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COMMUNITY-LED PROVISION OF NONFORMAL EDUCATION FOR DISPLACED LEARNERS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In this field note, I explore the community coalition model Creative Associates International and its partners employed to provide nonformal education to out-of-school displaced children and youth in northern Nigeria under the USAID-funded Education Crisis Response project. While there is no evidence directly linking community involvement to improved education outcomes in crisis- and conflict-affected contexts, the existing literature and final project results point to its importance in the education in emergencies field. In this field note, I briefly shed light on the education landscape in northern Nigeria, offer global evidence on the impact of community participation in education in low-income and crisis- and conflict-affected contexts, and describe the promise a community-led model employed by the Education Crisis Response project holds for improving education access for out-of-school internally displaced children and youth. I also describe the community mobilization and capacity-building approach adopted for the project and its success in providing access to education for more than 80,000 learners in a volatile region.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a powerful West African country with abundant natural resources. It is Africa's biggest oil exporter and has the largest natural gas reserves on the continent. Its wealth, however, has not trickled down to the education system. At 10.5 million, Nigeria has the world's largest population of out-of-school children,

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the majority of whom are in northern Nigeria (“Nigeria Has ‘Largest Number of Children’” 2017).

While the north-south divide has always existed in Nigeria, the disparity has widened because of the Boko Haram insurgency that systematically targeted formal schools. Boko Haram emerged in northern Nigeria in 2003 as a small group of Islamist militants who challenged the government. After the movement was militarily suppressed in Nigeria in 2009 (Mohammed 2014), it adopted the tactics and strategies of global jihadist groups—targeted assassinations, suicide bombings, hostage-taking—which resulted in a 40 percent spike in conflict events in 2014 and a 150 percent increase in fatalities in the country (ACLED 2014). The violence spurred a massive migrant crisis that displaced 1.8 million people in northeastern Nigeria (ACAPS 2018).

Internally displaced persons (IDPs), as defined in the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, are individuals or groups of people who have been forced or obliged to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, human rights violations, or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border (UN OCHA 2001). An overwhelming majority of the children affected by conflict who lack access to formal education are IDPs (Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children 2004).

While additional research is still needed to determine the best way to rapidly expand access to education for large numbers of refugee and IDP children in an education in emergencies (EiE) context (Burde et al. 2015), evidence in crisis- and conflict-affected and low-income contexts points to the importance of community-based interventions. For instance, studies support the use of community-based schools to increase enrollment and learning gains among populations affected by conflict (Burde and Linden 2013), along with community monitoring to help increase teacher and pupil attendance (Barr et al. 2012) and contribute to learning gains (Jimenez and Sawada 1999).¹

Community involvement in the delivery of education services has been a key feature of Creative Associates International’s (hereafter, Creative) work in northern Nigeria since 2004. It began with the Community Participation for Action in the Social Sectors (COMPASS) project, wherein Creative, in partnership with

1 Community-based schools are broadly understood as schools serving children who live nearby.

Pathfinder International, provided the local government with technical assistance in primary education and school health. During this period, Creative developed its community mobilization approach—that is, the formation and mobilization of community coalitions—to roll out programming in hard-to-reach areas of northern Nigeria. Over a period of ten years, Creative refined its approach and, in 2014, adapted it to address northern Nigeria’s education crisis under the USAID-funded Nigeria Education Crisis Response (ECR) project. Results from the project point to the model’s ability to rapidly provide IDP children and youth with access to education in an EiE context.

NIGERIA’S EDUCATION CRISIS AND THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE

While the Boko Haram insurgency threw Nigeria’s education crisis into the spotlight, the Nigerian education system, particularly in the north, has been struggling for many years. Responsibility for the education system is currently shared by the federal and state education ministries and local governments, with support from communities and private organizations. The Federal Ministry of Education is responsible for ensuring the coherence of national policy and procedures, and the states are responsible for operating within those parameters. Communities historically have played a key role in Nigeria’s education system; many of the primary schools are already subsidized by contributions from the community through parent-teacher associations, schools, councils, and community-based organizations. In rural areas, where personnel costs are high, their contributions are especially critical. However, despite this support, the quality of education is low, the physical facilities are in poor condition, and teachers are not adequately prepared for their roles (Moja 2000).

