



Higher Education in Asia: Strategic Review

Improving Learning Outcomes for Asia (ILOA) Mechanism

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AFROHUN	Africa One Health University Network (formerly One Health Central and Eastern Africa)
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
ANRCBA	Applied Nutrition Research Capacity Building Activity (Laos)
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASHA	American Schools and Hospitals Abroad
ASIA/TS	USAID Bureau for Asia, Office of Technical Services
AUCA	American University of Central Asia (Kyrgyz Republic)
BE	basic education
BK	Bach Khoa
BUILD-IT	Building University–Industry Learning and Development through Innovation and Technology Alliance
CBE	competency-based education
CE-SAIN	Center for Excellence on Sustainable Agricultural Intensification and Nutrition
CLA	collaborating, learning, and adapting
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019 (SARS-CoV-2)
CVE	countering violent extremism
DDI	USAID Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation
DEP-AME	Data for Education Programming in Asia and the Middle East (task order under USAID Education Data for Decision Making [EdData II])
DOC	Development Outreach and Communication (USAID Officer)
DRG	democracy, human rights, and governance
EDC	Education Development Center
EG	economic growth
EHEI	Engagement of Higher Education Institutions
EQHA	Enhancing Quality of Healthcare Activity (Cambodia)
ESR	environmental security and resilience
FSU	Florida State University
FUV	Fulbright University Vietnam
FY	fiscal year
G2G	Government to Government
GH	USAID Bureau for Global Health
GIS	geographic information system
HE	higher education
HE LA	Higher Education Learning Agenda
HEEAP	Higher Engineering Education Alliance Program
HEI	higher education institution
HELN	Higher Education Learning Network (USAID)



HEP	Higher Education Project (USAID)
HESN	Higher Education Solutions Network
HSA	Health Services Academy
ICT	information and communication technology
ILOA	Improving Learning Outcomes for Asia
IPS	Indo-Pacific Strategy
ITC	Institute of Technology of Cambodia
JAPRI	USAID JAdi Pengusaha Mandiri (Become an Independent Entrepreneur) (Indonesia)
LASER PULSE	Long-Term Assistance and Services for Research, Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine
LGBTQIA+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual
LMICs	low- and middle-income countries
MOH	Ministry of Health
MS2W	Mekong Skills2Work
MSI	minority-serving institution
MSMEs	micro, small, and medium enterprises
NARC	Nepal Agricultural Research Council
NSAF	Nepal Seeds and Fertilizer (Activity)
OHW-NG	USAID One Health Workforce – Next Generation (Activity)
PBE	Philippine Business for Education
PDR	(Lao) People’s Democratic Republic
PEER	Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research
PPR	Performance Plan and Report
PRESTASI	Program to Extend Scholarships to Achieve Sustainable Impacts
PSE	private sector engagement
PSM	Professional Science Master’s (program)
PYD	positive youth development
R&D	research and development
RTC	Regional Training Center
RTI	RTI International (registered trademark and trade name of Research Triangle Institute)
RUA	Royal University of Agriculture (Cambodia)
SBCC	social and behavior change communication
SEAOHUN	Southeast Asia One Health University Network (SEAOHUN)
SHARE	Supporting Holistic and Actionable Research in Education
SHERA	Sustainable Higher Education Research Alliances (Activity)
SMEs	small- and medium-sized enterprises
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
STEM+AT	science, technology, engineering, mathematics, accounting, and tourism
STRIDE	Science, Technology, Research, and Innovation for Development (USAID program)
TIP	Technological Institute of the Philippines



ToR	Terms o
TSAU	Tashkent State Agrarian University
U of M	University of Michigan, William Davidson Institute
UDL	universal design for learning
UND	University of Notre Dame
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USAID-LMI	
COMET	Department of State/USAID Lower Mekong Initiative, Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training
USD	United States dollar
USG	United States Government
USIP	U.S. Institute for Peace
WISE	Workforce for Innovation and Start-up Ecosystem (Vietnam)
YSEALI	Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative

Executive Summary

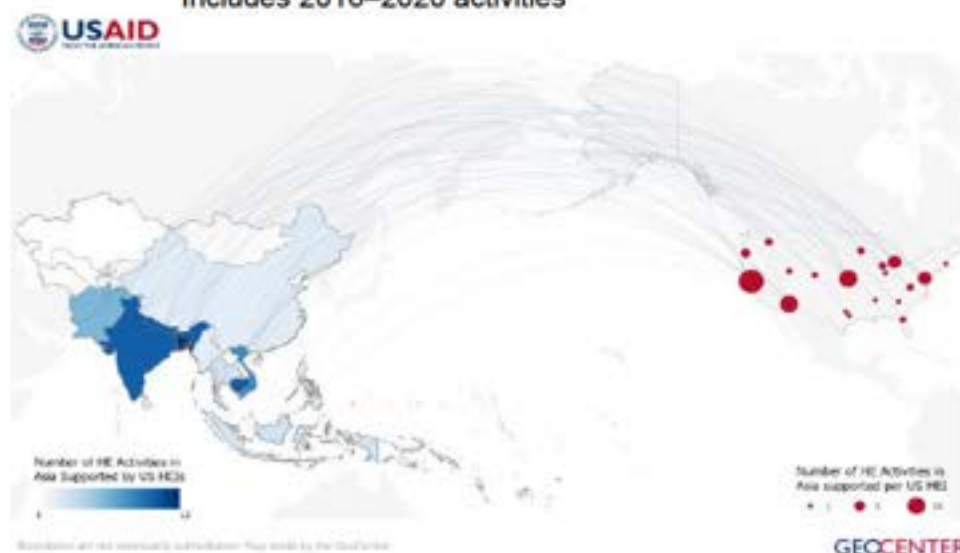
The United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Bureau for Asia conducted a strategic review to examine the depth and breadth of USAID higher education (HE) programming in Asia over the five-year period from 2016 through 2021. The review highlights ways in which USAID's HE programming has been a vehicle for all sectors, not only education, to achieve USAID development objectives. The review's findings and recommendations should inform continued USAID HE investment in Asia.

USAID investments in HE support the 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS). Within USAID and the interagency, there is a growing interest in HE programming opportunities. This recognition of the role of HE in driving economic development is reflected in its inclusion in the *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* (White House, 2022), which highlights education as key to regional economic prosperity and security, as well as regional resilience to transnational threats. Unlike in previous strategies, HE is now explicitly noted in the 2022 version of the strategy as a vehicle to advance the United States Government's (USG's) vision for a "free and open Indo-Pacific" (p. 6). This review details examples of how USAID HE investments could support the IPS by countering malign influence, strengthening democratic systems, conducting cutting-edge research to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, and building diverse and equitable partnerships between U.S. and Asian partners.

USAID is forging lasting transpacific partnerships through HE investments. In 2021, this engagement included partnerships among 270 higher education institutions (HEIs) from across the region and with more than 20 HEIs from across the U.S.

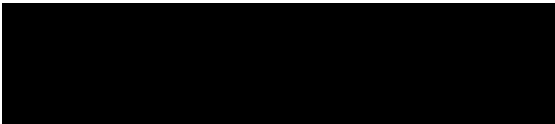
Figure ES-1. U.S. HEIs supporting USAID HE activities in Asia

Includes 2016–2020 activities



Source: Generated for this report by geographic information system (GIS) specialists and graphic designers at the USAID GeoCenter. Data sources: Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Performance Plan and Report (PPR) data and the [Higher Education Learning Agenda Activities Spreadsheet](#).

Programs are aligned with USAID's Education Policy and achieving outcomes in all USAID sectors by "advancing knowledge and research; providing quality and relevant education and workforce training; and engaging and strengthening networks and communities" (Dockser et al., 2020, p. 5) in food security and agriculture; democracy, governance, and human rights; peace and security; economic growth and workforce



development; and global health. These investments are advancing locally led development, producing the next generation of leaders, laying the groundwork for more resilient economies and future trade partners, and sustainably advancing American values in a region wary of malign influence.

Examples of high-impact HE programs across sectors include:

- USAID has supported public health, animal health, agriculture, medical, and other universities to modernize their curriculum and practices through activities such as One Health Workforce – Next Generation (OHWN-G). In 2011, USAID established the Southeast Asia One Health University Network (SEAOHUN) a regional network currently comprised of 102 universities in 8 countries including Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. In addition to creating new research alliances to tackle complex health issues, this activity equips health professionals with “the skills and perspectives to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease threats” as well as “critical thinking, communication, leadership, and collaboration skills” (USAID, n.d.-c, p. 1).
- USAID/Bangladesh’s Feed the Future portfolio brings together U.S. HEIs (Mississippi State University, Cornell University, and Purdue University) with Bangladeshi institutions to develop Innovation Labs that support USAID’s investments in aquaculture, food safety and nutrition.
- In Pakistan, USAID is countering violent extremism (CVE) through “establishing sustainable mechanisms for dialogue, critical thinking, and peace education” (United States Institute of Peace [USIP], 2020, p. 2) for at-risk youth and creating CVE curricula at universities throughout Pakistan. A program in Burma awards graduate-level scholarships to emerging leaders to enable them to study conflict resolution at selected U.S. universities.
- The Science, Technology, Research, and Innovation for Development (STRIDE) program in the Philippines provided technical assistance to all major stakeholders in the country’s innovation ecosystem in support of the Philippine government’s whole-of-community approach to innovation. USAID/Vietnam has funded a series of HE programs focused on advancing high-tech skills needed for the rapidly growing Vietnamese economy, in partnership with an array of private sector partners.
- USAID/Indonesia is strengthening HEI capacity to meet skills development and entrepreneurship needs in the economy and advancing a range of research exchanges and HEI partnership programs.
- USAID HE investments advance climate change response by developing new local leaders and researchers in climate-resilient development and by expanding the evidence base in this area. Examples of activities include Saving Species in Vietnam,

Emerging best practices:

- ◆ Establish demand driven partnerships based in mutuality.
- ◆ Work with smaller HEIs and state universities, which can be more motivated and agile partners than national, elite HEIs.
- ◆ Partner with micro, small, and medium enterprises to localize results and drive uptake.
- ◆ Use flexible funding and adaptive management to allow HE programs to respond to crises such as COVID 19.
- ◆ Engage youth and promote positive youth development through research and extension opportunities.



