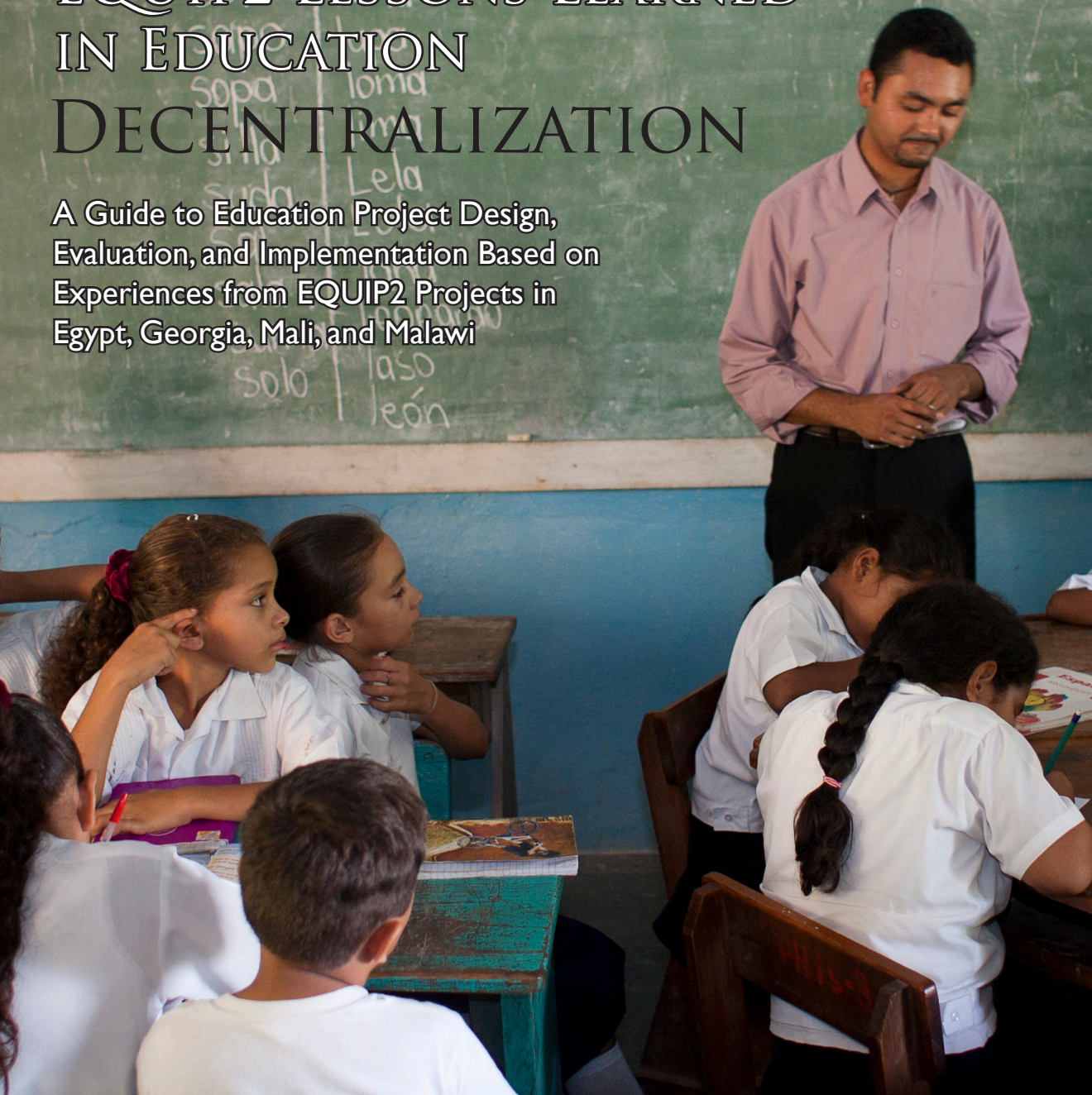# EQUIP2 Lessons Learned in Education Decentralization

A Guide to Education Project Design, Evaluation, and Implementation Based on Experiences from EQUIP2 Projects in Egypt, Georgia, Mali, and Malawi

By Marcia Bernbaum

EQUIP2 Lessons Learned in Education

Decentralization

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Acronyms

AE	Académies d'Enseignement
AIR	American Institutes of Research
ANICT	Agence Nationale d'Investissement des Collectivités Territoriales
AOTR	Agreement Officer's Technical Representative
AQEE	Quality and Equity of Education Program
BEF	Basic Education Fund
BOT	Board of Trustees
CADDE	Education Deconcentration and Decentralization Unit
CAM	Communities of Learning
CAOA	Central Authority for Organization and Administration
CAP	Centre d'Animation Pédagogique
CAPS	Critical Thinking, Achievement, and Problem Solving Test
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COP	Chief of Party
COTR	Contracting Officer's Technical Representative
CPS	Cellule de Planification et Statistiques
CSCQBE	Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education
CTR	Regional Technical Correspondents
DED	German Development Service
DEMIS	District Education Management Information System
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DNCT	National Directorate of Local Authorities
EQUIP	Education Quality Improvement Program
EDC	Education Development Center
EFA	Education for All
ERP	Education Reform Support Program
EDSA	Education Decentralization Support Activity
EDP	Education Decentralization Program
EGM	Education Government and Decentralization
ERC	Education Resource Center
ESIP	Education Sector Investment Program
EU	European Union
FOERC	Faculty of Education Reform Committee
FSN	Foreign Service National
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
GAR	Equippe Gestion Axé sur les Resultats

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEDA	Georgia Education Decentralization and Accreditation Program
GER	Gross Enrollment Ratio
GIS	Geographical Information System
GNP	Gross National Product
GOG	Government of Georgia
GRM	Government of Mali
GTZ	German International Development Agency
IMG-EF	Inter-Ministerial Working Group for Education Funding
LWA	Leader with Associates
MAP	Test o Education Management
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEF	Ministry of Economy and Finance
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOeST	Ministry of Education and Technology
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MSAD	Ministry of State for Administrative Development
MSI	Management Systems International
MSLD	Ministry of State for Local Development
NCREL	North Central Regional Education Laboratory
LPC-EC	Education Committee of Local Popular Councils
NAQAAE	Nat. Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Education
NDP	National Decentralization Policy
NER	Net Enrollment Ratio
NESP	National Education Support Program
NGO	Non-government Organization
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PAT	Professional Academy for Teachers
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief
PGP	Shared Governance Program
PISE	Joint Donor Sector Investment Program
PMP	Performance Monitoring Plan
PMRP	Performance Monitoring and Research Plan
PRODEC	Ten Year Education Development Plan
PTF	Technical/financial partners
RAP/DM	Regional Action Planning Decision Making Program
REDF	Regional Education Development Fund
RFA	Request for Application
RTI	Research Triangle Institute
SCOPE	Student Classroom Observation Protocol
SILO	Improvements in Student Learning Outcomes
SIP	School Improvement Plan

STTA	Short Term Technical Assistance
SWAp	Sector Wide Approach
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USAID/W	USAID Washington
USDH	United Stated Direct Hire
USG	United States Government

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Executive Summary

This review of five EQUIP2 Associate Awards was undertaken between July and October 2010. The projects were implemented in Egypt, Georgia, Mali, and Malawi from 2003 to the present. Each project focuses on education decentralization or has education decentralization as a principal component. The review's objective was to gain insights from experienced development practitioners into practical lessons in designing, implementing, and evaluating decentralization projects. The primary audience is education officers new to USAID.

To prepare this report key documents were reviewed[1] and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 36 individuals involved with these projects, including USAID staff who designed and oversaw their implementation, monitoring, and evaluation; the EQUIP2 Chief of Party, technical advisors, and FHI 360 home office backstops; and current or former Ministry of Education officials involved in project implementation.

EQUIP2 Associate Awards with Decentralization Components

EGYPT: Education Reform Support Program (ERP)
Funding: $51,261,416
Time frame: 2004–2009
Decentralization objective: Help the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Faculty of Education Reform Committee (FOERC), other government bodies, governorate and education leaders, and private sector leaders to actively support the reform efforts through policy-level interventions, supporting replication within governorates and scaling-up of the reform.

GEORGIA: Georgia Education Decentralization and Accreditation Project (GEDA)
Funding: $11,996,369, reduced to $6,800,000
Time frame: 2005–2008 with an option for two one-year extensions; this option was not exercised.
Decentralization objectives: (1) develop a national strategy and action plan to implement the decentralization program for general education; (2) assist in establishing regional bodies of education management—the Resource Centers; (3) assist in implementing reforms at the regional level; and (4) build the capacity of the Ministry of Education (MES) in such areas as education administration, financial management, and training to sustain the decentralization program.

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1   Documents include: Requests for Application (RFAs), EQUIP2 annual work plans and reports, EQUIP2 final reports, and relevant background reports on the countries that form part of this review.

MALI: Regional Action Planning Decision Making Program (RAP/DM)
Funding: $4,999,239, reduced to $4,455,000
Time frame: 2004–2009
Purpose: Provide the decentralized regional structures of the Ministry of Education (AEs or Académies d'Enseignement) with the technical expertise, particularly in data analysis and financial accounting, to analyze and use education data for sound activity planning and resource allocation decisions.

MALI: Education Decentralization Program (EDP)
Funding: $22,500,000
Time frame: 2009–2014
Purpose: Achieve measurable improvements in expanding access and improving the quality of basic education by building upon previous USAID programs that have reinforced education system decentralization, but address the issue more comprehensively toward building communication and collaboration between relevant stakeholders, particularly those at the sub-regional (CAP or Centre d'Animation Pédagogique), commune, and school levels.

MALAWI: Education Decentralization Support Activity (EDSA)
Funding: $11,559,643
Time frame: 2009–2012
Purpose: Strengthen decentralization implementation at Ministry of Education headquarters, district, and school levels to support system progress to attain National Education Sector Plan 2008–2018 goals.

BASIC INFORMATION ON EDUCATION DECENTRALIZATION

Education decentralization, as defined in a 2005 EQUIP2 paper compiled by Donald Winkler entitled Understanding Decentralization is "The process by which decision making responsibilities are transferred from higher levels of government to lower levels and even to the schools themselves." Effective and efficient government requires "an appropriate balance" of centralization and decentralization. Even when national governments decentralize functions, they retain significant responsibility for developing appropriate and effective national decentralization policies and strengthening local institutional capacity to assume new responsibility.

Decentralization can encompass different types of responsibility transfer: devolution, deconcentration, and delegation. Devolution is the permanent—legal or constitutional—transfer of decision-making authority from a higher level of government to a lower level. Deconcentration is the transfer, usually by administrative decree, of decision making authority from higher to lower levels of the bureaucracy within the same level of government. Delegation

is the assignment, usually by administrative decree, of decision-making authority to other public or private agencies.

Functions and accountability can be delegated to different levels: hiring and placing teachers, selecting textbooks, purchasing expendable supplies, funding new schools and selecting sites. Some of these functions may remain centralized; others may be devolved to schools or community organizations. Yet other functions may be transferred from the Ministry of Education's headquarters to the department, region, or sub-region.

Multiple motivations influence decentralizing education services. As part of democratization, political pressures may increase to provide degrees of autonomy to minority populations who are not in the capital where the power base is located. Increased accountability and efficiency, education access, or education quality may be goals. When the central government does not have the resources to provide needed education services, it relies on others (NGOs, private sector) to step in.

Although effective decentralization should logically lead to increased education quality, no hard evidence supports this assertion. Decentralization's impact on school quality depends on capacity, information, MOE support, and local tradition and culture, especially concerning community initiative and participation. Improving quality may not even be the intent of a decentralization policy. The intent may simply be local empowerment.

Constitutional reform, new legislation, executive decree, or an edict often sets decentralization's principles and goals. Implementation regulations follow the new legislation. Finally, national, regional, and local institutions need assistance to exercise their new roles and responsibilities.

Education decentralization can be part of an overall national policy that affects all sectors, or just the social sectors. Decentralization can focus just on education, or even a specific function in education, such as stationery procurement, teacher hiring and firing, and so on.

Full decentralization is usually a long-term process of at least 10 to 15 years, assuming the political will exists to carry it out. Invariably, with changes in government and key actors, the political will to implement education decentralization will ebb and flow.

Decentralization of education is often a nonlinear process that has steps forward and steps backward, often with many interests involved. Other challenges include: central ministries not taking on the new monitoring and

training functions to give real decision-making and management power to lower levels, and difficulties in executing decisions to the local level for lack of funding from those responsible for making the decisions.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM REVIEWING THE LITERATURE ON DECENTRALIZATION AND FROM THE FIVE EQUIP2 ASSOCIATE AWARD EXPERIENCES

Designing an Education Decentralization Program
1. Understand the political motive(s) underlying decentralization. Be aware that over time political will and stewardship of government/ministries for decentralization will ebb and flow.
2. Decisions on funding and political capital investment should be guided by a clear understanding of the depth and nature of the political will for decentralization.
3. In an environment that is receptive to education decentralization but political will is not deep and widespread, support short-term goals and create building blocks for future change.
4. Decentralization is usually not a "linear" process; implementation takes place in a political environment over which USAID has little control, and USAID must be nimble, flexible, and willing to accommodate to strategies/sequences that may not appear to be 'logical'.
5. A comprehensive approach that simultaneously addresses education decentralization at all levels (Ministry of Education headquarters, regions, districts, communities, schools) requires an appreciation that changes at all levels often occur on their own schedule. Sufficient time, resources, and flexibility to make mid-course adjustments are needed.
6. Supporting a decree or law that legislates or paves the way for education decentralization may be a necessary first step, but is not sufficient. Plan to assist in preparing the implementing regulations and assist national, regional, and local institutions to exercise their new roles and responsibilities.
7. Be clear early on regarding the depth and nature of decentralization that the government is seeking, and thus the type of support that is needed from USAID.
8. Reach agreement among key actors (USAID, host country, implementing partners) on fundamental design assumptions and revisit these assumptions frequently during implementation. When they are not borne out, be prepared to adjust strategies and/or activities.
9. Evidence is limited that decentralization alone leads to increased education quality. However, the extent to which it focuses on improving quality and the closer the decentralization actions are to the school/

community the more likely decentralization, combined with other needed inputs, will contribute to improving education quality.

10. To make informed decisions for decentralizing education services, have access to good information about the education system and to know how to make judicious use of this information.

11. When designing a decentralization project, push as far down the causal impact chain as possible to identify end-of-project outcomes or impacts that are achievable in the project time frame.

12. In designing a monitoring and evaluation plan, (a) build in qualitative assessment methodologies that provide an understanding of what is happening during implementation; (b) identify indicators (qualitative and quantitative) that can adequately show achievement of important project objectives; and (c) be open as needed to making adjustments in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) indicators and targets.

13. Support for developing school improvement plans at the school or community level makes sense as one approach. However, unless accompanied by funding to schools to implement their plans, there is little prospect that plans will be effectively implemented.

Operating within a Limited Time Frame

14. It is possible to make partial advances in education decentralization in a three- to five-year project time frame. However, achieving full and effective decentralization is a longer-term effort of at least 10 to 15 years with many factors outside a donor's control.

15. Instead of aspiring to achieve 'sustainability', focus on actions that 'initiate' and 'stimulate' change.

Working with Ministries of Education

16. Clarifying roles and responsibilities of relevant MOE staff and supporting capacity building to assist them to carry out these roles and responsibilities are especially important.

17. Embedding technical advisors in an MOE can be effective in building close working relationships with key host country counterparts; embedded advisors are often sought out by key Ministry personnel to provide timely assistance to resolve immediate issues.

18. Downsides of embedding technical advisors include: lack of physical space in the Ministry, requests that may be outside the advisor's scope of work, and the risk that the advisor ends up doing the work that Ministry personnel should be doing.

Collaborating with Key Actors

19. Do not limit actions to working within an MOE. Interact with important actors from the Ministry of Finance and other relevant ministries and/or autonomous or semi-autonomous entities.

20. Changes in key actors during program implementation (USAID, host country counterparts, the implementing partner) are inevitable. These changes can have positive or negative impacts and should be factored into both project design and implementation.

21. Stay aware of other donor education decentralization activities. Other donors can be important allies; they can also be unwitting detractors to decentralization efforts.

22. Finally, develop relationships of credibility and trust between USAID staff and its implementing partners as well as among USAID staff, its implementing partners, and host country counterparts.

USEFUL STRATEGIES

In carrying out the review of the five Associate Awards, several interesting strategies were identified that USAID officers who design programs that focus on or include decentralization may want to incorporate in their program designs. These strategies are listed below. More information on each may be found in pages 41 to 43 of the main text and by contacting the relevant USAID missions.

Egypt ERP
- Form an inter-ministerial committee to oversee coordination of decentralization activities across ministries.
- Engage in strategic planning/review mid-stream. This resulted in adjusting ERP objectives and indicators to make them more realistic and reflect changes in the implementation environment.

Mali RAP/DM
- Use a self-critical process to help Ministry of Education staff come to conclusions themselves as a means of promoting the cause of decentralization.
- Introduce a results-based culture for training.
- Assemble cross-sectoral teams, composed of MOE regional actors with responsibilities in different areas and trained on content common to all these areas; implement cascade training while being observed by trainers .

Malawi EDSA
- Design a Performance Monitoring and Research Plan (PMRP) that, in addition to providing quantitative indicators, includes qualitative evaluations and applied research designed to understand why project activities are or are not having impact and what works and what doesn't through decentralization activities.
- Work through country systems and with NGOs to deliver grants to schools to implement their school improvement plans (SIPs).

Egypt, Georgia, Mali
- Apply the Institutional Rubric to measure stages of systemic change.

Background

Between July and October of 2010, a consultant contracted by FHI 360 reviewed documents and conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 36 individuals involved in the design and implementation of five EQUIP2 Associate Awards implemented since 2003 in Egypt, Georgia, Mali, and Malawi. All five projects focused on education decentralization or had education decentralization as a principal component.

The principal objective of this review has been to draw lessons learned, insights, and strategies that might be useful to USAID education officers who design, implement, and monitor education decentralization projects. Section I provides an overview of education decentralization, the methodology used in this review, and overviews of each project experience. Section II is the main section of this paper and focuses on findings, lessons learned, strategies, insights, and recommended actions for USAID staff and partners. In addition, Annex 1 provides in tabular form a list of what worked and what did not work across the country cases. Annex 2 summarizes each project experience in case study format. The interview protocol used is in Annex 3. A list of the individuals interviewed for each country, along with their respective roles in designing, implementing, or backstopping the project is in Annex 4.

A. OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION DECENTRALIZATION[2]

Defining education decentralization and its dimensions
Decentralization, as defined in a 2005 EQUIP2 paper compiled by Donald Winkler entitled Understanding Decentralization is "The process by which decision making responsibilities are transferred from higher levels of government to lower levels and even to the schools themselves." Effective and efficient functioning of government requires "an appropriate balance" of centralization and decentralization. Even when national governments decentralize functions, they retain significant responsibility for developing

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2   Note to the reader. This section is not meant to be a comprehensive review of what the literature has to say on education decentralization. The objective is to provide a brief context focusing on education decentralization for the discussion that follows. This section includes insights from Don Winkler's paper prepared under EQUIP2 entitled Understanding Decentralization. It also includes insights from Luis Crouch, who like Winkler, is a highly respected internationally, given his experience working in education decentralization.

appropriate and effective national decentralization policies and regulations as well as strengthening local institutional capacity to assume responsibility for new functions.

Decentralization can encompass different types of responsibility transfer: devolution, deconcentration, and delegation.

- **Devolution** is the permanent—legal or constitutional—transfer of decision making authority from a higher level of government to a lower level.
- **Deconcentration** is the transfer, usually by administrative decree, of decision making authority from higher to lower levels of the bureaucracy within the same level of government.
- **Delegation** is the assignment, usually by administrative decree, of decision making authority to other public or private agencies."

One or more of the following functions may be decentralized to different levels: teacher hiring, book selection, purchasing of expendable supplies, or funding and site selection of new schools. For instance, in hiring teachers, it is possible to think of a rich gamut of options, from the most centralized to the most decentralized:

1. The need for hiring teachers is detected by a central system, which appoints and deploys teachers to districts and schools.
2. The need is detected at the school or district level, but transmitted to a central system that chooses and deploys teachers without district or school choice.
3. The need is detected at the school or district level, the teacher is chosen at that level, but the choice must be pre-approved at a central level.
4. The need is detected at school or district level, and the final decision on who is hired can be made at that level without pre-approval, but accountability for doing it properly is still owed upward to the center, and the center can audit at any time.
5. The need is detected at the school or district level, the decision is made at that level, and accountability is owed only to authorities at the same level (e.g., to the school board or district education board or the mayor), but according to national policy.
6. The same as 5, above, but according only to district policy.

Options 1 to 3 are centralist, option 4 could be called de-concentrated, and options 5 and 6 can be called devolved, with the last one being quite extreme and likely only in federal countries and only for state- or province-level autonomy (or, sometimes, indeed, school-level autonomy).

Why decentralize education services

Multiple reasons influence decisions to decentralize education services. As part of broader democratization, political pressures may increase to provide relative degrees of autonomy to minority populations that do not reside in the capital where the power base is located. Increased accountability and efficiency, increased access to education, and improved quality of education may be goals. When the central government does not have the resources to provide needed education services, it relies on others to step in (NGOs, private sector, lower levels of government, and even parents and communities). The government's motivation for decentralizing education may be based on one or a combination of these.

Devolving responsibility to local government (district, commune, governorate, etc.) may increase accountability and efficiency by shortening the distance between parent and policymaker or the distance between policymaker and the school. This transfer can also increase parental demand for greater quality or improve the capacity of sector policymakers and managers to implement their policies and programs, but the impact depends on having educated and informed clients and professional school managers.

Delegating funding and spending authorities directly from the central government to the school can be to: (1) improve efficiency and reduce costs so that local managers can make better decisions on the basis of local information; (2) increase education quality and strengthen schools' accountability to parents, presuming that both have adequate information about school performance and schools have the knowledge and resources to improve; and (3) introduce competitive market forces to the public education monopoly by offering parents and students a privately managed schooling option.

When funding and spending authorities are delegated to the school, school councils usually meet periodically with parents, giving participating parents a strong voice. School councils also often work with the school director on school planning and budget issues, creating a strong link between the governing board and the school. Delegation can strongly increase accountability. However, higher levels of government usually retain significant responsibilities, including decisions on how much to spend per pupil, how much to pay teachers, and how to train them.

Context and time frame for decentralization

Education decentralization can be part of an overall national policy that affects all sectors or just the social sectors. Decentralization initiatives can focus just on education or even a specific function within education, such as stationery procurement, or teacher hiring and firing. Decentralization is often a non-linear process that has steps forward and steps backward, with many interests involved. The reason for this is simple: decentralization invariably involves loss of power for some, and an increase in power for others, and this hardly ever takes place easily. Full education decentralization is usually a long-term process of at least 10 to 15 years, assuming that the political will exists to carry it out. Invariably, with changes in government and key actors, the political will to implement education decentralization will ebb and flow.

Decentralization and improvements in education quality

Although effective decentralization should logically lead to increased education quality, no hard evidence supports this assertion. Decentralization's impact on school quality depends on capacity, information, MOE support, and local tradition and culture, especially concerning community initiative and participation. Improving quality may not even be the intent of a decentralization policy. The intent may simply be local empowerment. Thus, whether decentralization can lead to quality depends on whether improving quality is an actual aim.

Devolution to the community level can strengthen parental demand for greater quality or improve the capacity of sector policymakers and managers to implement their policies and programs, but the impact depends on having educated clients and professional school managers.

Delegation to other public or private agencies offers somewhat larger possibilities for improving school quality. Creating elected school councils or governing boards in and of itself encourages more active participation on behalf of parents. Active parent participation can translate into increased teacher attendance monitoring and budget preparation and implementation.

Distinctions between decentralizing to lower levels of governments as opposed to schools or schools and communities

Decentralization to lower levels of government and decentralization to schools or schools and communities are very different, although they can be blended into a hybrid policy. Decentralization to lower levels of government is much messier, more political, and often carried out for non-educational reasons with little evidence that it benefits education, although some evidence suggests increased inequality.

Decentralization to schools—sometimes called school autonomy or a variant of school-based management—usually has improving education as its focus, is usually driven by the MOE, and has some empirical evidence suggesting that it improves educational outcomes. This evidence includes both statistical analyses and controlled experiments. The evidence does not indicate large impacts, but the results are often statistically significant.

How education decentralization is carried out
Constitutional reform, new legislation, executive decree or edict often sets decentralization's principles and goals. It may mention the importance of citizen participation or indicate that local governments will have a new but perhaps undefined responsibility for basic education or specifically reserve certain areas (e.g., higher education) for the national government. However, this first step rarely specifies powers and responsibilities in any detail, and it may be in conflict with other laws—civil service, education, finance—governing the education sector.

Implementation regulations follow the new legislation or decree. Existing laws must also be amended to encourage consistency with new decentralization policies. This is not always done immediately, resulting in legal ambiguities about roles and responsibilities, which may persist for several years.

National, regional, and local institutions need assistance to exercise their new roles and responsibilities. The extent to which this occurs, however, depends on the institutions' management and fiscal capacity. A lack of administrative capacity or financial resources may prevent a local government from assuming its new role.

Delegating authorities to the school level
Delegation runs the gamut from giving schools authority to maintain their own buildings to giving them financing and authority to hire and manage teachers and principals. Delegating limited powers and responsibilities rarely poses an implementation challenge, but delegating broad powers to an elected school council requires significant council capacity building, new job descriptions and selection procedures for principals, and a culture change in the MOE from command and control to facilitate and assist.

Financing under education decentralization
When responsibility and authority are transferred to the community level, sub-national governments may depend exclusively on own-source revenues to fund education at one extreme or on national government transfers at the other. In most countries, sub-national government's own revenues are a

minor source of education finance; most revenues come from fiscal transfer from the central government.

The central government may transfer money in large, unconditional blocks to sub-national governments to spend as they wish. Alternatively, the central government may transfer money as grants to be used expressly for public education (or even for functions or sub-functions). The central government may also transfer money as grants only to purchase specific inputs.

The transfers from the central to sub-national government may be determined by formula, making the distribution more transparent and predictable. Transfers may also be ad hoc and determined by political negotiation, where distribution usually favors sub-national governments affiliated with the national government's political party. Or transfers may simply be chaotic and random, and may ultimately be the outgrowth of past negotiating power. Regardless of the way transfers are done, there are elements of risk. Individuals at the center who devolve finance often fear corruption in use of funds at sub-national levels. In addition, by authorizing the transfer of funds, some individuals may risk giving up power and/or a source of personal income.

School grants are the principal mechanism for financing autonomous schools that have been delegated new responsibilities. School grants may be unconditional, giving school councils decision-making power, or they may be conditioned on spending for designated purposes or inputs. Donor agencies widely support school grants.

Decentralization challenges[3]
In 2006, USAID, FHI 360, the British Council, and The World Bank Institute teamed up to develop an integrated video conference with teams of professional educators from five countries. Over a seven-month period, the five country teams made up of representatives from the central ministries, local education offices, and head teachers shared both positive and negative experiences. These five countries had attempted decentralization reforms to various degrees. Some lessons learned were agreed on by all.

1. Decentralization reforms had not sufficiently increased local decision making power. A large dichotomy always exists between the policy and reality. In most cases, schools boards made decisions, but had to wait for these to be 'approved' by district education offices.

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3   From Bourdon, C. Hansell, Decentralization Frameworks and General Lessons from the International Context, unpublished paper produced in 2009 under the EQUIP2 Education Decentralization Support Activity (EDSA) in Malawi.

2. Despite large reforms, central ministries have not taken on the new monitoring and training functions necessary to give real decision-making and management power to lower levels. Some ministries have taken on new training functions, but have not sufficiently released power to the newly trained professionals.

3. Central funding has always been the last function to decentralize. This lag leads to difficulties in executing decisions when the decision makers at lower levels don't have money.

B. METHODOLOGY

The principal objective of this review has been to gain insights from experienced development practitioners into practical lessons in designing, implementing, and evaluating projects that focus on education decentralization or have decentralization components. The primary audience is new USAID education officers.

The qualitative method investigates the why and how of decision making, not just what, where, and when. The main methods used in the study included interviews and document review. This review is not based on an in-depth evaluation of each Associate Award. Visits were not made to each country to interview a wide variety of actors. An extensive review was not made of all of the documents generated by or related to the Associate Award.

Preparation of interview protocol, summary/matrix, consent form for each project

To prepare for the study, an interview protocol was developed and piloted. A summary and matrix for each country case was also developed based on information taken primarily from the Request for Applications (RFA) and FHI 360's proposal, to be used as a reference point during the interviews.[4] A consent form, to be signed by each interviewee, was also prepared. Key topics raised in the interview protocol (Annex 3) may be found below.

Interviews carried out using the protocol and summary documents

The protocol was used to carry out interviews of approximately an hour-and-a-half each. Between 6 and 11 individuals were interviewed for each country case: (1) USAID staff involved in the design of the RFAs and in overseeing project implementation; (2) FHI 360 and sub-contractor staff who prepared EQUIP2's proposal in response to the RFA, implemented the project, and

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4 The summary and matrices for each project contain information on: life of project funding, project start and end dates, the country and education context, role of other donors, the project purpose, and key activities.

backstopped the project from the United States; and (3) where possible, host-country counterparts who implemented the project. A total of 36 individuals were interviewed for five projects in the four countries.[5] [6]

Topics Addressed in Interview Protocol

1. EQUIP2 project's **development hypothesis** (or what one wanted to accomplish related to the project goal) related to education decentralization, the assumptions underlying the hypothesis, and their validity.
2. **Key project activities** related to decentralization: what they were; why they were selected; the assumptions linked to the activities and their validity; whether the activities led to the outcomes one expected; if not, why.
3. **Adequacy of time frame and funding** for what the EQUIP2 project wanted to accomplish related to education decentralization.
4. Extent to which the project built in **sustainability**, the extent to which sustainability was achieved (or not) and why.
5. Whether the project led to **outcomes** that were expected and, if not, why.
6. **Adjustments made**, if any, to activities, budget, and time frame.
7. **Project monitoring and evaluation**: indicators selected to assess project impact and track activity progress in education decentralization; which were most useful and why; how the information collected was used; are there other indicators that would have been more useful.
8. **Successes and challenges** related to decentralization: aspects of the project that were most successful and why; biggest challenges encountered in managing the project and how addressed.
9. **Ability to adapt to changing circumstances, reprogram,** or change aspects of the program.

Interviews written up and shared with each interviewee

As each interview was completed, it was written up and shared with the interviewee for review and comment. During the interviews, interviewees were assured confidentiality. They were also told that if they were quoted (either in name or indirectly) in this or another document they would have to give their approval in advance.

Other sources of information accessed

To supplement the interviews, which served as the primary information source, several documents were reviewed for each project: RFAs, end of project reports (where available), and quarterly, semi-annual, and/or annual reports, and, where possible, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plans and available M&E reports.

Country searches were conducted via Google to identify, download, and review relevant documents on the country context for each country, especially

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5   The five projects are: Egypt: Education Reform Support Program (ERP); Georgia: Georgia Education Decentralization and Accreditation Program (GEDA); Mali: Regional Action Plan Decision Management Program (RAP/DM); Mali: Education Decentralization Program (EDP); and Malawi: Education Decentralization Support Activity (EDSA).

6   In the case of Mali (RAP/DM and EDSA) a number of individuals were interviewed twice for each project.

as they related to decentralization in that country. In addition, basic statistics (education and other) were obtained from the most recent United Nations Human Development Report (HDR) and from the World Bank's education statistics database.

Those already interviewed were sought out as needed to clarify points from the interview, obtain additional information, and/or to triangulate information obtained from other interviews. In a couple of instances, other individuals directly or indirectly involved with the EQUIP2 programs were sought out to obtain additional, primarily contextual, information.

Analyses carried out
A summary of the interviews was prepared for each project. This summary listed what each individual had to say on each of the main interview topics and looked for commonalities as well as differences in responses across interviews on given topics.

With this information, plus information from the documents and online resources, a review was prepared for each Associate Award (Annex 2). In addition, a list was prepared of what worked and what did not work across Associate Awards (Annex 1). This information, along with a review of the education decentralization literature served as the basis for preparing Section II—Findings, Lessons Learned, Strategies and Insights.

Feedback obtained on review
Once the full document was prepared, it underwent two stages of review, with comments incorporated from each stage: (1) from the FHI 360 EQUIP2 director and the Senior Vice President responsible for the Global Education Center (October–November, 2010) and (2) from the individuals interviewed for the study (January–March, 2011). Feedback, including on accuracy of content, was obtained from the Chiefs of Party for four Associate Awards, technical advisors for four Associate Awards, a USAID education team leader, two FHI 360 officers in Washington, and two specialists in decentralization. All quotes that appear in the document that follows have been reviewed and approved by the individuals quoted.

C. HIGHLIGHTS OF EQUIP2 ASSOCIATE AWARD EXPERIENCES

Each of the five EQUIP2 Associate Awards implemented in Egypt, Georgia, Mali, and Malawi is summarized in a one-page textbox. More information on each Associate Award is found in Annex 2.

EGYPT: Education Reform Support Program (ERP)

The USAID/Egypt five-year (2004–2009) $50,311,279, Education Reform Support Program (ERP) implemented by EQUIP2, with activities focusing on policy/systems reform, one of which was decentralization, was one of two Cooperative Agreements under ERP. The other, EQUIP 1 (2004–20011 at $73 million), focused on schools and community participation in schools. The ultimate objective of ERP has been to improve student learning by enhancing the quality of education service delivery at all levels of the system. Set in a context of a presidential policy pronouncement in 2002 favoring decentralization especially in the social sectors, ERP assisted the Ministry of Education and several of Egypt's governorates to take the lead in decentralizing education services and in so doing serve as a model for decentralization in other sectors.

Funding: $51,261,416
Time frame: 2004–2009
Decentralization objective: Help the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Faculty of Education Reform Committee (FOERC), other government bodies, governorate and education leaders, and private sector leaders to provide active support for the reform efforts through policy-level interventions, supporting replication within governorates and scaling up the reform.

USAID support through EQUIP2 for decentralization was built on a pilot carried out by USAID under a prior USAID project in the governorate of Alexandria. A 2007 USAID/Egypt revision of its education strategy led to the decision to amend the both of the EQUIP ERP Cooperative Agreements. Program components in both agreements were phased out, freeing resources and staff to focus on areas such as decentralization that were becoming of increased interest/priority to the MOE and, in the case of EQUIP2, address other emerging areas of policy priority.

USAID support for decentralization, through ERP, resulted in:
- Providing support (along with other donors) for the development of a comprehensive education strategic plan that included decentralization as a central focus;
- A policy to activate decentralization through three pilot governorates (Fayoum, Ismailia, Luxor) with the MOE as the lead ministry, which was endorsed by the National Democratic Party Policy Secretariat, the third most powerful political organization in Egypt;
- A new process for allocating resources to the school level by formula funding according to enrollment and pro-poor weighting endorsed by Ministry of Finance (MOF) and MOE;
- Decrees from the MOF to enable decentralization by increasing the ceiling for cash advances to schools; and from the MOE on revised roles for the boards of trustees, formula funding, and increased percentage of activity fees kept at the school level;
- A School/Board of Trustee Guide to Decentralized Education Finance manual approved by the MOF and the MOE for training and capacity building at all levels of the MOE system; and
- An Inter-Ministerial Working Group for Education Funding formed at the invitation of the Ministry of Finance. This Inter-Ministerial Working Group is the leading body for the required policy and system change needed to support financial decentralization.

Since EQUIP2's portion of ERP ended in April of 2009, USAID has continued to support education decentralization focusing specifically on decentralizing funding to governorates and schools. The amount of funding decentralized to governorates and school has increased from 8 million Egyptian pounds to 500 million Egyptian pounds.

GEORGIA: Georgia Education Decentralization and Accreditation Project (GEDA)

The USAID/Georgia's three-year (2005–2008 with options for two one-year extensions), $11,996,369, EQUIP2 Georgia Education Decentralization and Accreditation Associate Award (GEDA) was set within the context of the Rose Revolution that brought to power a reform oriented government that was very pro-United States. GEDA was designed as a complement to a large World Bank education program that had as a primary objective assisting the Government of Georgia to implement a sweeping General Education Law passed in 2005. This law, among others, provided for decentralizing power from the central Ministry of Education to schools through recently reconfigured Education Resource Centers.

USAID's RFA for GEDA anticipated implementing the project in two-phases and provided illustrative activities, giving flexibility to EQUIP2 to make adjustments as implementation progressed. In 2006 GEDA was cut from $11.99 million to $6.8 million and the USAID mission decided not to exercise the option included in the EQUIP2 Cooperative Agreement to extend the program for up to two additional years. During its last year, EQUIP2 operated within a limited and very uncertain funding environment and was given mixed signals regarding whether the project would continue or not.

Funding: $11,996,369, reduced to $6,800,000
Time frame: 2005–2008 with an option for two one- year extensions; this option was not exercised.
Decentralization objectives: (1) Develop a national strategy and action plan to implement the decentralization program for general education; (2) assist in establishing of regional bodies of educational management—the Education Resource Centers (ERCs); (3) assist in the implementation of reforms at the regional level; and (4) build the capacity of the MES in such areas as education administration, financial management, and training to sustain the decentralization program.

