



August 2023

RESILIENCE LEARNING AGENDA: DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMON AGENDA AND MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK

USAID Ethiopia Resilience Learning Activity (RLA)

The **USAID Ethiopia Resilience Learning Activity (RLA)** is a “learning sidecar” for USAID’s resilience investments, working across USAID staff, offices, and implementing agencies (projects) to strengthen a culture of learning, sharing, evidence generation, substantiation, and triangulation. RLA is implemented by LINC from 2022 to 2027.



BACKGROUND

USAID Ethiopia’s resilience-building portfolio is among the largest and most complex in the world, comprising more than twenty resilience-focused activities spanning multiple offices and development objectives. The Mission receives and manages a vast quantity of data on resilience in Ethiopia. Making resilience evidence easily available, reliable, organized, cohesive and easy-to-use for USAID and its stakeholders is a challenge. Then interpreting the available evidence and establishing learning priorities is a further challenge, one that if overcome, would enable USAID Ethiopia and its resilience partners to progress in its resilience-building efforts in a more deliberate and integrated way moving forward. In its first year of implementation, RLA realized the importance of establishing a common agenda and shared measurement framework aligned with USAID’s higher level resilience learning goals. We did this through the formulation of a **Resilience Learning Agenda**.



CHALLENGE

Disparate data and divergent priorities for resilience-building. Making data on “what works in resilience” available, and aligning strategic priorities across USAID and IPs is a challenge.



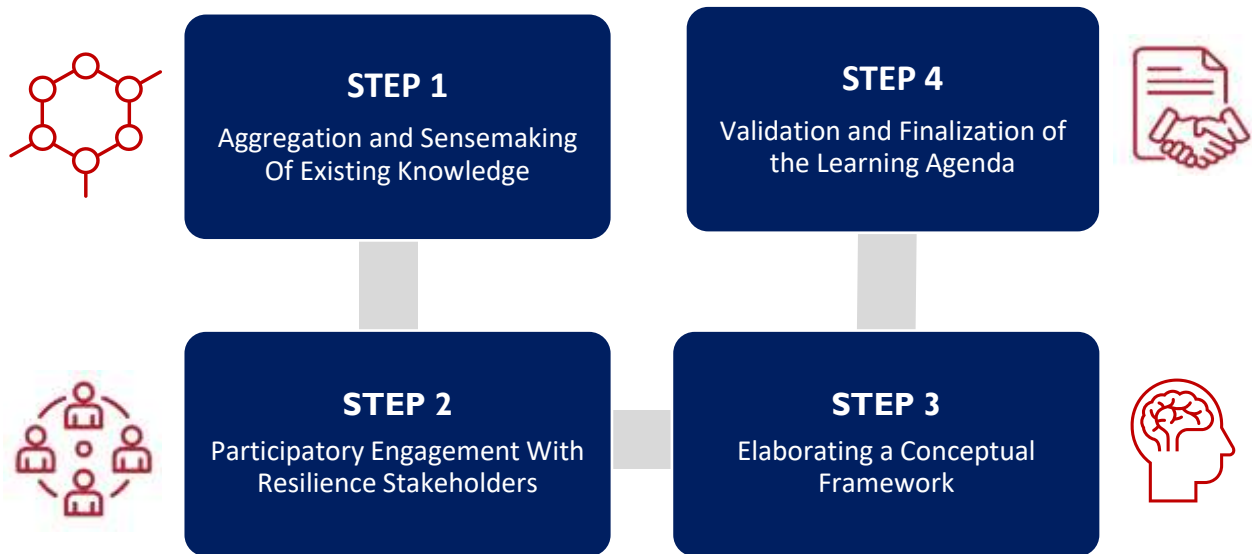
OPPORTUNITY

A USAID Ethiopia Resilience Learning Agenda. Establishing a common agenda and framework for measurement that all partners can unite around.