Protecting Wildlife in the Philippines, Forest Management in Bangladesh, and the Paani and Hariyo Ban (Green Forest) projects in Nepal.

While much has been achieved, this review points to several recommendations to improve future programming and advance HE development within the region:

1: More clearly capture gains across USAID-funded programming through knowledge management and communication efforts that build country-specific learning questions into activity designs, support implementation research, and work with communications experts to emphasize the cross-sectoral benefits of HE investments.

2: Evaluate the performance, cost effectiveness, and impact of HE activities, or HE contributions to activities across sectors, to inform better activity designs and support scalability.

3: Explore how private sector engagement might help HEIs provide high-quality and affordable professional development programs for faculty, conduct robust and innovative research, and improve facilities and equipment.

4: Investigate the additive relationships between investments in basic education and higher education programming, especially during crises and in conflict contexts.

5: Prioritize locally led development and strengthen the capacity of local HEIs to address pressing development challenges.

6. Systematize a focus on equity across HE programs within education and other sectors. HE programs should consider how they can meaningfully benefit and support women and girls; members of racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups; people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or asexual (LGBTQIA+); persons with disabilities; Indigenous people; and refugees by inviting meaningful representation of these groups in activity design processes, and by incorporating universal design for learning (UDL) into HE activities.

7. Further enable and support HEIs to address the most pressing humanitarian and democratic challenges across the Asia region, such as climate change, future pandemic threats, systemic spread of disinformation, malign influence, and anti-democratic political upheaval.

The recently awarded Improving Learning Outcomes for Asia (ILOA) mechanism is a prime vehicle to support the USAID Asia Bureau and missions throughout the region to implement these recommendations. Studies focused on the Asia region can be commissioned through ILOA and technical assistance from ILOA partners can support activity design, capacity building, and communications.



1 Introduction

Within the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the interagency there is a growing interest in higher education (HE) programming opportunities. This recognition of the role of HE in driving economic development culminated in its inclusion in the 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS; see White House, 2022), which highlights education as key to supporting the 2022 IPS pillars—most notably, economic prosperity and security in the Indo-Pacific region, and regional resilience to transnational threats.


The purpose of this strategic review is to examine the depth and breadth of USAID HE programming in Asia over the five-year period from 2016 through 2021,¹ and to highlight examples of how USAID’s HE programming has been a vehicle for all sectors, not only education, to achieve their development objectives. These objectives include increased economic ties; improved institutional linkages; people-to-people exchanges; and deeper engagement of local partners, higher education institutions (HEIs), and governments in the Asia region. This effort also provided an opportunity to contextualize USAID’s Higher Education Programming Framework (USAID Center for Education, 2021) to the Asia region. To complete this review, we capitalized upon the rich data submitted by missions through venues such as Performance Plan and Report (PPR) documents, and data sources such as USAID’s Higher Education Learning Agenda (see Kraybill, 2020). This review also highlights best practices and common themes that emerged through maps and country case studies.

This review is intended for Agency and Asia Bureau leaders, and for technical officers in Washington and across the Asia region, to inform future programming in which HE partnerships may be engaged. The review also recommends to policy makers the roles that USAID could play in enhancing the strategic capabilities, assets, and potential of HEIs as development partners across sectors.

2 Policy Context for HE Programming in Asia

USAID’s 2018 Education Policy details the key approaches that USAID takes to “achieve sustained, measurable improvements in learning outcomes and skills development” (USAID, 2018, p. 6) from preprimary education through HE. Such approaches include local ownership and country focus, strengthened systems and capacity development in local institutions, innovative partnerships, data-driven decision making, and systematic promotion of equity and inclusion. The Education Policy highlights the important role HEIs play in achieving outcomes across the education continuum, including improving access to high-quality education and supporting youth to gain critical skills; as well as HEIs’ capacities to be central actors in development and partners to USAID. As we detail below, USAID is working closely with partner countries to produce the next generation of leaders through a variety of ways, such as strong teacher professional development, HE, and leadership training opportunities. At the institutional level, USAID’s efforts to strengthen public and private HEIs internationally, particularly in partnership with American HEIs, helps to sustainably advance American values and a liberal arts (i.e., American) style of education. Liberal arts education and U.S. education models “promote freedom of thought, critical thinking skills, and a focus on career

¹ ASIA/TS commissioned a review of HE partnerships from the Asia and Middle East regions in 2011. That analysis examined 375 HE programs over a 40-year period and identified best practices for USAID partnerships to support higher education institutions across the Asia and Middle East regions. The Data for Education Programming in Asia and the Middle East Task Order reviewed USAID-funded HE programs from 2011 through 2016 (Johnson et al., 2016).



development while promoting values of democracy and transparency”² (p. 8). Compelling examples of this in the Asia region—such as the Building University–Industry Learning and Development through Innovation and Technology (BUILD-IT) Alliance, Higher Engineering Education Alliance Program (HEEAP), Higher Education Project, Fulbright University Vietnam (FUV), and Science, Technology, Research, and Innovation for Development (STRIDE) in the Philippines—abound and are presented later in this review.

The Indo-Pacific region, stretching from the West Coast of the United States to the Indian Ocean, is the fastest-growing region in the world, the source of nearly \$900 million in investments in the United States, and the recipient of nearly one-third of American exports, according to the 2022 IPS (White House, 2022). As noted earlier, unlike previous strategies for the Indo-Pacific region, HE is now explicitly noted as a vehicle to advance the USG vision for a “free and open Indo-Pacific” (White House, 2022, p. 16). As detailed in the 2022 IPS (White House, 2022), the USG is pursuing five objectives: “advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific; building connections within and beyond the region; driving regional prosperity; bolstering Indo-Pacific security; and building regional resilience to transnational threats” (p. 7). In growing numbers and with USAID support, HEIs in the U.S. and throughout the Asia region have played and will continue to play critical roles in advancing the U.S. Government’s (USG’s) most critical priorities for the region.³ This review provides numerous examples of how HEIs are capable partners to USAID in achieving this vision—such as countering malign influence, strengthening democratic systems, conducting cutting-edge research to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, and improving natural resource management.

As the IPS notes, “the United States is the leading international provider of education to students from the Indo-Pacific—nearly 68% of international students studying in the United States hail from the region” (White House, 2022, p. 10). HE programming—such as youth leadership programs, educational and professional exchanges, and English-language training programs—offers incredible partnership opportunities between the U.S. and the Indo-Pacific region. USAID will increasingly rely upon HE programming to act as a catalyst to “promote new partnerships for cutting-edge joint research in critical domains of science and technology” (White House, 2022, p. 10).

The Indo-Pacific region in particular is a great source of innovation and mutually beneficial partnerships. As such, the IPS emphasizes the need to “reinvigorate youth leadership, educational, and professional exchange programs and English-language training programs that have long anchored our bonds” (White House, 2022, p. 10) between the U.S. and Asian countries. Diverse and equitable partnerships form the core of this approach, and the IPS points to the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) and partnerships that promote graduate studies and research capabilities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) as promising pathways. While USAID investments in HEIs in partner countries have sought to improve the quality of HE, scholarships (in all forms—in-country, U.S., third country, short-term, and long-term) provide further opportunities to advance human capital and democratic values both in the U.S. and in partner countries. Again, compelling examples abound in the Asia region, such as the Program to Extend Scholarships to Achieve Sustainable Impacts (PRESTASI) in Indonesia and Lincoln Scholars in Burma, both described later in this review.

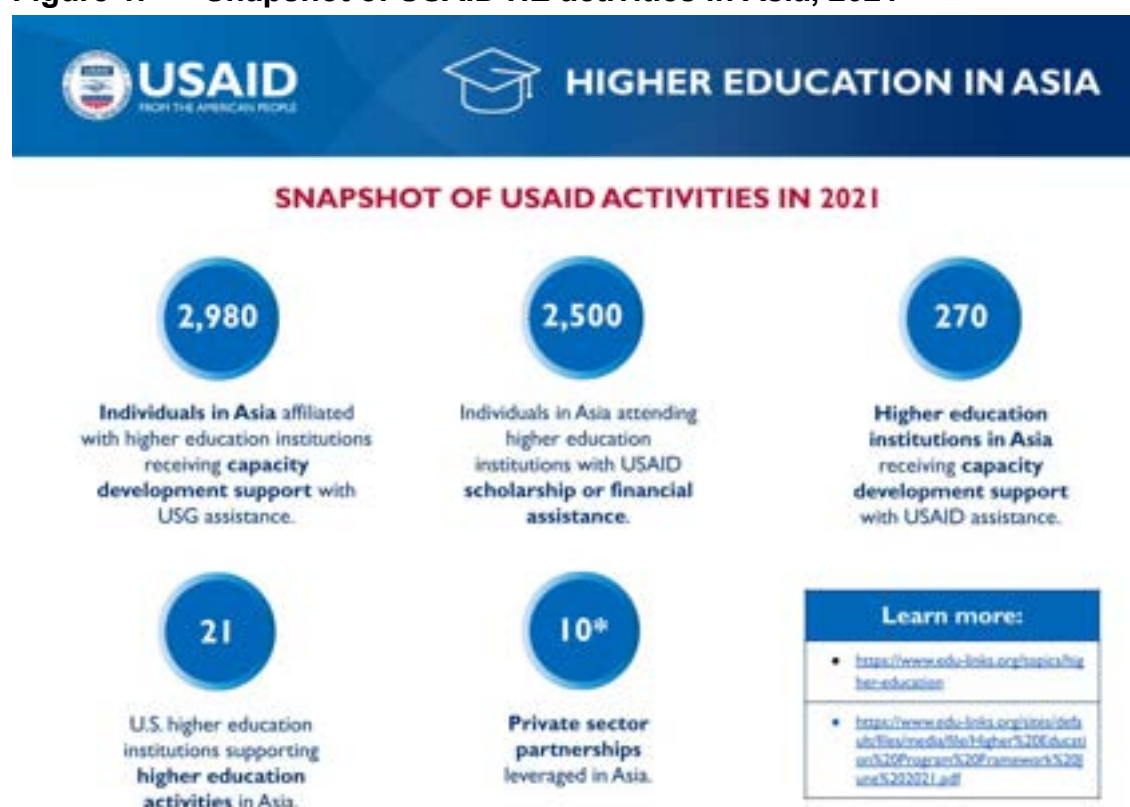
² DDI/Education [Approach to Countering Foreign Malign Influences](#)

