



**USAID**  
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# USAID'S HEARTH LEARNING AGENDA

JULY 2022





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#### SUGGESTED CITATION

Gorospe, K.D. 2022. USAID's Health, Ecosystems, and Agriculture for Resilient, Thriving Societies (HEARTH) Learning Agenda. United States Agency for International Development: Washington, D.C. 10pp.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful for the thoughtful contributions from: Sandrika Ateifa, Natalie Bailey, Amadou Bakayoko, Judy Boshoven, Sara Carlson, Robert Cohen, Elizabeth Daut, Sara Diamond, Keith Dokho, Kathleen Flower, Anna Ghnouly, Whitney Hedlund, Nathan Hulley, Ignatius Indriartoto, Itoro Inoyo, David Jacobstein, Kiersten Johnson, Vy Lam, Ken Lee, Victor Mombu, Clive Mutunga, Moffatt Ngugi, Marc Nyunzi, Elizabeth Pleuss, Tatiana Pulido, Ramy Razafindralambo, Kyle Rearick, Chris Schaan, Kelsey Schueler, Samuel Sellers, Salohy Soloarivelo, Amy Stenoiien, Vinaya Swaminathan, Donald Tambunan, Andrew Tobiason, Kyla Tripp, Geeta Uhl, Catherine Wahlen, James Winter, Olaf Zerbock

This Learning Agenda was developed based on the outputs of the HEARTH co-design workshops conducted starting in FY2020 and refined based on input from the multidisciplinary USAID HEARTH team in Washington and USAID Missions and technical experts from the Measuring Impact II activity who facilitated the co-design workshops.

A group of elephants at sunset, North Luangwa National Park, Zambia. © Daniel Rosengren/FZS.

COVER PHOTO TOP: In exchange for access to public land, farmers in Ghana generate short-term income while restoring degraded forests using a modified *tungya* system that plants trees and plantains together. Photo by Andrew Tobiason.

COVER PHOTO BOTTOM: Woman with traditional Malagasy face paint sorting cacao beans. Photo by Beyond Good ©.

## PURPOSE AND CONTEXT

Health, Ecosystems, and Agriculture for Resilient Thriving Societies (HEARTH) is a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) program that supports the creation of public-private partnerships to co-design cross-sectoral development activities that integrate human health and well-being considerations with the conservation of critical ecosystems important for supporting biodiversity and mitigating climate change. The HEARTH portfolio consists of 17 activities (awarded or in co-creation) being implemented globally across Africa, Asia, and the Pacific (Figure 1). HEARTH builds on the concept of Integrated Conservation Development Projects (ICDPs), an approach first introduced in the 1980s, that aimed to align the goals of environmental conservation with international development. Years of ICDP implementation provided a wealth of learned lessons including why some ICDPs failed to deliver sustained benefits to communities. Some of the shortcomings of ICDPs have been attributed to: conservation entities being pushed into the role of development provider for which they were ill-equipped and inadequate scaling up of increased local support for conservation objectives to create larger environmental impacts. In many cases, inadequate monitoring and evaluation has made it difficult to measure the impacts of ICDPs and generate strong evidence on their effectiveness.<sup>1</sup>

