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Dedicated To Increasing Equitable Access To  
Education In Areas Affected By Crisis And Conflict

December 2016

An Analysis of Theories of Change in USAID Solicitations  
for Education Programs in Crisis and  
Conflict Affected Environments



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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

AEP	Alternative Education Program
APS	Annual Program Statement
DO	Developmental Objective
ECCN	Education in Crisis and Conflict Network
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
IR	Intermediate Result
RFA	Request for Application
RFP	Request for Proposal
SO	Strategic Objective
Sub-IR	Sub-Intermediate Results
TOC	Theory of Change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) initiated a bold new Education Strategy to better define and channel its education investments into three principal areas: early grade reading, youth workforce development, and education in crisis and conflict-affected environments. While USAID's work in these areas was not new, the explicit and concerted focus was, and it allowed the agency to begin developing more focused guidance and support for its staff and its programs within these areas.

Of USAID's three education goals, the third—"increased equitable access for 15 million learners in environments affected by crisis and conflict"—is perhaps the broadest, since it does not focus on a particular level of or target group for education programming. Instead, it concentrates on a particular setting—environments affected by crisis and conflict.

In the years leading up to 2011, and still today, there was much that the international development community did not understand about quality education programming in crisis and conflict-affected environments. Since 2011, USAID has progressively sought to build such understanding among its staff and implementing partners. It established the Education in Crisis and Conflict Network (USAID ECCN) in 2015 to create a community of practice that could hasten progress toward improved policy, programming, and research around education in crisis and conflict.

A key task for USAID ECCN is to develop and disseminate guidance and training related to the use of theories of change in education programs designed for crisis and conflict-affected environments. To begin this process, USAID ECCN researchers sought to establish a baseline of the types of theories of change used in USAID solicitations in the early years and those immediately pre-dating the agency's Education Strategy. A follow-on analysis, planned for 2019, will show how USAID and its partners' use of theories of change has evolved. More broadly, USAID ECCN hoped to improve its understanding of how theories of change are developed and used. This, in turn, would enable it to more effectively frame guidance for USAID and implementing partners—aligned with USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) Framework now articulated in the ADS Chapter 20—on designing and using evidence-based, contextually appropriate theories of change and project designs.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In a related exercise, USAID ECCN reviewed a sample of project Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plans, also developed during the period pre-dating the 2011 Education Strategy through 2015. The goals of the review were to establish a baseline of how USAID and its partners defined and measured progress toward education in crisis in the early years of the Education Strategy, and to gain insight into how to support improved practice in this area. The results of the review were released in June 2016 and are available on the ECCN website.

In this first solicitation review, we analyzed 18 USAID solicitation documents issued before 2015 that related to increasing equitable access to education in crisis and conflict environments (listed in Annex A). We considered the following questions:

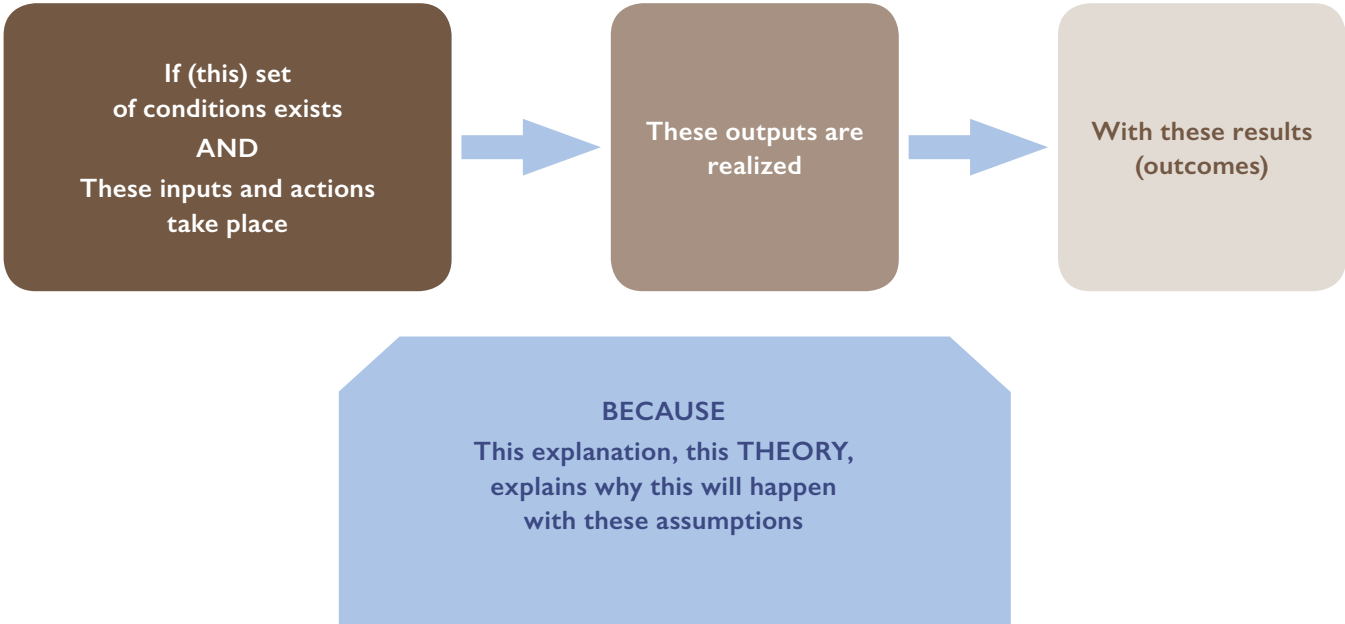
- To what extent are theories of change articulated in project solicitation documents?
  - > To what extent are specific theories of change prescribed within solicitation documents for potential implementing partners to use?
  - > To what extent are potential implementing partners requested to develop theories of change on their own as part their proposal?
- To what extent are the theories of change backed by evidence or references?
  - > To what extent do solicitation documents request bidders to provide supporting evidence for a theory of change?
- How do the (prescribed or requested) theories of change account for the complex and fluid nature of conflict and crisis environments?
  - > To what extent are theories of change planned (concrete) as opposed to emergent (adaptable)?

Before sharing the findings from this analysis, we introduce key concepts related to theories of change and describe the challenges and potential of theories of change for programming in crisis or conflict-affected environments. We then describe our analysis methodology in detail before discussing our findings.

## II. WHAT IS A THEORY OF CHANGE?

A theory of change is, in essence, an assertion that:

**Figure 1. What is a theory of change?**



## Elements of a theory of change

A recent comprehensive review of the use of theories of change by bilateral and multilateral development agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) found that at a minimum, every theory of change included six elements:

- An analysis of the context, including social, political, and environmental conditions; the current state of the problem the project seeks to influence; and actors able to influence change
- A description of the long-term change that the initiative seeks to support and the ultimate beneficiaries of the change
- A process/sequence of change anticipated to lead to the desired long-term outcome
- Assumptions about how these changes might happen, given the activities, outputs, and especially the dynamic (and uncertain) context
- A diagram and narrative summary that capture the outcomes of the discussion
- A methodology for tracking progress and evaluating results (Vogel 2012)

Within USAID, a theory of change is articulated in a Results Framework, which “defines the results necessary to achieve a strategic objective and their causal relationships and underlying assumptions. The framework establishes the organizing basis for measuring, analyzing, and reporting results of the operating unit” (ADS 201).

A theory of change for any given USAID project actually involves multiple, hierarchical theories of change. Thus, a USAID Results Framework includes distinct levels of results, from sub-intermediate results (sub-IRs), to intermediate results (IRs) and Development Objectives (DOs)<sup>2</sup>—with a theory of change (or, in USAID’s guidance, ‘development hypothesis’) linking each level. The Logical Framework (or log frame), a project planning tool for achieving measureable results, takes this further, describing the links between inputs, activities, and outputs, each of which represents a hypothesis, such as “provide **these** teachers with **this** training and they will improve their classroom instruction in **these** specific ways.” During project implementation, implementing partners will plan even more detailed causal linkages, such as “recruiting and orienting **these** trainers, with **this** method, for **this** period of time, will result in a cadre of competent in-service teacher trainers.”

## Uses of a theory of change

The most important thing to know about theories of change is that they are intended to be helpful and practical. They are not an academic exercise to make your work more difficult, but instead a tool to improve the design, implementation, and assessment of your programs. From USAID. *Theories and Indicators of Change: Concepts and Primers in Conflict Management and Mitigation*. March 2013.

