

LASER PULSE

Long-term Assistance and Services for Research (LASER)
Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine (PULSE)

YEAR 2 Annual Report (2020)

Higher Education Solutions Network (HESN) 2.0 Programs
Annual Performance Report Narrative

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ACRONYMS

AOR	Agreement Officer Representative
BP	Boundary Partner
CDCS	Country Development and Cooperation Strategy
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSFA	Comprehensive Success Factor Analysis
DDL	Development Data Library
DEC	Development Experience Clearinghouse
DSI	South Africa's Department of Science and Innovation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSIL	Food Safety Innovation Lab
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESN	Higher Education Solutions Network
INGO	International NGO
IU	Indiana University
IS Team	Purdue Innovation Science Team
KII	Key Informant Interview
LASER PULSE	Long-term Assistance and Services for Research: Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine
LPN	LASER PULSE Network
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PI	Principal Investigator
PM	Progress Marker
RAN	Resilient Africa Network
RFA	Request for Applications
R4D	Research for Development
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
UIC	USAID Interest Countries
UIP	Uganda Indigenous Peoples (buy-in)
UND	University of Notre Dame
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

I. BACKGROUND

Provide a quick one-to-two paragraph background of your activity, including your key partners and the countries and regions/districts you are working in.

[Long-term Assistance and Services for Research: Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine \(LASER PULSE\)](#) is a five-year, USAID-funded consortium, led by Purdue University and also comprising Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Indiana University (IU), Makerere University and the University of Notre Dame (UND). The consortium identifies and creates practical, research-driven solutions to the most pressing challenges in developing countries.

LASER PULSE employs a novel approach called [embedded research translation \(ERT\)](#), in which research is co-designed with development practitioners, producing field-sourced, evidence-based solutions to development challenges that span all USAID technical sectors and global geographic regions. This work is conducted through a global network of more than **2,300** researchers and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives in **61** countries.

LASER PULSE implements ERT by making research awards; having researchers and development practitioners collaboratively identify sector gaps; carrying out and testing research; and developing translated research products for immediate use. Supportive functions include capacity building, especially involving ERT processes; technical assistance, to foster effective researcher/practitioner partnerships; and advocacy to garner institutional and government policy support for ERT.

2. MAJOR MILESTONES/ACHIEVEMENTS

Describe the top two-three milestones / achievements during the bi-annual reporting period. Provide links to blogs and media where available, so we can help promote.

2.1. East Africa Awards

After refining the request for applications (RFA) and review process with the bureaus, in September 2019, LASER PULSE released an RFA for East Africa in the Education, Food Security and Water Security sector areas. Of the 63 concept notes received, 12 applications advanced to full review. In late Spring 2020, LASER PULSE decided to fund five [applications](#): two in Basic Education, two in Food Security, and one in Water Security. The sub-award agreements for these applications were fully executed between the respective organizations and Purdue University (LASER PULSE lead). As the region for LASER PULSE's first research award round, East Africa afforded significant learning for application to later rounds. These learnings are summarized under [“Streamlining Processes” in Point 8.1.3.](#)

2.2. Colombia R4D Workshop (see the linked conference report for more details)

LASER PULSE held the Colombia R4D Workshop (1-2 October 2019), meeting all of its objectives:

- Identify missing system factors for the three priority sector focus areas, through the application of modified Comprehensive Success Factor Analysis (CSFA) tools, and through discussions with researchers and practitioners.
- Catalyze collaboration among researchers, as well as among researchers and practitioners, and facilitate partnerships for the award round.
- Improve understanding of LASER PULSE's ERT concept.

Table 1. Colombia R4D Conference Participant Summary

Participant Type	Female	Male	Latin America	Africa	US / Canada	Total	Percent
Researchers	16	17	32	1	1	33	28.2%
Implementers	23	27	49	0	1	50	42.7%
Donors	6	11	16	0	1	17	14.5%
LASER Staff	6	11	2	2	13	17	14.5%
Total	51	66	99	2	16	117	100%

- Ignite interest among donors and policy makers in sustainable support for development research partnerships among researchers and practitioners.

LASER PULSE engaged Colombian researchers and NGO representatives, as well as donors (USAID and foreign bilaterals), before the workshop, through discussion groups. These group sessions provided important insights into the USAID Colombia mission’s three sector-focused priority areas: Integrated rural development, Youth, and the Venezuelan migrant crisis.

Participants led many sector-focused sessions, which generated comments and feedback that helped to focus conference sessions and provided context for the award round RFA. **Table 1** provides a breakdown of participant numbers by category, gender and country.

2.3. “Visualizing Venezuelan Migration Issues in Colombia” Hackathon

The hackathon, a planned Year 2 activity, built on USAID/Colombia connections following the R4D workshop.

LASER PULSE developed hackathon research challenges around data needs for addressing the Venezuelan migrant crisis, based on questions from the USAID/Colombia mission. LASER PULSE collaborated with the QED Group, Data Elevates, and faculty from Purdue, UND, Universidad del Norte (Colombia), and Universidad Nacional de Colombia (UNAL), to source and register teams, and to create an online platform site to upload and showcase the data. Table 2 shows the numbers of teams and participants. After a formal review identified 11 data visualization submissions, USAID/Colombia selected three winning teams. USAID’s Center for Development Research, the Colombia USAID mission, and LASER PULSE tweeted the results. Additionally, stories were posted by [UND](#) and [Purdue](#).

Table 2. Hackathon Team and Person Count

Institutions Represented	# of Teams	# of Persons
Univ. del Norte	2	6
Notre Dame (ND)	7	21
Purdue	12	34
UNAL	6	17
ND/Purdue	2	7
Total	29	85

- <https://twitter.com/GlobalDevLab/status/1248690118665424899>
- <https://twitter.com/GlobalDevLab/status/1248687255050506240>
- <https://twitter.com/GlobalDevLab/status/1248686874492796928>

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ACTIVITIES (highlights follow; details in [Appendix 1](#))

Provide a description of the key activities undertaken in the reporting period. It is useful to organize this section according to the objectives and intermediate results in your projects's Results Framework.

IR 1: Increase HEI delivery of collaborative and effective development-focused research

LASER PULSE prepared reports on institutional barriers to ERT in Vietnam’s and Ethiopia’s higher education systems (led by Makerere University’s ResilientAfrica Network, or RAN); developed two online courses addressing identified gaps; created and disseminated ERT templates and guidance materials; prepared for R4D workshops in Vietnam, Ethiopia, Indonesia; and created online training modules and digital materials to support using Comprehensive Success Factors methodology to hone country and regional focus areas (led by the Purdue Innovative Science Team). Workshops in Vietnam, Ethiopia and Indonesia did not take place due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

IR 2: Increase HEI synthesis, exchange, and translation of research results into usable development products and practices

LASER PULSE created country-specific RFA templates for Colombia, Vietnam and Ethiopia, as well as a LASER PULSE [award manual](#) for research awardees; and developed new ERT processes (led by IU and CRS) including a Research Translation Needs Assessment Survey and follow-up consultation meetings to support research teams in research translation.

IR 3: Increase dissemination of translated research results for evidence-based solutions

LASER PULSE conducted a literature review, interviews, and a [survey](#) to identify the barriers of research translation for both researchers and practitioners. LASER PULSE also developed [five online training courses](#) on research translation.

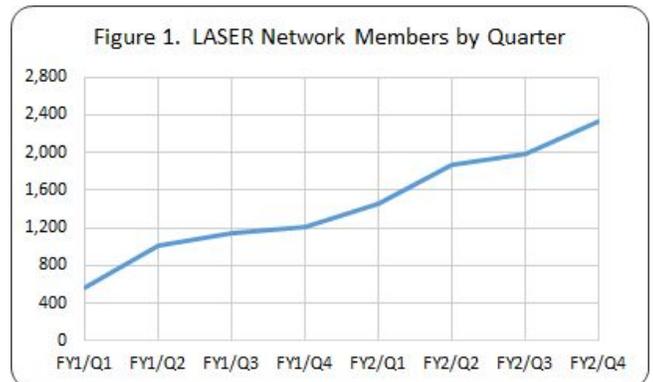
Sub IR 4: Enhance systems and structures for gender and minority considerations in the HEI network that enable women and minorities to conduct research

LASER PULSE incorporated language to prompt gender considerations into the RFA template, complementing online gender training for all team members of principal investigators (PIs) who apply for grant awards.

4. ENGAGEMENT WITH PARTNERS IN FISCAL YEAR (FY) 2020

Provide a brief overview of how you've engaged with the partners that make up your HESN 2.0 Award, both internal and external. Be sure to include the addition of any new partnerships and describe the types of interactions you have undertaken. Please limit this section to 2-3 paragraphs.

LASER PULSE engages with LPN members through activities such as quarterly newsletters/blogs; LPN surveys to gauge member needs and experiences with respect to ERT; [training and other resource provision](#); and award round and buy-in opportunities, as well as external opportunities posted to the LASER PULSE site.



The substantial growth in [LPN](#) membership can be seen in Figure 1. The network now comprises 2,327 members: 2,075 researchers and 196 practitioners, plus 56 others (e.g. private sector, government), of which 1,011 are female; 1,214 are male, and the remainder were blank (100) or “prefer not to answer” (2). There are a total of 523 institutions (269 academic, 254 other) in 56 countries. The top 10 countries represented and their membership numbers are U.S. (421), Vietnam (379), Colombia (300), Jordan (197), Kenya (192), Brazil (184), Ethiopia (179), Uganda (72), Peru (54), and Philippines (47).

Research awardees from the higher education institutions (HEIs) cited below (in both 4.1 and 4.2) are all LPN members.

4.1 Established new partnerships with HEIs receiving sub-awards/subcontracts (formal or informal).

Provide a brief (1 sentence overview), and estimate the amount of financial support with each institute of higher education (can be provided in an appendix if easier).

In Y2, LASER PULSE established new partnerships with 15 HEIs, interacting through sub-awards or buy-ins, the former of which have been made or are anticipated. Details are in [Appendix 2](#).

4.2 Established and nurtured, respectively, new and ongoing partnerships for human and institutional capacity building among HEIs in the U.S. and developing countries.