³ DDI/Education [Approach to Countering Foreign Malign Influences](#)

3 Higher Education in Asia: Scope of HE Activities

According to a recent programming brief, “USAID developed the HE Program Framework to capture its vision of HE as a central actor in driving locally led development” (USAID, 2020, p. 2). As shown in the graphic (**Figure 1**) and Asia regional map (**Figure 2**) below, USAID has brought this vision to life in Asia through diverse approaches, including institutional partnerships between U.S. HEIs and Asia HEIs, and scholarship and capacity development programs for students. Private sector partnerships within HE also represent a new and exciting area for development. The USAID private sector engagement team for evidence, learning, and data manages USAID’s Public–Private Partnerships Database,⁴ and has begun to collate (through self-reported data) HE activities that formally partner with private sector entities. Although the number of private sector partnerships below is likely an underestimate, tracking such data can help assess the effectiveness of USAID’s private sector partnerships and shape the Agency’s approach in light of the priorities set forth by the IPS and other Agency policies (e.g., localization).

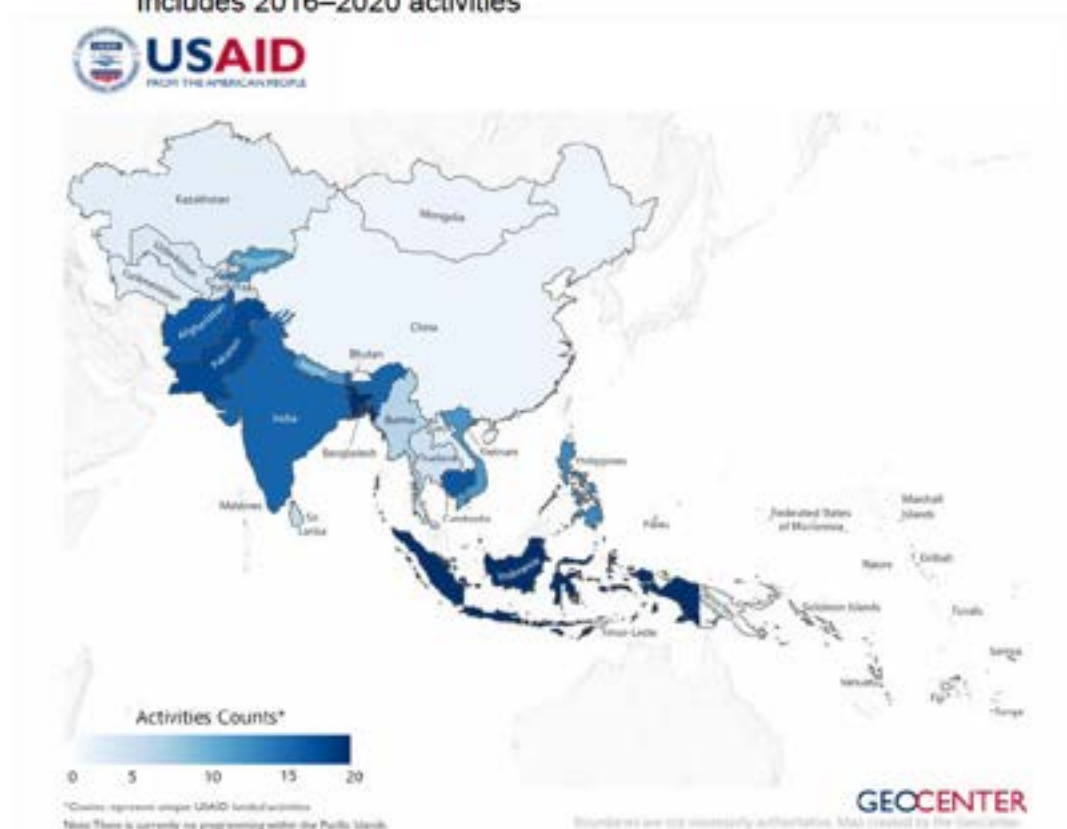
Figure 1. Snapshot of USAID HE activities in Asia, 2021



Source: Generated for this report by So-Youn Oh in the Asia Bureau Outreach Division. Data source: FY 2020 PPR data.

⁴ <https://tableau.usaid.gov/#/workbooks/3333/views>

Figure 2. HE activities per country
Includes 2016–2020 activities



Source: Generated for this report by geographic information system (GIS) specialists and graphic designers at the USAID GeoCenter. Data sources: Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Performance Plan and Report (PPR) data and the [Higher Education Learning Agenda Activities Spreadsheet](#).

4 Contextualizing USAID's HE Program Framework to Asia Region

Through a global and field driven consultation process, the USAID Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation's (DDI's) Center for Education "developed a Higher Education Program Framework that depicts USAID's common, sector-inclusive understanding of a higher education system, commitment to key higher education outcomes, and ways of engaging with higher education to achieve these outcomes" (USAID Center for Education, 2021, p. 1). **Figure 3** below is a reproduction of USAID's framework diagram.

Figure 3. USAID Higher Education Program Framework



Source: USAID Center for Education (2021), Figure 1, p. 1.

The center of the framework outlines the three core functions of any HE system: (1) advancing knowledge and research, (2) providing high-quality and relevant education and workforce training, and (3) engaging and strengthening networks and communities. Our analysis of FY 2020 PPR data demonstrates how Asian missions are programming across these three areas in order to strengthen the HE system and drive locally led development across all sectors. The sections below discuss key themes and trends of regional HE programming across these core functions.

4.1 Advancing Knowledge and Research in Asia

In partnership with Asian HE systems, USAID advances the generation of knowledge and research that drives development and innovation across a variety of sectors. According to USAID's 2014–2018 HE landscape analysis report, "The linkages between U.S. and host HEIs formed the foundation of higher education engagement and created opportunities for innovations in science, technology, and discovery in both the United States and host countries" (LeBron et al., n.d., p. 42).

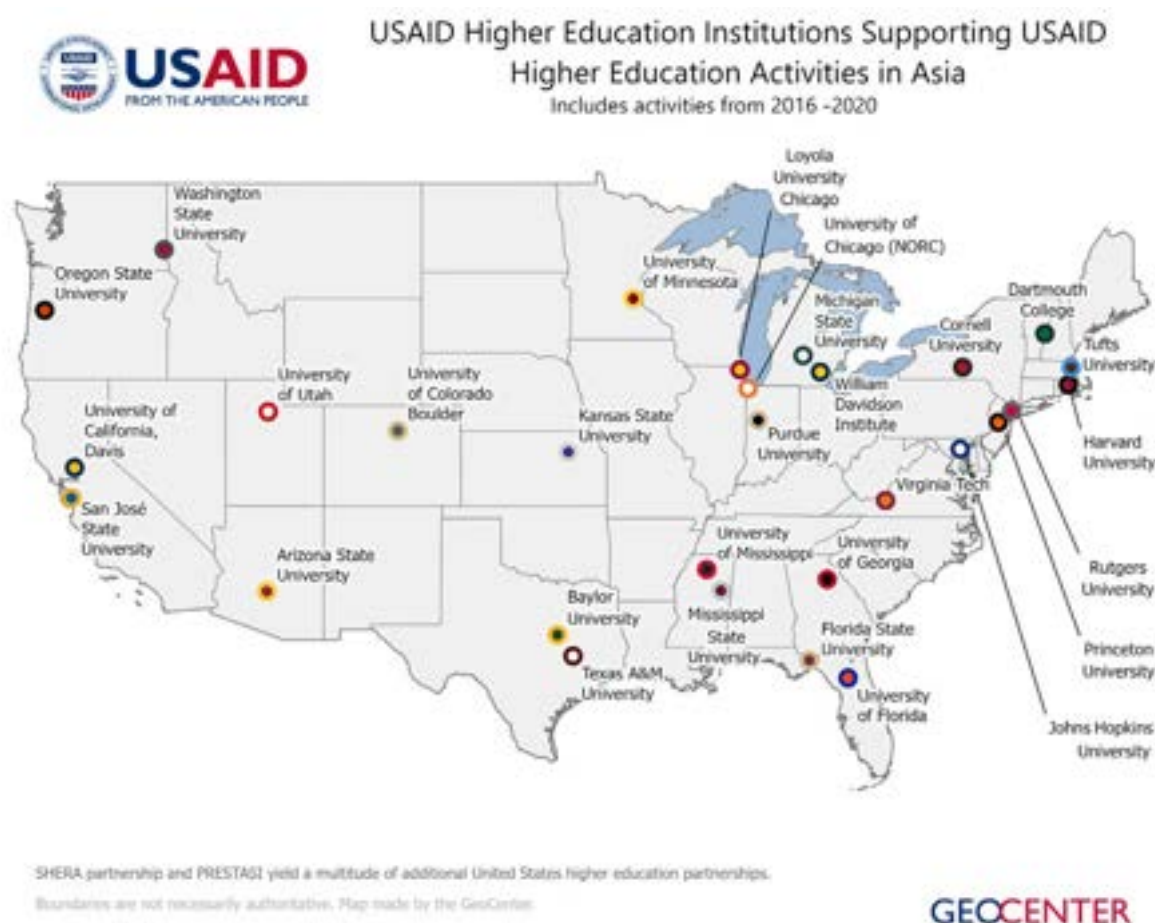
Across the region, we saw examples of U.S. and Asian HEIs aligning research priorities and resources around the most pressing development challenges. For example, USAID/Bangladesh's Feed the Future portfolio brings together U.S. universities (including Mississippi State University, Cornell University, and Purdue University) with local Bangladeshi institutions, to develop Innovation Labs that support USAID's investments in aquaculture, food safety, and nutrition. Partnerships often result in the establishment of new academic and vocational courses or curricula related to local development priorities. The Asia region supports research across all sectors, but most commonly in the areas of food security, agriculture, biodiversity, nutrition, global health, medical education, and technology.

