



ANNUAL REPORT

DATA FOR IMPACT & APPLIED LEARNING



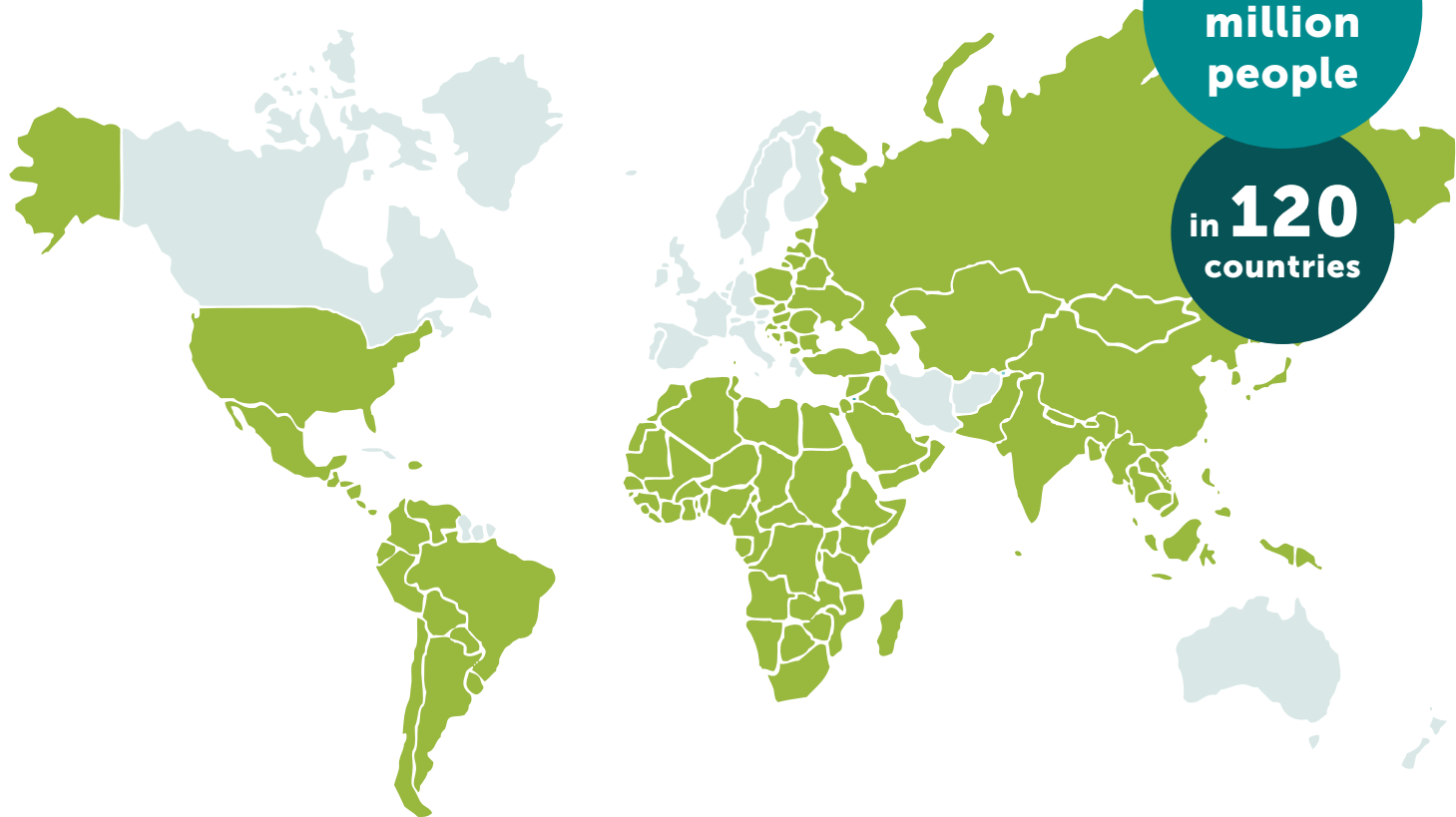
IREX BY THE NUMBERS

At IREX, we strive for a more just, prosperous, and inclusive world—where individuals reach their full potential, governments serve their people, and communities thrive. We invest in people who, in turn, create change in their own communities and build people-to-people bridges between nations. We work with partners in more than 120 countries in four areas essential to progress: cultivating leaders, empowering youth, strengthening institutions, and increasing access to quality education and information.