Please list any relevant capacity-building partnerships (please duplicate from the 4.1 list above if needed) with institutions of higher education, provide a brief 1 sentence overview of the human and/or institutional capacity building conducted, and estimate the amount of financial support transferred.

- Dohuk University:** Dohuk is the in-country partner for the Support to Traditional Cultural Practices for Northern Iraq buy-in, commenced in September 2019, contributing to anthropological assessment tool design, and its data collection and analysis to inform the program design of agricultural extension support.

- **Vietnamese universities and implementers:** Representatives of 40 NGOs, government agencies, and HEIs engaged in planning meetings for the Vietnam R4D Workshop and award rounds, as well as provided feedback for the CSFA survey. LASER has undertaken more focused engagement with research teams, as well as Vietnamese reviewers, with the release of the Vietnam RFA in July 2020.
- **Ethiopian universities and implementers:** LASER PULSE visited with eight universities, three government ministries and four international NGOs (INGOs) to promote ERT and the planned R4D conference and grant round.
- **Two Colombian universities:** As described in [Section 2.3](#) of this report, Universidad del Norte contributed entries from two teams (with six total individuals) and Universidad Nacional contributed entries from six teams (17 individuals) to the LASER PULSE hackathon.
- **Two Ugandan universities:** Mbarara University of Science and Technology (Mbarara) and Gulu University Constituent College (Gulu) are implementing partners, with Makerere, of the Voices of Indigenous Peoples of Uganda buy-in. The universities receive capacity-building support in the form of research design and implementation, project management, and financial management.

5. MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING

Progress Against Indicators

Provide us with the most up-to-date progress against indicators, using the Indicator table below. Please note that any people-level indicators reported must be disaggregated by sex.

Table 3. Annual Performance Indicator Table for LASER PULSE (Fiscal Year 2).

Key result Area (Intermediate Result)	Indicator # & Code	Indicator Name	Life of Project		Year 1		Year 2	
			Target	Achieve. to Date	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved
Objective: Enhanced discovery and application in policy and practice of university-sourced, evidence-based solutions to development challenges	(1) L3.S.2_in1	# of program or policy changes made by the public sector, private sector, or other dev. actors influenced by Lab-funded research results or related scientific activities	20	4	2	0	3	4

* Click on the table graphic, or the “Table 3” link above it, to access the full table.

Deviation From Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Targets

Please provide an explanation for indicators results that are more than 10% above or below targets. Describe the steps you are taking to meet previously established targets going forward.

Table 3 above consists of the 19 LASER PULSE indicators, listed in red text from 1-18, with Indicator 4 being repeated (as 4b) under a different Sub-IR. For FY2, 7 indicators exceeded their targets by 10% or more, 1 hit its target exactly as specified, 3 narrowly missed their targets (i.e. deviation less than or equal to +/- 10%), and 7 under-achieved by more than 10%. The following bullet points provide some context for the indicators that deviated by 10% or more:

- **Indicator 1** L3.S.2_in1 # of program or policy changes made by the public or private sector...
 - + LASER reports one more program or policy change (PPC) than targeted for FY2. Two PPC are attributed to the South Sudan Psychosocial Impact Evaluation buy-in, and 2 PPC are attributed to LASER

core activity in which other USAID-funded programs – IDEAL, Feed the Future Innovation Lab (FSIL) – adopted design elements of RFAs issued by LASER PULSE.

- **Indicator 2** L3.S.1_in2 # of research products produced with LASER-supported funding
 - + LASER developed targets for this indicator based primarily on the awarding of research grants, and secondarily on the buy-ins; research outputs derived from work conducted by the consortium itself were not factored into the targets. As such, a combination of core research products and a large number of datasets from one buy-in (UIP) led to the over-achievement in FY2.
- **Indicator 3** Custom LP.1 # of tertiary-level educators and faculty who complete professional development activities with USG assistance (e.g. R4D conferences and LASER’s online training modules)
 - + The massive over-achievement is due to the popularity of the online training modules; LASER had no idea that such a huge participation rate would be obtained. Even an upward revision of targets following the previous reporting period, and the absence of the Vietnam R4D conference, made little difference in moderating the total. A minor contributing factor (approximately 50 participants) is that the Purdue-led FSIL also required LASER’s gender course as part of their RFA issued in April 2020.
- **Indicator 4** Custom LP.2 Percentage-point improvement on research readiness assessment score
 - LP-4 was redesigned following the last reporting period because the intended measure (average improvement in online training participant scores based on a before and quiz) was untenable due to the nature of the training and the web platform. It was redesigned and then deployed in mid-September, but no data has been obtained yet. This is partly due to its redeployment late in FY2, but also the evaluation survey that captures the underlying data for calculating the scores is currently optional. This will likely have to be made mandatory in order to collect a sufficient volume of data. Note that this summary also applies to LP-4b (same indicator applied to scoring development practitioners taking online training).
- **Indicator 5** Custom LP.3 % of research proposals with adequate gender and translation components
 - Estimating targets for this indicator was very difficult because there was no basis from which to provide initial estimates, and so it was understood that the initial RFA(s) would be informative. Despite not meeting the target, the key result here is a clear improvement (increase) in the percentage from 36% for the East Africa RFA concept notes to 53% for the Colombia RFA concept notes. This likely reflects the greater pre-conference engagement that LASER had in Colombia with women researchers during in-country visits, as well as an emphasis in all HEI meetings to ensure that women researchers were at the table when LASER opportunities were discussed.
- **Indicator 9** L3.S.1.1_in3 % of research projects led by UIC or MSI HEIs / research institutions (includes LASER buy-ins)
 - Although LASER certainly would like to have most buy-ins led by UICs, it is not always possible for this to be realized due to, for example, the preference of the USAID OU that is sponsoring the buy-in and/or expertise required for a specific research topic area. FY3 will witness at least 2 batches (Colombia, Vietnam) of research awards coming online that feature UICs leading the research projects.
- **Indicator 10** Custom LP.10 # of research products translated for use
 - + Similar to LP-2, this indicator has targets based on research awards and buy-ins; LASER did not account for translated research outputs produced by the consortium itself. As such, almost all of the excess translated research products reported are from LASER core activities. LASER may exceed the FY3 target somewhat, given the un-targeted demand for core outputs, but it is anticipated that reporting will align better with targets in the latter years of the program (FY4, FY5).
- **Indicator 11** Custom LP.5 Partnership scorecard to measure deep collaboration between researchers and development practitioners

- No data to report. The partnership scorecard was deployed late in FY2; some data was expected to be collected for this report, but none was obtained. Data will be reported in the FY3 Bi-annual Report.
- **Indicator 12** Custom LP.6 # of development actors trained on translation (at R4D conferences and on-line modules)
 - ✦ Exceeded the target by 15%, with most data coming from users taking the online training module; the over-achievement would have been “worse” if the Vietnam R4D conference had taken place as planned.
- **Indicator 13** Custom LP.7 # of LASER-produced research translation materials (e.g. toolkit) utilized by researchers
 - No data to report. Research translation tools were developed in FY2 and were uploaded to the LASER website for use by projects. Due to technical issues with the underlying web platform, data tracking the use of these materials by members within the LP Network existed but was not available at the time of reporting. Data on this indicator will most certainly be reported in the next period.
- **Indicator 15** L3.S.2.2_in3 # of participants at convenings to disseminate research for use and/or develop policy recommendations
 - ✦ The target was greatly exceeded due to excellent participation in two webinar events held by the PSE-I buy-in to introduce and demonstrate the Evidence Gap Map that they developed. Given the large targets in the following years, this excess is likely to be important in reaching the Life-of-Program target.
- **Indicator 16** L3.S.2_in2 # of instances of USAID OUs using CDR-supported research tools, approaches or mechanisms
 - LASER did not anticipate having a total of 10 buy-ins in the first year of the award; nor did we anticipate only 3 in FY2. So the under-achievement shown here is balanced out by the over-achievement in FY1 such that LASER is right on track in terms of the cumulative total (note that the LASER-Colombia Hackathon is counted in FY2, as well).
- **Indicator 17** Custom LP.8 # of translated research products shared with networks, policy-makers, private sector and/or donors
 - ✦ Same issue as for LP-2 and LP-10, namely that LASER did not account for translated research outputs produced by the consortium itself. Thus, 5 core-derived outputs, plus several more than expected from the PSE-I buy-in, led to the excessive total observed.
- **Indicator 18** Custom LP.9 # of female researchers, and US minority researchers, conducting LASER-funded research
 - The under-achievement here is due to the delay in awarding the Colombia RFA awards; data from these awards, if combined with the East Africa data shown, would have ensured target achievement.

M&E Updates

Please describe changes to M&E processes over the reporting period. For example, have you made changes to data collection processes? Did you provide staff and/or sub-partner training on data quality protocols/methodologies? Have there been revisions to indicators or out year targets, or changes to assumptions in your HESN 2.0 Award's logic model? Please describe.

The main change to M&E processes during FY2 were revisions/refinement of some indicators and some target revisions. As these changes are documented in greater detail in the LASER PULSE MEL Plan, the following bullets points summarize some of the key revisions made:

- The FY2 to FY5 targets for LP-3 were revised upward substantially because LASER did not foresee the large numbers of LPN members taking the online training modules offered (see 2nd bullet point in above section).

- LP-4 was redesigned to measure participant satisfaction of the training module(s) and obtain a self-assessment in terms of knowledge improvement and usefulness of the information imparted; no targets were changed, but the descriptive title was revised to “Research readiness assessment score”.
- LP-8 was revised to report on individuals (i.e. LPN membership) as opposed to the number of institutions since this is more relevant to LASER’s objectives and processes; targets were revised accordingly.
- LP-10 was converted to a custom indicator to preserve its function in terms of tallying the number of translated research products produced; no targets were changed. The CDR standard indicator which it replaced (# of research projects with translated results) is now concurrently tracked as one of the “Additional CDR” indicators that LASER reports on unofficially. At the time of LASER adopting L3.S.2.2_in4 as LP-10, it indeed measured the number of translated research products produced – but later it was revised by CDR to measure the number of research projects with translated results.