Key accomplishments under GEDA:
- Thirty-five ERCs were refurbished with apparently good results; these well-constructed and attractive renovations were seen as a shot in the arm for educators at the regional level.
- Training was carried out in school finance and budgets, as well as strategic planning for ERCs and project management for Ministry of Education personnel.
- Brochures based on training provided were produced, covering topics such as school finance and budgeting, school accounting, communication in schools and school management, and strategic planning for ERCs and schools.
- Training was initiated, through ERC staff trained through GEDA, to support Boards of Trustees and new school directors in understanding their roles and responsibilities.
- Several handbooks on school boards, school management, and ideas for running meetings, as well as a piece on how ERC personnel might serve as consultants were completed.
- A manual for strategic planning for ERCs was developed, with data on 32 ERCs, illustrating the commonalities of missions and the variability of strategies, dependent on resources, community involvement, and location.
- Three evaluation reports were completed illustrating the range of stakeholders for ERCs, and the effectiveness of the training of school boards, school directors, and ERC economic officers.

MALI: Regional Action Plan/Decision Making Program (RAP/DM)

The USAID/Mali five-year (2004–2009), $4,999,239, Regional Action Planning/Decision Making program (RAP/DM) was designed in the context of a constitution passed in 1994 that provided for the delegation of funding and authority to decentralized entities at the regional and commune level and a 10-year government of Mali education plan (PRODEC), adopted in 1999, to guide Mali's education sector reform, including decentralization of decision making.

RAP/DM, one of three USAID/Mali education programs (the other two focusing on support for education at the commune level and interactive radio), was designed to collaborate closely with activities in decentralization being implemented by USAID/Mali's democracy and governance office. It was also designed within the context of three-year renewable donor sector support program, PISE, to assist Mali to reach EFA goals. RAP/DM, with AED as the prime, had EDC in the technical lead.

Funding: $4,88,239, reduced to $4,455,000
Time frame: 2004–2009
Purpose: Provide the decentralized structures of the Ministry of Education at the regional level (AEs or Académies d'Enseignement—Regional Education Offices) with the technical expertise, particularly in data analysis and financial accounting, to analyze and to use education data for sound activity planning and resource allocation decisions in the education sector.

Early in RAP/DM implementation a new Minister of Education came in who was less committed to decentralization than his predecessor under whom RAP/DM was designed. The new Minister either fired or moved to other positions key actors in the MOE who worked closely with USAID in project design. Also, in 2005, one year into project implementation, the USDH education team leader responsible for working closely with MOE staff to design RAP/DM departed Mali for onward assignment and was replaced by a USDH education team leader who had a different implementation philosophy. In 2006, reductions in annual education allotments to USAID/Mali forced the mission to make cuts in the RAP/DM budget and those of other education programs; some, but not all, were later replaced.

Highlights of accomplishments under RAP/DM include:
- Eight thousand person-days of training provided to CAP, AE, and central ministry staff in—among others—action plan preparation, use of statistical data for decision making, the decentralization process, Geographic Information Systems (GIS),and tools for enhancing equity in education.
- Several innovative planning tools helped education planners and decision-makers understand whether current strategies for expanding access and improving equity were actually delivering results in a way that would lead to Education For All (EFA).
- Rapid studies were conducted to analyze and provide information for decision making in a number of critical areas, including: community teacher subsidies, bottlenecks in accessing funding for action plan activities, and implementing key sector reporting and planning activities.
- Communication systems within the MOE were improved through increased use of technology (email, Skype, a limited access cell phone network, etc.).
- Regional and sub-regional Action Plan implementation increased, and in 2007, budget execution reached 60 percent, up from 43 percent the previous year.
- A GIS to map schools and population in 20 CAPs underscored the wide disparities in equity and access to schooling in remote rural villages, and led to the MOE decision to adopt a policy on expanding access to rural schools, using the single-teacher-school model.

MALI: Education Decentralization Program (EDP)

In April of 2009, USAID/Mali signed a second Cooperative Agreement with EQUIP2 for a $22.5 million Education Decentralization Program (EDP) to be implemented over a five-year period as a follow on to RAP/DM and other activities. The RFA built on a number of lessons learned from RAP/DM and expands the focus of activities from the central and regional levels to include communes and schools.

The RFA for EDP was quite directive. It included 26 specific results that were to be achieved over a five-year period. The RFA also specified that EQUIP2 was to work closely with USAID's other education projects and, in particular, to implement its decentralization program in tandem with the Office of Democracy and Governance's decentralization program which received some education funding. Within the first few months of signature of the Cooperative Agreement, the mission led an exercise including all education programs designed to come up with a monitoring and evaluation plan that had common targets across USAID/Mali education projects. This exercise resulted in 38 indicators.

Funding: $22,500,000
Time frame: 2009–2014
Purpose: Achieve measurable improvements in expanding access and improving the quality of basic education in Mali by building upon previous USAID programs that have worked to reinforce education system decentralization, but address the issue in a more comprehensive manner aimed at building communication and collaboration between relevant stakeholders, particularly those at the CAP, commune, and school levels.

A November 2008 directive from the Prime Minister's office provided for significant amounts of funding for the local governments, and this was reflected in the 2010 budget. This was to enable them to directly implement basic services. This event happened after the RFA came out, and was not factored into project design. This law has significant implications for the implementation of EDP, given that in designing the project the assumption has been that this would happen in the third year of the project, thus providing time the first two years to prepare for this decentralization of funding.

With the arrival of the new USDH team leader in August 2010, and in the light of the above, plus implementation experience to date, the M&E plan is being examined to decide which indicators should remain, which should be removed, and whether any indicators/studies should be added.

MALAWI: Education Decentralization Support Activity

The USAID/Malawi three-year (2009–2012), $11,559,643, Education Decentralization Support Activity (EDSA) was designed in the context of a National Decentralization Policy (NDP) intended to improve social services through decentralization passed by the Parliament of Malawi in December 1998.

An education assessment conducted in 2008 and supported by USAID/Malawi, concluded that decentralization is primarily administrative and the devolution of power remains largely rhetoric. The center continues to play a significant role both in setting policies and in carrying out routine functions. The assessment also noted that the crucial responsibilities of management, finance, and curriculum at the regional, community, and school levels continue to be defined by the central Ministry of Education office.

Funding: $4,88,239, reduced to $4,455,000
Time frame: 2004–2009
Purpose: Provide the decentralized structures of the Ministry of Education at the regional level (AEs or Académies d'Enseignement—Regional Education Offices) with the technical expertise, particularly in data analysis and financial accounting, to analyze and to use education data for sound activity planning and resource allocation decisions in the education sector.

EDSA was designed collaboratively with the Malawian Ministry of Education and other donors as part of a broader 10-year National Education Support Program (NESP) and in response to the mid-term Education Sector Implementation Plan (ESIP), 2009–2013. Built into the design was the understanding that EDSA would be integral to and implemented in the context of a large donor SWAp under design to assist the Ministry of Education to achieve NESP objectives. Among others, EDSA helped prepare the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) Catalytic Funds Application, for which Malawi was successful in leveraging approximately $250 million of pooled donor funding that served as the basis for much of the work supported by other development partners, especially by the World Bank. The EDSA Associate Award is being implemented by FHI 360 as the prime with EDC and RTI as subcontractors.

EDSA is designed to provide assistance at three levels: policy, district, and community. Each level became a component of the activity and would, respectively: (1) strengthen policy and strategy articulation, interpretation, and implementation (policy support); (2) Improve decentralization implementation, planning, and data utilization for informed decision making (decentralization and planning); and (3) Enhance the role and participation of communities in monitoring education service delivery (schools and community). A feedback loop built into the program, combined with a monitoring and evaluation plan that includes ongoing evaluation and research activities, is intended to make available information on an ongoing basis that can be used by the Ministry of Education personnel to take decisions regarding decentralization and to adjust implementation activities as needed.

FINDINGS, LESSONS LEARNED, STRATEGIES, AND INSIGHTS

The lessons learned, strategies, and insights were derived from findings from the five projects, supplemented by state-of–the-art information on experiences more broadly from efforts to decentralize education services. Some are specific to projects or programs that focus on decentralization support. Others have broader application for projects designed with other objectives. A more detailed review of each Associate Award experience is in Annex 2.

A.   LESSONS LEARNED

Twenty-two education decentralization lessons learned emerged from the review. These lessons learned are grouped in the following four categories:

- Designing an education decentralization program
- Operating within a limited time frame
- Working with Ministries of Education
- Collaborating with key actors

Each lesson learned is written as a recommended action for USAID designers and program implementers. The text that follows begins with the overall finding. It is followed by specific findings from relevant EQUIP2 Associate Awards. Each lesson learned ends with implications for USAID education officers.

Designing Education Decentralization Programs

1. ***When designing a program on decentralizing education, understand the political motive(s) underlying decentralization. Be aware that over time in political will and stewardship of government/ministries for decentralization will ebb and flow.***

Most steps taken by governments to decentralize have a political motivation. In Egypt in 2003, President Hosni Mubarak issued a decree establishing a

framework for decentralization. The decree was general and although the motivation underlying it is not totally clear, some suggest that it was in response to the increasing power of the Muslim Brotherhood, which holds out a potential threat to the Mubarak government. Interviewees suggest that a group of younger, better-educated individuals in high levels of the Egyptian government have been pushing for delegation of authorities and funding to local levels.

USAID/Egypt had already initiated an education decentralization pilot in the governorate of Alexandria by the time Mubarak issued this decree. Taking advantage of the opening the decree created, USAID incorporated into EQUIP 2 a component that expanded the Alexandria pilot to seven governorates believing that experience from the pilots would inform MOE decentralization policy. The continued political openness to decentralization throughout ERP favored implementation of the component.

Decentralization in Mali was a political response to Moussa Traore's 23-year dictatorship and the widespread public frustration with the regime's nontransparent, nonresponsive governance, which led to violent demonstrations in 1991. The elections that followed led to Alpha Konare's inauguration in June 1992 and paved the way for sweeping reforms, including a movement toward comprehensive decentralization of Mali's administrative system. Communes were established with leadership popularly elected by citizens. Communes were to have extensive delegation of authorities and funding to implement important activities in health, sanitation, and education in each commune's villages. Legislation also called for the deconcentration of central MOE and other ministry authorities to regions and sub-regions. However, over time and with changes in leadership, political commitment waned.

RAP/DM (2004–2009) built on a renewed political opening bolstered by a group of senior personnel at the MOE. They were committed to making administrative deconcentration at the Ministry a reality by supporting efforts to deconcentrate authorities and functions to newly created regional (AE) and sub-regional (CAPS) MOE entities. However, soon after the project began these individuals left their positions and there was a setback in political will. The RAP/DM Chief of Party addressed this change in political will by finding creative ways to decentralize without calling it decentralization. A conscious decision was made to engage with the MOE in just-in-time activities that permitted senior Ministry leadership to make decisions that favored achieving Education for All targets, a topic around which there was little controversy. These decisions concurrently favored decentralization.

EDP (2009–2014) is taking advantage of a decree the current Prime Minister of Mali issued in 2008 to expand the radius of decentralization from the national and regional levels under RAP/DM to the school and community levels under ERP. This decree implements decentralization legislation passed in the early 1990s by sending significant government resources to communes to be used to support the social sectors. The incoming USAID education team leader recognizes the importance of this decree on EDP implementation (an action that hadn't been anticipated until project year three) and has asked the EQUIP2 Chief of Party to adjust the indicators to reflect changes in project strategy.

The political motivation for decentralization in Georgia (GEDA, 2005-2008) was brought about by a change in the popularly elected government and the promulgation soon thereafter of a General Education Law that delegated funding (although not necessarily the corresponding authorities) directly to schools, bypassing regional governments that in prior years had received education funding and made decisions regarding its use. The Minister of Education during GEDA, who was charismatic and had the ear of the President, was committed to establishing capacity at the regional and school levels to implement the new decentralization law. He had less interest in building capacities at the central ministry, he saw the center as an interim organization that would eventually downsize and change in functional responsibilities. Accordingly, the primary focus of GEDA early on became to provide support and capacity building at the regional and school levels.

In Malawi (EDSA, 2009–2012), the parliament passed a National Decentralization Policy (NDP) in December 1998 largely in response to 30 years of centralized and authoritarian rule of President for Life Kamuzu Banda and the need to show Malawi's populace that they had a role to play in governing themselves. Ten years later, the MOE finalized a series of documents intended to provide the basis for rolling decentralization of education services to the districts. Included were the National Education Sector Plan (August 2008), Education Devolution Guidelines (October 2008), and the National Strategy for Community Participation in the Management of Primary Schools (February 2007), which included guidance for developing school improvement plans (SIPs), and guidelines for district education planning. EDSA (2009–2012) was designed to assist the MOE and other ministries to enable this roll out.

Implications for USAID education officers

Be aware that a key motivation to decentralize is often political and that the motive or motives underlying the decision to decentralize vary. Understand that changes in political will (with changes in presidents, ministers of education) are inevitable over time and that it is highly probable that one or more of these ebbs and flows may take place during the three- to five-year life of a USAID project. Anticipating these changes needs to be built into project design. If they occur during implementation, sufficient flexibility is necessary to adjust implementation strategies, project activities, and indicators.

2. *Decisions on funding and capital investment should be guided by a clear understanding of the depth and nature of the political will that exists for decentralization.*

USAID education officers will encounter education decentralization contexts that run a gamut from highly centralized systems with no interest in decentralizing to openings to the idea but no widespread political will to the political will backed by law and strong support from the president and/or Minister of Education.

USAID should examine the education decentralization environment prior to deciding how much funding and political capital to invest. If the environment provides few openings, funding should be limited. To the extent that clear political openings exist for taking concrete actions, USAID willingness to fund support for decentralization should increase.

In Georgia, USAID responded to clear political will at the highest levels by designing a program that provided sizable funding to support education decentralization. In 2005, two years following the Rose Revolution, a Law on General Education was approved with full support of the president and the Minister of Education. It moved authority and accountability for making key basic education decisions (such as hiring and firing teachers) from regional entities to schools and boards of trustees made up of parents and other community members. Education Resource Centers (ERCs)—regional bodies of education management—were established to prepare schools and boards of trustees to administer the funding and assist in implementing decentralization reforms in the regions. The GEDA project was designed to assist in implementing the decentralization provisions of the Law on General Education, helping the ERCs to become established so that they, in turn, could help schools and boards of trustees to carry out the authorities delegated to them.

Although the 1990 Mali constitution provided for the devolution of social sector funding to local governments and for the deconcentration of central ministry authorities to regions and communes, over time decentralization lost its early momentum. Thirteen years later, in 2003, the MOE, with donor support and assistance, adopted a 10-year education plan, PRODEC, which sought to revive education decentralization by giving impetus to deconcentrating decision making, localizing teacher training and professional development, and making communities more fiscally responsible for education. PRODEC included provisions for establishing decentralized structures at the regional and sub-regional levels to assist in implementing these new functions. In 2004, USAID/Mali took advantage of this opening by designing a more cautious, targeted, and lower funded $4,999,239 program to be carried out over a five-year period. RAP/DM provided these newly decentralized structures with the technical expertise to analyze and use education data for sound activity planning and resource allocation decisions.

Implications for USAID education officers
Prior to project design, examine the broader context for education decentralization. Has the country demonstrated political will at the highest levels by passing a law that provides for decentralization in general (including education) or that decentralized one or more education services? Is there support at the highest levels (from the President, Ministers of Education, Finance, Local Government) for implementing this law? Does this law provide for decentralization in such a way that it will eventually improve quality at the school level? If there is no clear political will at the highest levels, are there individuals or entities that are open to laying the groundwork by piloting an activity, conducting advocacy for the a law or regulations that will support decentralization? Based on the outcome of this examination decide: how much funding/political capital to invest in supporting decentralization along with the best approach for USAID as an external donor to follow in supporting education decentralization.

3. ***In an environment that is receptive to education decentralization but political will is not deep and widespread, support short-term goals and create building blocks for future change.***

In the absence of a sweeping law and high-level, widespread political will, USAID may detect openings for decentralization support. Openings may support innovative local activities that have promise for expansion. They may be in identifying a few key, well-placed individuals who are deeply committed to decentralization and assisting them to open the door by implementing cautious steps. USAID should also identify and support existing processes

and structures that serve as building the blocks for future change on a wider scale.

USAID/Egypt's approach provides a case in point. In 2001, USAID/Egypt cobbled together funds from various education projects and initiated a small decentralization pilot activity in the Governorate of Alexandria in the context of a broader effort to revitalize Alexandria and included participation from the private sector. It sought to demonstrate that education quality could be improved without extensive and lengthy legislative reforms through three key "pillars": (1) decentralization of school management authority to the school level (2) increased community involvement and support of schooling, and (3) improvement of teaching-learning methods and practices. The focus was on 30 schools.

Based on the Alexandria experience, USAID/Egypt built into the EQUIP2 ERP a second and broader approach to encouraging decentralization through a component that expanded the Alexandria pilot to 7 of Egypt's 20 governorates, believing that the experience from the pilots would contribute to and inform policy on education decentralization at the national level. During the second year of ERP, a new Minister of Education and a new Minister of Local Government were appointed. Both were from Alexandria and both had participated in the Alexandria decentralization pilot. This established a welcome opening for achieving ERP's secondary objective of contributing to informing national policy on education decentralization by bringing political support and interest at senior levels of the Egyptian government to the seven governorate-level decentralization pilots.

With the end of the EQUIP2 portion of ERP in April of 2009, and based on the success of the pilots, USAID/Egypt is continuing to support education decentralization through, among others, piloting and expanding formulas for decentralizing funding to governorates and schools for specific education functions.

Implications for USAID education officers
If an examination of the environment for education decentralization (see Lesson Learned 2 above) reveals strategic openings for supporting decentralization, either by funding a small pilot or by helping to advocate for decentralization forms, take advantage of these openings by providing a modicum of funding for the activity. At the same time, look toward establishing building blocks for future change on a wider scale. For example, consider designing a pilot so that it feeds into future decisions where senior actors in the Ministry of Education, other ministries, the country's congress or parliament support it directly.

4. ***Decentralization is usually not a 'linear' process; implementation takes place in a political environment over which USAID has little control, and USAID must be nimble, flexible, and willing to accommodate to strategies/ sequences that may not always appear to be 'logical.'***

Given its underlying political motives and the constant change in the cast of political actors, decentralization is 'messy'. What might have been a linear process (e.g., one step logically follows another) actually becomes more 'spontaneous' where USAID has little control over the sequence of the actions. If host country counterparts are to build true ownership, USAID must learn to go with the flow, however illogical (assuming USAID fundamentally does not disagree with what is being done).

GEDA in Georgia had designed a first phase whose objective was to "develop a national strategy and action plan to implement the decentralization program for general education." From this national strategy and action plan would flow phase-two activities focusing on strengthening the regional Education Resource Centers. With GEDA assistance, the Minister of Education and his staff developed a national strategy that was never formalized in writing. GEDA's focus almost immediately moved to working at the regional and school level to catch up with the General Education Law that had already been passed. Funding was being sent directly to schools unprepared to manage funds and school boards already elected with had no understanding of their roles. Since the project was prematurely terminated it is not possible to ascertain whether or not this approach ultimately bore fruit.

In Egypt, USAID and EQUIP2 learned early on that, although they could establish an agenda and targets for decentralization, they controlled neither. Changes in ministers of education opened new opportunities and demands for assistance from ERP that supported achieving education decentralization, but not exactly in the way that USAID and ERP had anticipated. USAID and EQUIP2 wisely decided to "go with the flow." In so doing, they build an atmosphere of respect and trust with key counterparts and were able to accomplish a number of intermediate targets that were not anticipated when ERP was designed. In the words of an interviewee, "The success of efforts in Egypt were based in large part on the extent to which the project could be responsive, change directions quickly, and take advantage of windows of opportunity."

In Mali, the EQUIP2 RAP/DM Chief of Party showed remarkable flexibility, adapting to opportunities and challenges as they arose within the MOE through just-in-time and other activities. As one interviewee described

it, "There were many opportunities and openings to enter into the bigger policy issues. For example, there was a whole issue around community schoolteachers, should they be endorsed by the MOE? We did a quick study and were able to demonstrate with objective data that there was a good rationale for subsidizing teacher salaries; it was possible to subsidize salaries for 3,000 teachers. This rapid analysis gave MOE staff real data instead of working with emotions."

EDSA in Malawi channeled funds to schools to implement their SIPs through NGOs. However, when it became apparent that existing NGOs did not have the needed capacity, USAID and EQUIP2 staff, in close collaboration with MoEST staff, decided to change course and instead engage in a relatively risky (but from a sustainability standpoint more appropriate) approach of channeling funds for SIPs through bank accounts established at the district level for schools. Though still a work in progress, the initial year's experience is showing that this was a design change and risk worth taking.

Implications for USAID education officers
Be prepared, during implementation, to not necessarily follow the exact sequence of activities anticipated when the project was designed. Activities negotiated with an MOE during project design may change dramatically, or be rendered obsolete during implementation due to factors outside of USAID's control–a change in president and with it a country's priorities, a change in minister of education or permanent secretary bringing in individuals who were not involved with project design and thus have little buy-in to the project as designed, a dramatic political change due to internal strife. Above all, be realistic and flexible. 'Logic' and linearity may have to take a back seat to decisions that are made by others that can dramatically change the way actions are envisioned to be implemented. To remain a vital actor/supporter it may be necessary to make adjustments midstream in project activities, targets, and even objectives.

5. ***A comprehensive approach that simultaneously addresses decentralization at all levels (Ministry of Education headquarters, regions, districts, communities, schools) requires an appreciation that changes at different levels occur on their own schedules. Sufficient time, resources, and flexibility to make mid-course adjustments are needed.***

Effective decentralization, regardless of the nature of the decentralization effort, requires building commitment, ownership, and capacity in a variety of offices at the center (for example the planning office at the Ministry of

Education, the statistics office, the human resources office, the directorate of primary and/or secondary education), at the regional level, possibly the sub-regional level (if there is one), and at the school/community level. It is tempting to try to support decentralization initiatives that operate simultaneously at all levels. However, caution is advised, in assuming that decentralization actions will occur in a synchronized fashion, as actions at each level will often follow their own time frame.

Under the ERP program in Egypt EQUIP2 worked at the national and regional levels and EQUIP 1 at the regional and local level. Significant progress was made during project implementation in building capacity at all three levels. It was understood at the time when ERP was designed that progress would take place at its own pace at each level. In addition, ERP had the flexibility to make adjustments over time in the nature of the assistance provided at each level.

RAP/DM in Mali originally focused at the regional level. However, early on it became apparent that the project had to operate at the sub-regional and central levels as well and USAID agreed to an amendment that permitted EQUIP2 to work at these three levels. EDP, the follow on to RAP/DM, works simultaneously at the national, regional, sub-regional, commune, and school levels. It is still too early to see how effectively the project will meet the targets at each level.

EDSA in Malawi is also works at all levels and has built into its design a feedback loop to permit changes in implementation strategies and activities as needed. As with EDP, it is still too early to see how effective EDSA will be in meeting targets at each level.

Implications for USAID education officers
In deciding to adopt an approach to decentralization that operates simultaneously at two or more levels, USAID should design the project realizing that change at different levels occurs on its own time frame. USAID should also build in the time and resources for ongoing reflection (through periodic external evaluations and/or internal reflections) on whether the approaches are the most appropriate, whether they are having positive impacts, and, as necessary, take corrective actions to strategies and activities.

6. ***Supporting a decree or law that legislates or paves the way for education decentralization may be a necessary first step, but it is not sufficient. Plan to assist in preparing implementing regulations and assist national, regional, and local institutions to exercise their new roles and responsibilities.***

Having a decree that sets the base for key decentralization actions is important. Even more valuable is having the legal structures in place. However, they alone are not sufficient. Actions are also required to develop the implementing regulations, establish new roles and responsibilities, restructure and move staff (often from the center to the regions), build staff capacity to take on new roles, ensure that key actors at all levels understand the changes and buy into them, ensure that resources are in place, and have the flexibility to adjust to opportunities and challenges as they arise.

When USAID/Mali issued the RAP/DM RFA in 2004, provisions had been in place for 10 years for devolution of authorities and funding for basic services to local levels. Mali's 1990 Constitution specified that key government ministries (among them the MOE) would be required to deconcentrate authorities and funding to regions and sub-regions to help local governments implement their new authorities. However, little had been done to pave the way in the MOE for deconcentration to take place.

RAP/DM was to assist a somewhat reluctant MOE to deconcentrate authorities to newly established regional (AEs) and sub-regional (CAPs) entities and to assist them to acquire the capacities to carry out their new roles. The project provided extensive support in training and role clarification. Given the vacancies and the extensive staff turnover at both levels during the project, however, it is not clear that when RAP/DM ended the needed capacity was in place.

In Georgia, a General Law for Education passed in 2005 laid out responsibilities for the MOE to deconcentrate authorities to ERCs so that they could assist schools to spend funding that would be devolved to them from the central government. GEDA assisted the MOE to set in place the actions needed to implement this law, including: clarifying roles and responsibilities of the ERCs and training staff in their new functions; and assisting with developing a formula for equitable devolution of funding from the central government to schools.

Implications for USAID education officers

Passage of a law governing decentralization is a promising and important step. However, it is just a start. In designing projects, examine the panorama of actions that need to take place for decentralization to have an impact and build in (to the extent that USAID has the time, resources, and the opening to do so) support for other ancillary activities (passing regulations, clarifying roles and responsibilities, staff training/capacity building) required for the law to be implemented effectively.

7. ***Be clear early on in project design regarding the depth and nature of decentralization that the government is seeking, and thus the type of support that is needed from USAID.***

Decentralization has been defined as "the process by which decision making responsibilities are transferred from higher levels of government to lower levels and even to the schools themselves."[7] There are different ways of looking at decentralization. One is from the optic of different distinct types of responsibility transfer: devolution, deconcentration, and delegation.[8] Another is from the perspective of accountability and the functions that are to be delegated. Functions that can be delegated to different levels include: hiring and placement of teachers, selecting textbooks, purchasing expendable supplies, new school funding and site selection. Depending on the country and context, some of these functions may remain centralized; others may be devolved to schools or community organizations. Yet other functions may be transferred from the MOE's headquarters to the department, regional, or sub-regional level. Using hiring and placement of teachers as an example, authority for hiring and placing teachers can remain at MOE headquarters with accountability for these decisions remaining there. At the other extreme authority for hiring and placing teachers can be vested at the school or district level; in this case the school or district has full accountability for doing this correctly.

All concerned parties should be clear regarding the depth of decentralization that the government is seeking and the functions it seeks to decentralize. With this information it will be possible to identify the nature of the support that is needed from USAID (and other donors).

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7   Winkler, Donald R. *Understanding Decentralization*, FHI 360/EQUIP2, 2005.

8   *Devolution* is the permanent—legal or constitutional—transfer of decision-making authority from a higher level of government to a lower level. Deconcentration is the transfer, usually by administrative decree, of decision-making authority from higher to lower levels of the bureaucracy within the same level of government. Delegation is the assignment, usually by administrative decree, of decision-making authority to other public or private agencies.

In Egypt, ERP assisted in piloting and testing a formula for sending funds for purchasing expendable materials and making minor repairs from the central government to schools through *idaras* and *mudiriyas*. At the level of the schools, both the income and expenditures must be approved by the school board and posted in a visible place. The school is also accountable to the *idara*, which is accountable to the *mudiriya*, which is accountable to the central government for the expenditure of these funds.[9]

In Georgia, under the General Law on Education (2005), authorities vested in regional governmental bodies were transferred either directly to schools or recentralized back to the MOE. Under a new formula funds were sent directly to schools. Newly created boards of trustees were made responsible for selecting and hiring the school director, albeit from a list of three individuals sent from the MOE. The school director was given the authority to hire and fire teachers. Regional Education Centers were created to assist schools and boards of trustees to assume their new authorities and responsibilities. An important role of GEDA was to assist the newly hired REC staff, the newly hired school directors, and the recently created boards of trustees to carry out their new responsibilities.

In Mali, RAP/DM assisted the MOE to deconcentrate authorities and actions to recently established regional (AE) and sub-regional (CAP) entities. CAPs are to control funding for teacher training, implementation of the curriculum, data collection, studies and evaluations, and other activities. They also play a role in monitoring textbook distribution and school construction but did not control the funds for those activities. The AEs had basically the same type of funding, but they focused more on monitoring what the CAPs were doing and supporting secondary and technical education. EDP extends the focus of USAID/Mali's support to the local level. As of the 2010 budget, local governments manage funding for teacher salaries, building maintenance, school lunch programs, schools supplies and pedagogical materials (other than textbooks), and water and electricity (in some urban areas).

The Malawi education system at present is quite centralized. However, under decentralization, district assemblies are to be responsible for primary education while secondary education, vocational training, and literacy are to be managed by the MoEST divisions. Paying teacher's salaries at all levels (including primary education) as well as teacher promotion and discipline remain centralized.

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9   The funding that is has been transferred from the MOE to the governorates up until now has been done on an adhoc and non transparent basis with some governorate receiving up to 10 times more funding per student than other governorates.

EDSA is working centrally to ensure that deconcentration of authorities provided for in new regulations are carried out. At the district level, EDSA is providing district education officers and their staff with the tools and capacity to make decisions around allocation of resources to schools. EDSA also works to assist schools and communities to develop SIPs that they can use to obtain EQUIP2 and other donor resources available under a recently approved SWAp.

Implications for USAID education officers

The depth of decentralization actions, the specific functions that are decentralized, along with funding and accountability for using funds will vary, depending on the context and motivation for decentralization. When designing a project be clear regarding the depth of decentralization that the government is seeking and the specific functions it seeks to decentralize. With this information it will be possible to identify the nature of the support that USAID can provide, either as the sole donor supporting decentralization or as one of several donors.

8. ***Reach agreement among key actors (USAID, host country, implementing partners) on fundamental design assumptions, revisit these assumptions frequently during implementation, and when they are not borne out, be prepared to adjust implementation strategies and/or activities.***

During the 1970s and 1980s all USAID officers were required to design projects based on the Logical Framework Matrix (Log Frame), which included a column for stating assumptions. Assumptions are conditions outside of a project's manageable interest. Examples are that there will be political stability, no major environmental catastrophes, and that there will be limited or no turnover among key senior MOE staff. If they do not pan out, they can have a significant adverse impact on project implementation. These assumptions, along with the rest of the Log Frame, should be revisited regularly. If one or more are not borne out, then adjustments may be necessary to the project goal, purpose, outputs, inputs, and/or the implementation strategy. None of the five EQUIP2 Associate Awards included assumptions. Interviewees were asked what their assumptions were at the objective (development hypothesis) and activity levels. Of particular interest were the responses of USAID personnel involved in project design.

In the case of Egypt, the USAID AOTR (who was one of several designers) put forth two assumptions: (1) that there was value in building on experience, best practices that can be used to expand Alexandria

decentralization pilot to other governorates; and (2) that there would be local readiness to expand decentralization. Both turned out to be valid and were borne out during project implementation. The Alexandria pilot became an important referent in expanding the decentralization pilot to other governorates. The expansion to six other governorates was successful and the seven pilots influenced national policy on education decentralization.

In the case of Mali RAP/DM, the USAID AOTR put forth two assumptions. The first was partially valid and the second was not: (1) that the MOE wanted to improve its capacity; and (2) that key actors would stay. The EQUIP2 Chief of Party had the foresight to respond to the change early in the project from senior MOE staff who were favorable to decentralization to senior MOE staff who were not by adopting a strategy that indirectly addressed decentralization by focusing on implementing EFA and attending to the needs of marginalized populations.

In the case of Mali EDP, the USAID AOTR set forth four assumptions: (1) that there will be strong donor coordination; (2) that the MOE will play a leadership role; (3) that there will be good coordination among the MOE, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Territories; and (4) that communes are weak and members are illiterate and need capacity building. It is too early to assess whether these assumptions are valid. However, the new USDH team leader is currently working with EQUIP2 staff to revisit key design decisions to ensure project alignment with current realities in the MOE and at the commune level.

In the case of Malawi EDSA, the USAID education team leader identified four assumptions: (1) that the MOE would continue with its reform agenda and its education sector approach; (2) that the Ministry of Local Government and Local Development will continue to roll out its decentralization policy; (3) that communities would continue with the momentum; and (4) that an approach to help communities link to larger policies so momentum would continue. Thus far these assumptions, except for (2), seem to be bearing out. In the case of (2) the government in general is slow in making decentralization operational. This may affect progress in meeting targets.

Implications for USAID education officers
As part of the project design, identify the factors over which USAID and the project will not have control and establish them as key assumptions. During implementation, periodically revisit these assumptions to see if they continue to be valid. If they are not, adjust relevant assumptions and examine the impact that these adjustments might have for project strategies and activities.

In some cases it may be necessary to make adjustments in project goals, strategies, and/or activities.

9. ***Evidence is limited that decentralization alone leads to increased education quality. However, the extent to which it focuses on improving quality and the closer the decentralization actions are to the school/community, the more likely that decentralization, combined with other needed inputs, will contribute to improving education quality.***

No data indicate that decentralization alone leads to improvements in education quality and access.[10] Many decentralization efforts—including those carried out under EQUIP2 in Egypt, Georgia, Mali, and Malawi—are couched in the framework of a broader effort to improve education quality and in some cases access. Many factors need to be considered, however, beyond decentralization in the strict sense, if quality is to be positively affected. They include: an approach to education that produces results; adequate textbooks and teaching materials; training teachers and school principals; and appropriately involving parents and community members both in school activities and in overseeing what happens at the school. Also needed are accompanying systems, policies, and actions that align resources, authority, and accountability across the system to make these elements work, along with systems for knowing what happens in the classroom to measure and track if education quality is actually improving.

It is too early to assess whether project interventions in decentralization and other USAID-supported activities in these countries have positively contributed to improving quality and/or increasing access. What experience does show, however, is that the closer the decentralization effort is to the school and community, the more possibilities there are for a positive impact on quality and access especially if the effort is closely coordinated with other efforts such as those described above.[11]

The Egypt ERP provides a case in point. USAID took a comprehensive approach focusing on 7 of the country's 29 governorates. Each governorate became a pilot for education decentralization with the ultimate focus of improving the quality of education services delivered. Governorates, implementing units below the governorate level (*idaras* and *mudiriyas*), and schools received assistance in preparing their respective education plans. Staff at all levels (governorate, idara, schools) received capacity building to better carry out their roles. Teachers were given the tools and training to assist their students to improve their analytical problem solving. Project data were mixed on progress made in improving quality at the school level. There is no way to show what impact, if any, project assistance

10   Winkler, Don. Understanding Decentralization. FHI 360, EQUIP2, 2005.
11   Ibid.

in decentralization (preparing strategies and school plans) had on improving education quality.

The Malawi EDSA project, which focuses exclusively on decentralization, has as its objective to "strengthen the decentralization implementation at the headquarter, district, and school levels to support system progress in attaining National Education Sector Plan 2008–2018 goals." One of the plan's goals is to increase education quality. One of the indicators focuses on quality: "Extent to which decentralization of specific processes/responsibilities correlate with improvements in quality and learning at the school." Several interviewees observed that it is unlikely that EDSA support will be able to show a direct impact on quality in the project's three-year window.

The two Mali EQUIP2 projects, though couched in an overall quality enhancement framework, do not include quality improvements among their indicators; nor does the GEDA EQUIP2 Associate Award in Georgia.

Implications for USAID education officers
Exercise caution in anticipating improvements in quality/access as a direct result of decentralization. Education decentralization efforts, especially those focused at the school level (such as assisting parents, teachers, and students to develop school action plans along with making available funding to implement those plans), may contribute to quality improvements. However, they alone *are not sufficient*. Other project elements need to be built in such as teacher training, coaching, and follow up; revising/producing student materials; school libraries; preparing and using manipulative materials in the learning process, and systems to track quality improvements at the classroom level.

10. ***To make informed decisions for decentralizing education services, have access to good information about the education system and to know how to make judicious use of this information.***

No matter what the approach to supporting education decentralization, it is critical to have ready access to up-to-date credible information regarding the education system and its students and to use this information to make decisions on authorities and funding that are delegated to lower levels of the system. The type of information needed will depend on the decentralization actions to be taken and on the level at which decentralization is carried out. For example, national actors responsible for tracking decentralization actions may need different information than sub national or even district actors.

In Egypt, it would have been impossible to implement formula funding—an important focus of USAID's current support for education decentralization under ERP—without having up-to-date and accurate information on student enrollments at the governorate level along with accurate information based on poverty indices. Fortunately, existing data systems have been sufficient for this and ERP had built into it a component for helping the MOE integrate its education data systems.

In Mali, where other donors (particularly the French) have been important in assisting to install a credible education management information system (EMIS), RAP/DM and now EDP have used data from this system (supplemented by additional tools such as a GIS) to assist MOE staff to make decisions regarding support for schools and for MOE regional and sub-regional entities. The RAP/DM final report (see Annex 2) points to useful decisions with policy implications that the MOE made with RAP/DM assistance in using data from the EMIS and GIS.

The Malawi EDSA has an EMIS component that primarily builds capacity at in districts and at the level of schools. EMIS indicators have been identified and data reports developed that meet the information needs at each level. Although initial results are promising, it is too early to assess whether this component will have a positive impact on decision-making.