These partnerships lead to more contextualized, locally generated evidence that informs decision making around local policy and programming. U.S. institutions also support local institutions to improve the rigor and quality of their research (i.e., improving design, sampling, data analysis, and reporting) and to disseminate their findings to an international audience. Asian HEIs have reported significant increases in peer-reviewed publications and

internationally recognized conference presentations, which have helped to boost the reputation of local postgraduate programs and to secure future funding. For example, USAID's Sustainable Higher Education Research Alliances (SHERA) activity helped strengthen the quality of research produced by Indonesian HEIs, which led to one institution receiving a U.S. National Science Foundation grant to conduct collaborative research and development for a green/smart city.


Figure 4. U.S. HEIs supporting USAID HE activities in Asia

Includes 2016–2020 activities



Source: Generated for this report by geographic information system (GIS) specialists and graphic designers at the USAID GeoCenter. Data sources: Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Performance Plan and Report (PPR) data and the [Higher Education Learning Agenda Activities Spreadsheet](#).

Research partnerships also work closely with the private sector, leveraging additional resources from industry stakeholders and ensuring that academic research is targeted and actionable. USAID supports new technologies to help local governments and the private sector improve effectiveness, yield, and productivity. For example, the Nepal Seeds and Fertilizer activity is supporting the Nepal Agricultural Research Council to develop new hybrid maize varieties, advance the breeding of rice varieties, and implement best strategies for agronomics and soil fertility management. These technologies support the seed industry and local governments to achieve the yield and productivity targets that they require to improve food security and drive agriculture-led economic growth.



HE partnerships between the U.S. and Asian institutions create lasting ties of cooperation and have a cascading effect of stimulating more research and partnerships. Long-standing and sustained ties between individuals and institutions lay the groundwork for close allies and future trade ties between the U.S. and Asian nations, bringing the investments made overseas home. Local HEIs also help counter misinformation and malign influence from U.S. adversaries by disseminating rigorous research and promoting American values of freedom of expression and academic integrity.

4.2 Providing High-Quality and Relevant Education and Workforce Training in Asia

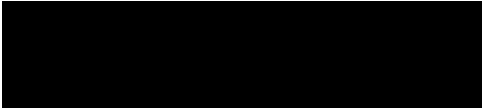
USAID has stated that “higher education systems strengthen the workforce through continuous, market-relevant improvement of teaching, learning, assessment, curriculum, and pedagogical practices” (USAID Center for Education, 2021, p. 2) while also expanding opportunities for local students and educators to access additional training and advanced degrees.

Almost all Asian missions offer some form of workforce training, internships, or scholarships for local students. Many activities award scholarships to students to pursue highly technical advanced degrees (bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees), along with ongoing, comprehensive support, including preacademic training, academic placement, monitoring, and reentry assistance. These activities reflect equitable practices while also promoting HE as a driver of development. Many training and scholarship programs seek local students from marginalized communities and groups in order to create pathways out of poverty and build a more inclusive workforce. Short courses and exchanges for university faculty also help to foster professional development, strengthen university partnerships, and provide mentoring and sector-specific training. Specifically, there is a strong focus on opportunities to strengthen leadership potential in fields such as health, economics, and agriculture.

USAID programs also strengthen the quality of student education by revising curricula, shifting pedagogical approaches, and developing new competency frameworks and assessments. For example, in Cambodia, the Enhancing Quality of Healthcare Activity (EQHA) worked with the Department of Human Resource Development of the Ministry of Health, the Regional Training Centers (RTC), and Cambodia Nursing Councils to strengthen the quality of nursing student education by shifting training approaches from content-based to competency-based education (CBE). The program was able to revise all training curricula, develop a new core competency framework, and provide equipment to midwives and nurses in training.

USAID-supported training and scholarship programs also increase the understanding of American culture and values among a socially, economically, and ethnically diverse group of young professionals and leaders. These types of interactions not only improve their technical competencies and enhance the potential of future leaders, but also help foster American values, such as freedom of expression, critical inquiry, and academic honesty. Some universities have even adopted a “social and civic responsibility” activity as an accredited course or social internship for students. In Central Asia, USAID also supports a number of English-language training programs to increase graduates’ employment prospects and ability to counter local disinformation.

The Asia region supports education and workforce training programming across all sectors, but most commonly in urban development, teacher training, nurses/medical education, ecotourism, agriculture and forestry, and health economics. Consultations with the Bureau for Global Health (GH) and the Asia Bureau’s Office of Technical Services (ASIA/TS) for Health



and Environment pointed to programs that provided specialized training in health economics, environmental science, and data analysis to strengthen nongovernmental capacity for such work and to support dialogue between researchers and national policy makers.

The Asia Bureau's 2020 Best of Results Database,⁵ a set of narratives from each mission on USAID's impact, offered additional examples of how countries are narrowing the skills gap and mismatches in the workforce, especially in the innovation sector. This shortcoming remains one of the many challenges that countries such as the Philippines face in HE. In data science-related areas in particular, according to the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, it is estimated that just over one-third of graduates and professionals nationwide possess the skills in demand by today's employers. USAID support for innovation in the Philippines has created a burgeoning ecosystem that has resulted in productive partnerships among government, industry, and universities, which will be instrumental as the country continues to accelerate and sustain inclusive growth. Since 2013, USAID has been linking academia with the private sector to create industry-relevant curricula as an effective, sustainable solution to this issue.

On September 10, 2020, with assistance from USAID, the Technological Institute of the Philippines (TIP), one of the leading engineering schools in the country, launched a Professional Science Master's (PSM) program in data science—the first such master's degree offered in the Philippines. This course of study was introduced in partnership with Emerson, a multinational company headquartered in the United States; and CloudSwyft Global Systems, a technology start-up and Microsoft's education partner in the country. With an estimated need for more than 80,000 data science professionals and continued high demand for expertise in this field, the program is envisioned to produce highly competent professionals that can help Philippine industries become more competitive through effective data use. In developing its curriculum, USAID benchmarked the PSM against similar programs at schools affiliated with the U.S. National Professional Science Master's Association.


Between 2013 and 2020, USAID supported the development of 13 PSM programs in Philippine universities in various innovative fields such as renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, and cybersecurity. USAID's long-standing and wide-ranging work strengthening human capital development—for instance, through education modernization and reforms, including increased research and development (R&D) collaboration with the private sector—has contributed to the Philippines' improved ranking in the 2020 Global Innovation Index (Cornell University et al., 2020), rising from 95th in 2012 to 50th in 2020 out of 131 economies surveyed.

4.3 Engaging and Strengthening Networks and Communities: Individuals and Institutions in Asia

Across Asia, as elsewhere, “higher education systems develop and engage with local, regional, and international communities to both ground their work in local challenges and connect to the most cutting-edge ideas the higher education community has to offer” (USAID Center for Education, 2021, p. 2). USAID invests in both *individuals* and *institutions* in order to expand networks, facilitate collaboration, and build technical expertise within host countries.

On the individual level, USAID HE programming focuses on supporting the people who address the most critical development priorities, such as nursing and frontline health workers, civil society activists, food producers, food safety experts, educators, local government

⁵ [Asia Bureau's 2020 Best of Results Database](#)



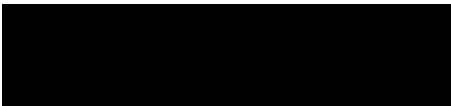
workers, youth workers, staff of business incubators, financial literacy experts, and wildlife and water protectors. USAID HE partnerships help strengthen the expertise and workforce capacities of individuals within national organizations and government partners to understand data and evidence across sectors, and to integrate available evidence into policy and decision making.

Programming enhances linkages between HE and industry, leveraging private sector resources and expertise in order to make courses more relevant to local market needs. Across the region, we noted significant industry investments in certification programs, digital learning platforms, and training in 21st-century skills and soft skills. USAID/Indonesia's Ready-to-Work Accelerator Program, for example, established ten Centers of Excellence in technical and vocational education and training centers as regional hubs for a Learning and Innovation Network designed to build institutional capacity and equip youth entering the workforce with the skills they need (RTI International, 2020).

USAID also strengthens HE systems through direct support to institutions themselves. USAID's technical assistance to partner universities includes developing competency standards, reviewing the current curricula to identify gaps, upgrading the curricula to meet international standards, and training universities' faculties. In some cases, Asian missions support core functions, such as university governance, financial management, human resources, procurement, and information technology systems. Through the American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA) program, USAID also invests in HE infrastructure to further U.S. Government (USG) public diplomacy, and to catalyze collaboration between U.S. and local HEIs. In the Kyrgyz Republic, ASHA is funding the American University of Central Asia (AUCA)—the only American-style university in the country. Funds have enabled new renovations, providing space for a Maker Space Learning Center with additional classrooms and meeting rooms, expanded laboratory facilities, classrooms, working zones, office spaces, as well as student cafeteria and spaces for public gatherings.

