

Embedded Research Translation Impact Brief



Sam Phelps/CRS

This impact brief provides a high level view of Embedded Research Translation (ERT)'s impact in the LASER PULSE program from 2018-2023 and demonstrates what is possible through a deeply collaborative and proactive model of research translation for international development.

Brief Background on Embedded Research Translation (ERT)

The potential of research to solve complex global challenges is widely accepted, yet the practicality of translating research is hindered by the profusion of a wide range of processes, approaches, and terms. Each discipline and sector have their own approach, making the type of cross-sector collaboration that is needed in international development a real challenge for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to develop and implement an effective research translation strategy. In its efforts to fill this gap and guide its collaborative research teams through delivering practical, research-driven solutions to development challenges, LASER PULSE developed the Embedded Research Translation (ERT) model.

LASER PULSE defines ERT as an **iterative co-design process among academics, practitioners, and other stakeholders in which research is intentionally applied to a development challenge.**

Through ERT, LASER PULSE bridges researchers, thought leaders, innovators, and scientists, along with practitioners on the ground doing the work—including NGOs, civil society, the private sector, and government actors—around the same development targets. Core to this approach are four pillars: partnership, process, product, and dissemination. Through the ERT model, LASER PULSE has created a framework for researchers and practitioners to be more intentional about translation in international development.

Measuring ERT Impact

Recognizing the complexity of attributing change and measuring impact of relatively short term research projects, LASER PULSE chose a diverse range of frameworks to guide our learning about ERT's application and early impact: (1) the LASER PULSE Theory of Change, (2) the LASER PULSE ERT Score, (3) the LASER PULSE Learning Agenda, and (4) the USAID program and policy change framework. We primarily drew upon (1) quantitative data from the LASER PULSE biannual survey (2020–2023), which was circulated to all LASER PULSE teams for a total of 537 responses, and (2) qualitative data from our ERT Learning Meetings, which included 25 semi-structured interviews with our core awards and USAID buy-in teams. We also incorporated the findings from an externally conducted LASER PULSE Midterm Performance Evaluation. The following questions framed our inquiry into ERT impact:

1. **How has ERT contributed to change?**
2. **How have LASER PULSE projects experienced each pillar of the ERT model?**
3. **To what extent does fidelity to the ERT model result in research that is likely to improve practice or policy?**
4. **To what extent has ERT support from LASER PULSE influenced projects' successful application of ERT?**
5. **Why do ERT? What is unique about it?**

Responses to each of these questions are summarized in the pages that follow.

Question 1 : How has ERT contributed to change?

One of the ways that impact was measured is through ERT's contribution to change. First, we looked at ERT's contribution to achieving the LASER PULSE Theory of Change.



Equitable & respectful partnerships

So even our translation partner, she had input into the research design...; **we did just everything together**... I really think **the relationships and the friendship**, and **the respect given** was the reason we've had this **insane amount of success and outcomes from the work**.

- Researcher (female, core award)

Unique structured approach

I would say that [ERT] is unique in the way it comes in a structured manner because **[before] there was not a structured way of partnering, using that process, producing** what we have been learning, and **disseminating** what we have found and things like that.

- Practitioner (male, core award)

LASER PULSE Theory of change: Closer collaboration between academic researchers, implementers, policymakers, and donors results in **new research that is readily translated** into useful policies, products, and practices **as evidence-based solutions to development challenges.**

Field-relevant & contextualized products

[Our practitioner partner] gave a perspective on how the tool should be organized...it was a joint effort for us that **without... that contextual knowledge, I don't think... the impact of this would have happened.**

- Researcher (female, buy-in)

Improved credibility & impact

Definitely **this project is a very special one**... to have a partner that is really good at doing their job as academics and **having an objective lens and ... actually providing the credibility towards the innovation and also the impact**, that's very unique.

- Practitioner (female, core award)

Question 1 : How has ERT contributed to change?