A limitation to implementation of GEDA in Georgia was the lack of a credible EMIS. Although information on ERC and teaching staff was available in another system, there was no credible financial reporting and no accountability for the EMIS factors that drove the distribution of funds to schools.

Implications for USAID education officers
As part of the analysis required for project design, assess the information environment in the Ministry of Education. Is there an effective EMIS system? Are the data credible? Are timely data available for decision making at central, regional and local levels? Is there a culture of using data/information at different levels of the MOE to make decisions? If the answer to any of these is no and an important objective is to improve decision making around decentralization, set aside resources and time to build capabilities in the MOE to have credible data available for decision making. Also ensure that project activities are designed to assist key Ministry of Information staff to use these data for making key decentralization decisions.

11. ***When designing an education decentralization project, push as far down the causal impact chain as possible in identifying end-of-project outcomes or impacts that are achievable within the project time frame.***

In project design, it is tempting to either identify ambitious and amorphous end-of-project outcomes for which USAID does not have to be accountable (capacity to decentralize education strengthened, contribution made to achieving decentralization) or specific output targets that do not show a causal link to concrete achievements (number of people trained, materials developed).

Recognizing that there will be factors outside of the project's control, push as far as possible toward achieving a realistic outcomes that eventually lead to achieving effective decentralization. A modest impact could be "policy dialogue on the pros and cons of decentralization and awareness building carried out." A little further toward the goal might be "measurable or documentable increase in awareness and policy posture among key decision makers" or alternatively "capacity built for advocacy and understanding of decentralization." Pressing further one might be able to anticipate "specific actual support for changes in legislation (actual laws, or norms and directives)" and even further "changes in actual legislation (or norms and directives." Moving toward the ultimate goal, one might be able to predict, with assistance from a given project, "funding or decision making actually flowing down to community organizations or schools" or even "funding and decision making at local levels for actions decentralized to those levels well-implemented."

In GEDA in Georgia, and considering the high-level political will, three of the six anticipated decentralization outcomes were relatively far down the causal chain: (1) "functions delegated to the regional educational structures by the central body are determined and described in statures that will be approved by the Ministry of Education and Science"; (2) "100 Resource Centers established and operating effectively"; (3) "teachers, students, and parents organizations functioning due to activities of resources centers." Three other outcomes were state more as output level targets: (4) "functions and structure of resource centers specified," (5) "training materials developed and published as a manual in school-based management" and (6) "transparent budget, financial management, accounting, property management, and governance systems and other procedures developed."

In ERP in Egypt, where sub-pockets of the population were receptive to decentralization, two anticipated outcomes identified toward the middle of the causal chain: (1) "administrative staff, from top-level governorate

and MOE central staff are competent in leadership, resource management skills, and delegation of authority" and (2) "improved collaboration between central agencies and *mudiriyas*." A third, "transfer of responsibility and some funding to lower-level administrators, including *idaras* and schools" was more ambitious and thus farther down the causal chain.

In RAP/DM in Mali, in an environment little commitment to education decentralization, anticipated outcomes were more modest and earlier on the causal chain: (1) "improved regional (AE) and sub-regional (CAP) capacity to plan, manage, implement and assess the 10-year education reform program of the Ministry of Education"; (2) "education planning is improved through capacity building at national, regional (AE), and sub-regional (CAP) levels"; and (3) "the decentralization process is enhanced through increased demand for relevant services by vulnerable populations excluded or underserved by Mali's education system."

Implications for USAID education officers

When designing a project focusing on or including education decentralization, and recognizing that there will be uncertainties and political factors outside of the project's control, push as far as possible down the causal impact chain to, identify outcomes or impacts that are achievable within the project time frame, such as those in the project examples above.

12. ***In designing a monitoring and evaluation plan for a decentralization program: (a) build in qualitative assessment methodologies that provide an understanding of what is happening during implementation; (b) identify indicators (qualitative and quantitative) that can adequately show achievement of important project objectives; and (c) be open as needed to making adjustments in M&E indicators and targets.***

Experience successfully assessing impacts of education decentralization programs is limited and much is yet to be learned about "best" approaches. However, what is known is that a mixture of methodologies will be required. Methodologies for assessing progress in implementing and achieving education decentralization project objectives will vary depending on project objectives and the nature of the support. It may be necessary to adjust indicators and targets established in an initial monitoring and evaluation plan.

ERP in Egypt began with a relatively broad and amorphous education decentralization objective and an M&E plan with a limited set of indicators.

When ERP was redesigned at project mid-point, in the context of a USAID/Egypt education strategy redesign, it was possible to develop a new M&E plan that included a set of indicators that more accurately reflected what USAID and EQUIP2 had now come to see that ERP could realistically achieve in decentralization.

The M&E plan also incorporated applied research and conducting periodic process evaluations to fine-tune ongoing activities and products. Formative evaluations on training manuals and community-based dialogue on preparing strategic plans helped to inform and improve both activities. Pilots in designing and implementing SIPs were assessed to identify to what extent they enhanced the quality of the SIP process. Research studies explored strategies to overcome barriers that emerged during implementation with the Inter-ministerial Decentralization Committee, the Governor's Education Reform Network, and new decrees and regulations. These studies helped in realign strategies.

In Malawi, the EDSA M&E plan contains studies and evaluations that are designed to nourish the feedback loop built into EDSA and ensured that data collected are used to reflect on project progress, inform key MOE and other actors on key issues, and be used—as needed—as a basis for making adjustments in project implementation. Evaluations to obtain information on project activities that will contribute to national policy dialogue and for district planning and budgeting. Ongoing research studies are being carried out to examine what promotes decentralization and what negates it and how HIV /AIDS impacts the process. In the case of the latter, baseline studies have been carried out. It is, however, too early to assess how effective these studies and evaluations will be in guiding implementation.

In terms of education decentralization seen more broadly, still lacking is a system for assessing receptivity to policy dialogue and tracking political will and administrative capacity to implement decentralization that can be used widely. A proxy is an "Institutional Rubric" designed for U.S. education systems to assess progress in policy reform and institution building, which has been adjusted by EQUIP2. This rubric has been applied in Egypt (ERP), Georgia (GEDA), and Mali (EDP). In Georgia, the rubric was just being applied when GEDA was terminated. In Mali it is about to be used. In Egypt, EQUIP2 used the rubric for internal tracking of progress in implementing and institutionalizing reforms.

Implications for USAID education officers
During design, build in a mix of methodologies to assess implementation progress and evaluate impacts in achieving project objectives. Quantitative

indicators have their role. However, where possible, build in funding for applied research studies and evaluations to look closely at topics that apply to what the project is doing to support decentralization. Make clear to the implementing partner that the data from these studies and evaluations should inform project implementation, including adjustments in strategies and/or activities. Build in flexibility to adjust M&E indicators and targets as needed.

13. ***Support for developing school improvement plans at the school or community level makes sense as one approach to promoting education decentralization. However, unless accompanied by funding to schools to implement their plans, there is little prospect that plans will be effectively implemented.***

A common approach to education decentralization is to assist schools, local school boards, and/or communes/broader community organizations to develop action plans to improve the quality and relevance of education services. When done well—with buy-in from all key actors and an understanding of how plans will be implemented and linked to regional and central education planning—this is a promising approach. ERP, GEDA, EDP, and EDSA had components that focused on assisting schools, boards, and communities to develop actions plans. However, as if action plans are not accompanied by resources and authorities to implement the activities in them, it is window dressing at best and counterproductive at worst and can build expectations among students, teachers, parents, and community members that are not possible to meet.

In Egypt, an important step under ERP that continued after ERP ended has been a pilot in three governorates to send funds to schools for expendable materials and school maintenance. Schools must prepare, within their SIP, a justification for how they will spend the money they receive. They are also obligated, through their boards of trustees, to report on the use of the funding and post an accounting in a public place in the school.

In Mali and Malawi' EDP and EDSA, both in process, contemplate providing school improvement grants. In the case of EDSA, USAID is transferring funding to local governments (district offices) that make grants to the schools. EDSA staff is finding that this funding to district offices is encouraging schools to develop SIPs. They are finding that it is also encouraging activism in districts that channel grants to schools implementing SIPs. In both countries it has been common for donors to provide grants to schools to implement their SIPs; this has been done primarily through NGOs.

Implications for USAID education officers

Supporting schools and communities in developing action plans (school improvement plans) is a valuable step toward responding to the specific needs of schools and communities as they attempt to improve the quality and relevance of the education services. In addition to building in assistance with developing school action plans, it may also necessary to build in provisions for schools and communities to receive funding to implement their plans. The ideal is that this funding be government funding so that these funding streams can continue over time. Also there should be provisions for funding schools fairly and equitably. If this is not possible, USAID might consider making funds available through its project or linking up with an ongoing SWAp that has provisions for making funding available.

Operating within a Limited Time Frame

14. ***It is possible, to make partial advances in furthering decentralization in a three- to five- year project time frame. However, achieving full and effective decentralization of education services is a long-term effort with many factors outside of a donor's control.***

Full and effective decentralization of education services often takes 10 to 15 years or more, well outside of USAID's three- to five-year project time frame. However, experience has shown that with a careful analysis up front, it is possible to take steps within a three- to five- year time frame that contribute positively to decentralizing education services.

In Egypt, ERP over a five-year period (2004–2009) successfully supported a pilot decentralization effort in 7 of Egypt's 20 governorates that contributed to developing an organizational plan for decentralizing new roles and responsibilities in decision making to all of Egypt's *idaras* and *mudiriyas*. The MOE and the Minister of State for Administrative Development signed off on the plan as ERP was coming to an end. ERP was also able to make important inroads in devolving limited authorities and funding to schools. By the time ERP ended, the MOE had begun using formula funding as a more equitable and transparent way to send central funds to the governorates for education.

EDSA in Malawi has a very ambitious and far-reaching objective: "Strengthen the decentralization implementation at the head quarters, district and school levels to support system progress in attaining National Education Sector Plan 2008–2018 goals." While much headway has been made, it is highly doubtful that this objective can be accomplished in the three-year

time frame. The USAID/Malawi Education team leader acknowledges the ambitious objective. Her rationale: "We were in consultations with Ministry of Education. We were well aware of the Education Sector Implementation Plan, which was a 3- to 4-year plan, drawn from the 10-year NESP. By the time we started EDSA, we knew it would be providing support during the first year of the ESIP plan. We believed that what we were doing should mirror and be aligned or in direct response to what the Ministry was going to be doing."

Implications for USAID education officers

Achieving full decentralization—through deconcentration to regional and sub-regional levels or devolution to the commune and school levels—is a lengthy process with many factors outside USAID's control. In designing a decentralization program, focus on specific targets that are achievable in three to five years and recognize that USAID is helping to lay the foundations for decentralization or helping to move a system that is already decentralizing to the next step.

15. ***Instead of aspiring to achieve 'sustainability', focus on actions that 'initiate' and 'stimulate' change.***

Sustainability is often measured against one of two criteria: continuity of project activities, and financial responsibility. The project continuity standard is a common and straightforward definition, assumes that all activities and personnel initially financed under donor projects will be absorbed into national budgets and continued after the project ends. In practical terms, however, sustainability is usually unworkable for several reasons. The commitment to absorb new positions and activities may not be feasible given national budget and bureaucratic realities. Unlike with government entities, donor -financed activities are not subject to the normal bureaucratic constraints and bureaucratic requirements. Consequently, financial constraints and tradeoffs for donor projects are simply very different from those of governments.

Only two RFAs of the fived issued for projects in this study mention sustainability. The Egypt ERP RFA has the following to say about sustainability: "Sustainability is also a primary concern. Training designs must target the institutionalization of the training models while building institutional capacity to undertake professional development." The Malawi EDP RFA provides the following: "Partners must contribute to education sector policy development and the creation of systems that will enable Mali

to continue progress toward long-term education goals even after the close-out of specific programs."

When queried about provisions for sustainability and what actually happened, the interviewees for this review provided a wide array of definitions regarding what contributes to sustainability.

- ERP (Egypt): embedding project staff in the MOE; establishing an inter-governorate council to share experiences and oversee decentralization in education; having support from high levels for what ERP is doing; issuing decrees and regulations; providing extensive staff training; putting formula funding into effect.
- RAP/DM (Mali): embedding project staff in the MOE; incorporating planning tools developed in RAP/DM into the MOE planning process; using financial analysis tools developed with RAP/DM assistance in the MOE budget support process.
- EDP (Mali): making existing policies and structures work better; strengthening the capacity of NGOs who operate at the commune level; building capacity of PTAs and school management committees; building capacity within existing systems.
- EDSA (Malawi): strengthening existing systems or refining them— nothing parallel or external; operating within the context of a SWAp environment.

The following were mentioned as factors that operate against sustainability: a chaotic political environment toward the end of the project (GEDA), sustaining financing of activities supported under the project such as staff training (EDP), and staff changeover (all five projects).

The best that can be said is that the five Associate Awards, to varying degrees have "initiated and stimulated change." However, in no case is it possible to say that they have 'achieved' sustainability their areas: (1) there is clearly no shared understanding of 'sustainability'; (2) none of the projects had evaluations built into them at the end to assess sustainability; (3) to assess sustainability would require following the MOE and the entities supported under the projects over an extended time frame after the projects end.

Implications for USAID education officers
In designing education decentralization projects caution is urged in charging the implementing partner with 'achieving sustainability' in the areas of project focus. Rather, USAID education officers should make the implementing partner accountable for taking actions to 'initiate' and 'stimulate' change. To set the stage for activities to continue beyond the life

of a USAID project, USAID education officers might want to adopt the following strategies: (1) Encourage the implementing partner to work within and strengthen existing systems (as opposed to creating parallel systems); (2) consider embedding key technical staff in the MOE (and enable them to support MOE initiatives and concerns that end up being seen as owned by the Ministry rather than outside technical assistance); and (3) approach capacity building that goes beyond just training.

Working with Ministries of Education

16. ***Clarifying roles and responsibilities of relevant MOE staff while supporting capacity building to assist them to carry out these new roles and responsibilities is especially important when providing assistance to decentralize education.***

This can't be emphasized enough. For decentralization actions to be effective, the individuals responsible for implementing them need to be clear on their roles and responsibilities. In some cases, definition or redefinition of roles and responsibilities may take place. Individuals responsible must also have the capacity to carry them out and a system that supports them in applying their new roles and responsibilities. This applies to the individuals in the MOE who implement the agreed-upon decentralization actions as well as other related ministries/entities involved. It also relates to the technical advisors that USAID will deploy through its implementing partner to assist with the decentralization.

A particular challenge lies in defining what the term 'capacity building' means. The Global Development Research Center draws from the UNDP and other development organizations in seeking definitions. According to the UNDP, capacity building is "the creation of an enabling environment with appropriate policy and legal frameworks. It includes institutional development, including community participation, human resources development, and strengthening of managerial systems." The UNDP "recognizes that capacity building is a long-term, continuing process, in which all stakeholders participate (ministries, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, professional associations, academics and others)."[12]

In the context of this review, "capacity building" tends to be staff training, in some cases providing trained individuals with follow up once they return to their work sites.

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12   www.gdrc.org/uem/capacity-define.html

In Egypt, EQUIP1 and EQUIP2 made significant progress under ERP in working out roles and responsibilities at all levels. Capacity building under ERP was primarily seen as designing and implementing comprehensive training programs to help key actors carry out their new roles. Now that EQUIP2 has ended, it remains to be seen whether the government of Egypt will continue needed capacity building with its own funds or other donor funds.

In Mali, under RAP/DM, considerable progress was made in training staff at the central, regional, sub-regional levels and providing them with follow-up assistance so that they could provide training at the school level, with oversight from those who trained them. Partial progress was also made under RAP/DM in clarifying roles and responsibilities at these three levels. Under EDP training is to be extended to the commune and school levels. However, the focus remains on training, without a broader view of other actions needed to build capacity. The outcome remains to be seen.

In Malawi, a key element of EDSA is capacity building of key host country counterparts (at the central, district, and school levels), along with clarification of roles and responsibilities. In the words of the USAID education team leader: "We did not view capacity building as just training, but going beyond that to accompany the people trained. You sit there with them, you go through the process with them, and you mentor and coach them. The idea is to solidify relationships, patterns of meetings, operational guidelines, and habits. We asked ourselves, 'How do people use information and knowledge? How do people use information, build on each other?'" As with EDP, the EDSA outcome remains to be seen, since it is still in process.

In addition, under EDSA and to pave the way for the technical assistance to be provided under EQUIP2, USAID set aside time to 'prepare the terrain' for the technical assistance with the receiving directorates at the MOE. Negotiations were carried out to ensure that the technical assistance efforts were relevant and useful. Monitoring, communication, and even coaching were frequent when the technical assistance began at the Ministry.

Implications for USAID education officers
In designing for capacity building and clarification of roles and relationships, try not to limit capacity building to staff training but in a broader perspective. Consider including follow up, mentoring, and coaching. Also consider including efforts to strengthen institutions and managerial systems and building capacities in-house to provide additional training as needed. In addition, build into the project design the assumption that staff turnover is inevitable and that there is a large leap between designing a document that

clarifies roles and responsibilities and provides training and having MOE staff effectively assume these roles and responsibilities. Assumptions around capacity of staff, staff turnover, and clarity of roles and responsibilities should be revisited periodically to ensure that the approaches/specific activities being undertaken to address these topics remain valid. If not, adjustments need to be made in implementation strategies.

17. ***Embedding technical advisors in a Ministry of Education can be effective in building close working relationships with key host country counterparts; embedded advisors are often sought out by key Ministry personnel to provide timely assistance to resolve immediate issues.***

There is no substitute for the informal conversations that take place in hallways and around water coolers. There is also no substitute for the trust and opportunities for friendship that are built up when people are working in common environments. In addition, being strategically placed in the MOE provides for just-in-time opportunities where USAID-funded technical advisors can assist the Minister and other senior staff in routine problem solving that indirectly or directly benefits project objectives. Egypt under ERP and Mali under RAP/DM made the conscious decision to embed key EQUIP2 staff in the MOE.

In ERP in Egypt, a number of highly regarded EQUIP2 Egyptian advisors were embedded in MOE offices. They prepared research studies in close collaboration with their ministry counterparts. They assisted the Minister to prepare important presentations to other government ministries/authorities on the implementation of ERP activities.

In the case of RAP/DM in Mali the Chief of Party and his small technical staff were embedded in the MOE throughout the five-year project. Friendships, relationships of trust and respect were established with key ministry staff, including the Minister, along with donor technical advisors working in the MOE. This made it possible for RAP/DM to assist in a number of important problem-solving activities.

As one interviewee in Mali observed, "We had technical assistance embedded in the MOE. There were lots of requests from the Minister of Education and other senior staff around annual planning, understanding how donor funds were being provided. There was a period of time when many donors were giving SWAp funding but without technical assistance to track this. The RAP/DM Chief of Party provided a lot of support to help MOE staff develop reporting tools. RAP/DM did quick studies; analyzing

data and making policy recommendations in short order time. These ended up being significant pieces of work."

Implications for USAID education officers
If promoting policy dialogue around education decentralization and/or assisting the MOE to implement key decentralization policies is an important objective of a project, consider embedding key project staff in the MOE to provide timely assistance to this process.

18. ***Downsides of embedding technical advisors in an MOE include: lack of physical space in the Ministry, requests for assistance may be outside the advisor's scope of work, and the risk that the advisor ends up doing the work that Ministry personnel should be doing.***

ERP in Egypt was only able to embed a limited number of its technical advisors at the MOE because space was at a premium. In Mali, RAP/DM was a small project with limited technical staff and the MOE had adequate space, so it was able to embed all key staff. However, EDP that follows on RAP/DM has a much larger technical staff and has only been able to embed a few key staff at the Ministry.

In Mali, under RAP/DM, another perceived drawback of embedding key project staff was that the Minister and other key MOE personnel often approached the EQUIP2 Chief of Party for assistance that USAID thought 'distracted' EQUIP2 staff from achieving key indicator targets. In the case of ERP, where the USAID/Egypt AOTR and the education team leader had a much more flexible implementation approach and there were plenty of funds, this was not a concern.

A third potential risk of embedding project staff is they may be asked to prepare documents that ministry staff would ordinarily prepare, thus 'displacing' or 'substituting' ministry staff.

Implications for USAID education officers
When there is the possibility of embedding key project staff in an MOE, consider the possible limitations and risks, for example: (1) lack of space at the MOE to embed project staff; (2) whether USAID is willing to have the Minister of Education and other key MOE staff approach project staff for assistance with solving problems that may not be seen as directly related to project objectives and/or problems that—though indirectly related to project objectives—distract project staff from carrying out planned activities; and (3)

the risk that the MOE may come to rely on project staff to carry out roles that Ministry staff ordinarily carry out or should carry out.

Collaborating with Key Actors

19. ***Do not limit actions to working within a Ministry of Education. Instead, anticipate and build into project design the need to interact with important actors from the Ministry of Finance as well as other relevant government ministries and/or autonomous or semi-autonomous entities.***

If the approach to decentralization involves deconcentration and, with it, transfer of authorities and Ministry of Education staff to regional and local MOE entities, this will inevitably involve restructuring (removing, adding) positions along with changing/adding job descriptions. In a number of countries, the authority for these actions does not come from the MOE but from another ministry or government authority. Individuals from these entities ideally should be involved in project design and need to be taken into account in project implementation.

Similarly, if the approach to decentralization calls for delegation or devolution of both authorities and resources, it will be critical to coordinate from early design stages with key actors in the Ministry of Finance and any other ministry/entities in the country that play a role in authorizing and affecting the transfer of central government funds. Often, transfer of funds will also involve legal authorities that may reside in another ministry/ government entity that will be responsible for preparing implementing regulations.

In Egypt, an important focus was on devolving central government funds to schools and boards of trustees and on putting into effect formula funding, which provides more equitable and transparent devolution of funds to governorates to implement education programs. To facilitate this, USAID, first under EQUIP2 and then under a project with RTI, is working with the MOE, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Local Development and, increasingly with the General Authority of Education Buildings (an autonomous agency responsible for school construction).

In Mali and in Malawi, USAID and EQUIP2 staffs work with staff from the MOE, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Territorial Administration, and the Ministry of Local Government. Under EDSA in Malawi, a delay in a request from the MOE to the Ministry of Local Government for approval

to implement guidelines for providing funding for SIPs almost derailed the initiation of this activity. Fortunately the counterpart at the Ministry of Local Development expedited the needed approval in time to transfer funding for SIPs to begin on time.

Implications for USAID education officers

Under deconcentration (e.g., moving responsibilities and authorities to lower levels of the education system), the MOE is not the sole actor. There are normally financial implications, which bring in the Ministry of Finance. There are also personnel implications (creating new positions, establishing roles and responsibilities) that usually involve a Ministry of Administration or its equivalent. If devolution of authorities is involved, invariably the Ministry of Local Government or its equivalent will need to be involved, not to mention other ministries and/or decentralized government authorities. Identify key ministries/government authorities that will be involved in implementation and, along with the MOE, involve them closely in project design. Maintaining close relations with them during implementation is important. Stepping in to address bottlenecks with these ministries/ authorities may also be necessary.

20. ***Changes in key actors during program implementation (USAID, host country counterparts, the implementing partner) are inevitable. These changes can have positive or negative impacts and should be factored in to both project design and implementation.***

Change in key actors during project implementation of a five-year USAID project, even during the implementation of a three-year USAID project, is a fact of life and can bring higher or lower levels of support for a project. An important challenge is balancing continuity while recognizing that new people bring new, often welcome, ideas. These changes should also be factored into relations with other development partners.

In Egypt, there were two changes in USAID education officers and two changes in the USAID director of the Health/Education office during the five-year life of ERP. The second director of the Health/Education office (who came in during the second year and remained for three years of ERP) played a key role in reorienting the USAID/Egypt education strategy and removing elements of EQUIP1 and 2 that were no longer seen as necessary, thus freeing up valuable resources and EQUIP2 staff to devote more time to priorities, among them decentralization.

On the host countryside, there were three Ministers of Education. The second came from the Governorate of Alexandria where he had played an important role in the USAID/Egypt-financed education decentralization pilot. Not long afterwards the former Governor of Alexandria, who also participated in the pilot, was named Minister of Local Development. Together they provided an important impetus for education decentralization, drawing heavily on EQUIP2 support. However, changes at other levels posed significant challenges. In the words of one interviewee, "Key personnel changes take place at inopportune times. New staff doesn't have the history; they have different views and priorities. It's hard to keep a project on track when you have these intervening factors that are sometimes bureaucratic, political, personal, and new agendas sometimes stop ongoing work."

In Georgia, the USAID mission director and in the deputy director changed. The Minister of Education, who oversaw the drafting of the Law for General Education, which served as the framework for the design of GEDA, was replaced as GEDA was ending. During the project there were many changes in MOE personnel at the central and regional levels. These changes posed significant challenges for GEDA.

In Mali, the USAID education team leader who designed RAP/DM was transferred soon after implementation began. Another USAID education team leader with a different management style replaced this individual. This person also took a lead role in designing the EDP follow-on that was much more structured than RAP/DM both in design and in the indicators to track project progress. However, this person left Mali for onward assignment not long after EDP was approved, leaving the deputy education team leader (a third country national who had just joined USAID/Mali) in charge for 10 months until a new education team leader arrived in August of 2010. The new team leader appears to be moving EDP back to a more flexible implementation mode with a more streamlined set of indicators.

Malawi is the only case where the USAID mission has been stable throughout EDSA design and implementation: in the mission director, the education team leader,[13] and the FSN AOTR. However, since EDSA began nearly two years ago there has been a change in the Minister of Education and in the Permanent Secretary. These changes resulted in the loss of the Director of Planning who played a key role in designing EDSA and who, had he stayed, would have played a key role in overseeing EDSA implementation.

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13 Soon after this study was completed the USAID education team leader was transferred.

Implications for USAID education officers

In designing an education decentralization project both USAID and the implementing partner should be prepared to deal with changes of key actors within USAID, among host country counterparts, and even within the implementing partners. Time and resources need to be built in to seek understanding and buy-in of key new actors as they come on board. It may also be necessary to adapt to different implementation styles. In some cases, a change in a key actor can lead to adjustments in project design, which may or may not be welcome. These changes also have implications for coordination/relations with development partners and USAID commitment to host country education plans under which a decentralization project has been designed.

21. *Maintain a finger on the pulse of other donor education decentralization activities. Other donors can be important allies; they can also be unwitting detractors to decentralization efforts.*

Depending on the development/education context, USAID may be implementing an education decentralization program where other donors are also supporting education decentralization and/or their actions under related programs that can favor or deter decentralization efforts.

In Egypt, USAID was one of several donors supporting a major strategic planning exercise whose central focus was decentralization. This apparently went smoothly. The European Union (EU) has been an actor in some facets of education decentralization and USAID and its partners in decentralization maintain fairly close contact with the EU. The World Bank, another major actor in education in Egypt, has been and continues to be an important ally that USAID and USAID's partners meet with on a regular basis.

In Mali, USAID wisely tasked EQUIP2 with coordinating closely with other donors that were working with the MOE and collectively shouldering a relatively high proportion of recurrent costs. Under RAP/DM, EQUIP2 and USAID inserted themselves as part of the PISE programs (three-year combined donor strategies to support education in a combined mode of project and non-project assistance) and joined efforts with the MOE and all donors in meeting EFA targets. A few other donors were also working in decentralization (UNICEF, GTZ, World Education, CIDA, French Cooperation) and RAP/DM and USAID worked closely with them.

However, there were at least two instances under RAP/DM where other donor policies and approaches produced problems. One had to do with other

donors providing government employees with off-site meeting per diems that are up to four times what they would earn if the per diems were from their own ministries. This, in turn, s created serious problems in getting government employees 'motivated' to collaborate in project activities unless they are taken to a nice retreat hotel to do the work—with donor per diems.[14]

Another problem at the end of RAP/DM was a donor decision under PISE to establish a new system for planning for and reporting on the expenditure of MOE funds (which include counterpart funds especially when the donor is providing non-project support). The result was a fairly centralized process for allocating funds and reporting on funding uses from regional and local entities. This, in effect, undid some of the progress made in decentralized decision making and reporting requirements at regional and sub-regional levels.

These challenges have continued in Mali under EDP. One interviewee commented: "The donors came in with a simplified action plan in 2009, they worked with the MOE to develop it. It had three major calculation errors (each of more than $20 million) that no donor felt responsible for. There were elements of a budget but no overall budget and no total budget. There were no activities, no expected results, and no quantities. Now we're trying to do the sector report for 2009, it is hard for the technical assistance team to assist with this strange situation."

Implications for USAID education officers

When working in a multi-donor environment, regardless of the USAID objectives, ensure close coordination with other donors. In the case of education decentralization, other donor actions can have both positive and negative implications for project implementation. Both USAID and its implementing partner should keep an eye out these opportunities and challenges. In the case of challenges that may have an adverse impact on project implementation, be prepared to play a proactive advocacy role to ensure that other donor actions do not limit the capability of the project to implement its activities.

22. ***Finally, develop relationships of credibility and trust between USAID staff and its implementing partners as well as among USAID staff, its implementing partners, and host country counterparts.***

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14   The challenge of donors providing high per diems to MOE staff does not occur just in Mali but in a number of African countries where donors are providing large amounts of funding for education, and in some case subsidizing MOE recurrent cost budgets. The Government of Malawi, with donor pressure, issued an edict that central government staff may not travel outside the capital for work retreats.

A common refrain from individual interviews for this review was that when they looked back at what made the Associate Awards successful a key ingredient was the establishment of credibility and trust among all key implementing parties. This does not happen overnight. If USAID is new to working with the MOE or key actors in other ministries, this can take time. Similarly, an implementing partner that is new to the country with new staff will face similar challenges. In the case of Egypt, it took two years to establish this relationship. However, once this relationship was established many doors opened that had previously been closed and it was much easier to engage in discussions regarding systems and policy reform.

As stated by John Gillies, former Director of EQUIP2 (now Senior Vice President at FHI 360 for Global Education), who visited Egypt several times during the initial design and subsequent implementation of ERP: "It was a function of building credibility over the first couple of years; our relationship with the Minister and the Senior Advisor to the Minister was key as was the Egyptian national's COTR role and relationship with the Minister of Education. All of those things worked over time. There was a turning point. It created opportunities and a degree of integration and access based on confidence and trust."

Implications for USAID education officers

During both project design and implementation a key ingredient to success is developing a relationship of credibility and trust with key host country counterparts. These relationships do not happen overnight and must be 'earned.' When key counterparts change it is critical to put in the time and effort to establish relationships with the new actors. Once the implementing partner is on board, that same relationship between USAID and key implementing partner personnel (especially the Chief of Party) should be established. The USAID education officer should also help the implementing partner develop similar relationships with key host country personnel and with key actors within the USAID mission.

B. USEFUL STRATEGIES

From conducting the interviews and reviewing project documentation, several interesting strategies from the five EQUIP2 Associate Awards emerged. These strategies may be of interest to other USAID education officers involved in designing as well as overseeing the implementation and monitoring/evaluation of decentralization projects. These strategies are listed below. For more information on each, interested readers are encouraged to contact the respective USAID missions.

Egypt: Education Reform Support Program – ERP (2004–2009)

Form an inter-ministerial committee to oversee coordination of decentralization activities across ministries.
EQUIP2, with USAID concurrence, decided early on to form an inter-ministerial committee to oversee implementation of decentralization. High-level representatives from the MOE, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of State for Local Development, the Ministry of State for Administrative Development, and the Civil Service sat on this committee. The Minister of Education reported to the Policy Secretariat headed by Gamal Mubarak, the son of President Hosni Mubarak and Secretary General of Policies for the National Democratic Party. This inter-ministerial committee took two years to set up, continued to meet throughout the project, and played a critical role in overseeing and lending support for decentralization in education.

Because all five ministries understood what the MOE was trying to accomplish and had Cabinet and Prime Minister support, when a new Minister came in toward the end of ERP, he had no choice but to continue supporting ongoing activities focusing on decentralization (the Minister of Education was not particularly interested in the decentralization policies being put in place).

USAID engaged in a strategic planning/review process mid-stream. This resulted in adjusting ERP objectives and indicators to make them more realistic and reflect changes in the implementation environment.
In 2006, two years into ERP, the USDH Education/Health office director led her education team in restructuring its strategic objective and a concurrent review of ERP. This was done to make ERP more strategic by cutting activities that did not seem to have promise for delivering desired results under the new Strategic Objectives, Sustained Improvements in Student Learning Outcomes (SILO). This resulted in focusing ERP resources and staff time on areas such as decentralization that were moving well and seen as having promise in what they could achieve.

Mali: Regional Action Planning Decision Making Program – RAP/ DM (2004–2009)

Use a self-critical process to help Ministry of Education staff come to conclusions themselves to promote the cause of decentralization.
When working with a centrally managed system, it is possible to see inefficiencies in the way resources are allocated. RAP/DM involved central

MOE staff (technical directors and the Minister's technical advisors) in a self-indictment process where they identify these inefficiencies themselves.

The process starts out by asking, what kinds of schools work best in a large village on a main road and what kinds of schools work best in an isolated community? Everyone plays a different role. One person is asked to imagine that she or he is the Minister of Education who is giving a mandate. The mandate is to increase efficiencies by reducing enrollments but not in away that makes the population angry. What participants in the role-play discover is that the best way to reduce effectiveness is to go for higher unit costs than they need or to make administrative decisions that conflict with local values. Participants come up with a lot of ideas. When the simulation ends they are asked, Of all of the items on this list that you came up with, how many are things that are you doing now? Participants understood that existing policy and practice were leading to inefficiencies, to dropouts. As a result of this process, doors were opened to seize the opportunity for decentralization.

Introduce a results-based culture for training.
RAP/DM introduced in the MOE a results-base training system based on problems identified by the trainees. Two waves of training were carried out each year. At the training education planners and decision makers came together for a series of training modules. The content was based on problems identified in the preceding several months. Those problems that made it to the module stage were problems that could be solved achieving measurable results. Any unresolved issues went into the content of the next training. The training was face to face followed by an on-site visit to see if the trainee had been able to apply the training content.

For every round of training RAP/DM staff would lay out the expected results that they had negotiated with the MOE. The report from the training would say "This is what actually happened." For example: If in January 400 Ministry staff were trained on a new action plan template, then by the end of February each regional MOE office would submit its action plan using the new template.

Assemble cross-sectoral teams, composed of MOE regional actors with responsibilities in different areas and trained on contents common to all these areas, implement cascade training while being observed by trainers.
Whenever RAP/DM did its training, it brought in one person each from planning, finance, and basic education from each of the 15 regional MOE offices. These individuals went through a rigorous training-of-trainer's activity. As a group they learned the same content. RAP/DM staff broke the group down so each group had no more than 15 people in a room at a time,

recognizing that with smaller groups it is easier to see whether the individuals trained 'got it' or not. When these individuals went back to their offices to train their staff, a team of three people would be able to lead any of the six modules. RAP/DM saw to it that technical staff who provided the training accompanied the cross-sectoral teams during their initial follow-up training to ensure that adequate training was being provided and, if not, assist the trainers to fine-tune their training activities.

Malawi: Education Decentralization Support Activity – EDSA (2009–2012)

Design an innovative Performance Monitoring and Research Plan (PMRP) that, in addition to providing quantitative indicators, includes qualitative evaluations and applied research designed to understand why project activities are or are not having impact and what works and what doesn't through decentralization activities.
The EDSA PMRP is designed to nourish the feedback loop built into EDSA. The idea is that data collected during EDSA implementation will be used to reflect on project progress, inform MOE staff and other actors on key issues, as well as be used as needed to adjust project activities. The PMRP anticipates that the three evaluations will be carried out under EDSA, focusing on: (1) the information and feedback loop to contribute to national policy dialogue, (2) use of information for planning and budgeting at the district level, and (3) community involvement in school-decision making. Also contemplated are two ongoing research studies to answer the questions: (1) What promotes decentralization and what negates decentralization as districts move from deconcentration to decentralization? and, (2) How does HIV /AIDS impact the decentralization process?

More detail on the quantitative indicators selected to be tracked under the PMRP, the specific evaluation topics, and details on the ongoing research activities may be found in the Malawi EDSA Associate Award review in Annex 2.

Work through country systems and with NGOs to deliver grants to schools to implement their school improvement plans (SIPs).
During the first year of EDSA, USAID/Malawi decided to channel grants and training for SIPs through Government of Malawi systems, rather than through NGO intermediaries as originally intended. By the end its first year, EDSA had funded SIP grants to 224 schools through district bank accounts in 6 of Malawi's 34 districts. EDSA also financed training in SIP development through Government of Malawi/MOE district and

zonal personnel by advancing monies from its participant training line to districts which, in turn, trained schools by zone, and then liquidated the advance with EDSA based on verification of training activities. EDSA is providing technical support to facilitate rolling out grants (e.g., finalizing and translating operational manuals, holding stakeholder workshops for dialogue and training) as well as resources and financing to support implementation of decentralized trainings and district and zonal monitoring and support activities. This process has also supported capacity development at district offices in developing, managing, and reconciling training budgets, activities, and expenditures.