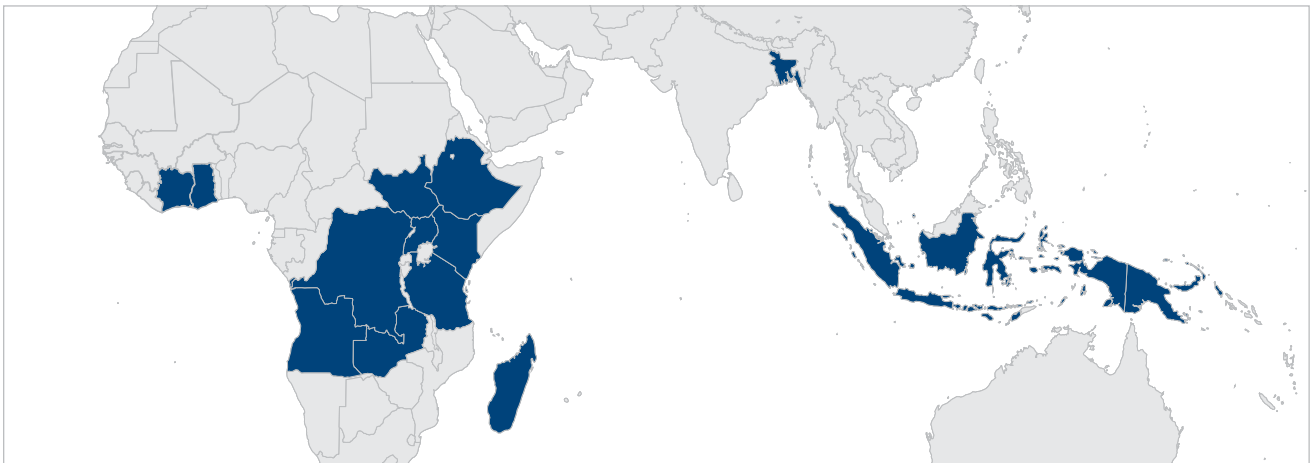
### BOX 1: The HEARTH model

The HEARTH model creates public-private partnerships that co-fund and co-design cross-sectoral development programs that integrate human health and well-being considerations with the conservation of critical ecosystems important for supporting biodiversity and mitigating climate change.

The purpose of the HEARTH Learning Agenda is to better understand the conditions under which private sector-driven, cross-sectoral development — the “HEARTH model” — results in better outcomes for both people and the planet. The model defines specific learning questions and proposes specific learning activities and products. The HEARTH learning questions fall under three overarching objectives:

1. **Improve USAID programming** by answering key research questions on the relationship between conservation and human well-being, including understanding when cross-sectoral integration results in better development outcomes.
2. **Understand the contributions of private sector engagement** to key environmental outcomes across the HEARTH portfolio.
3. **Communicate high-level results** from across the HEARTH portfolio to influential constituencies.

Figure 1. Countries with ongoing or forthcoming HEARTH activities.



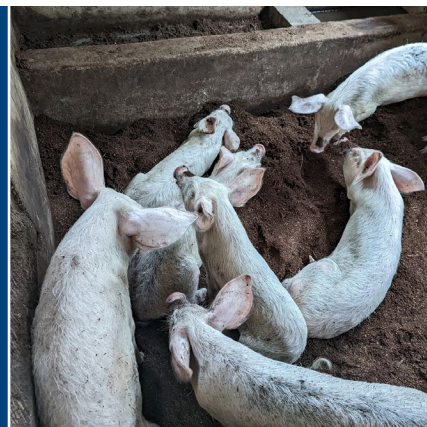
<sup>1</sup> Ross Hughes & Fiona Flintan, *Integrating Conservation and Development Experience: A Review and Bibliography of the ICDP Literature* (London: International Institute for Environment and Development, 2001), 8.

The Learning Agenda presented here was informed by, and will complement and contribute to several existing USAID learning agendas, including: the [Agency Learning Agenda](#), [Private Sector Engagement Evidence and Learning Plan](#), the [Latin America and Caribbean Environment Learning Agenda for Private Sector Engagement](#), the [Feed the Future Learning Agenda](#), the [Cross-Mission Learning Agenda for Conservation Enterprises](#), the [Combating Wildlife Trafficking Learning Agenda](#), and the [Wild Meat Learning Agenda](#).