The situation is especially dire in northern Nigeria, a region comprising 60 percent of the country’s out-of-school population (“Nigeria Has ‘Largest Number of Children’” 2017). The gender gap in northern Nigeria is also more pronounced; in 2008, as few as 39 percent of females ages 15-19 had attended school, compared to 65 percent of males (Antoninis 2014). While the Boko Haram insurgency has intensified the disparities between the north and south of the country, the divide existed even in precolonial Nigeria. Northern Nigeria is predominantly Muslim, due to centuries of contact with North Africa through the trans-Saharan trade. The southern part of the country is predominantly Christian, with a longer history of contact with Europe. This divide was reinforced by colonial policies of “divide and rule,” which reinforced perceptions of north-south separateness. This included the production of a limited cadre of Western-educated elite in the

south who were able to climb the social and economic ladder, which was not true of those in northern Nigeria who received a Quranic education. This is likely one of the factors that contributed to the distrust between proponents of traditional and Western education in the north (Mohammed 2014).

Distrust of Western-style education, however, has subsided in northern Nigeria since the 19th and early 20th centuries, despite rhetoric from Boko Haram. A 2005 survey by the Federal Ministry of Education showed that only 4 percent of community leaders identified mistrust of Western education as a barrier to integration in secular schools. However, the state governments have lacked the capacity and resources to fully integrate religious education providers into the public education system or to adequately support public schools. While private education providers in southern Nigeria have stepped in to fill the gap, families in the north continue to rely on community-based religious education (Antoninis 2014).

In 2013, following Boko Haram's takeover of part of Borno State, the Nigerian government declared a state of emergency in the states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe (ACAPS 2018). Violence in northeastern Nigeria escalated dramatically, with a sharp increase in fatalities, widespread kidnapping, and attacks on villages. Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states continued to bear the brunt of the insurgency (Campbell and Harwood 2018). UNHCR (2018) estimated that, as of 2018, the insurgency had displaced 2.4 million people in northeastern Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Children and youth have been especially at risk because of recruitment efforts by Boko Haram, repeated attacks on schools, and parents' corresponding reluctance to send their children to school, due to heightened fear for their children's safety.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN DELIVERING EDUCATION SERVICES TO IDP CHILDREN AND YOUTH

There is scant evidence on how community support can be mobilized to meet the education needs of IDPs, and the needs and coping strategies of IDPs living outside camps (Ferris and Winthrop 2010). While one typically imagines that IDPs live in camps, most of the displaced (including those in Nigeria) live in host communities (Guterres 2010). These IDPs have a variety of living arrangements, such as staying with relatives and friends, or renting or building homes in shantytowns. It is difficult to identify these populations, and therefore often hard to support them. Conflict and displacement also affect education access differently

for IDPs within the same country. Such factors can increase access to education by driving children from villages where there were no schools to camps where education is provided (Ferris and Winthrop 2010). In Nigeria, however, many children have been forced to leave their schools and move to areas where the host schools are overcrowded. IDP children also may face discrimination due to their ethnicity, or simply because of their IDP status. Despite such factors, the benefits of IDP children and youth going to school are well established. Schools can be a source of psychosocial support, provide a degree of stability and normalcy, and facilitate these children's integration into their host community (Mooney and French 2005).

