and benchmarking by cross-Activity comparisons can help to address this. The Analysis Framework developed for this review and the original delivery capacity framework are both examples of tools that can be used to assess capacity to implement effective reforms across a range of contexts.

By creating a shared language for understanding and measuring system capacity, common evaluation tools also provide a stronger basis for assessing capacity and reviewing progress with government partners. USAID should also consider leveraging such tools to expanding its existing indicator on systems strengthening (“Education system strengthened through [U.S. Government-]assisted policy reform,” discussed in Chapter 3) to take account of evidence of skills and behaviors developed in addition to evidence of policy reform.

Adopting a common approach to measuring system capacity could support pre-post analyses that allow for more robust formative and summative assessments of progress within the life of an Activity, as well as more comprehensive longitudinal evaluations of successive Activities. Similarly, pursuing greater comparability in the student learning outcomes measured across Activities could even allow future studies to establish the conditions in which systems strengthening progress is most likely to translate to improved student learning.

Recommendation 3: Clearly articulate systems strengthening strategies from the outset, and ensure aligned expectations with system leaders.

As well as defining the systems strengthening impact expected, and how it will be measured, Activities give themselves the best chance of success if they articulate what the journey of systems strengthening is expected to look like. Apart from making it easier to review progress, the process of articulating “how we will get there” should also force a better conversation, at both the initial design stage and the review points, about what the system is ready for. Key points to articulate include the following:

- How the role of the implementing partners and system actors will change over time—for example, progressive transition of responsibilities to system actors through an “I do, we do, you do” approach
- Specific systems strengthening milestones with timelines (e.g., *“By the second quarter of 2023, the M&E team at the data unit will independently analyze the quarterly assessment data”*)
- How the defined metrics to measure systems strengthening are expected to show progress over time (see Recommendation 2)
- The commitment required from the system (e.g., *“Implementing partner will be sharing office with curriculum writers and will be working with them over 3 months to revamp the curriculum”*)

Given that much of systems strengthening work takes effect by building the capacity of government leaders and their teams, setting shared expectations with those leaders from the start is critical. Articulating clear and measurable systems strengthening objectives (as per Recommendations 1 and 2) and framing the work in terms of a journey provides a more specific basis for having this conversation with system leaders. Aligning with the system leaders on the commitment required, in terms of time and resources, can help the system plan its human resource and financial requirements accordingly. Engaging system leaders in systematic regular reviews of implementation capacity can ensure that everyone has a realistic and shared understanding of progress and challenges.

Recommendation 4: Set the scope of Activities to allow for realistic progress, and consider investing in longer or multiphase Activities for greater impact.

Systems strengthening is an incremental process, and it takes time for new practices and behaviors to become institutionalized in systems. Activities can increase their chance of success by being realistic about the time required for systems strengthening and adjusting their scope or time frame accordingly. When Activities try to do too much in a given time frame, reform practices—especially ones that are too ambitious, given systems’ current capacities—are less likely to be sustained. It is also harder to help system actors identify how a new capacity they have developed may be transferable to other contexts, for example, how an approach to strategy development or stakeholder engagement mastered to support early grade reading reforms could be leveraged to support reforms in math, initial teacher education, or EdTech. As noted above, early capacity assessments of systems can help Activities understand the system’s maturity in relation to the proposed reform agenda and develop a realistic understanding of progress possible within the time frame of the Activity.

Longer engagements can allow Activities to increase the likelihood of good practices and behaviors being institutionalized in systems. Even if it is not feasible to commission Activities longer than 5 years, USAID could strategically plan country engagements, imagining how consecutive Activities might build on each other to allow for more sustained systems strengthening. Based on the experience of the last decade, this could include planning reforms in phases, focusing on smaller geographical areas to test approaches for impact and financial viability before scaling up, and addressing structural barriers to sustainable capacity-building.

Recommendation 5: Focus programs to “meet systems where they are at,” through understanding of finances, [REDACTED], and capacity to deploy new approaches.

Activities can benefit from being more narrowly focused, using initial assessments of capacity (as described above) to meet systems at their current level of maturity. This can enable

Activities to focus more explicitly on the building of specific skills, supporting the adoption of practices within governments, and making sure the relevant officials are secure in them (rather than creating systems that are too advanced for a government to adopt or maintain on its own). Focusing Activities in ways that complement the system’s existing reform priorities, and coordination [REDACTED], is also likely to lead to greater system buy-in and reduced duplication.

Recommendation 6: Incorporate EdTech interventions based on the maturity of the ecosystem, and in ways that can enhance the impact of Activities at scale.

EdTech interventions can strengthen the capacity of systems most when the interventions are deployed strategically, not reactively, and in ways that are appropriate to the skills of system actors and the infrastructure available. In particular, Activities can build capacity of systems by helping them make strategic policy decisions about EdTech: how it can enhance the impact of interventions and complement traditional learning, how systems can systematically measure EdTech impact, and how systems can map out and understand the digital divide and address it. The EdTech Ecosystem Framework is a valuable tool in this regard, although its use in the Activities we reviewed appeared to be limited.

Recommendation 7: Mainstream equity considerations into Activity design, so that everyone is included.

Activities are best placed to help make systems more equitable when equity considerations are mainstreamed into their design. This means going beyond the idea of equity and inclusion work as an “add-on” to the core Activity and considering how system strengthening efforts aimed at making the system more effective can also support it to be more equitable. For example, Activities can build the capacity of the system to do the following:

- Identify lowest performing/underserved groups of students in the system, for example, those in remote schools, minority groups, or students with disabilities.
- Use data to understand why these groups are low performing or underserved, whether there are “bright spots” in performance that go against the trend, what in-country experiences and international evidence reveal about potential solutions to improve performance or provision, and the implications for the design of the overall reforms.
- Target resources and support to low performing or underserved groups, including infrastructure support, training for teachers, and appropriate learning materials.
- Draw on stakeholder networks to increase the take-up and impact of targeted support, including through elevating the voices of underserved learners and communities themselves.
- Use EdTech to address inequalities and make sure that the use of technology is not exacerbating inequalities in the system.

Activities aimed at building a system’s general implementation capacity have an important role to play in building an understanding that education systems can and should accommodate different learners within their reforms, and that reforms targeted at supporting the lowest performing students are often a key way to improve overall outcomes in systems.

Recommendation 8: Increase focus on the elements of the Analysis Framework for which Activities have had the least impact.

Our analysis suggests that there are some important aspects of system capacity where relatively little progress was made across the Activities reviewed. This is likely because these

elements were not prioritized within Activity design, and possibly also because USAID implementation partners have not developed a sufficiently clear understanding of the change required to build these elements of capacity and robust techniques for building them.

Specifically, we recommend that USAID work with its implementing partners to do the following:

- Encourage governments to set student outcome targets wherever this is politically feasible.
- Systematically analyze the “delivery chain” in each reform effort for risks or weaknesses, and engage the system in this process.
- Bring data into formal, regular, and structured problem-solving conversations with system actors at all levels, especially senior leaders.
- Facilitate government partners to assess their own capacity to implement reform, and develop this as a regular habit, rather than just focus on helping them understand the general capacity of the education system.

Chapters 4, 5, and 7 of this report set out examples of good practice for each of these elements. Activities are most likely to see impact when they are intentional about modelling these practices and create opportunities for system actors to practice the skills involved. For example, facilitating formal, data-informed problem-solving conversations with system leaders can create an impetus for the system staff involved in those conversations to go beyond presenting data, and build their capacity to analyze data and make evidence-based recommendations. Similarly, facilitating regular assessments of capacity with system actors can help government partners (and the implementing partners working with them) manage transitions, setting up new leaders to quickly understand and build on the system strengthening work done with their predecessors.

1 Introduction

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has longstanding deep relationships with ministries of education across Asia. Over the past decade, a guiding principle for USAID’s approach to designing education programs, in addition to programmatic goals for improving learning outcomes at scale, has been a focus on systems strengthening.¹

1.1 The evolving focus of USAID education programming

A review of USAID education programs implemented between 1990 and 2005 noted that Activities during this period were focused on improving access and quality of education sustainably.² The goals of the USAID Education Strategy that was set out in 2005 included the promotion of equitable access to quality education and the enhancement of knowledge and skills for productivity. While the programs were designed with learning outcomes in mind, most focused on tracking system inputs as part of their monitoring and evaluation (M&E) efforts.³

Policy and strategy statements published from 2011 onwards marked a shift in USAID programming. Influenced by broader U.S. Government education policies, the main goals of the USAID Education Strategy 2011–2015 included “Improved early grade reading outcomes for 100 million children in primary grades by 2015,” as well as improved workforce development programs and increased equitable access to education in crisis and conflict environments.⁴ The Strategy also placed a strong emphasis on working within multi-stakeholder development landscapes by prioritizing collaboration [REDACTED], host governments, and in-country partners; building country ownership; and ensuring the sustainability of the reforms by *building the capacity of education systems*.

The USAID Education Policy published in 2018 built upon these priorities and laid out key principles according to which future investments in education programming would be made, which included prioritizing country ownership, focusing investments on “measurably and sustainably improving learning and educational outcomes;” strengthening systems and building capacity in local institutions; leveraging partnerships and resources, data-driven decision-making, and investments; and promoting equity and inclusion.⁵

The Local Capacity Development Policy,⁶ published in 2021, codified the Agency’s commitment to developing the capacity of local actors. The policy centers around “two mutually reinforcing pillars,” which include a local capacity development framework and seven local capacity development principles. The framework emphasizes two key processes: (1) systems analysis, which focuses on strengthening the capacities of local actors to bolster the performance of the system, and (2) selection of approach, according to which the “appropriate approach or set of approaches” is determined to build the capacity of the actors.

¹ U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education Fiscal Years 2019-2023, USAID Basic Education Strategy

² An Analysis of USAID Assistance to Basic Education in the Developing World, 1990-2005

³ USAID Education Strategy 2005

⁴ USAID Education Strategy 2011-2015, 1

⁵ USAID Education Policy 2018

⁶ USAID Local Capacity Development Policy (August 2021)

The seven principles delineated by the policy to guide effective local capacity development are as follows:

1. Start with the local system.
2. Develop diverse capacities.
3. Align capacity development with local priorities.
4. Appreciate and build on existing capacities.
5. Be mindful of and mitigate the unintended consequences of our capacity development.
6. Practice mutuality with local actors.
7. Measure performance improvement in collaboration with local actors.

As we shall see, these systems strengthening principles in USAID policy have been progressively embedded in the approach and aims of USAID education Activities implemented over the past 10 years.

1.2 USAID Systems Strengthening Review

The USAID Systems Strengthening Review aims to understand how USAID education Activities implemented over the past decade have helped to strengthen education systems in their respective countries, in line with the USAID policy priorities outlined above.⁷ The Review looks at a portfolio of 20 USAID Activities across 11 countries in Asia (full list in **Annex A**) collectively and individually, to deepen understanding in relation to four key research questions:

- What did the Activities set out to do?
- What have the Activities accomplished?
- What were the conditions for success?
- What are the main learnings for future USAID Activities?

Each of these research questions contains a series of sub-questions, which we will unpack in this report as we discuss the findings of the review.

For this review, we have drawn evidence from a desk review of Activity documents, an online survey with stakeholders involved in these Activities, select key informant interviews for the Activities, and deep-dive case studies for selected Activities in Cambodia, Nepal, and the Philippines.⁸ The data gathered from these sources have provided evidence against all four research questions. In some instances, we avoid mention of specific countries or programs to ensure anonymity of respondents.

Chapter 2 of this report provides an **overview of our methodology** for the review, including our Analysis Framework for conceptualizing systems strengthening. **Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6** set out the **findings of the review in relation to each of the four research questions** in turn, with Chapter 6 outlining the review's recommendations for future [REDACTED]

⁷ Of all Activities under review, the Pakistan Pre-Service Teacher Education Program (Pre-STEP) is the only one Activity that began implementation in 2008. All other Activities included in the review started in 2012 or after.

⁸ Stakeholders from Activities in the Kyrgyz Republic did not participate in the online survey or key informant interviews because of overlap with the USAID Asia Bureau Education Sector Analysis study being conducted at the same time. The Mission in Tajikistan was unable to identify stakeholders from the Quality Reading Program to participate in the review.

Activities. Chapter 7 illustrates examples of systems strengthening through **case studies looking at selected Activities in three countries: Cambodia, Nepal, and the Philippines.**⁹

2 Methodology

2.1 Defining systems strengthening: Our Analysis Framework

Systems strengthening is complex and can be defined in different ways. To enable a structured reflection, we created a framework to help us conceptualize and categorize the different facets of systems strengthening consistently across our analysis.

Our framework is adapted from Delivery Associates' Delivery Capacity Review Framework, which has been used to assess system capacity to deliver with governments and public service systems across the globe. To adapt the framework, we reviewed the literature to understand systems strengthening from an education and development perspective. The adapted framework includes key concepts from the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education (2019–2023), the USAID Education Policy (2018), studies using the RTI Core Functions Framework, the RTI EdTech Ecosystem Framework, and other relevant literature as well as feedback from USAID and RTI colleagues.¹⁰

Based on this input and consultations with USAID, the updated Analysis Framework (**Figure 1**) defines a strong system as one that is capable of:

1. **setting clear goals and reform strategies** to achieve them;
2. **driving delivery** of these goals by effectively using data, routines, and the power of relationships; and
3. **creating an improvement culture**, by building capacity, using education technology, and promoting equity and inclusion.

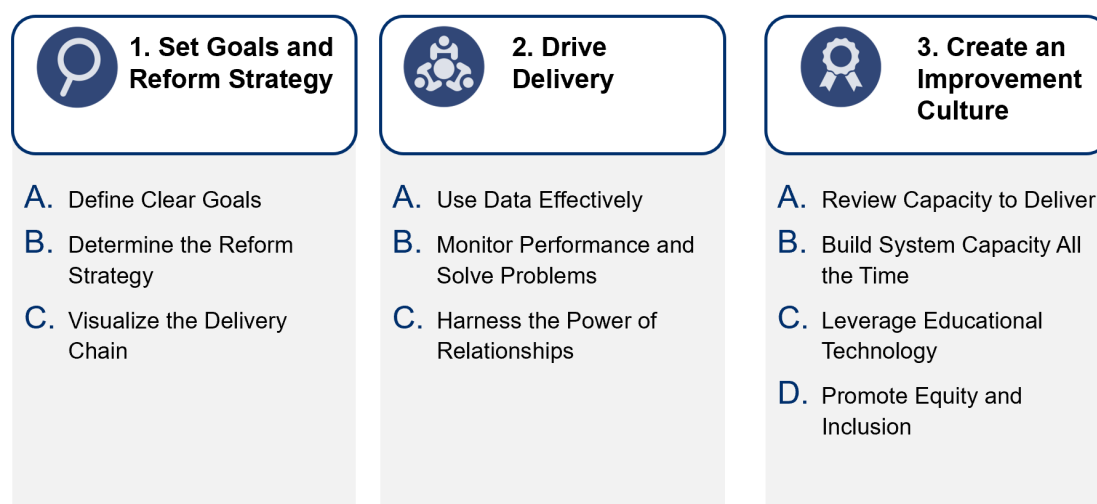
"System" means the national or regional education system in which the Activity was working. Although our analysis focused on the public sector system for managing education, where other nongovernmental organization (NGO), civil society or private sector actors were important in delivering reform, we have encompassed them in our definition of the system. Where an Activity focused on a specific region of a country or a particular aspect of the education system, our findings attempt to distinguish, as far as is possible, between the impact the Activity had in its area of focus and any wider impact it had in strengthening the broader education system.

The Analysis Framework focuses on **systems strengthening in terms of the system's capacity to implement education reforms effectively**. The focus of the review is therefore on **the extent to which Activities supported systems to adopt good implementation behaviors as defined in our framework**, rather than the extent to which Activities supported systems to implement specific education interventions that can contribute to improved learning outcomes.

⁹All Children Reading, All Children Learning, and Inclusive Primary Education Activity (IPEA) in Cambodia; Early Grade Reading Program I and II in Nepal; and Basa Pilipinas and Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines.

¹⁰ The RTI Core Functions Framework is set out in the paper, "Doing Reform Differently: Combining Rigor and Practicality in Implementation and Evaluation of System Reforms," [REDACTED]. The RTI EdTech Ecosystems Framework is set out in the report, "Scaling Access & Impact Realizing the Power of EdTech," produced under the Omidyar Network's Education initiative

Figure 1. Analysis Framework



The first two pillars of the framework look at the extent to which Activities have helped or enabled education systems to embed elements or behaviors critical to delivery. For example, being able to define clear goals; develop robust plans to meet them; understand through whom implementation must occur; and use data, routines, and relationships to drive accountability and outcomes.

The third pillar looks at the extent to which Activities supported education systems to understand and improve their own capacity to deliver effective reforms—to get better at getting better, for example, by embedding processes to review and build capacity, leverage technology, and promote equity and inclusion.

The Analysis Framework serves as the framing mechanism for gathering evidence for this review. We used the framework to design the online survey, the questions for the key informant interviews, the self-assessment workshops for deep-dive countries, and to look for systems strengthening evidence as part of our desk review.

In reviewing evidence against the 10 elements of our framework, we have focused on the **progress of systems over the life of the Activities**. Our Analysis Framework rubric (**Annex B**) defines what “weak” and “strong” evidence of progress in systems strengthening would look like against each of the elements. This has enabled us, for each Activity or country, to assign a rating against each element of the framework using a four-point scale to highlight relative areas of strength and challenge. The **heatmap of ratings across Activities** is presented in Chapter 4 as part of our answer to the research question, “What have the Activities accomplished?” Narrative rationales for our ratings on each of the three case studies are presented in **Chapter 7**, and for all other Activities in **Annex C**.¹¹ More broadly, we have used the Analysis Framework throughout our findings to conceptualize systems strengthening and organize key illustrative examples.

¹¹ The report does not include heatmap ratings for Activities in the Kyrgyz Republic and for the Quality Reading Program in Tajikistan, for reasons noted in Chapter 1.

2.2 Data collection and analysis

We have used **three key data sources** to gather evidence on systems strengthening for this review: **a desk review, an online survey, and key informant interviews**. In addition, our **deep-dive case studies** on selected Activities in Cambodia, Nepal, and the Philippines have enabled us to explore our research questions in greater detail and examine the conditions for success and key takeaways for the continued strengthening of education systems. As part of the deep-dive case studies, we conducted additional key informant interviews and an additional desk review and **facilitated self-assessment workshops with key stakeholders** in each country to gather insights.

We have synthesized evidence from all three data sources and our deep-dive case studies to develop findings against our four research questions. We did this, in particular, by drawing on all the evidence gathered per Activity in the heatmap analysis against our Analysis Framework. Wherever evidence from one source did not corroborate evidence from another source, we have noted the discrepancy and presented our analysis of what this means.

Desk review

We reviewed key reports and documents for each of the Activities. These included but are not limited to Activity solicitations; annual reports; quarterly progress reports; Activity evaluations; and monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) plans. We have used the desk review to gather evidence to be used in our Analysis Framework in relation to the four research questions of the review, and to help identify areas for exploration in the key informant interviews.

Multicountry survey

Our online survey aimed to gather quantitative and qualitative insights to understand how Activities have contributed to systems strengthening. The survey was sent out to USAID Missions, implementing partners, and government partners for Activities, identified by the Missions. We used purposive sampling to identify survey participants: people who were/are directly involved in the Activities, have a holistic oversight of the Activity in its entirety, and therefore have enough knowledge to comment on its systems strengthening effectiveness.

The survey questions were designed to map to elements of the Analysis Framework. The survey comprised **13 “ratings” questions**, asking respondents to **rate the effectiveness of the Activity in supporting specific systems strengthening elements on a scale of 0–10** (0: not effective at all, 10: very effective). Each rating question was followed by a multiple choice question that asked respondents to choose all the ways (if any) in which the Activity supported that aspect of systems strengthening. The survey was shared with 164 participants, and we received 90 responses in total (54% response rate). The responses break down as 53% (48) from implementing partners, 22% (20) from USAID Missions, 19% (17) from government partners, and 6% (5) from other stakeholders.

Although the survey responses covered nearly every Activity, the number of respondents per Activity or country was relatively small—in most cases fewer than 10. Accordingly, we present our **analysis of trends for the full sample** or by respondent role. We consider that the **sample size makes it impossible to draw robust quantitative conclusions at the Activity or country level**. However, responses to all survey questions at the Activity/country level have been added to our evidence bank for these Activities and play an important role in helping us to draw qualitative insights, taken together with evidence from the desk review and interviews.

In analyzing survey responses, we have considered the potential for **self-selection bias** among participants who completed the survey. We have accounted for this in two main ways.

First, our focus is on **variation within this sample of respondents as opposed to making absolute judgements** based on the survey data alone. For example, we use the survey to compare responses to different questions (and hence different elements of the Analysis Framework) to understand which areas are perceived as better or worse than others.

Second, we have used an approach based on the **Net Promoter Score (NPS)** methodology to account for the fact that responses to rating questions clustered to the right-hand side of the scale.¹² NPS is a commonly used metric for measuring customer satisfaction and loyalty in a variety of industries on a 0–10 scale, dividing responses into the categories: 0–6: detractors, 7–8: passives, and 9–10: promoters. The NPS approach maintains that where responses tend to the positive side of a scale: (1) it is important to understand the extent to which respondents were very positive versus only somewhat positive; and (2) lower scores can be viewed as relatively negative. We recognize that this is a novel application of NPS. We use the NPS categories only to color-code charts for rating questions; scores per rating are still visible.

Key informant interviews

We conducted key informant interviews with a subset of our survey participants identified by Missions to deepen our understanding of Activities. The interviewees were purposively sampled to maximize representation from all three stakeholder groups (USAID Missions, implementing partners, and government partners). Each one-on-one interview followed a semi-structured format, using an interview guide. Interview questions focused on soliciting perspectives on the systems strengthening aspects of Activities, based on the Analysis Framework.

We conducted 37 interviews in total across the Activities, including 16 interviews with implementing partners, 12 interviews with USAID Missions, and 8 interviews with government partners.¹³ In reviewing evidence from interviews, we focused on how different stakeholders responded to our questions and whether stakeholders were aligned in their responses, the systems strengthening language they used, and which areas of systems strengthening were most frequently cited rather than omitted from responses. Evidence from interviews was added to our evidence bank to review collectively with evidence from the survey and desk review.

A limitation inherent in this sort of retrospective review is the need to rely on stakeholders' recollections of the changes they had observed over time and the extent to which these changes were attributable to the Activities. We acknowledge that this sort of evidence is potentially susceptible to recall bias. Similarly, in some cases, interview respondents had only engaged with Activities for part of their period of delivery. We tried to address this limitation by maximizing the representation of interviewees (across stakeholder groups and the lifespan of Activities) wherever this was possible. Chapter 6 includes a recommendation on common approaches for measuring system capacity, which, if implemented, could enable future studies to conduct pre- or post-analyses that would be less susceptible to recall bias.

Deep-dive case studies

Our deep-dive analysis focused on selected Activities in Cambodia (All Children Reading [ACR], All Children Learning [ACL], and Inclusive Primary Education Activity [IPEA]), Nepal

¹² [REDACTED] (2003) The one number you need to grow. *Harvard Business Review*.

¹³ Stakeholders from Activities in the Kyrgyz Republic did not participate in the review because of overlap with the USAID Asia Bureau Education Sector Analysis study being conducted at the same time. The Mission in Tajikistan was unable to identify stakeholders from the Quality Reading Program to participate in the review.

(Early Grade Reading Program [EGRP] I and II), and the Philippines (Basa Pilipinas and Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines [ABC+]). These countries were chosen for the deep-dive case studies in consultation with RTI and USAID. Each of these countries emerged early in the review as positive examples of systems strengthening, and each had experienced a sequence of USAID Activities on early grade reading that built on each other. The deep dives aimed to understand in particular how the design and implementation of these Activities created conditions for systems strengthening, how they addressed challenges common to developing country system contexts, and what lessons can be learned for future USAID education programming.

As part of our deep-dive data collection, we reviewed additional Activity and country education documents and conducted interviews with additional individuals across the three stakeholder groups for the shortlisted Activities in Cambodia, Nepal, and the Philippines. We conducted 16 additional interviews across the three countries, including 7 for ACR, ACL, and IPEA in Cambodia; 5 for EGRP I and II in Nepal; and 4 for Basa Pilipinas and ABC+ in the Philippines.

To deepen our understanding of Activities, we also conducted virtual, interactive **self-assessment workshops** with participants from the three countries. Each workshop included participants from the respective Mission, implementing partners and, where possible, government partners. Using the Analysis Framework, participants were facilitated to rate Activities using the four-point scale and engaged in a discussion to share their reflections and agree on a “consensus rating” for each of the 10 elements of the framework; this evidence informed the final rating assigned by the review team. Over the course of these workshops, we interacted with 14 individuals, including 4 in Cambodia, 5 in Nepal, and 5 in the Philippines.

3 What did the Activities set out to do?

This chapter presents findings in relation to the first research question of the review: “What did the Activities set out to do?” Sections 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 set out findings in relation to specific sub-research questions from the review’s original terms of reference. For each sub-research question, we set out our findings under one or more “Key Findings.”

3.1 Across the portfolio of systems strengthening Activities, what did the Activities set out to do individually and as a group? What were the key elements of Activity design? How was ‘systems strengthening’ defined and measured?

Key Finding: All Activities had elements of systems strengthening within their stated aims, but this was more explicit for some Activities than others.

Figure 2 shows how stated aims in activity results frameworks (Intermediate Result [IR] statements and sub-IR statements) aligned with our Analysis Framework. It is important to note that **Figure 2** only looks at the stated IRs for the Activities, not what the Activities did in practice. For example, none of the Activities stated an explicit focus on helping systems define their own clear aims for student outcomes (*Element 1A: Define Clear Goals*); this is not to say that collaborative goal setting was not a feature of any Activities, just that no Activity explicitly set out to strengthen that element of a system’s capacity to implement reform. Similarly, although none of the Activities stated an explicit focus in relation to *Element 3A: Review Capacity to Delivery*, sector assessments and capacity assessments were a part of several Activities (as we shall see in Chapter 4).

Figure 3 illustrates our assessment of the extent to which language on systems strengthening featured in different Activities’ stated aims over time. By “systems strengthening language” we mean language that clearly indicated that the aims of the Activity were linked to building systems’ capacity in relation to one or more elements of our Analysis Framework, even if the words used in the results framework were different from the language of the Analysis Framework rubric. Activities identified as having a “major emphasis” on systems strengthening include systems strengthening aims in more than one of the IR statements and include sub-IR statements that describe specific inputs and outputs in building systems’ capacity focused on different levels of the system: national, subnational, and school levels.

Figure 2. Activity results framework alignment with Analysis Framework

● Activity stated aims directly aligned with analysis framework

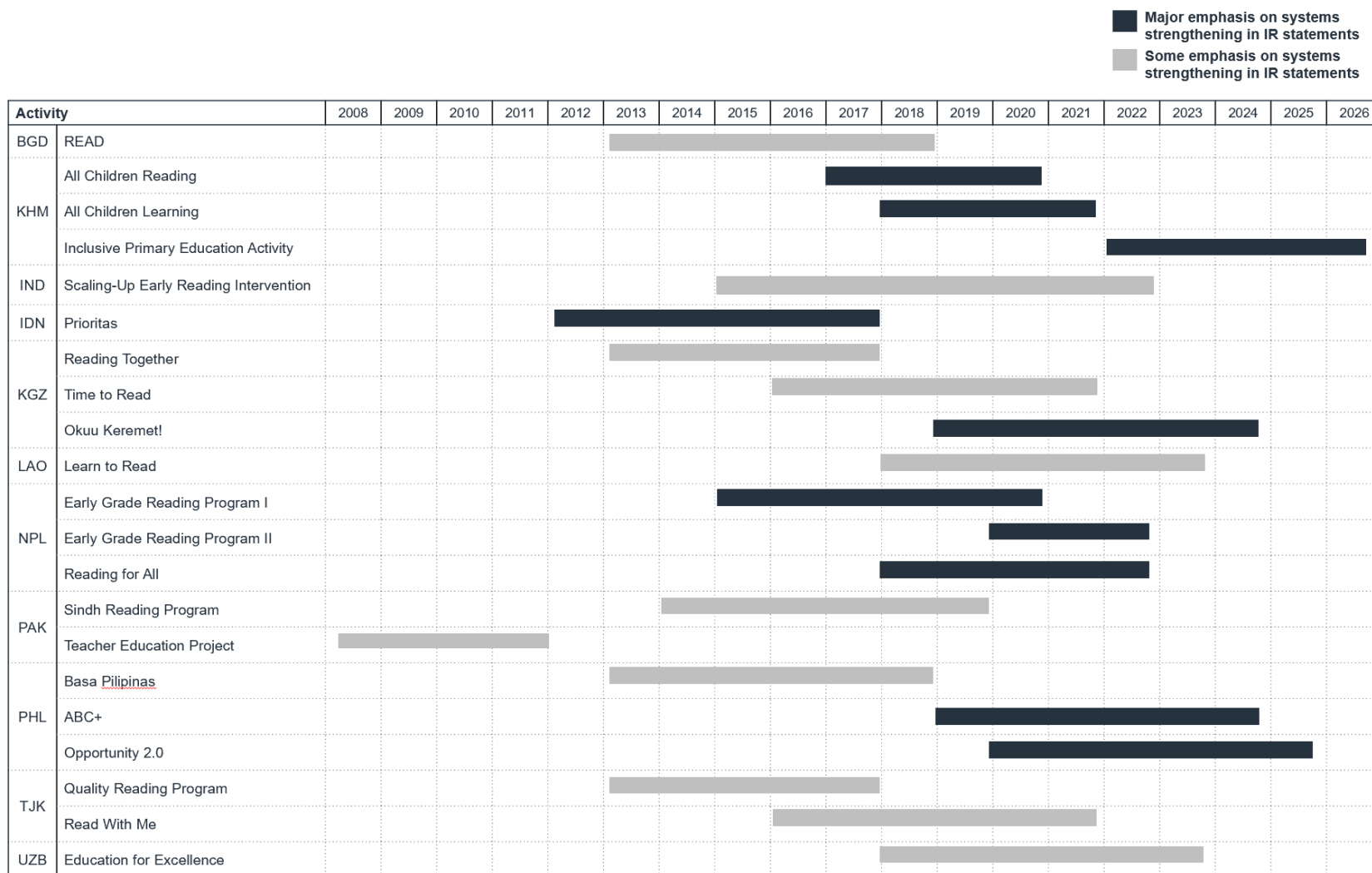
○ Activity stated aims indirectly aligned with analysis framework

	1. Set Goals and Reform Strategy			2. Drive Delivery			3. Create an Improvement Culture			
	A. Define Clear Goals	B. Determine the Reform Strategy	C. Visualize the Delivery Chain	A. Use Data Effectively	B. Monitor Performance and Solve Problems	C. Harness the Power of Relationships	A. Review Capacity to Deliver	B. Build System Capacity All the Time	C. Leverage Educational Technology	D. Promote Equity and Inclusion
BGD READ		○		○		○		●	●	
All Children Reading		●				●		●		
KHM All Children Learning		●		○	●	●		●		●
Inclusive Primary Education Activity					●	●		●		●
IND Scaling-Up Early Reading Intervention*										
IDN Prioritas						●		●		
Reading Together								●		
KGZ Time to Read		●		○		●			●	
Okuu Keremet!		●				○				
LAO Learn to Read		●				○		●		●
Early Grade Reading Program I		●		○		○		●		
NPL Early Grade Reading Program II		●		○	○			●		●
Reading for All		●						●	●	●
PAK Sindh Reading Program		●		○		●		●		
Teacher Education Project		●						●		
PHL Basa Pilipinas		●		○		○		●	●	
ABC+		●				●		●	●	
Opportunity 2.0		●			●	●		●		●
TJK Quality Reading Program				●		○		●		
Read With Me		●		●		○		●		
UZB Education for Excellence		○	○					●	●	

*We did not find a Results Framework for SERI comparable to other Activities

Countries: BGD=Bangladesh, KHM=Cambodia, IND=India, IDN=Indonesia, KGZ=Kyrgyz Republic, LAO=Laos, NPL=Nepal, PAK=Pakistan, PHL=Philippines, TJK=Tajikistan, UZB=Uzbekistan

Figure 3. Systems strengthening language across Activities



Countries: BGD=Bangladesh, KHM=Cambodia, IND=India, IDN=Indonesia, KGZ=Kyrgyz Republic, LAO=Laos, NPL=Nepal, PAK=Pakistan, PHL=Philippines, TJK=Tajikistan, UZB=Uzbekistan

We found stated aims that aligned with at least one element of our Analysis Framework for all Activities included in the review. The most frequent examples of the types of stated aims that related to systems strengthening were the following:

- **Supporting the ministry to adopt an evidence-based approach to improving reading** in schools, such as building technical capacity to develop teaching and learning materials, and using curriculum and learning standards (*Relates to Element 1B of the Analysis Framework: Determine the Reform Strategy*)
- **Strengthening partnerships** among government, [REDACTED] to implement education reform (*Relates to Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships*)
- Setting up **teacher support systems** such as coaching, mentoring, and training (*Relates to Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time*)
- **Building governance and management capacity** at different levels of government (*Relates to Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time*)

In addition, most Activities also stated aims that, while they were primarily focused on improving practice in schools and classrooms, may have indirectly strengthened systems' capacity to implement effective reforms. For example:

- Increasing the **use of learning assessment**, which potentially enabled ministries to gather more robust data to better understand student outcomes and progress at a school, district, or subnational level (*Relates to Element 2A: Use Data Effectively*)
- Increasing **community engagement** to improve reading outcomes, which potentially helped local, regional, and national leaders establish communication channels with parents and other community organizations that could act as ongoing mechanisms to seek support for reform (*Relates to Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships*)

Activities in which IR statements are most focused on systems strengthening as a means of improving student learning outcomes include: ACR/ACL and IPEA in Cambodia, Prioritizing Reform, Innovation, and Opportunities for Reaching Indonesia's Teachers, Administrators, and Students (PRIORITAS) in Indonesia, Okuu Keremet! in Kyrgyz Republic, ABC+ and Opportunity 2.0 in the Philippines, and EGRP I and II and Reading for All in Nepal. Except for PRIORITAS (which ran from 2012–2017), all these Activities began in and after 2015.