This approach has had a spillover effect as USAID, through EDSA, has been able to support the MOE in its national rollout of its Primary School Improvement Program (PSIP). Under PSIP, the MOE is using donor-provided basket funding to award SIP grants to all schools (1,090) in the same six districts that EDSA has been working in. Under later phases of PSIP (2011–2013) the MOE plans to expand SIP development and grant activities to 12 and then 24 districts.

Egypt, Georgia, and Mali

Apply the Institutional Rubric to measure stages of systemic change.
The Stages of Systemic Change, or Institutional Rubric, was developed by Beverly Anderson in the United States for use by education administrators who recognize that the education system needs fundamental changes to keep pace with an increasingly complex global society and that they need some sense of what to expect and what direction to take. FHI 360 has adapted this rubric for use in a number of programs overseas that support systems/policy change. Interested parties track their progress along this rubric to analyze their progress. In the case of the EQUIP2 Associate Awards in education decentralization, the rubric began to be applied in Egypt at the end of ERP, was just being applied in Georgia when GEDA was terminated, and is planned to be used in Mali under the EDP project.

The rubric outlines six stages of systemic change that characterize the shift from a traditional educational system to one that emphasizes interconnectedness, active learning, shared decision making, and higher levels of policy/systems reform. The six stages are: (1) maintenance of the old system, (2) awareness that the current system is not working, as well as it should, (3) exploration and trying new approaches, (4) transition (where a critical number of opinion leaders and groups commit themselves to the new system and take more risks to make changes in crucial places), (5) emergence

of new infrastructure where one element of the system operates in keeping with the desired new system, and (6) predominance of the new system where the more powerful elements of the system operate as defined by the new system and key leaders begin to envision even better systems.

C. VALUABLE INSIGHTS

In the course of the interviews several of the interviewees shared several valuable insights that may be of interest to USAID education officers designing education decentralization programs. A number of these insights are woven into the lessons learned action of this review. Additional insights follow.

Egypt: Education Reform Support Program – ERP (2004–2009)

Transforming from a traditional culture to a new one is difficult
Transforming culture from the traditional state to the new one was very difficult. Decentralization demands a new design, a design shift. We have to transform our activities and work from the traditional way of working to a new one. For school based reform to work we need to let the school do its own work, mobilize the community to help them achieve them what they need to do. Having authority conveyed from the central to the local level is a very new idea, you need to empower them with the adequate training and provide them with the appropriate environment. (Sherrif Kandil, ERP Deputy Chief of Party).

Reaching consensus is not easy and often outside of USAID or the project's control
They themselves have not done such a good job at developing internal consensus; some ministries are on board and some are not; and some parts of ministries and on board, other parts are not. Getting people around the table to make difficult choices was out of the control of the project. (Luis Crouch, ERP decentralization advisor)

The value of being in the right place at the right time
There has been a mixture of luck, the right time to get going with these things as there was local pressure to do this within the government, and to some degree simply the fact that USAID had worked on these issues and had laid a lot of seeds since 2000 that began to flower. (Luis Crouch, ERP decentralization advisor)

Mali: Regional Action Planning Decision Making Program – RAP/DM (2004-2009)

Benefits, through the EQUIP2 cooperative agreement mode, of being able to engage in a participatory design process

This was the first time I saw that through the EQUIP mechanism that one could collaboratively put structure around the program in an open communication sense. Typically you get an RFP/RFA that has a fairly clear design already laid out where you have to speculate on the reality on the ground. In this case the RAP/DMP design team was able to visit AEs, talk to CAPS and MOE staff to see the current reality and incorporate this into the process of finalizing the specifics of the final design and the implementation plan. (Rudi Klauss, AED member of the design team)

The importance of placing value on regular and informal communication

We introduced the culture of Mintzberg; a theory of organizational behavior. When you look at organizations that are successful, there are unrecognized coalitions between members of different units and different levels of hierarchy who communicate regularly and informally, and that is what makes it work. In bringing in a culture that unofficial communication is a good thing: through Internet and a closed network of cell phones we radically changed the way the MOE at central level and regional offices related to one another. (Doug Lehman, RAP/DM Chief of Party)

Opening the door to solving problems

A standard survey approach was to ask whether you received a given correspondence from the MOE. Did you have difficulty understanding it? This was a strategy for getting someone on board and aligned. The door is open to solving the problem. If there is a problem, how can we help you? The people know that someone cares, that this is real; we got more responsiveness from regions and sub-regions. (Doug Lehman, RAP/DM Chief of Party)

Decentralization as the business of everyone

We related to the CADDE, financial directorate, the planning office, and the primary education directorates equally. Most TA programs are lodged within a single department. We deliberately related to all structures as equals. In our approach decentralization is a business of everyone. (Doug Lehman, RAP/DM Chief of Party)

On opportunities and openings to use data to enter into the bigger policy issues

There were many opportunities and openings to enter into the bigger policy issues. For example, there was a big equity issue around community schoolteachers;

should they be expected to work with no MOE financial support? We did a quick study and were able to demonstrate with objective data that there were several thousand community school teachers who did not receive even a modest subsidy for their work; this hard data paved the way for the inclusion of 3,458 new community school teachers subsidies in the 2008 national budget. This rapid analysis gave MOE staff real-time data instead of analyzing the situation on the basis of anecdotal information. (Doug Lehman, RAP/DM Chief of Party)

Malawi: Education Decentralization Support Activity – EDSA (2009–2012)

On the use of qualitative indicators
USAID/Malawi also recognizes the importance of qualitative indicators. The EDSA Results Framework includes this type of indicator: what promotes and negates decentralization; what policies have been passed; what systems have been put in place to allow decentralization. (Joan Owomoyela, EQUIP2 COP)

On the challenges of convincing target audiences to use data tools
The challenge is that change is often a process and we have only just developed the Decision Support Tool (DST) and the School Assessment Chart… We will need to follow up the School Assessment Chart on the ground to see how it actually adds value in practice, what challenges will emerge, and how best to proceed. For instance, District Councils are by nature political, we will need to see where the pressure points are in the set up to trigger data utilization for evidence-based decision making. It's not just a question of sending a School Assessment Chart to a school but seeing what value, if any, it is to the school and community, how does it meet aspects that matter to them in their schools, i.e. what indicators are useful, which are missing? However we believe that once we create a demand for accountability and justification for decisions on the part of stakeholders (civil society, elected officials, parents, communities, chiefs, government departments, etc.) the process of data utilization institutionalization will fall in place almost naturally." (Charles Matemba, Malawian EMIS advisor)

The need to translate concepts into terminologies that targets groups can understand
Even in communities where literacy levels are low, there's consensus that in general education standards have declined despite other advances the sector has registered, communities have ideas of what a "good" school is. We want to build on that. One of the challenges in Data Utilization training in rural communities is presentation. Language or terminology can be a barrier. You want to communicate an idea above teaching terminology on their terms based on what they already know. Sometimes mathematical concepts (such as averages) do not occur in local language as one word. Rural communities may easily relate to that

their school doesn't have adequate teachers for the enrollment rather than that their school has high pupil teacher ratio (PTR). Responsiveness and sensitivity to such hindrances is important in using data to draw a picture of how their school is vis-à-vis how it should or could be (hence stimulating their actions), especially if aspects of standards and comparisons over time and among entities are also brought to the fore. Communities already relate numerical concepts in currency, farming etc, they relate to the average price of a crop per kg for a given season, for example. (Charles Matemba, Malawian EMIS advisor)

Findings, Lessons Learned, Strategies, and Insights

ANNEX 1: WHAT WORKED AND WHAT DID NOT WORK

	What worked	What did not work/has not been verified
Project Design	Building in flexibility to switch gears/take advantage of opportunities as they arise (Egypt/ERP) Recognizing that changes in policies, especially in decentralization, take time and building them into project design (Egypt/ERP) Taking a systemic approach/operating simultaneously at all levels of the system (Egypt/ERP, Mali/EDP, Malawi/EDSA) Providing for comprehensive assistance (TA on an as-needed basis, training, assistance in drafting key documentation, observation tours) (Egypt/ERP, Mali/RAPDM) Building in a multi-phase approach over two or more USAID project cycles (Mali, Georgia, Egypt)	Lack of agreed upon development hypothesis/assumptions that serve as important project core (Egypt/ERP, Georgia/GEDA, Mali/RAPDM, Mali/EDP, Malawi), EDSA Anticipating that decentralization will translate into increased access/quality (Egypt/ERP, Mali/EDP) Expecting major decentralization progress to occur within a 3- to 5-year time frame (Mali/EDP, Malawi/EDSA) Directive USAID design with specific targets (Mali/EDP)
Project Implementation	**USAID and contractor** Close collaboration with other donors involved in decentralization/related activities (Mali/RAPDM, Mali/EDP, Malawi/EDSA, Egypt/ERP) **USAID** Interest/involvement of USAID AOTR and education team leader in substantive aspects of implementation (Egypt/ERP, Malawi/EDSA) Having an AOTR with close knowledge of/contacts with MOE and other key actors (Egypt/ERP) Sensitivity to political environment, openness to/taking advantage of opportunities when they arise (Egypt/ERP, Mali/RAPDM, Malawi/EDSA)	**USAID** An excessive focus on meeting numerical indicator targets that do not reflect the depth of the decentralization support provided (Mali/EDP) Changeover of key USAID staff with different views/implementation styles (Mali/RAPDM, Georgia/GEDA) Funding cuts that affect implementation momentum (Mali/RAPDM, Georgia/GEDA) **Contractor** Changeovers in COP (Mali/EDP)

	What worked	What did not work/has not been verified
Project Implementation	**Contractor** Developing trust/close working relationship with host country counterparts as well as USAID (Egypt/ERP, Georgia/GEDA, Mali/RAPDM, Mali/EDP, Malawi/EDSA) Continuity in key staff (COP, home office backstop, senior management) (Egypt/ERP, Georgia/GEDA, Mali/RAPDM, Malawi/EDSA) Sensitivity to political environment, taking advantage of opportunities as they arise (Egypt/ERP, Mali/RAPDM) Embedding key technical staff in MOE (Mali/RAPDM, Egypt/ERP) Problem solving approach, help people self indict (Mali/RAPDM) Using statistical data on schools/GIS for problem solving and to address broader policy issues (Mali/RAPDM) Building in appreciation that policy dialogue is time consuming and can be nerve racking/ that it takes time for counterparts, who often lack authority and clarity, to reach consensus around difficult choices (Egypt/ERP) **Host country** Strong leadership and interest in project objectives on the part of the Minister of Education/other key actors (Georgia/ GEDA at the beginning, Egypt/ERP in the middle) Formation of a high-level inter-ministerial committee to oversee decentralization decisions as a means of bringing visibility to project activities and ensure continuity in spite of changes in Ministers of Education (Egypt/ ERP)	**MOE** Unpredictable turnover in key MOE staff (Mali/RAPDM, Egypt/ ERP, Georgia/GEDA) Changes in Ministers of Education and, with them, commitments achieved/progress made (Georgia/GEDA, Mali/RAPDM) **Donors** Donor per diems create disincentives for MOE participation in non per diem activities (Mali/RAPDM, Mali/EDP) MOE playing donors off against each other (Mali/RAPDM) Donor requirements for reporting on sector-wide projects that encourage centralization (Mali/ RAPDM, Mali/EDP)

	What worked	What did not work/has not been verified
Monitoring and Evaluation	Having flexibility to adapt targets to coincide with realities on the ground during implementation (Egypt/EDP) Building research and evaluation into the PMRP as a tool for providing information to EDSA and the MOE through a feedback loop (Malawi/EDSA)	M&E plans based on PMPs with numerical targets that don't tell the story (all projects) Tension between achieving US-AID targets and having flexibility to address priorities as they arise (Mali/RAPDM) Absence of mid-term and final evaluations (all projects)

Annex 2: EQUIP2 Associate Award Case Studies

A. EQUIP2 EGYPT: EDUCATION REFORM SUPPORT PROGRAM (ERP)

Time frame: April, 2004–April, 2009

Funding level: $51,261,416

The information from this EQUIP2 Associate Award review is drawn from interviews with 11 individuals closely associated with ERP, including USAID/Egypt staff, technical advisors, and EQUIP2 staff both in Egypt and in AED/Washington. Along with other EQUIP2 Associate Award reviews, it provides the basis (along with insights from state-of-the-art research on education decentralization) for the lessons learned, strategies, and insights that form the focus of Section II of this report.

This Associate Award case is divided into the following sections: (1) Egypt context, (2) ERP project design, (3) ERP project implementation, (4) ERP successes and challenges (as seen by the 11 persons interviewed), (5) monitoring and evaluation. The last section (6) reflects on the Egypt EQUIP2 ERP experience in terms of what can be useful for USAID education officers responsible for designing and overseeing the implementation and monitoring and evaluation of projects that focus on decentralization or have a decentralization component. It is divided into four subsections: what worked, what did not work", interesting strategies, and valuable insights.

An attempt is made to write this review in 'story' form (e.g., what was the context and how did it influence the design, what were the key aspects of the design that influenced implementation, what was learned in terms of successes and challenges, and what can be learned from monitoring and evaluation).

1. Egypt context

National and education context during the time the ERP project was designed and implemented
Egypt is the most populated country in the Middle East and the world's most densely populated country (U.S. State Dept). In 2009, Egypt rated 123 out of 182

on the Human Development Index, placing it in the Middle Human Development category (UNDP, 2009).

Between 2004 and 2008 Egypt aggressively pursued economic reforms to attract foreign investment and facilitate GDP growth. Despite high levels of economic growth in energy, transportation, telecommunications, retail trade and construction, living conditions for the average Egyptian remain poor (CIA World Factbook). Egypt's president, Hossni Mubarak, who recently turned 82 years old, had been in power since 1981. His son, Gamal Mubarak who had been widely rumored to be his successor, was the Secretary General for Policies of the National Democratic Party, the party's third most powerful position.

Egypt spends 3.8 percent of its GNP on education (World Bank, 2008). Egypt's literacy rate is 66.4 percent of the adult population (2009 UNDP). Ninety-three percent of children enter primary school today, compared with 87 percent in 1994 (US State Department). Primary net enrollments are high (92.5 percent, World Bank, 2007) as are primary completion rates (93.2 percent, World Bank 2007).

Schools in Egypt's urban areas are highly dense—students attend class in shifts yet there are 60 to 70 in a class—and exam-driven, which are not suitable factors for effective learning. The exams—especially those in the third, fifth, and eighth grades and at the end of secondary school—are based on the memorization of facts rather than critical thinking. Although they rarely participate in their children's schools, parents value education very highly and their primary concern is that their children pass examinations with high marks. Teacher salaries have not kept pace with inflation. As a result, teachers double or triple their salaries each month by offering tutoring sessions to help students pass their exams.

Among the most important challenges facing Egypt's education system is improving the effectiveness of investments in education and striking an appropriate balance between central and local management.

Education decentralization context at the time of ERP design
Egypt has a tradition of devolution of responsibility to its governorates for managing education. Every year Egypt's 29 governorates receive an allotment of funding that they, in turn, are to apply to hire school principals and teachers, pay for expendable materials, attend to school maintenance. The process for allocating these funds is reportedly ad hoc and not very transparent, with some governorates receiving up to 10 times the amount of funding per pupil as others, in large part due to the formula for allocating funds according to number of classrooms rather than number of students (source: interview carried out for this Associate Award review). Each governorate has an Undersecretary of Education, named by the central Ministry of Education, who works alongside governorate staff responsible

for overseeing the expenditure of education funding that they receive from the central government.

In 2001 USAID/Egypt, through a small pilot activity in Alexandria cobbled together with funds from various education projects, initiated an attempt to decentralize education. This activity was carried out in the context of a broader effort to revitalize Alexandria and included participation from Alexandria's private sector. It sought to demonstrate that educational quality could be improved without extensive and lengthy legislative reforms through three key 'pillars': (1) decentralization of school management authority to the school level (2) increased community involvement and support of schooling, and (3) improvement of teaching-learning methods and practices. The focus was on 30 schools.

In the summer and fall of 2004, during which the EQUIP2 Cooperative Agreement for the Education Reform Program (ERP) was being negotiated and finalized, USAID/Egypt—with funds from DT2 participant training—financed strategic planning exercises for seven pilot governorates, including Alexandria, that were intended to serve as the focus of decentralization efforts under ERP.

Parallel to the early days of EQUIP2 implementation, the Egyptian Minister of Education (MOE) was in the process of developing a comprehensive strategic plan for education with the training and capacity building guidance of UNESCO. The plan, which took several years to complete and spanned two Ministers of Education, in addition to receiving direct support from UNESCO, received generous financing and technical assistance from a variety of donors, among them USAID, the EU, the World Bank, UNICEF, and the Ford Foundation. This strategic planning exercise had as its overall objective revisiting the way education in Egypt was being managed and implemented. The plan reportedly included a strong focus on decentralization and used as inputs the strategic plans developed by seven governorates with USAID financing in 2004.

While not explicitly part of the initial ERP design, USAID—through ERP—coordinated with other donors to assist the Ministry of Education in preparing its strategic plan. ERP assistance at the central level, at the level of the governorates and the idaras consisted of technical assistance from Egyptians and outside specialists, financing for studies, and funding for numerous workshops and conferences where diverse actors were brought together to lay the case for and reach agreement on key elements of the strategic plan at different levels.

Two years into ERP, and while the strategic planning process was still taking place, a new Minister of Education was named. This individual, a prominent academic from Alexandria, had participated in the USAID-financed Alexandria decentralization pilot as the head of the education committee. Within a year, the

Governor of Alexandria under whom the education decentralization pilot was carried out was named to be the Minister of State for Local Development. Both individuals were to play key roles in supporting education decentralization from the national level. The new Minister of Education brought back to the Ministry a prominent Egyptian educator, Dr. Hassan El Bilawi who retired from the MOE in the early days of ERP and was hired as a senior Egyptian technical advisor under ERP. One of Dr. Bilawi's principal responsibilities as senior advisor to the Minister of Education was overseeing the completion of the strategic plan and its implementation. An important focus that Dr. Bilawi brought to the strategic planning process was improving the quality and relevance of education provided in the classroom accompanied by encouraging increased involvement of parents in the education of their children and in playing a direct role in oversight of their children's schools; the latter represented a culture shift in the way parents see and participate in education.

Between 2006 and 2009, USAID/Egypt through ERP came to play the lead role among donors in supporting education decentralization as provided for in the strategic plan. Other donors continued with their projects (in support of basic education, vocational education, and higher education) within the context of the strategic plan that most of them had supported in its design. As education decentralization activities gained momentum, thanks to USAID's assistance under ERP, decentralization in education began to be held out by individuals at high levels in the Egyptian government as a model for other sectors.

Ouster of Mubarak government in February 2011
On February 11, 2011—several months after this case study was completed and nearly two years after the EQUIP2 ERP Associate Award had come to an end—President Hosni Mubarak was forced to resign after weeks of intense pressure from a spontaneous protest of Egyptian civil society clamoring for an opportunity to be heard and for a move toward democracy in their country. Since Mubarak resignation, the Prime Minister has also been forced to resign, the new Prime Minister has formed a new cabinet, and Egyptians voted on a referendum making changes in the Egyptian constitution to pave the way for Parliamentary elections to take place in June 2011. The Egyptian military are currently in place as a caretaker government until, as a result of the June elections, newly elected government is installed.

While a move toward democracy would appear to have positive implications for education decentralization efforts in Egypt, it is still too early to ascertain how this change will affect education decentralization initiatives that began with the support of ERP between 2004 and 2009.

2. Design of the Education Reform Support (ERP) project

Design context and process

The EQUIP2 portion of ERP, funded at $51,261,416 for a 4 years and 10 months (from June 23, 2004 to April 30, 2010) came into existence as part of a larger project, Education Reform Support (ERP), designed by USAID/Egypt in an effort to consolidate a broad range of existing education programs under one umbrella while at the same time undertaking some new initiatives in education. Activities under ERP were to be carried out under USAID/Egypt's then education Strategic Objective 22: "Egyptians in targeted areas acquire the basic education and skills needed for productive lives."

The original idea was to issue ERP as a competitively bid contract. However, due to time constraints, the decision was taken to seek out USAID/Washington approval to fund ERP under the EQUIP Leader with Associates (LWA) mechanism. Given its large scope and level of funding (a total of $126 million over a five-year period) USAID/Egypt was advised by USAID/Washington that it had to divide ERP between two EQUIPS with EQUIP2, led by FHI 360, taking on activities related to policy/systems reform and EQUIP1, led by AIR, responsible for activities at the school level, including working with teachers, school administrators, and parents.

In the spring of 2003, EQUIP1 and EQUIP2 were invited to Egypt to prepare a joint proposal in response to an RFA issued by USAID/Egypt. USAID/Egypt made clear from the start that—though two mechanisms were to be used—the two EQUIPs were to work hand in hand under one common vision and purpose. The two EQUIPs were given the option, as is permitted under an LWA, to come up with a proposal for another approach than that outlined in the RFA. However, given time constraints, FHI 360 and AIR decided not to follow this option. Instead, they agreed among themselves and with USAID/Egypt that once the two Cooperative Agreements were signed the two EQUIPs would spend an initial few months working together to prepare a common framework and detailed work plan. The latter, unfortunately, never took place; EQUIP2 began before EQUIP1 and pent up demands from the Ministry of Education caused by a several month delay in negotiating the two Cooperative Agreements forced both EQUIPs to move quickly into implementation.

Associate Award objectives/purposes[15]

The EQUIP RFA set out four broad purposes with the understanding that there would be flexibility during implementation, especially in those activities that had to do with policy/systems reform, to make adjustments to respond to opportunities and challenges as they arose. The four purposes (language taken from the RFA) are as follows:

15   The information included in this subsection and those that follow is drawn from the ERP RFA.

1. Take advantage of opportunities to effect improvements within discrete pockets of the education system that demonstrate the system's need and capacity for better ways to deliver education services.
2. Integrate and concentrate resources in selected parts of the country; capitalize on the readiness of Egyptians to support change.
3. Select a "family of schools" in one district in each participating governorate for implementation of the program.
4. Build on existing USAID activities, providing an overall strategic and managerial framework for inter-project collaboration.

In addition, there was a specific objective for activities in the area of educational decentralization:

Help the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Faculty of Education Reform Committee (FOERC), other government bodies, governorate and education leaders, and private sector leaders to provide active support for the reform efforts through policy level interventions, supporting replication within governorates and scaling up of the reform.

The RFA did not include a development hypothesis or a set of specific assumptions, two items that would have appeared in a project of this nature had it been designed in the 1970s or 1980s. When asked what she thought the design assumptions were the USAID COTR, who contributed to the design of ERP, advanced two assumptions both of which were valid and played out: (1) that there was a wealth of experience and willingness of the government to use best practices and successes, particularly from Alexandria, to expand the pilot to other governorates and build on it; and (2) that there was local readiness to expand decentralization.

Guiding principles
The RFA was very clear in a setting out guiding principles to be followed by the two EQUIPs as they moved into implementation.

1. Reform activities should be driven bottom up and successful implementation drives policies and not vice-versa, the program will encourage system-wide reforms by experimenting at lower levels of the system and demonstrating their effectiveness for future replicability.
2. Activities should lead to sustainability.
3. Tackle every opportunity to support the institutionalization and systematization of successful reforms at the governorate level that have nationwide applicability and to advocate that reform to the MOE and FOERC for policy reform/support to sustain the results and guide towards scaling up.
4. Work in governorates where there is already demonstrated commitment to reforms.

5. Build on existing USAID activities, ensuring that these are utilized, reproduced, and distributed and that sustainable training on their use is closely incorporated.

Indicators
The RFA did not set out a list of detailed indicators, leaving these to be developed once EQUIPs 1 and 2 developed their first year work plan. Important to subsequent implementation, the RFA went out of its way to emphasize that the nature of the policy issues to be addressed would emerge from program activities as they were defined. The RFA also specified that in the area of education government and decentralization (DGM) that ERP should "support the Egyptian private sector leadership to play a prominent role in advocacy and support for policy reform at the MOE and with public opinion to understand necessary changes and their impact on improving the education system."

3. Implementing the EQUIP2 portion of ERP

Design choices that guided implementation
In preparing the ERP RFA, and as is referenced above, USAID/Egypt made a number of design choices that would guide ERP implementation. They included:

1. That there would be flexibility during implementation, especially in those activities that had to do with policy/systems reform, to make adjustments to respond to opportunities and challenges as they arose;
2. That reform activities should be driven bottom up and successful implementation drives policies and not vice-versa, the program will encourage system-wide reforms by experimenting at lower levels of the system and demonstrating their effectiveness for future replicability;
3. That activities should lead to sustainability;
4. That the project should tackle every opportunity to support the institutionalization and systematization of successful reforms at the governorate level that have nationwide applicability;
5. That ERP would work in governorates where there is already demonstrated commitment to reforms;
6. That ERP would build on existing USAID activities, ensuring that these are utilized reproduced, and distributed and that sustainable training on their use is closely incorporated;
7. That in decentralization the Egyptian private sector would play an important role; and
8. That rather than including detailed indicators in the RFA, USAID would leave these to be developed once EQUIPs 1 and 2 developed their first-year work plan.

As will be seen in the discussion that follows all of these design choices played out in implementation.

Implementation approach
ERP was divided into six interrelated areas. Four were continuations from prior USAID/Egypt education projects and two were new. Of the four that were to be continuations from prior projects, three corresponded to EQUIP1: (1) classrooms and schools focusing on teacher training, community support, and school to work; (2) school construction; (3) nonformal education. EQUIP2 was given the fourth: (4) integrated English language training. In addition, EQUIP2 was assigned the two new areas: (5) faculties of education reform, which focused on improving pre-service teacher training provided at the university level; and (6) decentralized government and management—the focus of this topical paper—which supported policy-related actions/decisions and replications of models at the governorate level in the seven pilots with the idea of taking successes and policy dialogue to the MOE and GOE level for national application.

From the beginning EQUIP2, with USAID/Egypt concurrence, adopted a systems approach, with the underlying conviction that it was important to work simultaneously at all levels of the system. Also with USAID concurrence, EQUIP2 built in flexibility in its implementation approach, with the understanding that EQUIP2 would respond to policy reform opportunities as they arose.

Recognizing that for project activities, especially in decentralization, to be meaningful EQUIP2, again with USAID concurrence, also decided early on to form an inter-ministerial committee to oversee implementation of decentralization. High-level representatives from the Ministries Education, Finance, Local Development, Administrative Development, and the Civil Service sat on this committee. The Minister of Education reported to Policy Secretariat headed by Gamal Mubarak, the son of President Hosni Mubarak and Secretary General of Policies for the National Democratic Party. This inter-ministerial committee, which took two years to set up, continued to meet throughout the project and played a critical role in overseeing and lending support for decentralization in education. Because all five ministries understood what the MOE was trying to accomplish and had Cabinet and Prime Minister support, when a new Minister of Education came in toward the end of ERP (who was not particularly interested in the decentralization policies being put in place), he had no choice but to continue with ongoing support to decentralize given that the Prime Minister enforced the need to continue actions started under his predecessor.

In the area of strategic planning, the seven governorates designated for ERP to focus on went through strategic planning exercises, supported by USAID/Egypt, in the months before ERP started. The results of these exercises created an energy

around strategic planning. The resulting strategic plans went to the central level and informed the strategic planning process that eventually involved all governorates in Egypt. When the central strategic plan was developed, representatives from the ERP seven governorates and other governorates participated in this exercise.

EQUIP2 and USAID/Egypt were provided a valuable opportunity to receive support for decentralization when in 2006 a Minister of Education was named who came from Alexandria and who had been an active participant in the decentralization pilot. With the arrival of the new Minister, EQUIP2 embedded senior Egyptian technical advisors in the Ministry of Education. These individuals, in a very low-key fashion, assisted the Minister of Education and other MOE staff to carry out studies and prepare policy papers and talking points for the Minister when he gave important presentations on decentralization outside of the Ministry of Education.

EQUIP2's involvement in decentralization spanned a wide variety of tasks as is illustrated below:

- Technical assistance to the governorates and eventually to the MOE in developing its strategic plan and in establishing the framework for decentralization
- Design, printing, and distribution of the three-part document, Executive Summary, National Strategic Plan, and Appendices in Arabic and English
- Financing extensive workshops at various levels to develop/validate the strategic plan, and extensive trainings in a variety of areas of decentralization; among the participants in these workshops were representatives from the private sector in the governorates
- Supporting the seven pilot governorates in having their own meetings to share successes and innovations, as well as problems in implementing decentralization on a pilot basis
- Supporting the formation of a Governor's Education Reform Network, which met periodically with the Minister of Education to recommend policies to be taken by the MOE based on their experiences
- Conducting several important studies that served as an underpinning for subsequent decisions regarding the implementation of decentralization
- Assisting with the formulation of new roles and responsibilities at the local, district, and central levels of the MOE in preparation for decentralization of roles and responsibilities currently vested with the center
- Providing technical assistance and training for school accreditation programs (which impacts on decentralization)
- At the local level, developing and implementing a nation-wide communication strategy for all 46,000 schools involving training on the elements of the strategic plan, suggested community involvement activities, multi-media

materials for undersecretaries and school principals to engage dialogue and generate local plans

• Financial/resource allocation to district and school levels, with training manuals and workshops and community meetings to support this allocation

In 2006, and very propitious for both EQUIP1 and EQUIP2, the USDH Education/Health office director led her education team in a restructuring of its strategic objective and a concurrent review of ERP. This was done with an eye toward making the project more strategic by cutting activities that did not seem to have promise for delivering desired results under the new SO, "Sustained Improvements in Student Learning Outcomes" (SILO). This effort resulted in focusing money and staff time on areas, such as decentralization, that were moving well and seen as having promise in terms of what they could achieve.

By early 2007, the Education/Health office director expressed concern with the policy/systems reform activities being carried out in Egypt. The EQUIP2 home office, in response, brought in a high-level team of policy specialists who had made important contributions to the state of the art on policy and systems reform under the EQUIP2 Leader Award, to assess the environment for policy reform in Egypt. The team, based on its visit where it met with many high-level leaders in Egypt's public and private sectors, recommended that the environment was very appropriate for USAID support in education policy/systems reform.

Of significance, one of the members of the team who is a world leader in decentralization identified an opening between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance to explore the use of formula funding as a means of decentralizing funds to the idara and school levels. (The door had already been opened to formula funding given pressure from the pilot governorates that schools needed to have funding made available directly to them).

An important focus of EQUIP2 decentralization support for the remainder of EQUIP2 (and beyond, under another USAID/Egypt funding mechanism) became working with MOE and MOF and others to set the base for and experiment with sending increased amounts of funding to *idaras* and schools using the formula funding approach.

Adequacy of time frame and budget
As EQUIP2 was endowed with an ample budget (over $50 million for five years) funding for the most part was sufficient (some individuals interviewed argued that it was more than sufficient) to implement EQUIP2's responsibilities under ERP. Given that EQUIP2 was not given specific targets/deliverables regarding policy reforms to be carried out, whether or not 4 years and 10 months was sufficient is open to interpretation. A couple of interviewees for this Associate Award review

pointed out that if the principal objective was to set the stage for key reforms by raising awareness of the importance of the reforms and the need for ownership of these reforms, 4 years and 10 months was adequate. However, if the objective was to complete the reforms initiated during the project, including decentralization, 4 years and 10 months was clearly not sufficient.

Effectiveness in building sustainability
Sustainability, as one of the guiding principals set out by USAID for implementation, was a crosscutting theme in all of EQUIP2's activities. Sustainability, as laid out in the RFA, was also a somewhat amorphous concept. In the area of decentralization one can say with a certain amount of confidence that the groundwork was laid for sustainability: (1) As the first sector to take concrete actions to decentralize, education benefited from ongoing interest from high levels of the Egyptian government, including President Mubarak; (2) a number of important decrees and regulations relating to education decentralization were issued (see below); (3) educational accreditation, which laid the base for schools to develop action plans and be accountable for their actions and thus an important underpinning to sustainability, passed into law; (4) the project supported extensive training of staff from the central MOE to the governorates, the idaras, the *mudiriyas*, and schools; (5) the groundwork was laid for sustained reform in student learning outcomes; and (6) the fact that formula funding, a key underpinning to real decentralization, has gone into effect (starting at $8 billion Egyptian pounds per year when EQUIP2 finished in 2009 to a projected $50 billion Egyptian pounds in 2010 speaks for itself). As one individual interviewed for this study observed, "There is no doubt that decentralization would be more sustainable if it made its way into law as has accreditation," an action yet to be taken.

Key outcomes
So, what concretely did ERP achieve in decentralization? The ERP final report, highlights the following as important accomplishments in decentralization, which can be attributed directly to ERP support (FHI 360, 2009):

- Policy to activate decentralization through three pilot governorates (Fayoum, Ismailia, Luxor) with the MOE as the lead ministry endorsed by the National Democratic Party Policy Secretariat;
- New process for allocating resources to the school level by formula funding according to enrolment and pro-poor weighting endorsed by MOF and MOE;
- Decrees to enable decentralization from the MOF on increasing the ceiling for cash advances to schools; and from the MOE on revised boards of trustees, formula funding, and increased percentage of activity fees kept at the school level;

- School/BOT Guide to Decentralized Education Finance manual approved by MOF and MOE for training and capacity building at all levels of the MOE system;
- First Inter-Ministerial Group formed at the invitation of the Minister of Finance (June 2007) including ministries of Finance, Education, Local Development, Administrative Development, and CAOA. The Inter-Ministerial Working Group for Education Funding (IMG-EF) is the leading body for the required policy and system change needed to support financial decentralization.

EQUIP2 achievements in other areas also contributed either directly or indirectly to decentralization of education in Egypt between 2004 and 2009:

- **Strategic planning**: (1) The Ministry of Education Strategic Plan (in Arabic/ English), Executive Summary, Plan, and Annexes, 553 pages, were released to the National Democratic Party (NDP) in November 2007; (2) 27 Governorate Strategic Plans, representing all governorates in Egypt, were completed and approved; (3) idara Implementation Plans for all 75 *idaras* in the seven ERP target Governorates were prepared; and (4) National Strategic Plan Indicators for monitoring and evaluation the implementation process in all governorates were completed in January 2009.
- **MOE reorganization**: (1) There was a complete revisiting of the functions, roles, and responsibilities at all levels of MOE, which resulted in a new organizational structure and devolution of functions as part of the organizational transformation in a decentralized system to support School-Based Reform; (2) another first-time inter-ministerial committee with MOE, the Ministry of State for Administrative Development (MSAD), and the Ministry of State for Local Development (MSLD) jointly worked on the new MOE organizational plan; (3) a review and plan was prepared for reducing the size of the central ministry; and (4) the Ministries of MSAD and MOE approved the new Organizational Transformation Plan.
- **Quality assurance and accreditation**: (1) Law 82 (2006) establishing the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Education (NAQAAE) was passed; (2) an internal and external review of accreditation manuals and training materials was carried out; (3) National Effective School Standards were established as the basis for accreditation of schools; (4) a full-cycle pilot of accreditation materials and the accreditation process was carried out in the governorates of Minia and Alexandria; and (5) Quality Assurance Units in all 29 governorates and 260 idara in the country were established and provided with basic awareness, orientation, and training in accreditation processes and materials.
- **Leadership program**: (1) Leadership development became a policy and system change in the MOE and there was a nation-wide commitment to sustain the education reform effort through effective leadership and advocacy; (2) a total

of 147 middle managers representing every governorate in Egypt successfully completed a year-long residency training conducted by EQUIP2 on the MOE education reform strategy; (3) the MOE is giving primary consideration to members of the Leadership Program for upcoming senior level assignments; and (4) the MOE has committed itself to continue new intakes of potential leaders and conduct their own training programs on Egyptian education reform through the Professional Academy for Teachers (PAT), using the extensive training modules produced by EQUIP2.

4. Factors, within and outside of the control of USAID and ERP, that favored project accomplishments and factors that served as deterrents

As part of the EQUIP2 lessons learned exercise interviewees were asked to reflect on elements of EQUIP2's portion of ERP that were successful. They were also asked to reflect on challenges. The following is taken from a longer list of reflections provided by the eleven individuals interviewed.

Factors that were seen as favorable
- A close relationship and trust were established with key host country counterparts, USAID, and EQUIP2 and were seen as trusted interlocutors with the MOE.
- EQUIP2, with USAID's backing, was responsive, able to change directions quickly, and constantly examine the continuum of where there were opportunities to support political change, one example being the support provided under EQUIP2 (but not programmed in the EQUIP2 RFA) to the MOE in developing its strategic plan.
- EQUIP2 set up an inter-ministerial working group with high-level participation from five ministries; this allowed for continuity/sustainability in decentralization reform efforts even in the face of changes in the Minister of Education (of which there were three during the life of ERP).
- An extensive effort was by made by EQUIP2 to actively engage a wide variety of actors to participate in the strategic planning process and in its subsequent implementation. Among others, ERP was able to get high-level decision makers, academics, business leaders, and community leaders to attend important workshops as active participants.
- EQUIP2 engaged in a wide span of activities rather than focusing on one or two specific types of interventions: technical assistance to the MOE as well as governorates, preparation of research studies, extensive training programs, organizing workshops, assisting with preparing key MOE policy documents and presentations.