While the jury is still out on the most rigorous and rapid means of providing education to large numbers of IDP and refugee children in crisis- and conflict-affected contexts (Burde et al. 2015), there is widespread consensus on the need to diversify the provision and delivery of education to meet the unique learning needs of different populations (ADEA 2010). There is growing emphasis in the EiE community on the role accelerated education programs (AEPs)—flexible, age-appropriate programs that promote access to education in an accelerated timeframe—can play in promoting education access to children and youth whose education has been interrupted due to crisis and conflict (USAID 2016). Based on a review of good practices and learning from AEPs worldwide, the Accelerated Education Working Group, which comprises education partners working in accelerated education, compiled a list of principles that help education stakeholders design, implement, and evaluate AEPs (Myers, Pinnock, and Lewis 2017). These principles range from recommendations about the flexibility of AEPs (e.g., class time and location) to their alignment with the national education system. They state that, “for AEP success and sustainability, community engagement is critical from the start” (Myers et al. 2017, 59). While the principles broadly approach community engagement within the framework of community-education committees (e.g., parent-teacher associations and school management boards) or community outreach workers, various studies point to a broader spectrum of interventions that involve community engagement.

A comprehensive literature review of what helps to promote children's access to education, quality learning, and wellbeing in crisis-affected contexts revealed that, in countries affected by protracted conflict, community-based education increases access to education, especially for girls at the primary level (Burde et al. 2015). For instance, a randomized controlled trial of village-based schools in Afghanistan found that placing a school in a village dramatically improves the academic participation and performance of all children, but particularly girls

(Burde and Linden 2013). Village- or community-based schools are designed to serve only children living in close proximity to the school. Until the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, these schools were typically supported by international aid agencies in order to improve access to education. While they followed the official government curriculum, many of them were run by a local staff employed by international development organizations. These community schools were smaller and were taught by locally educated individuals; they often received little government monitoring.

In addition to placing schools and learning centers within communities, broad community participation can play an important role in the delivery of education services. While community participation in developing countries primarily refers to community financing, such as contributions of money, material, labor, expertise, and land (Bray 2000), there is increased recognition of the wider role communities can play (Colletta and Perkins 1995). For instance, communities can advocate for enrollment, recruit and support teachers, and monitor teacher and school performance. Evidence from low-income contexts points to how enhanced community monitoring can increase teacher and student attendance and result in statistically significant increases in test scores (Barr et al. 2012). Increased community participation and training also can boost demand for education and reduce dropout (Beasley and Huillery 2012). Of course, if community involvement is to be effective, there must be certain important preconditions, such as a basic level of resources and adequately trained and supported teachers (De Grauwe 2005).

The level and depth of community participation in school management is also important. Rose (2003) differentiates two extremes of participation: genuine participation and pseudo-participation. Where there is genuine participation, communities take part in decisionmaking in a voluntary and spontaneous way; where there is pseudo-participation, communities accept decisions that have been made for them by external parties. As Taniguchi and Hirakawa (2016) point out, Jimenez and Sawada's study (1999) shows how community participation under the Education with Community Participation Program in El Salvador increased educational productivity. These communities had actual decisionmaking power, and they could allocate school budgets and hire and dismiss personnel. The success and failure of community participation also depends on the stakeholders' capacity to be effectively involved in governance issues (Chikoko 2007) and their relationship with the central government, particularly in conflict-affected environments. As Jones (2005) points out, the participation of local power elites in school management is not equivalent to genuine community participation; it

can be better described as pseudo-participation. Many of these trends and findings are characteristic of the ECR project, where the community, through community-based nongovernmental subgrantees or community coalitions, played a critical role in providing access to education for IDP children and youth.

THE EDUCATION CRISIS RESPONSE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Creative, in partnership with Pathfinder, began its education programming in northern Nigeria in 2004 with the COMPASS project. COMPASS was a multisectoral project through which Creative provided technical support to local governments in the areas of education and health. The project engaged specifically with multiple committee wards that were subunits of the local government area. Upon implementation, the project team realized that it could engage more efficiently with the various wards through relevant community stakeholders. This led to the idea of community coalitions, which are formal groups comprising representatives from key community groups (e.g., women, youth, traders, unions, religious and traditional leaders, etc.) that worked directly with the wards to achieve program objectives across target locations. From this point onward, Creative made the formation and mobilization of community coalitions a pillar of its programming in northern Nigeria.

