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# Needs Assessment Summary: Together for Early Childhood Evidence

Consortium on Pre-Primary Data and Measurement in Africa

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## Key Messages

- Countries face multiple challenges, especially related to early childhood education access and availability of data.
- There is a strong desire to improve inter-sectoral coordination.
- Increasing quality is seen as one potential opportunity for USAID to engage in the early childhood sector.
- Consortium offers an opportunity to exchange learnings and continue to build USAID's ECE investments.
- Together for Early Childhood Evidence offers an opportunity to build on and provide technical guidance for the emerging ECE activities in countries.

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As part of its commitment to increasing investments and programming in early childhood education (ECE), in 2018 USAID partnered with the ECD Measure Group at the University of Nebraska Medical Center to create a Consortium on Pre-Primary Data and Measurement in Africa (CPDMA). The Consortium (now known as Together for Early Childhood Evidence) is focused on building capacity within USAID Missions and country teams to engage in early childhood work within selected countries in Africa.

To better understand the opportunities and challenges at the country level in early childhood education, care and learning, the ECD Measure Group conducted a needs assessment from July-October 2020. The needs assessment was designed to gather inputs from USAID staff in Washington D.C. and select Missions to further inform planning of Together for Early Childhood Evidence activities, with a specific focus on defining the needs for technical assistance for building early childhood systems. As requested by USAID Africa Bureau, the assessment focused on gathering inputs specifically from USAID Missions. However, Together for Early Childhood Evidence will focus on addressing the needs and providing technical support to USAID Missions as well as the broader country teams, made up of various key early childhood stakeholders. This summary report outlines the key findings from the needs assessment and indicates areas for potential technical assistance to strengthen early childhood systems in the six countries participating in the Consortium (Ethiopia, Liberia, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia).

Healthy early childhood development (ECD) depends on support across the health, nutrition, social protection and education sectors. It is worth noting that this needs assessment, and the broader Together for Early Childhood Evidence initiative, comes from an education perspective, as education teams in USAID were the primary contacts for the needs assessment

(and the Consortium is funded through USAID Africa Bureau Education). Although the needs assessment was intended to gather information on the coordination across entities and sectors that is required to move forward in ECD, there was an emphasis on understanding the education sector's role in providing early childhood services. As per the scope of the project, Together for Early Childhood Evidence works with education sector staff within USAID.

## Key Findings from the Needs Assessment

The needs assessment included an online survey completed by 12 USAID DC-based and Mission-based staff, as well as follow-up in-depth interviews with USAID staff in the six target countries. The online survey primarily consisted of multiple-choice questions about the ECE context in respondent's countries, as well as their opinions on the areas in greatest need of support. The in-depth interviews built upon survey answers to gather more detailed inputs on USAID's perspectives on strategic entry points and specific country needs in the ECD sub-sector.

The following is a summary of the key findings from the overall needs assessment (online survey and in-depth interviews):

- **ECD is a priority area for USAID Missions in each of the six focus countries.** In all six focus countries, ECD (not only ECE) is either included directly in USAID Mission country strategies or implicit within the health/education goals. However, most USAID Mission teams need more support and guidance on how to turn ECD priorities and mandates into projects they can implement within budgets and workable timeframes.
- **Countries face multiple challenges, especially related to ECE access and availability of data. The majority of**

respondents in the online survey indicated that increasing ECE quality and access and improving the availability, scope and use of data (i.e., measurement of child development and quality of learning environments) were very challenging issues in their countries. These issues were considered amongst the highest priorities to address.

- **There is a strong desire to improve inter-sectoral coordination.** All countries reported that **early childhood services are delivered through multiple sectors.** Intersectoral coordination (primarily between education, health/nutrition and social protection) in implementing holistic ECD programming was noted as a key challenge by all country teams.
- **USAID Missions need a clear entry point to support the government.** Most of the Mission teams interviewed mentioned other in-country partners who are already significantly involved in ECD and/or ECE. In identifying areas for future USAID engagement, it will be important to avoid any overlap with ongoing interventions. **Increasing the quality of ECE is seen as one potential opportunity for USAID to engage in the early childhood sector.**
- **There is an opportunity to learn from experiences in countries to continue to build USAID's ECE investments.** Several of the focus countries have already piloted or have ongoing ECE programming. There is an opportunity to further review the evidence from these experiences to make data-driven decisions on improving the early childhood systems.
- **Countries need more data, ECE technical expertise and funding to execute their work. Together for Early Childhood Evidence offers an**

**opportunity to build on and provide technical guidance for the emerging ECE activities in countries.**

## Potential Areas for Technical Assistance

Based on the issues identified in the needs assessment, Together for Early Childhood Evidence will focus on providing technical assistance and capacity building for the six country teams and other USAID staff to strengthen early childhood systems. While the previous work of the Consortium was largely focused on data and measurement, results from the needs assessment show that this is not necessarily always the highest priority for countries. As such, the focus of Together for Early Childhood Evidence has expanded to include a broader range of topics related to early childhood, while acknowledging that data can play an important role in reaching broader goals on accessible, quality ECE for all children. Together for Early Childhood Evidence will still maintain an emphasis on data-driven decision-making for ECE systems. Building on the challenges highlighted in the needs assessment, the following have been identified as three potential areas for support:

- **Improving access to ECE.** Support for country teams could include engaging with the education sector planning process to advocate for more funds for ECE; stock-taking on effective models for ECE; analyses of country systems including identification of possible ways to expand access through private as well as public providers; and connections with other countries to discuss approaches to expanding access.
- **Improving ECE Quality.** Together for Early Childhood Evidence can help country teams evaluate and review existing tools for measuring quality and learning and help countries on the path to developing quality assurance systems and routine

measurement for ECD and learning. Together for Early Childhood Evidence can provide examples and resources from other countries that have developed systems for measuring ECE quality and have used that data to make improvements in ECE programming.

- **Supporting sustainable, collaborative engagement across sectors.** Together for Early Childhood Evidence can provide an opportunity for country teams to share: 1) examples of effective cross-sectoral collaborations within USAID country offices; 2) barriers and challenges that prevent cross-sectoral collaborations; and 3) ideas for enhancing cross-sectoral collaborations within and across USAID offices. Using the perceptions of USAID staff and knowledge of effective practices within the broader field of ECD, Together for Early Childhood Evidence can make recommendations on how USAID teams can build upon and expand cross-sector partnerships in their programming.

## Key Next Steps

Based on the agreed areas of technical assistance for country teams and USAID Missions, ECD Measure will host virtual meetings to support country teams and USAID education Missions to help establish integrated ECD work within each country, with an emphasis on ECE. Technical assistance may include: periodic meetings with country teams from the task force; meetings with other Missions as requested to provide specific guidance on requested topics; and hosting recorded webinars focusing on specific ECD issues. Eventually, depending on possibilities to travel within the context of the ongoing global pandemic, ECD Measure will also host in-person meetings. In addition, Together for Early Childhood Evidence will support country-level research activities to further understand and address each country's specific needs in ECE systems.

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