LAST YEAR, IREX'S
WORK TOUCHED THE
LIVES OF

11
million
people

in **120**
countries



IREX 2018 Annual Report

EMPOWERING YOUTH

IREX invests in youth by promoting quality education, professional development, civic engagement, and job skills. We focus especially on supporting underrepresented young people to become community leaders and active, informed citizens.

22,407

youth gained employment skills through initiatives that IREX led

89%

of Thomas Jefferson Scholarship Program* alumni with a tertiary degree gained employment—twice the rate of their peers

CULTIVATING LEADERS

IREX cultivates leaders at every level of society who strive to serve others in their communities. We enhance their leadership skills, expand their networks, and deepen their expertise.

26,890

leaders sharpened their leadership skills through fellowships and trainings implemented by IREX

95%

of Mandela Washington Fellows* plan to engage with U.S. professionals they met during the exchange

STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS

IREX helps institutions become more effective, accountable, and responsive to the diverse populations they benefit. We partner with educational, media, government, business, and civil society organizations that want to excel as they serve others.

3,176

institutions were better able to serve their constituents with support from IREX

81%

of participants in Data Zetu in Tanzania reported greater confidence in engaging with data

EXTENDING ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

At IREX, we believe educated, informed citizens contribute to broad-based prosperity, promote lively civic engagement, and hold those in power accountable. We work with partners around the world to broaden access to quality education, strengthen independent media, and increase people's ability to engage with vibrant information.

60,000

students will learn from teachers IREX trained in more effective pedagogies last year

91%

of students were excited about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) after our World Smarts program

*The Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders and the Thomas Jefferson Scholarship Program are sponsored by the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. Government and administered by IREX.

OUR APPROACH TO APPLIED LEARNING

At IREX, we strive to be a “learning organization.” We collect and analyze data from our work, adapt our approaches based on what we find, and test innovations that build upon what works and eliminate what does not—all with the goal of improving people’s lives.