Other changes to M&E processes include developing and deploying a system for collecting and collating qualitative information in the form of Outcome Mapping Progress Marker reporting (see next section). Also, a [Program and Policy Change \(PPC\) reporting form](#) was developed, based upon the corresponding DevResults datatable, to provide a user-friendly manner for persons queried about PPCs (e.g. USAID OU personnel) to record their feedback/observations.

Learning in FY2

Both Outcome Mapping (OM) and a Learning Agenda are part of LASER’s MEL system, particularly with regard to informing adaptive management responses and overall program learning efforts. The metrics and information obtained from OM clearly offer insight into the positive impacts made by LASER that are not necessarily captured in the quantitative performance measures presented in Table 3. Indeed, OM and its PMs have proven to be a great compliment to the RF-based quantitative performance indicator system used by USAID. Selected information compiled from both a PM Monitoring Journal and the Learning Agenda are presented in [Appendix 5](#).

6. USAID ENGAGEMENT

6.1 Current/active USAID buy-ins to program

Please provide a summary of progress for each active buy-in you worked to implement during this reporting period.

Due to the length of the summary that provides an update of each LASER-managed buy-in, a link to the [Buy-in update sheet is included here](#). Table 4 below (use link) displays data on those performance indicators specified for each buy-in by the respective USAID OU that engaged LASER to manage it.

[Table 4. Summary Table for Buy-In Specified Indicators \(Fiscal Year 2\).](#)

Name of buy-in	Buy-in start date	Expected buy-in end date	Indicator	Data Source	Unit of Measure	Results current reporting period	Results to date
South Sudan Psychosocial Evaluation	10/15/2018	9/30/2019, but extended to Spring 2020;	S.3_in3 # of high potential program or policy changes (PPC) made by public sector, private sector,	PPC Reporting Form*	Instances of PPC	2	2
		Project completed	S.1.3_in3-HESN # of data-related analyses provided to USAID Operating Units by HESN	BIDRF**	Technical report	1	1

* Click on the table graphic, or the “Table 4” link above it, to access the full table.

6.2 Potential USAID buy-ins

Please provide a brief overview of any buy-ins that are currently under discussion/negotiation between you and a USAID Operating Unit. This overview should provide a sentence summarizing the potential scope as well as the name of the OU and likely time period (start date/end date) of the buy-in, if known.

Title: Tanzania Early Grade Social and Emotional Skills and Phonics-Based Literacy Learning Agenda

USAID operating unit/mission: USAID Tanzania Education Office

Buy-in amount: \$1,061,309

Duration: January 2020 to August 2023

Lead Implementer: TBD

Overall objective: The USAID/Tanzania Education Office, hereafter referred to as the “Education Office” seeks to partner with USAID/LAB/CDR to co-create a learning agenda with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) on the Tanzania mainland, the Ministry of Education, and Vocational Training (MOEVT) on Zanzibar, teacher training colleges, and higher education institutions. The overarching goal is to conduct research on: 1) integrating social and emotional competencies into instruction to improve the quality of teacher-learner relationship and nurture a safe, inclusive classroom environment and 2) identify opportunities in the education ecosystem for integrating a phonics-based literacy approach.

6.3 Other engagements with USAID

Please describe engagements with USAID operating units (OUs) outside the Center for Development Research. This might include design input from a OU on a sub-project, support in data collection, participation in USAID Mission events, etc.

Please see the bookmark to [Other Engagements with USAID](#).

7. LESSONS LEARNED/BEST PRACTICES

Reflect on the past reporting period and describe any “Lessons Learned” or “Best Practices” that emerged.

7.1. LASER PULSE offers a unique approach of “embedded research translation” (ERT).

A literature review by CRS, the preliminary findings of which are summarized [here](#), confirmed that ERT differs from any other concepts of research translation found. A full report is planned by the end of 2020. LASER PULSE defines ERT as follows: “an iterative co-design process among academics, practitioners, and other stakeholders in which research is intentionally applied to a development challenge. Core to this approach are four translation pillars – partnership, process, product, and dissemination.”

7.2. A buy-in launch meeting is key.

With an uptick of buy-ins in FY2, LASER has learned it is essential to introduce prospective buy-in partners to the LASER PULSE buy-in process in a well planned and interactive launch meeting. A strong kick-off meeting is critical for the success of new buy-ins to articulate roles and responsibilities with all stakeholders involved (LASER management, USAID M/B/IOs, implementing team) in the buy-in process, establish a cadence for communicating and meeting, address questions and refine the scope of work, budget and program description. New implementing teams will need to navigate the various expected communication channels and will need to understand that LASER PULSE is the entity responsible for overseeing the buy-in progresses smoothly and deliverables are on track according to the approved workplan. Therefore, it is crucial to clarify how the buy-in work will unfold and establish strong communication and guidance from the launch meeting.

7.3. The TIP buy-in modeled engagement with a policy maker on a jointly funded buy-in.

The Trafficking in Persons (TIP) buy-in offered valuable learning experiences because many elements of the buy-in were new. The buy-in activity was co-created by LASER PULSE, USAID South Africa, and the

Government of South Africa's Department of Science and Innovation (DSI). This multistakeholder collaboration, which includes a host-country government agency, offers the opportunity for LASER to monitor its [Policy Maker Progress Markers \(PMs\)](#) and identify changes in this boundary partner (BP) that can validate LASER PULSE's theory of change.

LASER will report on the PM: "Policy makers maintain systems, structures, and processes that support evidence use (e.g. budgets, time, HR)" to its TIP BPs (DSI in particular) by (1) following up on how research findings are applied, and (2) promoting continued support for government collaboration with researchers on evidence for policy recommendations. Advocacy for host-country government support for ERT is a LASER strategy for sustainability.

7.4. The U.S. proposal-writing lens often differs from that of countries where LASER PULSE supports projects. It is important to bridge this gap.

East Africa and Colombia award rounds revealed differing abilities to respond to RFAs, based on experience with bilateral donor applications (which academics in any country are less likely than NGO practitioners to have); familiarity with project cycle stages; and experience writing proposals for research translation.

Another factor we have encountered is the influence of culture on proposal writing style. Some applications received were challenging for U.S. reviewers to understand – not because applicants lacked experience writing proposals, but because of the cultural gap in written presentation of arguments, strategies, methods and activities. A Colombian key informant commented: "*Part of the issue is that there is a characteristic writing style in Latin America that favors a passive voice and oblique argumentation, which is the complete opposite to Anglo-American writing style, which favors an active voice, directness and succinct argumentation via an efficient use of language.*"

This experience provided LASER PULSE opportunities to learn, and to help applicants write applications and proposals in the style in which the donor would expect to receive them. LASER PULSE developed a training video, [Preparing a Successful LASER PULSE Application](#), with specific reference to writing style and other considerations. LASER PULSE also is considering how to provide more substantial guidance on many aspects of proposal writing (including problem-identification frameworks) for its Y3 applicants.

7.5 Engaging with USAID missions presents opportunities and challenges, which LASER PULSE has learned to navigate.

Through engaging with USAID missions, LASER PULSE has promoted ERT collaboration. Every five years, a mission undertakes extensive consultative processes with government leaders and other stakeholders to develop the next Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS), which the mission reflects in proposed focus areas for a LASER PULSE RFA. LASER PULSE advances CDCS priorities, as well as local institutions' self-reliance, by promoting collaboration with academia (traditionally not a development partner for any donor) toward a country's development objectives. All of these factors are win-wins for LASER PULSE and the mission. Also, working with missions enhances LASER PULSE's credibility with INGOs, other donors, and national government leaders.

On the other hand, many political considerations and sensitivities with a mission can take the attention of diplomats and local staff at a moment's notice, reducing their ability to focus on LASER PULSE opportunities. Moreover, mission concurrence formalities can slow LASER PULSE's progress in advancing an award round before releasing an RFA.

LASER PULSE has learned to position itself as a willing partner, showing how research collaboration can help to address development challenges. At the same time, given a mission's first priority of responding to exigencies of the host country, LASER has learned that mission concurrence and engagement are essential, but that it is not feasible to rely too heavily on the mission to advance our work.

8. PIVOT POINTS/CHALLENGES

Discuss possible pivot points and/or challenges that your HESN 2.0 Award has identified during the reporting period. This could be changes in the operating environment or context that could affect programming or new opportunities for collaboration or influence. Please link your pivot points to lessons learned to demonstrate how you are adaptively managing your activity. When discussing challenges, please provide proposed solutions. If applicable, note what USAID staff could do to help the project overcome challenges.

8.1. An adaptive mid-year recalibration

LASER PULSE developed a [Recalibration Plan](#), which outlines strategies to adapt programming to contingencies for COVID-19, extend the reach of activities, and reduce bottlenecks in the awards process.

8.1.1 Applying contingency strategies

The Recalibration Plan addresses effects of COVID-19, with contingencies for planned activities. LASER PULSE has applied these adjustments to R4D events and award rounds as follows:

- LASER PULSE moved forward with award rounds for Vietnam and Ethiopia, although COVID-19 travel and meeting restrictions precluded in-person pre-award events.
- *LASER PULSE plans to hold Vietnam and Ethiopia post-award R4D Sustainability Workshops in Y3 – in person if feasible (once travel to those countries is allowed), or, if necessary, virtually with in-person follow-ups. These events will use awards to exemplify ERT and to advocate for ERT and CSFA.*
- *A follow-up sustainability workshop will be held in Colombia in Y3 to advocate for government and donor uptake of ERT. It may be necessary to hold an initial virtual meeting with a subset of key influencers, followed by an in-person meeting.*

8.1.2 Extending reach

- To expand access to research tools by enabling LPN members to use CSFA to identify gaps. The CSFA team has developed training videos and manuals for organizational leaders and researchers/practitioners. Through the release of these materials, LASER PULSE plans to democratize this methodology as a systems lens to frame and contextualize the work of individual researchers and practitioners, as well as make donors, academic leaders, and others aware of opportunities for greater impact.
- To share information on its ERT, CSFA, and other distinct approaches more broadly, LASER PULSE will continue to present results of its work at conferences and “sister network” (such as IDEAL) events, as well as prepare and submit manuscripts for peer-reviewed journals.
- To expand geographic and sectoral reach in Y3, LASER PULSE intends to hold a global award round – the Grand Research Challenges for Development (GRCD), with a call for sector focus areas and open to any USAID interest country (UIC) where special notification is not required. The call will also be open to selected special notification countries.