Ideally, a theory of change should contribute to the quality and effectiveness of education program design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Specifically, a theory of change should:

- Encourage deep observation and analysis of the context: how power is distributed and used, how decisions are made, what are the root causes of crisis and violence, what are the coalitions for and against any given change, how change is likely to occur
- Prompt a search for and analysis of windows of opportunity emerging from existing local organizations and effective practices and building from that base
- Highlight the importance of consultations with “unusual suspects”—groups and organizations that may have low levels of trust but can find new ways forward by coming together

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2 Previously referred to as Strategic Objectives, or SOs.

- Surface the need and opportunities to avoid exacerbating conflict factors and foster social capital and cohesion among stakeholders, target groups, and beyond to achieve results and sustain them in crisis and conflict-affected contexts
- Help to expose unexamined assumptions—the conceptual leaps that are often hidden by the facile causalities presented in a Results Framework (modified from Vogel, 2014)

However, as Andrew Blum, a keynote speaker at the launch of USAID ECCN, has noted,

The governments, foundations, and individuals that fund international aid work in regions of crisis and conflict demand assurance that their money is being spent wisely; any hope for success demands being able to deploy smart, well-run programs, programs that use continuous evaluations to determine how best to proceed. It also means being able to hold agencies and organizations accountable. There's a paradox, however. The challenges inherent to working in conflict zones means that strengthening the current approach to accountability—judging success against outcomes established many [months] ahead of startup—will create less effective programs, not better ones. The paradox is caused by a stable, slow-moving system, like the U.S. government, colliding with the unstable, rapidly changing conditions in conflict zones. . . . Needless to say, this doesn't always work out (Blum, 2015).

Can a theory of change address this paradox? To answer this question, it helps to understand the different types of theories of change.

### **Types of theories of change**

In examining how theories of change can be used to expand equitable access to education in crisis and conflict-affected environments, two broad analytical categories stand out: planned social change and emergent social change. The analysis of theories using these two categories provides a useful lens through which to examine the more detailed logic and change theories applied in specific projects.

#### **PLANNED SOCIAL CHANGE**

Planned social change theory seeks a clear articulation of the causal linkages among inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes. It is based on the conviction that a rigorous application of scientific method can, using reliable and valid evidence, comprehend social reality, and use that understanding to shape the future.

Planned social change theory is the dominant theory of change among development agencies because it appears to provide greater assurance that their financing and assistance will achieve the desired outcomes. It is embodied in the Logical Framework planning tool and, for USAID, the Results Framework. Reeler (2007) describes planned social change:

In a situation that needs changing we can gather enough data about a community and its problems, analyze it and discover an underlying set of related problems and their cause, decide which problems are the most important, redefine these as needs, devise a set of solutions and purposes or outcomes, plan a series of logically connected activities for addressing the needs and achieving the desired future results, as defined up front, cost the activities for a project budget, and then implement the activities, monitor progress as we work to keep them on track, hopefully achieve the planned results and at the end evaluate the project for accountability, impact and sometimes even for learning.

In development projects that reflect a planned social change theory, budgets, inputs (staffing), outputs, and outcomes (results) are specified in contracts with implementing partners. However, contracts are typically difficult to modify; evidence of changing contexts and conditions, and insights that vary from design assumptions, tend to be marginalized. Modifying projects, much less budgets, takes considerable bureaucratic effort.

Planned social change projects are evaluated with either a program evaluation or an impact evaluation. A program evaluation determines the extent to which specified outputs and results have been achieved, and with what degree of effectiveness and efficiency. In an impact evaluation, an independent party assesses the changes caused by project inputs and activities, comparing the treatment population to a counterfactual control group using random assignment or targeted sampling.

A key assumption in an impact evaluation is that the implementation of the project is stable and consistent over time and across treatment locations, which can be atypical in crisis and conflict settings.

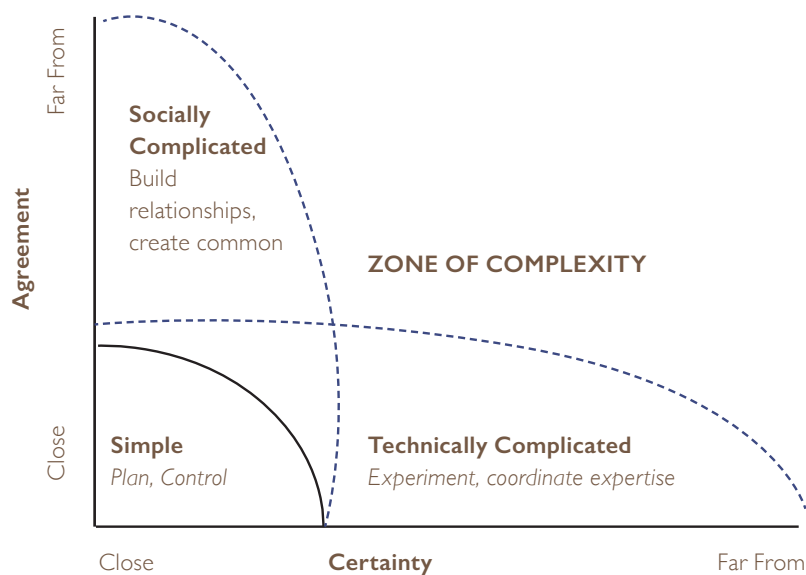
Both program and impact evaluations typically focus on the degree to which planned results are realized (for example, increased reading levels or increased equitable access to education in crisis and conflict-affected environments) rather than on the degree to which host country policies and institutional capacity are strengthened.<sup>3</sup>

### EMERGENT SOCIAL CHANGE

Planned social change is appropriate for simple objectives, such as delivering an established training program, or printing textbooks and distributing them to schools. Complicated technical problems, such as designing a textbook for early grade reading in multiple local languages, are more challenging, but tractable. Emergent social change theory asserts that most social change is neither simple, nor even complicated—it is complex.

The concept of social complexity is illustrated in Figure 2, which comes from M. Q. Patton's book *Developmental Evaluation* (2011):

**Figure 2. Social Change From Simple To Complex**



When there is a high level of agreement among stakeholders about the nature of the social problem and the means for solving it (for example, policy consensus supporting a program to inoculate children against polio), the context is simple and calls for planned social change with specified inputs, processes, and outputs. However, when the social and political situation is conflictual, and there is a low level of agreement among stakeholders coupled with uncertainty about the appropriate technical steps (for example, building government institutional capacity to introduce a multilingual early grade reading program with multiple local languages), the context is complex. Complex contexts call for different assessment, design, management, and evaluation tools.

<sup>3</sup> The USAID Education Strategy for increasing equitable access to education in crisis and conflict environments, Result 3.3, specifies “Institutional Capacity to Provide Services Strengthened.” This Result does focus on policy and program issues such as teacher management systems, education information management systems, and reforms to support equity and transparency. However, the indicator and primary focus of USAID’s education in crisis work is the increase in the net enrollment rate.



One view of the task of theory is to simplify: to reduce the complexity of the natural world to theories and laws of cause and effect validated by evidence. However, most social systems are dynamic and complex. They are embedded in an ecology, constantly adapting, interacting, transforming, and evolving. The attempt to apply linear, causal models appropriate to closed, mechanical, simple (or even complicated) systems to analyze and plan the evolution of complex social systems is, from this perspective, misplaced.

Emergent social change theory draws from complex adaptive systems theory, which recognizes the inherent complexity of social change. It also draws from development theory, research, and practice on institutional capacity development, social capital, and citizen action.<sup>4</sup> Characteristics of complex adaptive systems include:

- Social problems and goals are difficult to define clearly, with stakeholders having divergent perspectives, narratives, and interests.
- Social change requires changes in existing, culturally conditioned relationships and behavior, and this arises from shifts in actors' identity, meaning, and purpose.
- The interactions that lead to changes in behavior and relationships are recursive, nonlinear, and emerge through multiple interacting elements. Thus, social interventions have uncertain change pathways and unpredictable results.
- The knowledge and capacities required to change relationships and behavior are spread across multiple actors and contexts (e.g. home, community, organizations).
- Outcomes for individuals and social groups are multi-causal (e.g. the interrelationship of poverty, education, nutrition, and health) and are not the responsibility of any single organization or project.
- Social change is difficult to measure, as it involves changing relationships, resiliency, and power, as well as individual behavior.