- EQUIP2, from the start, adopted a systems approach, reframing reform elements as circumstances changed.
- Rather than insisting on the reforms that they saw as being appropriate, USAID and EQUIP2 supported the MOE in implementing the reforms that it saw as priorities.
- Throughout the project there was strong support from senior host country officials for policy reform in education, including decentralization.
- USAID was supportive and responsive; in particular, the AOTR—who had excellent connections with senior MOE and other Ministry personnel—was able to play a valuable role in opening doors and building trust.
- The EQUIP2 Chief of Party was capable and experienced in development. She remained throughout the life of ERP, insisted on the importance of taking a systems approach, and wisely hired Egyptian advisors who had excellent connections with senior Ministry of Education and other personnel.
- EQUIP2 was able to identify several highly respected experts in their fields to provide short-term technical assistance. Two, Drs. Luis Crouch and Hank Healey, available under an RTI subcontract, have played a key role in helping the Egyptian government to experiment with and increasingly gain confidence with formula funding as a way to decentralize resources to the school level with accountability.
- AED's Washington home office provided excellent backstop support, including from senior level EQUIP staff who were called in, at different points during implementation, to assist with addressing problems as they arose.

Challenges
- The process of policy dialogue related to decentralization was time-consuming and nerve racking (however, this was to be expected).
- It took time for counterparts, who often lack authority, to reach consensus around difficult choices.
- There was limited MOE absorptive capacity below senior level officials.
- There was suspicion and resistance at lower levels to the reforms (again, to be expected).
- It took time to transform cultures, especially when one looks at changing a culture that is accustomed to autocratic decision making from above.
- USAID/Washington by forcing USAID/Egypt to implement a comprehensive program under two EQUIPs, set up a situation rife with difficulties.
- Pressures for quick start-up after delays in negotiating and signing the two EQUIP agreements did not permit the two EQUIPs to work out their roles/ relationships at the beginning, hampering smooth implementation.
- Pressure from USAID/Egypt senior management to show concrete results and spend money was often counterproductive when the objective was to encourage

counterparts to implement important policy reforms in a process that proceeds on their and not USAID's schedule.

- There were at times tensions between USAID/Egypt's need to align time lines and deliverables while maintaining the flexibility needed to take advantage of windows of opportunity as they arose.
- Occasional mixed messages/pressure from USAID resulted in taking decisions that were not advisable.
- There was a lack of understanding, among staff in other offices/at other levels in the mission regarding what the EQUIP2 portion of ERP was attempting to achieve.

5. *Monitoring and evaluation*

M&E strategy

An aspect of ERP that was unusual for USAID education programs at the time it was designed was that it built in a large monitoring and evaluation component. This component was charged not only with collecting the M&E data required for ERP but for all of the USAID mission's education programs, which grew significantly over the life of ERP and became a deterrent for focusing on M&E activities under ERP due to the increasing USAID demands for M&E data from ERP.

The M&E unit, housed under EQUIP2, was tasked with initiating "discrete evaluation activities for the purposes of (a) formative evaluation of programs or materials, (b) cost-effectiveness evaluations of alternative strategies or approaches, (c) piloting evaluation methodologies for tracking progress of activities, (d) exploring strategies to overcome barriers, (e) other such purposes. The monitoring and evaluation plan shall provide resources for such activities, which may not be anticipated at the beginning of the project." Interestingly, the RFA avoided providing a specific list of indicators and targets to be achieved under ERP, other than the importance that ERP contribute to a set of broad results set out under its sub-Intermediate results that form part of USAID/Egypt's education strategic objective. Examples of intermediate results relating directly to decentralization included: (1) "Administrative staff, from top-level governorate and MOE central staff are competent in leadership, resource management skills, and delegation of authority"; and (2) "Transfer of responsibility and some funding to lower-level administrators, including *idaras* and schools; improved collaboration between central agencies and *mudiriyas*."

M&E/PMP indicators

When ERP was modified in late 2006, and with the benefit of two years of experience that brought with it greater clarity regarding what the project might achieve related to decentralization, a more specific set of indicators were developed

for Decentralized Governance and Management. Most, as can be seen below, are stated in numerical form:

M&E/PMP indicators

- Number of Faculties of Specific Education/Kindergarten producing National Academies of Reference Standards/Strategic Plans
- Number of boards of trustees established
- Governorate Strategic Plans developed
- Number of regulations, laws, decrees, policies, and guidelines passed by the government of Egypt
- Number of participants in idara implementation plan preparation
- Number of idara implementation plans prepared
- New Reform idara operational
- Education Reform Fund established
- Number of staff trained in leadership capacity
- Number of mudiriya and idara staff trained in PSEP
- Number of governments with LPC-EC Councils trained in Technologies of Participation
- Number LPC-EC Council members trained in Technologies of Participation

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In addition, at the governorate level, each governorate developed its own M&E plan to track progress in achieving proposed targets under ERP in general and decentralization in particular. Since these plans were not available for this Associate Award review it is not possible to comment on their relevance and/or effectiveness.

Under ERP, and in keeping with the original M&E plan for ERP, a number of studies and formative evaluations were carried out. They included:

- Formative evaluations of programs or materials: CAPS tests, accreditation training manuals, Teacher Cadre tests, PSEP training manuals, decentralization training manuals, social marketing training manuals, new BOT decree, Leadership Program, community-based dialogue on strategic plan nation-wide.
- Cost-effectiveness evaluations of alternative strategies or approaches: accreditation strategies, decentralization strategies, CAPS implementation, Teacher Cadre implementation, and EMIS implementation.
- Piloting evaluation methodologies for tracking progress of activities: NCREL Policy Framework, EMIS, School Report Cards, school improvement plans, Level 1–5 training evaluations.
- Exploring strategies to overcome barriers: inter-ministerial committees, Governor's Education Reform Network, Ruling Party and Policy Secretariat engagement, new decrees and regulations.

Reflections of individuals interviewed on the PMP
When individuals interviewed for this Associate Award review were asked how these indicator data were used, responses included: (1) that they were used in USAID reporting; and (2) that they were used by EQUIP 2 staff to ground truth the project in how it was doing; (3) that use was made of several evaluation documents prepared under ERP by staff at the Ministry of Education (e.g., board of trustee decree evaluations that were commissioned by the MOE, the MOE used data concerning piloting of all initiatives, the cost effectiveness analyses that were done for the MOE; accreditation data, Leadership Program data, SCOPE, MAP, CAPS, and Teacher Cadre data were closely watched and used by MOE) , and (4) by the governorates (school report cards, school improvement plans, accreditation, EMIS, strategic planning, social marketing, SCOPE, MAP, and CAPS).

When asked in hindsight what they would have done differently in terms of monitoring and evaluation, individuals interviewed observed the following: (1) that something should have been included that indicated the openings and receptivity, incremental opportunities for policy dialogue; (2) that the project should have tracked the point at which the decentralization experience moved from the initial governorate to working in all governorates; (3) the fact that having a demand and a push for coherent strategic planning should have been more than a checklist of X strategic plans prepared, that instead (or in addition) there should have been a way of tracking political will and administrative capacity to do this; (4) that the Institutional Rubric system was not particularly useful for tracking policy development; (5) that the plan should have included indicators for reaching the public.

6. Reflecting on the Egypt EQUIP2 ERP experience in terms of what can be useful for other USAID projects that focus on decentralization or have a decentralization component

What worked
1. Having ample funding, made it possible to incorporate and carry out new activities not necessarily contemplated in the design.
2. Five years was sufficient time to get activities started and begin to show some concrete results.
3. Having flexibility built in to the design made it possible to change gears/adjust with entrance of new actors, new MOE/government priorities.
4. Developing a relationship of trust and respect between key actors in the MOE, USAID, and EQUIP2, was built up over time; this did not happen over night.
5. Embedding senior Egyptians in the Ministry of Education to serve as low-key technical advisors; assistance provided to the Minister and other senior

personnel was done in such a way that it was seen as an internal MOE accomplishment; EQUIP2 never sought recognition for this assistance.

6. A strategic USAID USDH team leader who led a mid-term correction/redesign made it possible to eliminate activities that weren't working or weren't strategic, thus making it possible to focus attention on activities that had promise.

7. Redesigning the project midstream developed more realistic objectives and a set of accompanying indicators.

8. USAID and EQUIP appreciation grew that decentralization is a long-term process, that it is not necessary linear, and that there are factors outside of its control (such as changeover in staff, time needed to permit host country counterparts to reach agreements around difficult choices).

9. Key actors on the USAID side and on the EQUIP2 side continued.

10. An FSN AOTR had excellent relations with key government actors.

11. Starting in 2007, there was high-quality and timely external technical assistance for decentralization.

12. There was timely senior-level backstop support from AED.

What did not work

1. Creating separate Associate Awards for ERP—each with their own deliverables, financial accountability, deliverables, and AOTRs and insisting that the two work together under one overall objective—created constant tensions between EQUIP1 and EQUIP2 that made it difficult to implement a holistic, systems approach.

2. EQUIP1 and EQUIP2 began at different times, in the context of a change in the Egyptian government with pressure to show immediate results, and no time at the beginning to coordinate strategies, which further complicated the dual structure of ERP.

3. Pressure, at times, from USAID/Egypt to produce concrete results/spend down on the project pipeline without appreciating that activities that focus on policy and institutional reform often take time and proceed at their own pace.

4. The absence of a final evaluation made it impossible to go beyond numerical achievements to assess project impacts in terms of quality/relevance of actions taken as a result of USAID support.

Useful strategies

1. Formation of an inter-ministerial committee to oversee coordination of decentralization activities across ministries; this high-level support also ensured that a new Minister could not undo activities already launched in this area.

2. USAID engaged in a strategic planning/review process mid-stream, which resulted in adjusting ERP objectives and indicators to: (a) make them more realistic; and (b) reflect changes in the implementation environment.

Valuable insights from interviewees

The importance of building credibility, confidence, and trust, which takes time:

It was a function of building credibility over the first couple of years; our relationship with the Minister and the Senior Advisor to the Minister was key as was the Egyptian national's COTR role and relationship with the Minister of Education. All of those things worked over time. There was a turning point. It created opportunities and a degree of integration and access based on confidence and trust. (John Gillies, EQUIP2 Director, FHI 360 Washington)

Transforming from a traditional culture to a new one is difficult:

Transforming culture from the traditional state to the new one was very difficult. Decentralization demands a new design, a design shift. We have to transform our activities and work from the traditional way of working to a new one. For school-based reform to work we need to let the school do its own work, mobilize the community to help them achieve them what they need to do. Having authority conveyed from central to local level is a very new idea, you need to empower them with the adequate training and provide them with the appropriate environment. (Sherrif Kandil, ERP Deputy Chief of Party).

Reaching consensus is not easy and often outside of USAID or the project's control:

They themselves have not done such a good job at developing internal consensus, some Ministries are on board and some and not; and some parts of ministries and on board, other parts not. Getting people around the table to make difficult choices was out of the control of the project. (Luis Crouch, ERP decentralization advisor)

The value of being in the right place at the right time:

There has been a mixture of luck, the right time to get going with these things as there was local pressure to do this within the government and to some degree simply the fact that USAID had worked on these issues and laid a lot of seeds since 2000 that began to flower. (Luis Crouch, ERP decentralization advisor)

B. EQUIP2 GEORGIA: GEORGIA EDUCATION DECENTRALIZATION ACTIVITY (GEDA)

Time frame: July 20, 2005–July 19, 2008

Funding: Initial: $11,996,369; Final: $6,800,000

The information from this EQUIP2 Associate Award review is drawn from interviews with eight individuals (including EQUIP2 staff and technical advisors in Georgia and at AED in Washington, DC) along with review of project documentation.[16] Taken in conjunction with the other country reviews, it provides the basis (along with insights from state-of-the-art research on education decentralization) for the lessons learned, strategies, and insights that form the focus of Section II of this report.

This Associate Award review is divided into the following sections: (1) Georgia context, (2) GEDA project design, (3) GEDA implementation, (4) GEDA successes and challenges (as seen by the eight persons interviewed), (5) monitoring and evaluation. The last section (6) reflects on the Georgia GEDA experience in terms of what can be useful for other USAID projects that focus on decentralization or have a decentralization component. Section 6 is divided into four subsections: what worked, what did not work", interesting strategies, and valuable insights.

An attempt is made to write this review in 'story' form (e.g., what was the context and how did it influence the design, what were the key aspects of the design that influenced implementation, what was learned in terms of successes and challenges, and what can be learned from monitoring and evaluation).

1. Georgia context

National and education context
Georgia, according to the 2009 Human Development Report, scores 89 out of 182 countries in terms of overall quality of life. Literacy is at 100 percent, primary enrollments (98.7 percent net enrollments in 2008, World Bank statistics) and completion rates (99.7 percent in 2008, World Bank statistics) are high. In 2008 education spending in Georgia was 2.9 percent of GDP.

Georgia's situation in the 1990s, after communist rule ceased, was not so positive. GDP declined 75 percent between 1991 and 1994 and public expenditures were drastically reduced. Expenditures on education declined from 4 percent of GDP in

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16   In the case of GEDA, it was possible to review the RFA, the semi-annual report, and the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan. Given that the project terminated suddenly, there is no final report.

1992 to 2.2 percent in 2002, after reaching an unprecedented low of 0.5 percent in 1994. The decline in education funding has been one of the most severe in the region, with few precedents worldwide. Payment of teachers' salaries was in arrears in some regions, parents were frequently responsible for purchasing books and other materials supposedly supplied by schools; and most school buildings were in poor condition. Since 1995, budget allocations for the education sector have begun a slow recovery, but years of under-funding have contributed to a decline in the quality of and access to education.

Recognizing that dramatic change was needed, between 2001 and 2008 the government of Georgia (GOG) began implementing a general education reform program within the framework of the World Bank's Education System Realignment and Strengthening Program–Adaptable Program Credit. The first phase addressed the realignment of the system's objectives by: developing a national curriculum for primary and general secondary education, creating a national system to assess the results of student learning in core areas and specific grades, providing training to teachers and principals for the attainment of targets, and providing basic learning materials. This program was supplemented by interventions aimed at strengthening the MOE's policy and management capacity to improve effectiveness and efficiency in the use of physical, financial, and human resources as part of decentralization.

Education decentralization context at the time of the design of GEDA
A new Law on General Education, which passed parliament on 2005, addressed such issues as financing and administration of schools, duties of the Ministry of Education (MES) at central and regional levels, testing of students, teaching standards, curricula, and textbooks. The Law established a new system of school governance composed of boards of trustees, teachers' councils, school managers/administrators, parents' consultative bodies, and student self-governance bodies. The idea was for boards to provide general oversight to schools, select principals and approve his or her deputies, approve curricula and textbooks, sanction school by-laws, and approve budgets and annual reports.

Reform of education financing was a critical element of the new law. At the time the law was passed local governments financed school activities using transfers from the central government. Under the new system, per capita allotments were to be used, using formula funding, supplemented by local resources (presumably from local governments and private donations) designating funds to go to specific schools. Systems and procedures for planning, budgeting, and monitoring funds were nonexistent. The development and implementation of transparent accounting systems and procedures for the new financing system was considered to be an immediate priority.

When the law was passed it was recognized that the most serious challenge to the success of the reform program for general education would take place during the decentralization process. Decentralization required a new management vision, based on democratic principles, that was shared by local communities. Once policies, procedures, roles, and responsibilities were defined, virtually every aspect of implementation of the education law dealing with decentralization would require immediate assistance. Most aspects of the relationships between the central Ministry, regional MOE offices, individual schools, communities, and local governments were unclear at the time the law was passed. It was envisioned that the Law on General Education would be followed by a clear strategy and sets of procedures along with capacity building efforts order to achieve the objectives of the reform program.

2. GEDA design

Project design process
It was not possible to interview anyone from USAID/Georgia to obtain information on the design process.

GEDA purpose/objectives
The RFA set out the following as the purpose of GEDA, designed to be a three–year, $11,996,369 program with the possibility of renewing the program for up to an additional two years: "Assist the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) to implement the provisions of the new Law on General Education and the Law on Higher Education, including a system for accreditation."

Specific objectives included:

1. Developing a national strategy and action plan to implement the decentralization program for general education;
2. Assisting in establishing of regional bodies of educational management–the Education Resource Centers;
3. Assisting in the implementation of reforms at the regional level;
4. Helping develop and institutionalize an accreditation system for general, vocational, and higher education institutions; and
5. Building the capacity of the MES in such areas as education administration, financial management, and training in order to sustain the decentralization and accreditation programs.

The GEDA RFA provided for a two-phase process with the first phase to focus on addressing the needs of the MOE at the central level and developing a plan for the second phase, which focuses on decentralization to the regions. After the

completion of the first phase—and once required plans, functional definitions, and procedures were in place at the central level—the RFA envisioned that two regional teams would be fielded to help the MOE implement the decentralized reform program in two regions of Georgia (one in the east and one in the west).

Conditions and results to be in place at the end of the Associate Award
The RFA specified that, by the end of the three-year project, USAID expected the following conditions to be in place at the national level and in selected regions/areas receiving direct assistance:

- The functions delegated to the regional educational structures by the central body are determined and described in statutes that will be approved by the Ministry of Education and Science
- The functions and structure of the resource centers are specified
- One hundred Education Resource Centers established and operating effectively in the regions of Georgia (including training programs)
- Teachers', students', and parents' organizations functioning due to the activities of the resource-centers
- All Education Resource Center employees selected through competitive procedures and trained
- Training materials developed and published as a manual in school-based management
- Transparent budget, financial management, accounting, property management and governance systems, and other procedures
- An independent accreditation system in place and functioning

Anticipated final results
The final results (intermediate-level results in USAID's strategic plan) outlined in the RFA that were to be achieved by the project were as follows:

- More effective and relevant general and higher education systems that reflect democratic principles, the needs of a free-market economy, and that meet desired quality standards
- A more efficient general education/school financing process that is transparent to all stakeholders
- Percent increase in secondary school enrollment and in public expenditures on education in targeted area

Assumptions
The GEDA RFA did not include any assumptions. Since it was not possible to interview anyone at USAID involved in the GEDA design, it is not possible to ascertain what the assumptions of the designers might have been.

3. GEDA Implementation[17]

Design choices that guided implementation of GEDA

As is reflected in the RFA, USAID/Georgia made some significant design choices when it designed GEDA:

1. It would be possible to carry out a two-phased process related to decentralization the first phase focusing on putting in place the regulations required to implement the General Education Law as well as clarify roles and responsibilities, to be followed by a phase in which activities would roll out at the regional level with ERCs.
2. In three years, with two additional option years, it would be possible to assist the government of Georgia to have, "A more efficient general education/school financing process that is transparent to all stakeholders."
3. During the same time period, it would be possible to have a "More effective and relevant general and higher education system that reflects democratic principles, the needs of a free-market economy, and that meets desired quality standards."
4. One hundred Education Resource Centers would be established and operating effectively in the regions of Georgia and ERC employees would be selected through competitive procedures and trained.
5. Teachers', students', and parents' organizations would be functioning due to the activities of the resource-centers.

As can be seen below, design choice 1 was initiated but not completed and design choice 4 was partially carried out: before GEDA was closed out in 2008 (three years into the program) 35 of the planned 100 ERCs had been refurbished, their staffs had been identified, and they started receiving training. The remaining design choices (2, 3, and 5) were not borne out.

GEDA implementation environment

GEDA initiated implementation in July of 2005 under a new government voted into office in January of 2004, intent on erasing all vestiges of the past and in the midst of an environment of a Ministry of Education under the leadership of a charismatic Minister who had strong backing among his staff. Individuals brought in to senior levels of the Ministry of Education (including the Minister who was a close friend of President Saakashvili) had, by and large, good academic credentials. However, the majority were 30 years old or younger and had little experience in education. In addition, staff turnover at all levels was very high. The Minister of Education remained until 2007, when he left to assume another senior-

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17 The information for this section comes from multiple interviews carried out with individuals associated with the GEDA project plus an interview with the former Deputy Minister of Education who was in this position during the first two years of GEDA.

level position in the government. The individual who replaced him had limited qualifications in the education sector.

Early in implementation there was a great deal of support for GEDA within the USAID/Georgia mission. However, changes in personnel within USAID/Georgia over the course of implementation led to a decline in support for education. Mission backstop support for GEDA became less timely. There were also delays and limitations in communications between USAID and EQUIP2 on the funding availability for GEDA.

EQUIP2, for its part, was staffed with an experienced Chief of Party (COP) who, in turn, identified and hired a capable Georgian staff. The COP brought in as a senior U.S. technical advisor, a very capable individual with experience working in the State Department of Education in Montana who took charge of activities in the western region, in addition to providing assistance on preparing the finance formula that was to allocate funds to schools based on a number of criteria. Other short-term advisors provided by RTI provided useful assistance on specific topics related to decentralization at the beginning of the project.

GEDA implementation

From the start, GEDA encountered multiple implementation challenges, in large part due to the conditions described above. The first phase activities, which were supposed to focus on putting in place the implementing regulations required for the decentralization specified under the General Law on Education to be carried out, were implemented, however, with limited interest on the part of the Ministry of Education in ensuring that staff at the central level received the training that they needed to understand their new roles. A strong Ministry focus was on moving immediately into working at the regional level with the ERCs. Rehabilitating facilities was something that could be done rather quickly and the results would be quite visible, thus giving a needed political boost to the Ministry of Education and the government in general. In addition, given that the government already had funding in the hands of the schools and school boards that were elected, board training and training in the use of financial information were essential at the school level.

The focus of GEDA in the area of decentralization, therefore, very early on moved to the regional level identifying facilities to be rehabilitated and rehabilitating them, as well as initiating training for both regional ERC staff and central MES staff. The training, which began as the facilities were being rehabilitated, was carried out in the midst of a variety of uncertainties and moving targets. When training began, a number of the ERC staff had not yet been identified and roles and relationships for the newly hired ERC staff (a new position in the MES structure) were still in the process of being defined. Where possible, GEDA assisted ERC staff, as they were

being trained, to in turn train school directors, teachers, and boards of trustees. However, given that MES funds for travel and per diems (both for ERC staff to visit communities and schools and for community and school staff to visit the ERC's) were limited, the project was not able to ensure the level of cascade training envisioned. As roles and responsibilities of the ERC staff were identified, training programs were adjusted to reflect these roles. Concurrently, GEDA also provided training to staff at the central level of the MES.

Adequacy of time frame and budget
In early 2008, USAID/Georgia decided not to extend GEDA for the additional two option years provided for in the RFA, thus terminating in three years what was designed as a five-year project. This decision, plus funding uncertainty during the months prior to USAID's announcement to AED that it was planning to terminate implementation after three years, made it very difficult to implement activities provided for in the third year work plan. When the project finished in July of 2008, a little over half ($6.8 million) of the original life of project amount ($11,996,369) had been spent.

Even had the project played out in terms of anticipated time frame and funding, there was considerable doubt among those interviewed regarding the adequacy of the project time frame and budget. In the words of two interviewees:

> *It's just what they had; I don't think there was any real sense of the scale of these changes or what it takes to do them; there was no relationship of the design to expected outcomes.*

> *From the very early days, we said to USAID we can achieve the objectives as written but not the goals. It will take longer. We knew that this was a drastic change and that true institutionalization wouldn't happen in four to five years.*

Effectiveness in building in sustainability
The reductions both in time and funding had major implications for sustainability. The ERCs were refurbished. However, training activities (including planned cascade training to community boards, school directors, and teachers) were cut mid-stream. Also stopped mid-stream was support for assisting schools to effectively apply formula funding and assistance to the Ministry of Education in putting in place implementing regulations for decentralization (which ended up being done parallel to other project activities rather than preceding them).

In addition, as was pointed out by several individuals interviewed for this case study, provisions for building in sustainability were not included in the RFA. EQUIP2 staff interviewed indicated that they tried to take steps to ensure sustainability of the activities they engaged in under the project. However, the early

termination of the project did not make it possible to make significant progress in this area.

Key outcomes

It is difficult to report on outcomes given that GEDA finished quite abruptly and EQUIP2 did not prepare a final report. The information that follows is assembled from interviews, and quarterly and semi-annual reports.

- Thirty-five ERCs were refurbished with apparently good results; these well-constructed and attractive renovations were seen as a shot in the arm for educators at the regional level.
- Training was carried out in school finance and budgeting, as well as strategic planning for ERCs and in project management for Ministry of Education personnel.
- Manuals based on training provided were produced covering topics such as school finance and budgeting, school accounting, communication in schools, and school management and strategic planning for ERC heads and schools.
- Training was initiated, through ERC staff trained through GEDA, to support boards of trustees and new school directors in understanding their roles and responsibilities.
- Several handbooks on school boards, school management, and ideas for running meetings, as well as a piece on how ERC personnel might serve as consultants were completed.
- A manual for strategic planning for ERCs was developed, with data on 32 ERCs, illustrating the commonalities of missions and the variability of strategies, depending on resources, community involvement, and location.
- Three evaluation reports were completed illustrating the range of stakeholders for ERCs, and the effectiveness of the training of school boards, school directors, and ERC economic officers.

New USAID/Georgia project focusing on decentralization and improving management

Following the termination of GEDA, USAID/Georgia issued an RFA for a project designed to "help the GOG decentralize education, improve management, and create a national accreditation system" (USAID/Georgia). The contract was awarded to Chemonics. Interviews with individuals familiar with the Chemonics project suggest, due in large part to the design of the project, that an opportunity has been missed to use the materials developed and the training experience under GEDA in project implementation under the Chemonics contract.

4. Factors, within and outside of the control of USAID and GEDA, that favored Associate Award accomplishments and factors that served as deterrents

As part of the EQUIP2 lessons learned exercise interviewees were asked to reflect on elements of EQUIP2's portion of GEDA that were successful. They were also asked to reflect on challenges. The following are taken from a longer list of reflections provided by the eight individuals interviewed.

Factors that were seen as favorable
- An insightful USAID two-phase design
- Refurbished and visible ERCs as a base to build on, a recognition that the central government was supporting education in the regions and pride in the facilities
- Good quality training, a sense that people in the regions were being supported
- A collegial relationship with MOE staff
- ERC heads were treated with respect, as professionals
- The Minister of Education was committed and well connected
- A capable Chief of Party and qualified project staff
- Strong AED home office project support, including valuable support from AED home office senior management

Challenges
- Difficult political context
- Lack of time/flexibility to understand that GEDA was supposed to be building capacity
- Lack of resources from the MOE for ERC staff to visit schools and for school staff to visit the ERCs to receive training
- Young and inexperienced MOE staff
- Lack of commitment to/understanding of decentralization among MOE staff
- Lack of accountability within the MOE
- Instability/rapid turnover among MOE staff
- Limitations in capacity/motivation of ERC staff
- Capacity building was not sustained
- Declining support for education within USAID/Georgia at the time
- Miscommunication between the client and contractor with regards to financial obligations
- A new ATOP to USAID and the education sector, which presented a difficult situation in managing and working with the project
- GEDA was constantly underfunded
- Lack of continuity between GEDA and follow-on project managed by Chemonics
- Difficulties with the RTI subcontract

5. *Monitoring and evaluation*

M&E strategy

In July of 2007 EQUIP2 presented a thoughtfully designed monitoring and evaluation plan to USAID/Georgia. The plan indicates the intention of carrying out both formative and impact assessments "to provide feedback on the impact of new organizational structures. Once they are operational, GEDA will implement a continuous process of low-intensive qualitative (case studies) data gathering to gain insight into how the system is working with schools and the MES. The nature of these assessments will be modest and low visibility to create a positive atmosphere of program adjustment and continuous improvement rather than judgment"

The M&E plan also indicates that GEDA will "measure institutional capacity and performance by establishing useful measures of the institutional capacity and performance as a measure of the effect of training, technical assistance, and policy change."

The plan also provides for policy research: "In addition to specific performance measures and activity tracking, the GEDA project will focus on a select number of key policy research questions. The short time frame of the GEDA project may limit the nature of policy research studies. Sample policy research would include: To what extent do ERCs effectively strengthen education quality, in terms of: autonomous school management and governance (BOTs); quality assurance; MES priorities; and school priorities? Which aspects of ERC activities, management, and support should be continued, modified, or discontinued? To what extent do ERCs and BOTs reduce corruption and improve public confidence in the education system?"

The M&E plan also provides a series of operating principles, listed below.

GEDA M&E Operating Principles

1. In the GEDA project, USAID is intervening at two strategic leverage points in the education system, both centrally and regionally. GEDA is intended to achieve system-wide impact by addressing critical structural constraints in terms of support services, resources, and incentives. The focus is on capacity building, but capacity within an appropriate functioning system.
2. While the IR 3.4.3 is improved school quality, the impact chain from GEDA activities to changes in school management and instructional quality is at best indirect and will take a period of time to become manifest.
3. The three-year project timeframe limits the utility of using system status measures (completion, enrollment, learning outcomes) as changes at this level are relatively slow.

4. The IR 3.4.4 addresses results in terms of support services, which is the main focus of the GEDA project. The measures can be relatively straightforward—establishment of the support services with trained personnel, or the capacity installed.

5. Ideally, the selection of indicators of project progress will be closely aligned to GEDA's activities, and reflect both USAID reporting and MES management needs.

6. A project choice will be between traditional measures of results in education quality and services—where it will be difficult to show results in the project period—and on the system conditions that will institutionalize and strengthen the process. Capacity, sustainability, formative evaluation, and performance measures it may be useful to track the degree to which the reforms and capacity are institutionalized. While these measures may not be useful for USAID reporting purposes, they can provide useful information to both USAID and the MES about the progress and initial impact of the education reforms.

7. The PMP measures for GEDA should be useful measures that meet the key criteria that the cost and management effort needed to gather the information is justified by the value of the data. Some data will be relatively low cost to collect, whereas others will be higher cost.

M&E indicators

Based on the preceding, the M&E plan presents a set of indicators that are listed below.

Activity level indicators
- Number of ERCs rehabilitated and equipped
- ERC operational manuals developed.
- Number of ERC personnel trained
- Number of Parent-Teacher Association or similar 'school' governance structures supported
- Number of teachers/educators trained with USG support
- Number of key Ministry personnel trained.
- Number of administrators and officials trained.

Output-level indicators
- Number of ERCs functioning with trained staff.
- Effective EMIS in place and functioning at the ERCs and key Ministerial offices (e.g., finance, HRM, programs).
- Number of sector assessments conducted by the USG

Policy/institutional sustainability indicators
- Number and percent of general education schools served by ERCs at a minimum standard level.
- GEDA contributions to support education system/policy reform.

Due to the early termination of GEDA a year following the presentation of the M&E plan it was not possible to carry out the M&E plan as envisioned. All that was possible was to obtain output indicators based on such items as number of ERCs refurbished, number of ERC and MOE staff trained in specific areas, plus some data collected to assess the impact of the training provided by representatives of boards of trustees.

Views of the M&E plan from the perspective of those interviewed for this Associate Award review

When asked what they thought were the most useful indicators in the M&E plan, individuals interviewed thought that the indicators of policy and institutional change were the most valuable. Also highlighted was an evaluation done focusing on the impact of training provided to boards of trustees. When asked what they thought were the least useful, the response was the standard OP indicators (e.g., the majority of the activity and output indicators).

When asked how the M&E plan was used, one interviewee indicated that the systems and policy indicators (also known as the Institutional Rubric) was beginning to be used with selected people in the MOE to think about where they were and what the next challenge was. Another individual interviewed indicated that the report on the impact of training of boards of trustees was used to report to the boards of trustees and share information with ERC personnel.

When asked in retrospect what they would have done differently, one person interviewed stated that the project had the indicators that were needed; that the project was about to institute institutional development indicators using a rubric for institutional change but was unable to because the project finished early.

6. Reflecting on the Georgia EQUIP2 GEDA experience in terms of what can be useful for other USAID projects that focus on decentralization or have a decentralization component

What worked
- The ERCs refurbished and built a visible base, a recognition that the central government was supporting education in the regions
- Training for ERC staff that appears to be relevant and of good quality
- The preparation of manuals, to be used in further training
- The COP and key technical advisors qualified and able to establish a collegial relationship with MOE staff
- The first Minister of Education committed and well connected

- Strong AED home office project support, including valuable support from AED home office senior management

What did not work
- An overly ambitious and unrealistic project design not grounded in Georgia reality
- Limited time and funds to achieve project objectives: the project was terminated at the end of three years having expended approximately 60 percent of anticipated life of project funding
- The project operated in a very difficult political context
- GEDA staff assigned to work with young and inexperienced MOE staff who turned over frequently
- Limitations in the capacity/motivation of ERC staff
- Capacity building cut off mid-stream when the project was terminated
- Declining support for education within USAID/Georgia at the time
- Miscommunication between the client and contractor with regards to financial obligations.
- New AOTR to USAID and the education sector, which presented a difficult situation in managing and working with the project
- Funds unavailable for ERC staff, trained under the project, to visit schools to provide cascade training and funds not available to bring school staff to the ERCs for training
- Limited continuity between GEDA and follow-on project managed by Chemonics
- Inability of the subcontractor (RTI) to assign qualified/committed long-term technical assistance to oversee GEDA activities in the eastern region

C. EQUIP2 MALI: REGIONAL ACTION PLAN DECISION MAKING PROGRAM (RAP/DM)

Time frame: August 20, 2004–June 30, 2009

Funding level: $4,999,239 reduced to $4,028,843 in 2006 with funds reinstated finishing at $4,450,000.

The information from this EQUIP2 Associate Award review is drawn from interviews with seven individuals closely associated with the RAP/DM Associate Award, including USAID/Mali staff, EQUIP2 staff both in Mali and in AED and EDC in Washington, DC. Along with the other EQUIP2 Associate Award reviews, this review provides the basis (along with insights from state-of-the-art research on education decentralization) for the lessons learned, strategies, and insights that form the focus of Section II of this report.

This Associate Award review is divided into six sections: (1) Mali context, (2) RAP/DM design, (3) RAP/DM implementation, (4) RAP/DM successes and challenges (as seen by the seven persons interviewed), (5) RAP/DM monitoring and evaluation. The last section (6) reflects on the Mali RAP/DM experience in terms of what can be useful for USAID education officers responsible designing, overseeing the implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation of USAID projects that focus on decentralization or have a decentralization component. It is divided into four subsections: what worked, what did not work, interesting strategies, and valuable insights.

An attempt is made to write this Associate Award review in 'story' form (e.g., what was the context and how did it influence the design, what were the key aspects of the design that influenced implementation, what was learned in terms of successes and challenges, and what can be learned from monitoring and evaluation).

1. Mali context

National and education context
Mali, located in West Africa, is among the 25 poorest countries in the world, ranking 178 out of 182 countries according to the UNDP's 2009 Human Development Index placing it in the Low Human Development category. Two thirds (65 percent) of Mali's land area is desert or semi-desert, distribution of income is highly unequal and some 80 percent of the labor force is engaged in farming and fishing. Nearly three-quarters (73.8 percent) of Mali's population is illiterate (UNDP, 2007). Mali is heavily dependent on foreign aid and vulnerable

to fluctuations in world prices for gold and cotton, its main exports (CIA World Factbook).

Mali spends nearly 4 percent of its GNP (3.8 percent in 2008) on education. Mali's primary Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) has almost tripled over the last 27 years, from 26.5 percent in 1990 to 77.6 percent in 2007. However, a little over half (56.8 percent, World Bank, 2009) of the students that enter primary school complete primary school, and inefficiencies in terms of high repetition rates and poor quality of education leave the majority of Malians without the basic skills they need to find employment.

Education access and retention rates vary widely by region. Because access to public schooling tends to favor urban areas and cannot meet popular demand, Mali is witnessing a significant growth in the number of private, community-managed, and Islamic schools (*midirsas*). The latter make up approximately 57 percent of Malian primary schools and serve 38 percent of the student population.

In 2006, Mali was endorsed as a focal country of the Fast Track Initiative (FTI), a global partnership that supports the Education for All goal to attain universal primary education by 2015.

Education decentralization context at the time of RAP/DM design
Mali's education decentralization has been carried out within the context of a constitution passed in 1990 that provides for the devolution to local governments of funding for the social sectors and authority to spend this funding. It has also provided for the deconcentration of government ministry authorities to decentralized entities at the regional and commune level. Although some progress has been in devolving funding and authorities to regional and commune levels and in deconcentrating authorities to Ministry of Education regional and sub-regional entities, the application of decentralization at the time RAP/DM was designed had lost a good bit of its early momentum.

In 1999 the government of Mali adopted a ten-year plan, the *Programme Décennal pour le Développement de l'Education* (PRODEC), to guide Mali's education sector reform. Through PRODEC, the MOE sought to deconcentrate decision making, localize teacher training and professional development, and make communities more fiscally responsible for education. To promote deconcentration the MOE established two decentralized structures for decision making: the regional Directorates of Education (AEs) and pedagogical centers (CAPs). The AEs were created for a regional coordination role that is to be in collaboration with local governments. However, the organizational relationships between the central ministry and the AEs, between the AEs and the CAPs, and between the CAPs and the schools have not been clear. Decree No. 02-313/P-RM dated June 4, 2004,

gave communes the responsibility for planning education needs, managing primary schools, constructing infrastructure, and recruiting teachers. However, the Ministry of Education has actively engaged in its own internal decentralization that has run parallel to and been weakly integrated with the devolution process aimed at empowering communes.