USAID also supports institutions by establishing platforms (both physical and digital) where students, researchers, local government, private sector actors, and laborers can work together to find sustainable solutions to local challenges. Across Asia, USAID has stood up technology parks, innovation hubs, and centers for learning that offer the chance for mentorship and capacity building among local stakeholders. They help strengthen the universities' links to industry, raise the quality of graduate degree programs to an international level, and provide venues for policy dialogue for economic and social development.

As Education Development Center (EDC) noted in the executive summary of the project's final report, "on October 6, 2014, USAID and the US State Department's Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) launched the USD \$12.4M Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training (USAID-LMI COMET) project, its flagship workforce development initiative, working with youth, universities and vocational schools, and industries in Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Thailand, and Vietnam. The project harnessed the use of online learning platforms to increase the number of skilled workers in ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] through targeted priorities in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, accounting, and tourism (STEM+AT) in the Lower Mekong sub-region. Over the life of the project, USAID-LMI COMET improved the skillsets of nearly 66,000 current and upcoming workers in STEM+AT fields, leveraging information and communication technology (ICT), and strengthening the quality and reach of vocational trainings and education courses. To prepare a pipeline of skilled workers for the innovation economy, USAID-LMI COMET provided education and training institutions with new skills to adapt to changing labor markets. These key skills included creative problem solving, analytical thinking, lifelong learning, communications, and



teamwork. This also included project-oriented learning and work-based learning ... in order to allow learners to build the hybrid skills needed to successfully transition to work” (EDC, 2019, p. 5).

While the USAID-LMI COMET initiative can be viewed as successfully engaging networks and communities across the region, there are also important lessons to be learned from this experience. Regional projects hoping to achieve sustainable systems strengthening results across multiple countries must be adapted for each of the unique contexts by addressing gaps in local capacities while applying local knowledge and strengthening existing systems.

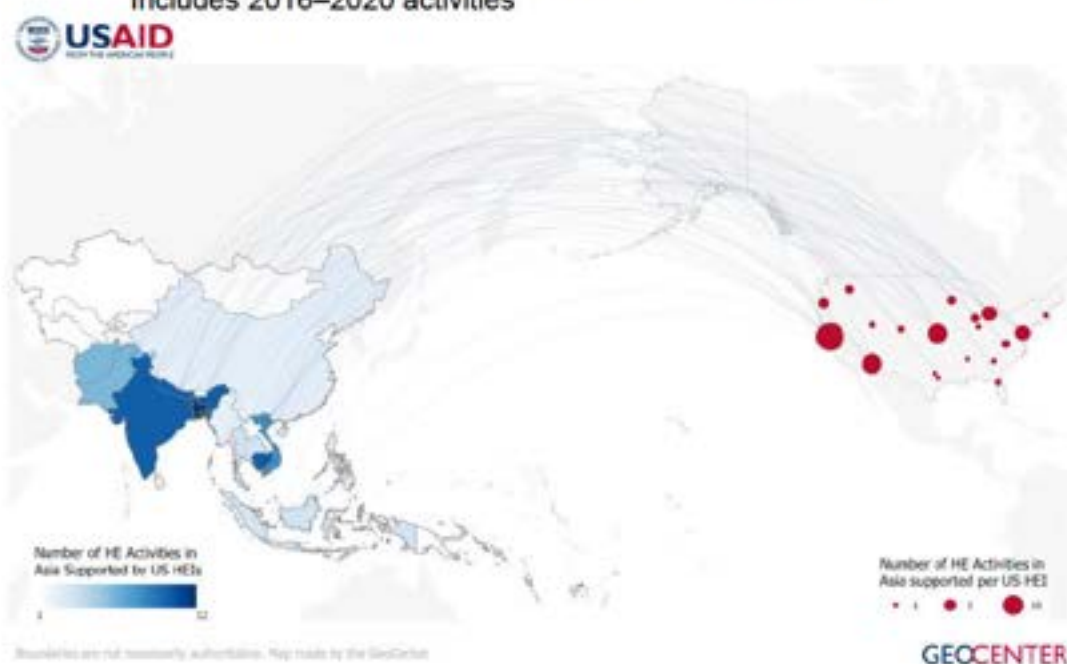
As EDC highlighted, “working closely and directly with post-secondary learning institutions, the USAID-LMI COMET project built, broadened, and deepened their collaboration with industry partners, creating more bridges to connect young, innovative, and capable learners with the economy. Through the project, key stakeholders co-designed systems, using an adaptive management approach called collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA), to ensure that innovation in teaching and learning is embedded and continuously improved, creating an approach that continuously fosters the skills youth need in order to thrive in the current and changing labor markets” (EDC, 2019, p. 5).

Finally, “to further support sustainable economic growth and improved capacity that could go to scale, the project built a regional Mekong Skills2Work (MS2W) Network, made up of 12 universities and technical vocational institutes. This MS2W Network, and other institutions supported by the project, comprises over 1,000 trained instructors that are now equipped with improved pedagogical methods; project-oriented, work-based learning, and other approaches...; and improved capacity to implement practical innovation challenges and other structured creative problem-solving activities” (EDC, 2019, p. 5).

4.4 Promising Programming Practices in Asia: Sustainable Partnerships and Diverse Networks

Partnerships are the cornerstone to effective and sustainable development across sectors. Within HE, USAID’s approach establishes partnerships that are demand driven; strengthen linkages between local HE systems and industries; and offer expansive opportunities for HEIs, “government, the private sector, and civil society to work together to solve development problems” (FHI 360, 2018, p. 2). Two compelling examples are found in USAID/Philippines STRIDE program and FUV.

Figure 5. Transnational Connections between US and Asian HEIs
Includes 2016–2020 activities



Source: Generated for this report by geographic information system (GIS) specialists and graphic designers at the USAID GeoCenter. Data sources: Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Performance Plan and Report (PPR) data and the [Higher Education Learning Agenda Activities Spreadsheet](#).

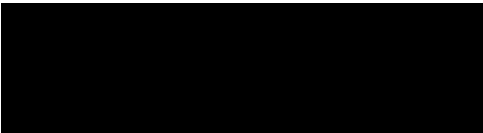
4.4.1 Case Study: STRIDE – Philippines

The STRIDE program⁶ was “a five-year, \$32 million cooperative agreement initiated by USAID as one of the largest investments of the United States Government (USG) in the Partnership for Growth, a high-level initiative focused on countries committed to good governance and aimed at stimulating inclusive economic expansion in the Philippines. STRIDE was awarded in 2013 to RTI International and a consortium comprised of Rutgers University, Florida State University (FSU), University of Michigan William Davidson Institute (U of M), and local resource partner Philippine Business for Education (PBEd). In 2018, USAID granted a three-year, \$4.9 million cost extension permitting STRIDE to continue targeted technical assistance to Government of the Philippines partners” (FHI 360, 2018, p. 2).

Over the life of the activity, the consortium engaged 125 Philippine universities and colleges, 54 U.S. universities, and 200 Philippine industry partners. The overall objective of STRIDE was to strengthen the science, technology, research, and innovation capacities of the HE system in the Philippines, focusing specifically on high-growth economic sectors. To strengthen trust and linkages among local industry, HEIs, and the government, STRIDE created mutually beneficial opportunities that fostered collaboration between industry and universities, and it strengthened capacities of HEIs to solve real technical problems that industry was facing and to conduct research. This type of partnership approach—decentralized, voluntary, and market-led—is an effective alternative to top-down, centralized approaches that often are not sustainable.

However, a significant challenge was overcoming the pressures that university administrators faced to quickly increase revenue. STRIDE aimed for partnership efforts “at multiple levels (executive leadership, research administration and technology transfer, and teaching faculty)”

⁶ For more details on STRIDE and HEEAP, see FHI 360 (2018).



(FHI 360, p. 10) to move the dial toward knowledge creation rather than immediate revenue. A key lesson for USAID through this process was that the most motivated universities often were not the most prestigious or well-established research universities, because the latter institutions sometimes felt they had fewer benefits to gain from STRIDE. By taking an intentionally diverse and equitable approach to partnerships, USAID found that smaller universities, private technological institutes, and state universities were often more open to “(industry guest lectures, faculty externships, and industry-based projects)” [FHI 360, 2018, p. 12]), which organically led to curricular shifts to improve student employability and capacities of staff at all levels. Similarly, for future iterations of such activities, “USAID indicated that the program should have focused more on small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) who have more local control over research collaborations than multinationals and have access to fewer global resources. These factors may make SMEs more receptive and committed partners” (FHI 360, 2018, p. 13).


4.4.2 Case Study: FUV

Founded in 2016, FUV is Vietnam’s first fully independent nonprofit university. FUV is a compelling example of how American HE models can be successfully contextualized within a host country’s traditions and culture. American scholastic standards related to critical thinking and analysis, independent and rigorous research, transparency, academic freedoms, and merit-based achievement are routinely modeled through academic programs at FUV. Through ongoing expansion of FUV’s diverse partnerships with the private sector, including technology and manufacturing industries, and American HEIs such as Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, Dartmouth College, and Princeton University, FUV has been able to expand its course offerings for undergraduate programming, develop cutting-edge curriculum and instructional approaches, and establish itself as an HEI that can produce a skilled workforce better equipped to meet the demands of a rapidly modernizing global economy. As one example, FUV’s Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation partnered with high-growth start-ups and venture capital firms to facilitate a six-month entrepreneurial work–study program for students. Further, USAID support has enabled FUV to cultivate signature programs in Vietnam studies and computer science, and to launch a Fulbright Executive Education Program.