The recognition that social systems change is complex and embedded in evolving contexts is not a counsel of despair. Rather, it calls for a different approach, a different theory of change that acknowledges the reality that social conditions are complex because they are manifestations of human social, political, and economic relationships. Over the past 30 years there has been a marked increase in research on complex systems and the application of this body of work to organizational, economic, and social change theory and practice.<sup>5</sup>

Many development organizations use emergent change theory when working with local institutions to expand learning opportunities for those outside the formal schooling system. These programs value social capital and social justice by learning and building on the identities, meanings, culture, and complexity that communities, children, and youth experience, evolving education programs from this base. This approach is favored by a number of organizations, including Action Aide (REFLECT), the International Development Research Center (Outcome Based Evaluation), UNICEF (Education for Peacebuilding), the World Bank's Education Resilience program, and by projects such as USAID/Kenya's Yes Youth Can.

USAID, in the development of the Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) framework, which is now articulated in ADS 201, provides specific guidance reflecting an emergent theory of change. CLA is defined as "...a set of processes and activities that help ensure programming is coordinated, grounded in evidence, and adjusted as necessary to remain effective throughout implementation." The guidance directs USAID Missions to "At a minimum, the Mission must develop a plan that addresses the following, with timeframe and responsible offices listed in the schedule of performance management tasks: Plans for strategic col-

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Education Reform Support; Better Feedback Loops; Assessing and Learning for Social Change; Twaweza; Helping People Help Themselves

<sup>5</sup> Some examples: the development of emergent social change theory within organizations is described by Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* (1990); in education reform by Michael Fullan's *Change Forces-the Sequel* (2005); in program evaluation by Michael Quinn Patton's *Developmental Evaluation* (2011); and in development and education programs by Harry Jones of the Overseas Development Institute, in *Taking responsibility for complexity: How implementation can achieve results in the face of complex problems*, Irene Guijt's *Assessing and Learning for Social Change* (2007); Luis Crouch and Joe DeStefano in *Education Reform Support Today* (2006); Ramalingam and Primrose (2014) in "From Best Practice to Best Fit..." and Whittle (2014) *How Feedback Loops Can Improve Aid (and maybe Government)*.

*laboration; Knowledge gaps at the strategy level and plans for filling them; Processes for periodic opportunities to reflect on progress, such as after-action reviews and partner meetings, to inform adaptation; and Plans for resourcing CLA at the Mission.” (USAID ADS 201 9/7/2016, p.47).*

Development projects that use emergent social change theory seek to engage local institutions in action learning and capacity building through the processes of assessment, planning, management, and monitoring and evaluation, and by using local language, beliefs, values, leadership, and culture. The expansion and quality of service delivery (for example, increased enrollments, improved learning, better health) are used as the experiential base for building local ownership and capacity, which, it is believed, over time will lead to better, sustainable results.

Practical steps in the application of emergent social change theory include:

- Identifying and supporting local capacity
- Listening to a diversity of local voices to develop responses and approaches
- Using funding mechanisms that enable experimentation
- Supporting local actors to work together to achieve greater impact
- Developing locally managed, frequent, valid, and meaningful measures of changing behaviors, relationships, and outcomes; developing better feedback loops.

This approach shifts emphasis away from a detailed, technical exercise in pre-intervention planning followed by a carefully managed set of specified steps in implementation, toward a process of action learning. Action learning engages stakeholders and local actors to work toward collectively envisaged outcomes by using evidence to adjust interventions where necessary, finding unforeseen opportunities for social change. It favors placing a greater level of effort on identifying local strengths and assets, while reducing dependence on external consultants.<sup>6</sup> The implementation of programs using an emergent theory of change is increasingly referred to as “adaptive management.”

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<sup>6</sup> The theory of emergent social change, while using appreciative inquiry to build on local assets, is ideally carried out simultaneously with a thorough and rigorous review of research and experience related to the development issues.

### III. METHODOLOGY

There has been little research demonstrating the practical efficacy of either planned or emergent social change theory. In what contexts will one or the other be effective? What is the time frame for results? What are the longer-term effects on peacebuilding, sustainability, and growth? What about cost-effectiveness? How can we measure impact? A first step in answering these questions is to analyze how theories of change are used in USAID projects. This section describes the methodology we followed in conducting that analysis.

#### Data

Our analysis is based on an examination of 18 USAID solicitation documents related to increasing equitable access to education in crisis and conflict environments, issued between 2007 and 2014. We focused on solicitation documents because they best represent USAID's thinking around program design, and because we could reliably compare the documents to one another given that they serve the same purpose and have similar structures and content.<sup>7</sup> We acquired the documents from USAID and through an open search of the Federal Business Opportunities website.<sup>8</sup>

At the time of our analysis (late 2015), there were 44 programs in crisis and conflict environments for which solicitation documents would have been issued. However, we were only able to access 18 of them. We recognize this as a significant limitation of our study; our sample size is small and there is a degree of selection bias (the solicitation documents that were not attainable may be systematically different from those that were). However, given that these 18 projects include all targeted geographic areas in crisis and conflict, and that all focus on increasing equitable access to basic and non-formal education for children and youth affected by crisis and conflict, we believe they are a representative sample.

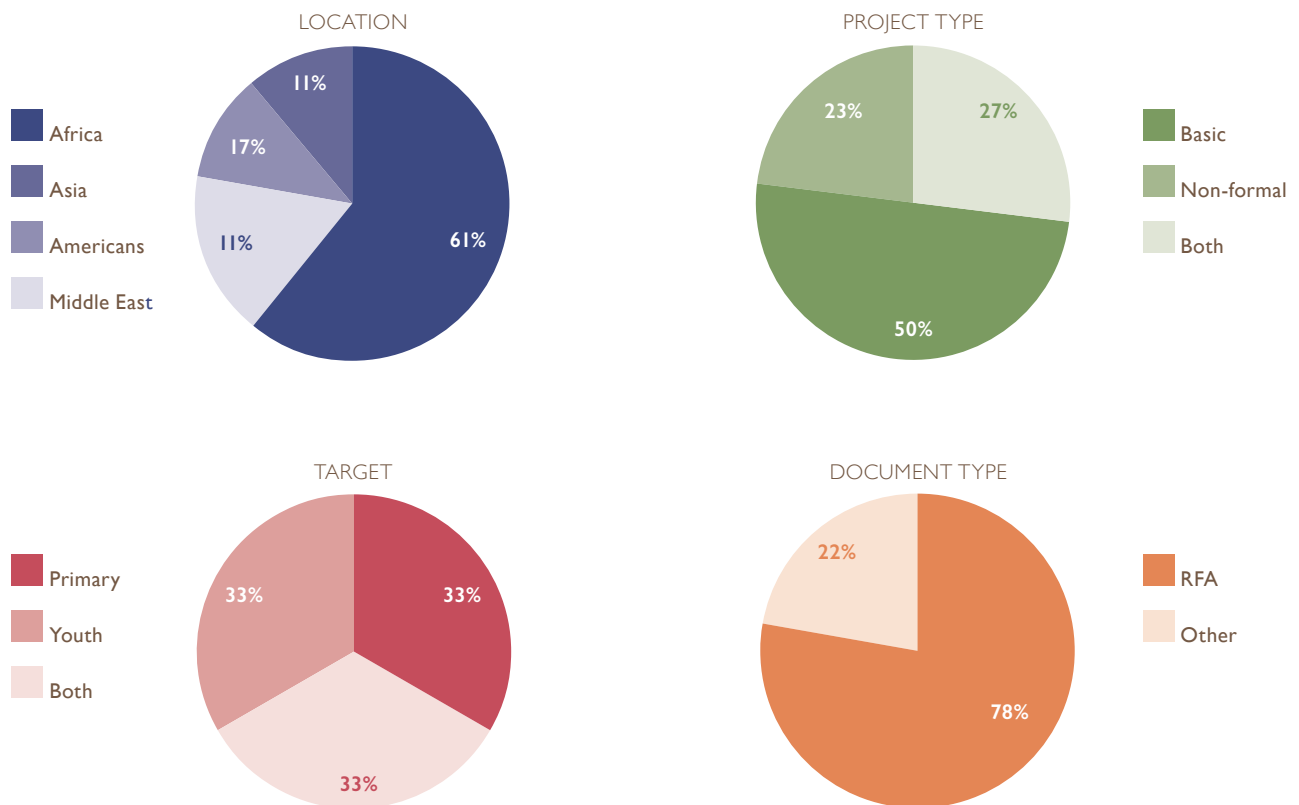
Of the 18 solicitation documents we considered, 13 were Requests for Application (RFAs), one was a Request for Proposal (RFP), and four were other documents (Annual Program Statements, for example). Figure 3 shows the breakdown of the solicitation documents by location, project type (basic versus non-formal education), target age groups, and type of document used. The award dollar amounts for the projects included in the sample ranged from \$10.59 to \$165 million, with a mean project award of \$43.46 million.