## BOX2: The HEARTH Implementation Laboratory

Shared interest in integrated programming among USAID technical staff in the global health, food security, governance, and environment sectors inspired the creation of the HEARTH program. Specifically, how do public-private partnerships and cross-sectoral development lead to the protection of critical ecosystems for biodiversity and climate change mitigation and enhanced human health and well-being? The HEARTH Global Development Alliance was launched in December 2018 to investigate this question. Starting in FY 2020, 10 USAID Missions participated in co-design workshops with their private sector partners to develop the following outputs: (1) a situation analysis or “map of the problem” that articulated the development challenge each HEARTH activity aims to address in their land- or seascape; (2) selection of a suite of strategic approaches or interventions to address the development challenge; and (3) a theory of change or “map of the solution” that articulated the hypothesis for how the co-design teams believe the interventions will work. The results of the co-design workshops showed that many of the HEARTH activities have similar environmental and human development goals and are using similar interventions based on common theories of change. Therefore, the HEARTH program represents an “implementation laboratory” from which to understand the complex relationships that underpin sustainable development. The results of the co-design workshops informed the HEARTH theory of change and learning questions.



TOP LEFT: Gorillas with the Rushegura group. Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda. Photo by Jason Houston.

BOTTOM LEFT: Local artisans produce and sell handicrafts along the trails used by tourists. Buhoma, Uganda. Photo by Jason Houston.

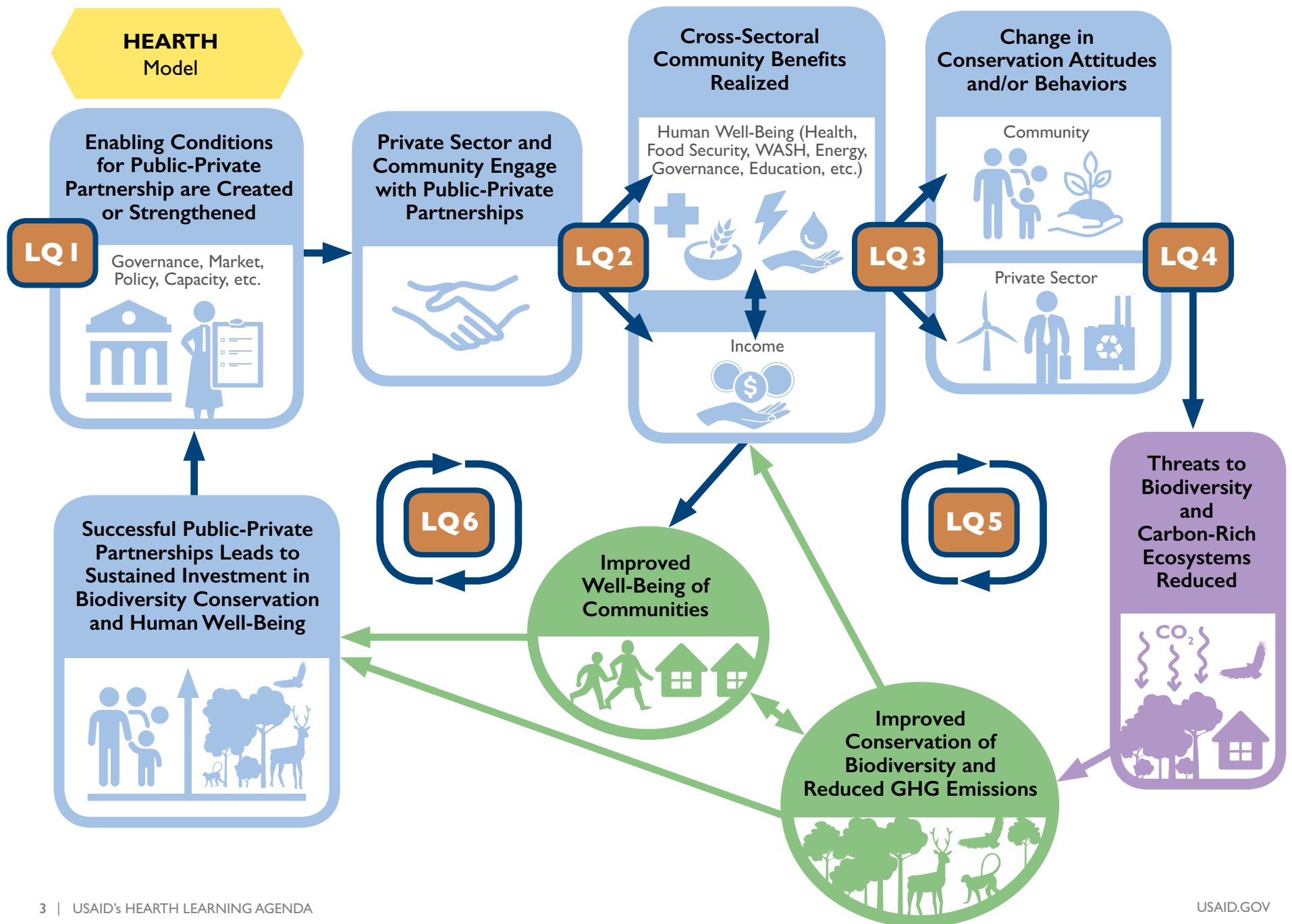
TOP RIGHT: The sale of these pigs will boost income and resilience of a cacao farmer in western Ghana, who in turn is providing piglets and coaching to other women in her community. Photo by Andrew Tobiason.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Malagasy woman nurturing cacao seedlings in a tree nursery set up by the TSIRO Alliance. Photo by Salohy Soloarivelo/USAID.