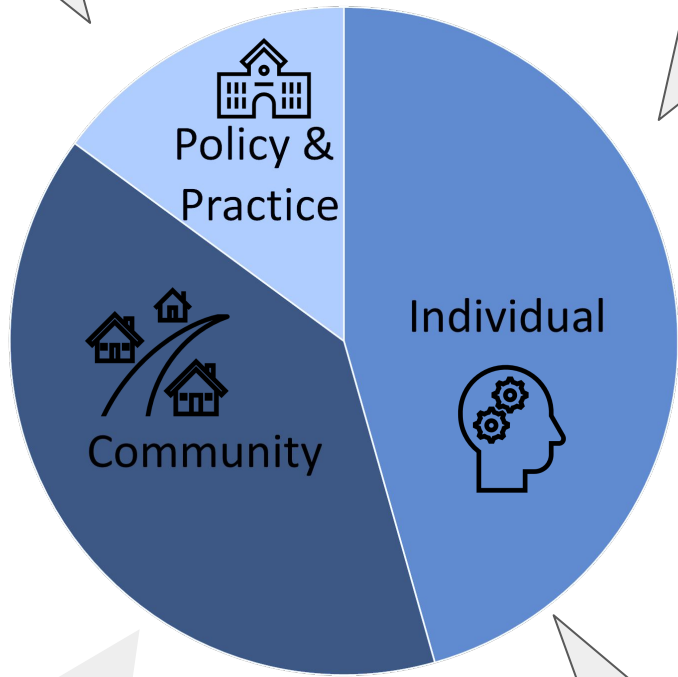
We also looked at the changes reported by projects at different levels. The majority of changes were identified at the individual and community levels, followed by some indications of change at the policy and practice levels.



Dooshima Tsee/CRS

The most important thing that it did was to **provide an opportunity for USAID to pursue an evidence-based design of its new program.** - USAID Activity Manager (female, buy-in)

When we were starting on the journey of this project... I thought I'd sit back and wait until the research is done and then we translate. **But actually, we the translators, were part of the project from day one.** -Practitioner (female, core award)



So one of the big outcomes is that **we are working with the government and the agriculture sector network to help figure out how to scale this** more broadly in the country. -Researcher (female, core award)

My team and I have more evidence ... to improve target outcomes... - Practitioner (male, core award)

Question 2 : How have LASER PULSE projects experienced each pillar of the ERT model?

The four pillars (partnership, process, product and dissemination) underpin the ERT model; understanding projects' experiences of each of these tenets gives insight into the effectiveness of these entirety of the model.



Philip Laubner/CRS



Partnership

“Through understanding ERT, we were able to reach out to the highest level of decision makers in the country... That level of engaging higher level decision makers is something bold, but we managed, thanks to ERT.”
-Researcher (male, core award)



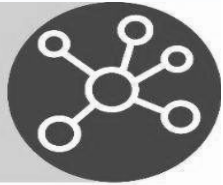
Process

“...the collaboration is very strong due to the weekly meetings we hold and we maintained. The collaboration grew into friendship with the partners on this project.”
-Practitioner (male, core award)



Product

“...our translation partner has kept us very honest and very focused and very on track and they have been phenomenal thought partners along the way. And I think that will show in the quality of the ERT deliverables that we're able to produce.”
-Researcher (female, core award)



Dissemination

“The dissemination and scalability strategies have been conceived so that external stakeholders and other communities learn and appropriate the results to apply them in the future.”
-Practitioner (male, buy in)

Question 3: To what extent does fidelity to the ERT model result in research that is likely to improve practice or policy?