8.1.3 Streamlining processes

LASER PULSE has reduced bottlenecks experienced in previous award rounds in two key respects:

- USAID missions are being asked to identify priority focus areas from the CDCS, instead of using a priority identification phase of CSFA, which LASER PULSE did for East Africa. Turning to the missions for priorities has shaved four to six months from the timeline, and it ensures early, intensive mission engagements. This early engagement increases the likelihood of mission agreement with the award-round sector focus, and it tends to cultivate LASER PULSE allies, helpful for follow-on activities.
- LASER PULSE eliminated the concept note phase for award rounds, starting with the Vietnam round. This change removed the need to review concept notes, which can occupy up to a month, as LASER PULSE seeks reviewers and then carries out the review and selection process.

8.2. Integrating communications activities

Each LASER PULSE consortium member proposed communications-related activities for the Y2 Workplan. These efforts, affected by a change in key personnel during Y2 planning, could have been integrated better. LASER PULSE's AOR requested a coordinated communications strategy going forward.

In response, LASER PULSE shifted to an integrated Strategic Communications Plan framework. Primary research activities involve such elements as moderator guides, focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), and surveys. They inform messages and strategies to change attitudes and behaviors of target audiences (LASER PULSE BPs). Once key messages are developed and strategic activities are adapted to respond to feedback, LASER PULSE will create outreach campaigns targeted to researchers and practitioners *The [Y3 Workplan](#) calls for completing the communication plan, a report on barriers and opportunities for researcher-practitioner collaboration, and a journal article. A summary presentation of the [survey on barriers and opportunities](#) can be accessed [here](#).*

9. KEY ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT REPORTING PERIOD

Summarize the activities that are planned for the next reporting period (not including buy-ins). List steps that your HESN 2.0 Award intends to take to ensure the award's continued success.

9.1 Hold post-award R4D Sustainability Workshops in Colombia, Vietnam, Ethiopia (Y3 Activities 1.3.2 - 1.3.4). Ability to hold in-person workshops will depend on the lifting of COVID-19 travel and meeting restrictions. In early 2021, LASER PULSE will reassess the COVID-19 situation (e.g., likelihood of a vaccine in the next few months). If the review indicates delays, as a first step, LASER PULSE will hold virtual meetings with a targeted, limited set of BPs in each country.

9.2 Make awards for country-specific rounds in Vietnam and Ethiopia (Y3 Activities 2.1.2, 2.1.3) It will be possible to make awards despite the COVID-19 contexts for these countries. LASER PULSE will require each awardee to submit a COVID-19 contingency plan for activities.

9.3 Complete and apply the LASER Strategic Communications Plan (Y3 Activity 3.1.1) "Applying" means carrying out messaging and activities in response to analyses of qualitative and quantitative data LASER PULSE gathered in Y2. LASER PULSE strives to complete analyses by December 2020, in order to create targeted messages for researchers and practitioners, even though the complete plan, with all analyses, is targeted for May 2021. In-person activities will depend on easing of travel and meeting restrictions.

9.4 Carry out two private sector engagement workshops (Y3 Activities 1.3.5, 1.3.6) Working with the business development offices at Purdue and UND, LASER PULSE plans to hold virtual engagement workshops with private sector partners.

9.5 Finalize and disseminate Research Translation Literature Review Report (Y3 Activity 2.3.2) Following completion of a [high-level summary of research findings](#) in Y2, the completion of the full report is planned for the end of 2020. An academic paper will be developed from the report and submitted for publication.

9.6 Finalize and release the RFA for the Grand Research Challenges for Development (GRCD) award round (Y3 Activity 2.1.4) The UND team leading the development of the GRCD anticipates releasing the RFA for this round during 2021. LASER PULSE will strive to also make awards during 2021, but has not committed to that time frame due to a need to resolve strategy and process matters.

9.7 Increase the functionality and usability of, and engagement through, the LASER PULSE online network platform (Y3 Activities: 1.1.3, 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.4.2, 2.3.3, 3.1.3, 3.1.4) This activity focuses on the two key quality elements for LPN engagement: 1) improving LASER PULSE's platform functionality (1.4.2) – an activity that began in Y2 and will continue into Y3 with completion of and migration to the new platform; and 2)

increasing engagement with LPN members through Y3 engagement activities planned by the RAN team, while also taking advantage of the new functionality to expand network engagement.

9.8 Roll out Purpose-Context Mapping (PCM) for high-impact solution development (Y3 Activity

2.2.1) The Innovation Science team is conducting this work with a suite of tools to help various clients understand robust innovation paths for research. The team is talking with UND and CRS about opportunities to develop case studies (a LASER PULSE Y3 deliverable) to spotlight ongoing projects of their organizations. Such case studies with practitioner partners will add value to the guidance for LPN members – especially awardees.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

The LASER PULSE Cooperative Agreement was reviewed by the U.S. Global Development Lab's bureau environmental officer (BEO) for potential environmental impacts and received a categorical exclusion pursuant to 22 CFR 216.2(c)(2). Specific FY2 activities not enumerated in the Cooperative Agreement were likewise reviewed by the BEO.

For Higher Education Solutions Network (HESN) 2.0 Awards with Initial Environmental Examinations (IEEs):

If your Award had one or more activities that did not receive a categorical exclusion when they were reviewed by the BEO (either under the FY 2020 workplan, in a previous workplan for an ongoing activity, or under a subsequent sub-award review) and an Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) was prepared, please provide an update on each activity with an IEE in place or under review and explain the steps that you and/or your partners have taken to monitor and mitigate environmental impacts per the requirements outlined in your IEE(s).

LASER monitors sub awardees that have IEEs to ensure EMMPs are being followed, and to address additional potential environmental or social impacts that may arise during the project implementation. To date, this includes one subaward (East Africa Award Round):

- Building Sustainable Resilient Supply Chains: A model of Youth Input Resellers in Kenya. PI, Jake Ricker-Gilbert (Purdue University). Status: IEE submitted to the Lab BEO November 4th. The team awaits feedback and next steps.

11. GENDER/SOCIAL INCLUSIONS CONSIDERATIONS

The LASER PULSE program director works collaboratively with the gender specialist from Makerere to provide recommendations and input regarding:

- LASER PULSE gender requirements and metrics for LASER PULSE research award RFAs, as well as video training guidance for award applicants on gender mainstreaming, and for award reviewers on how to assess gender considerations by applicants
- LASER PULSE buy-ins
- LASER PULSE training sessions on gender mainstreaming consideration for LPN members. At least one additional USAID-funded program being implemented through Purdue (the Food Safety Innovation Lab) requires its sub-award applicants to take the LASER PULSE gender training.

Gender Statistics for Award Rounds and Buy-ins

- *Award Rounds: East Africa:* six female, seven male researchers; *Colombia:* nine female, six male researchers. Total 15 female, 13 male researchers from HEIs (NGOs not counted here).
- *Buy-ins:* 57 female, 56 male researchers across 12 buy-ins (11 active, one just completed).

12. DELIVERABLES COMPLETED

LASER PULSE's completed deliverables are listed in two groups: (1) [translated research products](#) and (2) [research products](#). Group (1) includes video, webinar, powerpoint, web platform, and brief. Group (2) includes data collection tool, dataset and report.

APPENDIX 1: ACTIVITIES IN YEAR 2 ORGANIZED BY IRs

IR 1: Increase HEI delivery of collaborative and effective development-focused research

Sub-IR 1.1: Increase capacity of UIC HEIs to obtain, administer, and conduct effective applied research programs

1.1.2 Conduct focused research gathering activities among Asian researchers to provide information on institutional barriers in SE Asia for embedded translation

Makerere University's Resilient Africa Network (RAN) conducted discussions at eight universities in Hanoi, and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, around the following research focus areas: 1) Understanding the university system in Vietnam; 2) Research infrastructure; 3) Linkages, partnerships and collaboration; 4) Continuity and sustainability; 5) Research applicability; 6) Dissemination and knowledge translation; and 7) Research management and support systems. The findings from these discussions were presented in a report: [Understanding Vietnam's Higher Education Institution Research Infrastructure, Research Translation, and Sustainability Mechanisms](#), which has been uploaded to the DEC.

In addition to this report on Vietnam's HEI context with respect to ERT, the RAN team carried out research on the same focus areas to understand barriers to ERT in the Ethiopian higher education system. The RAN team met with researchers in Ethiopia in May 2020 to obtain qualitative data for a study to explore the existing systems, infrastructure, research translation, and sustainability in the context of HEIs in Ethiopia. Participants were sourced from public HEIs, including Jimma University, Addis Ababa University, Hawassa University and Mekelle University. Below are the findings for the report, [Understanding Ethiopia's HEI Research Infrastructure, Research Translation, and Sustainability Mechanisms¹](#), from this research.

Research Findings: Results indicated that HEIs in Ethiopia are involved in teaching, research and community service as their core mandate. The university representatives interviewed said they had adopted thematic research approaches to address community needs, aligned with USAID's priority sectors. Below are some key takeaways from above-referenced report:

- The Government of Ethiopia allocates annual funds on a competitive basis for public university researchers. Among these are funds specifically to support female researchers.
- While the vice president for research and community service has overall responsibility for transparency and integrity of the university research transactions and systems, there are different levels of financial control at the university and college level.
- The interaction between researchers and policy makers is uncommon. The path to link research translation to influence policies and decision-making is unclear.
- Research findings are disseminated through publications that target the scientific community. The significant research produced does not reach the potential end-users because it is published in scientific journals and shelved in university archives.
- Researchers reported that research translation at times is slow because of the complexity of the process and the many actors involved. Research translation gaps were attributed to inadequate value attached to research evidence in decision-making by researchers. The main information sources for policy makers are expert opinions, reports, and benchmarking.