## HEARTH Theory of Change

The HEARTH theory of change presents a hypothesis of expected intermediate results and processes based on HEARTH's strategic approach and goals (Figure 2). The theory of change and its associated learning questions (see next section) are a framework to help teams identify learning priorities and understand and adapt the HEARTH model of public-private partnerships and cross-sectoral development. Rather than focusing on specific sectors, the HEARTH theory of change is a comprehensive view of HEARTH activities implemented globally.

Figure 2: The HEARTH Theory of Change, including intermediate results (blue), threats (purple), and outcomes (green). The labels, LQ1 to LQ6, indicate the steps and assumptions that are the focus of HEARTH’s thematic learning questions.



## Enabling Conditions

Enabling conditions are important for ensuring that the private sector and communities are able to actively engage with the public-private partnership without barriers to entry. The enabling conditions for public-private partnerships include but are not limited to the governance, market, and policy environments as well as efforts to enhance capacity through training and education of local stakeholders and/or public or private partners.<sup>2</sup> For public-private partnerships to be successful, it is important to align the needs and aspirations of community and private sector participants; ensure that supporting environments such as market demand, supply chains, infrastructure, governance systems, and legal and policy frameworks are in place; and train participants in the necessary technical and business management skills.

## Cross-Sectoral Benefits

Creating a public-private partnership does not preclude the delivery of cross-sectoral benefits. Likely, what is needed for benefits to be felt and realized is the active participation and engagement of both the private sector and the public. These benefits can be realized either in the form of human well-being (e.g., health, food security, water sanitation and hygiene [WASH], governance, energy, education, etc) or economic (e.g., income) benefits. In addition, these benefits may be mutually reinforcing. For example, increased income may support increased access to human well-being services and/or enhanced human well-being may result in additional or saved income for individuals and households.

## Attitude and Behavior Change

One way that can promote changes in attitudes and behavior towards environmental issues is through incentives, such as through the delivery of cross-sectoral benefits that are directly tied to the conservation of biodiversity or critical ecosystems. This may occur through strategic approaches that raise awareness and build positive attitudes about the connection between ecosystem status and human well-being, and provide incentives or remove barriers to targeted changes in practices that are connected to an environmental threat. This intermediate result is crucial to establishing a link between human well-being and environmental conservation outcomes.