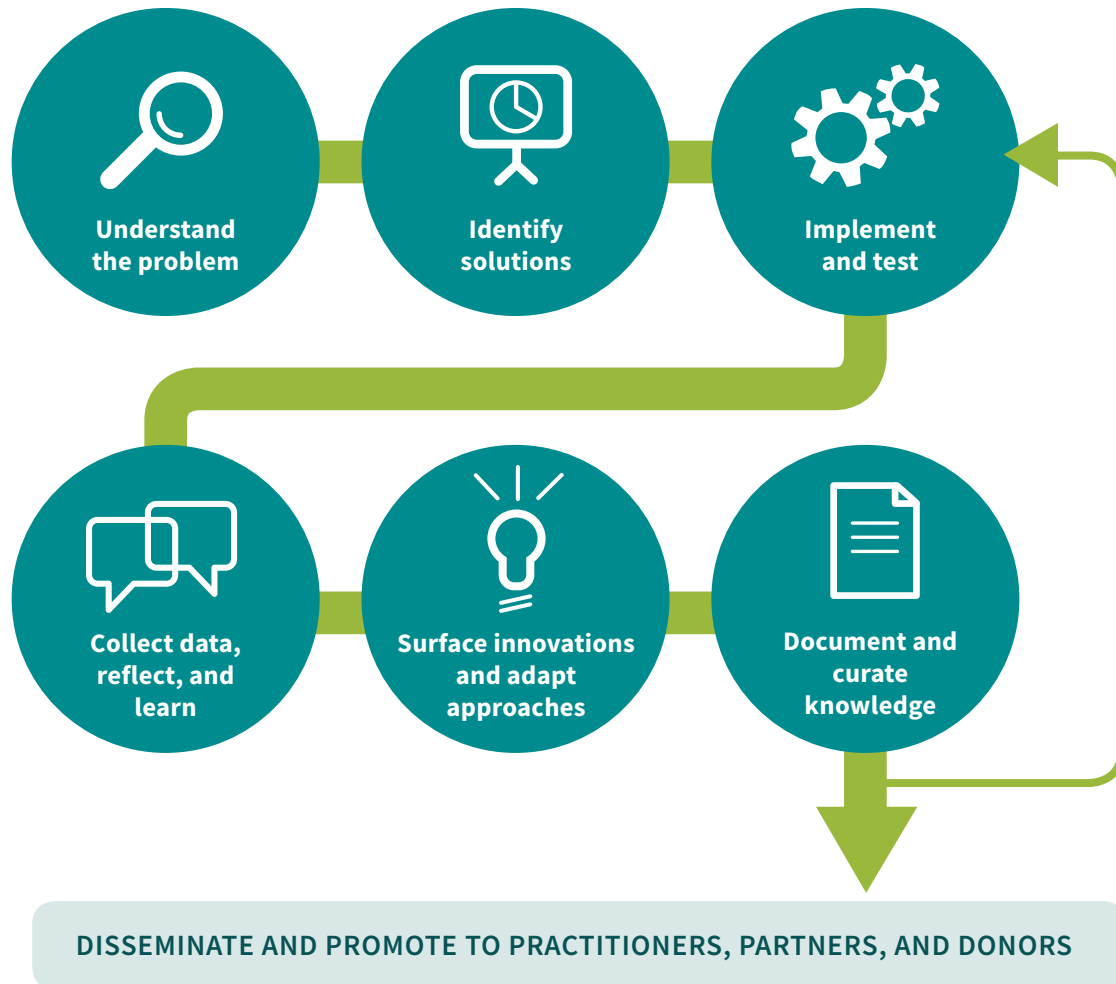
We ensure that research and evaluation inform—and are informed by—practice. We created our Center for Applied Learning and Impact to embed research, based on our on-the-ground experience, across the organization.

In all of our work, spanning 120 countries, we monitor progress and evaluate impact, use evidence to adapt, create innovative approaches, and share what we learn with the sector.

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- When evaluating an initiative, we seek to learn what we could do to achieve greater impact across five dimensions:
- **RELEVANCE:** Directly and demonstrably addressing a real need or problem
 - **SCALE:** Reaching as many people as possible and propagating effective models
 - **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION:** Serving all relevant populations
 - **SUSTAINABILITY:** Ensuring outcomes endure after an initiative ends
 - **LEVERAGE:** Achieving a high return on investment
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In the following pages, we offer five brief case studies that illuminate lessons learned in each of these areas. We hope that these examples will be useful to the development community as we all reflect on how to enhance the impact of our work.

APPLIED LEARNING PROCESS



HELPING STUDENTS EXCEL BY ADDRESSING ACADEMIC CHALLENGES EARLY

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

International student exchange programs intentionally challenge participants by immersing them in unfamiliar cultures and classroom settings. The Global Undergraduate Exchange Program in Pakistan (Global UGRAD-Pakistan), a program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. Government and administered by IREX, brings a diverse group of more than 100 youth leaders from across Pakistan to the U.S. to attend a semester-long academic program at U.S. universities and colleges.

For many of these young leaders, it is their first time experiencing American higher education with its emphasis on critical thinking and in-class discussions with professors. The program provides participants with a dynamic, and at times challenging, cultural and leadership development experience. Many find themselves in learning environments unlike any they've experienced, while needing to fulfill program requirements including maintaining a minimum 2.0 GPA, conducting 20 hours of community service, and learning a rigorous leadership curriculum.