Some examples of systems strengthening language in the results frameworks of Activities include:

- “The [Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport] has the tools to improve inclusive, evidenced-based early grade literacy instruction” (ACL, Cambodia)
- “Improved education management and governance” (PRIORITAS, Indonesia),
- “Capacity of [the Ministry of Education and Science] at all levels in areas of primary education policy, [human resources], planning & management, and M&E built” (Okuu Keremet!, Kyrgyz Republic)
- “Improved national and district early grade reading service delivery” (EGRP, Nepal)
- “Improved application of inclusive pedagogical approaches for reading by teachers, principals and [Ministry of Education and Science] officials” (Learn to Read, Laos)

Key Finding: The most commonly occurring references to systems strengthening closely mirror language from USAID policy and strategy documents.

Common system strengthening aims tended to mirror the language of the priorities outlined in USAID education policy documents, for example, supporting the ministry to adopt an evidence-based approach to improving reading; strengthening partnerships among government, [REDACTED] setting up teacher support systems; and building governance and management capacity at different levels of government. The exception is a focus on equity: although this is highlighted as a priority in USAID education policy, we found a limited focus on equity in Activities' stated aims.

As seen in **Figure 3**, references to systems strengthening in Activities' stated aims became more frequent after 2015, suggesting an evolution in program design with an increased focus on building system capacity as a means to achieving improved learning outcomes for students, in line with the evolution of USAID education policy. However, when we compare Activities' stated aims with our Analysis Framework, we see that some elements of systems strengthening received much less attention than others. This may be attributable to the absence of a shared, coherent framework for understanding and measuring progress in systems strengthening, beyond the high-level articulation of priorities that currently exists in USAID policy and strategy documents.

Key Finding: Interviewees were more likely to describe the aims of their Activities in terms of student outcomes than in terms of systems strengthening.

Improving reading outcomes for children was the goal most cited by interviewees. Around half of the implementing partners and USAID Missions interviewed did not reference systems strengthening when describing the aims of the Activity. However, when prompted, all interviewees talked about building the capacity of government counterparts to sustain reform as one of the things they are trying to accomplish.

The sort of language interviewees used to describe the systems strengthening aims of their Activities, included the following:

- Taking a *“harmonized approach”* to the national reading strategy, the role of USAID as *“convener and coordinator,”* to *“build a consortium of partnerships”* to implement reform
- *“Transferring best practices to the government,” “Demonstrate a comprehensive approach to literacy”*
- *“Building technical and institutional capacity”*
- *“Sustaining and institutionalizing reform”*
- *“Strengthen national and local system”*
- *“... to support the Department’s own program”*
- *“Support government in the implementation of the national strategy”*

Interviewees mostly talked about systems strengthening and capacity-building of government partners in terms of ensuring sustainability (of reform and outcomes) of Activities, building country ownership, increasing uptake of reforms, and enabling the government to scale up or replicate reforms in other geographies of the country. The relatively generic language used by interviewees, and their tendency not to mention system strengthening aims unless prompted, may be another indication of the absence of a shared, coherent framework for understanding systems strengthening.

Key Finding: There is no evidence of a robust or shared basis for measuring whether systems were being strengthened.

Within Activity documents, we found limited references to ways of measuring systems strengthening. Systems strengthening indicators were expressed at the output level, such as the number of trainings and trainees, professional development activities completed at different levels (such as by administrators and education officials), number of stakeholder partnerships or number of partners engaged, and number of policies formulated. However, there are limited outcome indicators for systems strengthening, and those there are are not consistent across Activities.

Examples of outcome indicators for systems strengthening include the following:

- **PRIORITAS, Indonesia:** “Districts use the teacher deployment tool for improving the efficiency of the education system,” “Districts develop needs-based in-service training plans and collaborate with provincial training providers to implement these plans,” “Districts use financial analysis to allocate more resources to quality improvement,” “Schools produce budgeted plans in a transparent and participative manner”
- **IPEA, Cambodia:** “Education system strengthened through USG-assisted policy reform,” “Percentage of target primary schools that have improved governance, transparency, and accountability”
- **EGRP, Nepal:** “School leadership and management index”

USAID has recently introduced an indicator, “Education system strengthened through [U.S. Government]-assisted policy reform,” that captures narrative information on policy-related education systems strengthening actions at the national, subnational, or regional levels (also listed above as one of the systems strengthening outcome indicators for IPEA).¹⁴ This may lead to greater consistency in how systems strengthening is referenced across Activities, although we note that the focus of this indicator is on policy reform, rather than on the broader aspects of systems strengthening (e.g., behavior and system change, capacity development) captured in the Analysis Framework for this review.

3.2 What theory of change and other critical assumptions were made concerning capacity and interest in system reform?

Key Finding: Some Activities have a coherent theory of change relating to systems strengthening within a defined results framework.

Whether or not it was explicitly described as a “theory of change,” we found that, for several Activities, the “results framework” or “conceptual framework” that laid out the IR statements for the Activities conveyed a coherent flow of logic, describing the role of different inputs and outputs in improving learning outcomes for students.

We find a coherent theory of change relating to systems strengthening for ACL in Cambodia, PRIORITAS in Indonesia, Okuu Keremet! in Kyrgyz Republic, EGRP I and II and Reading for All in Nepal, and Opportunity 2.0 and ABC+ in the Philippines. In these Activities, systems strengthening aims are stated in more than one of the IR statements, and sub-IR statements describe specific inputs and outputs in building systems’ capacity to deliver effective reform. The inputs/outputs are focused on different levels of the system: national, subnational, and school levels.

¹⁴ USAID indicators are available here: [USAID FY 2022 Standard PIRS For Education Programming](#)

In all other Activities, we find that the results statements either do not directly state systems strengthening aims or focus on limited aspects of systems strengthening.

Key Finding: Except in a few cases, Activity documentation did not clearly articulate the “journey” of systems strengthening.

A key theme from the literature, including USAID’s own policy documents, is that systems strengthening is a journey whereby the system becomes increasingly independent and self-led, and a critical consumer of external support. We also found limited evidence from Activity documentation to show that this principle was shaping Activity design. References to systems strengthening within the stated aims of Activities did not consistently articulate the “journey of systems strengthening”—the phased process through which an Activity would take a system from an established starting state to a desired end state. Key documents were largely silent on what the journey of systems strengthening looked like in a given system, how far along the journey the system was at the outset of the Activity, where it should be by the end of the Activity (relative to the ideal end state), and what are markers to gauge progress.

In Activity documents and interviews, ways of supporting the system in its systems strengthening journey were referenced, including the following:

- Implementation teams **working closely with government partners** in the design stage as well as the implementation of Activities to model good practices and create ownership, uptake, and sustainability of reform
- **Embedding technical teams** (such as for curriculum or materials development) with government teams, or technical teams working closely with government teams
- **Formal trainings or workshops**, such as those for teachers, teacher trainers, school heads, and government officials (including workshops on data analysis, planning, and budgeting)

Implementing partners frequently conveyed an intuitive understanding of the systems strengthening journey and how to support systems in this journey—talking, for example, about the importance of coaching system actors to eventually lead the work themselves. However, they sometimes struggled to articulate this clearly in terms of a phased journey of systems strengthening, for instance, what the division of work between implementing partners or government partners would look like in a certain year of the Activity.

Exceptions include: The Scaling-Up Early Reading Intervention (SERI) in India, which articulated an “I do, we do, you do” approach to capacity-building and transferring ownership to the government; the Learn to Read program in Laos, which included a capacity-building strategy of phased transfer of leadership to provincial and district levels (albeit articulated in Year 3 of the program); and PRIORITAS in Indonesia, which explicitly intended that the government disseminate the program to non-partner schools in later stages of the Activity. In addition, members of the implementing team in Cambodia also articulated an approach equivalent to “I do, we do, you do” in interviews, referring to a sequence of demonstration, collaboration, and transitioning ownership.

3.3 What other regional [REDACTED] activities (if any) intersected with the Activity?

Key Finding: We found some evidence of Activities coordinating with other [REDACTED] activities to streamline reform efforts and avoid fragmentation or duplication.

For some Activities, we found strong evidence of coordination [REDACTED] to help the system build on existing efforts, harness the collective impact of investments, and ensure the sustainability of reforms. We also found evidence of platforms for [REDACTED] partner coordination in most countries, in which Activities participated regularly to support streamlining of efforts. Examples include the following:

- In **Cambodia**, **ACR** was designed to complement ministry activities planned under a grant from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). Reform interventions were replicated in districts [REDACTED] and the early grade reading assessment (EGRA) [REDACTED]. The Activity also worked with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), [REDACTED]
- In **Laos**, **Learn to Read (LtR)** collaborated with development partners on activities that overlapped with LtR objectives and target populations, for instance, implementing, refining, and scaling up the Reading Readiness Program (RRP) with GPE. LtR also helped the ministry roll out a curriculum supported by UNICEF, World Bank, and GPE. In addition, learning materials produced were made available on the ministry’s digital platform, which is supported by UNICEF.
- In **Nepal**, **EGRP** adopted a sector-wide approach in the education sector, including aligning [REDACTED] multilateral organizations [REDACTED]

However, although coordination [REDACTED] was generally built into the design of these Activities from the outset, it was not specified within the stated aims of those Activities.

3.4 How was educational technology intended to be addressed within these Activities—in particular, to what extent did USAID programs include any investments in support of building system capacity to make use of education technology (EdTech)? To what extent did investments made in EdTech as part of countries’ responses to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) include building institutional capacity to make better, systematic use of technology to support education (and training) as a feature of increased education system resilience?

Key Finding: Few Activities demonstrated an intended role for EdTech in systems strengthening; most EdTech elements were incorporated as a response to COVID-19.

EdTech does not seem to have been envisaged as a core component of most of the Activities. That said, most Activities incorporated uses of technology, partially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Activities that did have a focus on leveraging technology for systems strengthening as part of their results framework include:

- **Reading Enhancement for Advancing Development (READ) Bangladesh:** “ICT for Education”—trainings to help teachers leverage ICT in education, and for developing e-content for readers aligned with the curriculum (*pilot, ~2000 teachers trained*)
- **Time to Read, Kyrgyz Republic:** “Innovative platforms and delivery mechanisms to sustain reading material availability (e-platforms, distribution cycle) expanded (or developed)” (*intended to be nationally accessible*)
- **EGRP II, Nepal:** “New interactive digital learning content is developed and uploaded to [Center for Education and Human Resource Development’s] learning portal” (*intended to be nationally accessible*)
- **ABC+:** “Functionality and usability of the learning resources portal improved” (*intended to be nationally accessible*)
- **Basa Pilipinas:** “The successful piloting and evaluation of an appropriate, cost-effective information and communications technology for education” (*pilot in 26 schools in the City Division of San Fernando, La Union*)
- **Uzbekistan Education for Excellence Program (UEEP), Uzbekistan:** “Develop and deploy Uzbek standards and instructional materials platform” (*intended to be nationally accessible*)

Common intended uses of EdTech in the Activities included the following:

- **Provision of digital learning materials:** This included resources for teachers, sometimes hosted on digital platforms (e.g., training materials such as videos or PowerPoints, as in the case of IPEA; an online platform housing materials for teachers in UEEP), and digital reading materials for students (e.g., open-source reading materials in READ Bangladesh, resources shared on national learning in LtR).
- **Online teacher trainings:** As a response to COVID-19 and to test low-cost training models, some Activities tested online teacher trainings and “blended learning” teacher trainings (e.g., LtR, ABC+, IPEA).
- **Creation of applications:** This included applications to support teachers such as applications to support assessments in Okuu Keremet! and the Sindh Reading Program. Applications were also targeted for wider use, for instance, by parents, such as the EGRP’s application for teachers and parents to help students learn to read, and Reading for All’s application to teach sign language.
- **Provision of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment:** Several programs (including ACL, Reading Together, EGRP, Reading for All, and Okuu Keremet!) leveraged devices for their interventions. Often, these devices were provided to teachers or for classroom use and housed the digital materials or applications discussed above. In other cases, tablets were provided directly to students. In ACL, these devices were only provided to a subset of children (those with disabilities). EGRP also provided ICT equipment to government partners to help them collect data. In addition, Read with Me (RWM) helped establish methodological resource centers with digital learning equipment to support teacher professional development. Likewise, to facilitate learning in the pandemic, Opportunity 2.0 provided digital learning equipment to the Philippines’ Department of Education (DepEd) to

support the Eskwela learning centers and provided laptops to Alternative Learning System (ALS) implementers.¹⁵

- **Leveraging technology for communication and engagement:** For example, the Sindh Reading Program introduced an interactive text message or SMS platform to push reminders and tips to teachers and offered teachers helpline services.
- **Leveraging technology for M&E:** For example, in Cambodia, a remote survey software was used to track the disbursement of textbooks; in EGRP, technology was used to depict data visually in a compelling format for audiences at all levels—from the local to the international, to help decision-making; in Okuu Keremet! a “suite of technology” was used to monitor student performance and pedagogy and share data across all levels of government.

As we shall discuss further in Chapter 4, many of these intended uses of technology were either pilots or were not widespread throughout systems within Activities, due to limited access and limited capacity of actors in the system to use them.

¹⁵ The Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a parallel learning system in the Philippines that provides a practical option to the existing formal instruction

4 What have the Activities accomplished?

This chapter presents findings in relation to the second research question of the review: “What have the Activities accomplished?” Sections 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 set out findings in relation to specific sub-research questions. As in Chapter 3, for each sub-research question, we set out our findings under one or more “Key Findings.” We have also noted in parentheses the element of our Analysis Framework to which each key finding most directly relates.

To assess the systems strengthening impact of Activities, we have used evidence from our survey, key informant interviews, and desk review. We also synthesized the evidence for each Activity or country to arrive at a set of “traffic-light” ratings against the 10 elements of our Analysis Framework (see **Annex B** for the Analysis Framework rubric).

Survey responses tended to rate Activities positively on their effectiveness in strengthening the systems in which they operated—although the degree of positivity varied across the elements of the Analysis Framework. **Figure 4** shows the spread of ratings given by survey respondents, with responses color-coded to show how “promoters,” “passives,” and “detractors” (using NPS categories, as described in the Methodology section) are distributed across survey questions. **Annex D** shows how rating responses differ across stakeholder groups. Overall, stakeholders rated similarly, with government partners rating slightly higher than implementing partners, who rated slightly higher than USAID Missions.¹⁶

The traffic-light ratings for all Activities are presented as a “heatmap” in **Figure 5**, which aggregates the country-level heatmap analysis in Chapter 7 and **Annex C**. Some Activities have been rated together because they built on each other as part of a continuous sequence of support. The ratings given reflect the cumulative progress made since the beginning of the first Activity. The Activities in question, which are explored in more detail as case studies in Chapter 7, are ACR, ACL, and IPEA in Cambodia; EGRP 1 and EGRP 2 in Nepal; and Basa Pilipinas and ABC+ in Philippines.

The heatmap analysis shows positive evidence of impact against all 10 elements of the Analysis Framework. Some Activities (or sequences of Activities) had a significant impact in strengthening their host countries’ education systems across multiple elements of the framework, with indications that the built system capacity will be sustained longer term. Examples here are ACR, ACL, and IPEA in Cambodia; Basa Pilipinas, ABC+, and Opportunity 2.0 in the Philippines; and EGRP 1 and EGRP 2 in Nepal.

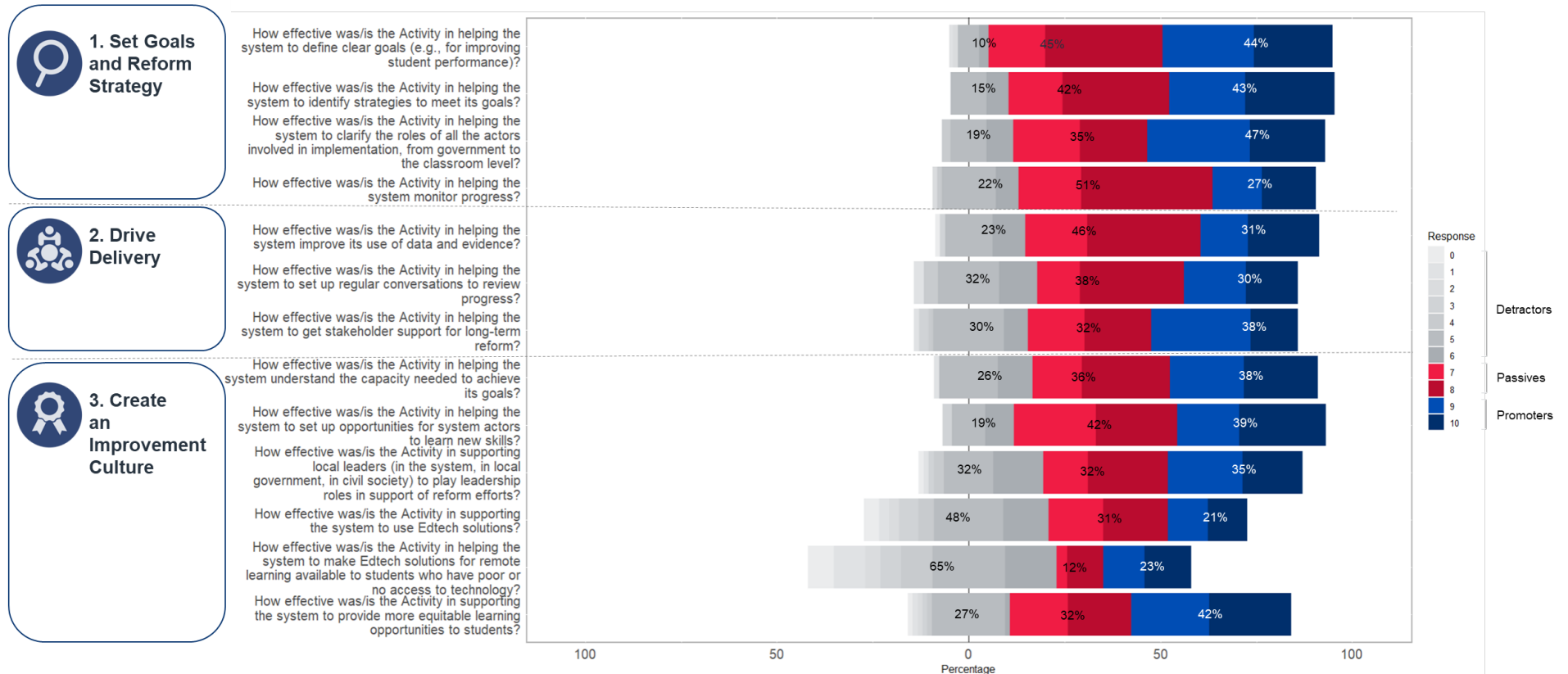
Similarly, there are elements of systems strengthening for which the number of green and amber-green ratings suggest relatively widespread progress in at least many of the Activities we looked at. These include (in descending order of green/amber-green ratings): *Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time*, *Element 2A: Use Data Effectively*, and *Element 1B: Determine the Reform Strategy*. No Activity was rated red on these three elements.

But there are also elements where, aside from a few examples of good practice, the Activities made less progress in building system capacity. These elements, where the majority of Activities were rated red or amber-red, include: *Element 2B: Monitor Performance and Solve Problems*, *Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology*, and *Element 3A: Review Capacity to Deliver*. No Activity received a green rating on these elements.

We have unpacked these trends in more detail in the rest of this chapter, noting how our findings connect to specific elements of the Framework for ease of reference.

¹⁶ The “Other” group of participants tended to rate more positively, but this group was very small (5 respondents).

Figure 4. Survey results—Ratings questions



Note: The number of respondents differed across the questions. The respondents are classified as follows: 0-6: detractors, 7-8: passives, and 9-10: promoters. The percentages shown on the graph are the percentage of promoters, passives, and detractors for each question.

Figure 5. Heatmap ratings for all Activities, against the 10 elements of the Analysis Framework

		1. Set Goals and Reform Strategy			2. Drive Delivery			3. Create an Improvement Culture			
		A. Define Clear Goals	B. Determine the Reform Strategy	C. Visualize the Delivery Chain	A. Use Data Effectively	B. Monitor Performance and Solve Problems	C. Harness the Power of Relationships	A. Review Capacity to Deliver	B. Build System Capacity All the Time	C. Leverage Educational Technology	D. Promote Equity and Inclusion
BGD	READ	R	AR	AR	AG	AR	AR	AR	AG	AR	AR
	All Children Reading										
KHM	All Children Learning	AG	G	AG	G	AR	G	AR	AG	AG	AR
	Inclusive Primary Education Activity										
IND	Scaling-Up Early Reading Intervention	AG	AG	AR	AR	AR	AR	R	AG	AR	R
IDN	Prioritas	R	AR	AG	AG	AR	AG	AG	AG	AR	AR
LAO	Learn to Read	R	AR	R	AR	AR	AR	R	AR	AR	AG
	Early Grade Reading Program I										
NPL	Early Grade Reading Program II	G	AG	AR	AG	AR	AR	AG	AG	AR	AR
	Reading for All										
PAK	Sindh Reading Program	AR	AG	R	AR	R	AR	AR	AG	AR	AG
	Teacher Education Project										
PHL	Basa Pilipinas	AG	AG	AG	AG	AR	G	AR	AG	AR	AG
	ABC+										
	Opportunity 2.0										
TJK	Read With Me	AR	AR	AR	AG	AR	AR	R	AG	AG	AG
UZB	Education for Excellence	AR	AR	AR	AR	R	R	R	AR	AR	R

Note: Some Activities have been rated together because they built on each other as part of a continuous sequence of support. The ratings given reflect the cumulative progress made since the beginning of the first Activity. The Activities in question, which are explored in more detail as case studies in Chapters 7, 8, and 9 of the Report, are ACR, ACL, and IPEA in Cambodia; EGRP I and EGRP II in Nepal; and Basa Pilipinas and ABC+ in the Philippines.

Activities in the Kyrgyz Republic and Quality Reading Program (QRP) in Tajikistan are not included in the heatmap analysis since stakeholders from these Activities were unable to participate in the review, as noted in Chapter 1 of the report.

Ratings Key



Limited/no evidence of systems strengthening or increased system capacity



Some evidence that the Activity has played a role in building system capacity, but **not consistently or in a way that was sustainable** beyond the life of the Activity



Significant evidence that the Activity has built system capacity in meaningful ways, even if this was **not always consistent or sustainable** beyond the life of the Activity



Strong evidence that the Activity has built sustainable capacity, strengthening the system's ability to deliver improved outcomes for students **beyond the life of the Activity**

Countries: BGD=Bangladesh, KHM=Cambodia, IND=India, IDN=Indonesia, KGZ=Kyrgyz Republic, LAO=Laos, NPL=Nepal, PAK=Pakistan, PHL=Philippines, TJK=Tajikistan, UZB=Uzbekistan

4.1 What have the Activities accomplished? What has not been accomplished?

Key Finding: Although Activities focused on improving student learning outcomes—and often helped shift systems’ reform conversations to focus more on outcomes—they rarely supported systems to set their own system-wide outcome goals. (*Element 1A: Define Clear Goals*)

System-wide outcome goals enable the whole system, from top government leaders to teachers in the classroom, to have a shared sense of what they are trying to achieve by when. Having clearly articulated goals also provides a basis for directing resources to strategies and projects that are likely to have the biggest impact on improving those outcomes.¹⁷

Heatmap ratings for *Element 1A: Define Clear Goals* varied widely in the heatmap analysis, with three Activities rated red and only two rated green (of 13 total ratings). By contrast, the question “How effective was/is the Activity in helping the system to define clear goals (e.g., for improving system performance)?” received some of the most positive ratings in the survey, with 44% of survey respondents rating this 9 or 10 and only 10% rating it 6 or below, and 72 of 86 respondents selecting the MCQ option “The Activity helped/is helping the system to define outcome goals for students.”

Across nearly all Activities, interviewees used the language of student outcomes to describe Activity goals, rather than speaking about Activities in terms of inputs and outputs.¹⁸ Many interviewees also referenced poor reading performance in their countries and the long-term disadvantages to students with poor reading skills, to talk about why Activities were important.

In some cases, a focus on reading outcomes for early grade learners was identified by stakeholders as a clear benefit of Activities. In India, we heard in relation to SERI that: “...*foundational literacy has now been recognized, government focus in the past was more on dropout-out rates and access issues but not on the quality of literacy. This change is largely due to SERI’s advocacy and models.*” In Uzbekistan, one interviewee described the way in which by enabling the system to collect student learning outcome data for the first time, there is an emerging shift in the education reform conversation from a focus on inputs (e.g., standards and curriculum) to a focus on outcomes. In Tajikistan, interviewees mentioned that RWM helped the government shift focus from infrastructure and make more budget and resource allocation to support children’s reading outcomes.

Activities also supported systems to orient toward outcome goals by introducing more robust means of measuring learning outcomes (for example, through EGRA), and supporting systems to develop reading proficiency benchmarks for grade levels. However, although MEL plans of Activities included and tracked student learning outcomes, interviewees tended not to cite any overarching metrics or system-level targets when describing *their systems’* outcome goals. This indicates that though Activities modeled effective goal setting, they had limited impact in supporting systems to set system-wide goals for themselves. This distinction likely explains the difference in positivity between the survey responses and the heatmap ratings.

¹⁷ [REDACTED] (2016). *Deliverology in Practice: How Education Leaders are Improving Student Outcomes*, 12-20.

¹⁸ The Pre-STEP program in Pakistan is an exception. Interviewees described the goal of the Activity as “reforming teacher education in Pakistan,” which is in line with the goals stated in the Activity documents.

Even where Activities did support system leaders to set outcome goals, it was not always clear that these goals were yet being used to unite the whole system behind reform efforts. We found system-wide outcome goals defined in the ALS Roadmap supported by Opportunity 2.0 in the Philippines; in the Education Strategic Plan 2019–2023 of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) in Cambodia; and in the School Education Sector Plan (SESP) of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) in Nepal. However, these goals were often not directly referenced by interviewees, even when prompted. We found in some cases that outcome targets had not cascaded below the national level of systems, for example, into provincial or district plans.

Key Finding: All Activities equipped systems with knowledge of good practices around reading reform design and implementation; however, there was mixed optimism about the extent to which governments have the capacity and will to independently drive these efforts. (Element 1B: Determine the Reform Strategy)

The question “How effective was/is the Activity in helping the system to identify strategies to meet its goals?” was also one of the highest rated questions in the survey, with 44% of survey respondents rating this 9 or 10 and only 15% rating it 6 or below. No Activity received a red rating in our heatmap analysis for *Element 1B: Determine the Reform Strategy*, suggesting that this was one of the areas in which Activities tended to have a stronger impact.

The clearest and most common example of Activities supporting systems to determine effective reform strategies was in relation to understanding what it would take to improve reading outcomes for students. Interviewees from governments were able to speak about improving reading outcomes in terms of the system-level inputs required: improving teaching and learning materials, teacher training models, textbooks, and formulating curriculum and standards, and a sense of how they work together as a complementary set of strategies.

In India and Pakistan, for example, interviewees recognized this as a major success of the Activities. In Pakistan, one interviewee commented: “*The Sindh Basic Education platform has had a huge impact on the government reform strategy (...) making reading a priority in policy reform.*”¹⁹ In India, we heard in relation to SERI that: “*The Government has begun a systematic way of talking about foundational learning,*” and “*The system has taken up a lot of practices about designing reform programs and implementing them.*” The influence of SERI’s literacy model can be seen in national policy documents, such as the National Education Policy and the National Program for Education. These documents were cited as “big wins” by one interviewee.

In some cases, Activities also worked with systems to pilot and test approaches, building system capacity to understand which policies and practices are most or least likely to work in its context. Some government interviewees described the way in which they had internalized this practice of interactive evaluation, suggesting that the Activity had built capacity for strategic decision-making that was transferable beyond the immediate context of early grade reading. For example, we heard in Uzbekistan that because of learnings from the pilot-testing approach modeled by UEEP, the ministry has increased its own pilot-testing time frame for new reforms from 6 months to 1 year.

However, some interviewees were concerned that government partners lacked the skills to be able to update their new strategies and would require technical assistance to amend key components, such as standards and curriculums, in the future. In some cases, interviewees

¹⁹ The Sindh Reading Program (SRP) falls under the Sindh Basic Education platform. The scope of this review includes SRP only.

were pessimistic about the extent to which governments had genuinely accepted the reform strategy developed through an Activity.

We heard that:

- [REDACTED]
- *“Although the Activity is supporting the system to identify evidence-backed strategies, they are not always accepted or implemented by the ministry.”*
- *“After completion of an Activity, the government rarely takes the responsibility to carry it on.”*
- *“Sometimes you are able to develop capacity, but there is no commitment from the government. We have trained thousands of people in each of the programs, but the question is the system committed to that change. Our program trained government officials on designing assessment. Those officials are very capable, and have been trained on designing those assessments, but are they doing it—no.”*

Planning for financial sustainability was often cited as a gap in Activities’ systems strengthening efforts. For example, one Activity included proposed salary increments for teachers, which interviewees were concerned may not be sustainable by the provincial governments because of fluctuating budgets. Financial and budgetary constraints were cited as a reason for governments not adopting, or being at risk of not continuing, reforms. As we shall see below, and in Chapter 5, where Activities were successful in supporting governments to identify and plan to mitigate risks to financial sustainability, this was seen by stakeholders as a significant benefit.

Key Finding: In a few cases, Activities played a major role in shaping government national policies or were integrated into national policies. (Element 1B: Determine the Reform Strategy)

For example, in Nepal, EGRP played a role in shaping the government’s National Early Grade Reading Program (this was one of the Activity’s objectives from the outset), contributing to the “continuing evolution” of the government’s program. This included the design and demonstration of a national model that the government could implement nationwide within its budget.

In Cambodia, IPEA has supported the ministry to develop its 5-year strategy to scale up the national early grade reading program, which includes strategies to generate financial support from key actors ([REDACTED]) and to coordinate that support both technically and geographically. IPEA supported the setup of the National Sector Coordination Platform, a forum of education stakeholders, to help them work together to implement the strategy, [REDACTED].

Where national-level policies incorporated [REDACTED], as in Cambodia and Nepal, they have supported the system to coordinate and streamline [REDACTED] efforts to ensure a cohesive “sector-wide” reform effort. In the survey responses, 54 of 85 respondents selected the MCQ option, “The Activity helped/is helping the system to build on existing [REDACTED]/country-led strategies.”

Key Finding: In some cases, Activities supported the system to better understand and shape the role of stakeholders and institutions. (Element 1C: Visualize the Delivery Chain)

The survey question “How effective was/is the Activity in helping the system to clarify the roles of all the actors involved in implementation, from government to the classroom level?” had the highest percentage of positive ratings, with 47% of survey respondents rating this 9 or 10 and 19% rating it 6 or below. Respondents who scored their Activities as effective for this area (rating score >0) selected the option “The Activity helped/is helping the system to identify the role of school teachers” most often (71 out of 84 respondents), followed by “The Activity helped/is helping the system to identify the role of teacher trainers” (70 out of 84 respondents) and “The Activity helped/is helping the system to identify the role of district/provincial education officers” (67 out of 84 respondents).

For some Activities, we found clear examples in interviews of the Activity helping the system understand the chain of actors through which implementation must occur and working with these actors in new ways to support reform efforts. For example, in Cambodia, IPEA identified the need for a dedicated team of mentors to implement early education reforms [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Activity helped the ministry make the case to the Finance Ministry for fiscal reforms to make that possible.

In Indonesia, PRIORITAS improved data flow between the ministry, districts, and schools, which has been relatively weak because of the decentralized structure of the system. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. Also in Indonesia, PRIORITAS supported the teacher training institutions to be more accessible to schools, to ensure that teachers were receiving the required ongoing support to improve their teaching. Since teacher training institutions were managed separately from the school system, overseen by the higher education department, they had traditionally been considered inaccessible by schools.

Key Finding: Activities had less impact in supporting systematic reviews of the delivery chain, to understand capacity and develop “feedback loops” to monitor implementation progress. (Element 1C: Visualize the Delivery Chain)

Despite the positive survey ratings, in most Activities, we found that systems could benefit from additional support to systematically map out the delivery chain—the chain of actors from the central level down to the schools, with a focus on the completeness of the chain and not just actors directly involved at the front lines. Accordingly, the heatmap ratings of *Element 1C: Visualize the Delivery Chain* were mixed, with two Activities rated red and none rated green.

Delivery chain mapping is important because it can help to surface issues in human resource capacity, financial constraints, and technical capacity and to identify the gaps in support and accountability mechanisms. This sort of analysis can be useful for understanding how the system is working at the outset of an Activity as in an initial diagnostic, but it is also useful for visualizing how a new reform will be implemented (as part of panning the reform strategy) and as a problem-solving tool while implementation is underway.

We saw the impact of the absence of delivery chain mapping especially in relation to establishing teacher support mechanisms:

- In Cambodia, as the system moves toward embedding a new teacher support model under IPEA, stakeholders noted the need for further mapping of roles and

responsibilities, and for systematic tools to gather information on implementation progress.