1.1.3 Develop two online courses, responding to the most prominent needs from gap analyses

Makerere has completed the content for two online courses, but is still incorporating learning activities and case

¹ This report is pending USAID GDL/CDR approval. Once approved, LASER will upload to the DEC and provide a link with this title.

studies for a richer e-learning experience. The RAN team had planned to gather more input from the R4D conferences that would enable them to better tie the content to the target audience's needs, but was unable to because of COVID-19. Therefore, this activity will carry over into Y3 to enable further refining according to audience needs. Currently, the team is determining where the content will be hosted. It is planned for these training sessions to be delivered as synchronous learning events, so recordings will be made, and posted after the schedule of trainings has been carried out. These two courses and their target audiences are:

- **Research Leadership:** Focusing on institutional support services, funding, research policies and guidelines, research agenda setting, incentivizing research, commercialization of research and intellectual property. (Target audiences: University leadership and heads of academic/research units)
- **Research Project Management:** Introducing participants to research team roles, human resources, work plans, human subjects research ethical review, budgeting, financial management, reporting/M&E, and research translation. (Target audiences: PIs, researchers, and heads of institutional support offices)

Sub IR 1.2 Adoption by network members of best practices for conducting and translating research

1.2.1 Develop templates and guidance materials for embedded research translation, and dissemination of results

IU finalized seven resources on research translation, available on the [LASER PULSE website](#). These resources include a Policy Brief Template, Project Summary Template, Communications Planning Template, and Research Translation Implementation Planning Template. In addition, they include narratives on *How to Plan for and Utilize a Policy Brief*, *Using Accessible Language in Research Project Communication*, and *Engaging Communities to Enhance Impact and Sustainability of International Partnerships*. LASER PULSE promoted their usage through emails, social media, and a virtual demonstration webinar targeting the network. Other resources are underway for targeted development during Y3; they will be based on needs assessments undertaken by the LPN and on LASER PULSE buy-in projects and research awards.

Sub IR 1.3 Increase inclusion of private sector, government, NGOs, and others in research for development

1.3.1 Develop strategy document, describing current barriers and including an outreach plan to address them to recruit and engage practitioners

A consortium-wide strategic communication plan outline for LASER PULSE programming, including the practitioner outreach strategy, was drafted in collaboration with other consortium partners in Spring 2020. As inputs into this strategy, CRS drafted three summary reports: 1) Preliminary Findings from the [Ethiopia Practitioner KIs](#); 2) [Vietnam Practitioner FGD Summary of Findings](#); and 3) a summary of the [Research Translation Literature Review](#) to inform the practitioner engagement plan. This activity will carry over into Y3, with the barriers research from all sources aggregated and analyzed to shape messages to BPs. The literature review analysis is ongoing, and the full report will be much longer and include a version to be submitted for publication.

1.3.3 - 1.3.5 R4D Workshops held in Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Indonesia

LASER PULSE teams led by IU made pre-conference preparation visits to Vietnam (two visits), to share and promote the LASER PULSE key concept of ERT with the USAID missions for those countries. In both countries, the missions identified sector focus areas for LASER PULSE award rounds, based on the CDCS needs for solutions in these sectors for the country. LASER PULSE teams held numerous meetings with academic researchers, government officials, and NGO representatives to discuss LASER PULSE's intention to hold workshops focused on identifying gaps to address within those sector areas, and followed by award rounds.

COVID-19 travel restrictions, as well as lockdowns on movements of citizens within these countries and the U.S., came soon after the team's return from Ethiopia, and a few weeks before the planned Vietnam workshop.

The LASER PULSE teams had been able to meet with BPs in Vietnam to refine sector gap focuses, and to carry out KIs and FGDs to understand barriers in collaboration between researchers and practitioners. But LASER PULSE had to carry out these steps virtually with researchers and practitioners (prospective award round applicants) in Ethiopia. In Y3, LASER PULSE plans to hold post-research award events in these countries to promote the sustainability of the ERT approach with government, donor, and private sector representatives to support researcher-practitioner collaboration on development solutions.

LASER PULSE staff had been in contact with Universitas Indonesia (UI) since February 2019 to join an ERT focus with the university's planned final Smart City Workshop in August 2020. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, the LASER PULSE team was unable to travel to Indonesia to meet with the USAID mission, UI researchers, practitioners, and UI program representatives to detail these plans. The Smart City Program ended early, as the workshop could not be held.

1.3.10 Optimize the LASER PULSE network platform as a matchmaking site

Purdue spent more than a year attempting to build greater user-friendliness and functionality in its network platform, which is hosted on STEMEd Hub (on Hub Zero). It became apparent in Y2 that this platform would not be able to provide the user experience and benefits on which LASER PULSE seeks to build a community of practice for ERT partners. In the second half of Y2, LASER PULSE developed a [SOW on the desired functionality](#), and posted it with its contacts office to receive bids. The six bids received were reviewed by Purdue Offices of Technology, Marketing & Media and others. LASER PULSE identified the bidder that offered the closest match to needs and the best value: [Fitzgerald Tech Solutions](#), which will use an existing host – Engineering Computer Network (ECN) or Information Technology at Purdue (ITaP) – to create a new site and build in the necessary functionality. It is important for LASER PULSE sustainability to maintain services to engage with the network and community of practice cultivated during LASER PULSE implementation. Hosting the network on ECN or ITaP will allow for this, and the added functionality Fitzgerald will provide will not be expensive to maintain at the close of LASER PULSE's implementation period.

1.3.11 Revise, apply and document Comprehensive Success Factors methodology as it evolves and is applied adaptively in different country and regional contexts

The Purdue Innovation Science Team (the IS Team) recorded the evolution of CSFA ([link to document](#)) from the East Africa sectoral systems trees and gap identification to the adaptation of this method as applied to refine the priority focus areas for Colombia, and later for Vietnam and Ethiopia. The IS Team created online training modules and associated digital materials to enable 1) [BPs in leadership positions](#), and 2) [Individual Researchers/Practitioners](#) to apply a system lens to complex challenges at scale, and individual contributions to these systems, respectively. Materials (e.g., tools/templates) that accompany the training modules can be accessed [here](#).

IR 2: Increase HEI synthesis, exchange, and translation of research results into useable development products and practices.

Sub IR 2.1 Increase collaboration of development actors with HEI researchers throughout the research-to-translation value chain

2.1.1 Make awards for standard R4D grant round for Colombia

LASER PULSE released an RFA for Colombia in the sector areas of Youth, Venezuelan Migration Response

(VMR), and Integrated Rural Development (IRD) in Spring 2020. After the review of 49 concept notes, 14 applications advanced to full review, and four applications were expected to be approved as of September 2020. An additional application is under discussion and review. More information about the four applications can be found in [this link](#).

From the experience of reviewing and negotiating edits to the applications for this award round, LASER PULSE understood that cultural norms for discourse have great influence on the formation and style of Colombian applications. In response to this finding, LASER PULSE created an online training course, [Preparing a Successful LASER PULSE Application](#), for potential applicants, that outlines and summarizes what LASER PULSE is looking for in an application, including key concepts and requirements, some common mistakes, and writing style considerations.

2.1.6 Develop RFAs based on USAID sector priorities

During Y2, the RFA template created for East Africa was modified substantially for Colombia, and then again, but less so, for Vietnam and Ethiopia award rounds. The RFA template "Section B" content is replaced each time with content specific to the USAID sector priority focus for each country.

During the Colombia award round, LASER PULSE adopted and applied a modified U.S. National Science Foundation consensus panel review process. Following the Colombia award round, the LASER PULSE team decided to omit the concept note stage to reduce the award review time by approximately one month, by eliminating the need for the review process for that stage. This link shows a LASER PULSE [generic template](#) for the revised RFA, and this link shows [review and selection procedures](#). Finally, a [LASER PULSE Award Manual](#) was created to provide written guidance, planning and reporting templates for managing the LASER PULSE sub-award.

2.1.7 Create a sustained Research Translation Advisory Board in Colombia

Following the Colombia R4D workshop, a Purdue delegation visited Colombia university partners to understand how their participation in the workshop influenced their preparation for the award round.

Colciencias, the ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation in Colombia, has reached out for a call to discuss some elements of LASER PULSE, specifically regarding how the team evaluates development research applications. Colciencias administers a national program for applied research, directed toward regional development priorities, financed by its general system of regalías through the tax revenue secured from the non-renewable resource extraction sector. Unfortunately, because of COVID-19 disruptions, LASER PULSE has not been able to hold the planned post-award sustainability meeting with Colombian government officials, donors, and other stakeholders. This activity has been deferred to Y3.

Sub IR 2.3 Enhance capacity of HEI researchers to translate research results into usable products and practices.

2.3.1 Engage with buy-in and grant teams to guide translated products, communication, and applicable audiences and actors for dissemination; support content tailoring and timely dissemination of translation products

After engaging with buy-in teams and reviewing the effectiveness of participating in weekly calls, IU and CRS developed and documented [new ERT processes](#). These processes were designed to guide RFA awardees and buy-in teams through collaboratively designing, producing and disseminating research translation products, as well as to help LASER PULSE understand how best to support the projects. These processes include integration of ERT into the Buy-in SOPs, RFA Template, Research Awards Manual, and M&E requirements. As part of this endeavor, IU and CRS also developed a Research Translation Needs Assessment Survey and Research Translation Progress Tracker to enable RFA awardees and buy-in teams to assess the current state of research translation in their projects and allow for appropriate interventions. This data will inform subsequent

engagements with LASER PULSE projects, including phone calls, webinars, templates, tools, and resources for capacity building. Existing tools and training sessions will be deployed for buy-ins and research awards as needed, and new resources will be developed based on identified needs. As of the end of Y2, the Needs Assessment is ready for deployment to existing buy-in teams, as well as the East Africa, Colombia, and Vietnam awardees. Deployment of the survey and subsequent engagements will take place during Y3.

IR 3: Increase dissemination of translated research results for evidence-based solutions

Sub IR 3.1 Increase access among development actors and information brokers to good practices and systems for translated research delivery

3.1.1 Design research translation communication strategy for grant and buy-in results to optimize LASER dissemination of translated research, and to market and promote LASER concepts of translation through LASER channels. Test and make adjustments to strategy based on results.