In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, FUV demonstrated many successes, including recently surpassing its annual enrollment targets and assembling a world-class team of faculty and staff. In 2020, USAID granted its second assistance award to FUV to support institutional development in the areas of university governance, academic programs, partnerships, and financing. Such institutional strengthening activities will enable FUV to attain regional and international accreditation for the institution and its programs.

4.5 Asian HEIs as Partners: The COVID-19 Pivot

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how a strong HE system enhances both the development capacity and resilience of a country. As the pandemic shut down local institutions and interrupted daily operations, HEIs were called to quickly adapt “and function as centers of learning and community-based engagement, despite sudden shocks to the system like the current global pandemic” (Dockser et al., 2020, p. 1). Analyses of recent PPR data showed that HEIs quickly pivoted “to ensure the continuity of learning during the pandemic,” while also leading rapid research and innovation “to mitigate the broader impacts of COVID-19” (Dockser et al., 2020, p. 2). The 2020 mapping of higher education programs’ response to COVID-19 (Dockser et al., 2020) in USAID partner countries further explored “the resilience and



engagement of HEIs” in mitigating the effects of COVID-19, while “highlighting best practices for higher education’s role in navigating a crisis” (Dockser et al., 2020, p. 3).

4.5.1 Case Study: BUILD-IT in Vietnam

As the *Higher Education Response to COVID-19* report summarized, “through the USAID funded BUILD-IT activity, the Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology launched its third annual Bach Khoa (BK) Innovation competition with a focus on design and innovation of pedagogical and social challenges. The winning team, mentored by educators in the Higher Engineering Education Alliance Program (HEEAP), designed a new portable air filter to combat COVID-19.⁷ At the Da Nang University of Technology, the BUILD-IT-supported Maker Innovation Space was the site of additional innovation by university learners and educators to combat the virus. The students distributed hand sanitizer among patients and staff and, within a three-day design sprint, they were able to design, prototype, test, and improve a low-cost automatic hand sanitizer dispenser. The Da Nang City Hospital ordered ten of the dispensers to be placed throughout that property” (Dockser et al., 2020, p. 30).

4.5.2 Case Study: Jadi Pengusaha Mandiri (Become an Independent Entrepreneur, or JAPRI) Program in Indonesia

Through USAID’s JAPRI activity, USAID strengthens universities’ capacity to meet learning skills development in entrepreneurship and promotes entrepreneurship among students as a career option. USAID works with seven universities across Java to enhance their existing entrepreneurship course. In the wake of COVID-19, USAID collaborated with universities and private sector firms to shift to online learning activities, with methods such as developing learning videos and web-based learning programs. These online learning programs allowed students to learn and complete courses at their own pace.

5 Higher Education Across Sectors in Asia

The visualizations below (**Figure 6** through **Figure 9**) represent the countries in the Asia region that are engaged in HE activities across each selected sector. In general, the activities are funded by stakeholders within the specific sector (e.g., agriculture) and strategically leverage HE knowledge and technical expertise to build cross-sectoral synergies and achieve activity goals. Each sectoral graphic is followed by an illustrative example of how HE helps to advance the USG’s most critical priorities in specific sectors.

⁷ The HEEAP activity can be viewed as a predecessor to the BUILD-IT activity (sometimes referred to as HEEAP 3.0). Former beneficiaries of HEEAP acted as mentors to current beneficiaries of BUILD-IT.

5.1 Agriculture

Figure 6. Countries with HE activities within the agriculture sector
Includes 2016–2020 activities



Source: Generated for this report by geographic information system (GIS) specialists and graphic designers at the USAID GeoCenter. Data sources: Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Performance Plan and Report (PPR) data and the [Higher Education Learning Agenda Activities Spreadsheet](#).

Agricultural Value Chain Activity (Uzbekistan)

Budget: \$14,054,960

Duration: 2015–2020

Summary: USAID supported Uzbekistan's Agricultural Value Chain Activity at Tashkent State Agrarian University "to design and conduct research on grape post-harvest practices, that resulted not only in scientific articles being published and disseminated, but also produced private sector guides and manuals with recommendations specifically targeted to Uzbek business culture, climate, and agricultural practices" (DAI Global, 2020, p. 16). The Uzbekistan Agricultural Value Chain Activity is a good example of how to leverage HE to catalyze and support economic growth.

Environmental Resilience Activity: Wonders of the Mekong (Cambodia)⁸

Budget: \$9,700,000

Duration: 2016–2024

Summary: In Cambodia, USAID is partnering with HEIs to conserve and sustain the Wonders of the Mekong—natural capital assets that are vital to the ecology, economy, and culture of the Mekong region. The Mekong River is a globally important river that helps feed the world and has been the lifeblood of great civilizations past and present. USAID’s implementing partner, University of Nevada Global Water Center, is working with the Cambodian Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute, Royal University of Phnom Penh, Royal University of Agriculture, and Institute of Technology of Cambodia to conduct applied research; build capacity; and develop outreach and communications products to highlight the economic, ecological, and cultural values of biodiversity and ecosystem services associated with the Lower Mekong River.

5.2 Democracy, Governance, Human Rights, and Peace and Security

Figure 7. Countries with HE activities within the democracy, governance, human rights, and peace, and security sectors
Includes 2016–2020 activities



⁸ The data source for these graphics did not identify environmental, security, and resilience as a specific sector. Rather, these types of activities were subsumed within agriculture, economic growth, and education.

Source: Generated for this report by geographic information system (GIS) specialists and graphic designers at the USAID GeoCenter. Data sources: Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Performance Plan and Report (PPR) data and the [Higher Education Learning Agenda Activities Spreadsheet](#).

Countering Violent Extremism (Pakistan)

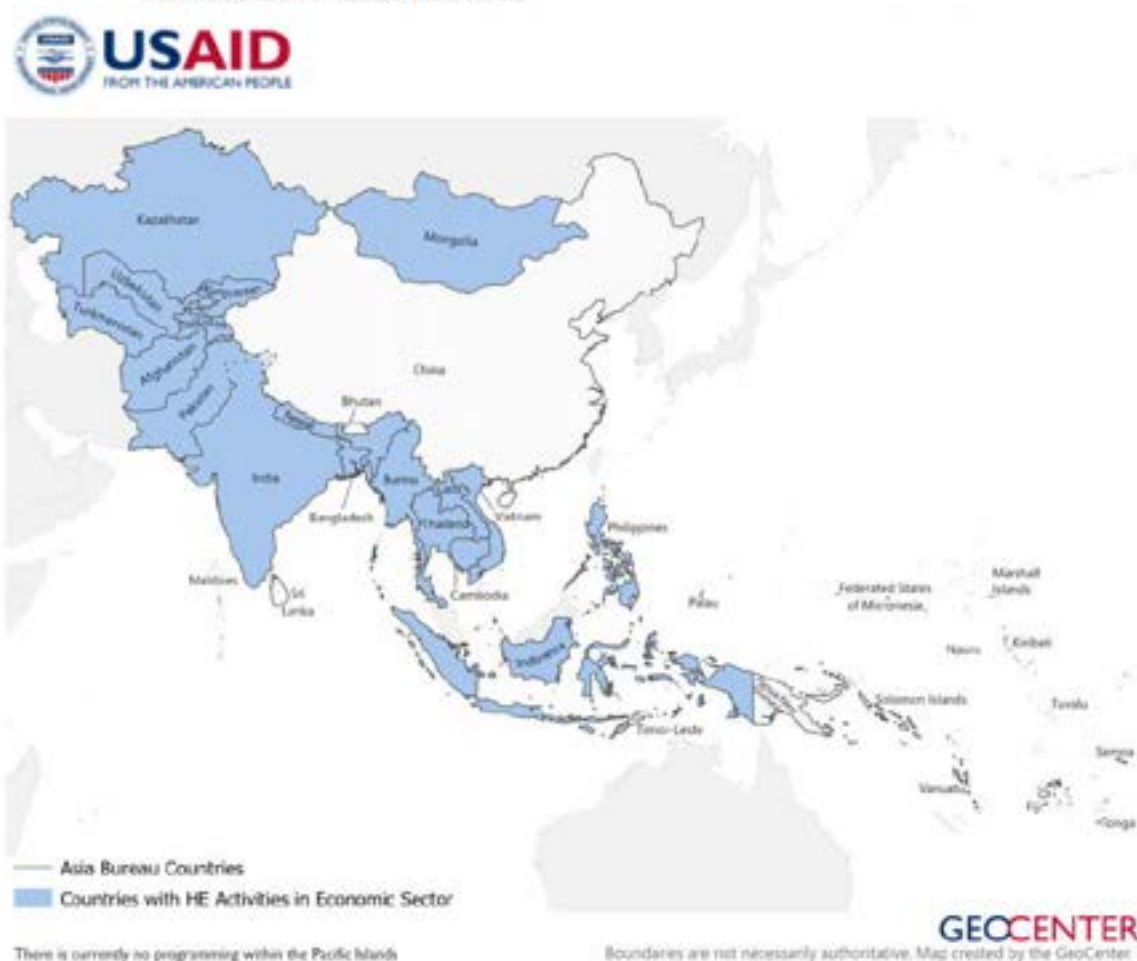
Budget: \$42,000,000

Duration: 2017–2022

Summary: In Pakistan, USAID and HE are countering violent extremism through partnering with faculty in universities to develop two courses with CVE components that are being taught in five universities in Sindh and Punjab Provinces. Another component of this activity has revived or created 58 student societies and has engaged 6,500 students and 500 faculty in CVE activities on campus and in communities.