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<sup>7</sup> We did not include, for example, programs in crisis and conflict countries that focused on reading or workforce development.

<sup>8</sup> See Federal Business Opportunities, [www.fedbizopps.gov](http://www.fedbizopps.gov)

Figure 3. Projects used in analysis: Descriptive data



### Process

Our first step was to develop a rubric that described key characteristics of planned and emergent social change, based on the development theories of Frej and Ramalingan (2011), Kania and Kramer (2013), Macclay (2015), and Patton (2011, 2016) (see Annex B for the rubric). We then reviewed each of the solicitation documents in detail: one person was responsible for reading through all of the text and coding / scoring as objectively as possible based on the rubric guidance. A second reviewer repeated the analysis to make sure there was agreement on scores assigned; there were no discrepancies.

A critical first step was identifying any explicit references to theories of change, using the term “theory of change” or an alternative, “development hypothesis.”<sup>9</sup> Where there was an explicit reference, we noted whether the solicitation document prescribed a theory of change, or required the bidder to develop the theory of change as part of the proposal. Where there was not an explicit reference to theory of change, we were able to infer the theory of change by examining narratives around recommended activities and overall goals. In particular, the rubric (Annex B) allowed us to assess key characteristics of planned versus emergent change, and to infer a guiding theory of change.

Next, we identified and scored key characteristics of planned and emergent change as they applied to each stage of each project (assessment, planning, implementation/management, and monitoring and evaluation). To ensure a systematic process and maximum objectivity in placing each phase of each project on the spectrum of planned/emergent change, we developed

9 Additional variations of these terms were searched for: “theories of change”; “social change”; “logframe”, “hypothesis”.

a questionnaire that we used in reading and characterizing each solicitation document. The questionnaire was composed of 20 thematic questions or points of analysis, five for each project stage. We used a nominal scale for each question, with a yes/no option for both the planned and the emergent response. For each positive emergent response, we assigned one point. This allowed the questionnaire to capture projects that had both planned and emergent elements in different phases, and also acknowledged that many of these characteristics are not mutually exclusive.

We totaled the positive emergent responses by stage (possible score = 0–5) and then averaged across the four for a final score along the planned/emergent scale (possible score = 0/5). A score of 0 indicates a 100-percent planned approach, and a score of 5, a 100-percent emergent approach. This sort of content analysis is based upon research methodologies outlined by Stemler (2001) and Weber (1990), among others. The questionnaire is included as Annex C.

The USAID ECCN Preliminary Rigor Ranking Criteria were applied to this study and it received a score of 20 out of 21, or Very High Rigor (see Annex D).

#### **IV. FINDINGS**

Six of the 18 documents (33 percent) referenced or included a theory of change or development hypothesis. Of the six solicitation documents explicitly referencing theory of change, four provided the theory of change and two requested it from the implementing partner in the application. None of the solicitation documents provided any guidance on how a theory of change should then be measured and/or evaluated (it is assumed this was provided in later PMEPs, but exploring these was beyond the scope of this analysis).

Examples of a prescribed theory of change, drawn from two solicitation documents, are:

The development hypothesis underlying this is that strengthening education at the community level in target locations by making education more relevant, inclusive, and safe will increase access for the most vulnerable learners thus meeting the populations' needs and promoting stability.

The theory of change is that when out-of-school children and youth receive age appropriate and relevant accelerated learning interventions, as well as year-round educational and extra-curricular support activities, more of them will attend and remain in school.

Another solicitation document provides an example of a request that the bidder develop a theory of change:

The applicant must include a program hypothesis that clearly explains the theory or theories of change that underlie the proposed programmatic approach. A theory of change states what expected (Changed) result will follow from a particular set of actions. A simple explanation would be, 'If I add more fuel to the fire, then it will burn hotter.' The application needs to clearly and logically explain the assumed connections between various actions and the goal of increasing equitable access to education in a particular conflict context.

The remaining 12 solicitation documents (67 percent) did not include an explicit reference to a theory of change or development hypothesis. Nonetheless, we were able to deduce their theories of change using the rubric in Annex A, as described in the Methodology discussion, above.

#### **Use of Evidence or Citations**

The solicitation documents inconsistently acknowledged the need for evidence-based approaches and strategies. Seven explicitly referenced specific evidence that guides the logical flow of programming (See Figure 4). In other cases, sources linked to evidence were provided to support contextual and background information related to the project, but were separate from the project's strategic overview and logic. Among the documents that presented varying degrees of evidence, one referred to similar programming in comparable contexts, while another explicitly outlined how prior USAID project evidence is to be used in developing programming. Box 1 illustrates the use of evidence in a solicitation document; this was the clearest example of such usage.

## Box 1. Use of specific evidence as annex in solicitation document

- Conflict harms children not just physically, but socially and emotionally as well. The cognitive development of children suffers during war because skills such as literacy, numeracy and critical thinking are delayed<sup>26</sup>. An interacting relationship exists between education and conflict. Education can be transformative, promote stabilization and peace<sup>27</sup>. Furthermore, teachers and curriculum can be important drivers of change, especially considering broader processes of state-building<sup>28</sup>.
- Uninterrupted access to a quality education is a right even in and after conflict. In the midst of conflict it can provide space, knowledge and skills that provide social-emotional, physical and cognitive protection<sup>29</sup>, while in the longer term, it can provide values and attitudes that offer a basis for transforming conflict itself<sup>30</sup>. Creating a safe and predictable learning environment is a critical step in ensuring learners right to and access to education in conflict-affected environments<sup>31</sup>.
- Research demonstrates that school-based psychosocial interventions can result in improvements that could impact on educational outcomes indirectly, through reduced anxiety, a sense of structure and meaning in the individual's life, improved self-esteem and improved relationships with teachers. At the heart of these approaches is the reestablishment of trust, which in many cases can only be imparted through changed adult behaviors as imparted through teachers.
- Education involves processes of socialization and identity formation, which are vital for economic growth and individual and national advancement and can act as an important vehicle for social cohesion<sup>32</sup>.
- Strengths and benefits of community based education programs include: tend to be more cost-effective than public schools, they provide access to education in underserved communities and challenging contexts, encourage local ownership and they often provide a more culturally-sensitive model for school management and curriculum development<sup>33</sup>. In post-conflict settings it is critical to include a longer-term vision on the role that community-based education plays in re-building or building the education sector and how effective approaches can be institutionalized with clear roles of community and government mapped out<sup>34</sup>. Effective ways to create an enabling environment for girls' education is to ensure strong community involvement in local school management. When the key decisions are made by distant entities, teachers feel less accountable to the community. That very accountability is the best guarantee of proper teacher conduct.

26 Machel, G., *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, United Nations, 1996

27 Bush & Saltarelli, *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*, UNICEF, 2002

28 Rose & Greeley, *Education in Fragile States: Capturing Lessons Learned and Identifying Good Practice*, Centre for International Education, Prepared for the DAC Fragile States Group Service Delivery Workstream Sub-Team for Education Services, 2006

29 Nicolai & Triplehorn, *The Role of Education in Protecting Children in Conflict*, ODI, 2003

30 Novelli & Smith, *The Role of Education in Peacebuilding: A synthesis report of findings from Lebanon, Nepal and Sierra Leone [Research Study]*, 2012

31 Sinclair, Margaret, *Education in Emergencies*, Commonwealth Education Partnerships, 2007 and Bethancourt, T., *Building an evidence base on mental health interventions for children affected by armed conflict*, PMC, 2009

32 Ibid

33 DeStefano, J. et. Al., (2007, December). *Reaching the Underserved: Complementary Models of Effective Schooling*. USAID. EQUIP2, 2006

34 Burde, D., *Weak State, Strong Community? Promoting Community Participation in Post-Conflict Countries*, *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 6, 2, 73-87, 2004

Among the seven solicitation documents that referred to evidence providing a rationale for programming, some cited specific evidence. For example:

Research conducted finds a 'clear and significant relationship among large youth populations; low levels of education, particularly secondary education; and the likelihood of conflict.'