## Threat Reduction

Improved conservation knowledge and attitudes should result in reduced unsustainable use of resources and other threat reduction; however, this is not a foregone conclusion. It is important to recognize that interventions will be more effective if specific actors and behaviors are targeted while also considering that the threat reduction occurs at a scale that is ecologically significant. For example, if actors do not live in key ecosystems that are considered critical to biodiversity conservation or serve as meaningful carbon sinks, or if the targeted actors and their behaviors are not associated with the most critical threats, then behavior change may not be sufficient to reduce threats.

## Humans and Nature

A central idea of the HEARTH model is that conservation and human well-being outcomes can be mutually reinforcing. This idea is depicted in the theory of change (Figure 2) as a positive feedback loop, whereby the conservation of biodiversity and critical ecosystems supports the realization of cross-sectoral benefits which, in turn, contributes to improved attitudes and behaviors towards environmental issues resulting in reduced threats to biodiversity and ecosystems. In some cases, benefits to humans require intact ecosystems, such as in the provision of ecosystem services (e.g., fertile soils, clean drinking water, protection from natural hazards) and conservation enterprises (e.g., the sale of non-forest timber products, ecotourism) require that ecosystems

<sup>2</sup> USAID, *Building a Conservation Enterprise: Keys for Success*, 2017, 27.

are intact. In other cases, the connection between human health and ecosystem status is more indirect, such as when habitat degradation results in increased hunting of wildlife, which, in turn, leads to increased risk of zoonotic disease spillover.

## Sustainability

Another idea that is central to the HEARTH model is the importance of partnering with the private sector. This idea is depicted in the theory of change (Figure 2) as another positive feedback loop, whereby the goals of the HEARTH model — namely, biodiversity and critical ecosystem conservation and cross-sectoral benefits — are met. Achievement of these objectives leads to the success of the public-private partnership and the partnership being seen as worthy of continued investment. Understanding the characteristics that enable sustained partnership and investment in mutually-reinforcing conservation and human well-being outcomes is one of the key learning goals of HEARTH. Furthermore, aside from steps that the private sector can take such as continued investment in the goals of HEARTH, engagement of local governments and the enactment of supportive policies can help to ensure that outcomes are scaled and sustained.

A female Rhino with her calf in North Luangwa National Park, Zambia.  
© Daniel Rosengren/FZS.



The control room in North Luangwa NP, Zambia. A large analogue map on the wall is used to keep track of ranger patrols, vehicles and rhinos etc. This setup is less likely to be hacked by poachers than a computer. © Daniel Rosengren/FZS.



Eliane, President of the Cacao Record Sambirano Cooperative, one of the cooperatives partnering with Beyond Good in Madagascar. Photo by Beyond Good ©.



Shade tree seedlings improve the health and productivity of cacao farms while increasing carbon stocks in the Sui River landscape, Ghana. Photo by Andrew Tobiason.

## HEARTH Learning Questions

The learning questions presented here seek to test the assumptions, understand contributing factors of the country context, and define key characteristics of an expected result. There are six thematic learning questions derived from the theory of change. The six questions were designed to be inclusive, or in other words, relevant to all HEARTH sites, but also strategic in that they highlight the key assumptions and areas of interest that are crucial to understanding HEARTH's overall strategic approach and goals.

**While this learning agenda provides a framework spanning all HEARTH field sites, the learning questions are relevant to individual HEARTH field sites to allow for learning to be compared and contrasted across sites.** For example, LQ1 should be interpreted as: "What are the context-specific enabling conditions needed to support public-private partnerships IN HEARTH FIELD SITE X"? In some cases, however, it will be instructive to make cross-site comparisons.