5.3 Economic Growth and Workforce Development

Figure 8. Countries with HE activities within the economic growth and workforce development sector
Includes 2016–2020 activities



Source: Generated for this report by geographic information system (GIS) specialists and graphic designers at the USAID GeoCenter. Data sources: Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Performance Plan and Report (PPR) data and the [Higher Education Learning Agenda Activities Spreadsheet](#).

Workforce for Innovation and Start-up Ecosystem (WISE)

Estimated Budget: \$2,000,000

Estimated Duration: 2021–2023

Summary: USAID's WISE activity is supporting Vietnam to upskill its workforce to meet the rapidly increasing demands for digital skills to power the economy. The goal of WISE is "to support interventions to expand the specialized skills segment of Vietnam's labor market to improve the upward mobility and competitiveness of Vietnam's workforce" (USAID, 2021). USAID and the Government of Vietnam will partner with HEIs to identify gaps in Vietnam's digital labor force, provide access to training to fill those gaps, and create clear career pathways for high school and university students to participate successfully in the growing digital economy.

5.4 Health

Figure 9. Countries with HE activities within the health sector
Includes 2016–2020 activities



Source: Generated for this report by geographic information system (GIS) specialists and graphic designers at the USAID GeoCenter. Data sources: Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Performance Plan and Report (PPR) data and the [Higher Education Learning Agenda Activities Spreadsheet](#).



USAID One Health Workforce – Next Generation (OHW-NG) activity

Estimated Budget: \$60,000,000 through 2024 (approx. \$25 million allocated for Southeast Asia One Health University Network [SEAOHUN]) with a ceiling of \$85 million.

Estimated Duration: 2019–2024

Summary: The OHW-NG consortium will work alongside the One Health university networks—Africa One Health University Network (AFROHUN, formerly One Health Central and Eastern Africa) and SEAOHUN—“to co-design and execute activities such as developing sustainable training programs that will teach current and future professionals the skills and competencies needed to address complex health issues, from antimicrobial resistance to zoonotic disease [prevention]. The program will harness a new generation of leaders trained in critical thinking, collaboration and a systems approach to problem solving—all essential tools for staying ahead of global crises” (Wood & Kerlin, 2019). USAID recently awarded SEAOHUN a 2-year Transition Award.

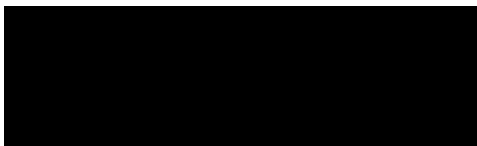
6 Mutually Beneficial: Domestic Dividends for USAID’s Asian HE Investments

A literate and employable population in Asia is in the interests of the shared national security of the region, the United States, and the globe. USAID HE investments in Asia, such as scholarships and student exchange programs, benefit U.S. HEIs financially and inculcate American values and education models among students who participate in the exchanges. These activities support positive, productive opportunities for Asian youth and increase their understanding of the United States and its values and culture. Further, these activities lay a critical foundation for Asian countries to lead their own inclusive development by supporting youth with the skills, knowledge, and opportunities to be drivers of growth and development in their own countries. USAID’s investments and partnerships in HE lay the groundwork for more resilient economies and future trade partners.

Below is a list of examples, across sectors, drawn from 2020 PPR data, of how USAID’s HE partners are tackling their country’s toughest development challenges while also benefiting the U.S. domestically.

Health/Medical Education

- The international public health benefit to having a more qualified local healthcare workforce (especially with the growing awareness of potential new pandemics) is highlighted in USAID’s HE programming. USAID actively seeks out Asian HEIs as implementing partners for health programs, not only as recipients of development assistance.
- USAID has supported public health, animal health, agriculture, medical, and other universities to modernize their curriculum and practices through activities such as One Health Workforce – Next Generation (OHW-NG). In 2011, USAID established the Southeast Asia One Health University Network (SEAOHUN) a regional network currently comprised of 102 universities in 8 countries including Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. In addition to creating new localized research alliances to tackle complex health issues, this activity has strengthened the national workforce in participating countries, equipping health professionals with “the skills and perspectives to prevent, detect, and respond to



infectious disease threats” as well as “critical thinking, communication, leadership, and collaboration skills”.


- Social and behavior change communication activity in Bangladesh and a Government to Government (G2G) agreement with the Health Services Academy in Pakistan both sought to improve public health in each country and strengthen relations with the USG.

Agriculture, Food and Nutritional Security

- The Myanmar Agriculture Policy Support Activity’s objective is to improve governance in the agricultural sector, building national capacity to prioritize and implement strategic organizational and policy reforms that improve food and nutrition security in Burma. The activity is also facilitating broad stakeholder participation in policy dialogue and advocacy, helping to advance USG priorities in the country such as strengthened local capacity and reinforcement of democratic values.
- The Laos Applied Nutrition Research Capacity Building Activity is working with the Center of Nutrition together with the University of Health Sciences and the Lao Tropical and Public Health Institute under the Ministry of Health to improve local capacity of health professionals to conduct and utilize nutrition research in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.
- Thrive in Tajikistan, a five-year, \$20 million program, expands the partnership between USAID and the Aga Khan Foundation to improve the quality of life for people in 16 districts of Tajikistan. Thrive specifically strengthens the ability of local government institutions in resource management and effective social service delivery; it also improves the performance of small-scale farmers and entrepreneurs. Similarly, the Agricultural Value Chain activity in Uzbekistan focused on increasing “agricultural productivity and prosperity in Uzbekistan. The activity worked throughout the entire value chain of Uzbekistan’s horticultural sector to create [local] employment, increase fruit and vegetable yield, quality, and exports, and strengthen relationships between [US and local] educational institutions and the private sector” (USAID, n.d.-a, p. 1).

HE Institutional Strengthening

- In Indonesia, through a number of HE activities, USAID has improved the capacity of Indonesian HEIs and individual scientists to conduct high-quality research that aligns with both USAID and host-country development priorities.
- HE activities have also encouraged knowledge sharing across the region to further develop local capacities for research and development across sectors through workshops, visiting lecture series, and conferences. For example, in Cambodia, the USAID-supported Center for Excellence on Sustainable Agricultural Intensification and Nutrition (CE-SAIN) “works closely with the Royal University of Agriculture (RUA) to improve the skills and knowledge of public and private sector agricultural workers” and to foster growth in the private sector. CE-SAIN held eight workshops and a lecture series led by visiting U.S. faculty members from land-grant universities that reached 135 students (40 percent women) in FY 2020. Both U.S. and Cambodian faculty increased their understanding of innovative agriculture technologies and benefited from partnerships with 20 U.S. HEIs.



Democracy, Governance, and Peace and Security

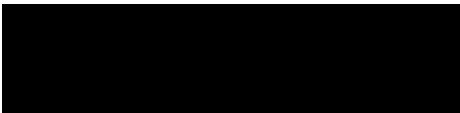
- In Pakistan, USAID is working to counter violent extremism through an interagency agreement with the U.S. Institute for Peace (USIP). USIP establishes “sustainable mechanisms for dialogue, critical thinking, and peace education” (USIP, 2020, p. 2) for at-risk youth at universities throughout Pakistan. Another activity in Pakistan created courses on CVE at multiple universities across Punjab and Sindh Provinces. These courses, designed for youth, focused on promoting community cohesion and building tolerance. Small grants served as seed money for local organizations to innovate and work directly with students at universities and madrassas on tolerance-building activities. Such activities promote democratic values and respect for human rights and aim to reduce instability and threats to national security that impact the U.S.
- USG educational and diplomacy programs are a hallmark of U.S. leadership in Turkmenistan. They actively help Turkmenistan to address its human resource capacity shortfalls that can, in turn, create threats to advancing U.S. security and economic foreign policies.
- In several countries throughout Asia, partnerships with HEIs are established to train the staff of democratic institutions (judges, lawyers, advocates, police) in rule of law, justice, and human rights; media and civil society; and public administration, including election administration. Civic education, voter education, and media disinformation and misinformation training for journalists continue to be priorities for the democracy, human rights, and governance sector.

Science, Technology and Innovation

- “The U.S.-Pakistan Science and Technology Cooperation Program [increased] collaboration in science, technology, engineering, and education for mutual benefit and peaceful purposes” between the scientific and research communities in the United States and Pakistan (USAID, n.d.-b).
- USAID’s flagship HE activity, STRIDE, provided technical assistance to all major stakeholders in the innovation ecosystem, and was at the forefront of implementing the Philippine government’s whole-of-community approach to innovation called the Regional Inclusive Innovation Centers. Similarly, the BUILD-IT Alliance in Vietnam and Science, Technology, Innovation and Research (STIR) programming in India also bring many of the investments overseas back to the U.S.

Educational Exchanges

- HE programming offers the opportunity to advance U.S. interests and values and to increase goodwill and understanding of U.S. culture, values, and norms related to democracy, human rights, accountability, and inclusivity among Asian students, faculty, and staff. The exchange programs and activities implemented by USAID with HEIs facilitate people-to-people ties, which in turn strengthen the capacity of U.S. HEIs to accommodate international students, share best practices, deepen academic connections and—hopefully—create future global trade ties.
- The \$19 million, five-year Lincoln Scholarship Program awards graduate-level scholarships to emerging Burmese leaders to study in the U.S. This program aims to promote Burma’s emerging leaders through further academic study, including conflict-resolution courses and leadership programs at selected U.S. universities. It is part of the USG’s ongoing commitment to support the people of Burma (from all states and



regions of Burma and all ethnic groups) as they pursue inclusive democratic and economic transformation in the wake of the February 2021 military coup and the pandemic.

- U.S. HEIs supported the Government of Cambodia's reform effort to upgrade teacher qualifications from a two-year diploma program to an American model involving a four-year bachelor's degree, in part through educational exchanges.
- U.S. professors specializing in fiscal federalism participated in learning and exchange opportunities in Nepal and Burma, with both host-country faculty and U.S. professors benefiting from the exchange.