In other cases, the solicitation document requested additional evidence:

All available evidence may be considered in light of the South Sudan context and adapted to ensure a simple, focused, highly effective approach to the achievement of the objectives under this component.

An appropriate mix of interventions shall be supported by evidence-based research and the contractor's own field experience related to how independent interventions (e.g. books, teaching training) or combination of interventions contribute to improved student reading, writing, and math performance.

There are references in each of the seven solicitation documents to the need for data collection and analysis, and for learning in order to provide sound evidence. For example:

The contractor must collect and analyze data . . . to elucidate success factors, constraints, and emerging opportunities.

The contractor will incorporate learning into the [performance monitoring and evaluation plan] framework to strengthen evidence base and test assumptions of models being implemented in the particular country context.

This program will pilot activities . . . generating lessons learned and evidence that will inform future efforts in similar contexts.

Two solicitation documents called for additional background research to be completed as part of the project implementation, so as to better understand the context and thus further refine the theory of change.

#### THE PLANNED VERSUS EMERGENT SOCIAL CHANGE SPECTRUM

Once we identified the explicit or implicit theory of change, we ranked individual projects and phases within the projects according to a spectrum of planned versus emergent theory of change.

Figure 4 displays all projects along the spectrum. Eleven projects (61 percent) fall between 0 and the 2.5 midpoint, signifying a more planned theory of change. The remaining seven projects (39 percent) were characterized as more emergent in their theoretical foundations. The average overall score for all projects was 2.25, indicating that the set falls just below the midpoint between planned and emergent change theories.

**Figure 4. Spectrum of emergent and planned theories of change by project**

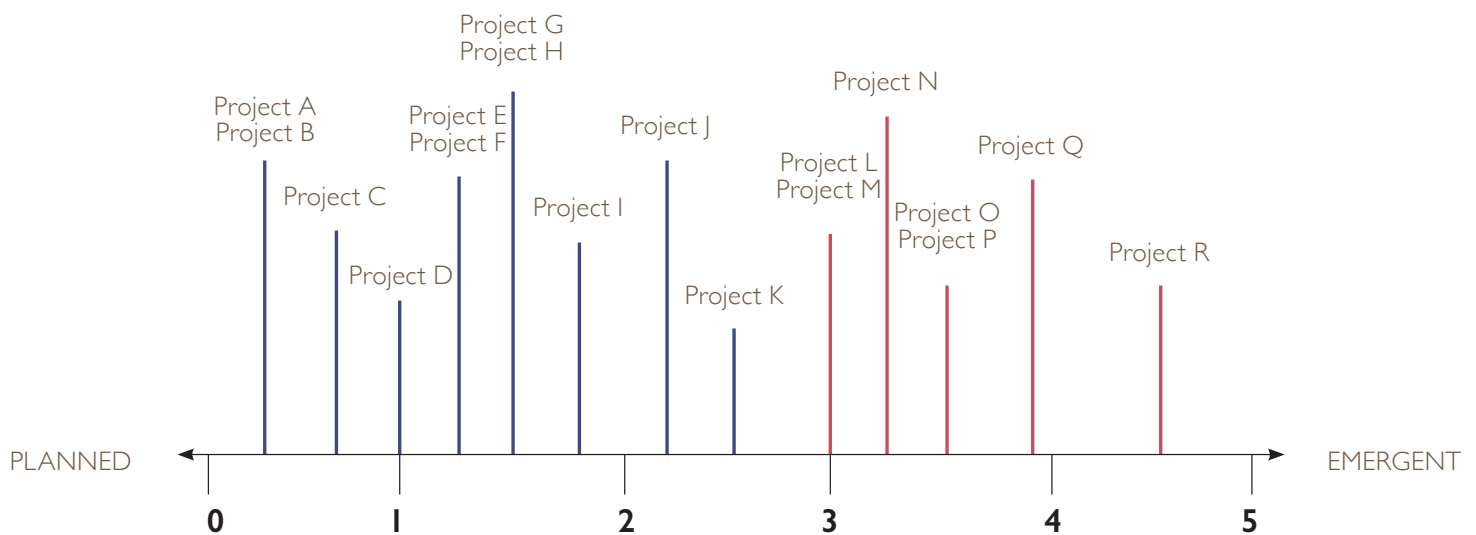
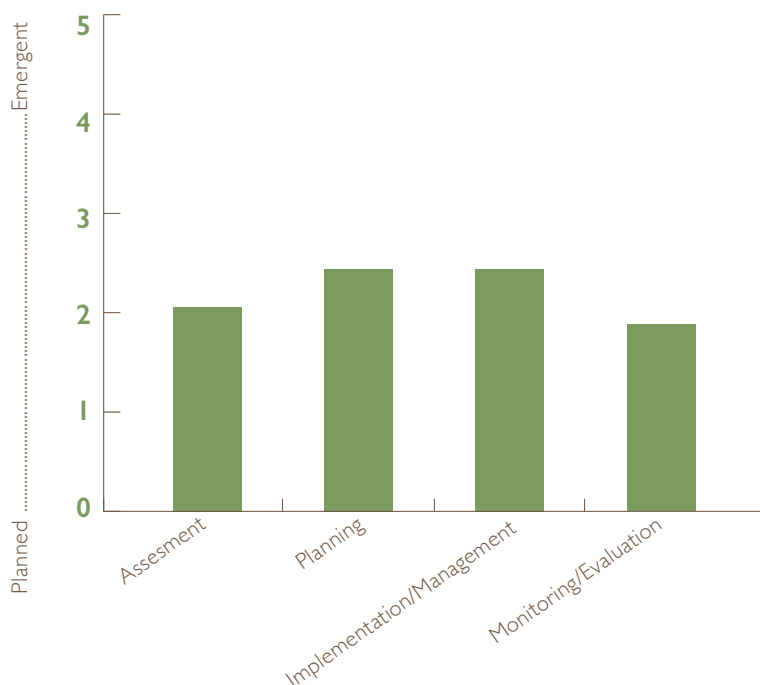


Figure 5 presents the average scores by stage. The planning and management/implementation stages exhibited slightly higher average scores (2.44), indicating that the set of projects were most emergent in these stages, while the monitoring/evaluation stage was the lowest (1.88).

**Figure 5. Average project scores by stage<sup>10</sup>**



#### EMERGENT THEORIES OF CHANGE IN THE SOLICITATION DOCUMENTS

An important aspect of an emergent theory of social change is the use of information obtained through project experience and activity.<sup>11</sup> While all solicitation documents mentioned the standard USAID reporting structures and monitoring and evaluation activities, these standardized uses of information are largely for external purposes.<sup>12</sup> As noted earlier, an emergent theory of change relies on an organization's or project's ability to act and react, to adapt to context and exhibit flexibility in the face of dynamic circumstances in order to achieve results. The assumption in the literature is that data collected more frequently (rolling assessments, for example) may reveal a changing environment or illuminate flaws in the initial project design. The solicitation documents that tended toward a more emergent approach highlighted, to various extents, tools for adaptive management, as detailed below.

Of the 18 solicitation documents, five (28 percent) referenced feedback loops:

The knowledge generated through this systematic process of learning will be fed back and utilized to make decisions about actions needed to improve project implementation.

The exchange of experiences, the development of networks, and continuous feedback loops through structured dialogue enriches the experience of people and can accelerate the development process of the project.

<sup>10</sup> Scale of 0 to 5 where 0 indicates completely planned theory of change and 5 indicates completely emergent theory of change.

<sup>11</sup> See Weick, 2000; Stacey, 2005; Scharmer, 2007

<sup>12</sup> See USAID Learning Lab: <http://usaidlearninglab.org/library>



The use of rolling assessments was mentioned in four (22 percent) of the solicitation documents. One solicitation document explicitly explained the term:

In order to ensure adaptability to emerging challenges and opportunities the project will incorporate rolling assessments into the monitoring and evaluation framework. This will include a monitoring framework that: a) maps out worst, best, and most likely scenarios and how the project will operate within those scenarios in order to achieve the proposed outcomes; as well as b) plans for systematically and routinely assessing program assumptions to check if they remain valid, and respond appropriately.

We read the solicitation documents for references to “organizational learning” and found that six (33 percent) elaborated on the generation of knowledge for improved future programming and its value to USAID. Examples include:

The contractor will incorporate learning into the PMEP framework to strengthen the evidence base and test assumptions of models being implemented in the context. The contractor must collect and analyze data . . . to elucidate success factors, constraints, and emerging opportunities.