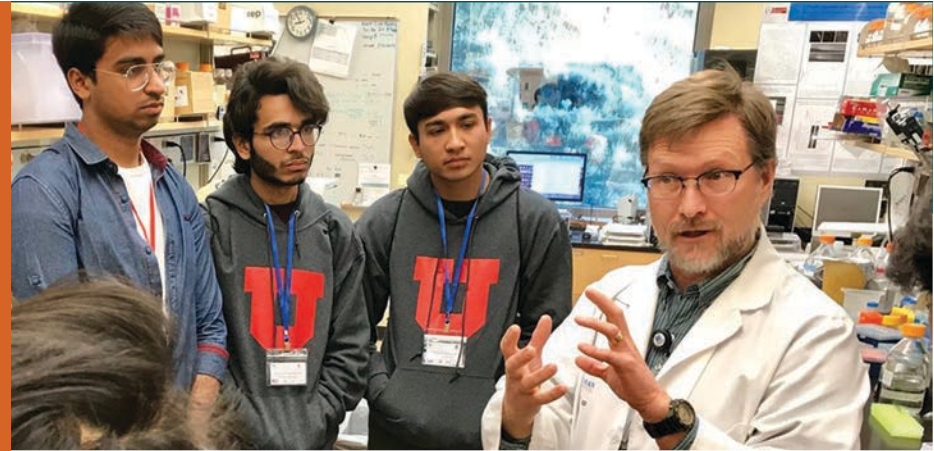
An analysis of participant data from 2015 found that year's average GPA of 2.7 exceeded the program's minimum requirement, but there was space to excel. IREX staff began to reflect on different approaches they could use to increase cohorts' average GPA.

TESTING A "PHASED" APPROACH TO STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

After a series of introspective meetings that examined participants' academic performance, staff developed a staggered, tailored check-in approach targeting common challenges that arise during different phases of the semester. For example, participants' concerns during their first week are focused on navigating their new campus environment and dealing with cultural adjustment. During week seven, concerns tend to be more about time management for academic midterms. Check-in calls tailored to these program components helped surface common issues and positioned the team to provide timely and targeted support that in turn improved participants' performance.



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2.7

3.0

As a result of data-informed adaptations, the average GPA of Global UGRAD-Pakistan students rose from 2.7—well above the program’s minimum requirement—to an impressive 3.0.



3.0

3.3

Every semester since, average GPA has exceeded 3.0. In the most recently completed semester (fall 2018), the average GPA was 3.3.

RESULTS

Using the new data-informed process, staff surfaced issues more quickly and more accurately. Working alongside university host advisors, staff identified appropriate solutions before challenges had a chance to affect a participant’s academic performance. The next semester, the group’s average GPA jumped to 3.0. Every semester since, average GPA has been at least 3.0. In the most recently completed semester (fall 2018), the average GPA was 3.3.

LESSONS FOR THE FIELD

When seeking to improve the outcome of a program (in this case GPA), consider more precisely identifying the problem before jumping to the solution. How does the problem vary by individual or over different time periods? Consider surfacing it at the individual level—not simply at the group level as a general trend—and then tailor the solution to the situation.



USING IMPACT EVALUATIONS TO INFORM EXPANSION OF MEDIA LITERACY INITIATIVES

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

In Ukraine, an increase in disinformation and propaganda has threatened democratic progress since the 2014 revolution. To address this issue, IREX developed a media literacy program called Learn to Discern (L2D) to teach citizens the latest techniques for identifying disinformation.

A cadre of 428 media literacy trainers taught 15,000 Ukrainian citizens, from high school teachers to library patrons, throughout the country. But given the flood of propaganda in Ukraine, did it actually help people separate fact from fiction?

EVALUATING IMPACT

To assess the impact of Learn to Discern, IREX conducted an evaluation after the program finished to test whether participants retained the media literacy skills they learned. Encouragingly, trainees showed significant improvement: they were 13% more likely to detect false information and 25% more likely to check multiple sources of information versus a control group. The study was conducted a full 18 months after the trainings, suggesting that the effects were long-lasting.