Mali has maintained a highly centralized expenditure structure, and the vision that state resources would be transferred to communes has yet to be realized. Neither the Ministry of Finance nor the Ministry of Education has demonstrated strong commitment to transferring education resources away from the central level, either to decentralized education services or to the communes. Teacher recruitment has been another area where the responsibility legally delegated to the communes has not been accompanied by the transfer of financial resources. Commune-level efforts to increase access to education have remained hindered by the fact that they continue to rely heavily on the Ministry of Education for the staffing of schools.

A further challenge is that many within the Ministry of Education, including those held accountable for ensuring system-level progress in increasing access to basic education, express skepticism as to the communes' capacity to develop effective plans to address education needs.

There is a pressing need to ensure that the Ministry of Education—especially the deconcentrated services of the AEs and CAPs—has the capacity to effectively assume the role of 'technical advisor' to the communes, and that Ministry of Education planning and budgeting takes into account the communes' bottom-up expressed needs and priorities. There is similarly a need to demonstrate that commune-level planning is compatible with the priorities of the Ministry of Education and with Mali's national objectives for the education sector.

There is no clear link between school-level planning, commune-level planning, and the planning conducted by the CAPs, AEs, and national services of the Ministry of Education. As a result, commune development plans frequently include overly ambitious budgets and exorbitant costs compared to their available level of resources.

The MOE is in a transition phase in improving its planning tools and principles. Actions plans are developed in isolation of budgetary planning and without an analysis of needs based on education statistics, making the planning process a theoretical exercise with no tie to the availability of financial resources.

Other donor and USAID partner involvement in educational decentralization
A number of other education donors, many of whom have moved toward providing direct budgetary support through a sector investment program (PISE),

directly or indirectly supported education decentralization in Mali while RAP/ DM was being implemented. They included: France, which was assisting the MOE to update EMIS, its education management information system; CIDA which decentralized a portion of its money toward the Northern regions (Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal); and the European Union (EU) which was providing financial training to communal accountants to allow them to better manage public funds allocated to communes under decentralization.

Two other USAID/Mali supported education programs that directly or indirectly supported decentralization during the period that RAP/DM was being carried out were: the Support to the Quality and Equity of Education (AQEE) Program, a $15 million, five-year contract (August 2003–July 2008) awarded to World Education in partnership with seven local NGOs; and a $12 million five-year (2003–2008) contract awarded to Management Systems International (MSI) to promote decentralized governance in Mali (PGP). AQEE's goals were to (1) improve the quality of instruction in Malian classrooms by supporting the creation of school-based teacher Communities of Learning (CAMs), (2) provide technical assistance to the Ministry of Education in developing a competency-based curriculum, and (3) increase community participation in school management. The major focus of PGP activities was on supporting communes in conducting participatory diagnostics that lead to the development of commune-level action plans. School Management Committees and Parent Associations participated in this process to ensure that commune action plans addressed local education needs.

2. Design of the Regional Action Plan Decentralization Management (RAP/DM) project

Design context and process
USAID/Mali prepared the RFA for RAP/DM in 2003 in close collaboration with a close-knit team of five senior level personnel at the Ministry of Education (the head of planning, the head of curriculum, the admin/finance head, the head of statistics, and the head of decentralization) who were deeply committed to decentralization. The initial focus of decentralization support was at the level of the recently created regional offices, the AEs.

In 2004 AED was asked by USAID/Mali to come to Mali for two weeks to finalize the design in close collaboration with USAID and the MOE. An early situational analysis indicated the need to focus also on the sub-regional levels, the CAPs. This was accepted by USAID. Though the EQUIP2 Cooperative Agreement for RAP/ DM was signed with AED as the prime, the technical lead for implementation was vested with EDC, one of AED's partners under EQUIP2.

Objectives/purposes as stated in the RFA

USAID/Mali's education strategic objective at the time RAP/DM was designed was "The Quality of Basic Education for Boys and Girls Improved." RAP/DM was designed to support USAID/Mali's Intermediate Result (IR) 4, under this strategic objective: "Improved AE Capacity to Plan, Manage, Implement and Assess the Quality Improvement Agenda."

The stated purpose of RAP/DM, as presented in the RFA, was to "Provide the decentralized structures of the ministry of education at the regional level (AEs or *Académies d'Enseignement*–Regional Education Offices) with the technical expertise, particularly in data analysis and financial accounting, to analyze and to use education data for sound activity planning and resource allocation decisions in the education sector."

The RFA also stated that assistance to be provided under RAP/DM was to consist of leading the creation of a Regional Education Development Fund (REDF) accessible to the AEs, the money for which will be channeled by USAID/Mali through the Ministry of Finance—the normal budget process of the government of Mali (GRM). REDF funds were to be channeled to the AEs that prepare the best plans to implement activities focused on primary education improvement.

Assumptions underlying RAP/DM design

The RAPD/DM RFA does not include any assumptions. The USAID COTR interviewed as part of this EQUIP2 Associate Award review was present when RAP/DM was designed. When asked what he thought the assumptions were, he identified three: (1) that the MOE wanted to improve its capacity, (2) that there was interest on the part of MOE staff in receiving training, and (3) that key actors would stay.

Other guidance provided in the RFA

The RFA provided the following as specific guidance to the implementer:

- The recipient will work in close partnership with the Ministry of Education (MOE) at the central level—the Office of Planning and Statistics (or *Cellule de Planification et Statistiques*—CPS) and the Management for Results Team within CPS (or *Equipe Gestion Axé sur les Resultats*—Equipe GAR), as well as with the AEs.
- USAID Mali has a deep commitment to synergy and collaboration. There will be opportunities and expectations that the Recipient will collaborate and coordinate with USAID's implementing partners of other activities (outside of education) to ensure that their information and quality improvement issues are taken into account and supported by the Recipient to the degree possible.

- In addition it is expected that to achieve results the Recipient will collaborate with other technical/financial partners (PTF) that are working under the education Strategic Objective.

Illustrative activities
The RFA lists the following as illustrative activities that EQUIP2 should become involved in:

- Set up adequate education planning, monitoring, and financial management systems in each of the 15 AEs of the country.
- Reinforce the MOE's committment to decentralization of its functions, particular in the area of planning and implementing primary education improvement at the regional and local level.
- Help AEs strengthen their capacity to plan and effectively implement, as well as monitor and evaluate, their activities and manage their funds.
- Take the steps necessary to improve the performance of the decentralized units of the MOE, particularly the directors of AEs, their education planners, and the regional accountants in the use of EMIS data analysis in decision making.
- Help develop sound regional education action plans and related budgets.
- Lead and coordinate the development of a Regional Education Development Fund (REDF) to support the implementation of the AEs' regional action plans.

Illustrative indicators
The RFA also provides a list of illustrative indicators and targets all centered on the AEs. All are stated in numerical form (for example: 100 percent of AEs report using data in their decision making five times in the past 12 months; 100 percent of AEs using statistical analysis in their regional action planning; 95 percent of AEs monitoring progress toward achieving action plan; 85 percent of AEs revising regional action plans).

Time frame and funding
RAP/DM was designed as a three-year project with two option years to extend the project up to five years. The initial funding level was $4,999,239. When USAID staff were asked why they selected this time frame and funding, the response was that USAID projects usually vary between three and five years in length. Funding levels were based in large part on the funding USAID anticipated that it would have over the five-year planning period.

Provisions for sustainability
There was no mention in the RAP/DM RFA of sustainability or provisions to be made to ensure sustainability.

3. RAP/DM implementation

Design choices that guided implementation
The RAP/DM RFA, as indicated above, included several design choices that guided implementation.

1. The recipient would work in close partnership with the Ministry of Education (MOE) at the central level—the Office of Planning and Statistics (or *Cellule de Planification et Statistiques*—CPS) and the Management for Results Team within CPS (or *Equippe Gestion Axé sur les Resultats—Equippe GAR*), as well as with the AEs.
2. The recipient would collaborate and coordinate with USAID's implementing partners of other activities (outside of education) to ensure that their information and quality improvement issues are taken into account and supported by the recipient to the degree possible.
3. The recipient would collaborate with other technical/financial partners (PTF) that are working under the education Strategic Objective.
4. There was interest on the part of MOE staff in receiving training.
5. The MOE wanted to improve its capacity to decentralize.
6. Key actors would stay.

As will be seen in the discussion that follows, the first four design choices were borne out during implementation. However, design choices 5 and 6 were not borne out. Exactly what happened and how the EQUIP2 Chief of Party responded to the fact that these two design choices were not borne out is described in the following section.

Implementation overview
Three events took place during the first year of project implementation that was to have an impact on EQUIP2's ability to implement RAP/DM as envisioned in the RFA. The first was that soon after the RAP/DM Cooperative Agreement was signed, key actors were either re-assigned to other roles or left the Ministry, leaving USAID/Mali and EQUIP2 with the challenge of working with and obtaining the buy-in of a new set of actors.

The second event that took place was a cut in USAID/Mali's education budget the first year of the project, which forced USAID to cut the budgets of all of its education partners. In the case of RAP/DM, the REDF fund—the vehicle for implementing the action plans to be developed by the AEs and CAPs—was eliminated. Technical assistance was also cut. Though some of the funds were restored in future years, RAP/DM never achieved the level of technical assistance envisioned and the REDF fund, which was central to giving the AEs funds to support improvement of education at the local level, was not reinstated.

The third was that within the first year the USAID education team leader who played a lead role in designing RAP/DM was transferred. She was replaced with a new USDH education team leader who played an active role in overseeing RAP/DM project implementation and in the subsequent design of the RAP/DM follow on, EDP.

In January of 2006 the RAP/DM Associate Award was amended, which cut life of project funding, including the REDF fund.

During the first year of implementation, EQUIP2, following USAID/Mali's guidance, established a very close working relationship with key MOE staff by, among others, embedding its office in the Ministry of Education and indicating that it was responsive to just-in-time requests for assistance. This soon led to requests on the part of MOE staff, including the Minister of Education, for EQUIP2 staff for assistance in addressing challenges at the central level that, though related to decentralization in many cases, were not within the specific scope of the RAP/DM Cooperative Agreement. In essence, this became a new and added thrust to RAP/DM implementation.

Seeing that the environment within the MOE was not ripe for decentralization, the RAP/DM Chief of Party adopted an implementation strategy that led MOE staff to engage in decentralization/deconcentration activities without billing them as such. Instead, the RAP/DM focus became assisting the MOE to meet EFA targets. A number of the activities that the COP and his project staff engaged in with USAID's consent were ostensibly focused on EFA, while concurrently, and in a low-key fashion, setting the base for decentralization/deconcentration.

A number of the just-in-time activities carried out under RAP/DM made use of modeling and management tools such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), in keeping with the overall project purpose to "provide…. technical expertise, particularly in data analysis and financial accounting, to analyze and to use education data for sound activity planning and resource allocation decisions in the education sector." An important focus of these activities centered around engaging the MOE at the central level and AE staff at the regional level in analyzing and addressing the needs of schools and student populations that were currently marginalized as a result of the centralized management of Mali's education system. RAP-DM also introduced the use of information technology for wider information-sharing between Ministry structures, and also between the Ministry and other education stakeholders.

During implementation, in addition to adopting the guiding principles set out in the RFA, RAP/DM (with USAID's approval) added a guiding principle: to promote sustainability by contributing to education sector policy development and

the creation of systems that will enable Mali to continue progress toward long-term education goals even after the close-out of specific programs.

A constant tension between EQUIP2 and USAID/Mali throughout project implementation was that the just-in-time activities, while greatly appreciated in that they responded to valid MOE and donor needs, were seen by USAID/ Mali education staff as veering project implementation away from the activities, indicators, and numerical targets set out in the Cooperative Agreement.

Adequacy of time frame and budget
From interviews carried out for this study with key USAID and EQUIP2 staff, there was consensus that the nearly five-year time frame for RAP/DM was sufficient, given the project's objectives. Having a significant cut in funding the second year of the project, resulting in eliminating the REDF and reducing technical assistance, was seen as inconvenient; however, it was not seen as compromising the ability of the project to carry out its objectives and meet its principal targets. More time was spent working at the national level than originally anticipated; however, this did not seem to be at the expense of activities carried out at the regional and sub-regional level. The Chief of Party pointed out that one technical assistance activity that they were forced to cut was assisting in developing job descriptions for the AE and CAP staff. However, he did not see this as a problem given that this was a function of the Ministry of Civil Service.

The limitations in funding were, in fact seen by the EDC EQUIP2 backstop as an asset rather than a liability. In her words: "If we had been too flush we wouldn't have had to be so creative in finding ways to do things within the MOE. We were able to leverage additional resources through sector budget support. The project was helping the MOE know how to respond to other donor funding, providing the MOE with monetary and management tools."

Effectiveness in building sustainability
USAID interviewees indicated that, in their opinion, sustainability was not achieved, thus the reason in part for a follow-on project, the Education Decentralization Program (EDP) that begin in 2009 and is also being implemented under EQUIP2. One EQUIP2 staff person interviewed commented that sustainability was achieved, in as much as MOE staff viewed the changes that took place under RAP/DM as their own. The other EQUIP2 staff member interviewed indicated that sustainability was achieved in as much as planning tools were incorporated into the MOE planning process. Financial analysis tools developed with RAP/DM assistance were being used for budget support, and as a result of the just-in-time activities the MOE put forth a decree for single teacher schools, the first decree of this nature.

Key outcomes

The RAP/DM final report lists the following as key project outcomes.

- Eight thousand person-days of training were provided to CAP, AE and Central Ministry staff in: budgeting, action plan preparation, program monitoring, use of statistical data for decision making, sector monitoring, the decentralization process, inventory management, use of ICT, Internet, and computer security, Geographic Information Systems, School Mapping, tools for enhancing equity in education access, and others.

- Follow-up to training was provided in the field by members of the RAP-DM extended team in all targeted regions and CAPs.

- RAP/DM made use of several innovative planning tools to help education planners and decision makers understand whether current strategies for expanding access and improving equity were actually delivering results in a way that would lead to Education For All (EFA).

- A constant focus on EFA and existing education disparities was a complementary strategy to cast decentralization as a tool for leading to universal access to quality schooling. Rural education models endorsed by the Ministry were introduced to promote equitable delivery methods of education to address rural disparities. The planning tools helped show how centralized management often works at cross purposes with providing schooling for marginalized populations.

- Rapid studies were conducted to analyze and provide information for decision making in a number of critical areas (i.e., community teacher subsidy, bottlenecks in accessing funding for action plan activities, implementation of key sector reporting and planning activities), demonstrating that commonly held perceptions were in need of statistical validation to ensure informed decision making.

- Communication systems within the MOE were improved through increased use of technology (email, Skype, a limited access cell phone network, etc.), and with clients of the Ministry (Web site for the annual exam results).

- The project captured the multidisciplinary nature of education planning and management in its design by setting up a network of technical correspondents in three key MOE directorates (CPS, DAF, and the CADDE), which came together on all RAP-DM training and programming.

- RAP-DM helped the Ministry of Education accelerate the completion of its national action plan process that integrates AE, CAP, and commune plans into one national plan for providing inputs for improving schools (including infrastructure improvements, textbooks and didactic materials, new teachers, teacher training, etc.).

- Regional and sub-regional Action Plan implementation increased, and in 2007, budget execution reached 60 percent, up from 43 percent the previous year.

This was a major improvement on previous years when very few funds were dispersed because the action plan was completed too far into the year to access national budget funds.

- The use of GIS was piloted to map schools and population in 12 CAPs and expanded in 2008–2009 to an additional group of 8 CAPs. The GIS mapping results underscored the wide disparities in equity and access to schooling in remote rural villages, and led to the MOE decision to adopt an innovative policy on expanding access to rural schools, using the single-teacher-school model.

4. Factors, within and outside of the control of USAID and RAP/DM, that favored project accomplishments and factors that served as deterrents

As part of the EQUIP2 lessons learned exercise, interviewees were asked to reflect on elements of RAP/DM that were successful. They were also asked to reflect on challenges. The following are taken from a longer list of reflections provided by the seven individuals interviewed.

Factors that were seen as favorable
- In keeping with the initial design, decentralization was seen as a business for everyone. RAP/DM staff related to the CAD, financial directorate, the planning office, and the primary education directorates equally.
- By helping the MOE to use statistical data as a basis for decision-making, MOE staff were led to taking decisions that favored deconcentration/decentralization that they might not ordinarily have taken.
- Key was taking a problem solving approach, open to people's concerns; this resulted in more responsiveness from regions and sub-regions.
- RAP/DM introduced in the MOE a culture based on results rather than activities as a means of gauging outcomes. Among others, RAP/DM instituted a results-based training system with the contents of training based on problems identified by the trainees
- RAP/DM incorporated individuals from a variety of MOE offices in the training provided under the project and made sure they continued operating as a cross-sectoral team in follow-up training provided at the next level.
- RAP/DM saw to it that technical staff responsible for providing the training accompanied the cross-sectoral teams when they provided their initial follow-up training to ensure that the training was being provided adequately and, if not, assist the trainers to fine-tune their training activities.
- The project used geo-referencing to do exercises and simulations. These exercises and simulations, among others, helped regional planners see how many students they would lose to the education system if they insisted on

consolidated schools in rural areas in which students would have to walk long distances to be able to attend the schools.

- It was valuable to be nimble and responsive to openings to leverage more systemic change; as a result some deep systemic changes occurred.
- There were many opportunities and openings to enter into the bigger policy issues. One example was rural education where RAP/DM staff succeeded in persuading senior MOE staff that there is not just one formula for delivering education in rural areas.
- AED, the prime, and EDC, the technical lead, worked well together in resolving issues.
- The AED home office project director was supportive and there was substantial interest from AED senior home staff in what the project was doing.

Challenges

- **As perceived by USAID/Mali staff interviewed**: (1) USAID saw success stories. However, at the end of the day USAID was not seeing the tangible results that it was looking for; (2) the just-in-time activities at times serve as a deterrent from meeting deadlines, achieving results; (3) the pattern of spending under RAP/DM was low, their monthly burn rate was too low. This, turn, created a pipeline issue; (4) the MOE's leadership role was an issue. USAID wanted the MOE to step in and do the coordination between programs, to avoid duplication and to be more effective; this was not happening as USAID would have liked. (5) There were limitations in political will to do decentralization; (6) sometimes project implementation was overcome by events; (6) the MOE was playing the donors against donors vis à vis per diems; (7) at times it was difficult having several donors operating in the same arena; (8) USAID was short staffed, the education office in USAID/Mali at times lacked front office support, USAID/Mali did not have an acquisitions officer or a legal advisor, both of which made for delays in a lot of areas; (9) EDC was doing reporting thematically, whereas USAID wanted the reporting to be done about each activity in the work plan.
- **As perceived by RAP/DM along with AED and EDC home office staff interviewed**: (1) There was an ongoing tension between traditional projects and this one which had a heavy emphasis on technical assistance to the MOE; this did not allow RAP/DM to control all the strings in terms of making the activities work; (2) there were challenges in maintaining momentum in the delivery of project programming in the face of uncertainty in funding, which went down and rose during the project, depending on the amount of education funding USAID/Malawi received every year from USAID/Washington; (3) RAP/DM was defeated in getting larger amounts of funds transferred to local government because the central MOE was too busy on acquisitions (buying texts), which the MOE continued to prefer doing centrally; (4) the

project would have liked to see more movement on decentralization of school construction; (5) MOE staff turnover was significant and unpredictable. There was a major changeover in CAPS directors mid-stream when all CAPS directors positions had to be re-competed; (6) a number MOE staff in the center did not want to let go; they developed the action planning exercise but they still did their visit to select construction projects, by the time these projects got approved, it was too late in the year to start them at the local level; (7) USAID was interested in having RAP/DM implement a lot of activities, which were relatively simple to manage: you are training people, delivering services. On the other hand if the GOM was to proceed with decentralization process, decisions needed to be made based on data to address constraints; (8) a sense that, because this was a small project in terms of funding, it never received the recognition from USAID that it should have.

5. *Monitoring & Evaluation*

Highlights of the RAP/DM Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP)
In September of 2006, eight months following the modification to RAP/DM that cut RAP/DM funds while expanding the focus of RAP/DM efforts to work also at the national level, EQUIP2 and USAID/Mali agreed on a new monitoring and evaluation plan as included in its Performance Monitoring Report.

As stated in the PMP, the following assumptions were considered critical to meeting proposed PMP targets:

1. Decentralization will continue to evolve as it has over the past five years (the Government of Mali and the Ministry of Education, in particular, will support the on-going transfer of competencies and resources with support from RAP/DM).
2. The Ministry of Education will be able to provide sufficient AE staff as well as Regional Technical Correspondents (CTRs) and ensure that they will have sufficient time to fulfil the functions of a CTR while fulfilling their routine activities.
3. Donors will all continue to contribute at the same rate that they are now contributing to MOE goals as well as continuing to support the same type of assistance they are offering.

The PMP also includes three elements that the author considered key for carrying out of the monitoring and evaluation plan:

• Indicators are priorities for the MOE as well as for RAP/DM and USAID.

- The CTRs are key players in sustaining new capacity development as well as monitoring progress toward program objectives.
- The RAP-DM program approach to training allows for on-going monitoring and is responsive to needs.

The PMP indicators, listed below, reflect the expansion of RAP/DM's scope to the national level and are different from the illustrative indicators included in the RFA. Data collection for the indicators was quite straightforward: required information was collected from existing data sources or when CTRs visited AEs and CAPs. As stated in the RAP/DM final report, targets established for most indicators were met.

Intermediate result:
Improved regional (AE) and sub-regional (CAP) capacity to plan, manage, implement, and assess the ten-year education reform program of the Ministry of Education Percentage of education sector reform activity budget that is allocated for decentralized implementation

Sub-intermediate results
1. Education planning is improved through capacity building at national, regional (AE) and sub regional (CAP) levels
   – Number of national, regional, and sub-regional administrators trained
   – Percentage of Regional Action Plans meeting quality standards
   – Level of budget execution of the Regional Action Plans
2. The decentralization process is enhanced through increased demand for relevant services by vulnerable populations excluded or underserved by Mali's education system
   – Number of CAPs having completed the EFA rural education access analysis
   – MOE strategies increasingly take into account education demand derived from vulnerable populations underserved by previous strategies

Process level
1. Education planning is improved through capacity building at the national, regional, and district levels
   – Number of regional and sub-regional MOE offices meeting minimum financial management requirements in the area of separation of responsibilities (AE)
   – Number of regional and sub-regional MOE offices meeting minimum financial management requirements in the area of separation of responsibilities (CAP)
   – Number of AE's submitting quarterly technical and financial reports in accordance with established norms

2. The decentralization process is enhanced through increased demand for relevant services by vulnerable populations excluded or underserved by Mali's education system
   – Number of CAPs geo-referenced
   – Education planners trained to use Geographic Information Systems
   – Number of regional action plans, including specific decentralization-enhancing activities
   – Number of sub-regional MOE offices (CAPs) having posted relevant statistical data in Communal Government Offices

In addition to the above, RAP/DM set up a feedback loop for its training programs for national staff, AE staff, and CAP staff, whereby via follow-up to a specific training it was possible to plan subsequent trainings. In the words of EQUIP2 COTR, Doug Lehman:

When we trained people, it was face-to-face training followed up by on-site visit to see if the person trained had been able to apply the content of the training. We would provide technical assistance; any issues not resolved went into the content of the next training. For every round of training we would lay out expected results that we negotiated with the Ministry of Education. If the training is successfully implemented, then we will be able to see some measurable change in a given organization's behavior in the next few months. For example: If in January we did training for 400 people on a new action plan template, and then by the end of February each regional MOE office would submit its action plan using the new template we would know that we had achieved our training objectives.

Views of the PMP from the perspective of those interviewed for this Associate Award review
When asked which they considered the most/least useful indicators, the EQUIP2 Chief of Party (COP) pointed out that indicators such as training of administrators were not very helpful and that the "number of decentralization enhancing decisions made by the MOE" was a rather unwieldy indicator. On the positive side, he pointed out that, with high turnover and the lack of optimal utilization of existing personnel, EQUIP2 found it much more effective to focus on good communication, and good use of statistical data for decision making.

In terms of use of the PMP data, the AOTR observed that these data were used primarily for program implementation review within USAID/Mali and for annual reporting to USAID/Washington. The EQUIP2 COP added that several of the indicators were used with the Ministry of Education. For example, percentage of action plan activities implemented was as much a Ministry of Education number as what went to USAID. In addition, the results developed for a round of training were used to design future trainings.

When asked, in hindsight, what they would have done differently regarding the PMP, interviewees provided the following responses: (1) It is not clear that the indicators told the story of the project, one would need indicators that provide more depth data on accomplishments; (2) often USAID is more interested in activities that can be totally controlled by the implementing partner whereas the successful implementation of these activities might no real positive impact on the development process.

6. Reflecting on the Mali RAP/DM experience in terms of what can be useful for other USAID projects that focus on decentralization or have a decentralization component

What worked
- By embedding technical assistance in the MOE, RAP/DM received numerous requests for assistance in annual planning, and in understanding how donor funds were being provided. RAP/DM staff was able to do quick studies, analyze data, and make policy recommendations in short order time.
- By helping the MOE to use statistical data as a basis decision making, MOE staff were led to taking decisions that favored deconcentration/decentralization that they might not ordinarily have taken.
- It was valuable to be nimble and responsive to openings to leverage more systemic change, as a result some deep systemic changes occurred. One example was rural education where RAP/DM staff succeeded in persuading senior MOE staff that there is not just one formula for delivering education in rural areas.
- EQUIP2 staff was able to develop close working relationships of trust with key MOE staff. This resulted in a number of accomplishments in terms of RAP/DM being there 'just in time' to provide valuable and timely assistance to key MOE staff.
- AED, the prime, and EDC, the technical lead, worked well together in resolving issues.
- The AED home office project director was supportive and there was substantial interest from AED senior home staff in what the project was doing.

What did not work
- There were limitations in political will to do decentralization that had not been anticipated when the project was designed.
- MOE staff turnover was significant and unpredictable. There was a major changeover in CAPS directors mid-stream when all CAPS director positions had to be re-competed.
- At times the MOE played the donors against donors vis-à-vis per diems. This created challenges for planned project activities.
- There was an ongoing tension between a traditional project where the project controlled all the strings in terms of making project activities work versus RAP/DM, which had a heavy emphasis on technical assistance to the MOE and where USAID had less control over the activities and outcomes.
- Following from the above, USAID staff viewed the just-in-time activities as useful; however, at times they were seen by USAID as a deterrent from meeting deadlines established under the PMP for achieving tangible results.

- USAID was short-staffed; for a period of time, USAID/Mali did not have a USDH in education, an acquisitions officer, or a legal advisor; the latter two made for delays in a lot of areas.
- EDC was doing reporting thematically, whereas USAID wanted the reporting to be done about each activity in the work plan.

Useful strategies
- Decentralization as a business of everyone: Instead of having technical assistance lodged within a specific structure within the Ministry of Education, RAP/DM related to the decentralization office, the financial directorate, the planning office, and the primary education directorates equally.
- Using a self-critical process to help Ministry of Education staff come to conclusions themselves as a means of promoting the cause of decentralization: In November 2006 RAP/DM held a workshop with MOE technical directors and the Minister's technical advisors. Using data from the Ministry of Education's database, RAP/DM showed participants what they had found in Malian context. Participants saw through the data that their assumptions were leading to inefficiencies, and dropouts. This in turn opened the door to opportunities for decentralization.
- Introducing a results-based culture for training: RAP/DM introduced in the MOE a culture based on results rather than activities as a means of gauging outcomes. Among others, RAP/DM instituted a results-bases training system with the contents of training based on problems identified by the trainees. Individuals from a variety of MOE offices who participated in the training provided under the project continued operating as a cross-sectoral team in follow-up training provided at the next level.
- Strategy for training follow-up that involved cross-sectoral teams trained by RAP/DM: RAP/DM saw to it that technical staff responsible for providing the training accompanied the cross-sectoral teams when they provided their initial follow-up training to ensure that the training was being provided in an adequate fashion and, if not, assist the trainers to fine-tune their training activities.

Valuable insights from interviewees

Benefits, through the EQUIP2 cooperative agreement mode, of being able to engage in a participatory design process:

This was the first time I saw that through the EQUIP mechanism that one could collaboratively put structure around the program in an open communication sense. Typically you get an RFP/RFA that has a fairly clear design already laid out where you have to speculate on the reality on the ground. In this case the RAP/DMP design

team was able to visit AEs, talk to CAPS and MOE staff to see the current reality, and incorporate this into the process of finalizing the specifics of the final design and the implementation plan. (Rudi Klauss, AED member of the design team)

The importance of placing value on regular and informal communication:

We introduced the culture of Mintzberg; a theory of organizational behavior. When you look at organizations that are successful, there are unrecognized coalitions between members of different units and different levels of hierarchy who communicate regularly and informally, and that is what makes it work. In bringing in a culture that unofficial communication is a good thing: through Internet and a closed network of cell phones we radically changed the way the MOE at central level and regional offices related to one another. (Doug Lehman, RAP/DM Chief of Party)

Opening the door to solving problems:

A standard survey approach was to ask whether you received a given correspondence from the MOE. Did you have difficulty understanding it? This was a strategy for getting someone on board and aligned. The door is open to solving the problem. If there is a problem, how can we help you? The people know that someone cares, that this is real; we got more responsiveness from regions and sub-regions. (Doug Lehman, RAP/DM Chief of Party)

Decentralization as the business of everyone:

We related to the CADDE, financial directorate, the planning office, and the primary education directorates equally. Most TA programs are lodged within a single department. We deliberately related to all structures as equals. In our approach decentralization is a business of everyone. (Doug Lehman, RAP/DM Chief of Party)

On opportunities and openings to use data to enter into the bigger policy issues:

There were many opportunities and openings to enter into the bigger policy issues. For example, there was a big equity issue around community school teachers; should they be expected to work with no MOE financial support? We did a quick study and were able to demonstrate with objective data that there were several thousand community school teachers who did not receive even a modest subsidy for their work; this hard data paved the way for the inclusion of 3,458 new community school teachers' subsidies in the 2008 national budget. This rapid analysis gave MOE staff real-time data instead of analyzing the situation on the basis of anecdotal information. (Doug Lehman, RAP/DM Chief of Party)

D. EQUIP2 MALI: EDUCATION DECENTRALIZATION PROGRAM (EDP)

Time frame: April 11, 2009–April 30, 2014

Funding level: $22,500,000

The information from this EQUIP2 Associate Award review is drawn from interviews with six individuals closely associated with EDP, including USAID staff, technical advisors, EQUIP2 staff both in Mali and in FHI 360 and EDC in Washington, DC. Along with other EQUIP2 Associate Award reviews, this review, plus insights from state-of-the-art research on education decentralization, provides the basis for the lessons learned, strategies, and insights that form the focus of Section II of this report.

This Associate Award review is divided into six sections: (1) Mali context, (2) EDP design, (3) EDP implementation, (4) EDP successes and challenges (as seen by the six persons interviewed), (5) monitoring and evaluation. The last section (6) reflects on the Mali EDP experience in terms of what can be useful for USAID education officers responsible for designing, overseeing the implementation and monitoring/ evaluation of projects that focus on decentralization or have a decentralization component. Section 6 is divided into four sub-sections: what worked, what did not work, interesting strategies, and valuable insights.

An attempt is made to write this Associate Award review in 'story' form (e.g., what was the context and how did it influence the design, what were the key aspects of the design that influenced implementation, what was learned in terms of successes and challenges, and what can be learned from monitoring and evaluation).

1. Context

Mali national and education context
Mali, located in West Africa, is among the 10 poorest countries in the world, ranking 178 out of 182 countries according to the UNDP's 2009 Human Development Index. Two-thirds (65 percent) of Mali's land area is desert or semi desert, distribution of income is highly unequal, and some 80 percent of the labor force is engaged in farming and fishing. Nearly three-quarters (73.8 percent) of Mali's population is illiterate (UNDP, 2007). Mali is heavily dependent on foreign aid and vulnerable to fluctuations in world prices for gold and cotton, its main exports (CIA World Factbook).

In education Mali spends nearly 4 percent of its GNP (3.8 percent in 2008) on education. Since 1990, Mali's primary education Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) has almost tripled, from 26.5 percent in 1990 to 77.6 percent in 2007. However, a

little over half (56.8 percent, World Bank, 2009) of the students who enter primary school complete primary school, and inefficiencies in terms of high repetition rates and poor quality of education leave the majority of Malians without the basic skills they need to find employment.

Education access and retention rates vary widely by region. Because access to public schooling tends to favor urban areas and cannot meet popular demand, Mali is witnessing a significant growth in the number of private, community-managed, and Islamic schools (*medersas*). Currently, these three categories make up approximately 57 percent of Malian primary schools and serve 38 percent of the student population.

In 2006, Mali was endorsed as a focal country of the Fast Track Initiative (FTI), a global partnership that supports the Education for All goal to attain universal primary education by 2015.

Mali education decentralization context at the time of EDP design

Education decentralization in Mali is being carried out within the context of a constitution passed in 1990 that provides for the devolution to local governments for the social sectors of funding and authority to spend this funding. It also provides for the deconcentration of government ministry authorities to decentralized entities at the regional and commune levels.

Decree No. 02-313/P-RM dated June 4, 2004, gave communes the responsibility for planning education needs, managing primary schools, constructing infrastructure, and recruiting teachers. Since then, many of the most significant challenges to expanding access and quality of basic education in Mali stem from this legal transfer of responsibilities to the communes, and the subsequent need to redefine the role of the Ministry of Education in relationship to communes. Although the Ministry of Education has actively engaged in its own internal decentralization, the process has run parallel to and been weakly integrated with the decentralization process aimed at empowering communes.

A key challenge in harmonizing these parallel decentralization processes has been referred to as 'the power of the purse.' Mali maintains a highly centralized expenditure structure, and the vision that state resources would be transferred to communes has yet to be realized. Although some communes have increased local tax revenues, these resources are inadequate to significantly expand access to education. Up until 2008, when the President of Mali issued a decree indicating that starting with the 2010 budget significant amounts of funding would be devolved to communes and other regional entities, neither the Ministry of Finance nor the Ministry of Education had demonstrated strong commitment to

transferring education resources away from the central level, either to decentralized education services or to the communes.

Prior USAID/Mali programs aimed at reinforcing education system decentralization

From 2003–2009, USAID/Mali implemented three programs aimed at reinforcing education system decentralization, through different strategies and with different target beneficiaries. They include: (1) the Support to the Quality and Equity of Education Program (AQEE), which included as one of its primary goals to increase community participation in school management; (2) the Shared Governance Program (PGP), which focused on increasing the participation of key commune-level actors in democratic governance in targeted communes, and to strengthen Mali's macro-political environment to enable effective decentralization, with a major focus on conducting participatory diagnostics that lead to the development of commune-level action plans; and (3) the Regional Action Plan Decision Making Program (RAP/DM), which provided technical assistance to Ministry of Education structures to support the administrative and financial decentralization of Mali's education system.

RAP/DM, the subject of a companion EQUIP2 Associate Award review, was a $4.45 million, five-year Cooperative Agreement (2004–2009), which provided technical expertise to promote the development and monitoring of annual education sector Action Plans and budgets at the regional and national levels. RAP/DM also facilitated financial decentralization in order to provide regional (AEs) and sub-regional (CAPs) entities created by the Ministry of Education with resources to improve the quality of basic education at the local level. A primary focus of RAP/DM was on training and other capacity-building activities that would enable Ministry of Education structures to improve their planning and institutional performance. The program used a just-in-time training technique intended to identify and resolve immediate obstacles to decentralization. Training was provided in: strategies and tools for decentralization, education planning, financial management, program monitoring, organizational development, and Internet usage. RAP/DM also promoted the design and use of resource modeling and management tools such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and engaged the MOE in analyzing and addressing the needs of schools and student populations that are currently marginalized as a result of the centralized management of Mali's education system. The program's target beneficiaries included Ministry of Education structures at the national level (CADDE, DAF, CSP), the regional level (AEs), and the sub-regional level (CAPs).

Key lessons learned through the RAP-DM program, as identified in the EDP RFA, included: the need for a more holistic, top-down bottom-up approach to education decentralization that includes a focus on the communes; the need to balance

just-in-time approaches with structured longer-term goals and objectives; and the need to promote information-based decision making, both within the Ministry of Education and by stakeholders at the school and commune levels.

2. EDP design

EDP design process

An important part of the EDP design process rested on learning from the three USAID/Mali experiences aimed at reinforcing education decentralization that are referred to above. In particular, RAP/DM—managed out of the education office—served as a key reference for the design of EDP.

The USAID/Mali USDH education team leader and the RAP/DM AOTR worked closely with the USAID/Mali democracy governance team and the Ministry of Education in designing the EDP RFA. The education team leader, who arrived in Mali in 2005 soon after RAP/DM began implementation, and the FSN, who for a portion of RAP/DM served as the AOTR, both knew the RAP/DM program well. An important input for the design of EDP was an external evaluation of USAID/Mali education programs that covered RAP-DM as well as the other two ongoing USAID/Mali-financed education programs.

Observed Natasha de Marcken (USAID education team leader):

> *From that evaluation as well as from the Mission's experience, we had learned some key lessons from RAP/DM that led us to management priorities for what we wanted to continue from RAP/DM as well as other things necessary to improve. There was a consensus on what to keep and what to improve. In EDP, we wanted to articulate more clearly the strategic objectives of the program. We wanted a results-oriented framework that would allow us to report to any audience.*

An interesting feature of the EDP design process was that USAID/Mali built in $100,000 into the EQUIP2 Associate Award to have an FHI 360 team come to Mali to work closely with USAID, the Ministry of Education and other government partners, as well as the USAID/Mali Democracy Governance team and other USAID/Mali supported education programs in preparing their proposal.