This approach built on a strong history of community support for education in Nigeria, and on global evidence that underscores the importance of community participation in education to boost enrollment and learning outcomes. The approach was adapted under the USAID-funded ECR project that started in October 2014 in response to the Boko Haram insurgency that overwhelmed northeastern Nigeria, particularly its fragile education system. As of 2016, 611 teachers had been killed, 1,200 schools damaged or destroyed, and 600,000 children left without access to education (UNICEF 2017).

The ECR was funded by USAID to expand access to quality, protective, and relevant nonformal education and alternative education opportunities for internally displaced out-of-school children and youth ages 6-17 in the states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, and Yobe. The project goal was to expand access to quality, protective nonformal education and alternative education opportunities for children who were not able to attend formal schools.

To achieve this goal, Creative and its partners—the International Rescue Committee, the Federation of Muslim Women’s Associations in Nigeria, the Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All, and 56 local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—established 1,456 nonformal learning centers. Community engagement was the primary vehicle through which the project was able to achieve the desired results within a volatile security context.

During the first year of the project, Creative conducted a community education and conflict assessment, the first of a series of assessments to inform the project inputs, shape content, and keep the program management abreast of the changing education needs of a population in flux. Findings from the first assessment in 2015 revealed that many IDP children and youth were not attending schools for a variety of reasons, including the stigma of being an IDP, lack of economic resources following their displacement, moving continuously, overcrowded classrooms in host communities, an overwhelming demand for relevant, skill-based education, and the need to feel safe in the classroom. The assessment also revealed how their living arrangements influenced IDP children’s decision to go to school. For instance, boys and girls living in community households are more likely to attend a formal or nonformal school than those in camp-based settings, where the schools may be farther away (Creative Associates International 2015). These findings directly informed the program design.

The project established five types of learning centers to accommodate the diverse needs of out-of-school children and youth: (1) nonformal learning centers for boys and girls ages 6-12; (2) learning centers for adolescent girls ages 13-17; (3) learning centers for adolescent boys ages 13-17; (4) centers for learners ages 6-17 who have physical disabilities; and (5) learning centers for girls ages 6-12. Each center offered a nine-month accelerated basic literacy and numeracy program that included alternative education topics, such as psychosocial support and gender-based violence prevention. The centers that targeted adolescents also provided relevant employability skills (e.g., tailoring, leatherwork, mobile phone repairs) (Creative Associates International 2017).

The project’s activities were grouped into four intermediate results.

Intermediate Result 1: Increased availability of quality, safe, nonformal alternative education opportunities. This included the establishment of nonformal learning centers in communities with a higher concentration of out-of-school IDP children. The nonformal learning centers provided a nine-month AEP and adhered to safety benchmarks developed by the project to ensure a safe and protective environment.

The ECR's project partner, Florida State University, enhanced the existing nonformal basic education curriculum and adapted the national benchmarks for basic literacy so it could be included in the program. The International Rescue Committee developed a specific social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum to be incorporated into the nonformal learning centers' literacy and numeracy lessons.

Intermediate Result 2: Improved quality of instruction in nonformal education and alternative education programs. This involved setting the criteria for learning facilitators who would serve the nonformal learning centers and their partners in the relevant agencies, departments, and ministries, as well as recruiting and training them in the target communities. The ECR adopted a cascade professional development approach, whereby it recruited master trainers from agencies, departments, ministries, and tertiary institutions in the target states and trained them in the nonformal learning center curriculum. The program focused specifically on developing skills in literacy, numeracy, and SEL, and on how to use the teaching and learning materials. The master trainers trained the mentor teachers, who provided professional development support to learning facilitators through bimonthly visits to the nonformal learning centers. The learning facilitators received a five-day training, during which they were shown how to create a welcoming, learner-centered environment. They were equipped with teaching aids, including a scope and sequence comprising the content and skills to be covered, as well as scripted lessons in literacy, numeracy, and SEL that guided them in their instruction delivery. The project also engaged local craftspeople to train youth and adolescent girls in marketable skills, which were identified during a skill prioritization exercise conducted in partnership with the National Directorate for Employment and Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency of Nigeria.