- In Nepal, stakeholders for EGRP II noted challenges in establishing feedback loops in the system and in establishing clear follow-up mechanisms to institutionalize practices and accountability.
- In another country, stakeholders noted concerns about the extent to which a new approach to teacher professional development had been understood and adopted across all the relevant bureaus of the national government, with some offices conducting independent trainings.

Sometimes we heard that a weak understanding of the delivery chain had actually undermined the Activities' ability to recommend reforms that were implementable by the system. For example, in one Activity, stakeholders noted that the system did not have the required number of district officials to engage in the monitoring activities prescribed by the Activity.

Key Finding: Activities helped systems generate assessment data and develop M&E systems, but sustained and independent use of data by systems was often cited as a challenge (*Element 2A: Use Data Effectively*)

Across the systems reviewed, we found that Activities supported M&E in systems, particularly through the generation of more robust student assessment data and/or systems to collect assessment data centrally. Heatmap analysis found that *Element 2A: Use Data Effectively* was one of the stronger areas for systems strengthening impact, with the majority of Activities rated green or amber-green and none rated red.

The survey question “How effective was/is the Activity in helping the system improve its use of data and evidence?” received mixed ratings, with 31% of survey respondents rating this 9 or 10, and 23% rating it 6 or below. Of the 78 respondents who scored their Activities as effective in this area (rating score >0), 53 respondents thought that the Activity they had been involved in helping the system establish new sources of data, and 52 respondents thought that the Activity helped the system monitor performance on key metrics. Only 40 respondents thought that the Activity helped the system understand why it is performing the way it is on key metrics.

The question “How effective was/is the Activity in helping the system monitor progress?” received similar mixed ratings, with 27% of respondents rating this 9 or 10, and 22% of respondents rating it 6 or below. Of the 83 respondents who scored their Activities as effective in this area (rating score >0), only 36 thought the Activity they were involved in helped the system gather data from the field through specifically assigned ministry M&E staff.

In some countries, Activities introduced assessment data and EGRA data in systems. For example, as noted above, the EGRA provided an overview of student learning outcomes in Uzbekistan for the first time. In India, SERI started a discussion around foundational literacy data and developed key indicators of reading fluency and comprehension, which have now been taken up by the government. In Pakistan, in relation to the Sindh Reading Program (SRP), one interviewee commented that: “*There is a whole team of people in the Sindh government who can now understand EGRA data.*” In Tajikistan, an interviewee said: “*Through the process of working together and piloting EGRA, the government accepted it and (recognized) the need to reorganize their assessment approach.*”

In some countries with consecutive Activities focused on reading, systems were able to administer EGRA and reading assessments at a large scale and use these to monitor performance over time. In Cambodia, for example, the MoEYS “*bought into*” EGRA, and it is

being used to measure performance across the country by the Quality Assurance Department, as well as to test internal models and approaches. In the Philippines, ABC+ helped set up a dashboard of Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) results, which helps monitor which schools need support.

Stakeholders across Activities tended to be less confident that Activities had built data capacity within systems, such that system staff would be able to analyze and use the data independently after the Activity had ended. In one country for example, an interviewee mentioned that EGRA assessors trained under the Activity were mostly from the private sector, and while the government was receptive to the EGRA data and acknowledged its usefulness, it is unclear whether it continued to look at the data once the Activity ended. In another country, it was said: “*Government does not have the capacity to analyze EGRA data itself*” [REDACTED]

Similarly, although assessment data was often used to understand *how* the system was performing, there was less evidence of system data being used to understand *why* the system is performing the way it is. We found some evidence across Activities of assessment data being used to understand underlying factors affecting performance and to inform teacher practices (Cambodia, IPEA; Bangladesh, READ), but this was noted as an area for improvement across Activities.

Key Finding: There is limited evidence of Activities establishing effective routines to review progress and solve problems early. (Element 2B: Monitor Performance and Solve Problems)

We found some evidence that Activities had supported systems to review progress on outcomes and outputs, through monitoring visits to schools (Basa Pilipinas in the Philippines, EGRP in Nepal), classroom observations (PRIORITAS in Indonesia, LtR in Laos) and discussions on data in stakeholder meetings (READ in Bangladesh; ACR, ACL, and IPEA in Cambodia), to review progress and identify challenges. In Cambodia, for example, a presentation of data showing relatively weak performance of Grade 3 students’ learning of foundational consonants at a steering committee meeting enabled a discussion that identified a missing component in the teacher training curriculum.

Across Activities, however, we found limited evidence that data-informed conversations to review progress either had not been developed at all or had not been embedded in system practices in a way that was regular, systematic, and action focused and that included senior leaders with the power to make decisions to drive implementation forward. Accordingly, *Element 2B: Monitor Performance and Solve Problems* was the weakest-rated element in our heatmap analysis, with three Activities rated red and no Activity related better than amber-red.

Key Finding: Activities modeled stakeholder engagement, particularly [REDACTED] coordination, contributing to systems’ capacity to use stakeholder forums to coordinate and seek expertise and resources for their reform efforts. (Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships)

The survey question “How effective was/is the Activity in helping the system to get stakeholder support for long-term reform?” received mixed ratings, with 38% of respondents scoring Activities 9 or 10, and 30% scoring Activities 6 or below. Of the 79 respondents who scored their Activities effective in this area (rating score >0), 66 said the Activity enabled the system to identify its key stakeholders, and 61 said the Activity created or enhanced stakeholder networks. Although heatmap analysis for *Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships*

was also mixed (majority of Activities rated amber-red or worse), this was also an element with some of the clearest examples of good practice, with three Activities rated green.

Activities often engaged stakeholders through steering committees and working groups. Many Activities were successful in supporting systems to coordinate [REDACTED] efforts, such as by creating or actively participating in stakeholder groups to help align partners and drive strategy and coordination in early grade reading. In Cambodia, the support for a “harmonized approach” to reading reform by ACR, ACL, and IPEA was acknowledged by interviewees: “*Before 2017, there were many development and NGO partners in early grade reading in Cambodia. Since the harmonization of the package, all of them are on the same page and use it in their areas.*” In Tajikistan, the usefulness of the Donor Coordination Council was acknowledged: “*The platform is used to share experience and activities to ensure there is no duplication.*” In Laos, LtR co-chaired the meeting of the system’s Early Childhood Education Focal Group, which facilitated the system’s engagement with development partners, such as to prioritize areas for the system’s 5-year plan.

Interviewees across Activities were positive about the role of these stakeholder groups in contributing to systems strengthening by streamlining efforts but gave mixed responses on whether systems can lead these efforts independently or beyond the life of the Activities. In some systems (such as in Cambodia), forums acquired broader significance and evolved into strategic structures for stakeholder coordination beyond the immediate Activity. In other systems (such as in the Philippines), models for stakeholder engagement, rather than an individual group or forum, became “*blueprints for how we engage with other partners.*” However, in many cases, structures for engaging stakeholders in the work of an Activity remained driven and led by the implementing partner, and there is little evidence that systems continued to leverage benefit from them after Activities had wrapped up. In one country, for instance, we heard that the government does not currently have the capacity to convene [REDACTED] [REDACTED] without support.

Key Finding: There was limited evidence of Activities’ creating a shared understanding of capacity in the systems in which they worked. (Element 3A: Review Capacity to Deliver)

The survey question “How effective was/is the Activity in helping the system understand the capacity needed to achieve its goals?” received positive ratings, with 38% of respondents rating it 9 or 10, and 26% of respondents rating it 6 or below. Of the 77 respondents who scored their Activities as effective in this area (rating score >0), 60 said the Activity helped the system understand its human resource capacity, and 59 said the Activity helped/is helping the system identify challenge areas for focus using data and stakeholder feedback.

However, in our heatmap analysis, *Element 3A: Review Capacity to Deliver*, is one of the weaker rated elements, with no Activity rated green, and only three rated amber-green. Our interviews suggest that respondents may have understood the survey question to mean whether governments were aware of big contextual factors and capacity gaps, rather than challenges that they can address—and we heard few practical examples of how Activities have helped systems review their capacity to deliver reforms and create a shared understanding of the biggest areas of strength and challenge to address.

Many Activities conducted situational analyses and sector assessments before designing policy reform. However, these analyses were one-off assessments rather than embedded as periodic exercises, and they were not always focused on assessing system implementation capacity (as opposed to curriculum quality or classroom practice, for example). Even where analyses did yield useful insights about implementing capacity, we found little evidence of the

analyses being shared with system actors to support their own reflection; very few interviewees cited these analyses when asked about how an Activity had built the system's capacity to review its own capacity. Similarly, we found little evidence that Activities built the capacity of systems to review their capacity to deliver on an ongoing basis.

Overall, we saw little evidence that Activities had created a shared language for talking about system capacity. For some Activities, we found that interviewees had differing views about the capacity of the system they were working in, the extent of gaps in system capacity, and the readiness of the system to drive forward reforms independently. In one country, for instance, some implementing partners felt that if Activity support was withdrawn, the system would not have the capacity to independently lead reform; other partners felt the government had a relatively high level of capacity. Similarly, in another country, we heard different views about the capacity of the system from interviewees. Sometimes these differences of opinion seemed to reflect philosophical differences about the extent to which, and speed at which, programs should be handed over to system leadership versus being externally managed and provided.

Key Finding: Strengthened teacher training was frequently cited as a key success
(Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time)

In the heatmap analysis, *Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time* was the element most consistently rated positively, with 11 of 13 Activities rated amber-green (although none rated green). Given the remit of nearly all Activities included the training of teachers, and trainers of teachers, this was perhaps to be expected. The survey question “How effective was/is the Activity in helping the system set up opportunities for system actors to learn new skills?” also received overall positive ratings, with 39% of survey respondents rating this 9 or 10 and 19% rating it 6 or below. Most interviewees talked about teacher training when reflecting on the success of Activities. Of the 79 respondents who scored their Activities as effective in the survey question above (rating score >0), 71 said the Activity helped the system set up trainings for teacher trainers, and 66 said: “The Activity helped the system to set up training for teachers.”

Many Activities institutionalized teacher training models and updated teacher training materials. These efforts focused on strengthening and aligning pre-service and/or in-service training, equipping teachers with techniques to improve learning in the classroom, and the “cascade approach” to professional development.

For example, the RWM program in Tajikistan created pre-service and in-service packages that were integrated into the respective mainstream curriculums. The Basa Pilipinas project used Learning Action Cells to provide teachers with school-based continuous professional development. In Nepal, EGRP II worked with the government to develop a network of local teacher trainers and mentors. To increase the chances that this capacity will be sustained, EGRP II worked with the government to ensure that all trainers involved in the network (from the central “train-the-trainers” down to the local level) are “in-house” staff employed by the government [REDACTED].

In interviews, teacher training and teaching techniques taught in Activities were often acknowledged as continuing to benefit the systems (READ in Bangladesh, PRIORITAS in Indonesia) after Activities had wrapped up.

Key Finding: Almost all Activities moved beyond “doing things for the system” to a more collaborative approach to building system capacity. (Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time)

Activities were able to build capacity of the system at different levels, by working closely with system technical and implementation staff. Development of teaching and learning materials in collaboration with system actors was often cited as an exercise that had enhanced system capacity (Basa Pilipinas in the Philippines, UEEP in Uzbekistan), in addition to teacher support structures as discussed above.

In some cases, Activities adopted an “I do, we do, you do” approach (ACR, ACL, and IPEA in Cambodia; SERI in India; PRIORITAS in Indonesia; LtR in Laos) as a conscious way of building the system’s capacity to build its own capacity. These approaches focused on demonstrating and collaborating with systems for the first phase of reform, with the aim of supporting systems to independently replicate and scale up reforms as Activities progressed. However, the approaches had varying levels of success across Activities. Capacity gaps, and staff and leadership in systems, made the transition to the “you do” phase challenging. Often as an Activity began to scale up, this unearthed flaws in the appropriateness of the reform strategy or weaknesses in delivery chain that had been less apparent before, for example, [REDACTED] lack of available workers with the skills to perform a key task. More systematic analysis of the delivery chain would likely have allowed partners to surface and begin to address these challenges earlier.

4.2 Is there evidence of longer-term impact and systems change?

Key Finding: Evidence of long-term impact is strongest where Activities were able to influence the national policies of the government. We also see evidence of longer-term impact in approach to reading reform, teacher training, and sensitization to data.

Across Activities, from among the systems strengthening contributions identified above, integration and influence on national-level policies and plans, taking a strategic approach to reading reform, teacher training, and sensitization to data appear to provide the strongest evidence of longer-term systems change.

Interviewees were optimistic about the contribution of Activities to these areas, and interviewees’ references to these areas were evidence of the systems’ familiarity with these concepts. To a large extent, Activities were successful in modeling these practices for systems, and there is evidence that Activities were able to change how the system approaches reading reform and data. Teacher training also consistently came up in interviews as a “success” of Activities, in terms of building capacity at the school level through coaches and mentors, and through integrating teacher training modules on reading pedagogy.

Some examples from interviews:

- **SRP, Pakistan:** “After the program, the Government of Sindh would refer to reading in their own policy positions. There was a huge achievement of buy-in in terms of reading. Reading focus is present on education reform policy documents of the Government of Sindh.”
- **Reading for All, Nepal:** “The project was successful in making policymakers aware of [catering to students with] disabilities (...) beyond access and ‘wheelchair for schools,’ but learning outcomes for children with disabilities.”

- **RWM, Tajikistan:** “The government has a long-term plan...and one example of change is they put international assessments like EGRA in the plan. This has brought a more systemic approach. Now assessment data is being used to guide policies.”

It is important to remember that not all policy change is evidence of systems strengthening and not all evidence of systems strengthening relates to policy change. Nevertheless, when asked for evidence of long-term impact on systems strengthening, interviewees most commonly cited policy changes rather than, for example, changed behaviors, skills developed, or networks created. This is likely because policy changes provide the most tangible (and high-profile) evidence of governments’ adopting mindsets or approaches that can outlast an Activity. However, the emphasis on policy may also reflect the absence of a shared framework for describing and evaluating some of the more subtle, but equally significant, ways in which improved system capacity can manifest.

As noted above and below, we also saw some strong, but less widespread, examples of systems strengthening in relation to stakeholder engagement and promoting equity and inclusion. These examples also appear to have driven longer-term shifts in system mindsets and capacities.

Key Finding: The correlation (or lack of one) between systems strengthening and improved learning outcomes is unclear due to limitations in data.

All Activities except one were associated with an improvement in learning outcomes for children (with the exception potentially explained by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic). However, as metrics for measurement of learning outcomes vary across Activities, it is difficult to determine which Activities had a *more positive* impact on student outcomes than others. We are therefore unable to determine if there is a correlation between Activities’ systems strengthening impact (as assessed using our Analysis Framework) and their impact on student learning outcomes.

4.3 To what extent did the Activities build system institutional capacity, sustainability, or resilience—in particular, capacity to assure more equitable provision of learning opportunities?

Key Finding: Interviewees tended to talk about equity as a discrete feature of Activities, rather than as a fundamental design principle. (Element 3D: Promote Equity and Inclusion)

Equity and inclusion efforts involved various groups across Activities and included children with disabilities, out-of-school youth, women and girls, ethnic minorities, and learners residing in remote areas. The survey question “How effective was/is the Activity in supporting the system to provide more equitable learning opportunities to students?” received relatively positive ratings, with 42% of respondents rating it 9 or 10, and 27% rating it 6 or below. Of the 77 respondents who scored their Activities as effective in this area, 57 said the Activity supported the system to design programs that are inclusive, 56 said the Activity supported the system to develop inclusive learning materials, and 53 said the Activity supported the system to use data to understand the impact of programs on different groups of learners. However, the heatmap analysis for *Element 3D: Promote Equity and Inclusion* was mixed, with two Activities rated green and three rated red.

Some Activities had a singular focus on bridging equity gaps, such as Reading for All in Nepal, which aimed at improving reading outcomes for children with disabilities, and Opportunity 2.0

in the Philippines, which was geared toward providing work-based learning, entrepreneurship opportunities, and training to out-of-school-youth. Both were rated green on *Element 3D*.

For other Activities, there were specific equity-based interventions purposefully incorporated into the project design (Activities with an equity focus stated in IR statements are identified in **Figure 2**). For example, RWM in Tajikistan provided children’s books printed in braille and sign language interpretation in a children’s educational TV for the first time in the country. IPEA in Cambodia included a focus on catering to the needs of children with disabilities (specifically children who were visually or hearing impaired) by helping teachers learn how to deliver inclusive lessons and assessments. Opportunity 2.0 and Reading for All are also working toward improving availability of data on out-of-school youth and children with disabilities, respectively, which can help the programs create more targeted interventions.

However, most interviewees across Activities described the impact of their Activities in terms of the general student population and only talked about equity when prompted. Except where the initial design of an Activity included a focus on disadvantaged or underserved populations, we saw limited evidence that Activities had supported systems to surface and confront inequities. Interviewees for some Activities indicated that equity and inclusion were not included as components of the programs, while others indicated it as an area for improvement.

4.4 In particular, did the system capacity to use EdTech recognize and take steps to address the digital divide (i.e., to overcome pre-existing inequities in access to ICT) and use the EdTech Ecosystem Framework as a way to fully explore and understand the factors that determine access and ability to exploit remote/digital learning opportunities?

Key Finding: There was limited evidence of Activities building system capacity to address the digital divide or use the EdTech Ecosystem Framework to exploit digital learning opportunities. (*Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology*)

EdTech was deployed in some Activities and was included in others in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In responding to the survey question “How effective was the Activity in supporting the system to use EdTech solutions?” only 21% of respondents rated it 9 or 10, and 49% rated it 6 or below. In MCQ responses, 51 out of 72 respondents identified that the Activity they were involved in supported the system to use EdTech solutions to complement traditional learning. For the question “How effective was/is the Activity in helping the system to make EdTech solutions for remote learning available to students who have poor or no access to technology?” only 23% of respondents rated it 9 or 10, and 66% rated it 6 or below. These two questions yielded the lowest proportion of “promoter” ratings and the highest proportion of “detractor” ratings of any question in the survey.

The comparatively low ratings may be since some Activities did not involve a significant EdTech component, while for others the impact and reach were hindered by constraints, such as lack of devices and infrastructure. In our heatmap analysis, no Activity received a green rating on *Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology*, and only two activities were rated amber-green.

- In Cambodia, we found evidence that Activities supported the system to make strategic decisions on EdTech by assessing impact of EdTech interventions. For example, ACL ensured that the Home Learning Package, which was produced in partnership with the Capacity Development Partnership Fund and MoEYS to support students and parents during COVID-19 school closures, was developed in both digital and hard copy

versions, so that students in remote areas without access to technology would not be excluded.

- In Tajikistan, RWM set up resource centers in educational institutions, conducting capacity-building of system staff to use ICT, and also collaborated with another USAID project to endure greater coverage of its EdTech initiatives.

There is limited evidence of Activities strengthening systems' capacity to address the digital divide or barriers to remote learning. In fact, the digital divide and barriers to remote learning were themselves cited as constraints by many interviewees across Activities. For example, in the Philippines, the ABC+ program shifted to virtual teacher training when the pandemic struck. However, the teachers had difficulties due to low Internet connectivity and a lack of dedicated devices. Remote teacher training in Laos also faced similar issues.

The capacity of teachers to use EdTech resources was also highlighted as a challenge by interviewees. For example, in Nepal, as part of a pilot project under EGRP, a group of teachers were provided with tablets preloaded with curriculum materials. However, the teachers were not familiar with how to use such technology. Similarly, the SRP provided teachers with tablets to allow them to see real-time assessment results of the students, identify specific aspects they were struggling with, and design individualized strategies to help them. The government in Sindh saw the benefits of using such technology; however, it was not scaled up as it was deemed to be too costly.

Overall, we saw very little evidence of a coherent approach to exploiting EdTech across the Activities under review. Interviewees made no mention of the EdTech Ecosystem Framework itself, and our document review was only able to identify one reference to the framework being used (pandemic response work as part of ABC+ in the Philippines was reportedly informed by a review against the framework, conducted as part of another USAID project).

5 What were the conditions for success?

This chapter presents findings in relation to the third research question of the review: “What were the conditions for success?” The full research question from the review’s original terms of reference is: **Across the portfolio of Activities analyzed, what were the conditions (political will, USAID’s capital, relationships at different levels, ██████, training, data systems and availability, communications, etc.) that made specific Activities more successful? What were the conditions that impeded Activity success? What approaches were more (or less) effective?** As in Chapters 3 and 4, we have set out our findings in relation to this question under a series of “Key Findings.”

All development activities, by definition, operate in conditions that are less than ideal. In answering this question, we have deliberately focused less on how external conditions, such as government finances, political changes, and the COVID-19 pandemic, impeded Activities’ systems strengthening success, and more on the ways in which Activities interacted with the external conditions they faced. As we shall see, Activities tended to be more successful when they deliberately strategized to address external challenges.

We have drawn insights into the conditions and approaches that made some Activities more successful than others from success factors and challenges identified in key informant interviews, and by analyzing trends across elements from our heatmap analysis of Activities. We have considered conditions that tended to be present for Activities with the “greenest” heatmaps (indicating the greatest impact on strengthening system capacity) and absent for Activities with the “reddest” heatmaps (indicating the opposite). Overall, we found that where multiple conditions for success were present, they tended to reinforce each other, leading to the greatest systems strengthening impact.

Key Finding: Activities which had an explicit focus on systems strengthening in their stated aims were more likely to have systems strengthening impact.

We found that, on the whole, Activities that deliberately set out to strengthen systems by design and had a coherent theory of change relating to systems strengthening were more likely to demonstrate progress in strengthening systems. Key examples include the sequence of Activities in Cambodia (ACR, ACL, and IPEA), the sequence of Activities in the Philippines (Basa Pilipinas and ABC+), Opportunity 2.0 in Philippines, and the EGRP I and II Activities in Nepal. These Activities had strong systems strengthening language embedded in their results frameworks (as discussed in Chapter 3). By contrast, we found no instances where Activities had significant success in strengthening systems across a broad range of elements of the Analysis Framework without having a coherent theory of change relating to systems strengthening, and major emphasis on systems strengthening within their stated aims.

However, having aims related to systems strengthening was not always a sufficient condition for impact. For some Activities, despite having systems strengthening language in stated aims and a coherent theory of change relating to systems strengthening, we did not see evidence of strong impact. Sometimes, as we shall see, this dissonance between stated aims and impact is attributable to the appropriateness of the aims to the system’s current capacity or challenges in securing buy-in from the system.

Key Finding: Activities tended to have the greatest impact on those elements of systems strengthening that were also an explicit focus in their stated aims.

Figure 6 shows the degree to which each Activity’s stated aims (in its results framework) correlates with its heatmap ratings on the 10 elements of our Analysis Framework. Activities tended to have stronger impact on elements of system capacity that were referenced in their stated aims and weaker impact on elements that were not mentioned in their aims. Across Activities, no Activity received a red rating for an element of the framework that directly or indirectly aligned with its stated aims.

Figure 6. Overlap of activity results framework alignment with Analysis Framework and heatmap ratings

- Activity stated aims directly aligned with Analysis Framework
- Activity stated aims indirectly aligned with Analysis Framework

		1. Set Goals and Reform Strategy			2. Drive Delivery			3. Create an Improvement Culture			
		A. Define Clear Goals	B. Determine the Reform Strategy	C. Visualize the Delivery Chain	A. Use Data Effectively	B. Monitor Performance and Solve Problems	C. Harness the Power of Relationships	A. Review Capacity to Deliver	B. Build System Capacity All the Time	C. Leverage Educational Technology	D. Promote Equity and Inclusion
BGD	READ	Red	Green (○)	Yellow	Green (○)	Yellow	Green (○)	Yellow	Green (●)	Green (●)	Yellow
	All Children Reading	Green	Green (●)	Green	Green	Yellow	Green (●)	Yellow	Green (●)	Green	Yellow
KHM	All Children Learning	Green	Green (●)	Green	Green (○)	Green (●)	Green (●)	Yellow	Green (●)	Green	Green (●)
	Inclusive Primary Education Activity	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green (●)	Green (●)	Yellow	Green (●)	Green	Green (●)
IDN	Prioritas	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Green (●)	Yellow	Green (●)	Green	Yellow
LAO	Learn to Read	Red	Green (●)	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green (○)	Red	Green (●)	Green	Green (●)
	Early Grade Reading Program I	Green	Green (●)	Green	Green (○)	Yellow	Green (○)	Green	Green (●)	Green	Yellow
NPL	Early Grade Reading Program II	Green	Green (●)	Green	Green (○)	Green (○)	Yellow	Green	Green (●)	Green	Green (●)
	Reading for All	Yellow	Green (●)	Green	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green (●)	Green (●)	Green (●)
PAK	Sindh Reading Program	Yellow	Green (●)	Red	Green (○)	Red	Green (●)	Yellow	Green (●)	Green	Green
PAK	Teacher Education Project	Grey	Green (●)	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green (●)	Red	Red
PHL	ABC+	Green	Green (●)	Green	Green	Yellow	Green (●)	Yellow	Green (●)	Green (●)	Green
	Basa Pilipinas	Green	Green (●)	Green	Green (○)	Green (○)	Yellow	Green	Green (●)	Green (●)	Green
	Opportunity 2.0	Green	Green (●)	Green	Green	Green (●)	Green (●)	Yellow	Green (●)	Green	Green (●)
TJK	Read With Me	Yellow	Green (●)	Green	Green (●)	Yellow	Green (○)	Red	Green (●)	Green	Green
UZB	Education for Excellence	Yellow	Green (○)	Green (○)	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Green (●)	Green (●)	Red

Ratings Key



Limited/no evidence of systems strengthening or increased system capacity



Some evidence that the Activity has played a role in building system capacity, but **not consistently or in a way that was sustainable** beyond the life of the Activity



Significant evidence that the Activity has built system capacity in meaningful ways, even if this was **not always consistent or sustainable** beyond the life of the Activity



Strong evidence that the Activity has built sustainable capacity, strengthening the system's ability to deliver improved outcomes for students **beyond the life of the Activity**

Countries: BGD=Bangladesh, KHM=Cambodia, IND=India, IDN=Indonesia, KGZ=Kyrgyz Republic, LAO=Laos, NPL=Nepal, PAK=Pakistan, PHL=Philippines, TJK=Tajikistan, UZB=Uzbekistan

Some interesting trends are observable for individual elements of the framework. For example, *Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time* was the element most frequently referenced in Activities' stated aims, and the most positively rated across activities, with only two Activities rated amber-red and none rated red. But, as we saw in Chapter 4, no Activity was rated green on this element because—although capacity-building interventions such as the training of teacher trainers were an extremely common feature—Activities struggled to make the transition to system actors leading and directing their own capacity-building.

Conversely, Activities tended to have positive impact for *Element 2A: Use Data Effectively*, despite less direct focus in stated aims. It seems that data use, including assessment data and monitoring data, is so embedded in the way [REDACTED] Activities approach education reforms, that Activities tended to build system capacity for data use even in the absence of a stated aim to do so (even if, as we saw in Chapter 4, this impact stopped short of securing system actors' ability to analyze and use data for decision-making independently). The positive ratings for *Element 1A: Define Clear Goals* may also reflect a "spillover" impact from *Element 2A*, since focus on assessments data often contributed to orienting systems toward a focus on outcomes for students.

Overall, Activities' stated aims were least often aligned with *Element 1C: Review the Delivery Chain*, *Element 2B: Monitor Performance and Solve Problems*, *Element 3A: Review Capacity to Deliver*, and *Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology*. On all these elements, the lack of stated focus tends to have a strong correlation with absence of impact, implying a genuine lack of focus on building capacity on these elements. Some Activities tended not to receive green or amber-green ratings on *Element 3C* despite stated focus; this is explored below.

Key Finding: Activities were more likely to strengthen a system when system leaders understood from the outset that this was part of the purpose of the Activity.

All Activities worked in collaboration with governments to help them implement education reforms, most frequently on early grade reading. However, unless it was made explicit, government partners were not necessarily aware of the extent to which Activities aimed to build their capacity to implement effective reforms—as opposed, for example, to building instructional capacity in classrooms or developing new curriculum materials.

For some Activities, shared systems strengthening objectives were aligned with systems from the outset, and this resulted in greater capacity being built in systems. In Nepal for example, EGRP was designed with the intention of supporting the Government of Nepal's National Early Grade Reading Program, and the system committed the time of its Curriculum Development Center and Education Review Office to take forward the curriculum development and assessments respectively. Similarly, in Cambodia, IPEA is positioned to help the MoEYS roll out its Early Grade Reading Program nationwide, so the system has, for instance, committed the time of the Primary Education Department and Education Quality Assurance Department, in an understanding that the support of the Activity will be phased out and the system will have to independently lead reform. IPEA (and its predecessor Activities) also illustrate how shared expectations can enable an Activity to build core implementation capabilities that can have an impact beyond the initial subject focus of the Activity—[REDACTED]

In contrast, we found that for one Activity, although system actors worked closely with implementing partners, the intended phased approach to systems strengthening (with gradual transfer of ownership of reform efforts to the system) was not understood by government partners from the outset, potentially because of miscommunication. When conversations

around the phased approach took place in Year 3 of the Activity, the system was not prepared for the next phase of the transition. This confusion limited the overall systems strengthening impact of that Activity.

Key Finding: Activities were less effective in building sustainable capacity when they failed to “meet systems where they were at.”

For some Activities, we found a mismatch between the support provided to systems, and the system’s capacity to receive that support. When interventions that hoped to strengthen system capacity were inappropriate for the technical, financial, or human resource capacity of systems, Activities tended to have less impact.

In one country for example, we heard that the ambitious scope of the program caused the implementing team to prioritize direct delivery of new curriculum materials at the expense of building system actors’ own capacity, which has been the original plan, especially in the Activity’s first year. In another country, financial constraints and limited human resources capacity meant that interventions and monitoring protocols prescribed by the Activity could not be sustained by the system. In a third country, though the Activity made progress in securing a first round of [REDACTED] teacher training activities, sustainability [REDACTED] was identified as a continued risk.

Often, we heard that EdTech interventions introduced by Activities were not appropriate to the maturity of the EdTech ecosystem in the country. High costs, poor infrastructure and availability of devices, and limited skills of system actors meant that EdTech interventions did not have a high impact, or when they did have impact, they were too costly for systems to scale up systematically. Hence, *Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology* is one of the weakest-rated elements across Activities.

Key Finding: Activities that aligned with the reform priorities of the system tended to have more systems strengthening impact, by increasing system ownership.

Activities that engaged with systems to co-design reforms increased system buy-in and tended to have more impact. Sometimes, this alignment was brought about by syncing with national programs [REDACTED]. When this ownership was effectively communicated by the central system to the wider system, for example through intentional branding, this further enhanced the Activities’ ability to strengthen system capacity.

In the Philippines for instance, we heard that the Basa Pilipinas program engaged the central government’s DepEd early in the design process and incorporated the priorities of the system on multilingual education and teacher training reform. As a result, Basa’s approach was quickly embedded within the system and continued to be a priority for the system despite a change in administration. DepEd subsequently had a strong ownership of Basa and employed careful messaging to communicate this to the system: DepEd leadership consistently referred to Basa as a “DepEd program supported by USAID” rather than vice versa. In a contrasting example, we heard about another Activity that was rolled out when the relevant government officials were extremely busy implementing their own curriculum reforms, limiting the system’s willingness to engage with the Activity.

However, we also heard that efforts to align with system priorities can also involve risks—for example, if the work of the Activity became so closely identified with the priorities of one administration that it became vulnerable to political change, or if the scope of an Activity was expanded at the request of a host government, thus reducing the time and resources that could be devoted to capacity-building.



Key Finding: Activities were most successful in helping systems be more equitable when equity considerations were mainstreamed into project design.

Although many Activities had specific outputs aimed at meeting the needs of different student groups, the Activities rated “greenest” on *Element 3D: Promote Equity and Inclusion* were those that engaged system leaders in a conversation about how they could make the system more equitable as a whole. Examples of this included targeting the Activities at specific groups (for example: children with disabilities in Reading for All, and out-of-school youth in Opportunity 2.0), or specifically planning to reach schools serving remote communities and ethnic or linguistic minorities (for example, in Basa Pilipinas). Approaching equity as a mainstream aspect of program design, rather than an add-on, acknowledged that for the system to improve its outcomes, it cannot afford to neglect the lowest performing communities, schools, and children who are often part of underserved minorities or excluded groups. Where this mainstreaming of equity into program design was missing, we heard that equity considerations would become sidelined by “the core work,” and thus Activities made limited contributions to systems’ capacity to be more equitable.

6 What are the main learnings for future USAID Activities?

This chapter presents findings in relation to the fourth research question of the review: “What are the main learnings for future USAID Activities?” The full research question from the review’s original terms of reference is: **What are the main learnings from this Activity analysis for future USAID [REDACTED]? What does this mean for the way USAID structures Activities, for the specific goals USAID prioritizes, and for how USAID partners?**

In response to this question, we have identified a series of recommendations for structuring Activities to enable them to maximize their impact on education systems’ capacity to implement effective reforms.

Recommendation 1: Specify clear systems strengthening objectives as part of the results frameworks of Activities, and align these with the system.

Being clear and specific about the capacity an Activity is trying to build is a key first step in aligning partners (including system leaders themselves) behind an effort to build it. Systems strengthening objectives can be defined in terms of specific capacities to be built in system actors or units, for example, “*The government effectively leads donor coordination in the sector through an established donor working group,*” “*The monitoring unit independently analyzes assessment data quarterly, shares it with districts, and uses it to make evidence-based decisions on where to target support.*” This sort of specificity is preferable to more vague references to “capacity-building,” which can be interpreted differently by different partners.