At the recommendation of the AOR, LASER PULSE consolidated intended communication plans and activities under one umbrella. To manage this process strategically, LASER PULSE created a Communications Working Group. The group, led by IU, has successfully coordinated necessary research across partner institutions to ensure that inputs on researchers and practitioners will be adequate and will inform the development of the strategic communication plan. This activity includes Vietnam and Ethiopia KIIs, conducted by CRS with assistance with IU and UND; Colombia KIIs facilitated by Purdue; gap analyses of Vietnam and Ethiopia by RAN; a Research Translation Literature Review by Purdue and CRS; a LASER PULSE Network Survey on engagement opportunities; a network survey on Barriers to Collaboration between researchers and practitioners (also sent to other networks); and analysis of existing descriptive data from the LASER PULSE website, network, and social media.

3.1.2 Develop research translation dissemination trainings, and promotional tools for researcher awardees, development practitioner awardees, and general public. Promote existing tools that align with LASER translation strategy

IU led the development of five online training courses, as well as the revision of the Introduction to Embedded Research Translation course. As of the end of Y2, all five trainings have been filmed with production assistance from Purdue University. These training modules are available on the LASER PULSE website, linked below. They have been promoted to the LPN and will be made available to research awardees and buy-in teams for use. Two IU faculty members and one Purdue faculty member developed the content for these modules with coordination by IU. Topics for online trainings include:

- [An Introduction to Using Applied Improvisation Techniques to Enhance Research Translation](#)
- [Using Accessible Language in Research Project Communication](#)
- [Designing a Training Toward Research Translation](#)
- [Effective Planning for Your Project's Communications Strategy](#)
- [Engaging Communities to Enhance Impact and Sustainability of International Partnerships](#)

3.1.5 Deliver a Quarterly newsletter to network members

As planned, four quarterly newsletters were produced in blog form ([November 2019](#), [March 2020](#), [June 2020](#), and [September 2020](#)) to keep network members abreast of LASER PULSE activities and opportunities. The graphic and a notification with links to these newsletters were sent to LPN members.

Sub IR 4: Enhance systems and structures for gender and minority considerations in the HEI network that enable women and minorities to conduct research**4.2 Review LASER RFA proposals to ensure adequate consideration and strategy to address gender issues**

Gender integration has been built into the RFA template, in the form of guidance for applicants and an Annex with metrics. This is in addition to the LASER PULSE online gender training (and certificate) that is required for all applicant PIs and team members. Additionally, training for reviewers contains guidance on how to review applications with a gender lens. And finally, the Grant Management document, which is being finalized, will contain gender review guidance for grants managers.

APPENDIX 2: DETAILS ON NEW PARTNERSHIPS WITH HEIs

- LASER PULSE's first award round in Y2 (for East Africa) resulted in awards to five teams, comprising five new HEI partners as follows:
 - New York University, School of Medicine (New York, New York): \$80,988
 - Busubizi Core Primary Teacher College in Mityana District (Uganda): Teachers as consultants for the project or participants in training workshops
 - Egerton University (Njoro, Kenya): \$47,768
 - Virginia Tech (Blacksburg, Virginia): \$104,152
 - University of Dar Es Salaam (Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania): \$36,058
- Finalizing sub-awards for Colombia, LASER PULSE anticipates the following awards for new universities (with another university pending):
 - Universidad Icesi (Cali, Colombia): \$134,826
 - The New School for Social Research (New York, New York): \$113,981
 - Universidad del Norte (Barranquilla, Colombia): \$117,906
 - Universidad EAFIT (Medellín, Colombia): \$107,906
- The Self-Reliance Learning Agenda buy-in is led by Texas A&M University, Bush School of Government and Public Service : \$248,500
- LASER PULSE's most recent approved buy-in activity, The Nature and Scope of Trafficking in Persons (TIP), in South Africa, comprises the following five new HEI partnerships:
 - University of Missouri-St. Louis: \$137,065
 - University of Missouri (Columbia): \$6,626
 - Washington University-St. Louis: \$48,827
 - University of Witwatersrand (Johannesburg, South Africa): DSI Funding R633,600
 - University of the Western Cape (Cape Town, South Africa): DSI Funding R1,531,100

APPENDIX 3: DETAILS ON OTHER ENGAGEMENTS WITH USAID

- **USAID Center for Evaluation and Impact Assessment:** Is the USAID partner for the Self-Reliance Learning Agenda buy-in.
- **USAID The Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization, Center for Conflict and Violence Prevention:** Is working with LASER PULSE and a team of researchers selected to co-create the program description for an Armed Conflict and Violence Prevention Learning Agenda.
- **USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs:** Is working closely with LASER PULSE to select a team and finalize a program description to implement an evaluation for a new multi-year emergency program impact evaluation in South Sudan.
- **USAID Colombia Mission:** 1) Participated in the Colombia R4D Workshop; and 2) assisted with the Colombia hackathon, by providing information to focus the call for data visualizations, and selecting winners.
- **USAID Ethiopia Mission:** 1) Participated in many video conversations to provide sector focus areas for the CSFA; met with the LASER PULSE team during a scoping visit (February 28 - March 6, 2020); and contributed to refining the focus for the Youth Civic Engagement, and Measurement of Resilience sectors for LASER PULSE awards.
- **USAID Laos Mission:** Is the USAID partner for the Applied Nutrition Research Capacity Building Laos (LANI) buy-in.
- **USAID Malawi Mission; USAID Nepal Mission; USAID Cambodia Mission; the Bureau for Africa; the Bureau for Asia; and the Office of Education/Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment:** Are the USAID partners for the Multi-Country Study on Inclusive Education buy-in.
- **U.S. Global Development Lab Office of Program and Strategic Planning:** Has been working with LASER PULSE and the Iraqi HEI partner to design the Northern Iraq Cultural Restoration Project buy-in.
- **USAID Somalia Mission:** Is the USAID partner for the Evaluation of Somalia's Accelerated Quality Learning buy-in.
- **USAID South Sudan Mission:** Is the USAID partner for the Impact Evaluation of Psychosocial Support on Children's Well-being Literacy, and Math Outcome in the Integrated Essential Emergency Education Program buy-in.
- **USAID South Africa Mission:** Along with the Government of South Africa's Department of Science and Innovation (DSI), collaborates with LASER PULSE and implementing partners on buy-in activity to understand the nature and extent of Trafficking in Persons (TIP) in South Africa.
- **USAID Uganda Mission:** Works extensively with the RAN team on the Uganda Indigenous Peoples buy-in implementation, as well as the related USAID regional development initiative.
- **USAID Vietnam Mission:** Has provided substantial guidance for LASER PULSE's sector focus area and planning for the Vietnam R4D Workshop.
- **USAID Tanzania Education:** Is working with LASER PULSE to select a team and finalize a program description for a buy-in on Early Grade Social and Emotional Skills and Phonics-Based Literacy Learning Agenda.

APPENDIX 4: LIST OF TRANSLATED AND RESEARCH PRODUCTS

Provide a list of any deliverables submitted during this reporting period. (A bulleted list is acceptable)

Translated Research Products

- [A Journey to Self-Reliance: Successfully Scaling and Transitioning Kenya's Tusome Early-Grade Reading Program](#) Completed by the Tusome buy-in team (Lead author: A. Jalloh, CRS), with the final version approved by USAID in November 2019; uploaded to the DEC on January 16, 2020.
- [Tusome Early Grade Reading Case Study \(Webinar PowerPoint Presentation\)](#) Completed by the Tusome buy-in team (Lead author: H. Inyega, University of Nairobi), with the final version approved by USAID in November 2019; uploaded to the DEC on May 14, 2020.
- [Tusome: Early-Grade Reading Program](#) Blog post written by J. Ssentongo for the LASER PULSE website, posted on December 6, 2019.
- [Private Sector Engagement Evidence Gap Map Platform](#) Completed by the PSE-I buy-in team (Lead author: P. Perrin, University of Notre Dame), with review by USAID in March 2020; the link is to the platform via GitHub, as an upload to the DEC is not possible.
- [Impact Evaluation of Psychosocial Support on Children's Well-being, Literacy, and Math Outcomes in the Integrated Essential Emergency Education Services \(IEEES\) Activity](#) Presentation to USAID by the South Sudan Psychosocial Evaluation Buy-In (Lead author: A. Benitez, Indiana University).
- **LASER-CGDV Hackathon Data Visualizations:**
 - [A Staggering Exodus into Colombia](#) Created by a team from the University of Notre Dame (1st place).
 - [La Migración Me Quedo o Me Voy?](#) Created by a team from Universidad del Norte in Colombia (2nd place).
 - [Eder and the Venezuelan Migration Crisis](#) Created by a team from Purdue University (3rd place).

Q3/Q4:

- [Impact Evaluation of Psychosocial Support on Children's Well-being, Literacy, and Math Outcomes in the Integrated Essential Emergency Education Services \(IEEES\) Activity](#) Video presentation for the CIES virtual conference, April 2020, by A. Benitez (Indiana University) and others from the South Sudan buy-in team.
- [Private Sector Engagement Evidence Gap Map Webinar](#) Webinar presentation to USAID on April 28, 2020 by P. Perrin on behalf of the PSE-I buy-in team.
- [South Sudan Dissemination Webinar Presentation to USAID Sector Council](#) Webinar presentation to USAID on May 13, 2020 by A. Benitez et al. on behalf of the South Sudan buy-in team.
- [Applying Evidence when Engaging the Private Sector](#) Webinar presentation on July 21, 2020 for the public launch of the PSE Evidence Gap Map (P. Perrin on behalf of the PSE-I buy-in team).
- [Research Gap Identification Using Comprehensive Success Factor Analysis](#) Completed by the Innovation Science team at Purdue University; link is to YouTube, with upload to the DEC following review and approval by USAID.
- [A System Level View of Development Challenges](#) Completed by the Innovation Science team at Purdue University; link is to YouTube, with upload to the DEC following review and approval by USAID.
- [Private Sector Engagement Evidence Gap Map](#) Blog post written by F. Rossi for the LASER PULSE website, posted on September 24, 2020.