- **LQ1: ENABLING CONDITIONS:** What are the context-specific enabling conditions needed to support public-private partnerships and how can they be strengthened?
- **LQ2: CROSS-SECTORAL BENEFITS:** Under what conditions<sup>3</sup> does the HEARTH model contribute to enhanced well-being (e.g. health, food security, equity, cultural and spiritual well-being) and economic prosperity of local communities?
- **LQ3: ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE:** Under what conditions do the benefits from the HEARTH model result in changes in conservation attitudes and/or behaviors of community members or private sector actors?
- **LQ4: THREAT REDUCTION:** Under what conditions do changes in community members or private sector actors' behaviors contribute to measurable reductions in threats to biodiversity and carbon-rich ecosystems?
- **LQ5: HUMANS AND NATURE:** Under what conditions does connecting conservation to community well-being lead to sustained benefits for humans and nature?
- **LQ6: SUSTAINABILITY:** Under what conditions do public-private partnerships lead to sustained investment in conservation and human well-being?



Meeting with a local community, near North Luangwa National Park, Zambia. © Daniel Rosengren/FZS.

## HOW TO ENGAGE?

contact [hearth@usaid.gov](mailto:hearth@usaid.gov).

<sup>3</sup> Here, and in subsequent questions, the term "conditions" is inclusive of and broader than the "enabling conditions" referred to in LQ1. "Conditions" here refers to not just the enabling conditions, but also the implemented interventions as well as the unique social, economic, cultural, biophysical, and political contexts specific to each HEARTH activity.





Relevant stakeholders are convened together during an activity start-up workshop to review evidence and identify key results and outcomes. Photo by Joseph Akongbangre.

## PROPOSED LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTS

The table below includes bulleted sector-specific questions that fall under LQ1 to LQ6. Because they are sector-specific, they apply to some but not all HEARTH sites. Instead, they are illustrative examples of the types of questions we hope to answer with the HEARTH portfolio. The table also includes a plan for answering learning questions, such as timing and key decision points, specific activities, and final products. This table serves as a preliminary guide, acknowledging that a more detailed plan will emerge as indicators are selected, monitoring plans are drafted, and data begins to be collected and analyzed.

LEARNING QUESTIONS & ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES			
Learning Questions	Timing and Key Decision Points	Illustrative Learning Activities	Illustrative Learning Products
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At what key decision-making points will learning from answering these questions be relevant?</li> <li>How will we apply learning during design and implementation?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What learning activities will we implement to answer these learning questions?</li> <li>When/how will they be implemented?</li> <li>When/how will we analyze and synthesize our learning?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the proposed final learning product for each activity?</li> </ul>
<b>LQ1 ENABLING CONDITIONS: What are the context-specific enabling conditions needed to support public-private partnerships and how can they be strengthened?</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What private sector motivations, country contexts, and relationship enablers lead to (or inhibit) the creation of public-private partnerships under the HEARTH model?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Since this question is focused on “enabling conditions,” it may be important to have Missions and partners reflect on their experiences soon after start-up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discrete research project funded by USAID/ Washington and linked to LQ6</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A peer-reviewed paper, 10 page policy brief aimed at USAID audiences with practical recommendations, and a 1-page summary of the key findings</li> <li>Series of cross-HEARTH learning exchanges in collaboration with the PSE Hub and linked with LQ6</li> </ul>