Systems strengthening objectives can also help partners locate the work of the Activity within the overall systems strengthening journey, whether the aim is for the system to sustain, replicate, or scale up the reform effort (or a certain component of it) independently. This, in turn, supports a more specific conversation about the capacities that are needed for system actors to play their intended future role. Baseline assessments of system implementation capacity conducted collaboratively with government partners (see Recommendations 2 and 8) provide a strong basis for identifying the system’s capacity-building priorities and setting these as shared objectives for the Activity. This approach is also likely to create greater buy-in and a sense of shared responsibility for capacity-building between the Activity and relevant system leaders.

Recommendation 2: Embed ongoing measurement of systems strengthening progress in Activity M&E, including baseline, endline, and external evaluations.

Capacity assessments at the beginning of Activities, allow partners to identify areas of focus and create a baseline measurement from which to measure progress. They can also ensure that reforms are ambitious but achievable given the system’s current capacity, and that system strengthening efforts are targeted at specific identified needs. Ongoing measurement of these capacities can allow Activities to measure progress and adapt strategies as needed. Endline assessments can allow a structured reflection on what strategies were effective at building specific capacities.

Measurement of systems strengthening is potentially most useful when it is expressed as progress in terms of outcomes—skills developed, practices adopted by government, successful handover to system leaders—rather than outputs. Using common evaluation tools across Activities has the potential to build a shared language and allow easier comparisons across [REDACTED] activities. Since many elements of capacity-building are somewhat

subjective, and hence difficult to measure, external moderation and benchmarking by cross-Activity comparisons can help to address this. The Analysis Framework developed for this review and the original delivery capacity framework are both examples of tools that can be used to assess capacity to implement effective reforms across a range of contexts.

By creating a shared language for understanding and measuring system capacity, common evaluation tools also provide a stronger basis for assessing capacity and reviewing progress with government partners. USAID should also consider leveraging such tools to expanding its existing indicator on systems strengthening (“Education system strengthened through [U.S. Government-] assisted policy reform,” discussed in Chapter 3) to take account of evidence of skills and behaviors developed in addition to evidence of policy reform.

Adopting a common approach to measuring system capacity could support pre-post analyses that allow for more robust formative and summative assessments of progress within the life of an Activity, as well as more comprehensive longitudinal evaluations of successive Activities. Similarly, pursuing greater comparability in the student learning outcomes measured across Activities could even allow future studies to establish the conditions in which systems strengthening progress is most likely to translate to improved student learning.

Recommendation 3: Clearly articulate systems strengthening strategies from the outset, and ensure aligned expectations with system leaders.

As well as defining the systems strengthening impact expected, and how it will be measured, Activities give themselves the best chance of success if they articulate what the journey of systems strengthening is expected to look like. Apart from making it easier to review progress, the process of articulating “how we will get there” should also force a better conversation, both at the initial design stage and at review points, about what the system is ready for. Key points to articulate include:

- How the role of the implementing partners and system actors will change over time—for example, progressive transition of responsibilities to system actors through an “I do, we do, you do” approach
- Specific systems strengthening milestones with timelines, such as *“By the second quarter of 2023, the M&E team at the data unit will independently analyze the quarterly assessment data”*
- How the defined metrics to measure systems strengthening are expected to show progress over time (see Recommendation 2)
- The commitment required from the system, such as *“Implementing partner will be sharing office with curriculum writers and will be working with them over 3 months to revamp the curriculum”*

Given that much of systems strengthening work takes effect by building the capacity of government leaders and their teams, setting shared expectations with those leaders from the start is critical. Articulating clear and measurable systems strengthening objectives (as per Recommendations 1 and 2) and framing the work in terms of a journey provides a more specific basis for having this conversation with system leaders. Aligning with the system leaders on the commitment required, in terms of time and resources, can help the system plan its human resource and financial requirements accordingly. Engaging system leaders in systematic regular reviews of implementation capacity can ensure that everyone has a realistic and shared understanding of progress and challenges.

Recommendation 4: Set the scope of Activities to allow for realistic progress—and consider investing in longer or multi-phase Activities for greater impact.

Systems strengthening is an incremental process, and it takes time for new practices and behaviors to become institutionalized in systems. Activities can increase their chance of success by being realistic about the time required for systems strengthening and adjusting their scope or time frame accordingly. When Activities try to do too much in a given time frame, reform practices, especially ones that are too ambitious given systems' current capacities, are less likely to be sustained. It is also harder to help system actors identify how a new capacity they have developed may be transferable to other contexts—for example, how an approach to strategy development or stakeholder engagement mastered to support early grade reading reforms could be leveraged to support reforms in math, initial teacher education, or EdTech. As noted above, early capacity assessments of systems can help Activities understand the system's maturity in relation to the proposed reform agenda and develop a realistic understanding of progress possible within the time frame of the Activity.

Longer engagements can allow Activities to increase the likelihood of good practices and behaviors being institutionalized in systems. Even if it is not feasible to commission Activities longer than 5 years, USAID could strategically plan country engagements, imagining how consecutive Activities might build on each other to allow for more sustained systems strengthening. Based on the experience of the last decade, this could include planning reforms in phases, focusing on smaller geographical areas to test approaches for impact and financial viability before scaling up, and addressing structural barriers to sustainable capacity-building.

Recommendation 5: Focus programs to “meet systems where they are at,” through understanding of finances, other donor work, and capacity to deploy new approaches.

Activities can benefit from being more narrowly focused, using initial assessments of capacity (as described above) to meet systems at their current level of maturity. This can enable Activities to focus more explicitly on the building of specific skills, supporting the adoption of practices within governments, and making sure the relevant officials are secure in them (rather than creating systems that are too advanced for a government to adopt or maintain themselves). Focusing Activities in ways that complement the system's existing reform priorities, and their work with other donors, is also likely to lead to greater system buy-in and reduced duplication.

Recommendation 6: Incorporate EdTech interventions based on the maturity of the ecosystem, and in ways that can enhance the impact of Activities at scale.

EdTech interventions can strengthen the capacity of systems most when they are deployed strategically, not reactively, and in ways that are appropriate to the skills of system actors and the infrastructure available. In particular, Activities can build capacity of systems by helping them make strategic policy decisions about EdTech: how it can enhance the impact of interventions and complement traditional learning, how systems can systematically measure EdTech impact, and how systems can map out and understand the digital divide and address it. The EdTech Ecosystem Framework is a valuable tool in this regard, although its use in the Activities we reviewed appeared to be limited.

Recommendation 7: Mainstream equity considerations into Activity design, so that everyone is included.

Activities are best placed to help make systems become more equitable when equity considerations are mainstreamed into their design. This means going beyond the idea of equity and inclusion work as an “add-on” to the core Activity and considering how system

strengthening efforts aimed at making the system more effective can also support it to be more equitable. For example, Activities can build the capacity of the system to do the following:

- Identify lowest performing or underserved groups of students in the system, for example, those in remote schools, minority groups, or students with disabilities
- Use data to understand why these groups are low performing or underserved, whether there are “bright spots” in performance that go against the trend, what in-country experiences and international evidence reveal about potential solutions to improve performance/provision, and the implications for the design of the overall reforms
- Target resources and support to low performing or underserved groups, including infrastructure support, training for teachers, and appropriate learning materials
- Draw on stakeholder networks to increase the take-up and impact of targeted support, including through elevating the voices of underserved learners and communities themselves
- Use EdTech to address inequalities and make sure that the use of technology is not exacerbating inequalities in the system

Activities aimed at building a system’s general implementation capacity have an important role to play in building an understanding that education systems can and should accommodate different learners within their reforms, and that reforms targeted at supporting the lowest performing students are often a key way to improve overall outcomes in systems.

Recommendation 8: Increase focus on the elements of the Analysis Framework for which Activities have had the least impact.

Our analysis suggests that there are some important aspects of system capacity where relatively little progress was made across the Activities reviewed. This is likely because these elements were not prioritized within Activity design, and possibly also because USAID implementation partners have not developed a sufficiently clear understanding of the change required to build these elements of capacity and robust techniques for building them.

Specifically, we recommend that USAID works with its implementing partners to do the following:

- Encourage governments to set student outcome targets wherever this is politically feasible
- Systematically analyze the delivery chain in each reform effort for risks or weaknesses, and engage the system in this process
- Bring data into formal, regular, and structured problem-solving conversations with system actors at all levels, especially senior leaders
- Facilitate government partners to assess their own capacity to implement reform, and develop this as a regular habit, rather than just focusing on helping them understand the general capacity of the education system

7 Deep-dive case studies

This chapter shares findings from the three deep-dive case studies on Cambodia (Section 7.1), Nepal (Section 7.2), and the Philippines (Section 7.3). Section 7.4 summarizes the overarching themes from the case studies.

7.1 Cambodia: ACR, ACL, and IPEA

ACR, ACL, and IPEA are a series of USAID-funded activities that began in 2017. They focus on improving early grade reading skills of children in primary schools in Cambodia (**Figure 7**). The sequence of Activities has been facilitated by RTI International with support from partners, including World Education International, Save the Children, and Room to Read. ACR focused on bringing the relevant implementing partners and development partners together to pilot a national program for early grade reading; ACL built upon ACR and “solidified it as a national program;” and IPEA is focused on supporting the government to scale the program across the country.

Figure 7. Cambodia—ACR, ACL, and IPEA: Overview of Activities

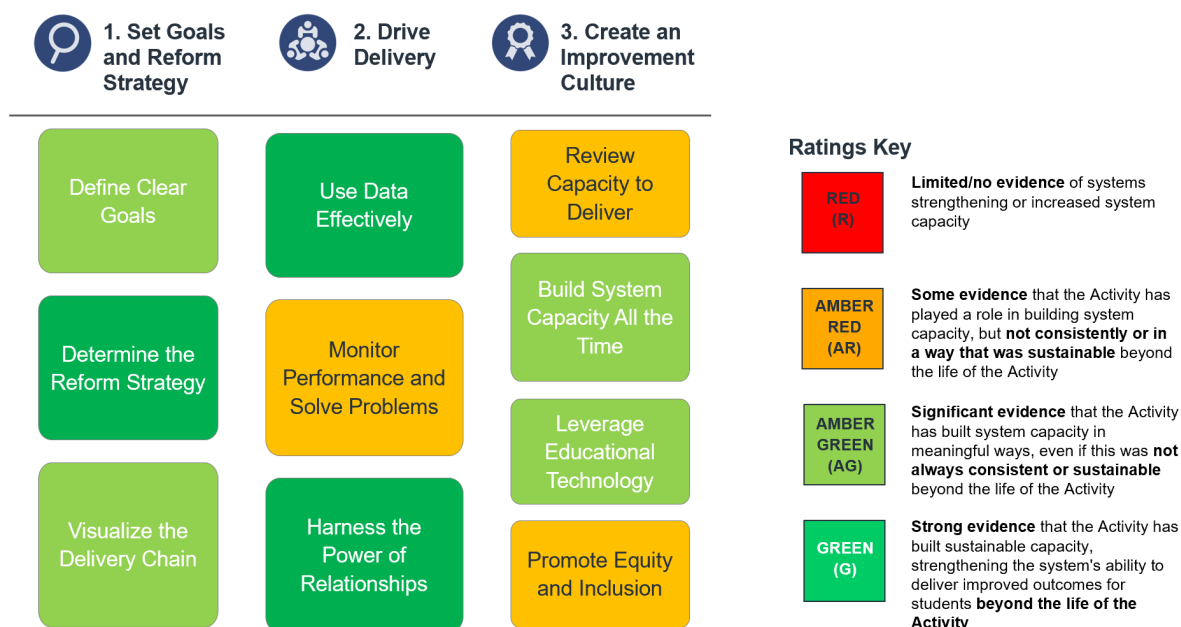
	All Children Reading (ACR)	All Children Learning (ACL)	Inclusive Primary Education Activity (IPEA)
Time Frame	2017—2020	2018—2021*	2022—2026
Geographical Scope**	Kampong Thom, Kep, and Kampot	Kampong Thom, Kep, and Kampot	Kampong Chhnang, Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, Takéo, and Tboung Khmum
Key Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The MoEYS effectively manages, at the national, provincial, district, and school levels, evidence-based EGR programs • Partnerships and coherence are strengthened to support EGR objectives in Cambodia • Assistance is provided for development of a coordinated and harmonized, evidence-based EGR and writing program endorsed and implemented in grades 1–3 that is feasible, practical, and scalable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoEYS has the tools to improve inclusive, evidenced-based early grade literacy instruction • Strengthened partnerships that promote collaboration, coordination, and synergies between partners supporting inclusive early grade learning • The MoEYS is supported to develop and implement a plan for piloting and scaling up a coordinated and harmonized, inclusive, evidence-based MoEYS national EGL program that is feasible, practical, and scalable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieved national rollout of the inclusive EGL program • Improved school governance, transparency and accountability

EGR=early grade reading; EGL=early grade learning

How did the Activities strengthen the capacity of the education system in Cambodia to implement effective reform?

We have synthesized the evidence collected for the review to rate the cumulative impact of the Activities on a four-point traffic-light scale against the 10 elements of our Analysis Framework (see Chapter 2). Below we share ratings (**Figure 8**) and identify strengths and challenges against each of the elements.

Figure 8. Cambodia—ACR, ACL, and IPEA: Cumulative impact of the Activities traffic-light rated against the 10 elements of the systems strengthening review Analysis Framework



1. Set Goals and Reform Strategy

- Define Clear Goals:** The sequence of Activities has contributed to a shift in how the system approaches education reforms, moving beyond counting inputs and outputs towards an increasing focus on student reading outcomes. This shift is evidenced by the system's use of the EGRA and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) to test the efficacy of classroom materials and development of fluency targets by grade level. The aspiration of improving learning outcomes for students across Cambodia and implementing the model of early grade reading reform across the country, is enshrined in the Education Strategic Plan 2019–2023 of the MoEYS. Although the strategic plan articulates certain metrics and targets for student learning outcome goals, most stakeholders we spoke to did not directly reference these goals, so it is not clear that actors at all levels of the system are able to readily articulate these goals and keep them at the forefront of reform decisions. **(Rating: Amber-Green)**

- Determine the Reform Strategy:** As well as helping MoEYS identify and adopt evidence-based strategies, the Activities also supported the ministry to harmonize the approach to early grade reading in Cambodia, bringing key donor and NGO players to the table and aligning them behind a national strategy to scale the reforms. Stakeholders described how the Activities had supported system leaders to make significant evolutions in their strategic thinking, for example, internalizing an understanding that teacher training is more effective if it is accompanied by ongoing monitoring and support, rather than being a “one-off.”

“When the program started out, there were a lot of fragmented approaches being used for early grade reading. We consolidated best practices and introduced a harmonized reading package in consultation with the ministry.”

- Key Informant for ACR, ACL, and IPEA

(Rating: Green)

- Visualize the Delivery Chain:** Analysis facilitated by the Activities, particularly IPEA, has been invaluable in supporting system leaders to better understand the chain of actors involved in implementation, and identify and address weaknesses and capacity challenges along the chain. For example, IPEA supported MoEYS to identify the need for, advocate for, and secure a change in education financing, Stakeholders identified this type of analysis as a strength to build on, for example, by using systematic tools to assess progress in the field and further clarify the roles and responsibilities of different actors, especially as the program scales up nationally. (Rating: Amber-Green)



Drive Delivery

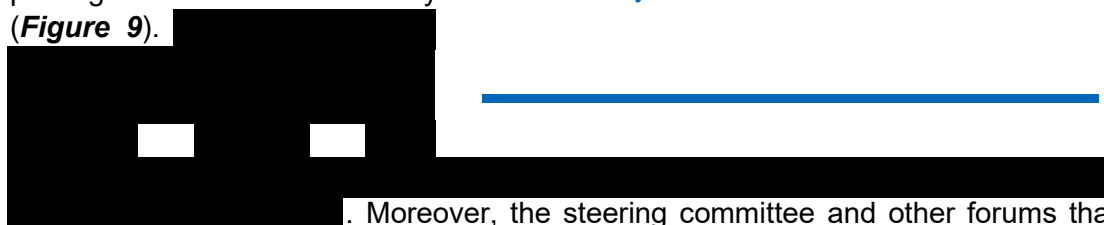
- Use Data Effectively:** The Activities have supported the system to establish new sources of assessment data and to bolster monitoring efforts. This includes integrating the use of EGRA to test different models and approaches. Based on needs identified during ACR and ACL, the Activities trained staff in the Education Quality Assurance Department (EQAD) to analyze national assessment data; IPEA is now in the process of training EQAD staff to analyze EGRA and EGMA data. Tools introduced by the Activities, such as KoBo Toolbox, have also been integrated into the MoEYS’ own monitoring efforts. We heard that some of the skills developed by the Activities may also have the potential to support robust M&E outside the realm of early grade reading, for example, the enhancement of EQAD staff capabilities to develop and maintain servers for storing assessment data. As IPEA progresses, strengthening the link between EQAD and policymaking, and greater disaggregation of trends at the provincial and district level, would further improve the system’s use of data. (Rating: Green)
- Monitor Performance and Solve Problems:** Data-informed conversations with system leaders, supported by the Activities, have strengthened the system’s capacity to review implementation progress. IPEA has worked with EQAD to build a data dashboard, key findings from which are presented in biannual steering committee

meetings, chaired by the minister. These conversations are valued by stakeholders and provide a high-level platform for identifying and addressing challenges. For example, a presentation of data showing relatively weak performance of Grade 3 students' learning of foundational consonants enabled a discussion that identified a missing component in the teacher training curriculum. We heard that the system could benefit from more frequent meetings with system leaders to monitor progress and swiftly resolve roadblocks, as well as supporting leaders at the provincial and district levels to hold similar conversations. **(Rating: Amber-Red)**

- Harness the Power of Relationships:** Prior to the Activities, multiple NGOs were working on disconnected, and sometimes conflicting, reform agendas throughout the country. The Activities have supported the system to move to the harmonized approach being used today, whereby MoEYS is empowered to set the national reform agenda under which key stakeholders are working toward the rollout of the national reading package across the country **(Figure 9)**.

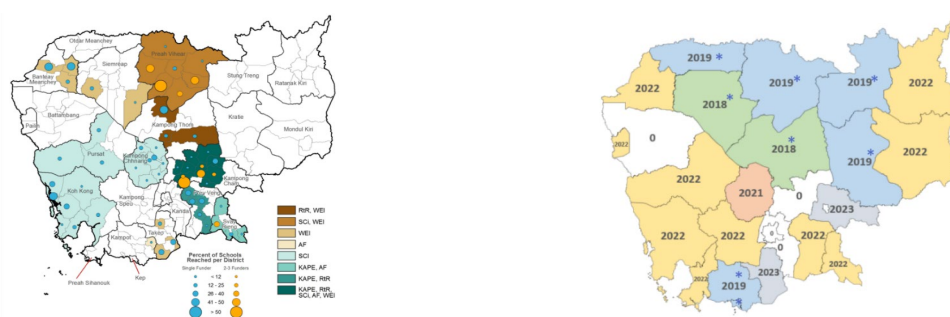
“The Early Grade Steering Committee, chaired by the Minister, is part of the Ministry’s structure that brings together the right departments to discuss, make decisions, and [grant] approvals. This becomes a coordination mechanism on the implementation and scaling up the national early grade learning program to ensure that decisions can be made, approvals are in place, and agreement or discussion is taking place, so it’s an early win. We were able to bring donors, civil society groups, and the MoEYS together to make decisions.”

- USAID Key Informant for ACR and ACL



Moreover, the steering committee and other forums that were created have been institutionalized as coordination mechanisms for the MoEYS to use going forward, potentially beyond the life of the Activities. **(Rating: Green)**

Figure 9. Early grade reading reforms in Cambodia 2015 vs. 2021²⁰



2015: Map of NGO-supported schools before the start of ACR, ACL, and IPEA, by province and district

2021: Map of the rollout of the national Khmer reading package, by province (labels denote the year each province begins the rollout of the early grade reading package)

²⁰ Sources: United States Agency for International Development (USAID). (2015, August). Sector assessment of Early Grade Reading in Cambodia.



Create an Improvement Culture

- **Review Capacity to Deliver:** Periodic reviews of the system’s capacity to deliver have informed design and implementation of all three Activities, for example, a formal sectoral assessment of early grade reading, shared via a consultation workshop in 2015. Within MoEYS, the Activities have supported some key departments to move toward identifying their own capacity gaps in relation to implementation, for example, the Primary Education and Teacher Education Departments, although other departments were identified by stakeholders as needing additional support in this regard. However, stakeholders noted that most capacity assessments were externally prompted, and the system needs additional support to effectively diagnose and address its capacity gaps. **(Rating: Amber-Red)**
- **Build System Capacity All the Time:** The Activities have been working closely with MoEYS officials from the beginning of the engagement to enhance their capacity and gradually transition more responsibilities to them. Going forward, the challenge, and IPEA’s stated aim, will be to gradually transition ownership of reforms to government counterparts from each level. A key example of this is the ongoing effort to institutionalize the school-based mentoring system, with external instructional coaches from World Education International building the skills of subnational staff so that they can lead coaching on a long-term sustainable basis. **(Rating: Amber-Green)**
- **Leverage Educational Technology:** There are clear examples of how the Activities helped the system enhance the impact of reforms using EdTech. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Activities supported the system to introduce a blended approach for teacher training (including home learning and videos), create free digital libraries for learning materials, and broadcast video lessons on TV. These innovations were well received and seen as cost-effective by stakeholders. The Activities also supported MoEYS to make strategic decisions on the use of EdTech that were appropriate to the context and capabilities of the system. For example, the Activity supported the system to use evidence from the rapid assessment on learning, which showed that the use of technology was not having a strong impact on learning, to deprioritize the scale up of EdTech interventions. **(Rating: Amber-Green)**

“The project provided evidence for inclusive education in Cambodia and helped teachers see children can learn despite having a disability. It has really been catalytic in moving those conversations forward.”

- USAID Key Informant for ACR and ACL
- **Promote Equity and Inclusion:** The Activities have enabled the system to start the journey of incorporating equity and inclusion into its reform efforts. For example, the Activities targeted areas with low learning outcomes and high dropout rates. IPEA also includes many interventions that account for equity considerations. For example, the EGRA has been adapted for students with disabilities, and the teacher trainings have guided teachers on teaching children with special needs. In addition, inclusive education tenets have been included in the design of the early grade reading package, which includes teacher guides, student supplemental books, and story books for mainstream schools. Despite being described by stakeholders as *“catalytic in moving [these] conversations forward”* and *“providing evidence for teachers to see that*

children with disabilities could learn with the proper support,” implementing partners identified this as an area where they are still making progress. **(Rating: Amber-Red)**

What conditions contributed to the Activities’ impact on systems strengthening?

The project was set up as three successive Activities that built on each other. This allowed the sequence of Activities to work closely with government counterparts over several years to build their capacity, pilot, test and embed approaches with the system, and engage in long-term financial planning [REDACTED]. The national scope of the Activities also helped influence central government at a strategic level, culminating in the influence the Activities were able to have on the MoEYS 5-year strategy.

There was an explicit focus on systems strengthening in the Activities’ objectives from the outset. We heard that USAID approached its programmatic role differently in this context from previous activities, placing a greater emphasis on institutional capacity-building than on implementing specific reform interventions. For example, by working alongside MoEYS as a convener and coordinator, the Activities were able to effectively implement and incentivize the formation of the sectoral coordination mechanism.

“USAID’s role wasn’t about implementing a project successfully, but [it was] more about influencing the sector in a way that it moves closer to a coherent approach to institutional capacity.”

- Implementing Partner for ACR, ACL, and IPEA

The Activities benefited from and cultivated government buy-in. USAID’s approach, positioning itself as a convener and coordinator, was complemented by MoEYS’ willingness and interest to engage with this new way of working. In particular, the political willingness of the senior leadership of the ministry was cited by many stakeholders as instrumental. The Activities cultivated close relationships with key officials in MoEYS, for example, leveraging co-creation of curriculum materials with Primary Education Department colleagues and collaborative data analysis with EQAD colleagues to establish the implementing partner’s credibility while building officials’ capacity to co-lead the work. MoEYS ownership was further established by the rebranding of the program as *Komar Rien Komar Cheh*, a deliberate part of the Activities’ institutionalization strategy, and MoEYS providing its own [REDACTED] scale-up in selected provinces. In addition, ministry staff in key leadership and technical positions have been stable throughout the sequence of Activities, contributing to the cumulative systems strengthening impact of the succession of Activities.

“The minister and other leadership are at the forefront of advocating for and owning the process and decisions. It came to be a ministry-owned program with support from USAID.”

- Key Informant for ACR, ACL, and IPEA

The need to align donor activities was identified early and acted upon. The harmonized approach adopted by the Activities allowed strong coordination between different NGOs and development partners in the early grade learning sector, [REDACTED] in designing learning materials and teacher training, which contributed to joint ownership of the harmonized early grade reading package. ACR

was able to bring key stakeholders and other implementing partners together by incentivizing them through the setting up of grants and the reduced fragmentation of efforts enabled a “*laser focus on learning outcomes.*”

How can IPEA build on the systems strengthening impact of the Activities?

- Advocate to set **system-wide outcome goals for early grade reading** and support the system to **align stakeholders at all levels behind these targets**, so that the system and its partners can work toward a shared definition of success for student performance.
- Continue **support to Primary Education Department** to lead the pilot and scale-up of the national early grade reading program, by **identifying “owners”** of the reform workstreams within the department who take the lead in coordinating and driving implementation.
- Continue **support to EQAD** to regularly **collect, analyze, and share student outcomes data**, including **disaggregated data at the subnational level**. This can enable a clearer picture of progress across the system and help identify “bright spots” to learn from and target support for provinces and districts making the slowest progress.
- Embed **frequent and regular “delivery routines” for system actors at all levels, including senior leaders**—structured conversations to review data on implementation progress and outcomes, diagnose problems, and make decisions.
- Develop **“feedback loops,”** such as tools to monitor on-the-ground progress, to test assumptions about implementation and to further clarify the roles of system actors and their readiness to take on greater responsibility for driving reforms.
- Encourage a **culture of self-reflection** within the system to review capacity gaps at different levels of the system frequently, by embedding routine capacity assessments in the system, and modeling how to address identified challenges systematically, for example, by using tools that specifically consider implementation capacity (such as the delivery capacity framework) to structure reflection workshops and identify priorities for external advice and support.

7.2 Nepal: EGRP I and II

EGRP I and II were ██████████ Activities that began in 2015 and provided technical assistance to the Government of Nepal to implement its National Early Grade Reading Program (NEGRP). The main goal of the Activities was to improve reading skills for public school students in the early grades (Grades 1–3) in 38 target districts in Nepal (**Figure 10** and **Figure 11**). The Activities came about after discussions with Government of Nepal, based on a USAID sector assessment, identified the need for a national early grade reading program. USAID provided initial support to the government to begin developing the NEGRP, after which the EGRP I Activity was set up to continue and build on the support for the continuing evolution and implementation of the national program.

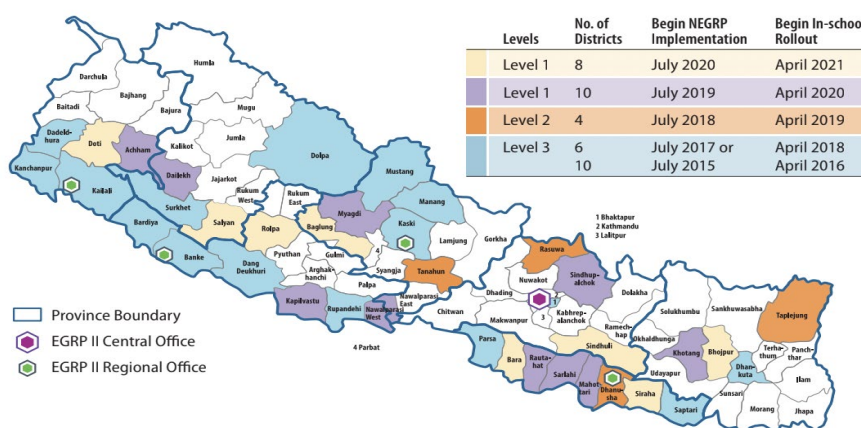
EGRP supported the Government of Nepal amid a shift toward a recently developed integrated curriculum and ongoing decentralization in Nepal’s governance system. RTI International facilitated the Activities with support from partners, including Another Option, Plan International Nepal, Room to Read (RTR), and SIL LEAD. The first phase (EGRP I) focused on bringing the relevant implementing partners and development partners together to design

and implement a national program for early grade reading in 16 districts. The second phase (EGRP II) focused on expanding the program to 22 new districts.

Figure 10. Nepal—EGRP I and II: Overview of Activities

	EGRP I	EGRP II
Time Frame	2015—2020	2020—2022
Geographical Scope	16 districts	22 districts
Key Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving early grade reading instruction Strengthening national, district, and local-level early grade reading service delivery Designing and conducting reading assessments in the primary grades Increasing family and community support for early grade reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scaling up the integrated curriculum Building municipal- and provincial-level capacity for service delivery Improving local governments' ability to provide teacher professional support Assisting continuity of learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Figure 11. Map of the geographical coverage of EGRP I and II²¹



Note: “Level 3” describes the 16 initial districts that were covered by EGRP I. Levels 1 and 2 are the 22 districts that received intensive support for the implementation of the NEGRP minimum package, where MoEST expanded early grade reading activities during EGRP II.

²¹ Source: RTI International. (2021). *USAID’s Early Grade Reading Program II (EGRP II) in Nepal, Year 1 Annual Progress Report: June 1, 2020–May 31, 2021*. USAID (2021). *USAID’s Early Grade Reading Program II (EGRP II) in Nepal, Year 1 Annual Progress Report: June 1, 2020–May 31, 2021*. USAID.

How did the Activities strengthen the capacity of the education system in Nepal to implement effective reform?

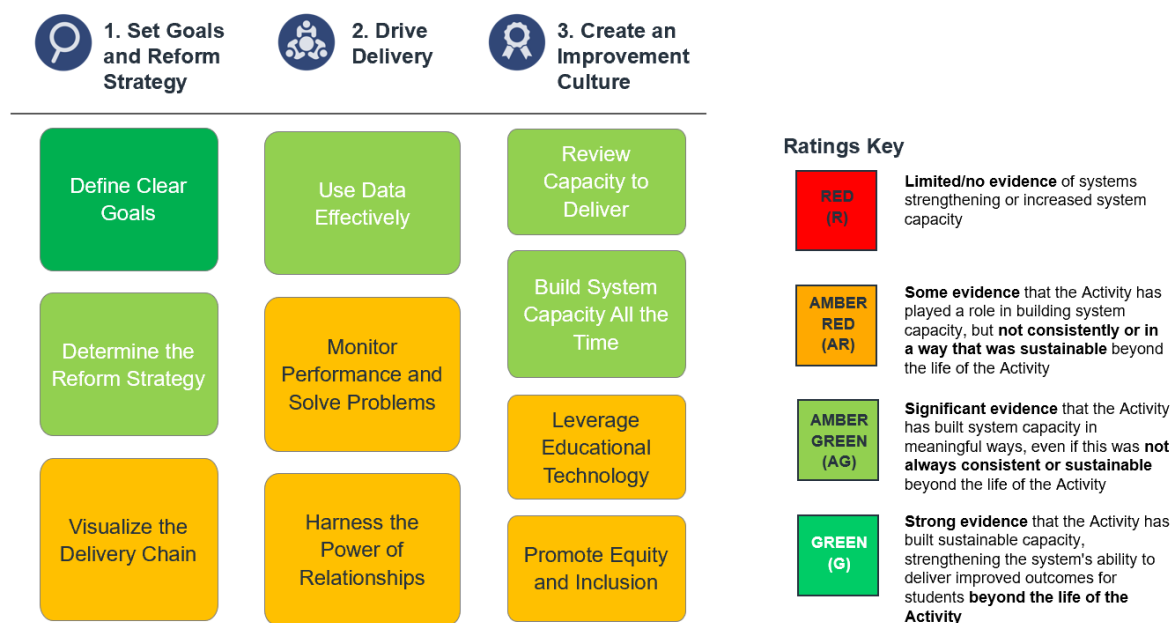
We have synthesized the evidence collected for the review to rate the cumulative impact of the Activities on a four-point traffic-light scale against the 10 elements of our Analysis Framework (see Chapter 2). Below we share ratings (**Figure 12**) and identify strengths and challenges against each of the elements.



Set Goals and Reform Strategy

- **Define Clear Goals:** The Activities have supported the development of local and central education plans focused on the quality of education and student outcomes in early grades. The School Sector Development Program developed by the Government of Nepal with support from the Activities defines yearly student outcome targets for the system. These targets have helped orient the local plans to a focus on early grade reading, helping to “*synchronize the vision of the government with implementation plans at local levels.*” (**Rating: Green**)
- **Determine the Reform Strategy:** The Activities played a significant role in shaping the NEGRP. This included the design and demonstration of a national model that the government could implement nationwide within its budget, and discussions with policymakers from the national and subnational levels to plan and operationalize the NEGRP. With the support of the Activities, the Government of Nepal developed its strategy document reflecting the goals, objectives, and key performance indicators, aligned with the new decentralized education governance system in Nepal, setting the system up to sustain and expand early grade reading interventions throughout the country. Stakeholders noted that more than half of the local governments across the country have developed also now their Municipal Education Plan with the support of the Activities. (**Rating: Amber-Green**)

Figure 12. Nepal—EGRP I and II: Cumulative impact of the Activities traffic-light rated against the 10 elements of the systems strengthening review Analysis Framework



• **Visualize the Delivery Chain:**

Although EGRP I and II were able to improve the coordination and definition of roles between central and subnational education structures in the context of decentralization, this continued to be a challenge for the Activities due to the delay in the passing of the Education Act.