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Research Products

- [LASER PULSE Research for Development Conference Report: Uganda 2019](#) Uploaded to the DEC on December 19, 2019.
- [Tusome Case Study: Final Report](#) Completed by the Tusome Buy-In, with final version approved by USAID in December 2019; uploaded to the DEC on January 16, 2020.
- [LASER PULSE Research for Development \(R4D\) Workshop Report: Bogota, Colombia](#) Uploaded to the DEC on February 19, 2020.
- [Private Sector Engagement Evidence Repository](#) Created by the PSE-I Buy-In to house all of the catalogued PSE literature, thus it serves as an integral component of the EGM platform. Finalized March 2020, link to the platform is via GitHub; upload to the DEC is not possible.
- [Application of Comprehensive Success Factors \(CSF\) Systems Analysis to Inform Development Research in Colombia, Part 1: Venezuelan Migration Response \(VMR\), Youth in Development](#) Produced by the Innovation Science Team, Purdue University (Lead author: J. Sinfield); final version approved by USAID, with upload to the DEC on May 5, 2020.
- [Application of Comprehensive Success Factors \(CSF\) Systems Analysis to Inform Development Research in Colombia, Part 2: Integrated Rural Development \(IRD\)](#) Produced by the Innovation Science, Purdue University (Lead author: J. Sinfield); final version approved by USAID, with embargoed upload to the DEC on May 5, 2020.
- [African HEI Research Capacity Assessment Dataset](#) Created by R. Mayega (Makerere University); uploaded to the DDL on November 12, 2020.

Q3/Q4:

- [Minorities, Cultural Practices, and Destruction by the Islamic State – Tal Keif and Hamdaniya](#) Completed by the Northern Iraq buy-in team (Lead author: D. O’Driscoll, SIPRI), with the final version uploaded to the DEC on August 4, 2020 following approval by USAID.
- [Psychosocial Support on Children’s Well-being, Literacy, and Math Outcomes in the South Sudan Integrated Essential Emergency Education Services Activity](#) Final report completed by the South Sudan buy-in team (Lead author: A. Benitez, Indiana University), with the final version uploaded to the DEC on August 25, 2020 following approval by USAID.
- [Understanding Vietnam’s Higher Education Institution Research Infrastructure, Research Translation, and Sustainability Mechanisms](#) Created by Makerere University (Lead author: N. Tumuhanye); uploaded to the DEC on September 2, 2020 following USAID approval.
- [Framing the Intractable: Comprehensive Success Factor Analysis for Grand Challenges](#) Journal article published in August 2020 by the Innovation Science team at Purdue University (Lead author: J. Sinfield); approved by USAID for upload to the DEC on November 20, 2020.
- [Barrier Analysis Survey](#) Created by Purdue University (Lead author: P. Brunese) as a LASER PULSE internal report; upload to the DEC is not currently planned.
- [Preliminary Findings from the LASER PULSE Research Translation Literature Review](#) Created by Catholic Relief Services (Lead author: L. Riddering) as a LASER PULSE internal report; upload to the DEC is not currently planned.
- [Understanding Ethiopia’s Higher Education Institution Research Infrastructure, Research Translation, and Sustainability Mechanisms](#) Created by Makerere University (Lead author: N. Tumuhanye); undergoing revisions requested by USAID, will upload to the DEC upon final approval.
- [South Sudan Psychosocial Support Evaluation Dataset](#) Created by J. DeBoer (Purdue University); DDL upload has not yet been initiated.

- **UIP Household Survey of Indigenous Peoples (MUST)** Dataset created by Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST) for the Uganda Indigenous Peoples (UIP) buy-in (Lead author: V. Nyakato); DDL upload has not yet been initiated.
- **UIP GIS Mapping Data** Dataset created by Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST) for the UIP buy-in (Lead author: V. Nyakato); DDL upload has not yet been initiated.
- **UIP Qualitative Data on Indigenous Peoples (MUST)** Dataset created by Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST) for the UIP buy-in (Lead author: V. Nyakato); DDL upload has not yet been initiated.
- **UIP Household Survey of Indigenous Peoples (GUCC)** Dataset created by Gulu University Constituent College (GUCC) for the UIP buy-in (Lead author: S. Ochieng); DDL upload has not yet been initiated.
- **UIP Household Survey on Child Trafficking (GUCC)** Dataset created by Gulu University Constituent College (GUCC) for the UIP buy-in (Lead author: S. Ochieng); DDL upload has not yet been initiated.
- **UIP Qualitative Data on Indigenous Peoples (GUCC)** Dataset created by Gulu University Constituent College (GUCC) for the UIP buy-in (Lead author: S. Ochieng); DDL upload has not yet been initiated.
- **UIP Qualitative Data on Child Trafficking (GUCC)** Dataset created by Gulu University Constituent College (GUCC) for the UIP buy-in (Lead author: S. Ochieng); DDL upload has not yet been initiated.

APPENDIX 5: LEARNING IN LASER PULSE FY2

Outcome Mapping

In the Outcome Mapping (OM) system, Progress Markers (PMs) are pre-defined behaviors that the program in question (e.g. LASER) is looking for in its Boundary Partners (BPs), the key entities with which it works to affect change. As such, PMs represent sets of qualitative “indicators” through which the performance monitoring aspect of the OM system is anchored. Table 5 below displays the PMs for each BP, and provides tallies for each PM (recorded responses) individually as well as by BP.

Table 5. Progress Marker Response Metrics by Boundary Partner

NGO PM	#	Researcher PM	#	Policy-maker	#	Donor PM	#
N-E1	2	R-E1	2	P-E1	0	D-E1	0
N-E2	1	R-E2	1	P-E2	0	D-E2	3
--		R-E3	4	--		--	
N-L1	0	R-L1	2	P-L1	0	D-L1	1
N-L2	0	R-L2	2	P-L2	1	D-L2	0
N-L3	1	R-L3	5	P-L3	0	D-L3	0
N-L4	0	R-L4	0	P-L4	2	D-L4	0
N-L5	0	R-L5	3	P-L5	0	--	
N-L6	2	--		P-L6	1	--	
N-L7	1	--		--		--	
N-V1	1	R-V1	1	P-V1	0	D-V1	0
N-V2	0	R-V2	0	P-V2	0	--	
Total # of PMs *	11		10		10		7
# reported on	6		8		3		2
Total reports	8		20		4		4

Note that PMs are graduated to represent three levels of progress, and are expressed by the terms “Expect to see” (E), “Like to see” (L), and “Love to see” (V). LASER organizes its sets of PMs by four BPs: NGO Practitioners (N), Researchers (R), Policymakers (P), and Donors (D).

As one would expect, most of the reporting has been on PMs associated with NGO practitioners and Researchers since these are the key BPs for LASER. Almost all (80%) of the Researcher PMs have responses with, on average, more than two responses per the PMs reported on. For both BPs, each PM in the “Expect to see” category has at least one response, and each has one “Love to see” response – which is like a “bonus”, as it indicates a hoped for (by not necessarily expected) behavior change. Overall, the reporting metrics and underlying program impacts based on BP behavior change are impressive, considering it was the first year of implementing OM, and with hardly any in-person contact with BPs (due to Covid responses).

Nevertheless, information for Policymaker and Donor PMs are lacking somewhat, but it is hoped that the remaining three years of LASER will provide sufficient time to observe significant behavior change in these BPs. Table 6 below provides a selection of PMs that illustrate progress made so far.

Table 6. Selected Responses from the Progress Marker Reporting

Description of significant behavior observed	Sources of Evidence	Lessons Learned
NGO Practitioners (N)		
N-L3: Practitioners respect the value of researchers with regard to contributing to solutions for development challenges – given the evidence base they operate from, and the human resources and time they have at their disposal, which are often not available for many practitioners.		
UNICEF and other INGOs respected the rigor applied to carry out the evaluation, the first of its kind in a complex environment like South Sudan, and to put some metrics to efforts that can be difficult to quantify.	Report from the preliminary dissemination workshop captured responses of the various dev. pract. present.	In the future, it will be helpful to involve the local Ministry (i.e. the Ministry of Education) early on in the research stage.
N-L7: Practitioners work with research partners to identify and leverage dissemination platforms for wider application.		
Northern Iraq buy-in research translation workshop with USAID. SIPRI and USAID both actively collaborated with researchers on the buy-in to map out possibilities for research translation and important actors to target throughout. This will allow the project to be well-connected to stakeholders in the present which will subsequently permit wider dissemination down the line.	Webinar on May 20, 2020. Notes from Northern Iraq buy-in.	Early collaboration among partners and stakeholders often reveals quite a few helpful things. In this case, additional actors were identified that might not have been explicitly pulled out before. This early engagement will help the impact of the project later on.
N-VI: Practitioners leading, and championing, research identification and collaboration and contextualization.		
IDEAL (comprising staff from Mercy Corps, Save the Children, etc.) developed and issued an RFA based, in part, upon LASER’s first 2 RFAs and a discussion with LASER staff. This RFA funds applied research awards to advance knowledge and address knowledge gaps around strategic integration of targeted food and nutrition security interventions. The key influence of LASER is with regard to IDEAL’s mandate that	E-mail dated August 18, 2020 from Austen Musso (Save the Children)	Outreach to sister networks to expand the reach of LASER (via LASER Network membership) was the intent behind establishing contact and linkages with IDEAL. However, their ensuing learning about LASER’s R4D/RFA process led them to review LASER’s

