



USAID/ETHIOPIA RESILIENCE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Brief: Guiding Integrated Resilience Programming Through Learning

This brief provides a detailed overview of the Resilience Learning Activity (RLA) and its process of developing a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Ethiopia Resilience Portfolio-Level Learning Agenda. It describes the challenges the Mission faces in managing a complex resilience portfolio and outlines RLA's methodology to devise a learning agenda, including the aggregation of existing knowledge, participatory engagement with stakeholders, conceptual framework development, and validation.

Overview

RLA, a five-year activity implemented by LINC, complements USAID/Ethiopia's resilience efforts, helping the Mission to better understand what relief and development interventions make households, communities, and systems more resilient to increasingly persistent shocks and stresses. RLA supports the Mission in uniting and galvanizing resilience learning in Ethiopia, using well accepted USAID resilience methodologies and

frameworks while employing a structured approach to connect learning levels and align with broader learning objectives. This brief presents highlights from RLA's work to develop a learning agenda, including the creation of the learning agenda with prioritized questions and a measurement framework, as well as recommended actions and lessons learned from the process.

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Context

USAID/Ethiopia manages an extensive and complex resilience portfolio involving more than 20 activities across various offices and objectives. Streamlining and using the wealth of resilience data produced by these activities poses a formidable challenge, as does interpreting evidence to establish learning priorities. Developing a unified learning agenda for USAID’s resilience investments would enhance coordinated resilience-building efforts, guide progress, and align partners around common benchmarks and definitions of success. Working in a highly participatory way and bolstered with analytical support, RLA succeeded in developing a shared learning agenda using the four-step approach described in the Methodology section of this brief from February to June 2023.

Methodology

Five Months to a Learning Agenda

Over five months, RLA engaged in extensive outreach and gathering of evidence, formative analysis and sensemaking, participatory engagement of USAID and resilience partners, consultations with experts, and establishing a conceptual framework for “stacking up” the learning. This section describes the process.