The impact evaluation's results helped IREX staff identify which elements of the L2D curriculum were essential to preserve as IREX streamlined the curriculum and rolled it out to more people. Since the study found that giving participants a sense of agency over what media and information they consumed was a critical factor in skill retention, the team created a simple, catchy, and scalable “name it to tame it” module that could be taught to a wide range of audiences. The exercise helps participants identify when they are having a strong emotional reaction and reactivate the logical part of their brains, putting them back in control of their own response to information.



IREX's Learn to Discern approach helps citizens recognize and resist disinformation, propaganda, and hate speech. Learn to Discern's unique methodology builds practical skills for citizens of all ages through interactive training, videos, games, and other learning experiences.



Learn to Discern's impact evaluation found that a full 18 months after training, compared to a control group, participants were:



13%

more likely to detect false information



25%

more likely to check multiple sources of information



28%

more knowledgeable of the news media industry

SCALING WHAT WORKS

While the study's results were encouraging, the pilot reached only 90,000 people in a country of 45 million. It was effective and staff began to brainstorm how to scale the approach to make more widespread change. The team looked for larger institutions in which to embed the curriculum. The IREX team is now working in partnership with the Ukrainian government, and the governments of the United States and United Kingdom, to integrate Learn to Discern and its critical-thinking skills into the high school curriculum in Ukraine. If successful, it will eventually be taught to millions of students a year, helping to make future generations less susceptible to disinformation and manipulation.

LESSONS FOR THE FIELD

The results of the evaluation underscore the value of running small pilot programs before scaling efforts to reach more people. The results of the impact evaluation of the L2D pilot gave the team confidence that the approach fundamentally worked. It also uncovered which aspects of the program were most effective, such as the module on avoiding emotional manipulation, so the team could retain those aspects when scaling up the initiative.



USING DATA TO DIVERSIFY APPLICANT POOLS

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

Ensuring applicants come from underrepresented groups allows programs to make the largest impact in participants' home communities. Starting from the outreach and application stage, we strive for diversity across gender, educational and professional background, ability, geographic location, socioeconomic status, religion, and sexual orientation.

Recruiting a diverse cadre of leaders—1,500 last year alone—can be a challenge. For example, Community Solutions, a program of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, draws community leaders from 87 eligible countries to the U.S. every year for a four-month fellowship with a U.S. nonprofit organization or local government agency. The program's global emphasis can make outreach and recruitment difficult. In 2015, participants were recruited from only 55% of eligible countries and 65% of participants were men.

DATA-INFORMED ADAPTION

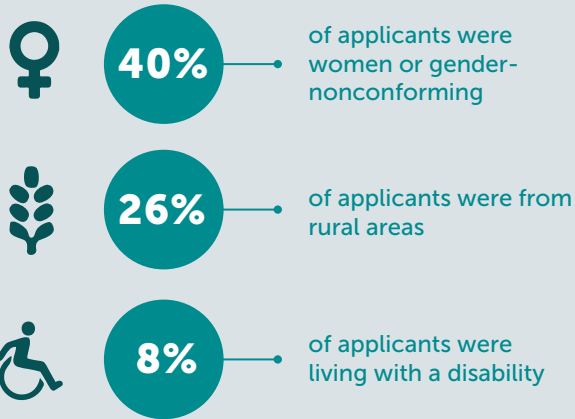
By analyzing applicant data in real time as applications roll in and between recruitment cycles, IREX staff were able to shift midcourse and strategically target countries with low representation through additional, focused outreach. This included increasing outreach to LGBTQ and women's organizations; sending reminder e-mails to target populations who had begun, but not finished, applications; and featuring at least one woman in every social media post.



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In 2018, the program was more diverse than ever:



By analyzing applicant data, the program increased the number of applications by **550%** from 2015 through 2018

Finalists were from **98%** of the 87 eligible countries

RESULTS

By using data to adapt, the program attracted its most diverse cohort of participants ever. In 2018, 5,822 people applied—the most in the program's history. Finalists were from 98% of eligible countries. The program had its highest percentage of women and gender-nonconforming applicants ever (40%). Applicants from rural areas represented nearly 26% of applications.

