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RESEARCH FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMMING – AFRICA (REEP) FEASIBILITY DETERMINATION: SOMA UMENYE MID-TERM PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Approved Date: TBD

Contract End Date: September 28, 2021

Contract Number: AID-OAA-TO-16-00024

Activity Start Date and End Date: 9/29/2016 – 9/28/2021

Total Award Amount: \$7,949,966.00

Implemented by: Dexis Consulting Group (Dexis)

Subcontractors: Research Triangle Institute (RTI)



Research for Effective Education Programming – Africa (REEP)

Feasibility Determination: Soma Umenye Mid-Term Performance Evaluation

February 16, 2018

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DISCLAIMER

Produced by Dexis Consulting Group for the United States Agency for International Development

ACTIVITY SUMMARY AND CONTEXT

Soma Umenye, a five-year (7/2016-7/2021), \$72.4 million contract is USAID/Rwanda's flagship reading activity. It aims to improve the reading skills of one million public school learners, nationwide, in grades 1-3, with the objective that at least 70 percent of these students are able to read grade-level text with fluency and comprehension. The first year of the project was recently completed, and a performance evaluation was determined to be an important tool in helping to assess and learn from the initial year of the project, and to guide appropriate adjustments as the program progresses.

Over the past two decades, Rwanda has made progress towards its goal of becoming a middle-income, knowledge-based economy. Underpinning Rwanda's strategy to foster and sustain economic, social, and political advances, is the guiding document, Rwanda Vision 2020. The strategy emphasizes strengthening human capital formation, particularly through education service delivery, which is comprised of two key components: access and quality.

In terms of access, Rwanda has achieved near universal access to primary education. According to the 2013/4 Global Monitoring Report, Rwanda ranked as one of the top three performers in the last five years, which was achieved by reducing the out-of-school population by at least 85 percent. However, there is a notable need for increased and strategic investment in the basic education sector to reach comparable improvements in the quality of education.

There is a growing understanding of the importance of, and interest in, early grade learning outcomes in the education sector, as reflected by a goal in the latest version of the education sector plan (currently being finalized) that aims to ensure all students leave the early grades of primary equipped with literacy and numeracy skills.

Soma Umenye aims to improve student reading by:

- Improving quality of classroom instruction at the primary level through the application of teacher and student performance standards, and the implementation of an evidence-based in-service training and coaching program
- Strengthening the pre-service teacher training program
- Increasing availability and use of evidence-based and gender-sensitive early grade reading materials
- Strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Education and University of Rwanda to conduct and apply research, and lead the reading reform process

Despite a growing interest in focusing on early grade learning outcomes, there are challenging issues being faced around acquiring sufficient data and evidence to support technically strong decision making. While one development partner, the Department for International Development (DFID), has been exploring investment in the early grades of primary, their program, due to roll out in 2018, is focused on English and is still in the process of being reviewed and validated by the Government of Rwanda. It remains unclear how the DFID program might contribute to or challenge USAID/Rwanda's opportunities for successful implementation of Soma Umenye. Other than DFID, USAID is the only development partner making a significant investment in the early grade learning space in Rwanda.

Soma Umenye experienced some performance and management issues in its first year of implementation and is now working on an adjusted approach moving into Year 2. USAID and the implementing partner have been working intensely over the last couple of months on course correction for Soma Umenye,

including a major revision to the roll-out plan and on repositioning the activity to better align with Government of Rwanda systems. In addition, due to delays, performance issues, and changes in the roll out of Soma Umenye, the impact evaluation contracted to contribute to USAID/Rwanda's early grade reading learning agenda is being reviewed for possible modification.

The USAID/Rwanda Mission requested a performance evaluation to determine the effectiveness and implementation of Soma Umenye thus far. Specifically, the performance evaluation will examine the effectiveness of the project approach and implementation, assess the performance of the implementing partner, and identify areas for improvement or adjustment. The evaluation may explore how this activity relates to and feeds into the larger effort of USAID, the Government of Rwanda and other partners in improving early grade learning.

Based on conversations with USAID, and the information contained in this document, it is Dexis' determination that this activity is feasible within the Research for Effective Education Programming – Africa (REEP) Task Order and therefore it is our recommendation to proceed with this activity.

EVALUATION PURPOSE

This is a formative midline performance evaluation. Through this evaluation, USAID/Rwanda aims to identify areas that could inform mid-course corrections to improve outcomes through the assessment of current and past performance in implementation, including critical factors for success as well as challenges both in terms of outcomes achieved, and in key stakeholders' perceptions. Additional aims of the evaluation include:

- An examination of how the realities of implementation remain in line with what was envisioned for the activity, or have needed to evolve, based on the size and complexity of the activity, evolving local environment and the significance of USAID investment to the education sector. Have those changes effectively addressed new challenges and opportunities? If yes, how? If not, why?
- An assessment of how the implementing partner has performed, along with its sub-contractors, against the terms of the contract and in the eyes of stakeholders, to document and better understand any issues, with a particular focus on challenges faced to date around working effectively with the Government of Rwanda.

PRIMARY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

To meet these aims, primary evaluation questions would include:

1. Has implementation of the project aligned with contractor objectives? If not, how has it evolved or adapted to address new challenges, opportunities, and realities?
 - a. Has the project employed any adaptive management approaches?
2. How has the implementing partner and its team performed against the terms of the contract? In terms of targets and indicators, as well as in the eyes of stakeholders (primary factors for success, challenges, contextual factors).
3. In the remaining years of the activity, how can the implementing partner and USAID improve activity outcomes?

4. Is there an opportunity to strengthen collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) practices in the project to facilitate adaptive management in support of more effective implementation in the second half of the contract?

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The proposed activity will be a mixed-methods formative performance evaluation. Key data collection methods include:

- Desk review of relevant literature and program documentation
- Key informant and individual interviews
- Focus group discussions
- Survey implementation

EVALUATION TEAM COMPOSITION

The evaluation team will feature a balanced mix of international and local expertise in evaluation and education. The following positions will be included:

- Evaluation Team Lead
- Senior Evaluation Specialist
- Mid-level Evaluation Specialist
- Education Evaluation Specialist
- Local Evaluation Specialist

TIMING

The evaluation is anticipated to take place in August/September 2018. This start date allows for adequate time within the second year of project implementation to effectively assess 2018 implementation, and to incorporate and plan for any adjustments prior to the 2019 school year. The evaluation would be scheduled to occur before the end of the 2018 school year, prior to preparation for end-of-year exams, which will take place in late October and early November.

Soma Umenye Mid-Term Performance Evaluation										
	2018									
	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Feasibility Determination										
Research Plan										
Recruitment, Planning, Logistics, and Methodology Finalization										
Pre-Field Work Planning, Team Planning Meeting, Onboarding										
Field Work										
Data Analysis and Reporting										