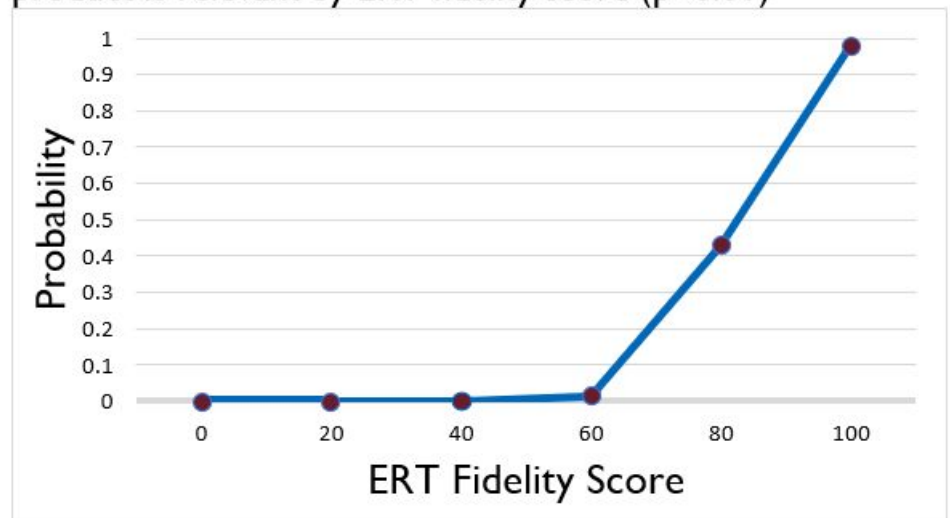
We drew upon the biannual survey data to understand if higher fidelity to the ERT model (calculated as a self assessment on applying ERT) contributed to the perception of the team's translation products improving development practice or policy.



Sam Phelps/CRS

We found that **HIGHER FIDELITY** to the ERT model resulted in **HIGHER PERCEPTIONS** of improving practice or policy.

Probability of agreeing/strongly agreeing that the research product is relevant by ERT fidelity score ($p < 0.01$)



	Odds Ratio [95% CI]
ERT fidelity	1.23 [1.18-1.28] ***

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Source: LASER PULSE biannual survey responses 2020-2023 (N= 537)

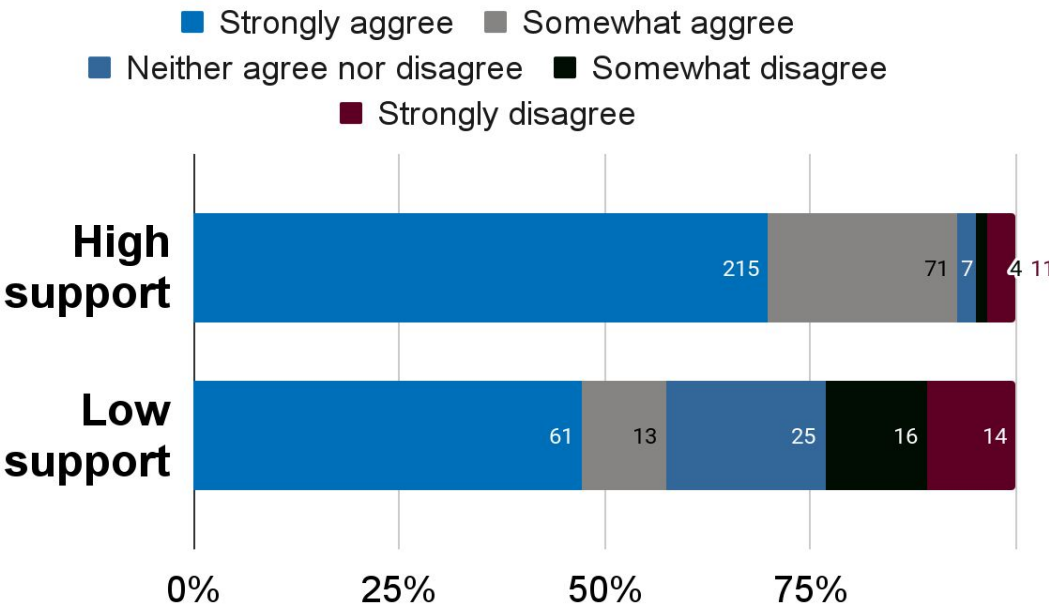
Question 4 :To what extent has ERT support from LASER PULSE influenced projects' successful application of ERT?

As ERT was refined over the course of LASER PULSE, research teams received increased support from the dedicated ERT Team. We compared the difference in level of support with research teams' perception of their translation products addressing development challenges.



Sam Phelps/CRS

We found that **HIGHER ERT SUPPORT** resulted in **HIGHER PERCEPTIONS** that ERT products will contribute to the improvement of development practice or policy.



Source: LASER PULSE biannual survey responses 2020-2023 (N= 537)

Question 4 :To what extent has ERT support from LASER PULSE influenced projects' successful application of ERT?