In addition, staff learned lessons to inform strategic planning for future cycles. This planning has resulted in the production and dissemination of a new recruitment video; outreach to 107 regional recruitment partners, including 26 disability organizations, 25 LGBTQ organizations, 25 IREX programs, and 13 women's organizations; and 1,197 individual e-mail responses to applicant inquiries.

LESSONS FOR THE FIELD

Analyzing data and adapting recruitment efforts during the application process and between recruitment cycles can increase the diversity of applicant pools. Ultimately, this ensures that all communities benefit from leadership development opportunities, not just the communities that are easiest to reach.

LEARNING FROM COMMUNITY-DRIVEN MODELS

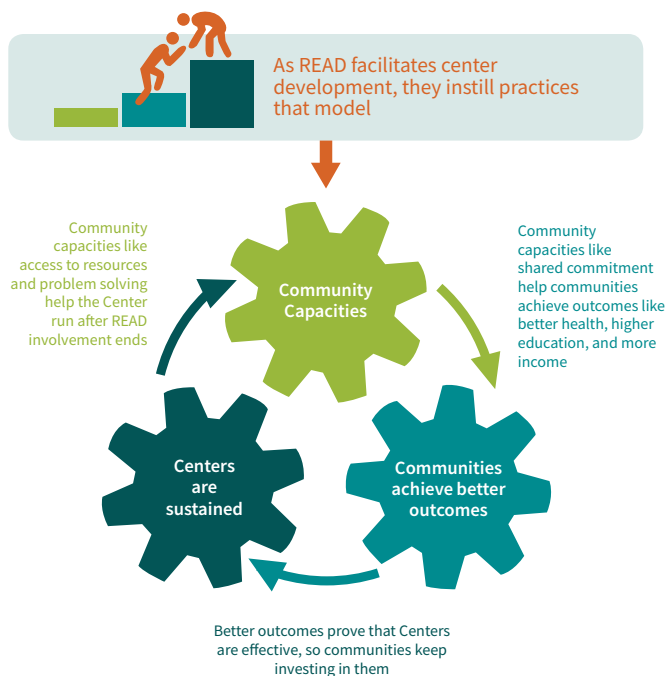
CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

There is a growing recognition that local solutions to social and economic problems are more sustainable and effective than those imposed by international aid groups with minimal community buy-in. At the same time, there is little empirical evidence on what makes community-owned initiatives successful.

IREX and Rural Education and Development (READ) Global have partnered on an initiative to dramatically reduce poverty in South Asia and beyond using a model that establishes community-driven READ Centers. These community centers offer education, employment, and health services. They also incubate new businesses that generate revenue to help cover the cost of operating each center. The model is highly sustainable: all 66 READ centers in Nepal have remained in operation. But what made them so sustainable?

USING DATA TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WORKS

IREX conducted a qualitative analysis, drawing on dozens of interviews and focus groups, to better understand how the model works in Nepal, why it is sustainable, and how it could be replicated and scaled elsewhere around the world.





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A qualitative analysis of the READ model found that certain elements were most responsible for predicting centers' sustainability, including:



Carefully selecting which communities are ready to manage a center



Cultivating inclusive community leadership to manage each center



Facilitating and mentoring the development of each center



Intentionally developing community capacity



A community-driven and managed design

RESULTS

The analysis identified specific elements of the community-driven model that were responsible for achieving development outcomes such as better health, improved livelihoods, and the sustainability of the centers. These elements include the unique combination of:

- Carefully selecting which communities are ready to manage a center and cultivating inclusive community leadership to manage it.
- Allowing READ staff to heavily invest their time in facilitating the process for each center.
- Intentionally developing community capacity during the planning, construction, and start-up phases.
- Ensuring that communities make the decisions about how to design and manage the centers.