Entrepreneurship and Workforce Development

- Through USAID's JAPRI activity in Indonesia, USAID strengthens universities' capacity to meet learning skills development in entrepreneurship and promotes entrepreneurship among students as a career option. USAID works with seven universities across Java to enhance their existing entrepreneurship courses with an aim to improve education and inclusive economic growth throughout Indonesia in particular for youth, women, and youth with disabilities.

Climate Change

- USAID advances USG interests in climate change by developing new local leaders and researchers in climate-resilient development and by expanding the evidence base in this area. Activities such as Saving Species in Vietnam, Protecting Wildlife in the Philippines, Forest Management and the Innovation Lab for Fish in Bangladesh, and the Paani and Hariyo Ban (Green Forest) projects in Nepal all strive to stave off climate change through local capacity strengthening.

7 Recommendations for HE Programming in Asia

USAID has made significant investments in HE across the Asia region, which have proven crucial in fostering innovations across sectors, supporting economic and social opportunities at national and local levels, and transforming systems through the establishment of scholarship programs. USAID's support to HEIs has enabled both individuals and HEIs to grow and contribute to their country's development progress. USAID has fostered unique partnerships among HEIs within the U.S. and in countries across the Asia region, allowing for social, economic, and scientific advancement in the U.S. and abroad. Knowledge sharing and dissemination efforts among HEIs supported by USAID have ensured high-quality training programs for teachers and HEI administrators across all levels of education, from preprimary to HE, and capacity strengthening in all sectors.

While much has been achieved, this review points to several recommendations:

1. HE is a tool in USAID's development toolbox for all sectors. USAID needs to better capture and share cross-sectoral and domestic dividends gained from U.S. investments in HE, which are abundant but not always highlighted. Knowledge management and communication efforts should more clearly emphasize these gains across USAID-funded programming.
 - a. Join and actively share learning through the Higher Education Working Group (internal to USAID) and USAID Higher Education Learning Network (HELN) (open

[REDACTED]

to external audiences). Within Asia specifically, the ILOA activity will establish networks for implementing partners to join and broaden USAID's learning.

- a. Build country-specific learning questions into all activity designs, as well as implementation research. These research themes can be connected to USAID's Higher Education Learning Agenda, and/or the IPS Learning Agenda.
 - b. Communicate with the Asia Bureau's Development Outreach and Communication Officers on how to better emphasize the cross-sectoral benefits of HE investments.
 - c. Explore further how HE investments abroad benefit the U.S. domestically; each sector can collaborate with the economic growth and public-private partnership teams (e.g., capitalizing upon connections with American Chambers of Commerce, private sector, U.S. HEIs).
2. Evaluate the performance, cost effectiveness, and impact of HE activities, or HE contributions to activities across sectors, specific to country contexts. Such information will support USAID's efforts to design better—i.e., tailored and effective—interventions and to support scalability.
 - a. Build education cost reporting (see Walls, 2021) into new activity designs and reporting requirements.
 - b. Conceptualize a varied evaluation approach during activity designs, considering performance evaluations, implementation research, and longer-term impact evaluations.
 - c. Encourage missions to report against a new and diverse set of HE standard indicators in activity plans.
 3. Explore how private sector engagement might help HEIs provide high-quality and affordable education and continuous professional development programs for faculty, and conduct robust and innovative research, while also maintaining facilities and equipment. USAID should consider “both small- and medium-sized enterprises who have more local control over research collaborations than multinationals and have access to fewer global resources” (FHI 360, 2018, p. 13). USAID's primer on HE and industry collaborations (Reyes Rios, 2022) contains a wealth of recommendations on how to overcome common barriers to successful collaborations.
 4. Investigate the additive relationship between investments in basic (including secondary) education and HE programming. Studies focused on the Asia region can be commissioned through ILOA and other activities.

This investigation should also continue in crisis and conflict contexts. USAID should ensure that HE is included in the Terms of Reference (ToR) for any country-level education clusters (during emergencies) or development partners' working groups.

5. Prioritize locally led development and strengthen the capacity of local HEIs, and other actors within the HE, to address the most pressing development challenges in democracy and governance, health, climate change, economic growth, and education. Some suggestions include:
 - a. Obligate more funding (through U.S. HEIs) to local institutions through a consortium model, such as Supporting Holistic and Actionable Research in Education (SHARE) or Long-Term Assistance and Services for Research (LASER) and the vast and diverse network of university researchers they have built across



the world and sectors Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine (LASER PULSE).⁹

- b. Design activities that put local owners in the driver's seat and amplify their voices (e.g., Youth Excel program activities focused on implementation research are often guided by youth and their priorities).
 - c. Collate and share examples of any centrally managed mechanisms where a local partner is prime. Explain to other potential local partners details about how these entities became a prime, offer concrete and actionable recommendations on how to ensure that local partners are leading activities, and include localization within the scope of new mechanisms from the outset. USAID's Global Health team has developed a [Local Capacity Strengthening Implementation Guide](#) that can be adapted for use across sectors.
6. Systematize a focus on equity across HE programs within education and other sectors.
- a. HE programs should consider how to meaningfully benefit and support women and girls; racial, ethnic, and religious minorities; LGBTQI+ people; persons with disabilities; Indigenous people; and refugees beyond offering scholarships. Marginalized groups should be able to speak up and have meaningful representation in activity design processes.
 - b. Incorporate universal design for learning (UDL) into HE activities (both pre-procurement design and implementation of current awards where feasible).
7. Further enable and support HEIs to address pressing humanitarian and democratic challenges across the Asia region, such as climate change, future pandemic threats, systemic spread of disinformation, malign influence, and anti-democratic political upheaval. As one example, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, HEIs have continued to "function as centers of learning and community-based engagement, despite sudden shocks to the system like the current global pandemic" (Dockser et al., 2020, p. 1). As a second example, a USAID working group addressing education and climate change has also generated several recommendations (see USAID, 2022) for how basic education and HE programming can advance climate action, incorporating engagement and partnerships with HEIs.
8. Explore whether and how recommendations from the previous HE reviews in the Asia region have been taken into account in the design and implementation of HE activities from 2016 onward. If not, why not, and what resources are needed? ASIA/TS could lead such a review through ILOA.

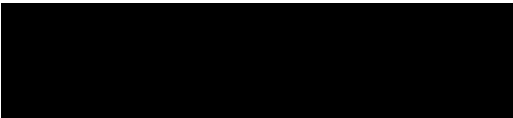
⁹ SHARE, led by the University of Notre Dame's Pulte Institute for Global Development, mentors a coalition of partners across Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. According to the university, SHARE seeks to strengthen the "capacity of education ecosystems to generate, translate, and use high quality, actionable data and evidence to inform programmatic and investment decisions in the course of addressing USAID learning priorities at the local, regional, and/or global levels" (Global Center for Development of the Whole Child, 2022).

The LASER PULSE consortium, led by Purdue University, includes 56 universities from 24 low- and middle-income countries, in addition to eight U.S. universities, including five minority-serving institutions. A five-year activity beginning in 2018, LASER PULSE co-creates and implements research and academic evaluations, and fosters sustainable research partnerships among universities, governments, USAID, and other organizations. LASER is part of the portfolio of the Higher Education Solutions Network 2.0, which is composed of two flagship programs (Higher Education Solutions Network and Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research), as well as three programs that launched in 2018.



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Annex A: Methodology for the Higher Education (HE) Strategic Review

To understand the scale and depth of HE programming across Asia over the five-year period from 2016 through 2021, we reviewed the Higher Education Activities Spreadsheet, Asia Bureau's 2020 Best of Results Database,¹⁰ FY 2020 Performance Plan and Report (PPR) data, and two new (2020) Key Issue Narratives—HE and Engagement of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). These data sources capture both standalone HE activities and HE contributions to activities across sectors, which were the focus of the review. Data were categorized and organized according to the key outcomes of USAID's Higher Education Program Framework (USAID Center for Education, 2021): advancing knowledge and research, providing quality and relevant education and workforce training, engaging and strengthening networks and communities (both individuals and institutions), and strengthening HE systems. The research team also analyzed examples of when and how HE programming furthered U.S. investments in Asia and when it produced benefits domestically. Best practices and case studies from across the Asia region were highlighted throughout this review given their critical lessons for USAID.

Finally, the research team sought staff expertise and experiences, to map out the various ways in which sectors engage HE to achieve their most critical objectives.¹¹ First, in July 2021, the team consulted with sector teams in the USAID Bureau for Asia's Technical Support Office (ASIA/TS), including Economic Growth, Democracy and Governance, Environmental Security and Resilience, and Health. Consultations were also held with members of the Global Health team, and the Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation's (DDI's) Center for Education. These consultations generated nuanced background information that complemented the PPR data. Second, through extensive collaboration with the geographic information system specialists, cartographers, and graphic designers at USAID's GeoCenter, the team created a series of graphics to better highlight the breadth and diversity of HE programming across the Asia region. The data sources for these maps included FY 2020 PPR data and the Higher Education Learning Agenda (HE LA) Activities Spreadsheet.

¹⁰ [Asia Bureau's 2020 Best of Results Database](#)

¹¹ As with previous retrospective analyses of higher education, such as [USAID's Higher Education Landscape Analysis, 2014–2018](#), this review team defined higher education engagement in the following ways: "a) activities that sought to strengthen host-country higher education institutions or systems as a primary or subsidiary goal; b) activities that contracted with, or provided funds to, host-country higher education institutions regardless of the purpose; c) activities that provided support to students, faculty, or staff of in-country higher education institutions (i.e. scholarships or faculty awards); and d) activities that engaged in workforce development or vocational education if such activities took place at the post-secondary level" (LeBron et al., n.d., p. 5).