From facilitating meetings to developing templates to assisting in fostering better understandings between researchers and practitioners, LASER PULSE project teams identified several instances of direct support that aided in applying ERT.

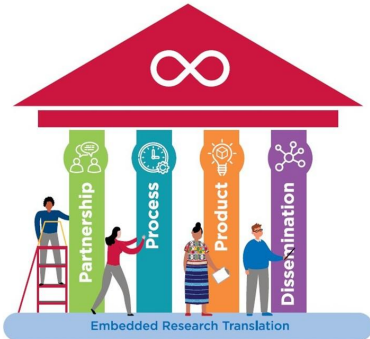


Dooshima Tsee/CRS

I think in terms of some specific examples of things that the ERT team did that was *[sic]* extremely helpful was helping to kind of **reframe during our conversations**, reframing the conversations or repeating what was heard to make it clear. **Sometimes even just documenting a few key steps or providing frameworks** by which we could kind of come to an agreement. -USAID Activity Manager (female, buy-in)

I think the most valuable thing was **this template that you guys provided** that allowed us to look at our deliverables and really map out what the purpose, what the audience was, so that we were crystal clear on what it was that we were trying to do, develop..... And then also **offering a member of the ERT team to consistently sit in on our meetings** as kind of a **fly on the wall** to make sure that things weren't getting lost in translation. -USAID Activity Manager (female, buy in)

[The project] gave me an **opportunity to learn what practitioners do**, how they translate, the kind of network they have and how they mobilize it for translation. **All this different important stuff that I learned from [the ERT team].** -Researcher (male, core award)



Question 5 :Why do ERT? What is unique about it?

The final question in the LASER PULSE learning agenda looked into the value proposition behind ERT, and aimed at identifying the unique characteristics of the approach that set it apart from other research translation models.



Michael Stulman/CRS

I would say [ERT] is unique because there was not a **structured way** of partnering and using that process and producing what have been as a learning lessons and disseminate what we have found. So this is very, very unique. - *Practitioner (male, core award)*

Provides Structure

ERT **brings together a bunch of research translation principles** that other people use, but it **does it in a one stop shop** that is useful and convenient for the researchers... - *USAID Activity Manager (male, Buy-In)*

Actually I can say **ERT approach is unique because it is maximizing the impact on the communities from the researchers...** - *Researcher (male, Buy-In)*

Connects with end users

This is a different approach...The extent of **involvement of the local research translation partners** in the actual research, in the field based data collection in the supervision, as well as in organization of the results, **they were highly participatory- unlike the traditional engagement with communities...** Their communities now are more aware... that universities... are ready to start research from the grassroots, take their concerns and **work together in finding a common solution** for pressing challenges. - *Researcher (male, core award)*

Question 5 :Why do ERT? What is unique about it?

One of the key findings in the LASER PULSE Midterm Performance Evaluation was the quality of the ERT resources and its unique element of including a designated research translation partner.

LASER’s greatest value add lies in capacity-strengthening for researchers and research translation.

There is appetite for research translation from both USAID and researchers and LASER is well-positioned to contribute to best practices throughout the Agency. **The resources LASER has developed around ERT are high quality and have the potential to be shared and adapted across the Agency. The inclusion of a dedicated research translation partner is the most unique element of ERT and sets it apart from the dissemination and utilization tools most researchers and USAID awards currently employ.** The emphasis on strengthening the capacity of researchers, especially LMIC and women researchers, is also a strength of LASER. RFA researchers received support to refine their research proposals, navigate the USAID compliance process, adapt their research because of COVID-19, and translate their research products into policy-friendly formats. **LASER has been successful at engaging and growing institutions, networks, and researchers. Institutional and individual capacity-strengthening of funding recipients has successfully helped researchers and universities partner with USAID for the first time.**

Source: LASER PULSE Midterm Performance Evaluation 2023

LASER PULSE will continue to apply the ERT model in its ongoing and future projects and anticipates collecting additional data on the impact of the model in upcoming years. [Join the LASER PULSE Network](#) to connect with us and reference the [Getting Started with ERT guide](#) to apply the model in your own context.



Dinorah Lorenzana/CRS