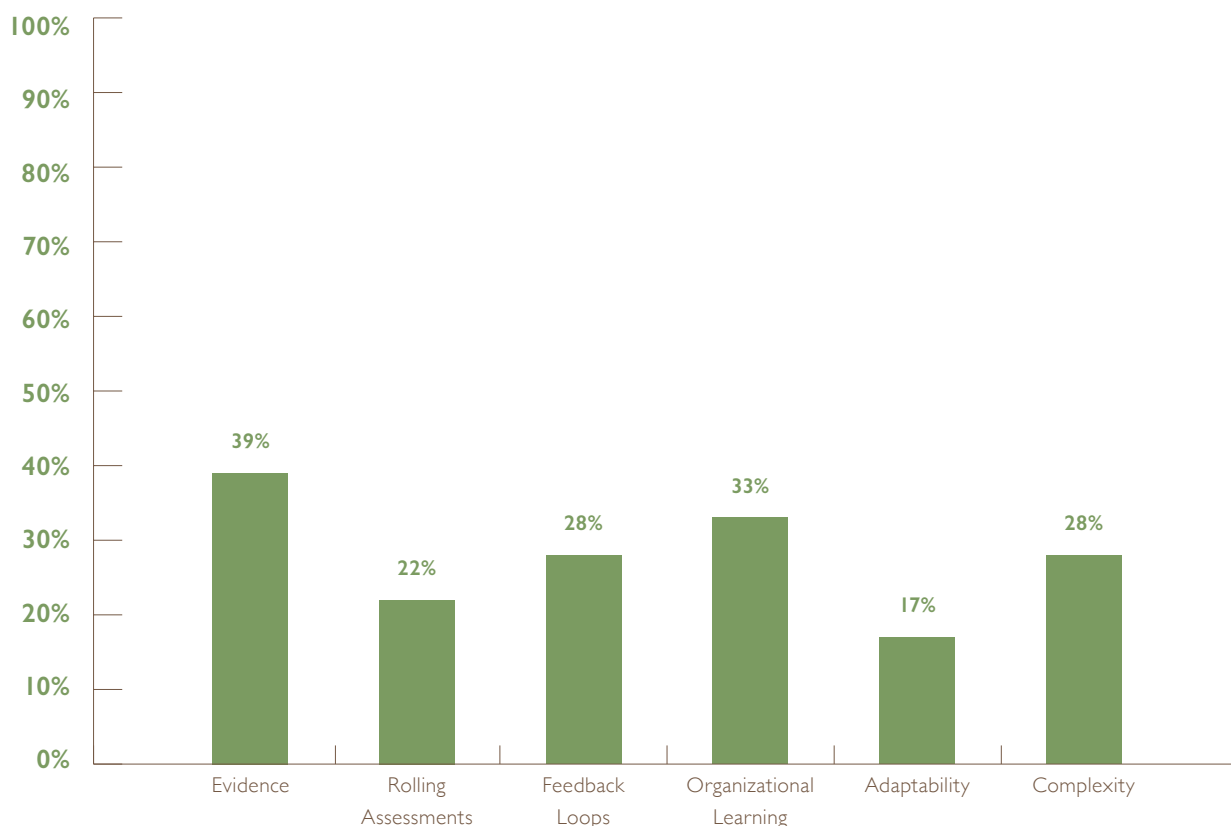
The learned lessons (positive and negative) will be shared with other implementers and organizations.

Evaluation in USAID has two primary purposes: accountability to stakeholders and learning to improve effectiveness.

This program will pilot activities . . . generating lessons learned and evidence that will inform future efforts in similar contexts.

We searched solicitation documents for the terms “adaptability,” “flexibility,” “responsiveness,” and “complexity” in order to further identify use of an emergent approach. Three (17 percent) referenced adaptability or flexibility of programming, and five (28 percent) recognized “complexity” in describing contextually appropriate action (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Explicit references to terms/features related to emergent theory of change within solicitation documents**



One solicitation document stood out for its inclusion of a section entitled “Adaptability, Flexibility, and Responsiveness.” An excerpt appears in Box 2.

### Box 2. Example of emergent change from solicitations

#### C.16. ADAPTABILITY, FLEXIBILITY, AND RESPONSIVENESS.

The DRC is a dynamic context with histories of conflict, insecurity, and emerging opportunities, what might be an appropriate response or intervention at one point in time may not necessarily be appropriate at another time. The challenge is to connect the appropriate interventions to the corresponding windows of opportunity or challenges. The Contractor must incorporate flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness in annual work plans that enable the Contractor to respond to changing environmental conditions and opportunities over the life of the Contract. Flexibility refers to the ability to easily adapt to new conditions and particularly relates to short-term decisions concerning implementation, the use of resources, and course corrections as issues, insecurity, or conflict arise. This includes decisions pertaining to the deployment of staff, project monitoring, and relocation of activities as the need, or new opportunities arise. Adaptability refers to an adjustment to new conditions, shocks, crisis, or stabilization and its impact on long-term decisions and corresponding programmatic adjustments. Responsiveness ensures that the activity does not remain committed to one approach blindly but continually assesses whether the timing, selected approach, participants, location, and any combination therein are still appropriate, effective, and achieving the expected results. The Contractor must ensure that the approved work plan and implementation schedule are able to operate in changing and potentially increasingly insecure environments. As part of the first work plan and implementation schedule process, the contractor must incorporate, scenario planning and Business Continuity Plans, based on the scenario planning with corresponding triggers that would require adoption of outlined scenarios. These plans must be updated annually.

## V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this analysis is to enhance understanding of the use of theories of change in the design of USAID education in crisis and conflict-affected environments, and thereby support the application of USAID’s recent guidance in ADS 201, which calls for, “*Understanding the theory of change behind programming, identifying potential gaps in technical knowledge, and developing plans to fill them;*” (ADS 201, 9/7/2016, p.127).

### Contextualizing the structure and content

To summarize, six solicitation documents explicitly referenced theories of change or development hypotheses, and of those, four provided the theory of change, while two requested that the bidder provide it. The remaining solicitation documents did not explicitly reference theories of change, but we were able to infer a theory from their narratives. Seven solicitation documents referred to specific evidence to support the theories of change (whether the theories of change were explicit or implicit), and two required that additional research be conducted in order to further refine a contextually specific theory of change.

While the majority of the solicitation documents did **not** reference evidence-based theories of change, this does not suggest that they were poor quality or unaligned with standards at the time. Rather, it reflects the recent increase in attention by development organizations (e.g. DfID) and in published research and programmatic literature to theories of change and the use and articulation of evidence in those theories of change; we would not expect the older solicitation documents to include this content. One of USAID ECCN’s critical roles is to provide tools and guidance for incorporating evidence-based theories of change into program design; the information collected through our analysis of solicitation documents has been helpful in identifying where USAID ECCN can build on existing momentum.

### **Contextualizing planned versus emergent theories of change**

The scores we assigned to the solicitation documents do not reflect a value judgment favoring planned or emergent approaches. While an emergent theory does lend itself to the particular and dynamic context of crisis and conflict settings,<sup>13</sup> there are also advantages to the structure and predictability of a planned approach as it may pertain, for example, to the security of an organization's employees. Within the solicitation documents analyzed here, there were instances where clear logic lead to a planned approach. For example, one project prioritized the physical construction of schools and included a logical sequence of activities towards that goal that clearly reflected pre-planning. A second project sought to build on multiple prior USAID-funded projects and included the evaluation of these projects as a basis for decision-making and strategy. In this case, indicators, activities, and projected outcomes were all clearly decided based upon these evaluations and, thus, contributed to a planned approach to the particular project put forth in that solicitation.

Simultaneously, particular details presented in a solicitation document may be indicative of circumstances that belie the theory of change noted elsewhere in the text. For example, one RFA specifically calls for the use of local personnel to conduct monitoring and evaluation activities not in order to develop local capacity, but because of security concerns for international staff.