Despite the issuance of supporting policies that define the roles of the different levels of the government, stakeholders noted that, in practice, weak accountability mechanisms, undefined data flows, poor communication, and absence of strategic linkages between the different levels of the system limited the Activities' ability to institutionalize good practices. **(Rating: Amber-Red)**

“There are no clear division of roles and responsibilities between different layers of government as there is no Education Act, so there is no clear division of responsibilities between the national and local governments, especially regarding teacher management.”

- Key Informant for EGRP



Drive Delivery

- **Use Data Effectively:** The Activities contributed to the system's capacity to use data by supporting the setup of the integrated education management information system (EMIS) platform, which is used by education stakeholders for planning and budgeting.

Stakeholders noted that although system actors across levels of the governments access data, analyze the

“EGRP I and II supported the government at the federal and local level to build their capacity in using and analyzing the EMIS data for planning purposes.”

- Key Informant for EGRP

data, and use it for decision-making, their capacity to do so independently is still variable. Turnover of staff at local governments was cited as a particular challenge in building sustainable capacity for data use. The Activities have also supported the system to generate and use student learning data, by introducing the EGRA to the system and building the capacity of local government officials to conduct these assessments. In addition, the Activities worked closely with the Education Review Office at the central level to support it to independently administer EGRA and analyze its results. **(Rating: Amber-Green)**

- **Monitor Performance and Solve Problems:**

The Activities supported the system to hold annual meetings to review progress and conducted joint monitoring visits with government officials to check implementation on the ground. However, we heard that these conversations on progress

could have been more effective if they had been held with greater frequency and with system actors at different levels. Stakeholders noted that, between the annual reviews and monitoring visits, the Activities found it challenging to maintain a clear picture of progress in the field. Monitoring and the use of information from monitoring to problem-solve implementation challenges remains an area for improvement within the system. **(Rating: Amber-Red)**

“Since the three layers of the government work independently and at the same time they work in a cooperative approach, there is not a clear monitoring mechanism over the tiers of the government.”

- Key Informant for EGRP

- **Harness the Power of Relationships:** EGRP supported the discussions of the government-led working group on early grade reading to minimize duplication of efforts and supported a strong alignment between donors and multilateral organizations in the early grade reading sector. Despite successful efforts during EGRP I to mobilize the community and parents and engage them with the learning process of students, budgetary constraints meant that this component was not carried forward to EGRP II. However, EGRP II did support the government to introduce the home- and community-based learning model to address learning loss of students due to COVID-19. **(Rating: Amber-Red)**



Create an Improvement Culture

- **Review Capacity to Deliver:** The Activities supported actors at both central and local levels to periodically review their implementation capacity for delivering early grade reading reform. For example, an impact evaluation for EGRP I, which included a cost-effectiveness exercise, informed the system’s School Sector Development Program. Stakeholders noted that system actors undertake annual self-assessments to identify needs of staff and areas of improvement. A strong example of an outcome from ongoing conversations about system capacity was the development of the NEGRP Minimum Package. After it transpired that the government could not afford to continue the program, as originally designed, in its entirety, the package was developed to outline interventions that local governments can implement given their budget constraints. **(Rating: Amber-Green)**

- **Build System Capacity All the Time:** By engaging with staff at all levels of the system, the Activities were able to build capacity along the delivery chain. At the federal level, stakeholders cited teaching and learning material development and focus on students' learning assessment as strengths of EGRP's capacity-building, with the officials in the Curriculum Development Center and Education Review Office "*capacitated to run capacity-building activities on their own.*" At the local level, monitoring, development of educational plans, and setting up teacher support mechanisms were identified as strengths. However, stakeholders described challenges in maintaining momentum for the reform efforts through changes in administration and staff turnover, commenting that "*[There is] no formal system for continuity of activities through political terms.*" Some stakeholders also noted that thinking more creatively about how to engage the private sector has the potential to enhance the system's capacity-building efforts. **(Rating: Amber-Green)**

“The program team worked together with the Government of Nepal officials at all levels and supported them to develop their capacity in various aspects. For example, at the federal level, the focus was on material development and students' learning assessments, whereas, at the local level, the focus was on monitoring, development of educational plans, and teacher support mechanisms.”

~ Key Informant for EGRP

- **Leverage Educational Technology:** Although EdTech was not a focus for the Activities, EGRP made some efforts to address the digital divide by providing tablet devices preloaded with curriculum materials for teachers in municipalities with a low Equity Index to increase access, introducing radio lessons for areas with poor access to the Internet, and making 119 titles available online on the Center for Education and Human Resource Development's website. Stakeholders reported that the Activities sometimes experienced challenges in enabling the use of EdTech consistently or at greater scale, for example, challenges in resolving "bottlenecks around ownerships, copyrights and access to portals." **(Rating: Amber-Red)**
- **Promote Equity and Inclusion:** EGRP promoted equity by prioritizing disadvantaged districts in its rollout. The Activities also made efforts to embed inclusivity by developing learning materials in Nepali and in some non-Nepali mother tongue languages, as well as in sign language, and developing materials for learners with dyslexia. However, stakeholders noted that increased support for marginalized and disadvantaged learners, and tailored approaches for diverse lingual groups, could further strengthen the system's capacity to be equitable. **(Rating: Amber-Red)**

“We have to develop a program in such a way that teachers can support children with different language backgrounds.”

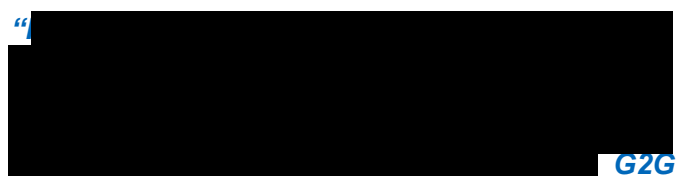
- Implementing Partner for EGRP

What conditions contributed to the Activities' impact on systems strengthening?

The Activities were set up with the explicit goal of supporting the Government of Nepal's national strategy. This promoted buy-in from the government and paved the way for the Activities to work closely with key offices within the MoEST, such as the Curriculum Development Center and Education Review Office, as well as directly with local governments to build their capacity.

The Activities made a concerted effort to engage and support actors at different levels of the system, particularly at the municipal government level, in the context of ongoing decentralization of education governance in Nepal. This was a critical focus for Activities during a period when Nepal devolved responsibility for basic education from national government to the local level. The Activities' advocacy with local government representatives for the allocation of resources to early grades was identified by stakeholders as a strength. Support from the Activities to develop local education plans also ensured that those local staff responsible for implementation had a clear roadmap for their work and were syncing their priorities with those of the national government.

The Activities used financial incentives to promote greater ownership of the reforms within the system. The Activities made use of the government-to-government (G2G) results-based mechanism to create an incentive for the government to set strong goals and use data to identify areas where support was needed. This mechanism meant that goals had to be both ambitious and realistic, and support had to be well targeted and

“ G2G helped develop a very close working relationship between USAID, EGRP and the government...‘I do, we do, you do’ was embedded in it.”

- Implementing Partner for EGRP

likely to deliver the desired results. Stakeholders reported that this mechanism helped solidify the commitment and interest of the government in the implementation of the interventions.

The Activities matched the model of support provided to the financial and operational capacity of the system to ensure greater sustainability of the reforms. Frequent capacity review conversations helped the Activity identify reforms appropriate to the system's maturity. This was illustrated by the finalization of the minimum package, which was cited as “a major step forward in making the NEGRP—and by implication, EGRP—sustainable” by enabling the system to sustain and scale up reforms in low-cost but effective ways.

How can future Activities continue to build on the systems strengthening impact of EGRP I and II?

- Further **strengthen strategic linkages between plans at different levels of the system**, by ensuring that national level goals are cascaded into municipal plans and making sure that operational realities and implementation lessons emerging at the municipal level inform the policy and system management and planning decisions at the provincial and national levels.
- Support the system to **clarify roles, responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms at different levels of the system**. Help system leaders to systematically

think through the delivery chain for early grade reading, identifying where roles need to be clarified and the ways in which, in the absence of formal accountability mechanisms, [REDACTED], effective communication, and capacity and relationship building to keep implementation on track.

- **Systemize the flow and use of data across different levels of the system**, by setting up systematic data collection tools for monitoring implementation of EGR reforms, ensuring that these monitoring data are shared frequently with relevant stakeholders and integrated into the program’s decision-making structures.
- Continue to **assess capacity gaps regularly and systematically at local levels** and ensure that **school improvement efforts are focused and within the realistic capacity of districts**.
- Focus on **building implementation capacity at the local level**, such as the capacity to independently analyze data and derive actionable insights from them. In particular, ensure that capacity-building efforts for local levels plan to **address the varying capacity among different districts**, which may be a result of geographical disadvantages and inequities across different regions in the country.
- **Establish “delivery routines” to strengthen M&E mechanisms**. Set up frequent structured conversations for actors at different levels of the system, including system leaders, to review implementation data and progress. Use these conversations as a means of checking that support is being responsive to varying local needs, and to make adjustments where needed.
- **Mainstream equity** into the design of programs by ensuring that Activities understand and monitor **which districts, schools, and learners have the weakest performance**; understand the root causes behind these inequities; and make **sustained efforts to target reforms for their improvement**. In addition, ensure that programs effectively leverage the lessons from the **Nepal Reading for All** program, on how the system can effectively cater to students with disabilities.

7.3 Philippines: Basa Pilipinas and ABC+

Basa Pilipinas and ABC+ are [REDACTED] Activities that aim to improve early grade learning outcomes, working closely with the Philippines DepEd. Basa Pilipinas (2013–2018) focused on improving reading outcomes for early grades in Regions 1 and 7 of the country. ABC+ is an ongoing Activity that started in 2019 and focuses on reading, numeracy, and socioemotional skills, primarily targeting Regions 5 and 6, along with limited activities in select districts of Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (*Figure 13*).

Figure 13. Philippines—Basa Pilipinas and ABC+: Overview of Activities

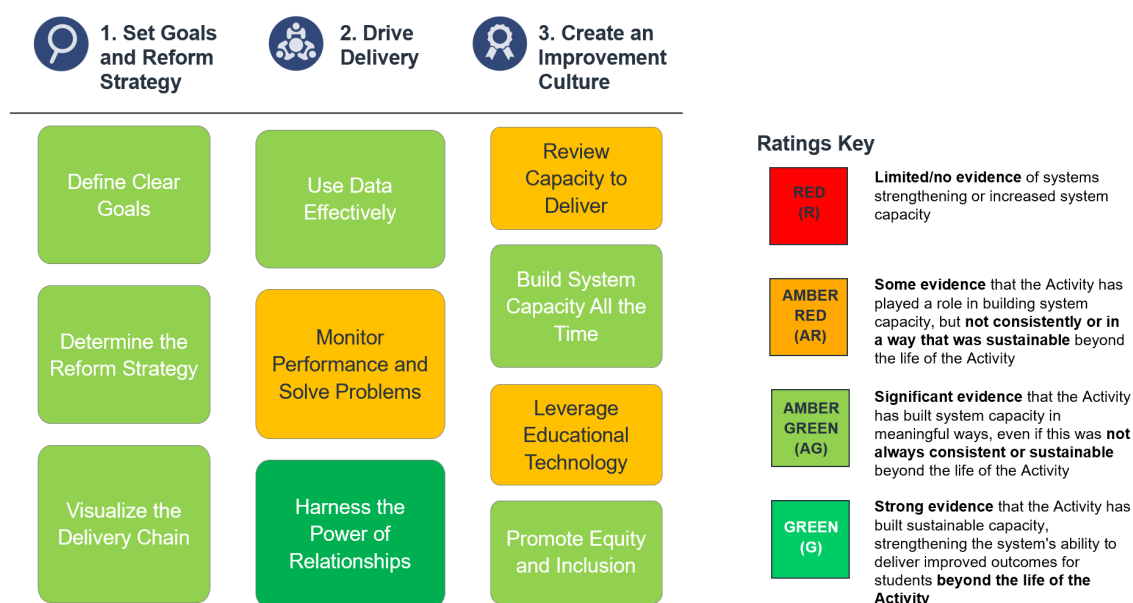
	Basa Pilipinas	ABC+
Time Frame	2013—2018	2019—2024
Main Implementing Partner	EDC	RTI
Geographical Scope	Regions 1 and 7	Regions 5 and 6 and BARMM*
Key Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved reading instruction Improved reading delivery systems Improved access to quality reading materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved early grade instruction and delivery systems Improved access to quality materials Improved education system capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting effective early grade instruction

*Limited activities within Maguindanao's selected Magindanawn-speaking districts in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)

How did the Activities strengthen the capacity of the education system in the Philippines to implement effective reform?

We have synthesized the evidence collected for the review to rate the cumulative impact of the Activities on a four-point traffic light scale against the 10 elements of our Analysis Framework (see Chapter 2). Below we share ratings (**Figure 14**) and identify strengths and challenges against each of the elements.

Figure 14. Philippines—Basa Pilipinas and ABC+: Cumulative impact of the Activities traffic-light rated against the 10 elements of the systems strengthening review Analysis Framework





Set Goals and Reform Strategy

- Define Clear Goals:** Basa Pilipinas and ABC+ both supported the system to orient its efforts toward achieving student outcomes for early grade reading. This included, for example, goal-setting discussions with DepEd facilitated by Basa Pilipinas, to agree on proficiency benchmarks for fluency and comprehension. ABC+ continues to support this effort: it is using the CRLA at the district level, to identify learners who are non-readers, for the district to focus attention and resources on supporting them. However, we heard that measurements and benchmarks for student outcomes defined by the Activities have not yet been translated into student learning outcome targets at the national or regional levels. **(Rating: Amber-Green)**
- Determine the Reform Strategy:** By piloting and testing approaches, both Activities supported the system to set coherent strategies to pursue existing early grade reading reform priorities: Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) and a new approach to teacher training. ABC+ is now facilitating the system to develop an integrated view of learning interventions, bringing together different learning and reading programs and initiatives led by DepEd. **(Rating: Amber-Green)**

“Basa helped give DepEd a more coherent picture of what [early grade reading] strategy can be, and it fully demonstrated effective instruction to teachers, management and supervision by principals and supervisors, and reading materials for appropriate levels.”

- Implementing Partner for Basa Pilipinas

- Visualize the Delivery Chain:** Basa Pilipinas’ sustained, meaningful engagement with DepEd across different levels of leadership “enabled the system’s roles and responsibilities to come alive.” ABC+ developed opportunities for central government and local government officials to work together to look at data, review implementation, identify solutions, [REDACTED]. This collaboration has demonstrated the benefits of increased dialogue and has brought stakeholders into conversations with the regions in new ways. Stakeholders noted that as ABC+ continues this effort, the system could benefit from supporting regions to further clarify the roles and responsibilities along their delivery chain for specific reforms, such as for teacher professional development. **(Rating: Amber-Green)**

“The chain of actors may look different in different regions, so the progress varies. The program is on track to resolve these challenges.”

- Government Key Informant for ABC+



Drive Delivery

- Use Data Effectively:** The Activities contributed to the effective use of assessment data within the system, by supporting the EGRA and the CRLA. Basa Pilipinas supported the system to use EGRA as a diagnostic tool, holding sessions with DepEd to discuss EGRA results and determine in which language domains learners were

struggling and how teachers could support them. The use of CRLA supported by ABC+ has also helped the system identify schools that require additional support, as results get displayed in real-time on a widely used dashboard. Despite the Activity having developed a cadre of DepEd staff who understand and know how to administer EGRA, stakeholders noted challenges around cost and the need for additional system capacity to run the assessment, meaning that the system continues to rely on USAID support for its data processing. **(Rating: Amber-Green)**

- **Monitor Performance and Solve Problems:** To develop a clear picture of implementation progress, Basa Pilipinas supported the system to conduct monitoring visits in the field. ABC+ has systemized monitoring of the teacher support system, collecting data to assess the participation of teachers and to understand capacity-building needs, and subsequently discussing challenges and solutions with system actors. Stakeholders noted that more embedded and routine conversations about implementation progress could strengthen the system’s capacity to use data for problem-solving and decision-making. **(Rating: Amber-Red)**

- **Harness the Power of Relationships:** As noted above, both Activities supported the system to strengthen relationships and align system actors—DepEd, regional offices, divisional officers, and school officers—around the reform efforts. Both Activities modeled approaches for cultivating and maintaining relationships with stakeholders, partners, and system actors. Basa Pilipinas increased the reach of teaching and learning materials [REDACTED]

“The [ABC+] program has provided us with a lot of insights on how to engage our partners and this has become the blueprint for how we engage with other partners in DepEd.”

- Government Key Informant for ABC+

Similarly, ABC+ supported the system to engage with the private sector and rotary clubs and emphasized the role of community engagement in supporting students’ learning. In addition, ABC+ setup a multi-stakeholder forum—the Educational Sectoral Mechanism—to enable DepEd and Local Government Units to create consensus around solutions and priorities. Stakeholders noted that while these forums are sometimes championed by specific people within the system and could be further institutionalized, models for stakeholder engagement introduced by USAID Activities have become “blueprints for how we engage with other partners.” **(Rating: Green)**

“I think one strength of the team was patience and persistence to make sure that key school officials and stakeholders are really involved...to make sure, that the most significant officials are on board and sold on the idea of really implementing the program.”

- Government Key Informant for ABC+



Create an Improvement Culture

- **Review Capacity to Deliver:** The Activities supported the system to reflect on its implementation capacity through systematic reviews of teacher training, development

of district learning recovery plans in response to data and situational analysis, and dialogue between central government and local government (noted above). Stakeholders expressed an appetite for further, more deliberate reviews of system capacity going forward. **(Rating: Amber-Red)**

- **Build System Capacity All the Time:** System leaders noted that implementation of the Activities was done in a way that built the capacity of those involved, ensuring “*sustainability that would benefit DepEd and the schools’ ability to innovate.*” For example, both Activities built the technical capacity of the system to develop teaching and learning materials, particularly for MTB-MLE. The system’s capacity to improve teacher training and support has also been strengthened, for example, the peer-to-peer mentoring model of Learning Action Cells was cited as a success by stakeholders, and the transition from external teacher trainers to building a cohort of trainers within the ranks of DepEd ensures decreased reliance on external support. Stakeholders noted that there are still variations in capacity between different regions and identified continued support to build local leaders’ capacity to independently drive reform as a priority. **(Rating: Amber-Green)**
- **Leverage Educational Technology:** EdTech was not a focus in either of the Activities. However, EdTech was used in limited ways to further the reforms. For example, Basa Pilipinas introduced a classroom observation tool called SCOPE in the Philippines, which enabled the quick dissemination of feedback, and implemented the ICT for Reading Pilot, which involved the use of tablets with digital learning materials. The ABC+ Activity scope included improving the functionality and usability of DepEd’s learning resources portal. The Activity also pivoted toward the use of technology when the COVID-19 pandemic struck: it developed instructional video materials to help learners who were identified as non-readers by the CRLA. Limited access to technology and poor Internet connectivity were cited as challenges in the system to scaling up and systemizing EdTech interventions. **(Rating: Amber-Red)**
- **Promote Equity and Inclusion:** Both Activities had specific components aimed at advancing various dimensions of equity and inclusion. For example, Basa Pilipinas took a “leave no schools behind” approach, which meant that all schools in target divisions were to receive the same level of support from the program. Similarly, ABC+ included a specific component for geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. In line with existing system priorities, both Activities also focused on supporting DepEd’s MTB-MLE policy. For example, ABC+ conducted a language evaluation study to map the most widely spoken languages in the target regions. ABC+ support in developing materials in additional mother tongues helped DepEd fulfil the fundamental equity principle of the MTB-MLE policy, helping to integrate equity concerns more fully in the sector. **(Rating: Amber-Green)**

“We have introduced technology to help us work in mother tongue-based education. We conducted a language mapping exercise, so we are able to identify the languages at the learner level. This allows us to ensure that no child is disenfranchised.”

- Implementing Partner for ABC+

What conditions contributed to the Activities' impact on systems strengthening?

The Activities focused on addressing priorities that had already been identified by the system, building on an existing national policy. Through consultations with DepEd, Basa Pilipinas was able to align its programming with the priorities of DepEd: the Activity was originally designed to focus on English and Filipino under the Department's bilingual education policy and made a shift to begin working in a wider range of mother tongue languages when DepEd introduced its MTB-MLE policy. Consequently, ABC+ was conceptualized to “scale up the gains” from Basa Pilipinas interventions and focus on sub-regions where those languages were widely spoken, and to take on the challenge of implementing MTB-MLE in more multilingual parts of the country. Basa Pilipinas also supported DepEd's Kindergarten to Grade 12 Basic Education Curriculum. This close alignment with the system's priorities allowed the Activities to be embedded within DepEd and led to strong ownership and buy-in. Although the two Activities targeted different regions, ABC+ was able to continue Basa Pilipinas capacity-building efforts in the central government and promote a long-term focus on early grade reading reforms.

Both Activities worked by engaging closely with government counterparts at all levels, including adapting to the needs of

regional leaders. By adopting an approach based on collaborative working, for example, co-designing teaching and learning materials instead of developing them externally, program staff were more effectively able to model these processes for their government counterparts. ABC+ took a phased institutional capacity-building approach and is “working within existing structures, mechanisms, and programs of the government to [better] anchor project interventions.” At a regional level, ABC+ is also supporting the system to tailor its approach, enabling regional leaders to think critically about implementation, adapting the needs and challenges of their local context.

Capacity beyond the system was leveraged through a multi-stakeholder approach. The Activities support the government to mobilize a range of actors outside the system to further the early grade reform agenda. This included public-private partnerships and engagement with NGOs, civil society, and parents. Through these efforts, the system was able to improve access to investment for learning materials and bolster community support for the changes introduced in schools.

Both Activities had an explicit focus on strengthening the system and institutionalizing the reforms. For example, stated aims of Basa Pilipinas referred to strengthening the capacity of “education institutions to design, implement and monitor early grade reading interventions at various levels” and of the “host government to implement sound early grade reading diagnostic tools in English, Filipino, and at least two mother tongues.” ABC+ had an even more explicit focus: in addition to improving early grade instruction and delivery systems and improving access to quality materials, the Activity had an objective (IR) dedicated to improving “education system capacity and commitment to manage and implement interventions supporting effective early grade instruction.”

“[Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao], one of the ABC+ regions, needs a lot of help in terms of aligning because there has been a political transition in the region, and it is re-establishing its connection with the DepEd central office. Region V has developed a learning recovery plan with very defined roles and specific targets. In Region VI, we were able to do that through a different mechanism where both [Local Government Unites] and DepEd are accountable for setting their targets and having occasional check-ins.”


- Implementing Partner for ABC+

How can ABC+ build on the systems strengthening impact of the Activities?

- Support the system to translate EGRA and CRLA benchmarks into **system-wide goals and regional goals for learning outcomes** for early grade reading, providing a basis around which to further focus and align the reform effort.
- Continue to help system leaders to map out the **delivery chain**—the chain of actors through which reform will happen, from the central level down to schools—for each key reform in each target region, and facilitate them to review the **skills, accountability relationships and mechanisms, and support required** for successful implementation.
- Support DepEd to plan and work through **sustaining and scaling up the reforms** in other regions, including working through financial considerations and technical and human resource capacity needs.
- Convene regular, structured conversations with DepEd to **agree how ABC+ will build DepEd’s own capacity to implement reforms**—that is, the most important systems, skills, and behaviors the Activity can help DepEd develop and institutionalize at the national level, building on early successes such as the Educational Sectoral Mechanism.
- Build the capacity of the system to **analyze EGRA data independently** to ensure the sustainability of its use and integration into conversations about progress and efficacy of reform efforts.

7.4 Overarching themes from deep-dive case studies

The three deep-dive cases studies were selected because our initial analysis suggested that they were Activities that exhibited many interesting examples of good practice in systems strengthening. On deeper investigation, this proved to be the case; the sequences of Activities discussed in the deep dives had some of the “greenest” heatmaps of all the Activities reviewed.

As relatively strong examples of systems strengthening impact, the three deep-dive case studies also allowed us to validate, through deeper exploration, many of the conditions for success identified in Chapter 5. All three case studies illustrate the value of making system implementation capacity an explicit focus within the aims of Activities. All three underline the importance of adjusting Activity design and delivery to “meet the system where it’s at.” All three demonstrate the potential impact that can be achieved where Activities build on existing national priorities to create a sense of system ownership, and where they align  stakeholders in a unified effort.

Moreover, all three case studies feature cumulative sequences of Activities. They allow us to see what is possible where USAID Missions, implementing partners, and government partners have the opportunity to work together over a sustained period. As such, these deep-dive case studies provide us, not just with evidence of the conditions that contribute to success in systems strengthening, but with tangible (and potentially replicable) examples of how Activities can be delivered to create those conditions.

The greatest areas of challenge identified in the case studies broadly mirror the challenges experienced across the wider sample of Activities. However, the detailed evidence gathering, which was possible through the deep dives, also allowed us to isolate examples of progress against those elements of the Analysis Framework where other Activities tended to struggle. Data-driven conversations to problem-solve teacher training and context-appropriate use of

EdTech in Cambodia, outcome goal setting and collaborative reviews of implementation capacity in Nepal, and replicable stakeholder engagement models and designing for equity in the Philippines—these are all practical examples of what “good” can look like. And even though interviewees in all three deep dives identified “visualizing the delivery chain” as an area for ongoing improvement, the case studies provide some of the strongest illustrations of how system leaders can be supported to analyze and navigate the chain of actors necessary for effective implementation.

Lastly, the deep-dive process itself demonstrates the potential value of looking at systems strengthening through the lens of a systematic Analysis Framework—and of using that framework to facilitate reflective discussions with mixed groups of stakeholders. By challenging ourselves to view the Activities both as nuanced initiatives operating in a unique context and as contributors to a global systems strengthening agenda, we have a chance to draw meaningful and transferable lessons for the future.

Annex A: List of Activities

	Sub-region	Country	Activity
1	South Asia	Bangladesh	Reading Enhancement for Advancing Development (READ)
2	Southeast Asia	Cambodia	All Children Reading (ACR) All Children Learning (ACL) Inclusive Primary Education Activity (IPEA)
3	South Asia	India	Scaling-Up Early Reading Intervention (SERI)
4	Southeast Asia	Indonesia	Prioritizing Reform, Innovation, and Opportunities for Reaching Indonesia's Teachers, Administrators, and Students (PRIORITAS)
5	Central Asia	Kyrgyz Republic	Okuu Keremet! (Learning is Awesome!) 1 st generation Reading Together 2 nd generation Time to Read
6	Southeast Asia	Laos	Learn to Read (Ltr)
7	South Asia	Nepal	Early Grade Reading Program I and II (EGRP (I and II)) Reading for All: Disability Inclusive Education for Nepali Children
8	South Asia	Pakistan	Sindh Reading Program (SRP) USAID Pre-Service Teacher Education Project (Pre-STEP)
9	Southeast Asia	Philippines	Basa Pilipinas Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines (ABC+) Opportunity 2.0
10	Central Asia	Tajikistan	Read with Me (RWM) Quality Reading Program (QRP)
11	Central Asia	Uzbekistan	Education for Excellence (UEEP)

Annex B: Analysis Framework Rubric

1. Set Goals and Reform Strategy			
Element	Questions to consider	Weak progress (Red)	Strong progress (Green)
<p>1A. Define Clear Goals</p> <p>Has the Activity helped the system to focus its work on achieving a clearly articulated and shared ambition?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the Activity helped the system define what it is trying to do terms of ambitious outcome goals for students? Has the Activity helped the system translate its goals into clear measurable (SMART) targets? Has the Activity helped the system plot realistic "trajectories" of interim targets rooted in evidence from past experience or research? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Activity was understood purely as a set of inputs and outputs - it did not engage the system in a conversation about its goals for students. The Activity has not helped the system move beyond vague, hard-to-measure statements of intent. To the extent that the Activity has helped the system set targets, it has not helped the system visualize what the path-to-goal will look like. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Activity has helped normalize the practice of grounding the system's efforts in ambitious and clearly articulated, long-term, sustainable student learning outcome goals. The Activity has helped normalize a practice of setting specific, measurable, ambitious, realistic and time-limited (SMART) targets to express the scale of change the system is trying to deliver for students. The Activity has helped the system develop robust techniques for setting targets, including interim targets, based on rigorous benchmarking and a strong understanding of past system performance.

1. Set Goals and Reform Strategy			
Element	Questions to consider	Weak progress (Red)	Strong progress (Green)
<p>1B. Determine the Reform Strategy</p> <p>Has the Activity helped the system to set coherent strategies and plans to achieve its goals?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the Activity enabled the system to deliberately prioritize a coherent set of strategies through which it will achieve its goal(s), supported by a clear theory of change and actionable plans? Has the Activity helped the system to make strategic choices that are evidence based and appropriate to the system's level of maturity? Has the Activity helped the system to build on existing donor/country-led efforts to improve educational performance? Has the Activity helped the system to plan for financial sustainability? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Activity has not supported system leaders to set priorities or articulate their own theory of change; system efforts are disconnected from each other and/or the system is "trying to do everything". The Activity has not helped system leaders to better understand which policies and practices are most/least likely to work in its context. The Activity has not helped system leaders make connections between efforts to improve educational performance in country. The Activity has not helped system leaders to quantify the level of resources needed to achieve their long-term goals or identify how their reforms will be funded/resourced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Activity has built system leaders' capacity to prioritize and articulate their strategies as part of a coherent theory of change to achieve the system's goals; these are captured in robust plans that are capable of driving the day to day work. As a result of the Activity, system leaders consistently make strategic choices and "innovation bets" based on a robust understanding of what has driven performance to date, and the evidence base for policy options, including the appropriateness of potential innovations to the system's current level of maturity and relevant connections to wider drivers of educational outcomes (e.g., health, nutrition, housing). The Activity has built system leaders' capacity to set strategies that connect and harness the collective impact of both donor/country-led efforts and investments to sustainably improve educational performance. The Activity has built system leaders' capacity to quantify resource needs, identify sources of funding and build a flow of resources that is reliable and secure.

1. Set Goals and Reform Strategy			
Element	Questions to consider	Weak progress (Red)	Strong progress (Green)
<p>1C. Visualize the Delivery Chain</p> <p>Has the Activity helped system leaders to understand the chain of actors through which implementation must occur?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the Activity enabled the system to better visualize the chain of actors, and the relationships between them, through which the system's strategies will be implemented at scale? Has the Activity supported the system to align their "delivery chain" behind the system's goals for educational outcomes, and identify potential risks and weaknesses in the chain? Has the Activity enabled the system to identify and setup "feedback loops" of data and intelligence along the delivery chain to better understand whether implementation is happening as planned? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Activity has not helped the system to visualize its delivery chain, there is little understanding/differing views of how the strategies will be implemented or the role that various actors must play in that process. The Activity has not helped the system to analyse the delivery chain for risks associated with incentives, capacity, and commitment, there are no plans in place to mitigate such risks. The Activity has not helped the System identify feedback loops; System, may monitor whether the work has happened and whether outcomes are changing, but there is little attention to the steps of implementation in between. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Activity has helped the system to clearly visualize the chain of actors through which implementation will occur, there is agreement and a shared understanding in the system about the chain's structure. The Activity has helped the System to analyse the delivery chain to identify potential weak links, misaligned incentives and funding flows, capacity/resource constraints and other risks, and develop robust plans to manage these risks. The Activity has helped the System to identify feedback loops to help monitor various parts of the chain; it regularly collects data from these feedback loops and uses it to inform the work.

2. Drive Delivery			
Element	Questions to consider	Weak progress (Red)	Strong progress (Green)
<p>2A. Use Data Effectively</p> <p>Has the Activity strengthened the system's capacity to generate, analyze and use data?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the Activity helped the system to understand HOW it is performing on key metrics? • Has the Activity helped the system to understand WHY it is performing the way it is on key metrics? • Has the Activity enabled the system to understand the extent to which policies and interventions are working and providing value for money? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data are not readily available or are not analysed regularly - even in relation to the aspects of student learning/system performance which were the focus of the Activity. • The drivers and root causes of performance are poorly understood - even in relation to the aspects of student learning/system performance which were the focus of the Activity. • The evidence bases for understanding the extent to which policies and interventions have worked or are working is weak - even in relation to the aspects of student learning/system performance which were the focus of the Activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Activity has helped establish new sources of robust data and/or tools/techniques for analysing data that are regularly being used by system staff and leaders to identify strengths, weaknesses and trends in performance (including benchmarking performance within the system and against peers). • The Activity has helped establish new approaches to investigating trends in performance that are well used by system leaders to understand root causes and inform decision making. • As a result of the Activity, system leaders have access to a much stronger evidence base to understand what is working (generally and for different localities and groups of students), and are using evidence to assess value for money of different approaches, and make policy and investment decisions.