Intermediate Result 3: Increased community engagement and support for schooling in targeted nonformal education communities. Here the project strengthened community ownership of the nonformal learning centers through advocacy and engagement. This involved the formation and mobilization of the 67 community coalitions that are the focus of this field note. These community coalitions were formed by 56 local NGOs, which in turn were selected as project subgrantees through a competitive bidding process. With the funds they received, the NGO subgrantees operationalized both the nonformal learning centers and the community coalitions. The community coalitions in turn conducted sensitization campaigns in their communities, which promoted support for the nonformal learning centers and awareness of the benefits of a holistic curriculum. With

the project's support, the community coalitions conducted feedback meetings to identify and address program implementation issues throughout the life of the project.

Intermediate Result 4: Increased state and local government and civil society support for nonformal education and alternative education options. The ECR established a nonformal education technical working group to support government leadership of program activities, including teacher training, development of instructional materials, and setting benchmarks and standards for project implementation. The working group, which comprised representatives from key agencies, departments, and ministries, coordinated technical input for the development of relevant policies, guidelines, and regulations to support nonformal education and alternative learning options. The ECR also built the capacity of its NGO subgrantees to leverage funding for education. The subgrantees attended a five-day training, during which they learned how to secure additional funding from other donors. The community coalitions received similar training on resource mobilization, which enabled them to mobilize additional resources for the nonformal learning centers and to launch advocacy campaigns.

A TWO-TIERED COMMUNITY-MOBILIZATION MODEL

While neither formal nor informal community groups had been used previously to mobilize communities to provide education for displaced populations in northern Nigeria, Creative was certain the approach could work, given that the majority of Nigeria's displaced population had been taken in by host communities. The nonformal learning centers would also be open to the host community's children and youth. Moreover, Creative's previous projects—the Northern Nigeria Education Initiative and COMPASS—had demonstrated that the demand for access to a quality education was a unifying force among diverse community stakeholders, and that a well-mobilized community can drive its own development using low-cost local initiatives.

To achieve the ECR goal of providing education opportunities for out-of-school children and youth, Creative rolled out a two-tiered community-mobilization model. Through a competitive bidding process, Creative identified 56 local NGOs with deep roots in the communities to directly establish and manage the nonformal learning centers. Through a public announcement, the ECR invited local NGOs to apply to become project subgrantees. It then reviewed the

applications using selection criteria such as strategic fit, technical approach, past performance, organization capacity, and approach to gender equity.

After selecting the NGOs, the ECR conducted an online institutional capacity assessment, as well as a financial and management capability questionnaire and a grants performance measurement tool, to determine the NGOs' capacity. These tools measured the organizations' key competencies in areas like strategic planning, internal governance, project management, and human resource development. The results of the assessment informed the project's five-day training program. The ECR and Creative home office staff members trained representatives from the NGOs on various aspects of organizational strengthening: human resources, financial management, grant-writing, and monitoring and evaluation. The training format included traditional seminars comprising presentations and group activities; deep analyses of each NGO's action plan; "one-minute moments" that focused on the organizations' communications and marketing capacity; hands-on evaluations of each NGO's materials; and one-on-one mentoring sessions.

The second tier of the ECR's community mobilization model was to form and train community coalitions. To enter new areas, ECR staff members conducted advocacy visits to the education and social development departments of targeted local government areas and local chiefs to inform them of the project goals and the formation of community coalitions. In regions where Creative had not previously worked and the security situation was unpredictable, Creative engaged national partners, such as the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria and the Civil Society Action Coalition on Education for All, along with its NGO subgrantees, to organize various community-based organizations representing youth, women, trade unions, tribal associations, faith-based organizations, traditional leaders, and displaced persons. During these initiation meetings, the ECR staff and partners discussed the importance of values and social norms that promote community action on education, then asked these different groups to select representatives to form their area's community coalitions. Through this process, the project established 67 community coalitions that formed the backbone of the project. Each NGO subgrantee was responsible for its network of community coalitions and took the lead on training them, with support from the ECR.