PROCESS AND APPROACH

Developing a shared learning agenda across USAID’s portfolio of resilience-building activities will provide a pathway to guide RLA and the resilience platform’s progress toward results, orienting USAID and its resilience implementing partners around standard benchmarks and shared definitions of success.

Working in a participatory way and bolstered through analytical support, RLA facilitated the development of a shared learning agenda using the four-step approach described below over the course of five months from February to June 2023.



STEP 1: AGGREGATION AND SENSEMAKING OF EXISTING - KNOWLEDGE

RLA began by conducting two rigorous analyses to inform the learning agenda development process: 1) a **Resilience Evidence Gap Analysis (REGA)** which focused on collecting and analyzing evidence from diverse sectors, and 2) a **Resilience Community Learning Agenda Analysis (RCLAA)**, which focused on reviewing and analyzing the learning agendas of USAID and its learning partners. Both of these foundational analytical efforts were time consuming, taking several months to complete. The evidence gap analysis coded scores of documents utilizing qualitative coding and analytical techniques. The learning agenda analysis identified learning clusters and aggregated 276 questions from twelve separate pre-existing learning agendas from USAID and IPs.

As the team progressed in its analysis of learning questions, the questions themselves were categorized into five question types: context, measurement, selection of approach, adaptive management, and results. Further into the analysis, technical themes began to emerge (e.g., livelihoods, HDP coherence, GYSI, etc.) and were tabulated against question type. The analysis team was ultimately able to narrow these questions down into eight learning categories, later referred to as “learning spaces”.

STEP 2: PARTICIPATORY ENGAGEMENT WITH RESILIENCE STAKEHOLDERS

Between March and June 2023, RLA leveraged its collective action platform to engage over 150 resilience stakeholders to contribute to the development of the learning agenda.

In March 2023, RLA convened a **Platform Launch Workshop** whereby sixteen resilience-focused implementing partners and thirteen representatives from various USAID/Ethiopia offices learned about the REGA and RCLAA work, engaged with potential learning spaces, and provided feedback on their own priorities to chart the course forward.

Eight learning spaces were presented to the group at the workshop. Participants began interacting with the learning questions at this stage, self-selecting into learning spaces that they were most interested in and providing feedback on content. Participants ultimately prioritized five learning spaces: 1) Measurement Utility, Consistency, Effectiveness; 2) Private Sector-led Economic Growth and Resilient Livelihoods; 3) GYSI Programming for Improved Resilience Outcomes; 4) Essential Service Delivery to Improve Nutrition, Sanitation, and Hygiene for Vulnerable Populations; and 5) Humanitarian - Development - Peace (HDP) Coherence.

These priorities became the technical focus areas for five **Learning Space Task Force Groups (TFGs)**. In May and early June, RLA convened a series of virtual and in-person TFG meetings that allowed TFG members, nominated by their organizations and experts in these subject areas, to interact with scores of draft learning questions. Over the course of two months, each of the TFGs met three times, interacting with and prioritizing learning questions for finalization. TFGs ultimately produced a list of draft questions organized within their learning space, and a preliminary “wish list” of potential communities of practice that may address prioritized questions.