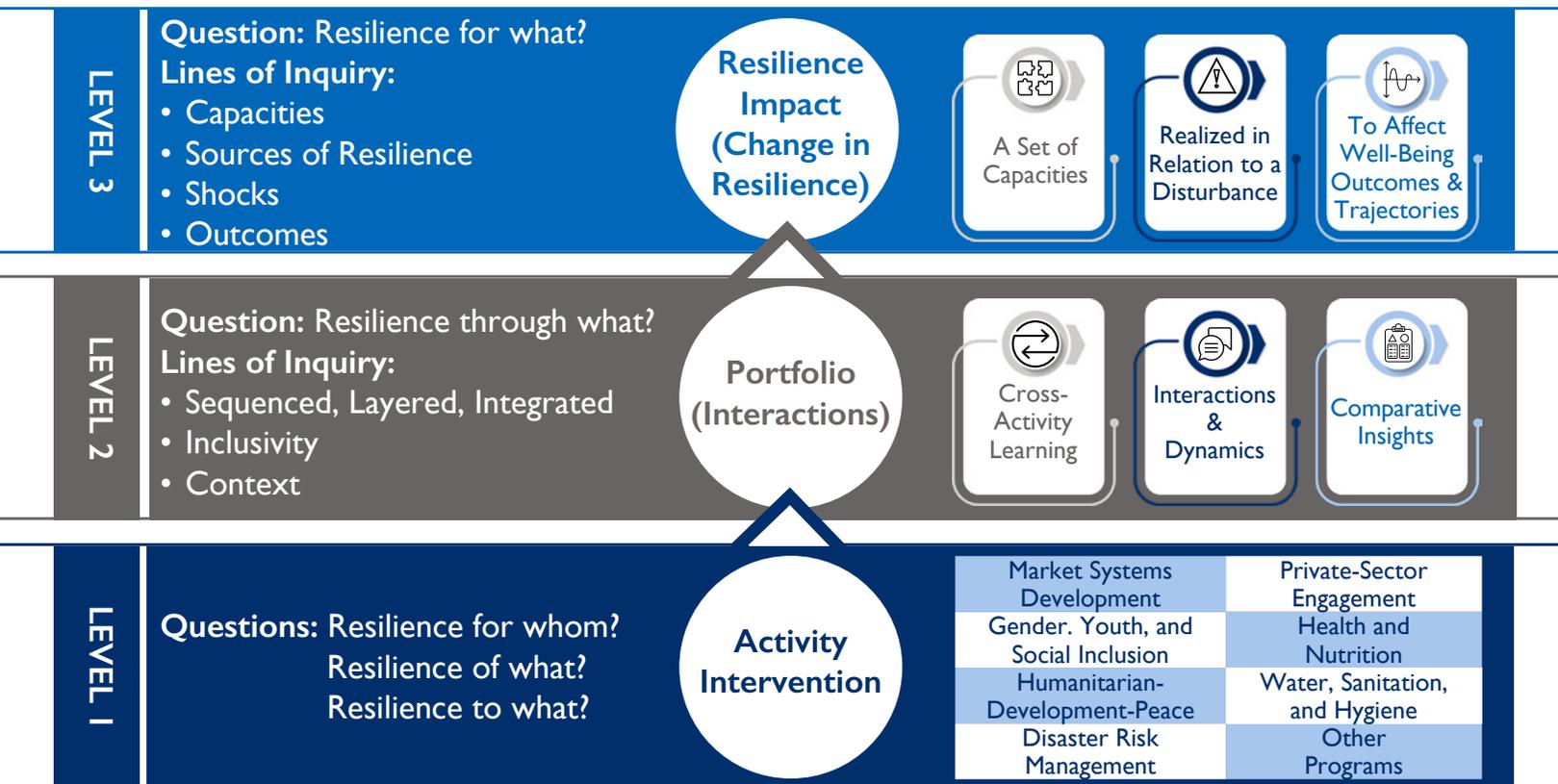


Figure 1. RLA Learning Agenda Framework reflecting three levels of inquiry

- **Step 1: Aggregation and Sensemaking of Existing Knowledge:** RLA conducted two analyses to develop its learning agenda: a Resilience Evidence Gap Analysis, which focused on collecting and analyzing evidence from diverse sectors, and a Resilience Community Learning Agenda Analysis, which examined USAID and partner learning agendas. These analyses took several months. The Resilience Evidence Gap Analysis coded scores of documents using qualitative coding and analytical techniques, while the Resilience Community Learning Agenda Analysis gathered and categorized 276 learning questions from 12 existing agendas. As the team progressed in its analysis, it classified learning questions into five categories: context, measurement, approach selection, adaptive management, and results. Distinct technical themes emerged, like livelihoods; Humanitarian-Development-Peace coherence; and gender, youth, and social inclusion, which were matched with question types. Ultimately, the analysis identified eight potential learning areas.
- **Step 2: Participatory Engagement with Resilience Stakeholders:** RLA engaged more than 150 resilience stakeholders for the next four months using its collective action platform to shape the learning agenda. In March, a Platform Launch Workshop brought together implementing partners and USAID/Ethiopia representatives, introducing the Resilience Evidence Gap Analysis and the Resilience Community Learning Agenda Analysis work and facilitating discussions on learning priorities. The workshop unveiled eight learning spaces, where participants engaged with learning questions, selecting five key areas for focus: measurement; private sector-led economic growth; gender, youth, and social inclusion programming; essential service delivery; and Humanitarian-Development-Peace coherence. These became the foundation for Learning Space Task Force Groups, composed of subject matter experts. In May and June 2023, RLA facilitated these groups through a series of virtual and in-person meetings to refine draft learning questions and develop a wish list of potential communities of practice for addressing prioritized questions.
- **Step 3: Elaborating a Conceptual Framework for Measurement:** With abundant input from its resilience network, RLA took the next step to align the emerging learning questions with existing resilience frameworks and RLA’s overarching research question, “Under what conditions and in what ways are USAID/Ethiopia’s interventions (alone or in combination or sequence) resulting in more resilient households, communities, and systems?” RLA convened internal meetings to harmonize network feedback with established resilience measurement frameworks like those of the USAID-funded Resilience, Evaluation, Analysis and Learning activity and other resilience thought leaders. RLA adopted a comprehensive three-level framework, incorporating shocks, resilience capacities, and resultant outcomes. This framework spans the Intervention Level; Portfolio Level; and Impact Level, a nested approach to stacking-up the learning (see Figure 1, page 2).
- **Step 4: Validation and Finalization of the Learning Agenda:** After five months of comprehensive engagement, analysis, and collaboration, RLA was approaching the final stages of its effort. This work period focused on outreach, evidence gathering, analysis, engagement with partners, consultations through the Task Force Groups, and the development of a conceptual framework. With identified themes and prioritized questions, RLA conducted a one-day workshop on June 14, 2023, with more than 50 participants from its resilience partner network and USAID. The workshop aimed to gather feedback and focus on the most crucial learning questions. The sessions yielded valuable input, with participants ultimately indicating they were on board with the learning questions.

RLA introduced the inaugural USAID/Ethiopia Resilience Portfolio-Level Learning Agenda following the event. This comprehensive document features 26 prioritized learning questions, suggests an approach for addressing high-priority queries, and outlines how insights will culminate to gauge the effectiveness of resilience interventions across the portfolio. It establishes a shared agenda and measurement framework, fostering collaborative action among USAID and multi-sectoral resilience partners.

Recommended Actions

While not the definitive solution to data disparities and divergent priorities, this learning agenda represents an important step on the resilience learning journey. RLA plans to revisit the agenda annually or as necessary, aiming to shift focus from “what” to “how” questions in future interventions, aiding USAID and partners in advancing learning pathways and enhancing the assessment of collective resilience investments. Part of this effort includes producing a research agenda that aligns with the learning agenda to provide a snapshot of the ongoing research priorities and future plans of Ethiopia’s resilience community.

Lessons Learned

RLA took away several important lessons from this complex learning agenda development process:

- ① **Balance trust with results:** Involving USAID and implementing partners was crucial for building trust while progressing with the learning agenda. RLA fostered trust by closely linking the learning agenda development to the collective action platform.
- ② **Involve technical experts and managers:** RLA ensured technical experts and leadership from resilience partner organizations participated in multiple consultative events, blending practical experience with specialized knowledge, resulting in a pragmatic and practitioner-focused learning agenda.
- ③ **Establish a conceptual framework:** RLA organized its diverse learning questions using a framework for resilience learning, aligning with RLA’s overarching goals. Inspired by the REAL network, this framework adds structure and feeds directly into the RLA’s research question and theory of change.
- ④ **Review existing information upfront:** Before involving resilience partners, RLA conducted formative analysis and aligned evidence gaps with learning priorities. This meant RLA came to the partners prepared, and could efficiently solicit their input and participation without wasting anyone’s time. The learning partners expressed appreciation for the advance work.