2. Drive Delivery			
Element	Questions to consider	Weak progress (Red)	Strong progress (Green)
<p>2B. Monitor Performance and Solve Problems</p> <p>Has the Activity established effective routines and approaches to review progress and solve problems early?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the Activity supported the system to set up regular, structured conversations to review progress and drive implementation forward? • Has the Activity supported the system to put in place a process for identifying and prioritizing problems in implementation before they become too big to handle? • Has the Activity helped the system to maintain its focus on student outcomes through challenges and distractions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversations for monitoring progress occur infrequently, if at all; system leaders lack a clear picture of how implementation is going - even in relation to the aspects of student learning/system performance which were the focus of the Activity. • The Activity did not help the system establish a clear approach for identifying and addressing problems or build the problem-solving capacity of system staff. • Despite the Activity, the system does not maintain a consistent focus; priorities shift frequently with the “political winds”, and leaders do not demonstrate a commitment to any agenda. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Activity has established an approach to regularly monitoring and discussing progress which is being used consistently to drive implementation, surface challenges and enable accountability and action to address underperformance. • The Activity established a clear process for identifying, prioritizing and taking action on problems before they derail delivery, and provided system staff with the tools to analyse and resolve problems effectively; these processes and tools are well-used and valued in the system. • The Activity has helped system leaders build momentum for ongoing reform and maintain their focus and resolve in the face of challenges, distractions and crises.

2. Drive Delivery			
Element	Questions to consider	Weak progress (Red)	Strong progress (Green)
<p>2C. Harness the Power of Relationships</p> <p>Has the Activity strengthened the system's capacity to identify, cultivate and maintain key stakeholder relationships?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the Activity enabled the system to better identify its key stakeholders, including the 7-10 influential people most critical to achieving its goal(s)? • Has the Activity created or enhanced stakeholder networks, forums or communication channels capable of supporting long-term reform? • Has the Activity enabled the system to tackle system-level relational and political barriers to change? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Activity has not helped the system to better understand its stakeholders. • The Activity has not added to or enhanced the mechanisms for engaging stakeholders in the system; there is fragmentation and duplication of efforts. • The Activity has focused on providing technical advice and support, but has not equipped the system to address the relational and political factors that can impede change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Activity has equipped the system with a precise map of its stakeholder relationships, including the 7-10 influential people most critical to achieving its goal(s); this analysis has proved to be of ongoing value for system leaders. • Networks, forums and/or communication channels created through the Activity continue to act as invaluable mechanisms for system leaders to seek support, commitments, expertise and resources for their reforms - including from local stakeholders (partner country governments, civil society, students) and international donors/organizations. • The Activity has included valuable, pragmatic advice and support to help system leaders manage and overcome relational and political barriers to change (e.g., traditional hierarchies or vested interests).

3. Create an Improvement Culture			
Element	Questions to consider	Weak progress (Red)	Strong progress (Green)
<p>3A. Review Capacity to Deliver</p> <p>Has the Activity supported the system to regularly and deliberately review its existing capacity to drive progress?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the Activity helped the system to understand its institutional capacity to implement? • Has the Activity helped the system to identify challenge areas for focus using data and stakeholder feedback? • Has the Activity helped the system leaders to adopt a culture of regular reflection and continuous improvement? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Activity has not supported the System to consider the capacity needed to implement its goals. • Challenge areas are identified based on anecdotes and assumptions, the Activity has not supported the system to take data or feedback from stakeholders into account. • The Activity has not supported the system leaders to adopt a culture of reflection and improvement; any assessments of capacity have been one-off, outside-in and have not been influential in decision making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Activity has supported the System to intentionally review its capacity to deliver in the broadest sense (including human, technological, financial and operational capacity) and have a clear sense of the capacity it will take to achieve its goals. • The Activity has supported the system to have a realistic view of challenge areas based on data and feedback from a range of internal and external stakeholders, and identify the roles in its delivery chain that are key to building and sustaining improvements in capacity. • The Activity has supported the system leaders to develop a habit of regularly reflecting with their teams on improving structures and ways of working and identifying clear next steps.

3. Create an Improvement Culture

Element	Questions to consider	Weak progress (Red)	Strong progress (Green)
<p>3B. Build System Capacity All the Time</p> <p>Has the Activity enhanced the system's ability to build its own capacity?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the Activity supported the system to set up structures and processes to support the continuous building of capacity? • Has the Activity increased local leadership and innovation capacity? • Has the Activity supported the system to develop its capacity to provide stewardship, oversight, and appropriate safeguards for non-state providers and public-private partnerships in education? • Did the Activity leverage, build on or feed into other country or donor-led capacity building efforts? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are few opportunities for staff and stakeholders to learn and practice new skills needed for their work. Organizational structures and processes inhibit staff learning and growth, staff have no personal or professional incentives to improve. • The Activity did not increase the technical/implementation skill of local leadership, create ownership of reform efforts or empower existing and new leaders to innovate and independently drive reform. • The Activity has not supported the country government to build capacity and mechanisms to regulate other education providers, public-private partnerships are disincentivized. • Any systems strengthening work as part of the Activity took place in isolation and did not leverage other capacity building efforts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Activity has supported the system to create opportunities for staff and other stakeholders to formally learn new skills. Organizational structures and processes promote learning and improvement and make it easy for staff with the right skills in the right place to drive implementation. • The Activity empowered local leadership by creating ownership of reform efforts, increasing their technical/ implementation capacity, and enabling new and existing leaders to independently drive reform, and test, evaluate and scale promising innovations. • The Activity has supported the country government to streamline regulation of non-state education providers and public-private partnerships which can enhance the reach and quality of education and to incentivize private sector to contribute to resolution of education challenges. • All systems strengthening work as part of the Activity was informed by a careful analysis of the landscape; there is clear evidence of how the Activity multiplied the impact of other capacity building efforts in the system and vice versa.

3. Create an Improvement Culture			
Element	Questions to consider	Weak progress (Red)	Strong progress (Green)
<p>3C. Leverage Educational Technology</p> <p>Has the Activity helped to leverage educational technology and address the digital divide?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the Activity built the capacity of the system to leverage educational technology? Has the Activity helped the system to address the digital divide and understand the barriers to remote/digital learning? Has the use of/investment in educational technology (and the EdTech Ecosystem framework) via the Activity resulted in increased system resilience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Activity has not supported the system to acquire the infrastructure or technical capability to leverage EdTech. The Activity has not supported the system to address the disparity in access and use of educational technology across different regions, there is no understanding of why some schools/regions do not leverage digital learning. The Activity has not supported the system to leverage EdTech to increase resilience, there is no practical complementarity of EdTech with traditional learning in classrooms, and EdTech cannot substitute for traditional learning if needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Activity has supported the system to acquire the infrastructure to access EdTech and built capacity of system actors to use EdTech in ways that add significant and demonstrable value to learning. The Activity has supported the system to address the disparity in access and use of EdTech across different regions, there is a clear understanding of why some schools/regions do not leverage digital learning and robust plans for how these barriers will be dismantled The Activity has supported the system to leverage ed tech to complement, support, or substitute for traditional learning in classrooms as needed, significantly and demonstrably increasing system resilience; system leaders been supported to make strategic policy decisions about ed tech, informed by an understanding of the innovation ecosystem that can support EdTech to scale in their context.

<p>3D. Promote Equity and Inclusion</p> <p>Has the Activity strengthened the system's capacity to deliver equitable outcomes and inclusive learning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the Activity supported the system to design education programs that are accessible, inclusive, and culturally and conflict-sensitive? • Did the Activity increase the system's capacity to ensure more equitable provision of learning opportunities? • Did the Activity support the system to ensure learning environments are safe, violence-free, and inclusive? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Activity has not supported the system to use assessments of equity and inclusion to inform policy making or program design. • The Activity has not supported the system to be more equitable: data on excluded groups is missing, teachers do not have the right training, learning materials, infrastructure, and use of technology does not support equitable provision of learning opportunities. • The Activity has not supported the system to ensure safe, violence-free and inclusive learning environments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Activity has supported assessments of equity and inclusion (which demographics/geographies are excluded and why) which now consistently inform policy making and programming (design of programs and infrastructure, practices in and out of school, allocation of resources) in the system. • The Activity has significantly increased the system's capacity to be more equitable, for example by data collection on excluded groups, the allocation of resources, the training and support for teachers, accessibility of learning materials, infrastructure, transportation, and assistive technologies • The Activity has encouraged and incentivized national and local governments to incorporate safety and wellbeing considerations (including resilience to conflicts and natural disasters, addressing the needs of learner with disabilities and reducing gender-based violence) into policy making and program implementation.
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Annex C: Heatmap Ratings for Activities

C.1 Bangladesh—Reading Enhancement for Advancing Development (READ)

Country: Bangladesh

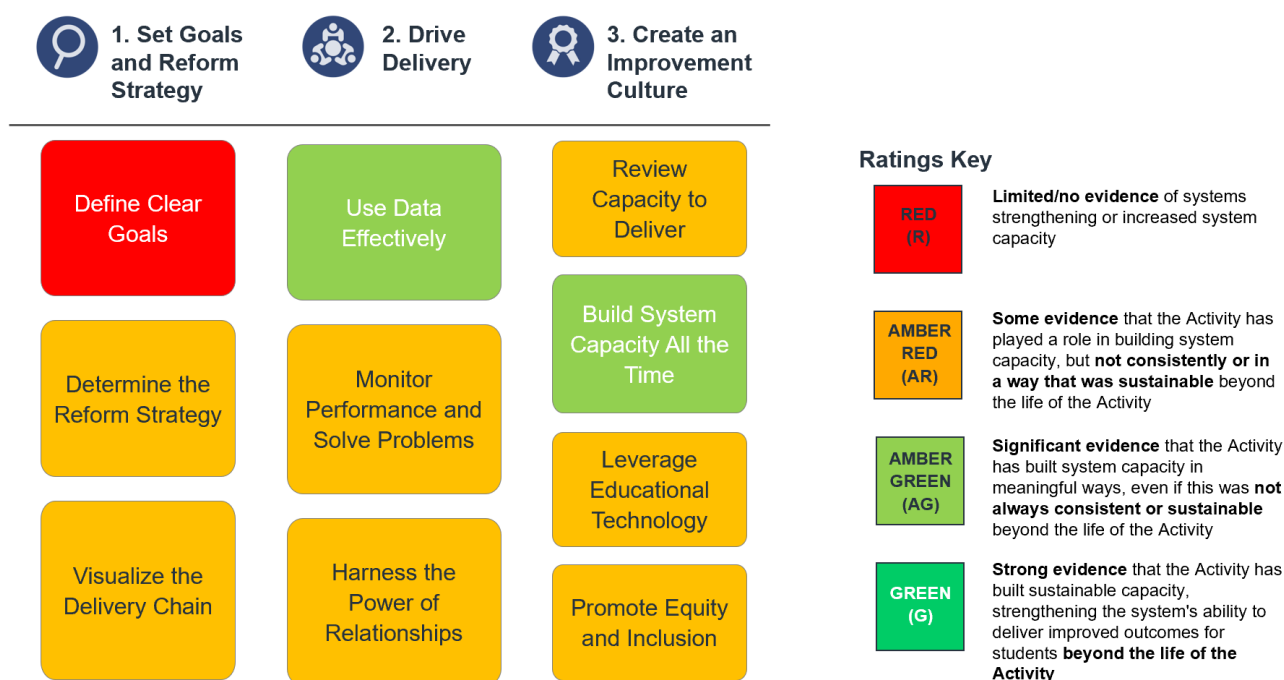
Activity: Reading Enhancement for Advancing Development

Timeframe: 2013–2018

Geographical Scope: 19 out of 64 districts

Activity Description: Supporting the education system to improve children’s reading skills through the capacity-building of teachers, conducting reading assessments, facilitating the provision of levelled supplementary reading materials, and engaging the community to promote reading

Heatmap Ratings and Rationale:



- While READ contributed to the system’s existing efforts to enhance the quality of education in Bangladesh, we did not find evidence that it supported the system to set goals grounded in student outcomes or translate goals for learning into specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound (SMART) targets. **(Element 1A: Define Clear Goals)**
- READ demonstrated a set of strategies to improve early grade reading in its target schools, including improving literacy instruction through training teachers, developing new teaching and learning materials, introducing formative assessments, and increasing community mobilization. However, we found limited evidence that the Activity built the capacity of system actors to prioritize and set strategies and

approaches based on ongoing assessment of drivers of impact. **(Element 1B: Determine the Reform Strategy)**

- We found evidence that READ supported the system to use student learning data obtained through the Instructional Adjustment Tool (IAT) to review and discuss progress. The Activity trained teachers on conducting and using formative assessments to adjust their teaching practices. We heard that the data were being analyzed by the education officials who were trained by the Activity. Results from IAT were also shared with various stakeholders and discussed at the district levels to compare progress, though it is not clear how frequently such discussions took place. We also heard that data on student performance were used to improve teaching practices. However, we did not find evidence of the extent to which these capacities and practices around data were embedded into the system to inform decision-making and continued to benefit the system beyond the life of the Activity. **(Element 2A: Use Data Effectively, Element 2B: Monitor Performance and Solve Problems)**
- READ engaged diverse stakeholders, setting up working groups and advisory committees with the government and national experts to ensure alignment, feedback, and ownership of READ initiatives. The Activity also partnered with local nongovernmental organizations for implementation. In addition, the Activity engaged school management committees and parents to increase awareness around reading and established community reading clubs and reading camps. Several of these stakeholder engagement opportunities were initiated by READ; however, we do not have evidence on the extent to which the Activity built the system's capacity to continue these stakeholder engagement forums beyond READ, or whether these forums persisted once the Activity ended. Similarly, although we heard that the Activity mapped key stakeholders and identified their role in implementation, it is unclear how this built the capacity of the system to understand and analyze its delivery chain. **(Element 1C: Visualize the Delivery Chain, Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships)**
- There is evidence that READ dedicated efforts to review the system's existing capacities and situation. For example, in Khagrachari, a multi-lingual environment, READ conducted a situation analysis on the languages used within and outside schools, and a baseline on the reading skills and background of the students. Likewise, it conducted a situational analysis of multi-media classrooms to identify needs. The findings of the analysis were shared with the system prior to designing the relevant training modules. Additionally, it conducted a stock-taking analysis of early grade reading materials. However, we did not find evidence that the Activity strengthened the system's ability to review its capacity to drive progress on an ongoing basis. **(Element 3A: Review Capacity to Deliver)**
- There is some evidence that READ contributed to building the capacity of the system to build its own capacity, particularly through contributions to teacher training. READ emphasized the academic supervision of teachers for ongoing support and trained administrators through a cascaded training model. It also conducted training for teachers and other officials on several topics including reading instruction and assessments. There is evidence that the system institutionalized some of READ's capacity-building efforts. For example, the reading instruction and assessments strategy was embedded in the in-service teacher training curriculum. Similarly, the literacy instruction training was endorsed by the reading instruction guidelines shared by the Directorate General of the Department of Primary Education. We also heard

that some teachers continued to use instruction techniques introduced by READ beyond the life of the Activity. **(Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time)**

- READ had a focus on contributing to the system's efforts toward educational technology: it digitized teaching and learning materials and developed applications to support reading which were uploaded on the Department of Primary Education's website. Further, it trained teachers to support their use of technology while teaching. However, we did not find evidence that it built the system's capacity to lead and scale-up such initiatives, or to make strategic choices on the use of educational technology to address the digital divide. **(Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology)**
- There is some evidence that READ contributed to inclusive and equitable education. For example, it supported the alignment of Grade 1 textbooks in select Indigenous languages with the curriculum and conducted book levelling workshops for select books in Indigenous languages. It also customized reading camps to support struggling readers. Additionally, READ's baseline study and final evaluation included information on equity-related indicators, and the evaluation analyzed the relationship between these variables and literacy outcomes. However, we did not find evidence that the Activity used these data to inform program design or build the capacity of the system to do so. Additionally, READ did not focus on learning outcomes of children with disabilities, girls, or children from marginalized communities **(3D: Promote Equity and Inclusion)**

C.2 India—Scaling-Up Early Reading Intervention (SERI)

Country: India

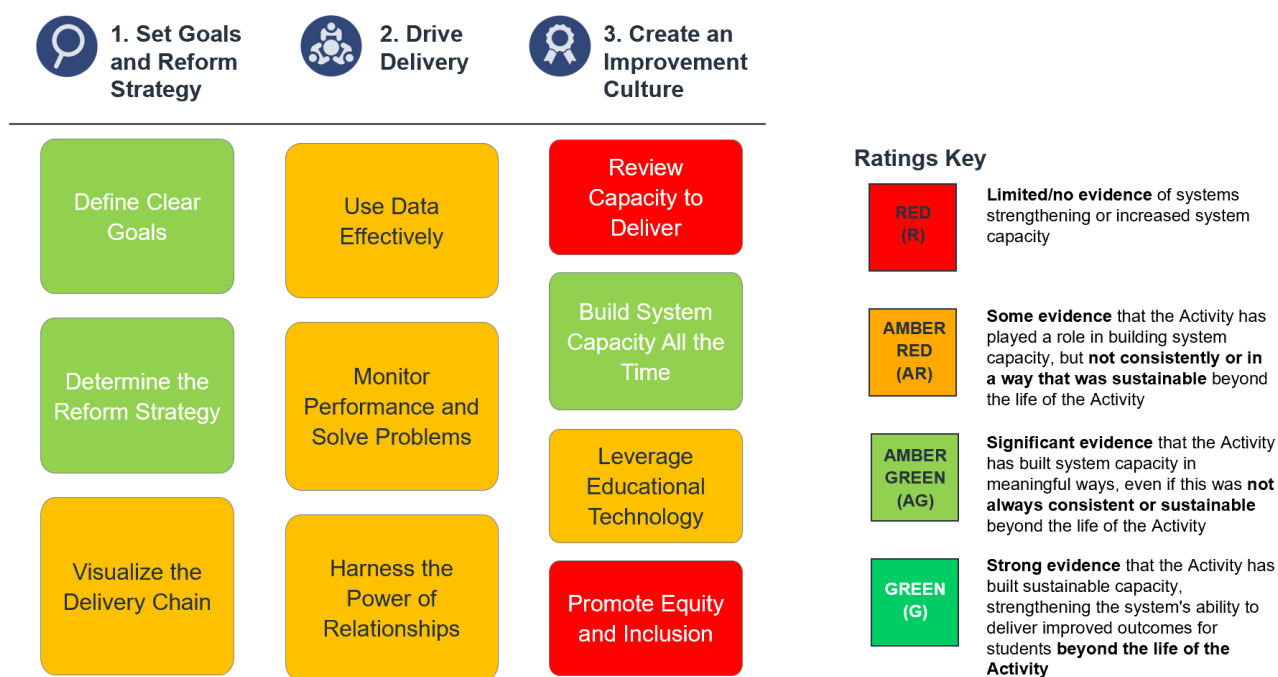
Activity: Scaling-Up Early Reading Intervention

Timeframe: 2015–2022

Geographical Scope: 4 states²² out of 28 states and 8 Union Territories

Activity Description: Supporting the system to improve early grade reading outcomes through developing teaching and learning materials, conducting reading assessments, providing teacher training and support, and supporting school libraries

Heatmap Ratings and Rationale:



- We heard that SERI's advocacy had a significant role in shifting the government focus from drop-out rates and access issues to the quality of education. The Activity introduced measures of foundational literacy and facilitated the development of fluency benchmarks for the Hindi language. Interviewees mentioned that because of the contributions of SERI, fluency is now a national goal that administrators strive to achieve. However, we did not find evidence of SERI enabling the system to set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound (SMART) targets grounded in student outcomes. **(Element 1A: Define Clear Goals)**
- The Activity built the system's capacity to approach foundational learning in a systematic way, with interviewees saying that the system has taken up SERI's practices. The Activity's model of literacy was incorporated in the National Education Policy and National Program for Education and has informed the NIPUN Bharat

²² Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh

Mission,²³ as well as state-level initiatives in the target states. The three-phase approach, ‘I do, we do, and you do’ employed by the Activity allowed it to demonstrate interventions to the system and generate necessary evidence in the ‘I do’ phase to help the system make strategic choices when scaling up the interventions. However, we did not find evidence that the Activity supported the system with planning for financial sustainability [REDACTED] which was cited by interviewees as a constraint in scaling up the impact of SERI’s reading interventions. Similarly, though the Activity focused on engaging existing system actors in the reform efforts, some actors, such as the cluster resource coordinators, did not have the bandwidth to undertake all the assigned tasks. **(Element 1B: Determine the Reform Strategy, Element 1C: Visualize the Delivery Chain)**

- SERI contributed to starting a discussion around foundational learning measurement, through the introduction of key indicators. We heard that in Chhattisgarh, SERI influenced the state to use fluency and comprehension categories in its state-level assessments to assess students across the state. The Activity also supported monitoring mechanisms, for example, through providing training and data collection tools to cluster coordinators. There is limited evidence of the extent to which these monitoring tools were adopted by the system. We also did not find evidence that the Activity supported the system with putting in place routines and processes for reviewing the data to identify challenges and solve problems. **(Element 2A: Use Data Effectively, Element 2B: Monitor Performance and Solve Problems)**
- There is evidence that SERI identified and cultivated key stakeholder relationships. It contributed to creation of networks, such as mobilizing nongovernmental organizations to form coalitions to advocate for foundational literacy and support the system. SERI was also part of the steering committee that provided it with a platform to engage with experts and government officials and helped the system leverage [REDACTED].
[REDACTED] However, there is no evidence of the system being supported to take a leading role in the coalitions and collaborations created through the Activity, or whether the networks and relationships created by SERI will continue to benefit the system beyond SERI. **(Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships)**
- While there is some evidence that SERI dedicated efforts to review the existing learning content and needs, the objective of these reviews was limited to informing the Activity and not the larger system. There is little evidence to suggest that SERI enhanced or supported the system’s capacity to review its own capacity on an ongoing basis. **(Element 3A: Review Capacity to Deliver)**
- SERI articulated an ‘I do, you do, we do’ approach to systems strengthening from the onset, working closely with government institutions and actors with the intent to transfer ownership of the interventions to the system, while gradually increasing the target schools in each phase of its work. However, there is evidence that even in the ‘you do’ phase, the implementing partner had to provide more technical support than it had earlier anticipated as the system was unable to independently take the interventions forward. Consequently, it was reported that the ‘you do’ phase emerged as a second iteration of the ‘we do’ phase. We heard: ‘[SERI] were partly able to help the government reform. Moving from ‘I do’ to ‘You do’ was a limitation.’ [REDACTED]

²³ The Ministry of Education has launched the National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy, which is also known as NIPUN Bharat Mission.

political considerations of the system were additional challenges for the system in the 'you do' phase. **(Element 1C/Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time)**

- While SERI initially did not have any educational technology component, in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, the Activity pivoted and digitized learning material at the government's request. The Activity also supported Pragati, an application for foundational literacy and numeracy assessments, which the system has plans to adopt and use for statewide assessments in Uttarakhand. However, there is still limited evidence of the institutionalization and scale-up of these educational technology solutions, and consequently, limited evidence that SERI built the system's capacity to leverage education technology consistently or at scale. **(Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology)**
- We found limited evidence that SERI supported the system to become more equitable and inclusive. The Activity developed multilingual content in one state to make it accessible to children regardless of their first language. However, success in this is yet to be determined by the Activity. There is no evidence that SERI focused on improving learning outcomes for children with disabilities, girls, or children from other excluded groups. **(Element 3D: Promote Equity and Inclusion)**

C.3 Indonesia—Prioritizing Reform, Innovation, and Opportunities for Reaching Indonesia’s Teachers, Administrators, and Students (PRIORITAS)

Country: Indonesia

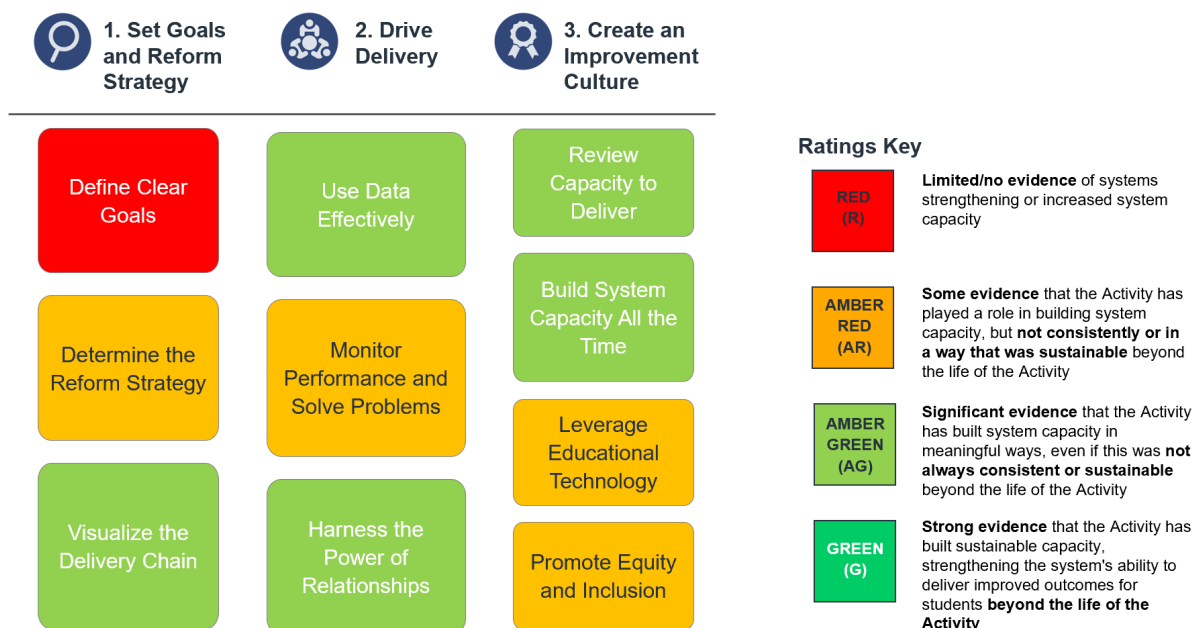
Activity: Prioritizing Reform, Innovation, and Opportunities for Reaching Indonesia’s Teachers, Administrators, and Students

Timeframe: 2012–2017

Geographical Scope: 9²⁴ out of 37 provinces

Activity Description: Supporting the education system to improve learning outcomes through improving teaching practices, education management and governance in schools, strengthening teacher training institutes, and enhancing coordination between different tiers of the system

Heatmap Ratings and Rationale:



- We found that PRIORITAS used learning outcomes data (e.g., the early grade reading assessment) to advocate for the system to focus on reading, and there is some evidence that it moved the conversation around students’ outcomes forward. However, it is not clear that it supported the system to set goals grounded in student outcomes or to translate goals into specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound (SMART) targets. (**Element 1A: Define Clear Goals**)
- PRIORITAS worked with system actors to embed reform practices in policies, plans, and budgets. Several policy recommendations made by PRIORITAS were incorporated in the system’s development and strategic plans, and some districts

²⁴ Provinces: Aceh, North Sumatra, Banten, Central Java, West Java, East Java, South Sulawesi, Papua and West Papua; the Activity worked with 90 districts across these 7 provinces.

██████████ replicate and disseminate the Activity’s interventions. Interventions also built on existing work by USAID in Indonesia. However, we heard that turnover at the ministry limited the institutional memory of the system, and district officials were more likely than national system actors at the center to be familiar with PRIORITAS reforms. **(Element 1B: Determine the Reform Strategy)**

- One of the key successes of PRIORITAS was facilitating communication and collaboration between schools and teacher training institutes (TTI). We heard that traditionally TTIs had been disconnected from schools, with schools relying on nongovernmental organizations, rather than TTIs, for instructional advice and support. The Activity’s efforts resulted in all partner districts completing plans and budgets to disseminate good practices through continuing professional development, matched to TTIs as service providers. **(Element 1C: Visualize the Delivery Chain, Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships, Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time)**
- PRIORITAS strengthened data flow between districts, provinces, and the central ministry by supporting upgrades to the education management information system (EMIS). The Activity encouraged districts to input data on students, teachers, and infrastructure into EMIS to enable the decisions of the ministry and provincial level on school grants to be based on the needs of the schools. We heard: *“The project explained the flow of data from the school level to the ministry to [the schools] to explain the importance of this and the budgetary implications.”* At the district level, the Activity supported the analysis of data with respect to teachers, their qualifications, and their allocation, to help understand resource gaps and oversupply. **(Element 2A: Use Data Effectively, Element 1C: Visualize Delivery Chain, Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology)**
- The Activity had baseline, midline, and endline rounds of monitoring, which included assessments, and school and classroom observations and interviews. We found that the monitoring efforts were undertaken by the Activity together with the local government, and it is not clear the extent to which these practices were embedded in the system. Additionally, we heard that the Activity had limited focus on monitoring the trained trainers and measuring the impact of trainings, which was noted by stakeholders as a limitation. **(Element 2A: Use Data Effectively, Element 2B: Monitor Performance and Solve Problems)**
- PRIORITAS initiatives mostly started with assessment studies to better understand challenges and to prioritize ways to tackle them using a bottom-up approach. These included: district capacity assessment, assessment of the role of provinces in education management, a teacher deployment study, and a collaborative capacity assessment (a focus groups with multiple relevant stakeholders in each district to understand the need for capacity development and the potential role of the province in building it). PRIORITAS also conducted classroom action research to identify issues in teaching and learning in schools and a study to review the implementation of the inclusive education policy. However, these reviews were largely led by the Activity, and there is little evidence that PRIORITAS built the system actors’ ability to regularly review its existing capacity to drive progress **(Element 3A: Review Capacity to Deliver)**
- PRIORITAS worked extensively on continuous professional development of educators and aimed to build the system’s capacity to replicate and continue these efforts. There

is evidence that the system received the Activity's efforts positively and replicated them [REDACTED]. However, in the final evaluation report, local government officials cited challenges including [REDACTED] limited human resources, and political commitments of local leaders that may prevent the system from independently continuing with these interventions. **(Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time)**

- PRIORITAS introduced several initiatives to support the system to leverage educational technology. The Activity developed a financial management application for schools to enhance transparency, created a tool to help districts with mapping and redistributing teachers, and produced videos for remote capacity-building of teachers and school staff. However, there is little evidence that PRIORITAS built the system's capacity to independently scale these initiatives or use educational technology systematically to enhance impact of reform activities. A survey respondent highlighted that while PRIORITAS introduced some technical innovations, the Activity ended before the "current drive to use technology that started in 2019/2020." **(Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology)**
- PRIORITAS raised awareness around inclusive education. For example, the Activity influenced the decision to incorporate inclusive education into the strategic plans for 20 districts and developed instruments to help teachers and principals identify children with special needs. It also included both mainstream schools and madrassahs in its partner schools. Additionally, PRIORITAS included content on accommodating the individual needs of students in the whole school development training module. However, these initiatives had a limited scope, and there is little evidence that the Activity built the system's capacity to implement them across all provinces and schools. **(3D: Promote Equity and Inclusion)**

C.4 Laos—Learn to Read (LtR)

Country: Laos

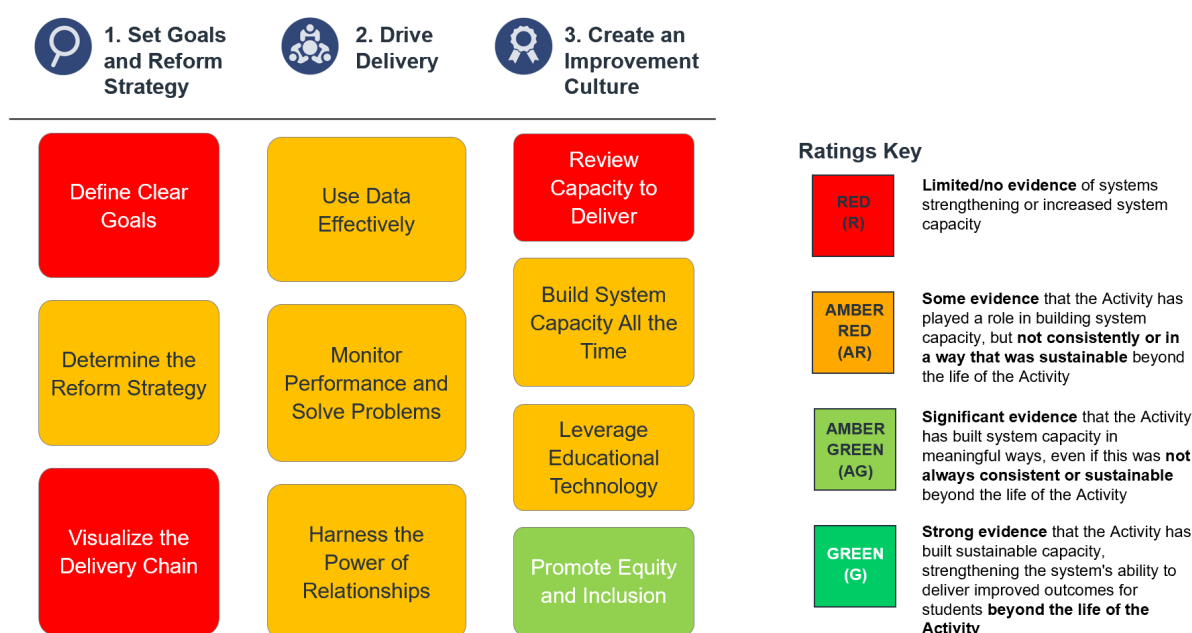
Activity: Learn to Read

Timeframe: 2018–2023

Geographical Scope: 4²⁵ out of 17 provinces and one prefecture

Activity Description: Supporting the education system to improve the reading skills of students by developing and distributing teaching and learning materials, providing support to teachers including in-service teacher training, classroom observation and teacher learning circles, and engaging school communities, particularly parents and other caregivers

Heatmap Ratings and Rationale:



- Student learning goals defined internally by LtR have not been translated into system-wide goals, and the Activity has had limited impact in supporting the system to set outcome goals or to define targets, e.g., by developing student proficiency benchmarks. **(Element 1A: Define Clear Goals)**
- LtR collaborated with the system to develop learning materials, teacher training, and school-based coaching, to support the ministry's education development plan, and model and advocate for effective approaches to improve reading outcomes. Stakeholders noted financial constraints in sustaining and scaling up LtR's reforms, particularly the teacher training reform and monitoring and evaluation practices, indicating limited support to the system to plan for financial sustainability or to set strategies appropriate to its context. **(Element 1B: Determine the Reform Strategy)**

²⁵ Provinces: Attapeu, Champassak, Xiengkhouang, and Vientiane

- There is some evidence, albeit limited, that LtR helped the system generate student outcomes data, particularly because the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic disrupted plans for conducting the early grade reading assessment. However, the Activity did train teachers to use formative assessment data to inform their classroom practice. **(Element 2A: Use Data Effectively)**
- LtR worked with the system to monitor teacher performance through school visits and classroom observations, which was followed by coaching sessions for teachers. However, we heard that: “The government did not have the budget to match the Activity’s monitoring capabilities.” Stakeholders also noted that district officials had limited capacity to conduct the monitoring visits prescribed by the Activity. These challenges also highlight the limited extent to which the Activity built the system’s capacity to analyze and plan for capacity and commitment challenges across its delivery chain. **(Element 1C: Visualize the Delivery Chain, Element 2A: Use Data Effectively, Element 2B: Monitor Performance and Solve Problems)**
- LtR works with [REDACTED] pre-primary and primary education initiatives, including with the [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] The Activity also co-chairs the Early Childhood Education Focal Group, which facilitates the system’s engagement with development partners, which included the prioritization of areas for the system’s 5-year education plan. We heard that the ministry coordinates its [REDACTED] initiatives well, in accordance with its reform priorities, but saw little evidence that LtR has enhanced the ministry’s capacity in this regard. **(Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships)**
- LtR worked to build the capacity of teachers to engage caregivers, parents, and the village education development committee to support children’s reading initiatives. We heard that systemizing engagement between parents and teachers can provide better support to children, but the community engagement component of the Activity is yet to be integrated within the system. **(Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships)**
- While LtR made some efforts to assess the system’s capacity, it did not conduct a formal diagnostic assessment of the relevant functional areas of the system. Aspects of the system’s capacity, such as the system leaders’ availability to participate in the interventions, capacity of district officials to participate in Activity reforms, and financial capabilities, were not always aligned with the Activity. A more systematic and collaborative assessment of capacity may have identified some of these issues earlier. We did not find evidence that LtR built the system’s ability to review its own capacity and functional limitations. **(Element 3A: Review Capacity to Deliver)**
- LtR adopted a phased approach of transitioning reform ownership to the system as part of its sustainability plan. However, the midterm performance evaluation of the Activity highlighted that system actors were not aware of the phasing approach and were not able to take on responsibilities in accordance with timelines outlined in the plan. Despite this, interviewees noted that LtR’s coordination with system actors has built the ministry’s technical capacity with regard to teacher training and curriculum reform, and that capacity of teachers and provincial education officers has also improved. **(Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time)**
- LtR helped the system leverage educational technology as a response to the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic by supporting online teacher trainings and developing digital resources for the ministry’s learning platform. Lack of access to

educational technology infrastructure and Internet connectivity limited the impact of these interventions. Additionally, LtR initiated the use of a digital tool to manage monitoring data from classroom visits, but there is limited evidence that this was adapted and scaled by the system. **(Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology)**

- LtR supported the system to promote equity in several ways. The Activity provided technical support to the Inclusive Education Promotion Center to revise the inclusive education curriculum, review materials, facilitate training of teachers, and develop the *National Strategy and Action Plan on Inclusive Education 2021–2025*. The Activity also supported the capacity-building of multi-grade teachers and piloted summer camps to support the reading needs of disadvantaged children. Additional advocacy by the Activity for initiatives such as a pilot of the student disability screening and referrals process could further support the system’s capacity to mainstream equity considerations into its reform agenda. **(Element 3D: Promote Equity and Inclusion)**

C.5 Nepal—Reading for All (R4A)

Country: Nepal

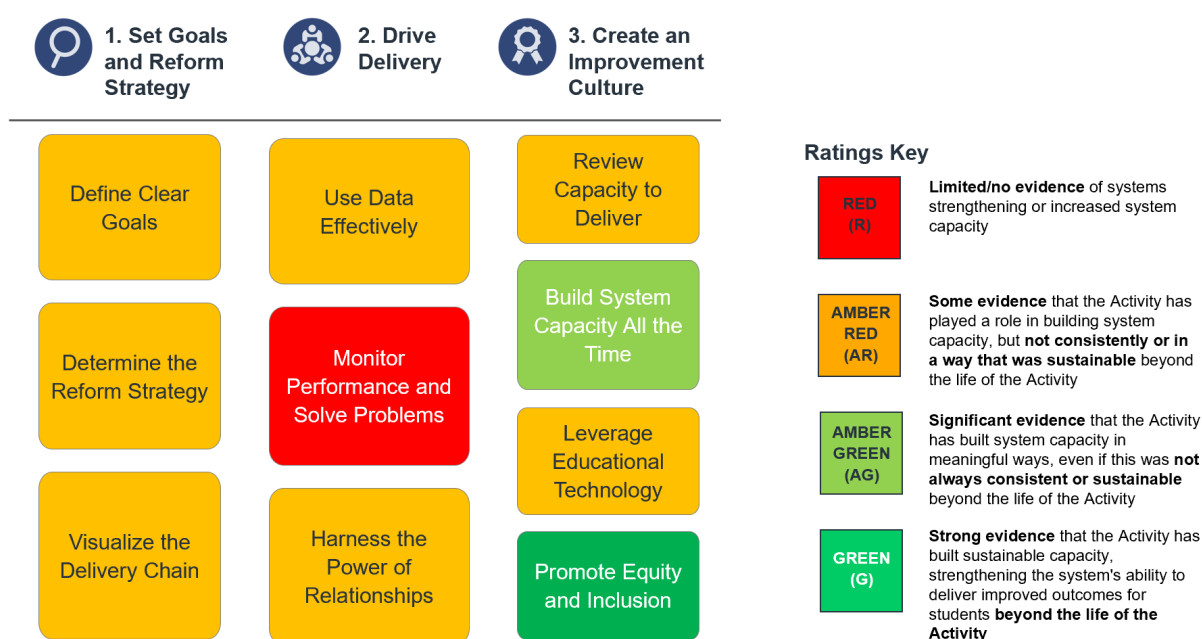
Activity: Reading for All

Timeframe: 201–2022

Geographical Scope: 16²⁶ out of 77 districts

Activity Description: Supporting the education system to improve the learning outcomes of children with disabilities through capacity building of teachers, developing teaching and learning materials, improving the data on children with disabilities and leveraging disabled person’s organizations to support children with disabilities

Heatmap Ratings and Rationale:



- R4A helped the system think beyond access issues for children with disabilities and focus its attention on their learning outcomes. It helped deepen the system’s understanding on learning outcomes of children with disabilities by administering an adapted version of the early grade reading assessment (EGRA). However, we did not find evidence that R4A supported the system with setting goals that are grounded in learning outcomes. **(Element 1A: Define Clear Goals)**
- R4A worked closely with the system to help it prioritize and support inclusive education, and we found that it contributed to building the system’s capacity to design and implement initiatives around it. A survey respondent mentioned that “*the Activity is helping the system innovate and lead development of local adaptations and solutions.*” We heard that R4A used evidence generated through action research and piloting of materials and approaches (such as individualized education plans) to identify effective strategies and shared the evidence with system leaders to advocate for policy changes

²⁶ Districts: Banke, Surkhet, Bhaktapur, Kaski, Dhankuta, Saptari, Parsa, Rupandehi, Manang, Mustang, Bardiya, Dang, Dolpa, Kailali, Kanchanpur, and Dadeldhura. However, in 2021 the project worked in 10 districts.

and budget allocation. We also heard that R4A's design and pilot approach set a gold standard for interventions around learning outcomes. While these are all steps in the right direction, it was reported that R4A's prescriptive design at the solicitation stage based on assumptions about system capacity limited its ability to strengthen the system to set appropriate reform strategies. Subsequently, we heard that the R4A's design could have benefited had it been co-designed with the system, and that there is still work to be done to build momentum and buy-in across the system on this area of reform. **(Element 1B: Determine the Reform Strategy)**

- R4A has an explicit focus on improving quality of data on children with disabilities. It worked with the system to develop an Integrated Education Management Information System sub-system for capturing data on children with disabilities and conducted capacity-building sessions for system actors. To gather data on learning outcomes, R4A collaborated with the system to adapt the EGRA tool for children with learning limitations and children with disabilities and engaged system actors and disabled persons' organizations (DPOs) to support the administration of the EGRA baseline, which was conducted in both home based and school settings. The Activity introduced the early screening of children with functional limitations and trained teachers to administer it. We heard that the system is committed to scaling the screening process nationwide. While R4A supported the system with generating and systemizing data, we saw little evidence of the system using data to make decisions. Likewise, there is little evidence that the Activity supported the system to systematically monitor its progress on learning reforms for children with disabilities or set up any routines to review data for problem solving. **(Element 2A: Use Data Effectively, Element 2B: Monitor Performance and Solve Problems)**
- R4A engaged system actors to work collaboratively to support inclusive education. The Activity worked in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, the Center for Education and Human Resource Development Department of Inclusive Education Section, Curriculum Development Center, Education Review Office, local government representatives, and DPO partners. Most notably, we heard: *"The Activity helped DPOs move from advocacy for access to being valued stakeholders contributing to ensuring learning outcomes for [children with disabilities]."* R4A helped the system engage DPOs in capacity assessments of the system, capacity development sessions, and the administration of EGRA. R4A also tried to facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration by participating in a steering committee with representatives from the Ministry of Health, MoEST, and Ministry of Women and Child. Despite the Activity's strong efforts in this area, stakeholders noted that advocacy and coordination efforts were very much led by the Activity, and it has yet to build the capacity and commitment of the system to take these forward independently. **(Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships, Element 1C: Visualize the Delivery Chain)**
- R4A contributed to building the capacity of different officials within the system, so they help the system improve itself over time. For example, it worked with the Center for Education and Human Resource Development to design, validate, and roll out tools for the early screening of children with learning disabilities. We heard: *"Municipalities will be able to continue with the screenings as they were the ones implementing the surveys through teachers, and logging information into the Integrated Education Management Information System."* The Activity trained system actors on administering the EGRA for children with disabilities and collaborated on the development of adapted

teaching materials. One of R4A's achievements was working with DPOs to enhance their understanding and role in supporting children with disabilities. We heard that while R4A worked to strengthen the local level, it has not sufficiently engaged the federal and provincial level stakeholders to strengthen their capacity on reforms for inclusive education. **(Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time)**

- While R4A used some educational technology interventions, there is little evidence that it built the capacity of the system to strategically use educational technology. R4A introduced a mobile application to teach sign language, provided tablets to children with hearing impairments, and developed digital learning content for children with disabilities, which was uploaded to the ministry's learning portal. However, we heard that R4A only provided a limited support to build the ministry's educational technology capacity. **(Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology)**
- R4A explicitly focused on strengthening the system's ability to support children with disabilities and improve their learning outcomes. We heard: *"The Activity has played a major role in getting inclusive education to be seen as a major priority that is an integral part of the school system."* A survey respondent added that R4A helped increase the system's understanding and confidence that it can address the needs of children with disabilities within existing schools, without creating a network of special schools. Additionally, there is evidence that R4A's gender equality and social inclusion plan helped further ensure inclusion in the Activity. **(Element 3D: Promote Equity and Inclusion)**

C.6 Pakistan—Sindh Reading Program (SRP)

Country: Pakistan

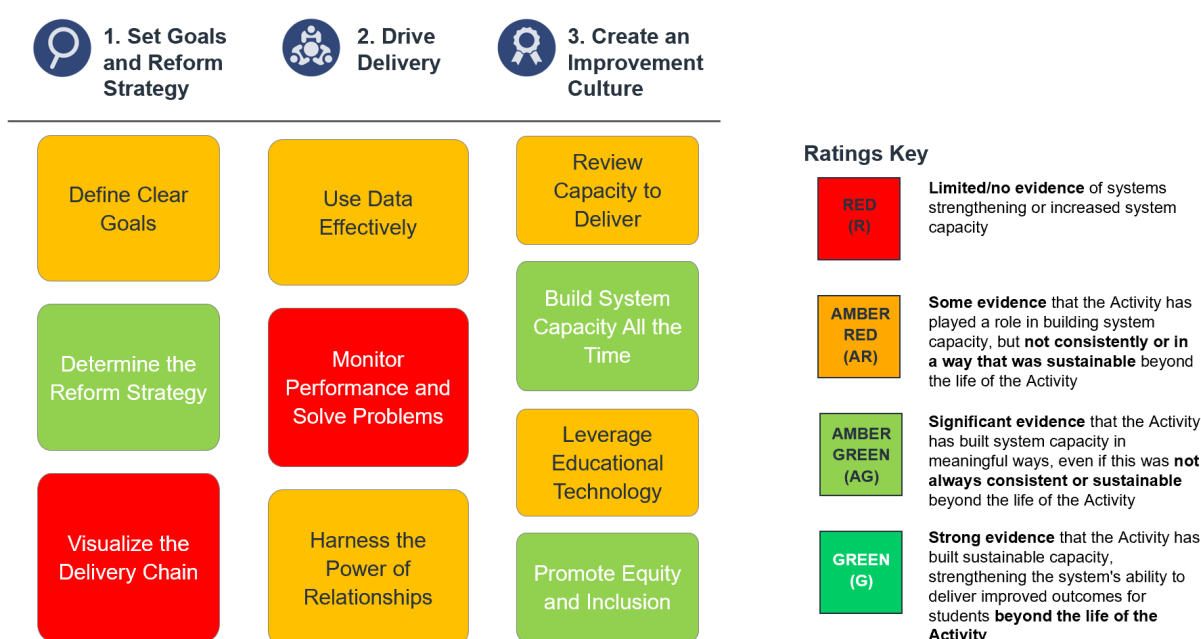
Activity: Sindh Reading Program

Timeframe: 2014–2019

Geographical Scope: 7 districts²⁷ and 5 towns of Karachi²⁸ out of 29 districts in Sindh

Activity Description: Supported the system to improve early grade reading through the capacity-building of teachers, developing teaching and learning materials, conducting reading assessments, contributing to creating more reading spaces for children, and facilitating learning opportunities for out-of-school children

Heatmap Ratings and Rationale:



- SRP helped make reading a priority in the Government of Sindh’s education policy and contributed to initiating a discussion on student outcomes. This was achieved by supporting the development of reading standards and benchmarks for the first time in Sindh’s basic education system. However, we did not find evidence that Activity supported the system to articulate goals grounded in student outcomes. **(Element 1A: Define Clear Goals)**
- SRP demonstrated and built the system’s understanding of practical strategies to improve reading, including formative assessment, teaching and learning materials, and a school-based teacher professional development program. The Activity contributed to the development of strategies for the system, such as the *Sindh Reading Improvement Strategy and Policy for Non-formal Basic Education*. It also embedded these efforts in the system’s budget request for the following year, as well as development plans [REDACTED]. However, we did not find evidence of whether the system was supported

²⁷ Districts: Dadu, Jacobabad, Kashmore, Khairpur, Larkana, Sukkur, Qambar-Shahdadkot

²⁸ Towns of Karachi: Orangi, Lyari, Kemari, Gadap, and Bin Qasim

to prioritize the right set of strategies beyond the program, and the extent of their implementation. **(Element 1B: Determine the Reform Strategy)**

- While SRP introduced and conducted several rounds of student assessments (early grade reading and formative assessments), trained system actors to conduct these assessments and analyze the data, and engaged system leaders in conversations on the resulting data, there is little evidence that the system independently continued with these practices after the Activity. Furthermore, we did not find any evidence that SRP helped the system set routines and processes to regularly review data and inform decisions. We heard: “Government officers, up to the Secretary level, began asking for data when making new policy suggestions and reforms. The concern is that once the reading program tapered off, it is not clear how much data is still being looked at.” With regard to data, a survey respondent noted: “The good practices introduced are not being institutionalized in the public education system.” **(Element 2A: Use Data Effectively, Element 2B: Monitor Performance and Solve Problems)**
- There is evidence that SRP worked with diverse stakeholders to promote reading. The Activity helped convene government officials and nongovernmental organizations to jointly promote a reading culture at the community level. Representatives from the Activity participated in the steering committee for Sindh basic education. Additionally, the Activity worked closely with development partners to strengthen the Non-formal Basic Education (NFBE) system. However, we did not find evidence that the system continued to leverage these collaborative channels to seek support, resources, or expertise, or if it took proactive measures to lead on the collaborations initiated by the Activity. Additionally, there is little evidence that SRP helped strengthen the system’s understanding of the delivery chain for more effective implementation. **(Element 1C: Visualize the Delivery Chain, Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships)**
- There is some evidence that SRP supported the system with conducting analysis of existing resources and approaches. For example, it reviewed existing NFBE policies and practices and engaged with relevant stakeholders to identify the strengths and gaps in the existing NFBE practices to inform its reform approach. Additionally, SRP reviewed and mapped the existing supplementary teaching and learning materials to identify gaps in the existing materials in Urdu and Sindhi language. The findings of the analysis were shared with the supplementary teaching and learning materials working group, which comprised system actors and experts. The Activity also conducted a review of the existing models for reading and math skills development. However, these reviews were limited in scope and led by the Activity, to inform its interventions, and not by the system. **(Element 3A: Review Capacity to Deliver)**
- SRP significantly contributed to public-private partnerships in education through the capacity building of Sindh Education Foundation trainers, contributing to the amendment of public-private partnership policy and practical recommendations to support public-private partnerships in education. The Activity also worked with system actors to build their capacity for material development (by co-developing materials), teacher professional development (by training teachers and facilitating peer-to-peer learning circles for teachers), and student assessments (by training early grade reading assessment assessors). However, we heard that the Activity was struggling to build commitment to change, and this sometimes limited the sustainability of impact and institutionalization of good practices. **(Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time)**

- There is some evidence SRP supported the system to leverage educational technology: the Activity introduced a tablet-based formative assessment application, set up an online resource center for learning materials, and launched an text message-based platform to share advice with teachers. However, the Activity had limited success supporting the system to address access constraints and make systematic use of educational technology. We heard: *'[Educational technology] practices weren't scaled after the program. Although [the system] saw the benefit, they thought these were too costly.'* (**Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology**)
- SRP contributed to strengthening NFBE and supported system capacity to ensure that learning is accessible to children not in the formal school system. The Activity partnered with the Non-Formal Education Directorate and aided the establishment of NFBE centers; provided technical support for the first-ever provincial NFBE policy in Sindh; and contributed to the design of its curriculum, assessments, teaching and learning materials, and monitoring system. SRP's community mobilization efforts also focused on girls' enrollment and retention. However, we did not find evidence that the Activity supported the system to mainstream equity considerations for marginalized groups into its agenda. (**Element 3D: Promote Equity and Inclusion**)

C.7 Pakistan—Pre-Service Teacher Education Project (Pre-STEP)

Country: Pakistan

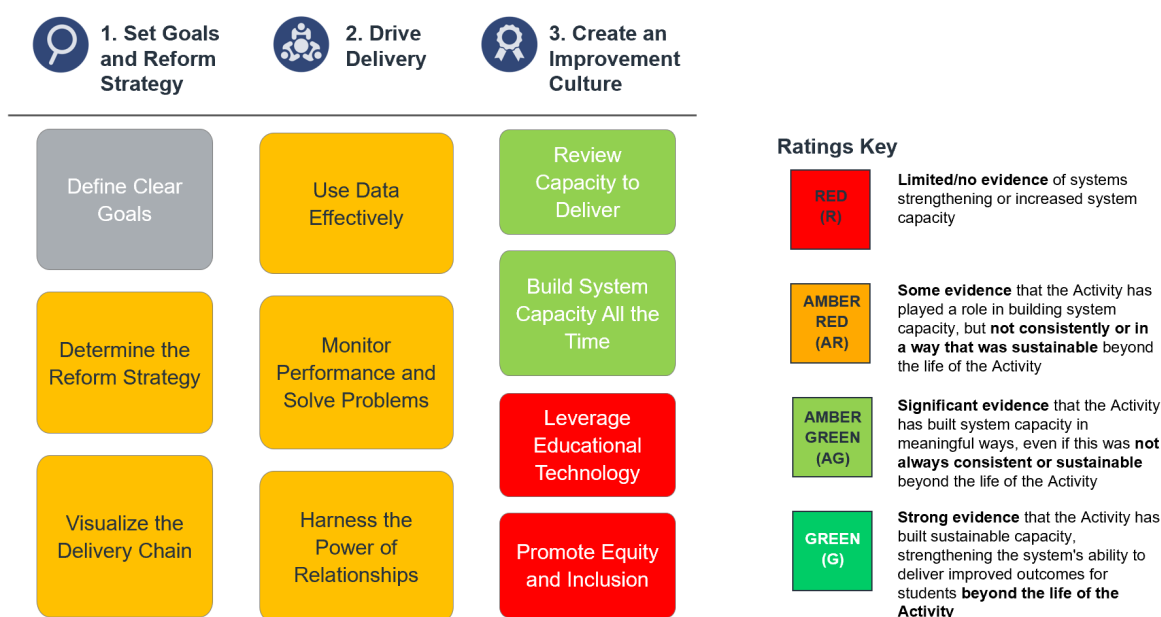
Activity: Pakistan Pre-Service Teacher Education Project

Timeframe: 2008–2013

Geographical Scope: National

Activity Description: Supporting the education system to improve the quality of teacher education in Pakistan by introducing reforms and working with the system and educational institutes to institutionalize these reforms

Heatmap Ratings and Rationale:²⁹



- Pre-STEP supported the system to introduce reforms to improve teacher quality. The Activity worked with the system to develop and implement a 4-year and a 2-year degree program for teacher education, reform teacher recruitment rules, and support teacher training. The Activity also worked with universities and colleges to develop plans to support the implementation of its reforms and to help them align processes and budgets with identified priorities. However, we heard that Pre-STEP's teacher education approach did not align with another [REDACTED] approach in the sector. We also heard that the Activity had limited impact on the system's capacity to plan for financial sustainability; for example, it was unclear whether the provincial governments would be able to sustain the proposed teacher salary increments. Overall, interviewees highlighted sustainability challenges for the Activity's reforms, suggesting limited systems strengthening to set effective reform strategies. (**Element 1B: Determine the Reform Strategy, Element 1C: Visualize the Delivery Chain**)

²⁹ Pre-STEP was not rated for *Element 1A: Define Clear Goals* since the focus of the Activity is on teacher education, not on student learning outcomes.

- Pre-STEP helped the system with “teacher mapping” to estimate the future demand of teachers. The Activity supported data collection to capture data on teachers, developed teacher profiles, integrated needs-projection models into the education management information system, and oriented system actors to use the that system. It is unclear to what extent the system continues to use this teacher mapping model. **(Element 2A: Use Data Effectively)**
- Pre-STEP conducted process evaluations and outcome evaluations for several initiatives, such as formative evaluations of teacher training modules. However, these efforts to conduct monitoring and evaluations were led by Pre-STEP, mainly to inform the Activity’s design, rather than to build the system actors’ capacity to understand and reflect on performance data. Similarly, a training database maintained by the Activity included information on all the trainings delivered and their participants, but was managed internally by the Activity and does not appear to have enhanced system capacity in this regard. **(Element 2A: Use Data Effectively, Element 2B: Monitor Performance and Solve Problems)**
- Pre-STEP worked closely with system actors and educational institutes in all its target areas and collaborated with local nongovernmental organizations to implement select initiatives. The Activity helped strengthen linkages between practicum schools and colleges to promote practicum and conducted workshops to improve linkages between universities and colleges. Pre-STEP set up a Research Advisory Council to select and support research grants under the Activity and established a national expert group to analyze and inform the in-service teacher education program. However, these forums were established by Pre-STEP for a particular task within the Activity, and there is little evidence that the system continued to leverage these stakeholder networks. **(Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships)**
- Pre-STEP supported the system to carry out several review activities: it supported colleges to develop assessment tools and conduct needs analysis to develop their improvement plans; it supported the provincial governments to conduct sector reviews to inform provincial strategic plans; and it supported teacher training institutions to self-audit for accreditation by National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education. There is little evidence, however, that the Activity built the capacity of the system to regularly review its capacity; reviews appear to have been largely one-time exercises to inform the design of specific plans and interventions, rather than to promote a culture of continuous improvement. **Element 3A: Review Capacity to Deliver)**
- Pre-STEP explicitly focused on building the capacity of teachers through strengthening teacher education. It contributed to the development and institutionalization of a 4-year and a 2-year degree program for teacher education and worked with the system to develop teacher certification and licensing frameworks. The national expert group established under the Activity helped develop a prototype for continuous professional development of teachers within the upgraded framework. However, we heard: “*The time frame [of the Activity] was a key challenge, as a program as ambitious as this cannot be completed in 5 years.*” In addition, changes in leadership within the system and in educational institutes impacted the interventions as it slowed down the processes, and the Activity had to make the additional effort to secure the approval of the new leadership to promote ownership of the reforms. Stakeholders told us that a bigger focus on the sustainability of reforms would have enabled the Activity to strengthen the system further. **(Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time)**

- There is some evidence that Pre-STEP helped the system leverage educational technology; however, the efforts to deploy educational technology were very limited in scale and scope. The Activity developed and introduced some blended learning modules and engaged experts to develop and introduce modules for remote teaching and build capacity of teacher educators on innovative pedagogies. It should be noted that these were pilot activities with a limited scope. While Pre-STEP introduced a course around educational technology in the degree programs, a formative evaluation mentions that there was a need to align it with the technological resources accessible to faculty and students. It is important to note that Pre-STEP was implemented almost a decade ago, when the focus on and access to technology was much different than it is today. **(Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology)**
- Pre-STEP's efforts to support equity and inclusivity within the Activity itself included ensuring a gender balance in the scholarships for teacher programs, facilitating distance education for remote learners, and translating some teacher training materials in Urdu to facilitate learning. However, there is little evidence that these efforts built the system's capacity to promote equity and inclusion over time. **(Element 3D: Promote Equity and Inclusion)**

C.8 Philippines—Opportunity 2.0

Country: Philippines

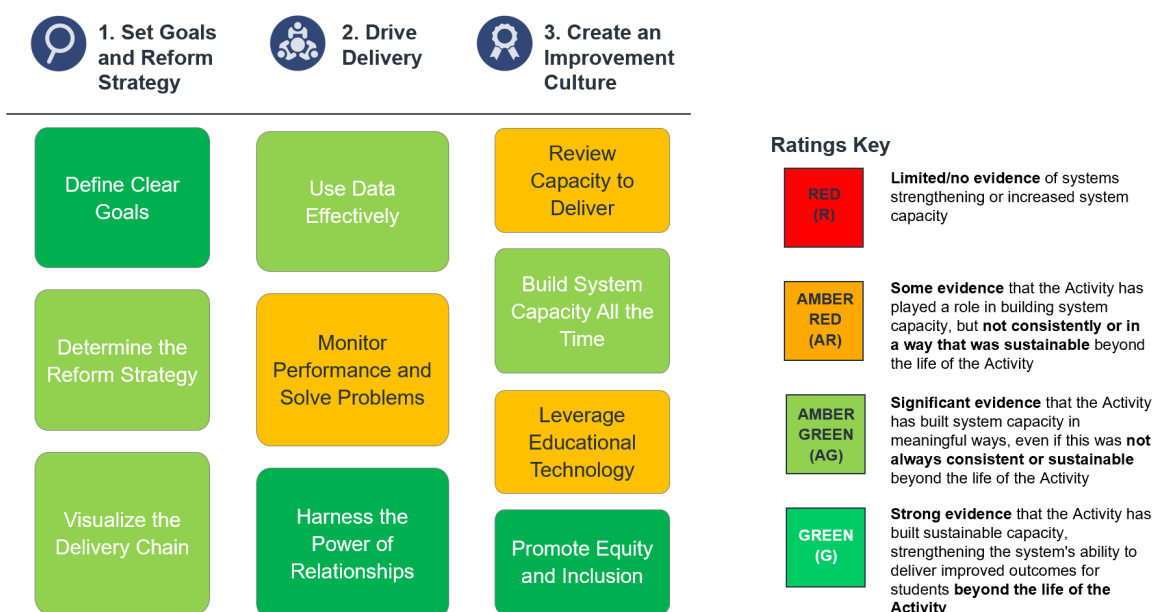
Activity: Opportunity 2.0

Timeframe: 2020–2025

Geographical Scope: 15 cities³⁰ across 3 hubs in Philippines

Activity Description: Supporting the system to provide better opportunities to out-of-school youth through facilitating capacity building initiatives for teachers and youth and leveraging the support of employers and civil society organizations

Heatmap Ratings and Rationale:



- Opportunity 2.0 emphasizes on the outcomes and impact of the interventions for out-of-school youth, such as learning levels and the acquisition of employable skills for learners. The Alternate Learning System (ALS) Strategic Roadmap developed jointly with the Department of Education lays out targets for learner outcomes in addition to targets to reach and various inputs and outputs relevant to learner outcomes. **(Element 1A: Define Clear Goals)**
- Opportunity 2.0 worked closely with the system to support the policy reform agenda for ALSs. The Activity helped the system formulate the ALS Act, the passing of which ensured the establishment and budgetary appropriation for the Bureau of Alternative Education (BAE). The Activity also supported the BAE to develop the ALS Strategic Roadmap, which lays out the 5-year plan for its ALS program. Opportunity 2.0 helped the system develop and pilot reform interventions, such as training modules like Work-Based Learning and Be Your Own Boss for the ALS curriculum. The Activity is in the

³⁰ National Capital Region Hub: Angeles City, Valenzuela City, Quezon City, Pasig City, and Legazpi City
 Cebu Hub: Cebu City, Tagbilaran City, Iloilo City, Zamboanga City, and Isabela City
 Davao Hub: Cagayan de Oro City, Iligan City, Davao City, General Santos City, and Cotabato City

process of building capacity in the system to make ongoing strategic reform choices based on evidence. We did not find evidence that Opportunity 2.0 helped the system leverage [REDACTED] efforts in this area. **(Element 1B: Determine the Reform Strategy)**

- Opportunity 2.0 supported the system to develop a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for its ALS program, which identifies data to be collected from multiple levels in the system to gauge the progress of reform activities. The Activity has supported the system's data collection efforts, including supporting youth profiling by youth development alliances (YDAs) to ensure that there are systematic data on out-of-school youth. It also supported the system with harmonizing data on out-of-school youth from multiple sources and introducing data collection tools to assess the youths' soft skills. The Activity conducted capacity-building sessions to build the M&E capacity of system actors, ALS partners, and the technical working group. While there is some evidence that the system can analyze data, we have heard that the Activity continues to support the system with data analysis, indicating that there is still a need to strengthen the system's capacity on data analysis. While we heard that the system looks at data at the city and regional level, we found that the Activity has not been able to build momentum for data-led decision-making in the system as currently the decisions are being led by policy and not data. Additionally, while the Activity has helped the system emphasize the monitoring of progress monitoring, reviews and evaluations in the M&E handbook, the handbook was approved by the system shortly before this review, so there is limited evidence available around its implementation so far. **(Element 2A: Use Data Effectively, Element 2B: Monitor Performance and Solve Problems)**
- Opportunity 2.0 helped the system engage stakeholders to leverage their support and to create a delivery chain to support out-of-school youth. Through establishing YDAs, it created a mechanism for system leaders and stakeholders from different sub-systems to coordinate initiatives for youth development. YDAs also dedicated [REDACTED]; some cities passed an ordinance on the establishment of YDAs [REDACTED]. We heard: "With the support of Opportunity 2.0, the Bureau has developed partnerships with private sector partners." Further, Opportunity 2.0 collaborated with higher education institutes and training centers to work on initiatives for out-of-school youth. **(Element 1C: Visualize the Delivery Chain, Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships)**
- Opportunity 2.0 conducted a needs assessment for the BAE, which helped inform the ALS Roadmap, including local labor market assessments to gather data on employment needs, opportunities, and youth perceptions. One of the Activity's contributions to building the capacity of the system is its support in developing career pathways for teachers in the ALS to retain them in the alternative education sector. Although the Activity works closely with the BAE to build its capacity, as well as with stakeholders at different levels in the system, our evidence suggests that the Activity is still taking the lead on various reform efforts, indicating that there is a need for the Activity to build the system's ability to independently review its own capacity and lead reforms for out-of-school youth. **(Element 3A: Review Capacity to Deliver, Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time)**
- Due to the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, Opportunity 2.0 adapted its programming to help the system leverage educational technology. For example, it shifted the focus to distance learning, developed interactive audio instructions, and

provided laptops to the system and ALS implementers. In addition, to facilitate learning during the pandemic, Opportunity 2.0 provided digital learning equipment to the Department of Education to support the *Eskwela* learning centers and provided laptops to ALS implementers. However, there was limited evidence of capacity built in the system to lead and scale-up educational technology initiatives strategically. (**Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology**)

- Opportunity 2.0 explicitly focuses on strengthening the system’s capacity to provide equitable and inclusive learning opportunities by focusing its support on out-of-school youth. The Activity has also conducted a gender and disability analysis to inform its work plan and M&E. It aims to build a gender and inclusion lens within the program and subsequently adapt interventions as needed for different groups, including persons with disabilities and teenage mothers. We heard: “[*Opportunity 2.0*] uses a lot of different modalities for reaching out of school youth to keep it as broad and accessible as possible, including audio instruction and distance learning.” (**Element 3D: Promote Equity and Inclusion**)