LARGE CONSULTATIVE WORKSHOP



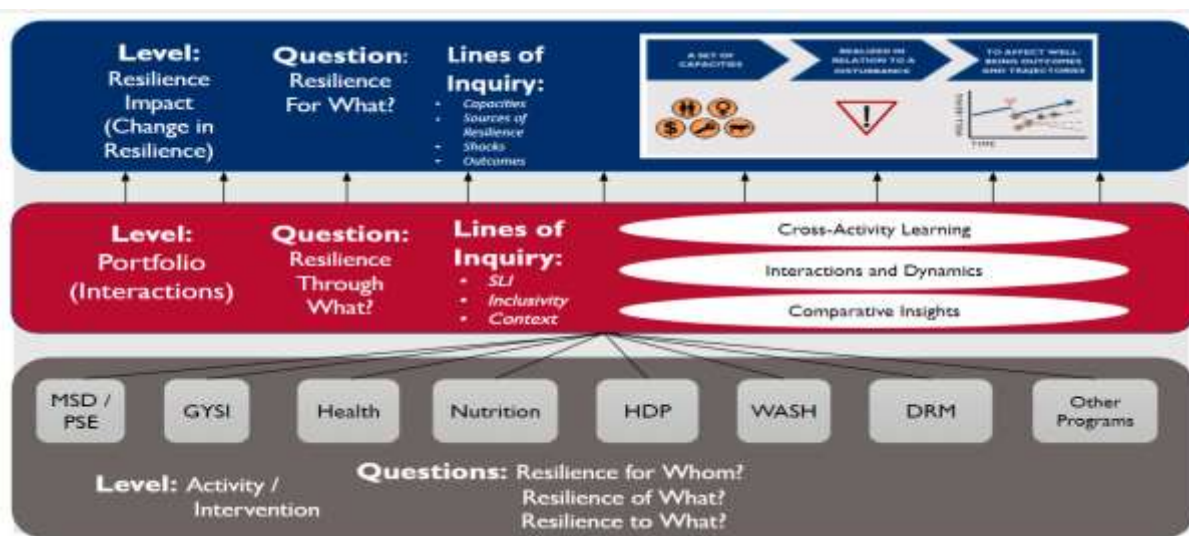
FIVE LEARNING SPACES ENGAGING EXPERTS FROM OUR NETWORK

STEP 3: ELABORATING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

RLA’s overarching research question asks, “Under what conditions and in what ways are USAID Ethiopia’s interventions (along or in combination or sequence) resulting in more resilient households, communities, and systems?” Now that the team had generated so much feedback and input from the resilience network, it was time to start hanging the emerging learning questions onto a framework aligned with RLA’s overarching research question and theory of change.

RLA convened several meetings internally, examining the feedback obtained from our participatory engagements and aligning it with well recognized resilience measurement frameworks. RLA arrived at a three-level framework illustrated below that incorporates consideration of shocks and resilience capacities,

and how these combinations lead to varied resilience outcomes. The learning “stacks-up” on three interconnected levels: Intervention / Activity / Project Level; Portfolio Level; and Impact Level, while the “resilience-for” questions are systematically addressed.



STEP 4: VALIDATION AND FINALIZATION OF THE LEARNING AGENDA

By the fifth month of this process, in June 2023, the effort was nearing its culmination. Over the previous five months RLA had engaged in extensive outreach and gathering of evidence, formative analysis and sensemaking, participatory engagement of USAID and resilience partners, consultations with experts through TFGs, and establishment of a conceptual framework for “stacking-up” the learning.

Having a set of themes and prioritized questions in-hand, RLA was ready to take it back to the platform. On June 14, 2023, RLA convened a one-day workshop with more than fifty participants across the resilience partner network and USAID. The group was composed of numerous experts that had participated in our TFGs, in addition to senior-level managers and other staff. The main task of the workshop was providing feedback to platform members on our process to-date and focusing-in on the highest priority learning questions. Valuable feedback was obtained through several participatory sessions, and perhaps most importantly, participants indicated that they were “on-board” to move forward with finalization of the Resilience Learning Agenda.

WHAT DID WE LEARN

The RLA team took away several important lessons from this complex learning agenda development process. They included:

Balance trust with results: This is essential to any multi-partner learning journey. Our process relied heavily on active participation of both USAID and implementing partners. Over 20 resilience partners (many of which compete for funding and thought leadership) were able to collaboratively participate in multiple stages of this process. Simultaneous to learning agenda development, RLA advanced a collective action process, building trust among partners while pushing the learning agenda process forward. Some of the ways we built that trust included the establishment of a shared governance framework for the platform, personal outreach and recruitment of resilience platform members, and regular workshops and events featuring the work of platform members. This helped to build a foundation for collaboration.