<p>development practitioners collaborate with researchers: "This RFA requires partnership between a food and nutrition security program implementer (e.g., a non-governmental organization, civil society, or private sector company) and an established research team from a Higher Education Institution (HEI) or research institution". It is essentially LASER's RFA partnership requirement inverted.</p>		<p>early RFAs for ideas - which then led to a discussion and their adoption of one of LASER's core concepts (embedded research tra. Lesson learned - one never knows where an interaction or collaboration will ultimately lead to.</p>
<p>Researchers (R)</p>		
<p>R-E3: Researchers communicate findings to practitioners, policy makers, and donors in an accessible format.</p>		
<p>This progress marker relates to the Tusome case study implemented by researchers from UoN and Makerere, in collaboration with CRS. The research team was able to widely disseminate and communicate the case study findings to the different USAID Missions and to USAD/DC. The researchers shared the findings through the below channels/products: policy brief, webinar presentation, and a detailed report. Some of the factors for this success include a good rapport that was developed between the researchers and USAID (donor). The research process was very collaborative. USAID/Washington DC and USAID/KEA teams participate throughout the entire research process- from study conception, field data collection, to dissemination of the findings.</p>	<p>Firstly, this was observed by the research team. Secondly, the webinar was facilitated by Training Resources Group, Inc. (TRG) and they shared feedback about the dissemination. They were impressed with the products (Powerpoint presentation as well as the policy brief).</p>	<p>This progress marker relates to the Tusome case study implemented by researchers from UoN and Makerere, in collaboration with CRS. The research team was able to widely disseminate and communicate the case study findings to the different USAID Missions and to USAD/DC. The researchers shared the findings through the below channels/products: policy brief, webinar presentation, and a detailed report. Some of the factors for this success include a good rapport that was developed between the researchers and USAID (donor). The research process was very collaborative. USAID/Washington DC and USAID/KEA teams participate throughout the entire research process- from study conception, field data collection, to dissemination of the findings.</p>
<p>Researchers involved with the PSE buy-in clearly presented tools for USAID usage in the summer of 2020. I was not involved in the Evidence and Learning Plan, but can say that the Evidence Gap Map was a clear and usable matrix of evidence for private sector engagement that was presented in an accessible manner via Zoom. The matrix itself is accessible online and easily searchable.</p>	<p>PSE buy-in, webinar, evidence gap map https://crcresearch.github.io/usaaid-pse-egm/#/egm</p>	<p>I'm not sure if this is exactly what LASER's programming was expected to do. The task to create tools for USAID usage seem to be more like contracted consultant tasks and aren't heavily based on research, though this one was about sorting existing research. Still, deploying this tool and providing a forum to share with USAID for inputs and feedback is a good approach to model moving forward.</p>
<p>R-L3: Collaboration with practitioners and policy makers in developing research questions, research methods, EOIs, and proposals.</p>		
<p>Purdue Researcher Jennifer Deboer, who is engaged in activities of the LASER South Sudan buy-in, collaborated with NGO Plan International to design a successful project proposal to the Shah Family Global Innovation Lab. The co-design of this project leveraged the impactful elements of Dr. Deboer's previous work with relevant program aspects of</p>	<p>The judging materials (I served as a judge for the Shah Family Lab's Seed Grant Round) and award</p>	<p>Engagement in LASER buy-ins can advance the LASER approach, engaging researchers to work with practitioners on development evaluations or development programs. The buy-ins provide insight into the workings of</p>

the NGO's work, where it helps advance the NGO's work by providing significant new skills (in engineering) for adolescent girls.	announcement.	both BPs to the other, and they necessarily match-make.
Suggestion from a researcher, as a good strategy, to partner with an NGO to implement the LANI buy-in	Email exchanges around this process. The partnership, with CRS leading as the on-the-ground institution, had to be approved by USAID.	As the consortium partners do not have offices with project implementing presence in the UICs, partnering with NGOs for countries where we have buy-in projects, not just assessments or other more 'consultancy' type work, seems an elegant solution.
R-L5: Researchers demonstrate (in attitudes and behaviors), respect for the experience, expertise, and understanding of practitioners, donors, and policymakers during collaborative research work.		
Practitioners reported feeling a new sense of respect from researchers on the buy-in (Laos-LANI) after project planning was complete. The researcher realized and appreciated the expertise and excellence of the practitioner in this line of work.	Email communication and check-in call with CRS staff member involved in the Laos-LANI buy-in	Collaborations are living, breathing entities that take time to develop. Through trust and patience, the relationship can flourish. This collaboration involved new individuals that had not collaborated in the past, although their institutions have a history of partnership. Being able to lean into this more established partnership also helped with the trust building and to defuse any early struggles.
R-VI: Researchers facilitating and nurturing long term sustainable relationships between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.		
The UIP buy-in has provided and catalyzed an opportunity for researchers from Makerere, GUCC and MUST to continue interacting with USAID/Uganda Missions' Regional Coordination Initiative (RCI). The RCI is implemented through Regional Steering Committees (RSCs) and these Committees are composed of researchers, policy makers, practitioners and the private sector.	GUCC and MUST have a researcher representative on the RSC, while Makerere is often invited to the RSC meetings.	The willingness of the RSC members (who are most of the time users of the information from the researchers) to participate in the buy-in has been great, and has reinforced the existing partnerships between researchers, policy makers (local governments), practitioners (NGOs) and donors (USAID).
Policy makers (P) & Donors (D)		
P-L4: Policy makers routinely engage in active collaboration with evidence producers coming from diverse disciplines and backgrounds.		
The three Ugandan district local governments (Moroto, Kaabong and Napak) have continued to show a lot of interest in the UIP buy-in/study. Yesterday (Sept 9th 2020), the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) who is the CEO of Moroto district attended the opening session at the ongoing workshop/ training of research assistants. He gave the opening remarks at the workshop. "Research informs interventions and gives direction on what to do. Does the proposed intervention fit the problem? If we do not do research, we risk	Training of Research Assistants Workshop (Data Collectors) for the UIP buy-in	Early buy-in and engagement of all stakeholders is critical. This does not only facilitate a smooth and successful delivery of activities, but also ensures sustainability and institutionalization of the program.

going in blind", emphasized the CAO. He pledged his commitment to support the research team throughout the process and he looks forward to the findings/report and the actual interventions to uplift the voices of IPs.		
D-E2: Donors create and pilot new research policies, programs, and approaches with the aim of improving the organization's use of research.		
New NOFOs, Bridge U and Bridge Train built upon some LASER concepts and language to request applications for awards that would provide more opportunities for researchers to embed translation	Grants.gov funding opportunities from the Global Development Lab	LASER does provide a learning lab for USAID, and potentially other donors with whom we might engage.

Learning Brief from the LASER PULSE Learning Agenda

Learning Agenda Question 1: What were the most important elements of the initial R4D conferences to build upon in subsequent events; which, if any, components can be de-emphasized or eliminated?

Arguably the most important aspect learned from the LASER PULSE Uganda R4D Conference in May 2019 was that the participatory sessions pertaining to Comprehensive Issue Analysis, later renamed Comprehensive Success Factors (CSF) Analysis, were not well received. Since this is a crucial element of LASER for shaping the research award RFAs, this was a key finding that was immediately addressed in terms of wholesale changes to how CSF-related activities would be subsequently administered – not just in the sessions of the next R4D conference (i.e. Colombia), but the overall structure and approach. The two participatory sessions, entitled *Issue Tree Breakout session* and *Issue Input session*, were the lowest ranked and fourth-lowest ranked, respectively, of the 14 sessions of the R4D conference that were evaluated. The main problems were interrelated and overlapping, but can be identified as follows: (1) most of the facilitators were ill-prepared and did a poor job of explaining the task and instructions, (2) the complexity of the topic and the attendant difficulty it posed for the participants, (3) the time allotted was woefully insufficient for the “ask” that was imparted, and (4) the poor selection and mix of breakout session participants. All of these issues were addressed for the subsequent R4D workshop in Colombia (October 2019).

Although facilitators (two per each of four groups) for each of the *Issue Tree Breakout* and *Issue Input* sessions in Uganda had been trained in advance to lead the participant groups through the CSF Analysis process, it was clear that they floundered. Reasons for this include: many of the facilitators were trained virtually (via a WebEx conference call); the facilitators' manuals were quite long, and many did not have a chance to read through these in advance; and the inherent complexity of the CSF Analysis process itself left even those facilitators who read the manual and received in-person training befuddled. The end result was that the facilitators could not sufficiently guide the participants through the process, and subsequently could not sufficiently articulate to the respondents exactly what was being asked of them.

As mentioned previously, the Uganda conference did not have a very good mix of people for optimizing the CSF analysis process. Many participants in each sector-specific breakout group were not experts, but rather development generalists, and so much of the intended group work stalled as participants tried to navigate the challenges of collaborative and transdisciplinary work – especially when confronted with the Issue Trees. Moreover, there was insufficient time to build knowledge, community, and trust sufficient to allow all voices to be equally heard and respected; and despite being tasked to identify gaps, many participants focused on prioritizing elements of the Issue Tree for their sector instead of identifying the gaps in knowledge. The focus

on prioritizing led to outputs that were broader than anticipated and required further refinement in a post-conference phase.

LASER did its best to address most, if not all, of these concerns for the Colombia R4D Workshop. First, the Innovation Team at Purdue that pioneered the CSF Analysis process totally revised its format and presentation to streamline it and make participant consideration of the material and tasks more manageable. For example, the introductory plenary presentation of the topic was shortened and made more relevant to the subsequent breakout sessions, and the sector-specific breakout sessions were better structured. The Innovation Team also provided more focused training for the facilitators and created more detailed PowerPoint presentations that served as instructions for the breakout sessions. The actual materials used by the participants were overhauled, as well, with the issue tree posters of Uganda (communally interacted with) reformatted into checklists of success factors (provided to each individual) that could quickly be identified with a checkmark for those elements where research is lacking. These improvements helped make the whole process much more digestible and useful for Colombia R4D participants, as compared to the previous conference in Uganda. For example, as observed from [post-conference survey data](#), 82% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the Colombia CSF checklists were helpful, whereas only 58% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the Uganda Issue (CSF) Trees were helpful.

Second, aside from better and more appropriate materials, improving the successful implementation of the CSF Analysis process required input from (1) a certain type of key informant, and (2) the right mix of participants during the breakout sessions. In addition, it was recognized that more development practitioners needed to be present (as the balance in Uganda was skewed towards researchers). Relying on Purdue's well-established presence in Colombia, and Notre Dame's extensive contacts there, an extensive round of pre-conference interviews and focus groups discussions took place to both hone the CSF trees and to identify the best pool of potential conference attendees to participate in the CSF Analysis process. The result of the effort was that 91% of Colombia R4D respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their breakout group contained a good mix of researchers and development practitioners, compared to 74% for the Uganda R4D respondents.

Session integration and flow improved, as well. Since research translation is at the very core of what LASER is about, this is an obvious priority for the conferences in terms of (1) making sure participants have a common understanding of what is meant by "research translation" and (2) imparting knowledge on how to actually conduct effective research translation. As such, both the Uganda (May 2019) and Colombia (October 2019) R4D Conferences featured a session entitled "The How-to of Research Translation", or "El Cómo de Investigación Traslativa" in Spanish for the latter event. This session was well-received by the Ugandan participants, with the only complaint being that there was not enough time devoted to the topic. For the Colombia conference, the time allotted for the session was increased by 50% (from 80 minutes to a full 2 hours).