LESSONS FOR THE FIELD

These four characteristics—careful site selection, involvement of outside experts, community capacity building, and community-designed management processes—explain how the centers became self-sustaining. The “why” is the sum of the four: because this deliberative setup process was inclusive, the centers served a broad base of community needs, from health to education to business incubation, ensuring that everyone in the region could benefit from it and therefore had an interest in supporting it.



BUILDING JOB SKILLS AND UNDERSTANDING THROUGH VIRTUAL EXCHANGE

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

Young people—whether they live in rural communities in Iowa or urban areas in Jordan—are entering an increasingly globalized workforce that requires technical *and* cross-cultural skills. International student exchanges are an effective way of gaining these skills, but many students don't have access to the finances, time, or social capital for an in-person exchange.

Online virtual exchanges can offer a more accessible cross-cultural experience at a lower cost per person. However, many online learning offerings fall short. Completion rates of massive open online courses, for example, are only 5% to 15%.

IREX recently implemented the Global Solutions virtual exchange initiative, which paired over 300 postsecondary students from the U.S. and Jordan onto 15 binational teams. Throughout the challenge students investigated global issues, such as energy use, water waste, and pollution that affected their communities—and then worked together with their binational teammates to develop potential solutions.

MONITORING PROGRESS TO INFORM ADAPTATIONS

The virtual exchange model was first piloted with an earlier version of Global Solutions called the World Smarts STEM Challenge. Using survey and focus group data, as well as feedback from its continuous check-in process, IREX staff measured student enthusiasm for STEM, cross-cultural communication, and comfort with technology.

The results revealed that creating an enriching virtual experience required nuanced support and that access to technology was not enough. Students and teachers needed support in soft-skill and partnership development, such as challenging cultural stereotypes and collaborating through technology. The IREX team also found that students needed the flexibility to connect on virtual platforms of their choosing and not necessarily through the program's own platform.

The Global Solutions Sustainability Challenge is a virtual exchange that connects community college students from the U.S. with students from Jordan to take on global challenges facing the hospitality industry. Global Solutions is supported by the Stevens Initiative, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and administered by the Aspen Institute. The Stevens Initiative is also supported by the Bezos Family Foundation and the governments of Morocco and the United Arab Emirates.



100%

of the 15 participating binational teams completed the program



91%

of U.S. students indicated confidence in socializing with people from other countries