Participation from both technical experts and managers: Over the course of seven different consultative events, we built in windows for both technical experts and managers / leadership of our resilience partners to participate. This ensured that we were able to obtain rich technical input from experts which was still grounded within the practical realities of implementation. As a result, we found the content of our learning agenda to be more pragmatic, and participants prioritized communities of practice to follow-up on the learning priorities that meet with their more immediate needs.

Establish a conceptual framework: Once we our team had the (long) list of learning questions in front of us, and several “learning spaces”, we realized that we needed to provide more structure to the learning. We asked ourselves what all these learning questions add-up to and began to investigate conceptual frameworks for resilience learning. In our case, the framework advanced by USAID’s REAL network won the day, and we were able to better categorize learning levels to meet our needs. This conceptual framework provides important structure to the learning agenda, and we are able to tie it directly back to RLA’s overarching research question and theory of change. We formulated our framework prior to our final validation workshop, which seemed like a natural point in the process for this to be elaborated.

Review the literature and existing information up-front: We did a lot of formative analysis prior to launching the effort with our resilience partners. This had multiple benefits. First, it didn’t waste our partners’ time, and we received a lot of feedback that participants were glad that we came to our launch workshop with real content and got them working straight-away. Next, it provided us with the opportunity to introduce ourselves to the partners in advance of our first workshop. We did 1:1 meetings with them and collected their learning agendas and other priorities. Finally, it allowed us to triangulate evidence gaps (through the REGA) against learning priorities, as these two things are not the same. For example, we found a big learning priority related to women’s savings groups, an area where our evidence gap analysis told us that there was already quite a lot of learning taking place.

A COMMON AGENDA AND MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK FOR THE RESILIENCE COMMUNITY

RLA produced the first USAID/Ethiopia Resilience Portfolio-Level Learning Agenda. This document lists and prioritizes 21 learning questions, recommends an approach for answering the highest priority questions, and articulates how the learning will stack-up into insights on the effectiveness of resilience-building interventions portfolio-wide. It establishes a common agenda and measurement framework (two key principles of an effective collective action effort) around which USAID and its multi-sectoral resilience partners can organize moving forward.

While this Resilience Learning Agenda is not the “full solution” to the challenge of disparate data and divergent resilience priorities, it is an important step on the resilience learning pathway. RLA intends to revisit the learning agenda annually, or whenever the need is identified moving forward. Now that the learning agenda helps to answer the “what” question, future RLA interventions will focus on the “how”, providing support to USAID and its partners to advance multiple learning pathways and better ascertain the effectiveness and impact of its collective resilience-building investments.

“There are differing approaches to resilience measurement across our sector. Many organizations have their own approaches. As a result, resilience outcomes are interpreted in various ways. I am glad that USAID has been supporting the whole process of more systematic resilience learning and assisting us through RLA.”

— Maria Alemu,
CLA Technical Advisor, CRS



NEXT STEPS

Coming out of the learning agenda development process, RLA has formed four Communities of Practice (CoPr) organized around timely, field-practitioner related topics that will inform multiple several of the 21 questions in our Learning Agenda and address specific learning priorities of USAID and our resilience partners. The learning agenda will be revisited on a routine basis, at least annually. As our CoPrs harvest learning, our adaptive management support to partners will ensure that learning and insights are incorporated back into their projects and the resilience learning community more generally.

USAID ETHIOPIA RESILIENCE ACTIVITY (RLA)

(2022-2027) is a \$20 million activity designed is a “learning sidecar” for USAID Ethiopia’s resilience investments. RLA works across USAID staff, offices, and implementing agencies (projects) to strengthen a culture of learning, sharing, evidence generation, substantiation, and triangulation. Ultimately, our aim is to build a common understanding and direct investments in resilience-building strategies and interventions that demonstratively result in more resilient households, communities, and systems. RLA is implemented by LINC (prime), Environmental Incentives, and JaRco consulting.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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