C.9 Tajikistan—Read with Me (RWM)

Country: Tajikistan

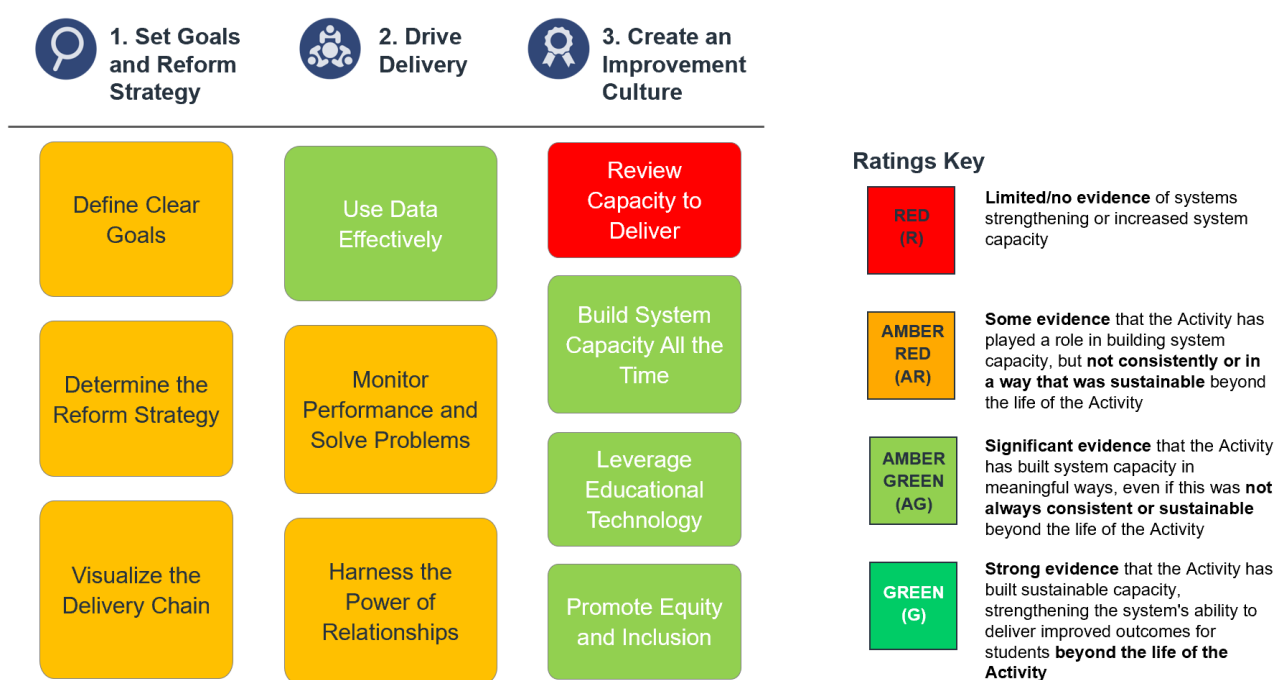
Activity: Read with Me

Timeframe: 2016–2021

Geographical Scope: National

Activity Description: Supporting the education system to improve reading outcomes for students through teacher training and mentoring, conducting reading assessments, facilitating the development and provision of reading and learning materials, and supporting digital learning

Heatmap Ratings and Rationale:



- RWM contributed to shifting the system’s focus toward reading and student-centered education with a greater emphasis on student assessment data, which led to a subsequent change in government priorities and budgetary decisions. However, we did not find evidence that the Activity supported the system to translate this shift in focus to setting system-wide student outcome goals. **(Element 1A: Define Clear Goals)**
- We heard that RWM worked closely with the system to design strategies adapted to the system’s context. One of the wins of the program was the successful advocacy for a competency-based learning model, which was accepted by the government. There is some evidence that RWM leveraged the efforts of earlier USAID education programs and ██████████ Activities. There is also some evidence that the Activity supported the system with using student outcomes data to inform strategies; however, there is limited evidence of the extent to which these practices were embedded within the system, or of the Activity’s support to the system to plan for financial sustainability. **(Element 1B: Determine the Reform Strategy)**

- RWM supported the system to understand and use early grade reading assessment (EGRA) data. The Activity conducted several rounds of EGRA and organized workshops to share the findings with system actors. We found that these findings were used by the system; for example, when they indicated that comprehension was weak, the government took this into consideration and began to promote teacher development and provide resources targeted toward improving student comprehension. We heard that, “EGRA’s data is being used by [the system] for policy planning, budgeting, and decision making.” The system is also reported to have included EGRA-like assessments in its long-term education development plan. However, we heard that the system does not have the capacity to analyze EGRA data independently yet. **(Element 2A: Use Data Effectively)**
- RWM supported the system to monitor implementation using data, such as by adaptive monitoring to provide visibility of the use and impact of the trainings and materials. The Activity also undertook monitoring visits to schools with representatives from Ministry of Education and Science and its affiliates to observe the implementation of RWM reforms in classrooms. However, we did not find evidence of the extent to which these monitoring practices were embedded into the system, or of RWM support for setting routines to regularly review data for decision-making with system actors. **(Element 2B: Monitor Performance and Solve Problems)**
- RWM supported the system to engage diverse stakeholders and leverage their expertise to promote reading. Through participation in the Development Coordination Committee Education working group, RWM coordinated with counterparts to support the government to develop the National Strategy on Education Development (2020–2030), the Midterm Education Plan (2020–2023), and to ensure leveraged resources maximized cost-efficiency. RWM also worked with the private sector including radio and television channels, telecommunication companies, banks, and other private businesses. Through partnerships [REDACTED], the Activity was able to leverage 10% of its contract value. However, these partnerships were predominantly led by RWM, and there is little evidence that they built the system’s capacity to cultivate, lead, and continue benefitting from these partnerships. **(Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships)**
- Although RWM conducted capacity assessments, including assessing the capacity of trainers and teachers to inform the program, there is limited evidence around the system’s engagement in these assessments. Subsequently, we did not find any evidence that the Activity built the capacity of the system to continuously and deliberately review its capacity to drive progress. **(Element 3A: Review Capacity to Deliver)**
- RWM contributed to improving the system’s ability to build its own capacity, particularly through its work on teacher training. The Activity developed teacher training modules that were aligned with the Ministry of Education and Science competency-based reading standards, developed a pre-service teacher training package with system actors that was integrated in the pre-service curriculum and in the bachelor’s program at the pedagogical university, and collaborated with regional in-service teacher training institutes to develop its conceptual framework to inform similar initiatives. RWM also introduced an innovative mentoring system for continuous support to teachers that was later mandated by the ministry through a regulation. However, we found limited evidence that the system was able to successfully embed and implement the mentoring system, partly due to financial constraints. We also found limited evidence

of the extent to which the Activity strengthened the system's ability to independently implement similar capacity-building initiatives. **(Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time)**

- RWM supported the system to leverage educational technology in several ways, most notably through establishing methodological resource centers with relevant technological equipment in select educational institutes to provide technological infrastructure to support the use of educational technology. The Activity conducted capacity-building of relevant individuals on the usage of the equipment, and it collaborated with another USAID project to ensure greater coverage of the initiative. Additionally, RWM digitized teaching and learning materials and supplementary materials, developed educational content for TV and radio, supported learning through mobile application and games, and introduced a blended learning teacher training program. However, we found limited evidence that RWM built the system's capacity to independently continue and scale the use of educational technology in a systematic and strategic way. We heard: *"While the system is interested in [educational technology], it does not have the budget to scale it to all schools."* **(Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology)**
- RWM made contributions to helping the system be more equitable. Most notably, it successfully reached 86% of remote schools in Tajikistan through its reform efforts, many of which received ██████ support for the very first time. The Activity also incorporated equity considerations into the teacher training modules to include recommendations for teachers on adapting instruction for visually or hearing-impaired students in their classrooms. It also made efforts for gender related and other inclusive approaches through advocacy efforts, including the printing of books in braille and integration of gender-related concepts into the criteria for evaluation of existing reading materials. While RWM pushed the system in the right direction through its interventions, we did not find any evidence that it built the system's capacity to lead and scale these interventions around inclusive education or use assessments of equity to inform policies and practices. **(Element 3D: Promote Equity and Inclusion)**

C.10 Uzbekistan—Uzbekistan Education for Excellence Program (UEEP)

Country: Uzbekistan

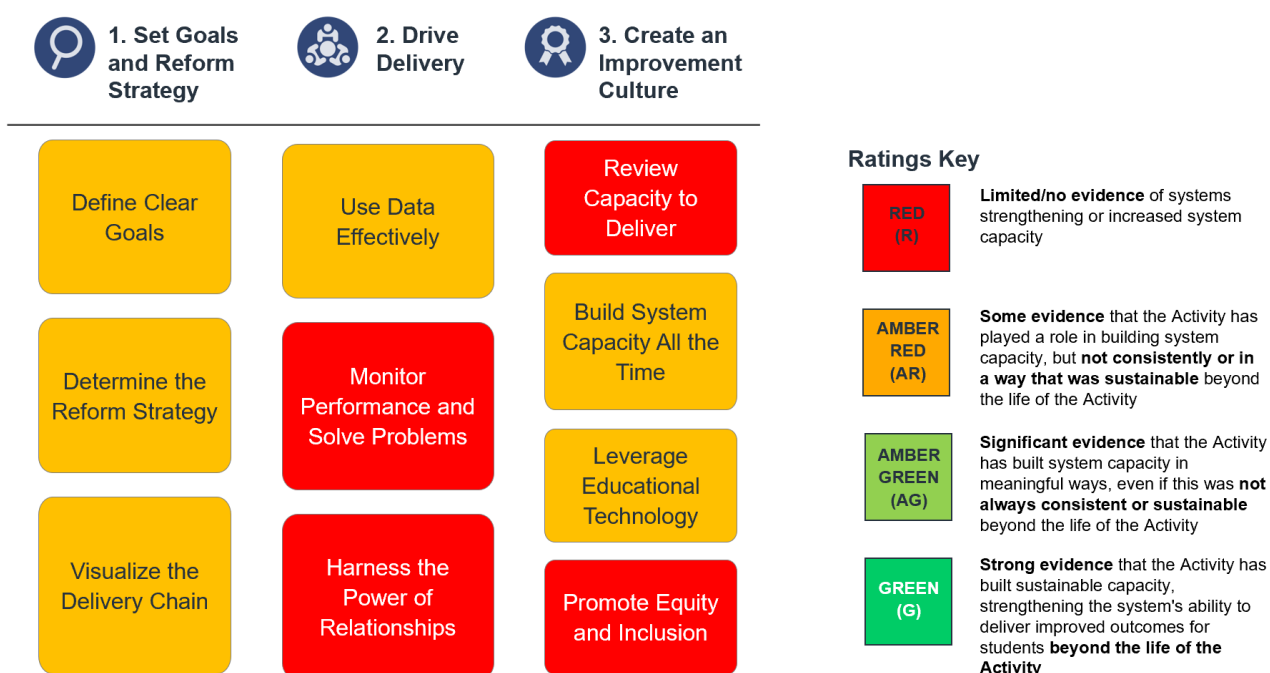
Activity: Uzbekistan Education for Excellence Program

Timeframe: 2019–2023

Geographical Scope: National

Activity Description: Supporting the system with the early grade education reform agenda through facilitating teacher professional development and developing teaching and learning materials

Heatmap Ratings and Rationale:



- UEEP contributed to the emerging conversation in Uzbekistan around student learning outcomes, especially through the generation of student outcomes data (early grade reading and mathematics assessment [EGRA and EGMA]) for the first time in the history of the country. However, the system still approaches reforms as a set of inputs and outputs, and we did not find evidence that system goals are being grounded in student outcomes. **(Element 1A: Define Clear Goals)**
- UEEP demonstrated pedagogical approaches to strengthen student outcomes (i.e., sequencing and linking student standards, scope and sequence, the development of teaching and learning materials). In addition, the Activity involved ministry officials in a pilot-testing approach to help the system understand evidence-based programming. This involved collecting data to understand how reforms, such as new teaching and learning materials, are operating in classrooms; possible improvements that can be made; and future actions to enhance impact. We heard that the ministry has increased its pilot testing time frame from 6 months to a year as a result of the demonstrated

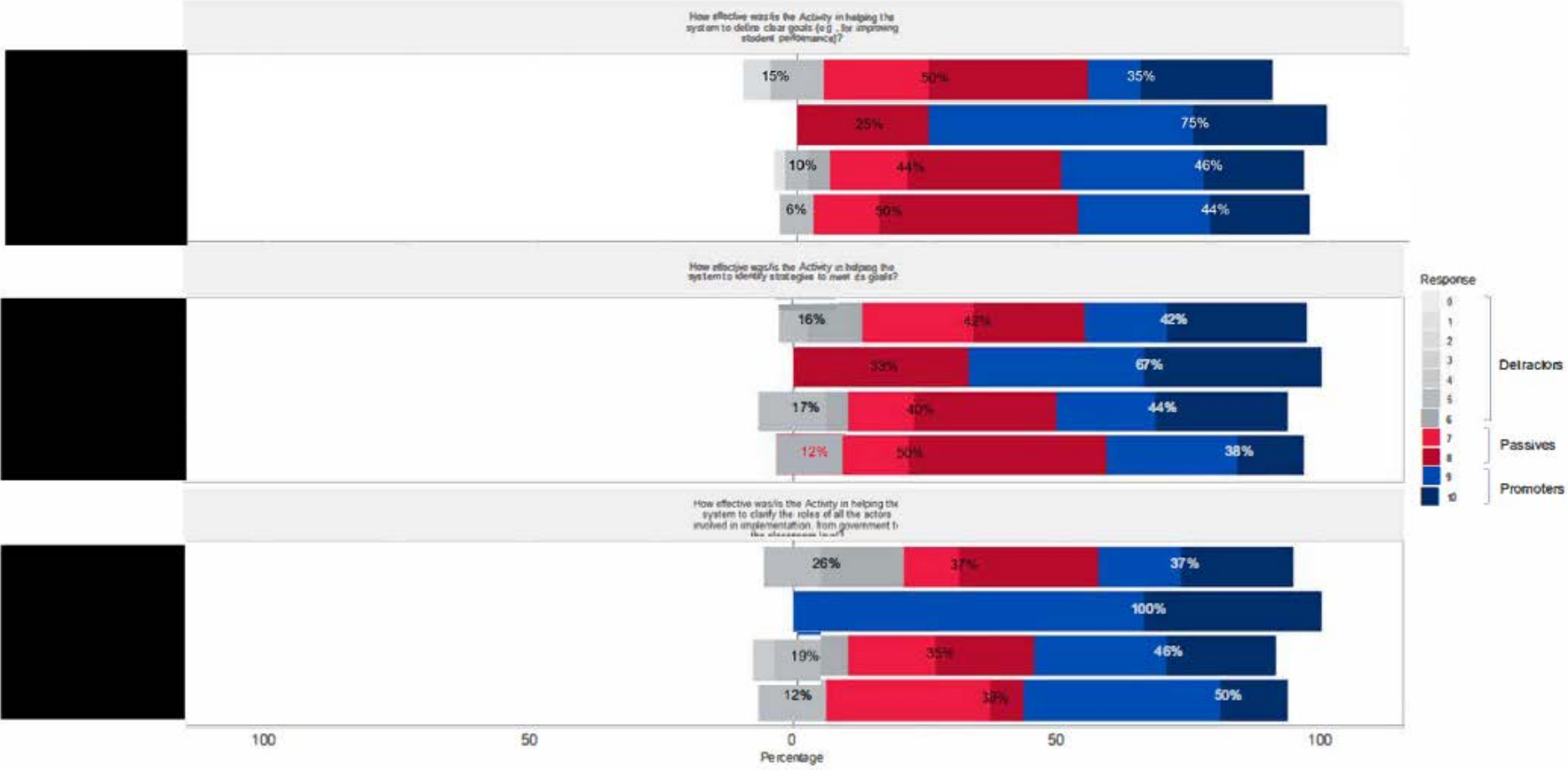
advantages of pilot testing. However, we did not find evidence that the Activity has built the capacity of the system to prioritize and set its own strategies yet. **(Element 1B: Determine the Reform Strategy)**

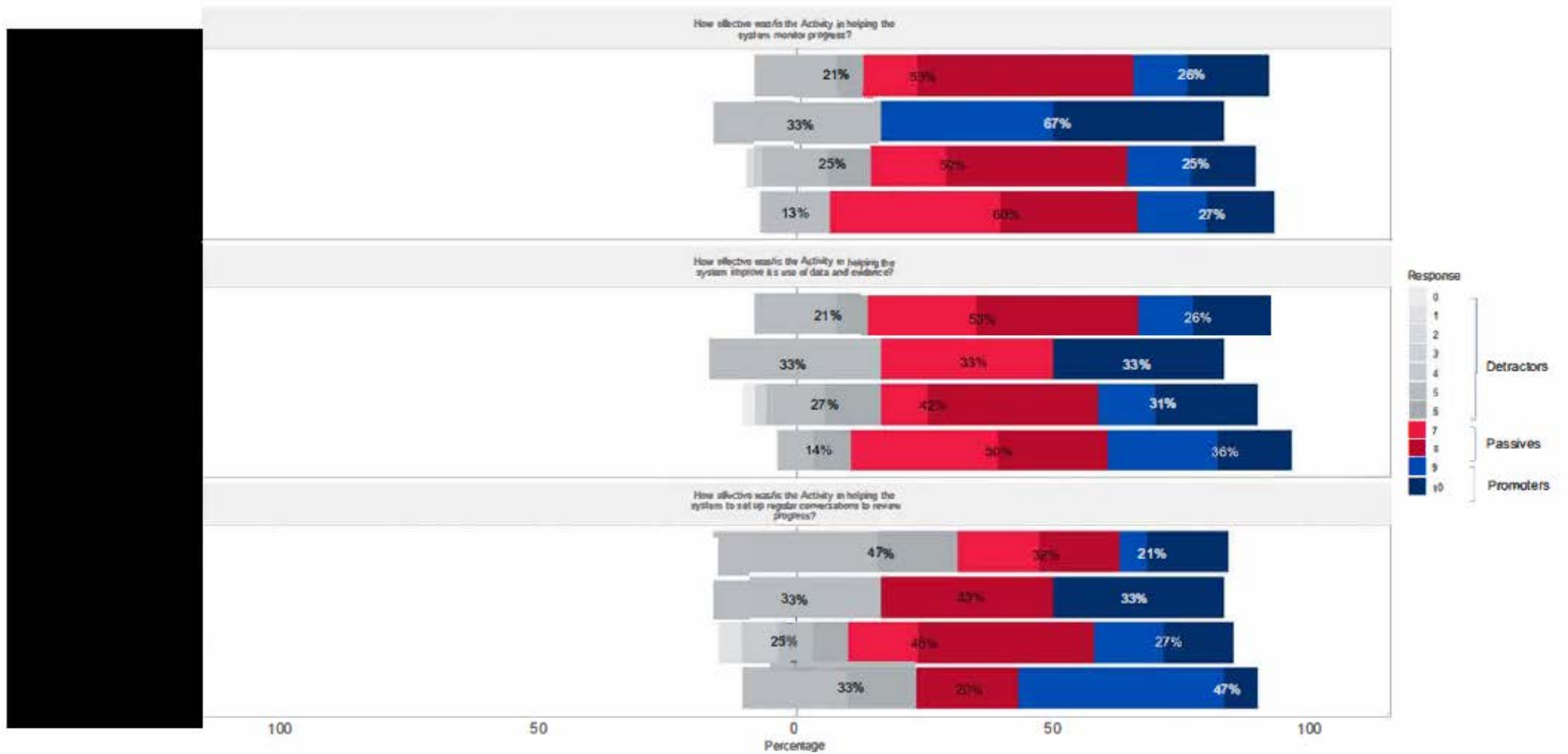
- Although the demonstrated pilot testing approach helped the ministry think about feedback loops: to understand how reforms, such as new teaching and learning materials, are operating in the classrooms, what is not working well or can be improved, and how to take corrective action or enhance impact, this has not translated into broader thinking about the delivery chain and its responsibilities. **(Element 1C: Visualize the Delivery Chain)**
- UEEP has not yet been able to build the capacity of the system to independently analyze and use the newly available assessment data in decision-making. Ministry officials acknowledged that: “We might need more support from international partners in future to analyze assessment data like the EGRA and EGMA.” In addition, we did not find evidence that the Activity has supported the system to establish effective routines and approaches to review progress and solve problems. **(Element 2A: Use Data Effectively, Element 2B: Monitor Performance and Solve Problems)**
- UEEP has had limited impact to date in building the capacity of the system to coordinate the work ██████████ in the education space. Our interviewees highlighted duplication and fragmentation in ██████ efforts, and that coordination efforts tend to be led ██████, rather than by the system itself. **(Element 2C: Harness the Power of Relationships)**
- There is evidence UEEP made the effort to review the existing resources and practices to inform its interventions. For example, the Activity conducted studies to review the status of instructions of a few subjects to inform the design of relevant learning materials and teacher professional development efforts. Additionally, UEEP also reviewed existing textbooks. However, these efforts were led by the Activity, to inform its initiatives, and not by the system **(Element 3A: Review Capacity to Deliver)**
- UEEP has contributed to building the capacity of a cohort of education professionals in the system to plan and implement curriculum change. Technical advisors from the implementing team have worked closely with ministry experts to demonstrate the pedagogical approach to materials development: sequencing and linking student standards, scope and sequence, and textbook development, as well as the quality assurance and review process. This process of co-development of teaching and learning materials has spanned 13 months. A ministry interviewee mentioned that they are now applying this process of materials development to other subjects not covered by UEEP. **(Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time)**
- The large scope of the program, and the pressures of implementing during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, may have caused the implementing partner to initially focus more on directly delivering outputs than on building the capacity of system staff. Some interviewees suggested that a more limited scope would have better allowed UEEP to “meet the system where it’s at,” especially given this was the first USAID Activity in the country. **(Element 3B: Build System Capacity All the Time)**
- There is some evidence that UEEP helped the system leverage educational technology. The Activity is helping the ministry plan for online teacher training and create a digital platform to house teaching and learning materials. Lack of access to

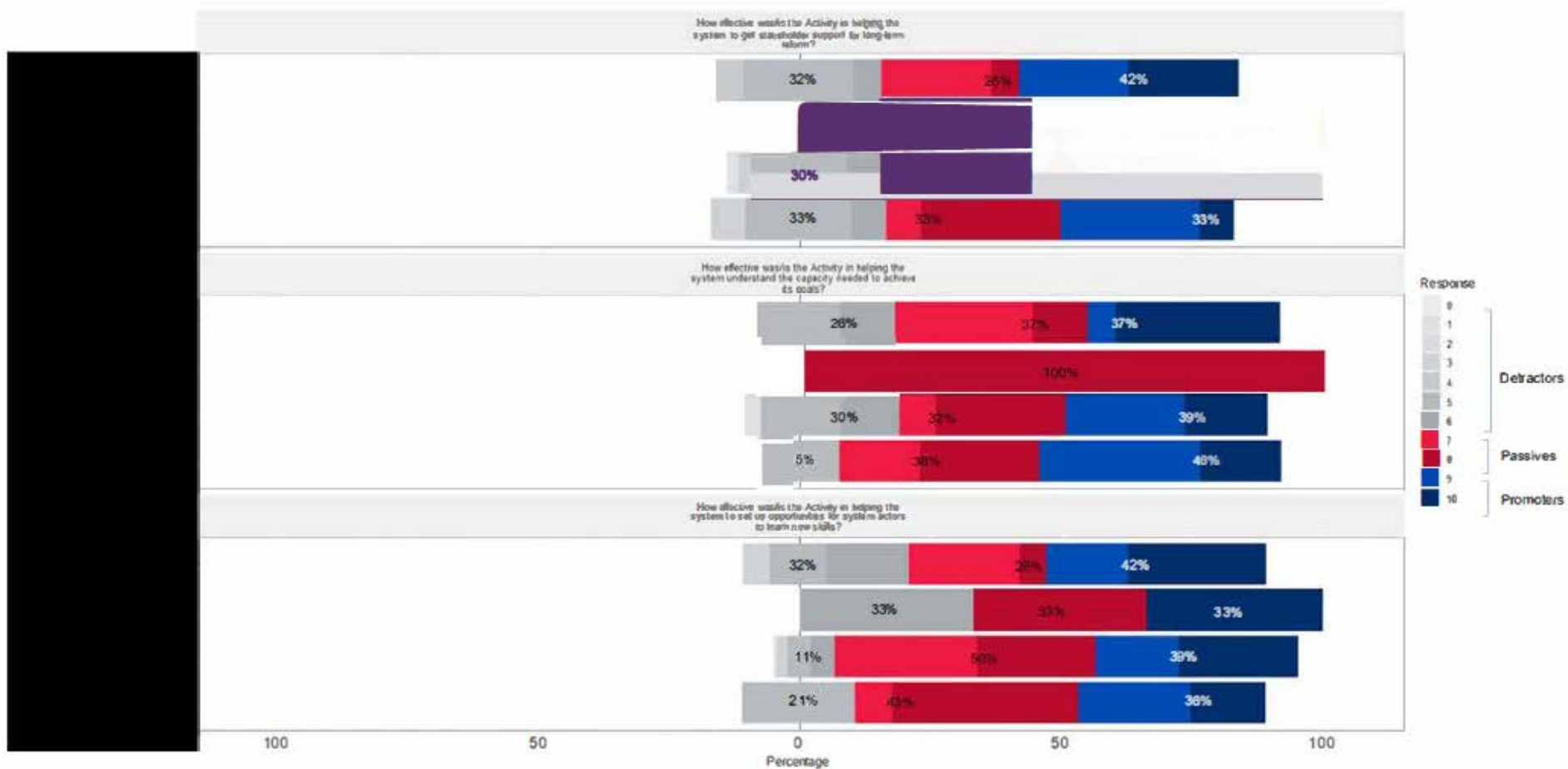
devices and gaps in Internet coverage are challenges that continue to limit the potential impact of educational technology in the system. (**Element 3C: Leverage Educational Technology**)

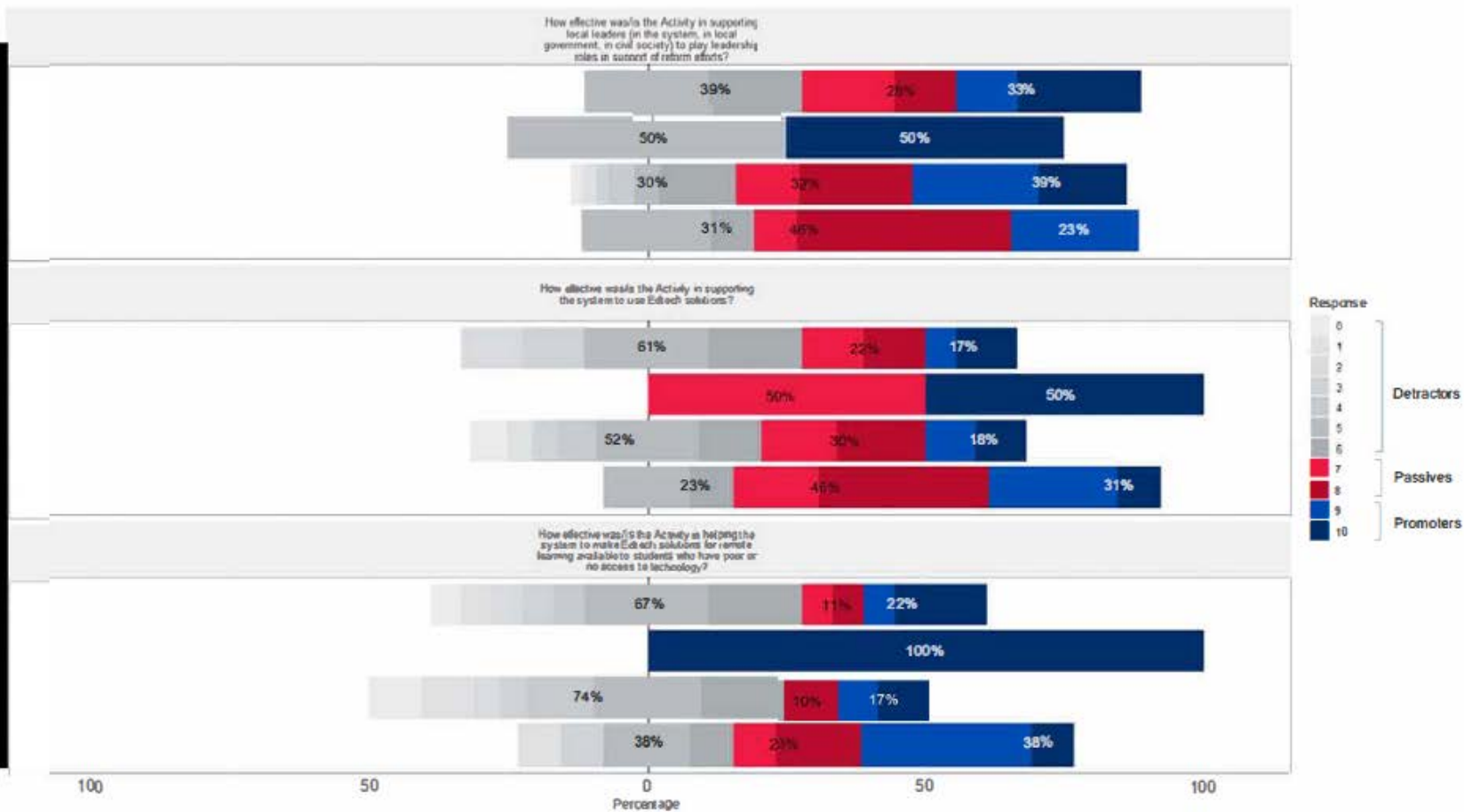
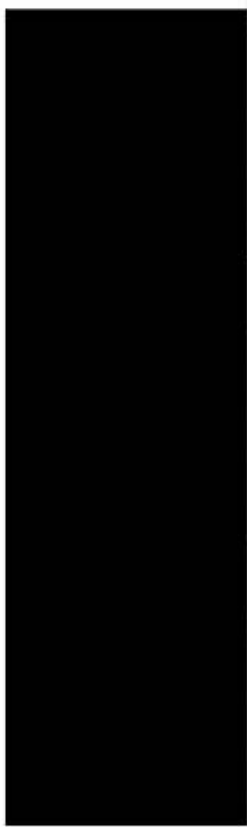
- There is limited evidence that UEEP has built the capacity of the system to promote equity and inclusion to date, beyond strengthened mixed-ability teaching methods and adapted textbooks to ensure cultural sensitivity, gender equity, and inclusivity. One interviewee said regarding the focus on equity: “*Because there is so much to do in a short time, there is no space to accommodate this.*” (**Element 3D: Promote Equity and Inclusion**)

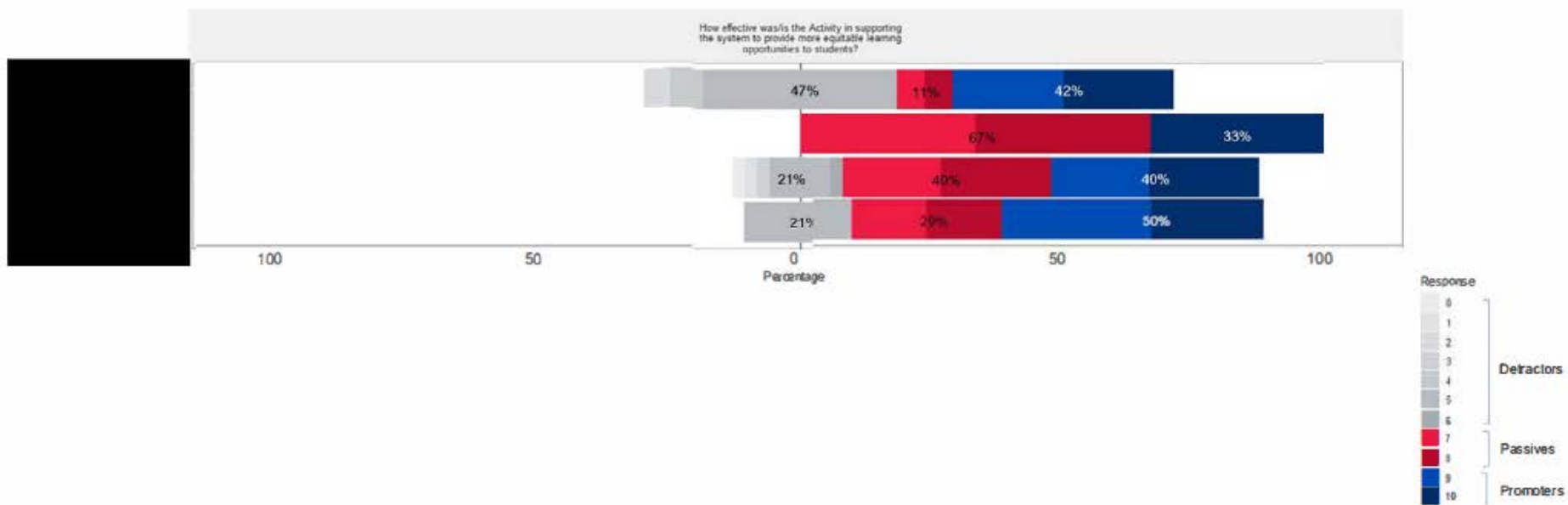
Annex D: Survey Responses—Ratings Responses by Stakeholder Group











Annex E: References

In addition to a wide range of working documents relating to each Activity (e.g., USAID country development and cooperation strategies, Activity solicitations, and activity monitoring, evaluation, and learning plans), our desk review drew principally on the following published materials.

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