Based on our analysis, it appears that particular activities and stages of project implementation may lend themselves more to an emergent or planned approach. As previously noted, average scores by project stage were lowest for monitoring and evaluation; this may be due to the specificity of USAID monitoring and evaluation procedure, which leaves less room for adaptive response. In contrast, many solicitation documents left project implementation details open-ended, with the expectation of variation due to the dynamic environment.<sup>14</sup>

### **Using the analysis for ongoing and future USAID ECCN work**

Ongoing or previous USAID ECCN work related to the broad concept of an emergent theory of change, for which this Solicitation Analysis was necessary background research to understand its current application in USAID programming, has included:

- Workshops in Abuja, Nigeria (September 2015), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (May 2016) and Bangkok, Thailand (October 2016) that include training modules on principles and rubrics that align with the CLA approach
- Adaptive Management Annotated Bibliography as part of USAID ECCN Resource Repository (forthcoming 2016)
- Adaptive Management Guidance document, on how to incorporate aspects of adaptive management into project planning and implementation (forthcoming 2016)

This analysis also serves as the baseline for measuring change over time, as we will repeat the analysis in 2019 using a sample of solicitations produced by USAID during 2015–2019. We have noted that the Collaborating, Learning and Adapting framework (see <https://usaidlearninglab.org/>) has now been incorporated within USAID guidance, ADS 201. This guidance describes the use of monitoring and evaluation to prioritize learning and adaptation. The emergent theory of change project analysis in this paper incorporates the principles and rubrics of the Collaborating, Learning and Adapting approach. This analysis provides a vital methodology for monitoring the ongoing evolution of USAID education projects in crisis and conflict-affected environments, in compliance with the recent ADS 201, towards more responsive and evidence-based designs. In addition, work led by USAID ECCN, aligned with the CLA framework, will help to further develop the application of CLA principles through workshops, webinars, and webcasts; dissemination of resources (reports, evaluations, assessments), and development / support of related guidance and tools.

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<sup>13</sup> See Liebhart & Garcia-Lorenzo, 2010; Weick, 2000

<sup>14</sup> One document says, for example, "USAID does not have a single, prescribed approach, but recognizes that effectiveness can be enhanced in a variety of ways."

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## ANNEX A: SOLICITATIONS USED IN ANALYSIS

**Table 1: Summary of USAID solicitation documents related to increasing access to education in crisis and conflict environments reviewed for this analysis**

COUNTRY	PROJECT NAME	ACRONYM	DATES	DOCUMENT TYPE
Honduras	Education Quality Improvement Program	EQUIP3		AEP
Liberia	Core Education Skills for Liberian Youth	CESLY	2009–2011	RFA
Liberia	Education Quality Improvement Program: Advancing Youth Project	EQUIP3		RFA
Haiti	Retounen Lekol: Access to Quality Education for Out-of-School Youth	RtL		RFA
Lebanon	Developing Rehabilitation Assistance to Schools and Teachers	DRASATI	2010–2015	RFA
Afghanistan	Learning for Community Empowerment Program	LCEP2	2005–2011	RFA
El Salvador	Education for Children & Youth Activity		2013–2018	RFA
DRC	Opportunities for Equitable Access to Quality Basic Education	OPEQ		RFA
DRC	Equitable Access to Education and Learning Project	EqAccEPL	2015–2020	RFP
South Sudan	Health Education and Reconciliation Project	HEAR	2006–2013	PMP
South Sudan	Safe Schools Support	SSS		RFA
South Sudan	Teacher Training			RFA
Kenya	Yes Youth Can	YYC		RFA
Yemen	Community Livelihoods Project: Access in Conflict/Crisis Areas		2012	RFA
Nigeria	Northern Education Crisis Response	ECR	2009–2014	APS
Pakistan	Sindh Basic Education Program	SBEP	201–2016	M&E
Somalia	Somali Youth Leaders Initiative		201–2016	RFA
Mali	Mali Out of School Youth	EQUIP3		RFA

## ANNEX B:

### Rubric for planned and emergent theory of change

STAGE	PLANNED SOCIAL CHANGE	EMERGENT SOCIAL CHANGE
ASSESSMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment done by agency or consultants drawing on existing data and field work, using agency-approved protocols and reporting</li> <li>• Identifies problems and gaps that project will address as determined by agency (and gov't)</li> <li>• Limited time frame for assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and consultations extensive with stakeholders and communities as action learning to arrive at collective understanding of issues and goals</li> <li>• Use of participative methodologies in local languages, bringing forth beliefs, values, religion, culture, information, insights, and ideas</li> <li>• Process seeks collective agreement at local (and possibly national) levels</li> <li>• Builds on existing promising practices and capacities; emphasis on capacity development</li> </ul>
PLANNING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops a log frame or Results Framework that specifies the causal logic between inputs, actions, outputs, and outcomes, or sub-IRs, IRs and SO</li> <li>• Focused on a single sector; typically little cross-sectoral connections</li> <li>• Contextual factors outside the manageable interest of the project (like teacher conditions of service and salaries) are assumed to be stable</li> <li>• Prepared by agency staff often with consultancies, in consultation and the agreement of government</li> <li>• Includes the development of indicators and M&amp;E methodology (performance M&amp;E plan) to assess project implementation and outcomes</li> <li>• Resources, modality (for implementation), time frame and reporting are determined by agency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involves local resource individuals and organizations facilitating a consultative planning process to determine desired outcomes, strategies, and organizational processes for decision-making</li> <li>• Addresses multiple issues, constraints and resources for moving toward outcomes—at a local level . . . thus an accelerated education program (AEP) may also provide for enterprise development, childcare support, and training for single mothers or child-headed households</li> <li>• Plans for the resources and methods for frequent, credible, feedback from local communities and stakeholders to assess progress, opportunities, as well as barriers</li> <li>• Plans for use of social media and arts (dance, music, drama, photography, video) for communications</li> </ul>
IMPLEMENTATION MANAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on project design, contracts out to implementing organization(s)</li> <li>• Implementing partner responsible for managing the implementation of the plan as given, reporting back on regular schedule to funding agency</li> <li>• Reporting is based on monitoring of the implementation of milestones and indicators described in the Project Plan and in annual work plans and budgets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeks to maximize use of local organization(s) and to build capacities</li> <li>• Implementation is based on an action learning cycle, with frequent, credible, feedback from local communities and stakeholders to assess progress, opportunities, as well as barriers and ways forward</li> <li>• Project implementation flexible, making adjustments and changes of strategy and use of resources based on feedback</li> <li>• Multiple local methods, innovations encouraged and assessed; those methods and tools judged useful shared across project sites</li> <li>• The focus of the implementation is to build capacity and organizational learning</li> </ul>
MONITORING & EVALUATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project effectiveness is judged by the degree to which the plan and its objective/results were efficiently implemented and achieved</li> <li>• The framework typically requires a baseline, mid-term, and final project evaluation, in which the indicators and costs specified in the plan are tracked over time</li> <li>• Where feasible and appropriate, impact evaluations, which require a counterfactual sample (ideally in a randomized controlled trial design) are conducted</li> <li>• Evaluations are typically managed/performed by an external contracted organization/consultant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See: Outcome Based Evaluation Assessing Social Change Model, REFLECT (Action Aide); Beneficiary Evaluation (UK Department for International Development—in press)</li> <li>• Self-assessment by participants and organizations, supplemented by external assessment</li> <li>• Building on the evidence from feedback loops to note change processes and progress; evolving outputs and outcomes</li> <li>• Look for innovations and tools from local implementers</li> <li>• Sustainability and organic growth</li> <li>• Indirect influence and unanticipated outcomes</li> </ul>

**ANNEX C:**  
Planned versus emergent social change questionnaire

STAGE	THEMES	QUESTIONS / ANALYSIS	PLANNED	YES/NO	EMERGENT	YES/NO
ASSESSMENT	External vs. community-driven action	1. How are problem and objectives identified?	Identifies problems and gaps that project will address as determined by agency (and gov't)		Research and consultations with stakeholders and communities as action learning to arrive at collective understanding of issues and goals	
	Prescriptive vs. open	2. How is assessment data gathered?	Assessment done by agency or consultants drawing on existing data and field work; using agency-approved protocols and reporting		Use of participative methodologies in local languages, bringing forth beliefs, values, religion, culture, information, insights, and ideas	
		3. Is consideration/mention of context stated?	Little focus/ acknowledgement/background on relevant contextual issues; no mention of adaptability	Context stated; need for adaptability regarding context articulated		
	Single vs. cross-cutting sectors	4. Who gathers assessment data? Who determines problem identification and project objectives?	Conducted by agency or consultants		Process involves community-generated input	
	Information used for external accountability vs. feedback loops for local learning	5. How long is the needs assessment process?	Limited/assigned time frame for assessment identified		Ongoing basis in iterative process that allows for objectives to change over time as new information is gathered	
					<b>TOTAL ASSESSMENT:</b>	