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**LQ2 CROSS-SECTORAL BENEFITS: Under what conditions does the HEARTH model contribute to enhanced well-being (e.g. health, food security, equity, cultural and spiritual well-being) and economic prosperity of local communities?**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the economic prosperity, nutrition, and/or food security improve among target households and if so, what was the contribution of HEARTH's sustainable agriculture interventions?</li> <li>• Did the well-being of target households improve and if so, what was the contribution of integrating HEARTH's health and WASH interventions with other sectors (e.g., education, food security, etc.)?</li> <li>• Did the economic prosperity and well-being of target households improve and if so, what was the contribution of participation in HEARTH-supported conservation enterprises?</li> <li>• Did equitable access to benefits increase among women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and other underrepresented and marginalized populations, and if so, what was the contribution of HEARTH's governance and/or capacity building interventions?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include indicators to measure relevant outcomes during baseline data collection and subsequent data collection points</li> <li>• Use the pause and reflect stage of activity implementation to review data summaries and consider progress towards outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HEARTH activity evaluations</li> <li>• Annual analyses and summaries of human well-being indicators for each HEARTH site and across the entire HEARTH portfolio</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report/published paper and accompanying policy brief for USAID audiences</li> <li>• A recorded presentation by interested HEARTH activities as part of a webinar series, "HEARTH: Updates on Human Well-being and Prosperity" focusing on trends (or pre vs. post comparisons) of human well-being indicators</li> </ul>
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**LQ3 ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE: Under what conditions do the benefits from the HEARTH model result in changes in conservation attitudes and/or behaviors of community members or private sector actors?**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors toward conservation improve among household members, and if so, what was the contribution of HEARTH's health, WASH, and agricultural extension services?</li> <li>• Did knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors toward conservation improve among household members, and if so, what was the contribution of increased prosperity through participation in HEARTH-supported conservation enterprises?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include indicators to measure relevant outcomes during baseline data collection and subsequent data collection points</li> <li>• Use the pause and reflect stage of activity implementation to review data summaries and consider progress towards outcomes</li> <li>• Since the main difference between LQ3 and LQ4 is whether changes are appropriately targeted and scaled, consider combining learning activities and products from LQ3 and LQ4 together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HEARTH activity evaluations</li> <li>• Annual analyses and summaries of conservation knowledge, attitudes, and behavior monitoring data for each HEARTH site and across the entire HEARTH portfolio, recognizing that changes in knowledge or attitudes does not equate to behavior change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report/published paper and accompanying policy brief for USAID audiences</li> <li>• Webinars/peer exchanges to share experiences on HEARTH's contribution to behavioral change, potentially in partnership with the Conservation Enterprises Cross-Mission Learning Group</li> </ul>
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**LQ4 THREATS REDUCED: Under what conditions do changes in community member or private sector actors' behaviors contribute to measurable reductions in threats to biodiversity and carbon-rich ecosystems?**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can interventions be targeted towards key actors such that the effect of behavior change is sufficient to reduce threats to biodiversity and carbon-rich ecosystems?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include indicators to measure relevant outcomes during baseline data collection and subsequent data collection points</li> <li>• Use the pause and reflect stage of activity implementation to review data summaries and consider progress towards outcomes</li> <li>• Since the main difference between LQ3 and LQ4 is whether changes are appropriately targeted and scaled, consider combining learning activities and products from LQ3 and LQ4 together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HEARTH activity evaluations</li> <li>• Conduct interviews with Missions and partners to capture lessons learned</li> <li>• Consider methods for using metrics of behavior change (e.g., # of people with changed behavior) to scale up and create metrics of threat reduction (e.g., # of hectares of forest under reduced threat)</li> <li>• Annual analyses and summaries of threat reduction monitoring data for each HEARTH site and across the entire HEARTH portfolio</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report/published paper and accompanying policy brief for USAID audiences</li> <li>• Webinars/peer exchanges to share experiences on HEARTH's contribution to environmental threat reduction, potentially in partnership with the Conservation Enterprises Cross-Mission Learning Group</li> </ul>
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**LQ5 HUMANS AND NATURE: Under what conditions does connecting conservation to community well-being lead to sustained benefits for humans and nature?**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the conservation of critical ecosystems and species improve, and if so, what was the contribution of HEARTH's voluntary family planning and/or maternal and child health interventions? i.e. by linking access to health services to conservation, did HEARTH improve environmental outcomes?<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Did ecosystem services important for agriculture (e.g. pollination, soil fertility, water availability) improve and, if so, what was the contribution of HEARTH's sustainable agriculture and conservation interventions? What impact did this have on household food security, if any?</li> <li>• Was the risk of zoonotic disease spillover reduced, and if so, what was the contribution of HEARTH's conservation interventions?</li> <li>• Were deforestation rates reduced, reforestation efforts successful, and/or greenhouse gas emissions reduced, and if so what was the contribution of HEARTH's sustainable agriculture interventions?</li> <li>• Did access to clean water improve and/or were climate risks, such as the prevalence and severity of flooding events reduced? If so, what was the contribution of HEARTH's green infrastructure interventions?</li> <li>• Was water quality and quantity impacted and if so, what was the contribution of HEARTH's forest conservation interventions? What impact did this have on the incidence of childhood diarrhea, if any?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include indicators to measure relevant outcomes during baseline data collection and subsequent data collection points</li> <li>• Use the pause and reflect stage of activity implementation to review data summaries and consider progress towards outcomes</li> <li>• Identify what subset of HEARTH activities have considerable overlap and would allow for useful comparisons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HEARTH activity evaluations</li> <li>• Discrete research projects</li> <li>• Programs should use both quantitative (M&amp;E data) and qualitative information to reflect on their experience integrating outcomes for humans and nature</li> <li>• Collaborate and/or share results with other USAID initiatives as appropriate, including the U.S. Global Food Security Strategy, Global Health Security Agenda, Global Water Strategy, and the Climate Change Strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-person HEARTH cross-site learning event, "HEARTH Lessons for Humans and Nature" (Presentations could be archived online, potentially in an ArcGIS StoryMap format)</li> <li>• Report/published paper and accompanying policy brief for USAID audiences</li> </ul>
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4 Here, and in other learning questions, "environmental outcomes" may not be measurable within the timeframe of the HEARTH activities (e.g., species abundance). In many cases, it may only be possible to consider changes in behavior (LQ3) and/or a reduction in threat (LQ4) as the measured outcome.

