



Research Technical Assistance Center (RTAC)
USAID DRIVE Convening: Planning for Sustainability
Wednesday, October 20, 2021
11:00 a.m. – 12:30 pm

Panelists

Nathan Tumuhanye, Director Operations, ResilientAfrica Network (RAN)
Fred Rossi, Knowledge Management & Performance Monitoring Specialist, LASER PULSE
Yuehwern Yih, Academic Director, LASER PULSE
Lindsay Hillenberg, Assistant Director of USAID Programs, Institute of International Education
David Simpson, Director of USAID Programs, Institute of International Education

Moderator

Ryan Johnson, Executive Director of Professional Sustainability Education and Training, School of Sustainability at Arizona State University

ResilientAfrica Network (RAN): Capacity Building among RAN University Partners and Community Engagement for Sustainability

Dr. Nathan Tumuhanye, ResilientAfrica Network

- RAN represents 27 universities in 16 countries – largest African University network for research
- Need avenue for community dialogue:
 1. Define challenges
 2. Identify stakeholders
 3. Identify mechanisms to engage communities on development challenges
- The network speaks to regional interests as it promotes and encourages participation and “buy in” → disease, conflict, climate issues, drought, and other areas
- Creating local communities – Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) signed with communities and community representatives that engage and target self-reliance
- Capacity strengthening at the community level → work with universities hand-in-hand to encourage self-reliance, community participation, and innovation
- RAN Sustainability – thanks to cooperation with universities, thought leaders, and community engagement
- Resident university faculty members are always engaged to create sustainability within their host institutions

LASER (Long-term Assistance and Services for Research) PULSE (Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine): Explicit Incorporation of Sustainability into LASER PULSE

Dr. Fred Rossi and Dr. Yuehwern Yih

- LASER collaborates with USAID missions, bureaus, and independent offices and other local stakeholders to identify research needs for critical development challenges, fund them, and strengthen the capacity of researcher-practitioner teams to co-design solutions that translate into policy and practice

- LASER helps identify research needs for critical development challenges by using a systems framework and collaborating with USAID missions, bureaus, and independent offices and other local stakeholders
- LASER funds research through two mechanisms – a core grants program and through buy-ins
- Sustainability
 - A. Impact of programs – 2 different layers → RFAs and buy-ins,
 - B. The network – lots of collaboration
 - C. Allocation of other resources
- LASER wants to be a thought leader and change the way we work in development
- LASER wants to create a clear pathway for development professionals in academia

Institute of International Education (IIE): Planning for Sustainability: Professional Networks

Lindsay Hillenberg and David Simpson

- Part of IIE's mission is to help people and organizations leverage the power of international education to thrive in today's interconnected world
- Planning for Sustainability: Professional Networks refers to managing scholarships and professional exchanges
- Ensuring Sustainability: Key Steps
 1. Vision identified at the start for sustainability after program
 2. Engagement and transfer to local entities
 3. Resources to support sustainability
 4. Identifying champions to support sustainability
 5. Capturing evidence to justify networks
- Challenges to Sustainability
 1. Immediate results required
 2. Lack of long-term perspective
 3. Resources – volunteers versus professional paid staff to sustain a network
 4. Conflicting vision of the objectives of forming a network

Questions for RAN

- Q: What are some top challenges that RAN has faced in continuing the momentum of community engagement in the COVID-19 situation, and how has RAN mitigated/adapted?
- Q: I am also eager to learn about how RAN coped and managed the COVID-19 situation in the communities engaged. Thanks for all the presentations

- A: Challenges include:

1) Rolling out activities across universities is a challenge: Unpredictable funding/donor needs can lead to minimal activities in some countries. We currently implement many activities in East Africa, West Africa, and Southern Africa but minimal activities in the Horn of Africa.

2) Funding expectations by Network partners are high. To address this challenge, we are working with our university networks to engage country governments and country-level development partners to support development research. We have seen success in four countries (Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa). We shall use the lessons from these countries to engage other Network partners taking into consideration the local context.

For instance, the government of Uganda has allocated \$8.2M per year to support research and development.

3) Capacity gaps in institutions (research project management, writing for development, and infrastructure for research). To address this, capacity building courses have been developed and are being offered (grants writing implemented alongside RTAC), resilience and innovation course, Research Leadership and Research Grants Management to be implemented alongside LASER in addition to joint implementation of projects with local university as part of capacity transfer.

4) Regarding Covid-19, yes, we have had quite several challenges including having to stop some activities that require intense engagements. However, for community-based projects where communities are leading, these have continued under the leadership of the community structures with RAN providing virtual support. Our regional cluster of universities have presence within local communities that allow continuity of activities at a low scale while observing SOPs.

Questions for LASER

- Q: Will there be future RFAs from LASER-PULSE? How can we learn about the potential funding opportunities?
- A: We will have 1 more RFA round focused on Minority Serving Institutions in the US; but they must partner with a development partner for research work in a USAID partner country. You can find info at laserpulse.org
- A: I want to also add that as awarding entities, it is greatly important for us - more than ever, to see the people behind the work and understand the challenges that are operating in, and be more malleable and willing to work hand in hand.
- Q: Was there an impact from COVID on your work?
- A: Yes, in terms of travel, events we planned, and on our partners throughout the world. Many of the things we do are better with person-to-person contact and networking. We should be mindful of the toll COVID-19 has taken on our partners, their families and colleagues.

Questions for IIE

- Q: Can you explain more about the benefits of paid staff versus volunteers?
- A: Paid professional staff have more time to be committed to sustain a network. Volunteers are just that – volunteers – and as well intentioned and committed as they may be can often be distracted by other priorities.