The level of motivation and the quality of work done by the NGOs and the community coalitions varied. The project team found there was a period during which the community coalitions took time to get fully mobilized and to commit to the project mission. To motivate the newer community coalitions, the project

staff members, in collaboration with the local partners, organized study tours of model community coalitions. The study tour brought together participants from relevant state agencies, local government education authorities, and communities, and gave them a first-hand look at the role of community coalitions, as well as an avenue for discussing how to provide nonformal education and alternative learning programs in their own settings. The lessons from the study tour were distilled into a community education handbook that became a key guidance document for NGOs on how to form and manage a community coalition. Topics included defining community coalitions and their functions, how to operationalize them and mobilize their members, how to leverage assistance from external sources, and the coalitions' role in providing conflict-sensitive education in their communities.

The study tours were followed by training. ECR staff members trained a cadre of master trainers from government institutions and partner NGOs, who then gave a three-day training to community coalitions on the community-action cycle, SEL, and early warning preparedness and response, which ensured the safety of the centers and the learning environment. Safety concerns were integrated into action plans led by the community coalitions, which included contingency plans in the event of a volatile change in community life—in essence, emergency response plans. A total of 685 community coalition members were trained.

The key framework that threaded together the community coalition training in the ECR and Creative's previous northern Nigeria projects was the community-action cycle, a conceptual framework based on participatory problem-solving approaches. The community-action cycle encourages community members to work together to identify, define, and prioritize problems in their community and subsequently identify solutions to improve or remedy the situation. The process also includes reviewing the progress made in order to adjust strategies and/or identify new problems. Informed by the community-action cycle framework, the community coalitions developed action plans and mobilized resources within the communities to assist the ECR staff and the partner NGOs with establishing and managing the nonformal learning centers. The project directors found that some community coalitions had less well-developed action plans than others because they lacked adequate support and monitoring by the NGO partners. They also found logistical challenges in instances where the community coalition members lived far apart. In such instances, the project staff would step in and provide additional targeted support to the NGO and community coalition, or to change which nonformal learning centers were assigned to them.

While the responsibility to establish and manage the nonformal learning centers lay with the subgrantee NGOs, it was the community coalitions that, with input from their respective groups, provided feedback on the location of the centers, the learning facilitators, and the needs of the target population. Taking lessons from their community-action cycle training, they mobilized resources to fund the centers and launched education advocacy campaigns to boost enrollment. They also helped flip the narrative about IDPs, thereby promoting a broader vision of community that included the IDP population.

Creative had embedded the collaborating, learning, and adapting approach within this process to ensure that the project was building relationships with a broad and relevant network of stakeholders, empowering communities to participate in the decisionmaking process, and enabling the project to respond quickly to their feedback by improving the quality, delivery, and inclusiveness of its program model.² This approach took the form of feedback-loop meetings that were organized in 31 of the project's local government areas to identify the key implementation issues affecting project success in the areas of access, learning performance, and safety. The model required assigning roles and responsibilities to stakeholders to address the issues. Held at least every two months, these meetings were chaired by the executive secretaries of the local government education authorities, facilitated by the NGOs, and attended by community coalition members (Creative Associates International 2018).

As mentioned earlier, the quality and effectiveness of participation depends on a community's relationship with the government. Creative found this to be the case in its target states as well, where NGO and community coalition relationships with the local government education authorities affected their work. The feedback meetings described above helped build and strengthen the relationship between the two, particularly in locations where the relationship was weak or nonexistent.

To oversee the program implementation, the ECR established multiple levels of quality assurance: (1) the community level, where they recruited monitoring facilitators from the community who visited the centers every day and provided weekly reports to the project; (2) the community coalitions themselves; and (3) the ECR project staff and state partners, who conducted formal monitoring.

² USAID describes the collaborating, learning, and adapting approach as a set of practices that help improve development effectiveness.