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**LQ6 SUSTAINABILITY: Under what conditions do public-private partnerships lead to sustained investment in conservation and human well-being?**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can USAID better leverage the private sector to improve environmental and human well-being outcomes?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It will be important to reflect on this learning question throughout implementation, from startup and evaluation, to have sufficient context of how these conditions factor into the overall success of the public-private partnership</li> <li>• Here, and in other learning questions, “environmental outcomes” may not be measurable within the timeframe of the HEARTH activities (e.g., species abundance). In many cases, it may only be possible to consider changes in behavior (LQ3) and/or a reduction in threat (LQ4) as the measured outcome</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrete research project funded by USAID/Washington and linked to LQ I</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A peer-reviewed paper, approximately 10 page policy brief aimed at USAID audiences with practical recommendations, and a 1-page summary of the key findings</li> <li>• Series of cross-HEARTH learning exchanges in collaboration with the PSE Hub and linked with LQ I</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under what conditions does engaging with the private sector result in increased access to human health and well-being services and behavioral change for improved environmental outcomes that are scaled and sustained?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It will be important to reflect on this learning question throughout implementation, from startup and evaluation, to have sufficient context of how these conditions factor into the overall success of the public-private partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct interviews with Missions and partners to capture their overall experience with the partnership and ability to achieve their desired outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative case study writeups focused on private sector engagement as it relates to integrating human well-being and environmental outcomes</li> <li>• Series of cross-HEARTH learning exchanges in collaboration with the PSE Hub and linked with LQ I</li> <li>• A final synthesis report on Lessons Learned from all HEARTH sites, including both positive and negative experiences similar to the USAID report, The Nature of Conservation Enterprises</li> </ul>



Staff members at the Buge Health Center, SNNP Region, Ethiopia. Photo by Nena Terrell.



TSIRO Alliance field work in Mananjary, Madagascar examining a mixed agroforestry system of cacao and spices. Photo by Salohy Soloarivelo/USAID.



An immobilised Black Rhino being fitted with a radio transmitter. North Luangwa National Park, Zambia. © Daniel Rosengren/FZS.