EDP purpose/objectives and approach

The purpose of EDP as stated in the RFA is "to achieve measurable improvements in expanding access and improving the quality of basic education in Mali." EDP is intended to build upon previous USAID programs that have worked to reinforce education system decentralization, but address the issue in a more comprehensive

manner aimed at building communication and collaboration between relevant stakeholders, particularly those at the CAP, commune, and school levels.

EDP has two objectives: The first is to improve the capacity of the Ministry of Education to implement decentralization. The second is to improve coordination among the Centres d'Animation Pédagogique (CAPs), the communes, and the schools.

EDP Approach as Described in the RFA

The approach is "holistic, with an emphasis on engaging stakeholders both within the Ministry of Education and among target communes in expanding access to quality basic education." Education decentralization is understood as a ladder along which information, analysis, planning, and reporting must flow both top-down and bottom-up to generate technically sound decisions. To reinforce that flow of information, "the program will support the Ministry of Education in developing stronger communications and management information systems between the centralized and decentralized services, and expand those systems to include education planning conducted at the school and commune levels. The program will have an emphasis on reinforcing the Ministry of Education's capacity to effectively implement decentralization policies, strengthening the Ministry's annual planning and budgeting processes, and promoting greater transfer of resources to decentralized services and target communes. A major goal of the program is to enable communes to play a more significant role in improving resource allocation, expanding access, and improving the quality of basic education."

EDP is structured to reinforce capacity and coordination among several ministries, key services at the national level, and decentralized services and their administrative and/or government counterparts (regional assemblies/governors, circles/prefects, communes/sub-prefects. The capacity-building component of the program is intended to be national in scope, benefiting all 15 AE and 70 CAP throughout Mali. There will also be a component of the program that is geographically focused, with the goal to improve communication and joint education assessment, planning, and monitoring among CAP-, commune-, and school-level actors in approximately 10 target CAP, 75 target communes, and 800 target schools. It is expected that this part of the program will be implemented by local Malian NGOs, and thus include a strong focus on community mobilization and engagement in education. The program will attempt to address a very specific problem that has been identified by those working to reinforce decentralization in Mali: the lack of effective coordination between the Ministry of Education, communes, and school-level actors striving to improve access to quality basic education.

The education decentralization program will be implemented in close coordination with a new governance program managed by USAID/Mali's democracy and governance team, and both programs will benefit from a Leverage Fund at ANICT that will use a Fixed Amount Reimbursement mechanism to provide resources to target communes.

Assumptions underlying the design of EDP
The EDP RFA does not list any assumptions. However, when asked what they saw as the basic assumptions, the USDH education team leader and the AOTR, both of whom took the lead in jointly designing EDP, listed six:

- Multi-sector programming would help to address the challenge of education sector decentralization more effectively than sector-specific approaches.
- The USAID education and D/G teams and their implementing partners would be able to effectively collaborate in implementing complementary programs and approaches.
- Donor coordination would remain strong.
- The MOE would play a leadership role.
- There would be good coordination among the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Territorial Administration.
- Communes are weak, their members illiterate, and that they need capacity buildings

Decisions around time frame and funding
EDP was designed to be implemented over a five-year period at a funding level of $22 million. When asked why the $22 million funding level was selected, the USAID/Mali education team leader responded as follows:

We looked at the resources we would make available for EDP in terms of past experiences, especially having to cut RAP-DM in half, and our experience working with work in decentralization at different levels. I spent time raising awareness and turning around the downward trajectory of Mali's education budget, with the result that the level of funding rose quickly. Then the challenge was the pipeline. We were not able to mobilize as rapidly as we needed to create new programs.

When asked why a five-year time frame, she responded as follows:

USAID overall is heading toward five-year programs. It is the maximum people feel comfortable with, but with any less than that you are just starting programs and not seeing things through.

Provisions for sustainability

The EDP RFA makes no mention of sustainability. However, when asked what the provisions were for sustainability, the education team leader responded:

What we were shooting for was unblock a major structural issue in the Ministry of Education: How do you get resources for education into the hand of communes? The intent of the two programs (EDP and the DG program) was to provide communes, AEs, and school structures the support needed to set the conditions for success for actual decentralization of Mali's education system. It was aimed at laying the groundwork for decentralization of resources, and providing the actors with a level of technical support from the MOE to make it a success. We wanted to strengthen linkages to make things work when communes receive funds—this is even more urgent now.

The FSN AOTR who also played an important role in designing EDP had the following to say about sustainability:

Sustainability is part of the RFA, part of the way we implement the program. The idea is strengthen the capacity of local NGOs. They implement the program at the commune level. If AED and the associates are not here, the local NGOs can pick up the work. At the same time as far as the planning process, the MOE will have the tools and capacity to implement decentralization without external help.

Anticipated results

The EDP RFA provides an extensive listing of anticipated results as can be seen in the below.

Ministry of Education
- Improved capacity in policy and management areas key to decentralization
- Education sector planning and budgeting processes improved and inclusive of decentralized activities
- Communication and information systems developed for top-down, bottom-up flow of information between Ministry services at national and decentralized levels
- Education assessment, planning, and monitoring tools developed and implemented
- Public-private partnerships developed to expand access to quality basic education
- Improved resource allocation and support to community and medersa schools

15 AEs
- Improved capacity of AEs to effectively manage decentralized roles and responsibilities
- Education sector planning and budgeting processes improved and inclusive of decentralized activities
- Communication and information systems used for top-down, bottom-up information flow between Ministry of Education services at national and decentralized levels
- Education assessment, planning, and monitoring tools used for up/down information flow
- Validation of commune-level proposals to ANICT
- Effective decentralization of the education budget

70 CAPs
- Improved capacity of CAPs to effectively manage decentralized roles and responsibilities
- Communication and information systems used for top-down, bottom-up information flow between Ministry of Education services at national and decentralized levels
- Effective decentralization of the education budget

In 10 target CAPs:
- Technical advice and data on access and quality of basic education provided to target communes as part of joint education planning
- Education assessment, planning, and monitoring tools used for joint planning and to provide planning and monitoring data for the Ministry of Education's information system
- Education sector planning and budgeting processes inclusive of commune and school-level activities
- Quality control and validation provided for communes' proposals to ANICT

In 75 Target Communes
- Rights ,roles, and responsibilities of communes regarding basic education clarified
- Communication systems developed for CAPs, communes, and schools to engage in joint education planning
- "Education Commissions" functional and providing technical advice to communes and circles
- Target communes, CAPs, and schools engaged in joint education planning using harmonized education assessment, planning, and monitoring tools
- School improvement plans reviewed, prioritized, and integrated into commune-level development plans

- Proposals for ANICT developed conjointly with and validated by CAPs as part of commune-level planning
- Information on commune-level planning and activities provided to CAPs for information flow up the Ministry of Education
- Improved resource allocation of teachers and education infrastructure in target communes
- Measurable improvements in access to basic education in target communes
- Improved communication/coordination with MF and MAT-CL on education decentralization
- Improved conditions for budgetary support to the Ministry of Education
- Leverage fund created at ANICT for education infrastructure in target communes
- Decentralization of the education budget

3. EDP implementation

Design choices that are guiding implementation

When EDP was designed a series of design choices were made:

1. For decentralization to be effective, it is necessary to support actions at the national, regional, sub-regional, and local/school level.
2. Multi-sector programming would help to address the challenge of education sector decentralization more effectively than sector-specific approaches.
3. The USAID Education and Democracy/Governance teams and their implementing partners would be able to effectively collaborate in implementing complementary programs and approaches.
4. Donor coordination would remain strong.
5. The Ministry of Education would play a leadership role.
6. There would be good coordination between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Territorial Administration.
7. Communes are weak, their members illiterate, and that they need special support.

It is currently too early in implementation to see if these design choices are being borne out.

Implementation process

EDP was awarded to EQUIP2 in April of 2009. Unlike its predecessor (RAP/DM), where FHI 360 was the prime but EDC was in the technical lead, under EDP FHI 360 is the prime and EDC, RTI, and OMAES are subcontractors. As was the case under RAP/DM, long-term technical staff working at the national level is

embedded in the Ministry of Education. Other staff is either working in the field or in an office in Bamako located outside of the Ministry of Education.

A year and a half has passed since EDP began implementation with three-and-a-half years remaining. Soon after the cooperative agreement was signed with EQUIP2 to implement EDP, the education team leader departed Mali for a new posting, leaving the education team leader position vacant for a little over a year and a short-staffed education team. The new education team leader arrived in August of 2010.

As was pointed out by most individuals interviewed for this Associate Award review, the project is between 9 and 12 months behind schedule. Factors contributing to implementation delays include: (1) delays on the part of the Ministry of Education in launching the third phase of its joint donor sector investment program (PISE 3) which have, in turn, caused delays in launching the EDP program; (2) time spent by senior Ministry of Education personnel in applying to be part of the FTI which has taken time from focusing on implementation of donor-supported programs, including EDP; and (3) the departure at the end of the first year of the AED Chief of Party leaving a gap in project leadership. None of the above were anticipated when EDP was designed.

Not included in the EDP scope of work in terms of activities to be implemented under EDP has been the timely assistance provided by the EDP decentralization advisor embedded at the Ministry of Education (who served as the Chief of Party under RAP/DM) in helping the Ministry of Education to prepare documents for both PISE 3 and the FTI. As the Acting USAID/Mali education team leader observed, this assistance has been welcome since without this assistance the Ministry of Education runs the risk of some of the donors withdrawing their assistance because they are not getting needed reports on time.

Not factored into the design of EDP was a 2008 presidential decree that provided for, starting with the 2010 budget, devolving significant amounts of funding to communes and other regional bodies in keeping with the provisions for decentralization provided in Mali's 1998 constitution. While welcome news in terms of the objectives of EDP, when the project was designed, it was anticipated that this would not happen until 2012, giving EDP two-and–a- half to three years to prepare communes and other regional bodies for decentralization of education funding.

EDP accomplishments to date
Over the past year and a half progress has been made in several discrete start-up activities:

- A joint mission with CADDE, the National Directorate of Local Authorities (DNCT), Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF), and High Commission for Communities (HCC), with the participation of Technical Program Shared Governance 2 (PGP2), started in June 2010. The overall objective of the mission is to support the process of financial decentralization in the education sector through the effective involvement of all key actors (decentralized and devolved) at all levels: regions, circles, and towns, in its implementation.
- In the area of decentralized management a training-of-trainers program was conducted.
- Progress has been made in getting full up-to-date geo-referencing data for the 10 priority CAPs.
- In its continuing technical support to the MEALN, a budgeting process that links bottom-up planning in the development budget at the level of CT was developed and has been validated in conjunction with CADDE, the DNCT, MEF, and PGP2.
- Project teams based in Ségou, Fana, and Sévaré have continued to make contact and present the program to the 10 target CAPs but also with partners such as the Coordinations Regional NGOs (CR/NGO) that sponsor a forum for exchanges between stakeholders and work on topics such as funding for education, school management mode, and decentralized training.
- All 50 adult education centers are operating in accordance with the guidelines and training program.

Adequacy of time frame, budget, and progress in achieving sustainability
It is premature to comment on adequacy of the time frame and budget as well as sustainability.

4. Factors, within and outside of the control of USAID and EQUIP2, that favored Associate Award accomplishments and factors that served as deterrents

As part of the EQUIP2 lessons learned exercise interviewees were asked to reflect on elements of EQUIP2's portion of EDP thus far that were successful. They were also asked to reflect on challenges. The following, taken from a longer list of reflections provided by the six individuals interviewed.

Factors seen as favorable
- USAID quite flexible and understanding on start-up delays
- Good relations/communications with between EQUIP2 staff and USAID
- Good relations/communications between EDC and FHI 360
- Due to 2008 instructions by the Prime Minister to the various sectors to implement financial decentralization over a three year period (2010–2012) and

to update his office regularly on progress, opened the door to assistance under EDP to the Ministry of Education in developing a decentralized allocating funding scheme and training Ministry staff on this scheme
- Synergy being achieved among USAID/Mali education projects through development of PMP indicators and targets

Challenges
- There is a relatively rigid design, with a set of pre-established indicators and targets that does not provide for flexibility to address the changes in the MOE and outside environment during implementation.
- EDP has suffered a major delay in implementation.
- There is a perception that EQUIP2 technical staff are too infrequently in the field.
- The MOE is besieged by donors wanting to spend money on things EQUIP2 doesn't consider priorities; this was also a challenge under RAP/DM.
- The sector investment program has relied on using sector budget support funding to accomplish a great deal without having adequate financial systems in place.
- For some of the donors, the focus of decentralization is more participatory centralized management.
- Donor per diems are very high and discourage MOE staff working when they don't receive them.
- The donors worked with the MOE in 2009 to develop a simplified action plan that has calculation errors; the plan provides elements of a budget and not a total budget and the plan has no activities and no expected results.

5. *Monitoring and evaluation*

M&E strategy
Before departing Mali, the USDH education team leader facilitated a process that included representatives from all USAID/Mali education programs as well as representatives of the principal USAID/Mali democracy and governance program, to develop a set of shared indicators. This process resulted in 36 indicators that may be found at the end of this section.

The EDP PMP, prepared by an outside consultant in consultation with USAID/Mali and EQUIP staff, includes these indicators. The PMP included two levels of monitoring: (1) following changes in behaviours and attitudes as well the new knowledge acquired as a result of the technical assistance and training conducted, and (2) following what is happening in management between the deconcentrated

services and the communes, on the one hand, and the supported schools, on the other hand.

The PMP also includes basic surveys to: (1) acquire a better understanding of the situation of school management in the decentralized mode in the target communes, CAPs, and schools at the beginning of the program, and (2) collect quantitative information to establish a basis for comparison to efficiently measure progress in upcoming years and get qualitative information to improve understanding of reasons underlying the statistical trends and in general provide a better appreciation of the situation.

The PMP also anticipates studies to answer two impact evaluation questions as listed below.

1. To what extent has the capacity of MEALN to improve and implement the decentralization process been strengthened?
   – Does Ministry of Education staff demonstrate the skills and competencies to implement the decentralization process more effectively?
   – To what extent have effective monitoring and evaluation tools been developed and used by Ministry of Education to monitor the process?
   – To what extent has the Ministry of Education's capacity to plan improved?
   – To what extent has the education sector budget been decentralized to the CAP and Commune level to allow communities to engage in decision making?

2. To what extent has coordination among the school, CAP, and communes improved, leading to improved planning processes?
   – To what extent are communities engaged in and participating in the planning process?
   – To what extent have SIPs led to improved teaching and learning at the school level?
   – To what extent has increased funding been mobilized for decentralized education development plans?

Assumptions included in the PMP
The PMP contains the following critical assumptions that underlie the program strategy:

• The government of Mali will remain committed in favour of the increasing of access to quality education in view of its ongoing willingness to invest at least 30 percent of its budget in education.
• Decentralization will remain the legal framework for the supplying of basic education.

- Local elections will take place in April 2009 and new communal mayors will be elected.
- The Ministry of Education will prepare and adopt an action Plan PISE III within the period of time 2009–2010.
- The Ministry of Education will prepare a new strategy of national education for the continuation of PRODEC.
- The mayors, communal stakeholders and commissions, CGS, and APE of schools will actively collaborate to implement decentralization in the education sector.

It is still too early in project implementation to see if these assumptions will be borne out.

PMP indicators
The EDP PMP contains the following 36 indicators, several of which (as noted above) are shared with other USAID education and democracy/governance projects.

Program Objective: Expand access to quality basic education with an emphasis on reinforcing lifelong literacy in Mali
1. Percent of target primary schools providing a quality learning environment
2. Number of children with access to basic education as a result of USAID programming
3. Number of sector studies or policy documents validated by the Ministry of Education
4. Number of public-private partnerships aimed at improving access to quality basic education

IR2: Improved Capacity of the Ministry of Education to Implement Decentralization
1. Number of Ministry of Education personnel with increased capacity to implement decentralization policies
2. Percent of deconcentrated services communicating with national services on key decentralization topics information system adapted for decentralized management
3. Percent of Ministry of Education services with improved information systems
4. Percent of national education budget executed at decentralized levels
5. Rural education strategy piloted in target communes
6. Development of Education for All assessment, planning, and monitoring tools
7. Number of policy decisions taken by the Ministry of Education that benefit community schools or *medersas*

IR3: Improved Coordination between School, CAP and Commune-level Planning
1. Number of CAPs providing annual Education for All data to target communes

2. Number of Education Commissions facilitating annual Education for All reviews in target communes
3. Number of target communes producing an annual Education for All plan
4. Number of community-based organizations supporting education in target communes
5. Percent of target CAPs' Action Plans that reflect communes' Education for All priorities
6. Percent of infrastructure development proposals from target communes that meet Ministry of Education quality standards
7. Percent of target commune budget reserved for education infrastructure in target communes
8. Number of classrooms repaired or constructed as a result of USAID programming
9. Percent of schools in target communes meeting minimum standards for student/classroom ratios
10. Percent of schools in target communes meeting minimum standards for student/teacher ratios
11. Number of actions implemented by target communes to improve education services
12. Number of school improvement projects implemented in target schools
13. Number of community-level activities implemented that directly engage children or youth
14. Number of newly literate adult learners as a result of USAID programming

Agency Indicators
1. Number of learners enrolled in USG-supported primary schools or equivalent non-school settings
2. Number of adult learners enrolled in USG-supported schools or equivalent non-school based settings (M/F/T)
3. Number of parent-teacher associations or similar school governance structures supported
4. Number of administrators and officials trained (M/F/T)
5. Number of classrooms repaired with USG assistance
6. Number of classrooms constructed with USG assistance
7. Number of host country institutions with improved management information systems as a result of USG assistance
8. Number of host country institutions that have used USG-assisted MIS system information to inform administrative/management decisions
9. Number of people trained in monitoring and evaluation with USG assistance (M/F/T)
10. Number of people trained in research with USG assistance (M/F/T)
11. Number of people trained in strategic information management with USG assistance (M/F/T)

These indicators are currently under review, at the request of the new USDH education team leader who arrived in August 2010. He is concerned with the delay in EDP start up as well as the delay in collecting PMP indicators baseline data. EQUIP2 has been requested to revisit the PMP, cut down the indicators

as necessary and submit a proposal that looks at what is working in the face of a context that has changed since EDP was designed.

Views of individuals interviewed on the PMP
Interviews conducted as part of this Associate Award review with individuals familiar with EDP revealed a concern regarding the number of indicators that EQUIP2 must report on and a sense of a 'straitjacketing' in terms of holding EDP accountable for a set of preset indicators in an implementation environment that is very fluid. When asked how the indicators are to be used, the response was that the indicators were primarily for USAID/Mali's program implementation review and in the annual report that goes to USAID/Washington. Data from trainings are to be used to design future trainings.

6. Reflecting on the Mali EQUIP2 EDP experience in terms of what can be useful for other USAID projects that focus on decentralization or have a decentralization component

EDP is only into the first year and a half of a planned five-year implementation time frame. The reflections, below, there for are not focused on the past (as would be in the case of a closed out Associate Award) but on the present.

What 'appears to be working' thus far
- A good relationship between USAID and EQUIP2 staff
- Continued interest on the part of the Ministry of Education in the program
- USAID quite flexible and understanding on start-up delays
- An announcement on the part of the President of Mali that, starting with the 2010 budget, large amounts of the central budget will be sent to communes and other regional entities to further decentralization objectives contained in the 1990 Constitution

What 'doesn't appear to be working' thus far
- The design provides a long set of pre-established indicators that may not be taking into consideration changes in the outside implementation environment.
- The sector investment program has relied on using sector support to accomplish a great deal without having adequate financial systems in place.
- For some of the donors the focus of decentralization has been more participatory centralized management.
- Some donors worked with the MOE to develop a simplified action plan in 2009 that has calculation errors, elements of a budget and not a total budget, no activities, and no expected results.
- Donor per diems are very high and discourage MOE staff working when they don't receive them.

E. EQUIP2 MALAWI: EDUCATION DECENTRALIZATION SUPPORT ACTIVITY (EDSA)

Time frame: February 20, 2009–February 28, 2012

Funding level: $11,559,643

The information from this EQUIP2 Associate Award review is drawn from interviews with seven individuals closely associate with the EDSA Associate Award, including the USAID education team leader, in country and third country EQUIP2 technical advisors, EQUIP2 staff both in Malawi and in FHI 360 and RTI in the United States. Along with the other EQUIP2 Associate Award reviews, this review (combined with insights from state-of-the-art research on education decentralization) provides the basis for the lessons learned, strategies, and insights that form the focus of Section II of this report.

This Associate Award review is divided into six sections: (1) Malawi context, (2) EDSA design, (3) EDSA implementation, (4) EDSA successes and challenges (as seen by the six persons interviewed), (5) monitoring and evaluation. The last section (6) reflects on the Malawi EDSA experience in terms of what can be useful for USAID education officers responsible for designing and overseeing the implementation and monitoring/evaluation of project that focus on decentralization or have a decentralization component. Section 6 is divided into four sub-sections: what worked, what did not work, interesting strategies, and valuable insights.

An attempt is made to write this review in 'story' form (e.g., what was the context and how did it influence the design, what were the key aspects of the design that influenced implementation, what was learned in terms of successes and challenges, and what can be learned from monitoring and evaluation).

1. Context

Malawi national and education context
Gaining independence from Britain in 1964, Malawi spent three decades under a one-party rule but has been a multi-party democracy since 1994 (CIA World Factbook). Malawi held parliamentary and presidential elections in May 2009, which were meant to influence both the opportunity for policy dialogue and implementation as well as leadership, because the Government of Malawi asked all government officials running for office to resign their position prior to campaigning. Malawi is broken up into 34 districts, and there exists a great urban-

rural divide; only 19 percent of the population lives in urban areas (CIA World Factbook). Malawi is ranked 153 of 169 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index (2010), ranking in the "low human development" category.

Malawi grapples with one of the worst situations of HIV/AIDS, which is prevalent in about 12 percent of adults (CIA World Factbook). The HIV/AIDS pandemic has aggravated the overall human resource situation, disproportionately affecting teachers, who represent one of the largest networks of civil servants in the country, and disproportionately high numbers of children. Among school aged children between 6 and 14 years, about 14 percent are classified as OVC, over half of whom are estimated to be AIDS orphans. Other problems faced by Malawi include an increasing population, increasing pressure on agricultural lands, and significant levels of corruption.

In responding to the 1990 and 2000 EFA commitments, Malawi's student enrollment has increased dramatically, but has led to substantial negative effects on the quality of education. At project start-up, primary gross enrollments were at 120 percent with over 3.3 million students enrolled in just over 5,200 schools, taught by 43,000 teachers. In 2007, the student teacher ratio was 78:1; by 2009 the student teacher ration had increased to 81:1. The low number of qualified teachers compounds the situation. In trying to counteract these problems in education, Ministry of Education (MoEST) leadership has begun taking strides towards a Sector Wide Approach (SWAP), as seen most explicitly through progress and efforts in finalizing its National Education Sector Plan (NESP). Education expenditure in 2003 was 5.8 percent of GDP (CIA World Factbook).

Education decentralization in Malawi at the time of EDSA design
The Malawi Parliament passed the National Decentralization Policy (NDP) in December 1998 in the hopes of improving social services through decentralization. Decentralization currently applies to most sectors with the health sector apparently the most advanced.

The implementation of a decentralized education system is central to the work of the MoEST in the next few years. MoEST decentralization documents have been finalized for rollout to the districts, including the National Education Sector Plan (August 2008), the Education Devolution Guidelines (October 2008), and the National Strategy for Community Participation in the Management of Primary Schools (February 2007), and guidelines for district education planning. An important objective of these policy and procedural documents is to increasingly democratize the education system by increasing parent and community involvement in decision taken regarding the operations of their schools. The key to a successful reform will be assuring that these policies and procedures are effectively implemented and that they have a useful impact on education quality.

In actuality, the education system is still centralized. Teachers are hired, paid, and disciplined by the MoEST HQ and allocated to the district. The districts are responsible for providing recommendations on disciplinary actions and assigning teachers to schools. School construction managed through the MoEST budget is centralized; however, district assemblies (and schools) do have access to other funding that is often used for school construction. Textbooks and many other learning materials (exercise books, chalk) are centrally procured. Through catalytic funding from the recently signed SWAp, the World Bank, DFID, and the Germans will ensure that funds are available to the districts and schools.

Current resistance to decentralization (observation from an individual interviewed) is not coming from the Permanent Secretary of Education but rather the political 'heavyweights' some of whom allegedly are benefiting financially from the centralization.

One significant issue with decentralization in Malawi that has yet to be addressed is that ward councilor seats (for locally elected district representatives) in district assemblies have been vacant since 2004—when district assemblies were dissolved. In the absence of local representatives, district assemblies continue to operate and manage district affairs through the offices of unelected district executives and district line ministry officers. The absence of ward councilors has been a source of friction between the Government of Malawi and Development Partners and has stalled, by three years and counting, initiation of a National Decentralization Programme II (2008–2013). However, they are receiving funds from the central government; this raises an issue of accountability.

2. EDSA design

EDSA design process
When the USAID education team leader arrived in Malawi in July of 2007, she encountered a low level of USAID funding in the education sector. Unexpectedly, USAID/Malawi received a higher level of funding than anticipated so the mission looked toward the National Education Sector Plan (NESP) that was under development to identify new activities it might engage in with the MoEST. USAID/Malawi staff did an internal exercise to see what they could do and identified decentralization, teacher training, non-formal education/HIV AIDS as possible areas of USAID involvement in support of the NESP. Prior mission activities in support of education decentralization at the time EDSA was designed had focused primarily on community mobilization on a small scale. Other USAID offices in Malawi apparently were not directly involved in supporting decentralization.

EDSA was designed in close collaboration with a Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) Technical Working Group on Governance and Management (initially called the Decentralization Technical Working Group). There were consultations with the Director of Planning, JICA, and GTZ. JICA had identified activities to strengthen district education planning. The Director of Planning identified strategic directions and USAID prepared a matrix for discussion. Over a series of Technical Working Group meetings USAID came up with framework for the EDSA RFA. Clear from the start was that EDSA would work as a discrete project in a highly collaborative fashion under the upcoming education SWAp.

At the time EDSA was designed there was no mission guidance on how to work within a SWAp environment. The health office had worked already under a SWAp and the mission director indicated that he was open to figuring out how to work as a discrete funder in education under a SWAp environment. The Ministry of Education was also on a learning curve, looking to and in dialogue with the health sector for lessons learned and recommendations for the formation of the Education SWAp. At USAID, the Education team had informal communication with the Health team to learn and gain insights, especially since USAID was the DP Chair at the time, despite its role as a funder of discrete projects (as opposed as contributing to basket funding).

EDSA purpose/objectives and approach
The purpose of EDSA as stated in the USAID/Malawi RFA that was issued in late 2008 was to "Strengthen the decentralization implementation at the MoEST headquarters, district and school levels to support system progress in attaining National Education Sector Plan 2008–2018 goals." More specifically the RFA indicated that project intends to "Assist the Ministry of Education and, to an extent, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and other key stakeholder ministries and development partners in making decentralization a functional concept on the ground within the education sector."

The RFA goes on to indicate that EDSA will target "improved management and governance. The activity packages various interventions meant to link with, support, and complement key Ministry of Education and government of Malawi policies or strategies, initiatives, and activities underway, namely the National Strategy on Community Participation and Management of Primary Schools, the JICA-supported District Education Planning efforts and the ongoing World Bank and upcoming DFID-supported Direct Support to Schools, as well as build on, complement, and bridge with major decentralization efforts supported by GTZ and DED."

EDSA, per the RFA, is designed to provide support at three levels: policy, district and community, with three components:

1. Strengthen policy and strategy articulation, interpretation, and implementation (policy support)
2. Improved decentralization implementation, planning, and data utilization for informed decision making (decentralization and planning)
3. Enhanced role and participation of communities in monitoring education service delivery (schools and community)

The RFA provides an extensive list of illustrative activities for each of these three levels.

EDSA Illustrative Activities

Policy
- Assist the Ministry of Education to develop a policy framework
- Provide technical assistance to support the development and implementation of operational plans for the National Strategy on Community Participation and Management of Primary Schools
- Assist in updating the education sector HIV/AIDS and SHN strategy and plans
- Coordinate with SWAp preparation, technical assistance, and implementation efforts, particularly in the area of Monitoring and Evaluation

Decentralization and Planning
- Governance and management improvement, emphasizing clarification of roles and responsibilities
- Capacity building of relevant institutions at district, zone, and school levels including, but not limited to, training
- Improving and increasing functional linkages between sector ministries, local assemblies, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, and the Ministry of Finance
- Review and strengthen the development of DEPS, especially their linkages and input from SIPS, as well as linkages to and articulation in District Development Plans.
- Assist the Ministry of Education in the dissemination and use of the Devolution Guidelines.

Schools and community (Priorities from highest to lowest)
1. Strengthen school management on governance, information management, and planning capacity

2. Link to and complement Primary Curriculum and Reform and crosscutting issues of gender equity and HIV/AIDS prevention, and support affecting schools and communities most directly

3. Leverage, build on, and strengthen civil society organizations and networks for improved coordination in supporting the provision of education

Illustrative approach
- Align decentralization and planning-oriented capacity building activities for schools and communities
  - Develop activities that align and link with the illustrative activities listed under Results 1 area for districts
  - Provide financial support for SIPs in selected schools (e.g., competitive grants) that would complement the funds earmarked for architecture, using relevant criteria
- Promote community and school advocacy for pupil early literacy as well as key themes aligned with focus or cross-cutting areas envisaged by the MoEST
- Promote increased engagement of communities and schools to support OVC, especially children living with HIV and teachers in HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and support (in selected districts)
- Develop a strategy in collaboration with the MoEST and relevant civil society organizations, on the ground to help deliver the capacity-building components of this activity, at the district level if possible, but especially at the school and community levels, in a coordinated fashion

Assumptions underlying the design of EDSA
While the EDSA RFA did not specifically articulate assumptions, the education team leader who played a significant role in preparing the RFA clearly articulated several assumptions that served as an important underpinning to the EDSA design.

- The MoEST would continue with its reform agenda, NESP and sector approach to implementing plan. "If there was that momentum we could ride on the coattails, our intent was to support that momentum."
- The Ministry of Local Government and Local Development will continue to roll out its decentralization policy. This was not a new concept; it has been out there forever. It is bearing out fair, not as much as expected. There are some elements of national decentralization policy that have gone down.
- Communities would continue with momentum and that an approach to help communities to link up to larger policies so momentum would continue.

Decisions around time frame and funding
When asked how USAID/Malawi came up with $11.6 million dollars for EDSA, the education team leader replied:

It was partly what we anticipated we would get in education funding and activities in progress or in development. For example, we also had a teacher training activity we planned to support. We looked at the breakdown of cost per district/school, particularly drawing from recent activities from which EDSA was meant to build and evolve. We used this analysis to scale up, plus anticipated levels and discussions with other development partners and government counterparts. We also knew that, given the prominence of the Direct Support to Schools, which was what originally this piece of decentralization and government initiative was called, there were indications that the GoM would potentially use pooled funding from the Joint Financing Arrangement. It was our best guess combined with analysis. In addition we knew we would have $1.5 million in PEPFAR funding.

When asked why three years, the same person responded as follows:

We were in consultations with Ministry of Education. We were well aware of the Education Sector Implementation Plan (ESIP), which was a three- to four-year plan, drawn from the ten-year NESP. By the time we started EDSA, we knew it would be providing support during the first year of the ESIP plan. We believed that what we were doing should mirror and be in direct response to what the Ministry was going to be doing.

Another reason for limiting EDSA to three years was anticipated change-over in senior MoEST and other staff.

Provisions for sustainability
Sustainability is implicitly built in as a major component of the EDSA design. When asked about sustainability and the provisions built into the EDSA design for sustainability, the USAID/Malawi Education Team Leader responded as follows:

The whole effort is about sustainability. We hope it won't just be rhetoric. We made a deliberate, conscious decision. While there would potentially be aspects or approaches that in part could be new, we did not want to implement any more pilots. It's all about sustainability. That is what we've told all our partners. Nothing we should be doing should be outside of the MoEST's plans.

We are looking at capacity building not just as training (on Excel, GLOBAL ED*ASSIST). Training is a first step. We are also looking at capacity transfer, and addressing critical questions such as, "how do you know what capacity you are building when you don't have an inventory of where people are, so you know you are building their knowledge and skills?" You can conduct training on content, but you need to accompany the people trained, sit there with them, and go through the process with them. You need to mentor them, coach them,

helping them network and seek out relevant resources. You need to ask yourself who your end user is. Usually is not just one person. What about the department and/or the unit? In EDSA part of the capacity building approach is to solidify relationships, patterns of meetings, operational guidelines, habits. We are asking ourselves questions such as, "How do people use information and knowledge? How do people use information, build on each other?""

When asked, how does one do capacity building, when staff is constantly changing, she responded:

A lot is outside of our control. We have invested in capacity building of the education sector. However, we have people leaving the MoEST and retiring. There is a lack of succession planning. For example, a Capacity Development Task Force was established and the chairman left near the end of the process, with basically no notice and no one slated to replace him. The Planning Director, who was closely involved in EDSA design and coordination, left. In order to build lasting capacity you need, at a minimum, some kind of continuity or the assurance of someone keeping these positions staffed. We need to be realistic. In many MOEs today, we need to work with what we have, to be able to reach out to people that exist, even those wearing multitudes of hats until the needed systems, the needed personnel, can come on board. In the MoEST today, there are many vacancies and it takes forever to replace people. You need to look at where you can have the greatest win in moving the process along. Ensuring a parallel track of supporting policy and human resource and capacity improvements is also key. The EQUIP2 COP has established trust among the skeleton crew that remains. As people come and go, we do see a tendency of people moving to leadership positions, sometimes raising questions on the pertinence of their capacity.

Anticipated results

The EDSA RFP provides illustrative deliverables for each of the three levels of focus as may be seen in the textbox below.

EDSA Illustrative Deliverables

Policy
- Policy framework developed
- Guidelines developed and used to implement/operationalize the new National Strategy on Community Participation and Management of Primary Schools
- Education sector HIV/AIDS strategy and action plan revised

Decentralization and Planning
- Strengthened district planning systems and linkages to zonal and school plans and improvements, including equipment and capacity/skills support to decentralized EMIS activities in six districts
- SIPs integrated in and reflected in the District Education Planning process
- Devolution guidelines disseminated and used at the district and school levels
- Roles and responsibilities clarified, defined in the context of devolved/decentralized environment
- Guidance developed and provided for EMIS information, production, analysis, and management and use at decentralized levels
- Strengthened quality control at the district and school levels

Schools and community
- Strategy developed and implemented for increased participation of civil society in education, particularly school management committees and parent teacher associations
- Linkages developed between district, zonal, and school planning processes
- Schools and communities provided with support in special thematic areas
- Communities promoting safe and constructive school environment and HIV/AIDS-related support to OVC and teachers
- Strengthened quality monitoring at the school and community levels
- Increased participation of school management committees and parent teacher associations in the district planning process
- Increased parental support and contributions to education with transparent management practices

4.   Implementing EDSA

Design choices that are guiding EDSA implementation
There were, as can be seen from the contents of the previous section, a number of design choices built into EDSA that are guiding its current implementation:

1. Support for decentralization would be most effective if USAID took the conscious decision to operate simultaneously at the central, district, and school and community levels and, in so doing, establish a feedback loop where actions at one level inform other levels.
2. With limited resources and time, EDSA would not work with all districts and divisions but instead worked in 6 districts (one in each administrative division) out of 34 total districts.

3. The MoEST would continue with its reform agenda, NESP, and the SWAp approach to implementing planning and USAID would support these agendas and approaches.

4. To do the above, USAID needed to be responsive to MoEST requests as well as collaborate closely with other donors.

5. UNICEF would pick up where USAID left off, under a prior EQUIP2 project, in supporting the institutionalization of the EMIS system at the MoEST central level.

6. EDSA would be the 'seed' that germinates interest and successfully validates innovative approaches to decentralization; with this 'germination' other donors would ideally pick up, expand, and validate decentralization support provided under EDSA.

7. EDSA would support the Ministry of Local Government and Local Development in rolling out its decentralization policy.

8. Communities would continue with momentum that had already been built to support decentralization and that an approach to help communities to link up to larger policies would be carried out under EDSA so that this momentum would continue.

9. Civil society had an important role to play in supporting EDSA implementation, among others, funds for the schools would be channeled through NGOs and country systems.

10. An important part of the project would be the creation of a feedback loop; information to be collected through monitoring and evaluation would feed back into joint project decisions made by USAID, EQUIP, and the MoEST.

11. Building in sustainability was fundamental; however sustainability needed to be seen from a broad perspective. Sustainability included: supporting the MoEST in designing and implementing its policies and plans rather than supporting the design and implementation of parallel policies and plans, and in addition to receiving training MoEST and other staff needed follow up, coaching, mentoring.