88%

of students felt the challenge was beneficial to their careers

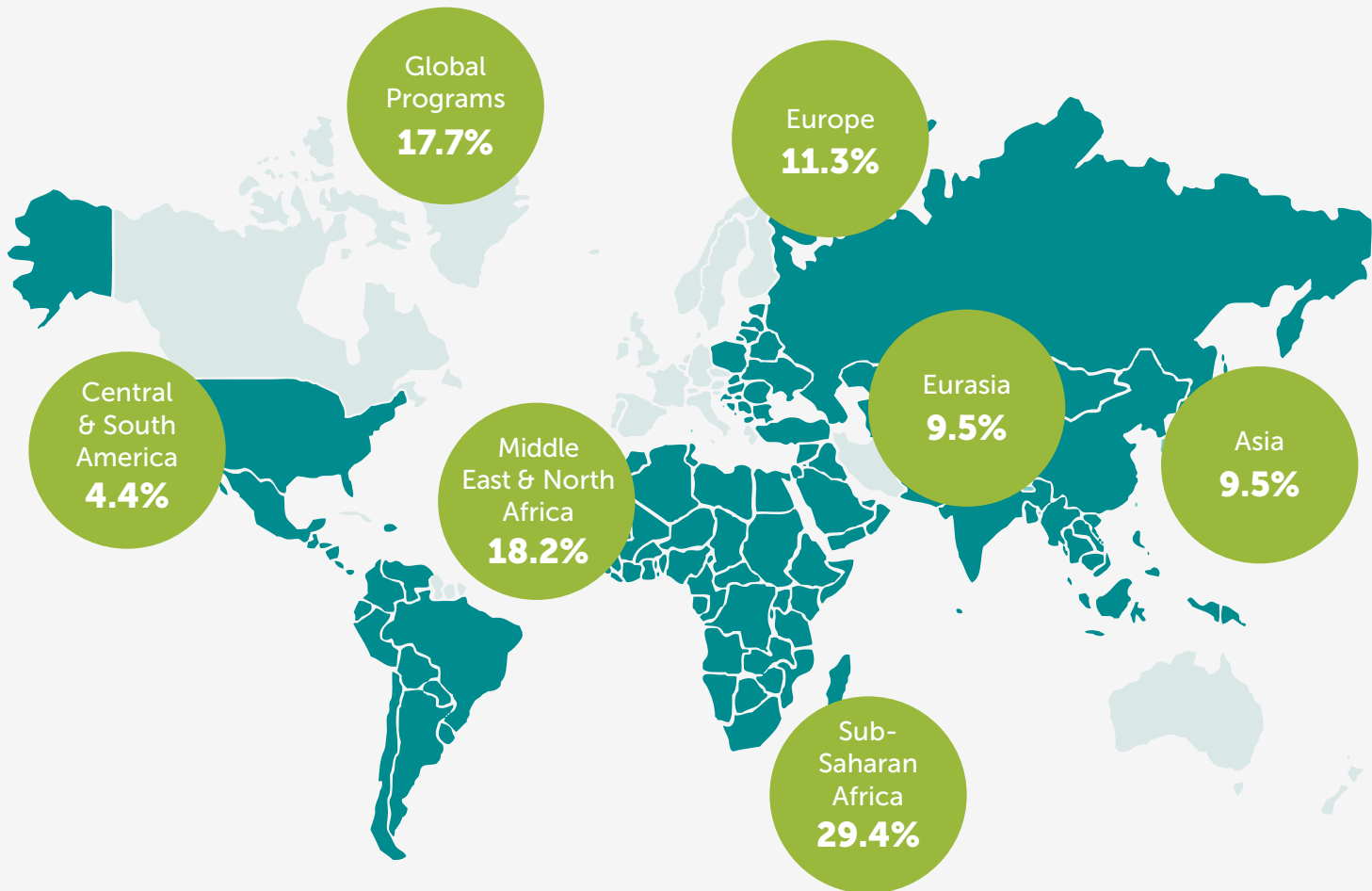
RESULTS

All 15 binational teams successfully completed the Global Solutions Sustainability Challenge. A survey conducted after the program demonstrated that students grew their skills in cross-cultural collaboration, technology use, and business planning. A total of 91 percent of U.S. participants expressed confidence in socializing with people from other cultures, a 30% increase from before the program. The winning team—composed of students from Kirkwood Community College in Iowa and Luminus Technical University in Amman, Jordan—won the business pitch competition with their concept for a pipe system that would reduce water waste in the hospitality industry.

LESSONS FOR THE FIELD

In an increasingly connected and fast-paced world, skills such as cross-cultural communication, flexibility, and technology literacy are vital for success. Virtual exchange can be a cost-effective, efficient, and scalable tool to connect students across the globe and provide enriching cross-cultural experiences that better prepare young people for jobs in today's global economy. However, the program must be carefully designed to facilitate tangible learning and authentic connections, which requires continuous monitoring, a structured yet flexible approach, and coaching in cross-cultural communication. Connection to the internet and a smartphone is not enough to deliver meaningful learning and collaboration.

PROGRAM EXPENDITURES BY REGION



DIRECT AND INDIRECT COSTS



\$90+
million portfolio



120+
countries



400
global staff

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

We offer our sincere thanks to the individuals and organizations that support our work.

We are grateful to the foundations, corporations, government agencies, and global citizens that generously support our efforts. Throughout the past 50 years, our focus on investing in people and inspiring change has remained steady. Thank you for helping us celebrate our history and for supporting our future.

Learn more:

WWW.IREX.ORG





IREX is a global development and education organization. We strive for a more just, prosperous, and inclusive world—where individuals reach their full potential, governments serve their people, and communities thrive.

IREX is a registered 501 (c)(3) organization.

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