A SCALABLE, TRANSFERABLE MODEL

The community-led model yielded impressive results. Over the life of the project, community coalitions facilitated the establishment of 935 distinct nonformal learning centers in safe spaces, the recruitment of 1,107 learning facilitators, and the enrollment of 80,341 learners. Their multipronged sensitization process helped them exceed the enrollment target by 23 percent, and the targeted completion rate of 65 percent ended up at 139 percent. They also were able to raise more than US\$60,000 in local funding to meet the needs of their centers. Meanwhile, the NGO subgrantees were able to secure nearly US\$1.5 million from additional donors after the ECR organizational strengthening training was completed. The coalitions established an additional 33 centers across the five states, which provided access to education for out-of-school IDP and host community children. Coalitions in the local government area of Toro and in Rafin Makaranta and Ramde Baru initiated conversations with the state ministries to integrate existing nonformal learning centers into the formal education system in places where there were no primary schools.

These results demonstrate the effectiveness of community-led programs in Nigeria, as well as their transferability and scalability. Creative used a similar community-led program model for the COMPASS program in 2004 and the Northern Nigeria Education Initiative in 2009, and was able to adapt it to mobilize communities to address the needs of displaced learners. While this approach is especially beneficial in areas that are hard to reach and volatile, it is also context sensitive, cost-effective, and sustainable. As Helen John, the former ECR community mobilization and NGO coordinator, noted, “Our working with the subgrantees was not because some of these communities couldn’t be reached but because of the knowledge of these communities and as a sustainability mechanism.” John’s point underscores how partnership with NGO subgrantees allowed Creative to tap into their intimate knowledge of the content and paved the way for their continued engagement following the end of the project.

Insights from studies of community participation in education indicate that the reasons the model worked in northern Nigeria was that the community organizations, both the NGO grantees and the community coalitions, had real decisionmaking power: they were able to choose the location of the nonformal learning centers, decide on the timing and schedule of the classes, and select the learning facilitators based on their communities’ needs. These factors helped set the stage for genuine participation. They also received targeted capacity-building support from the project. The NGOs specifically received training on

organizational strengthening, and the community coalitions on the community-action cycle, along with recurring technical and management assistance from the project staff. Finally, regular feedback-loop meetings with the NGOs, the community coalitions, and the local government education authorities helped build and strengthen the relationships among the three groups, which set the stage for a meaningful partnership beyond the life of the project.

Since the ECR was not a research project and its goals were focused on the provision of education, Creative did not systematically measure the impact its training had on the behavior and attitudes of its NGO and community coalition participants. One possible question for future research that will be of interest to the EiE community is whether the target communities have characteristics that make them amenable to providing education for displaced learners. If they do not, what aspects of the ECR capacity-building and mobilization model had the most impact? The model could benefit from such behavioral insights, which would help practitioners refine it to become more effective and transferable across sectors and countries.

There is significant scope for a discussion on how community mobilization affects social cohesion. Chan, To, and Chan (2006) present a compelling definition of social cohesion that offers an important lens through which to assess the impact of our community work in conflict and crisis contexts. UNICEF's Peacebuilding, Education, and Advocacy in Conflict-Affected Contexts program has helped put social cohesion front and center in the discussion about peacebuilding in education. Chan et al. (2006) present a series of questions that could be used to measure horizontal cohesion (within civil society) and vertical cohesion (between state and citizen). Anecdotal evidence from the ECR project suggests that the program activities facilitated a closer and more collaborative relationship between the target communities and the state authorities, as mentioned above. For example, the Lauka community in the Toro local government area of Bauchi State built two physical classrooms at the nonformal learning centers, which prompted the State Universal Basic Education Board to send formal school teachers to the Lauka community to begin a formal school—the first in the community. While the ECR prioritized government ownership of the nonformal learning centers from the outset, it would be worthwhile to assess whether similar programs to increase collaboration between government and communities affect vertical cohesion.

Many organizations rely on national and local partners to provide contextualized service delivery in hard-to-reach and insecure areas. However, to ensure the success of these programs and facilitate the sustainability of program initiatives, these organizations should provide partners with adequate and targeted support during the program initiative, which will help them grow and professionalize their operations and create channels that foster greater communication and collaboration between communities and government. This model is especially relevant in areas affected by conflict, where governments have a limited presence and IDP populations need long-term support.

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