Implementation approach/progress
EDSA, at the time of drafting this case study, was two years into implementation of what has been designed to be a three-year project. Responsibility for implementation rests with FHI 360 under the EQUIP2 mechanism represented by the Chief of Party who reports to FHI 360. A sub-contract with RTI provides technical assistance for decentralization and EMIS in the form of three short-term RTI consultants who visit Malawi periodically to design and oversee specific activities. Two Malawians RTI hired full-time are responsible for carrying out decentralization and district EMIS activities on the ground.

Implementation activities to date have been carried out i highly collaborative fashion. The USAID staff (education team leader and FSN AOTR) enjoys a very close and collegial working relationship with the EQUIP2 COP. All three may frequently be found at key MoEST meetings. In addition, the EQUIP2 COP (with the support of USAID/Malawi staff) works very closely with other key donors involved in implementation.

While there has been some progress, planned activities under EDSA at the central level have been slower than planned. Individuals interviewed for this study cite the following reasons: (1) senior-level MoEST staff, whom USAID and EDSA personnel expected would set aside time to work on policy activities during the first two years, have spent more time than was anticipated in finalizing the SWAp and now in preparing Malawi's FTI proposal; (2) delays in approving the SWAp have, in turn, caused delays on the part of USAID and other donors in implementing their activities; (3) the Director of Planning, who played a key role in designing EDSA, left the MoEST soon after EDSA was approved; (4) there has been a presidential election in the interim and, with the election, a change in Minister of Education and Permanent Secretaries (and with them changes in a number of key senior staff); and (5) EDSA staff, in collaboration with MoEST personnel, have prepared a number of fact sheets that comment on the Devolution Guidelines; however, a round table has yet to be convened to discuss the contents/ recommendations of these fact sheets. Although this has slowed the progress on policy briefs, EDSA has been able to develop brief policy analysis papers (called Fact Sheets) that have been used to stimulate dialogue on key issues.

One additional delay that affected implementation at all levels, was the USG regulation, which was interpreted as requiring the Government of Malawi sign a terrorism certification prior to EDSA disbursement of grant funding to schools via districts. Signing the certification required extensive internal consultation at MoEST, and delayed disbursement of grants funding by 6 months.

At the district level there has been significant progress especially with EMIS. The Malawian EMIS advisor, with the assistance of the Malawian decentralization advisor and with ongoing advice and guidance from RTI short-term consultants, have made progress in all six districts in seeing what information the districts collect from the schools, how they use it, linking what has been up until now separate data bases, and developing tools that will increase the probability that they will be used. A Decision Making Tool has been developed that calculates data being tracked at the national level to data being collected at the district level (for example, teacher–student ratios), as well as providing comparisons between schools at the district level. The idea is that with more timely and accurate data districts can prioritize where teachers are needed the most. Initial use of the DST has initiated

conversations on new, (less onerous and potentially more accurate) ways for districts to collect school data and provide guidance to schools on record keeping.

Year one project implementation of SIP grants through district financial systems and SIP training though District Capacity Building Teams (made up of district assembly and DEO staff, including primary education advisors) has developed the experience base of district managers and other DEO technical officers in overseeing a grants implementation and training program. The experience also supported the establishment (and use) of school bank accounts for 30–40 percent of primary schools in each district. These factors, among others, provided a good jumping-off point for MoEST implementation of Phase I of the Primary School Improvement Program (PSIP) in 2010-2011. (PSIP is a MoEST program that draws significantly on basket/FTI resources to provide SIP grants to all schools [1,090] in six pilot districts.)

At the school and community levels technical assistance under EDSA is also being used to generate the School Assessment Charts. These charts provide basic information on the school along several dimensions, compare trends within the school over time, and permit community and school staff to see how they measure up to others schools in their zone as well as national-level data. The School Assessment Charts are designed to serve as an input to schools in developing their SIPs that, once prepared, the schools can use to request funding under the project (the understanding is that in the second year the MoEST will fund the SIPs). To date EDSA has provided training to relevant individuals in communities and schools in six districts in developing their SIPs and using their School Assessment Charts. District reflection workshops to have been organized to examine the prior year's SIP process. Updated SIP guidelines have been translated into local languages to improve on their utility within the context of strengthening community participation.

An important aspect of implementation has been the establishment of feedback loops. Information from project implementation, along with data from ongoing research studies and evaluations are being fed back, on an ongoing basis, to USAID and project staff and key Ministry of Education staff for use in decision making as well as fine-tune aspects of EDSA implementation.

Design choices that have not been born out in implementation
As can be seen from the discussion above, through a number of the EDSA design choices appear to being borne out in implementation, two have not borne out as planned.

The first is that in the EDSA design it was assumed that civil society had an important role to play in supporting EDSA implementation, among others, that

funds for the schools would be channeled through NGOs. In fact, in the six districts where the project is being implemented, EQUIP2 staff found that NGO capacities were limited or nonexistent. Therefore, instead of channeling funds for schools through NGOs, a decision was taken to channel these funds through District Education Offices. Delays (with the MoEST, USAID, and FHI 360) in approvals for the necessary paperwork required for this change to take place have put the project behind schedule in terms of issuing grants to schools to implement their SIPs. Although this decision decreased the level of civil society involvement in many stages of the decentralization process, this effort has re-channeled EDSA capacity building efforts to line Ministry personnel in the districts and zones.

The second was that UNICEF would pick up where USAID left off with a prior EQUIP2 project in institutionalizing EMIS at central levels and ensuring that "this year's data" continues to be "provided this year." As it turned out, UNICEF has not provided this assistance, and the central MoEST (now no longer with outside technical assistance to ensure that "this year's data is provided this year") is now several months behind in issuing 2010 data. This is producing challenges at the district level under EDSA, where current year national data are required for the Decision Making Tool and the School Assessment Charts to be used effectively.

Adequacy of time frame and budget, effectiveness in building sustainability
It is premature to be able to assess whether EDSA's time frame and budget are adequate. However, the following observations emerge from those interviewed for this review when asked about the topic of time frame and funding.

One individual interviewed observed that the funding made available under EDSA is sufficient for three years. However, three years is not sufficient for being able to provide intensive and prolonged engagement. In this person's words: *"A lot of things have taken longer than expected, even though we did not expect things to move quickly. It was not until year two that a joint financing agreement (SWAp) was signed by the government. The national elections slowed things down."*

A Malawian staff member interviewed observed: *"By the time we get to the end, we will have the planning and budget, we will have a very good system in place, but not enough time to institutionalize it, grind it in so it stays. One more year would have been helpful, to see how people are using it, correct what we are not doing right."*

Another Malawian staff member interviewed added:

> *I have my doubts. Referring to policy: we may have the advantage of understanding what is going on, but in terms of actual changes we have to go through not just the MoEST system but the government of Malawi system for policies to be changed and implemented. There are aspects not up to the project.*

It depends on how quickly the government bureaucracy will operate. They have to adopt our recommendations. We can't say with assurance they will adopt them.

When queried on the three-year time frame for what the project would like to accomplish, the USAID education team leader acknowledged that a three-year project is but a start. She indicated that USAID, at the outset of discussions with the Malawi MoEST and development partner counterparts had begun to think about a possible follow-on project focusing on decentralization even in the design phase of EDSA. The thinking was that any follow-on support in this area of direct support to schools and decentralization would have to be premised on good project management practice—future planning would be contingent on the outcomes and learnings from this activity, but also the progress and learnings of the other efforts in the ESIP, which would be reviewed at the end of the three- to four-year period.

It is premature to comment on the effectiveness of EDSA in building sustainability.

Key outcomes
It is premature to comment on project outcomes as EDSA has not yet been completed. However, the text box below outlines some of EDSA's major accomplishments during its first two years of operation.

Accomplishments under EDSA, February 2009–February 2011

> ***Project experience, technical support, and financial support to the roll-out of MoEST flagship program, the Primary School Improvement Program (PSIP)***
> - EDSA's experience and deep engagement of MoEST systems in implementing the SIP grants in target districts and zones in FY 2009–2010 served as an anchor for PSIP design and initial implementation. PSIP is a MoEST program that draws on pooled and FTI catalytic funding. EDSA support for PSIP includes the following:
>   – Year 1 experience: EDSA target districts will anchor MoEST year one implementation of PSIP. This was done in part because in 2009–2010, EDSA worked closely with District Education Officers (including District Managers), District Capacity Building Teams and Primary Education Advisors in these districts to implement SIPs and SIP Grant activities. The experience base of officers in these districts provided a sure jumping off point.
>   – Development, vetting, and translation of key policy communication materials and guidelines: Over the past two years, EDSA has supported the completion, translation into local language, and dissemination of key MoEST policy guidance and planning manuals, including the National Strategy for Community Participation and Management of Primary School, NESP and ESIP District and Community Briefs, and a trio of SIP Manuals—SIP Development Manual, SIP Grant Financial Management

Guidelines, and Guidelines for SIP M&E and Information Management (the last manual is in progress).

– Training approach: The District Capacity Building Team approach, piloted in year one of EDSA, used to support cost-effective expansion of training activities to all schools in six districts.

– PSIP design support: EDSA worked with World Bank and MoEST Directorates to finalize the National Rollout Plan for the Primary School Improvement Program and several operational manuals.

Improved decentralization implementation, planning, and data utilization for informed decision making

• Development and initial implementation of the Decision Support Tool (a data analysis tool) in EDSA districts has led to the following: Interest among stakeholders in developing a DEMIS database that holds data collected on a term basis, requests for increased content and specific guidance to improve school record-keeping and ongoing dialogue on how the DST could be used to inform on critical policy issues (e.g., MoEST Double-shifting guidelines and District Deployment of Teachers).

• A revised term report form (designed to streamline the data collection and improve reporting efficiency, accuracy, and use for both schools and districts) is currently being piloted in EDSA districts. Data from the DST also populate a School Assessment Chart (which presents NESP-relevant school data in comparison to other schools in the zone). The SAC will likely be a feature of the PSIP Phase II rollout.

• The District Capacity Building Team continues to play a central training and information-sharing role at the district level. This includes conveying policy communication from HQ to schools, and experiences from schools back to HQ to inform policy dialogue, informing content included in PSIP guidelines.

• In Year 1 of PSIP implementation, EDSA will provide grants to zones and districts to support monitoring and management of SIP grant activities and expenditures.

Enhanced role and participation of communities in monitoring education service delivery

• In Year 1, EDSA provided SIP grants to over 200 schools in targeted zones in six districts. EDSA drove the entire SIP process (SIP training activities, SIP grant approval processes, delivery of grant funds, and verification of completion of grant activities) through the District Education Office.

• EDSA disbursed 4,271 OVC primary school grants and began monitoring OVC primary and secondary bursaries in collaboration with District Capacity Building Teams and MoEST Directorate of HIV and AIDS and School Health and Nutrition staff.

Based on the above experiences, USAID has recognized EDSA as a model for how projectized funding can work (and add value) to an Education SWAp. The EDSA experience has been shared with other USAID Education Sector programs in Malawi.

5. Factors, within and outside of the control of USAID and EQUIP2, that favored Associate Award accomplishments and factors that served as deterrents

As part of the EQUIP2 lessons learned exercise, interviewees were asked to reflect on elements of EDSA thus far that were successful. They were also asked to reflect on challenges. The following, taken from a longer list of reflections provided by the seven individuals interviewed.

Factors seen as favorable
- The USAID/Malawi mission director, the education team leader, and the AOTR who presided over the EDSA design continue up to this point during implementation.
- There is stability in EQUIP2 staff (COP, Malawian staff, external short term assistance).
- Having a cooperative agreement has allowed EQUIP2 to work with the MOE when EQUIP2 was developing its proposal; EQUIP two staff were able to circulate drafts of the proposal and get feedback from development partners and the MOE.
- There are excellent communications among the EQUIP2 COP, the USAID/Malawi education staff, and key MoEST staff.
- Qualified individuals at USAID and with EQUIP2; short-term technical assistance under RTI brings the breadth of experiences with education decentralization from other African countries.
- The mission director supports EQUIP2's working within a SWAp environment.
- USAID is willing to be flexible and adaptable. For example the project was supposed to use NGOs to do training. Instead the decision was taken to focus on direct support to host country systems and developing systems (District Capacity Building Teams) for sustainability.
- The MoEST Director of Basic Education, who is in charge of implementation from the MoEST side has pressure from his leadership to move grants.
- A sizable amount of funding has been made available for the education sector through the recently approved SWAp.
- Within the MoEST EDSA is not creating things from scratch; instead the EQUIP2 project is working in areas where there is government interest, something they want to move forward on.
- The project design links national and school levels through specific activities. Often there is a vast distance between government policy decisions and districts/schools knowing, understanding, and then acting on that guidance. The project facilitates user-friendly communication of key MoEST policies and guidance.

- The project ties the national level to the local level through the feedback loop. EDSA has taken lessons learned in six districts for system refinement and to prepare operations guidance manuals.
- EDSA is supporting and facilitating dialogue across different directorates.
- The project has had some successes in policy dialogue and supporting the MOE's communication and guidance to decentralized levels.
- There is a very good relationship with the World Bank in the development of the PSIP and expansion of MoEST grants activities.
- EQUIP2 does not put either USAID's or FHI 360's logo on its products. At the end USAID receives recognition

Challenges
- Having MoEST staff at senior levels with the capacity was needed; the very capable Director of Planning who assisted in designing EDSA left the MoEST.
- USAID did not foresee the catalytic funding application, FTI. This process took a year and was time-consuming; a lot of energy was focused on putting together the required documentation, which took away from other important MoEST activities, including focusing at the national level on implementing EDSA.
- There was a significant delay in approval of the districts EDSA would operate in and then with presidential elections a delay in approval of having grants go through District Education Officer.
- There were delays on the USAID side and at FHI 360 in getting the same approvals.
- Convincing the government to devolve authority, control, and responsibilities for making decisions on finance to local levels involves changing a culture.
- As important as the previous, fiscal decentralization goals are (e.g., district funding of school bank accounts), they are not clearly allowable under the current Public Finance Act and Public Procurement Act. This means engaging the office of the Accountant General, the Ministry of Local Government and the Office of the Director of Public Procurement to review and approve MoEST policy directing how schools may operate (or not) as procuring entities and holders of public funds.
- Clarifying where within the MoEST to get approvals; EDSA began by obtaining needed approvals from the Director of Planning. However, when he left, by default it became the Director of Basic Education, although policy and M&E continues to go through the Directorate of Planning.
- Views Differed on the implementation of the SWAp; creating parallel discussion groups to make decisions regarding SWAp implementation when existing groups are not functioning.

- USAID systems need to be made more conducive to working with a SWAp. USAID mechanisms, such as PMP indicators are still rooted in a direct implementation approach.
- Convincing MoEST counterparts that, although USAID is committed to supporting MoEST activities, USAID has time lines and targets that it must meet was a challenge.
- Exorbitant donor per diems discourage MoEST staff from working unless they can go off to a hotel and receive these per diems. The Government, with strong donor pushback, recently issued a circular that prohibits workshops outside of Lilongwe unless those attending the workshop are from the area where the workshop is being offered.
- There was concern that project technical assistance may be doing some of the work that should be done by MoEST staff.
- There is insufficient MoEST staff (often owing to vacancies in key positions) for work that needs to be done.
- On almost everything the time frame has been different than initially expected. The most concrete issue has to do with the grants and specifically the delays in getting approval to implement them through the District Education Offices.
- Development Partners' perceptions and appreciation of the EDSA efforts differ, including some tensions during periods of setback and delay to the start of the Joint Financing Arrangement. Notably, in a SWAp environment, the flexibility of projectized funding is sometimes an advantage USAID has vis-à-vis other DPs who's funding structures and mechanisms may afford less flexibility than USAID mechanisms. Too much forward progress by one DP can be jealously regarded by other DPs, and prove an impediment for collaborative forward progress.
- A future challenge will be having a more in-depth understanding of community reaction to SIP tools and grants and MoEST policy; it has not been something EDSA has had time to substantively investigate.
- The Decision Support Tool is Excel based, in most the places where the MoEST works there are few computers. In addition electricity is not constant.
- A challenge in rural areas of having communities get involved in the management of schools, given, among others, limitations in literacy.
- Communication between the MoEST and local governments is not as frequent or fluid as would be hoped.
- In comparison to other district offices, District Education Offices are understaffed and have limited educational qualifications. At the level of the District Council it is only the District Education Manager who attends those meetings and understands how everything is functioning. If this individual is not qualified, this presents a challenge.

6. EDSA Performance Monitoring and Research Plan (PMRP)

PMRP strategy

In May of 2009 EQUIP2 presented a Performance Monitoring and Research Plan to USAID/Malawi that was not only accepted but is held out to other USAID/Malawi offices as an example of what a PMP should be. The PMRP is designed to follow and operationalize the NESP Monitoring and Evaluation Guiding Principles as follows:

- M&E is participatory: Representatives from the MoEST, District Education Offices, Area and Village Development Committees, School Management Committees, civil society networks, and parents/custodians and learners will be part of the EDSA monitoring, evaluation and research work. Focus groups from the various levels and groupings will be utilized to develop, collect, and analyze data, as appropriate.
- M&E activities produce consistent quality information: The focus of EDSA's PMRP is to produce information on a bi-annual basis and through the information/feedback loop, provide qualitative and quantitative data that may be used by the education sector to develop and/or refine policies, strategies, and guidelines, as needed.
- M&E emphasizes analysis and decision making: EDSA's long-term technical advisors will work with the SWAp Advisors, MoEST Technical Working Groups and MoEST counterparts to ensure that information/data collected are analyzed and used for decision making.
- M&E incorporates capacity building elements: The District Decentralization Implementation Seminar, District Education Networks and Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education as well as the MoEST Technical Working Groups provide foras for the dissemination of information and for promoting networking, partnerships, and capacity building for both monitoring and evaluation work as well as research activities.

Assumptions

The PMRP has two assumptions, both related to how monitoring and evaluation will be carried out:

- EDSA will follow the MoEST logical framework approach, to monitoring and evaluation, as outlined in the NESP Monitoring and Evaluation Plan. The project will work within the MoEST Monitoring and Evaluation system. Thus, the majority of data used for USAID reports will be drawn directly from the MoEST EMIS databases, district EMIS databases and District EXCEL database.

- EDSA will align its output, outcome, and impact targets with those of the MoEST, where applicable. The MoEST will provide the necessary resources—human, material and financial—to the districts, zones, and schools to achieve the targeted results. The SWAp environment emerges indicators' targeted results may be modified in line with joint financing arrangements and other complementary activities financed by the Government of Malawi and Development Partners.

Evaluations and research to be carried out under the EDSA PMRP

Other important features of the PMRP are that (1) it combines the collection of qualitative and quantitative data; and (2) it contains several studies that are designed to nourish the feedback loop built into EDSA, thus ensuring that data collected during EDSA implementation are used to reflect on project progress, inform key MoEST and other actors on key issues, and be used—as needed—as a basis for making adjustments in project implementation.

The PMRP anticipates that the following evaluations will be carried out under EDSA.

Evaluations to be Carried Out Under EDSA

Information and Feedback Loop to contribute to national policy dialogue
- What conditions support or negate the efficient and effective use of data gathered through the information/feedback loop?
- To what extent has the information been used to refine polices and national strategies/guidelines?

Use of information for planning and budgeting at the district level
- What factors support or undermine institutionalization of new responsibilities and processes at the district level?
- What education activities support or undermine effective decentralization? How?
- To what extent does decentralization of specific processes/responsibilities (e.g., community capacity development in school improvement planning) correlate with school or district progress toward NESP goals, including improvements in quality and learning at the school level?

Percentage of communities active in school-decision making
- What factors support or undermine institutionalization of SIPs into MoEST systems and processes?
- What District Education Office or community activities support or undermine effective SIP implementation?
- To what extent is school improvement planning linked to supporting MoEST progress in attainment of NESP Goals?

Also contemplated are two research studies. Baseline reports have been prepared for each:

- "What promotes decentralization?" and "what negates decentralization?" as districts move from deconcentration to decentralization.
- How does HIV /AIDS impact the decentralization process?

More detail on the specific research questions and proposed data collection methodology for the first study may be found below.

"What promotes decentralization?" and "what negates decentralization" as districts move from deconcentration to decentralization?

In the six EDSA districts, the MoEST EMIS Unit and EDSA will track and analyze Education Sector Implementation Plan (2009–2013) basic indicators through a vertical (district to national level) and horizontal (across districts) comparative analysis. In each EDSA district targets will be set for the ESIP indicators to assist districts in making budgeting, planning, and management decisions that will help them contribute to the achievement of the ESIP activities/strategies and NESP goals

Building on the quantitative data collected and analyzed across six districts (horizontal comparison) and to the national level (vertical comparison), the qualitative component will examine the following overarching thematic questions to understand the 'story' behind the numbers.

- What conditions or factors tend towards limiting effective decentralization?
- What conditions or factors promote the decentralization process at the district and sub-district levels?
- To what extent does the decentralization of specific processes/activities contribute to (or limit) improvements in quality and learning at the school level?

Additional sub-thematic questions include:
- What indigenous practices/drivers promote decentralization practices? Do indigenous factors negate the decentralization process?
- What is the impact of external interventions on decentralization? Do external interventions help or inadvertently hinder the decentralization process? If so, how?
- What factors or elements strengthen the office of the District Education Manager? How does this translate into promoting decentralization?
- In what ways may the private sector assist in strengthening education efficiency indicators?
- How does HIV/AIDS impact the decentralization process?
- How do infrastructure challenges—for example, geographic constraints (e.g., mountain range), transportation networks, communication networks, etc.— impact the decentralization process?

EDSA PMRP indicators

The PMRP includes 21 indicators as listed in the textbox below. Some are context indicators; others are for reporting to USAID/Washington under different funding streams (basic education, PEPFAR)

PMRP Indicators

1. Extent to which decentralization of specific processes/responsibilities correlate with improvements in quality and learning at the school
2. BEF: Number of learners enrolled in USG-supported primary schools in EDSA districts
3. BEF: Drop-out rate in EDSA districts
4. BEF: Completion rates by primary schools
5. PEPFAR: Number of eligible adults and children provided with a minimum of one care service
6. PEPFAR: Number of eligible children with education and/or vocational training
7. PEPFAR: Quality of life for OVC in learning environment
8. IR 1—Effectiveness of AED policy/dialogue feedback loop to contribute to national policy dialogue
9. IR 2—Use of information for planning and budgeting at the district level
10. IR 3—Percentage of communities active in school decision making
11. BEF: Number of laws, policies, regulations, or guidelines developed or modified to improve equitable access to or the quality of education services
12. BEF: Number of policy briefing papers developed and accepted by MoEST/CSCQBE which contribute to articulation of policy framework
13. BEF: Number of host country institutions with improved management information systems as a result of USG assistance
14. BEF: Number of host country institutions that have used USG-assisted MIS system information to inform administrative/management decisions
15. BEF: Number of people trained in other strategic information management with USG assistance
16. PEPFAR: Number of District Education Plans which contain an HIV/AIDS component
17. BEF: Number of parent-teacher associations or similar 'school' governance structures supported
18. BEF: Number of SIP small grants implemented
19. PEPFAR: Number of OVC grants disbursed
20. PEPFAR: Number of T'LIPO members given training to build their organizational and HIV/AIDS and OVC skills
21. BEF and PEPFAR: Assessment of gender-lens applied to ensure gender-sensitive approaches and strategies are integrated into all activities

Views of individuals interviewed on the PMRP

When asked what they thought were the most useful indicators individuals interviewed pointed to those around capacity building, decentralization, governance and management, and gender breakdowns. One interviewee observed that if he were an outsider looking at EDSA and he could point to OVC receiving support, and government officials trained in EMIS this could be a useful starting point. The same person observed that: "The studies are what provide the meat of the information on the so what." A third interviewee indicated that she found the qualitative indicators to be more interesting: especially what promotes and negates decentralization will be most useful: what policies have been passed; what systems put in place to allow decentralization.

When asked how the M&E data have been used thus far, one interviewee indicated that, above and beyond regular monitoring, she was interested in what USAID and the education sector can learn in order to help the MOE learn. Another interviewee indicated that EQUIP2 had disseminated the baseline study in hard copy and hopes to host a forum in the next couple of months to discuss the baseline findings; "This is what we learned from phase one, what do we want to learn next?" A third interviewee indicated that the information from the baseline has been used to help with systems refinement and national operations manuals.

7. Reflecting on the Malawi EDSA experience in terms of what can be useful for other USAID projects that focus on decentralization or have a decentralization component

EDSA is two years into a three-year project. The reflections, below, therefore are not focused on the past (as would be in the case of a closed out Associate Award) but on the present and the recent past.

What 'appears to be working' thus far
- Continuity within USAID/Malawi: the mission director, USDH team leader, AOTR who presided over the EDSA design continued up to this point during implementation
- Stability in EQUIP2 staff (COP, Malawian staff, external short term assistance)
- Having a cooperative agreement which allowed EQUIP2 to work with the MOE when EQUIP2 was developing its proposal; EQUIP two staff were able to circulate drafts of the proposal and get feedback from development partners and the MOE.
- Excellent communications between the EQUIP2 staff, USAID/Malawi education staff, and key MoEST staff
- Qualified staff at USAID and with EQUIP2; short-term technical assistance under RTI that brings the breadth of experiences with education decentralization from other African countries
- A mission director who supports the project's working within a SWAp environment.
- USAID's willingness to be flexible, adaptable.
- The Director of Basic Education, who is in charge of implementation from the MoEST side, pressured from his leadership to move grants
- Within the MoEST the project not creating things from scratch; instead the project working in areas where there is government interest, incentive, something they want to move forward on
- Some successes in policy dialogue and supporting the MOE's communication and guidance to decentralized levels
- Very good relationship with the World Bank
- Turn-around in the perception of this activity; EDSA is gaining followers; more support and interest from other development partners

What 'doesn't appear to be working/has not worked' thus far

- The MoEST lacks staff at senior levels with the capacity needed; in addition, the MoEST has many vacancies.
- Unforeseen project delays: (1) at the central MoEST level (due to an FTI funding application which delayed EDSA activities given that a lot of energy of senior MoEST staff was focused on putting together the required documentation); (2) at the district level (a significant delay in approval of the districts and then with presidential elections a delay in approval of having grants go through District Education officers); and (3) with USAID and at FHI 360 in getting some key internal approvals.
- Convincing the government to devolve authority, control, and responsibilities for making decisions on finance to local levels.
- Limitations in the coordination required between ministries and discussion over several acts of Parliament governing utilization of public funds and government procurement, and how they may be applied to the school level.
- Differing views on the implementation of the SWAp. Parallel discussion groups have been created to make decisions regarding SWAp implementation when existing groups are not functioning.
- In spite of receptivity on the part of the mission director to working under a SWAp environment, USAID systems and mechanisms, such as PMP indicators, are still rooted in a direct implementation approach. However, indicators are mapped out to demonstrate linkages to the ESIP.
- Especially in rural areas having communities get involved in the management of schools, given, among others, limitations in literacy.

Useful strategies

- Building in, through the M&E plan and other activities, a feedback loop, which makes it possible as implementation progresses to learn from project activities and make adjustments as, needed.
- An M&E plan that, in addition to quantitative indicators, includes qualitative evaluations and applied research designed to further understand why project activities are or are not having impact and what works and doesn't through decentralization activities.
- Building in project activities that test the 'machinery of decentralization.' Policy change and public acts provide the initial authority for some decentralization. However, next steps (such as devolving money and decision making over resource utilization) take place by action. The 'how-to' takes place in figuring out how to do something that has not been done before. In EDSA this was manifest in the project trying to get the USAID grant funding to school bank accounts through district approval processes. In year 2, this meant learning from EDSA year one activities, and trying to get GoM funding to support school SIPs through district processes.

Valuable insights

On use of qualitative indicators:

> *USAID is also trying to change the results framework. They find the qualitative indicators to be more interesting: what promotes and negates decentralization will be most useful: what policies have been passed; what systems put in place to allow decentralization.* (Joan Owomoyela, EQUIP2 COP)

Challenges of convincing target audiences to use data tools:

> *A challenge is that we have only just developed the Decision Making Tool and the School Assessment Chart… We have to follow up the school assessment chart on the ground to see how it works. The challenges we are to face are just emerging. There are a lot of politics in the district councils. Now we will begin to see where the pressure points are. We need to follow the tools to see how they used or not in making decisions. It's not just a question of sending a School Assessment Chart to a school but seeing of what value it is to the school and community, what indicators are useful, which are missing? However we believe that once we create a demand or justification of decisions by stakeholders (civil society, elected officials, parents, communities, chiefs, government departments, etc.) data utilization will become not only essential but necessary as well.* (Charles Matemba, Malawian EMIS advisor)

The need to translate concepts into terminologies that targets groups can understand

> *Even in communities where literacy levels are low, there's consensus that in general education standards have declined despite other advances the sector has registered, communities have ideas of what a "good" school is. We want to build on that. One of the challenges in Data Utilization training in rural communities is presentation. Language or terminology can be a barrier. You want to communicate an idea above teaching terminology on their terms based on what they already know. Sometimes mathematical concepts (such as averages) do not occur in local language as one word. Rural communities may easily relate to that their school doesn't have adequate teachers for the enrollment rather than that their school has high Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR). Responsiveness and sensitivity to such hindrances is important in using data to draw a picture of how their school is vis à vis how it should or could be (hence stimulating their actions), especially if aspects of standards and comparisons over time and among entities are also brought to the fore. Communities already relate numerical concepts in currency, farming, etc., they relate to the average price of a crop per kg for a given season for example.* (Charles Matemba, Malawian EMIS advisor)

Annex 3: Interview Protocol

Step 1: Background Information

1. Interview start and end time:
2. Country and project:
3. Date of interview:
4. Name(s) of interviewee(s):
5. Nature of interviewee(s) participation/involvement in project and over what time period:
6. Context

Step 2: Share with interviewee portions of matrix for country that lists the project objective(s) (as stated in RFTOP and in USAID response), key activities/results, time frame, and funding level.

1. Ask if this reflects the person's understanding of initial project objectives and planned activities.

Step 3: Using this information as a point of departure, probe to obtain the following information related to project design:

1. What was the developmental hypothesis (or, What do you think the designers wanted the project to achieve? How was it expected to get there?) , was it valid, and did it evolve over time?
2. What were the assumptions behind the development hypothesis, were they valid, and did these assumptions evolve/change over time?
3. What were the key activities and how was the mix of activities selected (or how did you think that by investing in these activities you would achieve the project objective(s)?
4. What were the assumptions underlying selecting the specific mix of activities; were they valid; did these assumptions evolve/change over time?

5. The project was programmed to last X years with X budget. What was the basis for thinking that this time frame and budget would be appropriate for achieving your overall objective(s)?
6. When the project was designed were provisions made to ensure sustainability of project actions/activities? What were they?
7. (if appropriate) Was there an expectation that XYZ would be achieved during the first or second year of the project?

Step 4: With the above information in hand, let's turn to project implementation

(Note: it is possible that some of the topics below may have come up spontaneously and been addressed during Step 3. If they have, use this information as a basis for deciding to what extent it is necessary to address the questions that follow)

1. Did the project activities lead to the outcomes expected; if not, what were the reasons for not achieving expected outcomes?
2. Did the project build in sufficient resources; if not what were the consequences/ trade offs?
3. Did the project build in sufficient time; if not what were the implications for achieving the outcomes expected?
4. Did the project end up adding/modifying project activities, adjusting the budget, the time frame?
5. Was sustainability achieved? Is so in what way? If not, what were the factors that impeded achieving sustainability?

Step 5: Focusing on Monitoring and Evaluation

(Note: this is for individuals interviewed who had a close knowledge of M&E; it is possible that several interviewees did not and therefore may not have much to say)

1. What indicators were selected to assess project impact and track activity progress? Were there any evaluations and, if so, what was their objective?
2. Which were the most useful measures of impact/progress? Which were not? Why?
3. How was the information from the indicators tracking/evaluation(s) used?
4. With the benefit of hindsight were there other/additional indicators that you think should have been used?

Step 6: An examination of successes and challenges, adapting to changing circumstances

(Note: again it is possible that the topic of successes and challenges may have come up spontaneously during the interview. If so: indicate to the interviewee that s/he has already referred to several successes and/or challenges. Would s/he like to add any others or expand on any they have already mentioned?).

1. What aspects of the project were most successful? Why?
2. What were the key challenges faced during implementation; and was it possible to successfully address them?

(Note: Depending on how the interviewee responds, probe in order to identify if any of the items below represented challenges. Also make sure to identify the source(s) of the challenge: (1) within USAID; (2) within MOE; (3) within AED); (4) Factors outside of the control of key project actors.

3. How easy was it to adapt to changing circumstances?
4. How easy was it to reprogram or change aspects of the program?

Closing:

1. Is there anything else that you think is relevant that you would like to share?

Annex 4: Individuals Interviewed

EGYPT: EDUCATION REFORM SUPPORT PROGRAM (ERP)

USAID

- Robert Burch, PSC with USAID/Egypt education officer (2007–2007), ERP M&E Director (2004–2007)
- Hala El Serafy, USAID/Egypt ERP AOTR (2004–2009)
- Evelyn Rodriguez-Perez, USAID/Egypt USDH Education team leader (2008–2009)
- Elizabeth Warfield, USAID/Egypt USDH Education & Health team leader (2004–2008)

Implementing Partners

- Jane Benbow, EQUIP1 AIR Chief of Party (2007–2010)
- Luis Crouch, EQUIP2 RTI Decentralization Advisor (2007–2009)
- Hassan El Bilawi, EQUIP2 AED Technical Advisor (2004–2005), Senior Advisor to the Minister of Education (2006–2009)
- John Gillies, AED home office EQUIP2 Director (now Senior Vice President for the FHI 360 Global Learning Group) (2004–2009)
- Paula Gubbins, EQUIP2 AED home office ERP Project Director (2004–2009)
- Sherrif Kandil, EQUIP2 AED ERP technical advisor (2004–2006) and ERP Deputy Chief of Party (2007–2009)
- Audrey Moore, AED home office EQUIP2 Deputy Director (now Director) (2004–2009)
- Lynn Mortensen, EQUIP2 AED ERP Chief of Party (2004–2009)

GEORGIA: GENERAL EDUCATION DECENTRALIZATION & ACCREDITATION (GEDA) PROGRAM

Ministry of Education

- Bela Tsipuria, Deputy Minister of Education (2004–2006)

Implementing Partners

- John Gillies, AED home office EQUIP2 Director (now Senior Vice President for the FHI 360 Global Learning Group) (2004–2007)
- Jessica Jester Quijada, EQUIP2 AED home office GEDA backstop (2004–2007)

- Audrey Moore, AED home office EQUIP2 Deputy Director (now Director) (2004–2007)
- Dori Nielson, EQUIP2 AED technical advisor (2005–2007)
- Conrad Wesley Snyder, EQUIP2 AED GEDA Chief of Party (2004–2007)
- Tom Welsh, EQUIP2 RTI technical advisor (2004–2005)
- Jerry Wood, EQUIP2 AED home office GEDA Project Director (2004–2007)

MALI: REGIONAL ACTION PLANNING DECISION MAKING PROGRAM (RAP/DM)
USAID
- Natasha de Marcken, USAID/Mali USDH education team leader (2005–2009)
- Jo Lesser, USAID/Mali USDH education team leader (2001–2005)
- Ibrahima Sissoko, USAID/Mali FSN AOTR for RAP/DM (2004–2009)

Implementing Partners
- Nancy Devine, EQUIP2 EDC home office RAP/DM Project Director (2004–2009
- Doug Lehman, EQUIP2 EDC RAP/DM Chief of Party (2004–2009)
- Ken Rhodes, EQUIP2 AED home office RAP/DM Project Director (2007–2009)

MALI: EDUCATION DECENTRALIZATION PROGRAM (EDP)
USAID
- David Bruns, USAID/Mali USDH education team leader (2010–Present)
- Natasha DeMarcken, USAID/Mali USDH education team leader (2005–2009)
- Patrick Fayoud, USAID/Mali, TCN Acting Education Team Leader (2009–2010)
- Ibrahima Sissoko, USAID/Mali FSN AOTR for EDP (2009–Present)

Implementing Partners
- Larraine Denakpo, EQUIP2 FHI 360 home office EDP Project Director (2010–Present)
- Nancy Devine, EQUIP2 EDC home office EDC Project backstop (2009–Present)
- Rudi Klaus, AED team leader responsible for developing EDP proposal (2009)
- Doug Lehman, EQUIP2 EDC EDP decentralization advisor (2009–Present)
- Alistair Rodd, EQUIP2 RTI EDP short-term decentralization advisor (2009–Present)

MALAWI: EDUCATION DECENTRALIZATION SUPPORT ACTIVITY (EDSA)

USAID

- Marisol Perez, USAID/Malawi education team leader (2007-2010)

Implementing Partners

- David Balwanz, EQUIP2 FHI 360 EDSA short-term technical advisor (2009-)
- Grace Banda, EQUIP2 RTI EDSA Malawian decentralization advisor (2009-)
- Charles Matemba, EQUIP2 RTI EDSA Malawian EMIS advisor (2009-)
- Alistair Rodd, EQUIP2 RTI EDSA short-term decentralization advisor (2009-)
- Joan Sullivan Owomoyela, EQUIP2 FHI 360 EDSA Chief of Party (2009-)
- Carrie Willimann, EQUIP2 FHI 360 home office EDSA Project Director (2010-)

ANNEX 5: REFERENCES

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