STAGE	THEMES	QUESTIONS / ANALYSIS	PLANNED	YES/NO	EMERGENT	YES/NO	
PLANNING	External vs. community-driven action	6. What is the project theory of change?	Develops a log frame or Results Framework that specifies the causal logic between inputs, actions, outputs and outcomes, or sub-IRs, IRs, and SO; Results Framework utilizes standard structure/presentation		Theory of change articulated beyond the Results Framework; acknowledgement of the narrative connecting SO/IR or IR/ sub-IR; mention of context and input of communities / local knowledge in development of theory of change		
	Single vs. cross-sectoral approach	7. Is the project employing a single or cross-sectoral approach?	Focused on a single sector; typically few cross-sectoral connections		Addresses multiple issues, constraints, and resources for moving toward outcomes — at a local level . . . thus an accelerated education program (AEP) may also provide for enterprise development, childcare support, and training for single mothers or child-headed households		
	Prescriptive vs. open	8. Are contextual factors included?	Contextual factors outside the manageable interest of the project (like teacher conditions of service and salaries) are assumed to be stable	Contextual factors considered in such a way that project can evolve as these factors constrain implementation			
			Includes the development of indicators and M&E methodology to assess project implementation and outcomes; focused on proven strategies based on prior research; sustainability and scalability based on original plan	Initial plan is set up (and acknowledges required reporting mechanisms) but evolves as context changes; innovative strategies can evolve over time; allows for project to evolve and change over time; acknowledgement of this adaptability within document			
	Information used for external accountability vs. feedback loops for local learning	10. Who prepares/participates in planning process?	Prepared by agency staff often with consultants, in consultation and the agreement of government; resources, modality (for implementation), time frame and reporting are determined by agency	Plans for the resources and methods for frequent, credible, feedback from local communities and stakeholders to assess progress, opportunities, as well as barriers			
						TOTAL PLANNING:	

STAGE	THEMES	QUESTIONS / ANALYSIS	PLANNED	YES/NO	EMERGENT	YES/NO
IMPLEMENTATION / MANAGEMENT	External vs. community-driven action	11. Cost and resource planning / workforce capacity / Who manages project implementation?	Based on project design, contracts out to implementing organization(s); much external workforce; costs and resources determined by external agency; implementing partner responsible for managing the implementation of the plan as given, reporting back on regular schedule to funding agency		Seeks to maximize use of local organization(s) and to build capacities, including reliance on local workforce capacity; costs/resources are gathered throughout the lifespan of program, change over-time, and are managed by local entities	
	Prescriptive vs. open	12. Nature of project implementation	Implementation is focused on putting into place original plan; no mention of adaptability		Implementation is based on an action learning cycle, with frequent, credible, feedback from local communities and stakeholders to assess progress, opportunities, as well as barriers and ways forward; Project implementation flexible, making adjustments and changes of strategy and use of resources based on feedback	
		13. Contextual factors	No mention of potential for contextual change, dynamic nature of context		Frequent, credible feedback from local communities as it relates to relevant contextual information; project implementation is adaptable and sensitive to context and acknowledges dynamic nature of environment	
	Information used for external accountability vs. feedback loops for local learning	14. Reporting	Based on monitoring of the implementation of indicators as described in project plan and in annual work plans and budgets		Reports based on local methods and innovative forms of assessing project progress, and are used to make adjustments as needed. Departure from original plan is allow and expected	
	Single vs. cross-cutting sectors	15. Is the project single or cross-cutting?	Single		Cross-cutting	
					TOTAL IMPLEMENTATION:	

STAGE	THEMES	QUESTIONS / ANALYSIS	PLANNED	YES/NO	EMERGENT	YES/NO
MONITORING & EVALUATION	External vs. community-driven action	16. Evaluation plan / design	Includes the development of a priori indicators and M&E methodology (performance management plan) to assess project implementation and outcomes; where feasible and appropriate, impact evaluations, which require a counterfactual sample (ideally in a randomized controlled trial design) are conducted		Considers the extent to which local needs are being addressed, and acknowledges that these needs may evolve throughout the project's life; inclusion of standard reporting structures; but simultaneous mention of evolving project needs and inevitable change	
		17. Who is involved in evaluation process?	Evaluations are typically managed performed by an external contracted organization/consultant		Emphasis on local feedback; self-assessment by participants and organizations, supplemented by external assessment	
	Information used for external accountability vs. feedback loops for local learning	18. Definitions of success	Project effectiveness is judged by the degree to which the plan and its objective/results were efficiently implemented and achieved		Local, evolving needs are being addressed, not just in terms of original outcomes, but from a holistic perspective; includes unanticipated outcomes	
	Prescriptive vs. open	19. Level of specificity	The framework typically requires a baseline, mid-term, and final project evaluation, in which the indicators and costs specified in the plan are tracked over time; specific indicators, goals, measures must be noted; (standard reporting mechanisms)		Local feedback is gathered on an ongoing basis through creative and innovative approaches; adaptability in evaluation strategy / measurement of outcomes is acknowledged; unanticipated outcomes are noted; (standard reporting mechanisms still utilized, but with mention/addition of feedback loops and additional use of generated knowledge)	
	Single vs. cross-cutting sectors	20. Is the project single or cross-cutting sectors?	Single		Cross-cutting	
					TOTAL EVALUATION:	
					TOTAL/AGGREGATE SCORE:	

## ANNEX D: RIGOR RANKING

\*All USAID ECCN research pieces will be ranked according to our own criteria to ensure only products of very high rigor are produced and released.

### RANK: VERY HIGH

Table 2. Scoring Guide for Assessing Evidence in Crisis and Conflict-Affected Areas<sup>15</sup>

PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY	QUESTIONS <sup>16</sup>	SCORE
1. Conceptual framing	Is the study situated in the existing research?	1
	Does the study present its conceptual framework?	1
	Does the conceptual framework recognize the role of conflict/crisis?*	1
	Does the study pose research questions appropriate for the context in conflict/crisis?	1
	Does the study clearly state its hypothesis?	1
	<b>SECTION 1 SCORE</b>	5/5
2. Openness and transparency	Does the study describe the process of data collection in sufficient detail?	1
	Is the study specific about its limitations and weaknesses?	1
	Does the study acknowledge the impact of crisis/conflict on the process of the data collection and associated limitations?*	1
	Does the study report include data collection tools and other essential information?	1
	Is the study transparent about the generalizability of its findings?	1
	<b>SECTION 2 SCORE</b>	5/5
3. Robustness of methodology	Does the study clearly describe its research design and its limitations?	1
	Does the study describe data collection methods in sufficient detail?	1
	Does the study justify why the chosen design/method/sample are good ways to answer the research question?	1
	Is the study report explicit about the implementation process of the study?	1
	Does the study specify how the conflict/crisis affected the process of the study implementation and results?*	n/a
	<b>SECTION 3 SCORE</b>	4/4
4. Cultural appropriateness/sensitivity	Is the study design, including data collection methods, sensitive to the conflict/crisis of the area where it is conducted?*	n/a
	Are the data collection instruments culturally relevant and appropriate?	1
	Is there evidence reported that the data collection instruments were piloted?	0
	Was the analysis informed by consideration of cultural relevance?	n/a
	Is there evidence that research was conducted in a conflict-sensitive manner/adhered to "do no harm" principle?*	n/a
	<b>SECTION 4 SCORE</b>	1/2
5. Validity	Has the study reported measurement validity?	n/a
	Is the selected measurement conflict-sensitive?*	n/a
	To what extent is the study internally valid?	n/a
	Does the study report its external validity?	n/a
	Is the study explicit about its ecological validity?	n/a
	<b>SECTION 5 SCORE</b>	n/a
6. Reliability	Does the study describe steps taken to ensure measurement reliability?	1
	Has the study demonstrated that its selected analytical technique is reliable?	1
	<b>SECTION 6 SCORE</b>	2/2
7. Cogency	Does the study report present the clear connections between conceptual framework, study questions, and findings?	1
	Are all the conclusions clearly based on the data?	1
	Is the report written in clear, unambiguous, non-technical language?	1
	<b>SECTION 7 SCORE</b>	3/3
	<b>OVERALL SCORE</b>	20/21

<sup>15</sup> The Scoring Guide can also be used to assess the quality of evidence in studies in non-conflict areas.

<sup>16</sup> Questions with (\*) mark question tailored for assessing quality of evidence in studies in crisis and conflict-affected areas.