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Food Systems for Nutrition Innovation Lab

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I. Food Systems for Nutrition Innovation Lab

The Food Systems for Nutrition Innovation Lab (FSN-IL) is a five-year activity supported by the United States Agency of International Development's (USAID) Bureau for Resilience, Environment, and Food Security (REFS) and implemented by the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. FSN-IL targets food system innovations, novel technologies, and best practices to support improved diet quality, nutrition, and resilience. The goal of FSN-IL is to identify, test, and help scale promising nutrition-sensitive food system solutions from around the world by implementing an integrated effort across three domains to i) generate new research for development (R4D) while also effectively disseminating existing (but under-used) ready-to-use, pipeline-ready innovations; ii) support human and institutional capacity development (HICD) in partner countries and in the United States (U.S.) aimed at promoting capacity to understand R4D and promotion of innovations; and iii) engage widely across public and private sectors to catalyze uptake of innovations, share lessons on discovery-to-commercialization processes, and build expert resources, networks and partnerships to support local solutions and critical development outcomes. Actions across the three activity domains aim to enhance nutrient density, ensure food safety, and prevent food loss and waste, thus contributing to reductions in poverty, improved diet quality, nutrition, and resilience. The FSN-IL collaborates with its consortium partners while fully engaging with the wider academic, business, and policy communities at global and regional levels, ensuring close engagement with the priorities and interests of target geographies.

II. Research Progress Summary

A summary of activities undertaken during the reporting period is as follows:

Activity I: Consultations on Innovation Bundling

In Years 1 and 2, the management entity (ME) engaged with its partners and thought leaders across Tufts University to complete and finalize five scoping exercises that helped identify, develop, and inform the prioritization for its activities in research for development (R4D), human and institutional capacity (HICD), and stakeholder engagement.

In Year 3, the ME continues to utilize key findings from the scoping exercises, one of them being the emerging concept of socio-technical innovation bundling. These bundles combine mutually reinforcing and complementary innovations to support the uptake of innovations to make nutritious food safe and accessible to all. For instance, the technical component of a socio-technological bundle could be a mobile app that uses satellite imagery to track crop growth. This app could be paired with workshops for farmers, where they learn how to interpret the app's data and take appropriate actions, representing the behavioral innovation within the bundle. Together, these innovations exemplify a socio-technological bundle that if implemented and scaled, can help improve access to healthy and nutritious foods.

Accomplishments:

Activity I.1 Develop and Conduct "Scalability Assessment of Innovation Bundles" Workshops in Four Focus Countries

Drawing on learning from the CGIAR scaling readiness workshop in Bangkok (November 2023) and findings from the 2022 scoping exercise, a concept note for country-specific workshops on scalability assessment of innovation bundles has been drafted. The objective of these workshops is to bring together government, private, non-government, researchers and academics within the food systems space to

disseminate 'on-the-shelf' food systems innovations and assess its potential to scale, develop an understanding of innovation bundling, and using a stepwise approach to assess scalability of the bundle of innovations. Workshop participants from the government, private sector, academia, non-profits, NGOs, and CSOs will work together to apply the content and their newly acquired knowledge to assess innovations and innovation bundles generated using the Innovation Explorer, an interactive, online platform currently being developed to compile and disseminate innovations focused on improving the productivity of nutrient-dense foods, enhancing food safety, and reducing food loss and waste. The Scaling Readiness workshops are scheduled to be held in Bangladesh and Nepal at the end of April 2024, and in Malawi and Mozambique in May and July 2024, respectively.

Activity 1.2 Conduct Two Stakeholder Consultations in Focus Countries in Southern Africa (Malawi and Mozambique)

FSN-IL held multiple consultations with external stakeholders in Malawi and Mozambique to identify potential collaborators for upcoming in-country activities and to inform planning. Subsequent consultations will be held later in the year to reflect on the outputs of the planned scaling readiness workshops and discuss the challenges, priorities, and opportunities in scaling up food systems innovations in these countries. The consultations will also serve FSN-IL's efforts on ongoing and continued engagement with in-country stakeholders and support FSN-IL's understanding on the transformation process mapped by Malawi and Mozambique, and in addition to the R4D activities, understand the HICD needs and facilitate the process of expanding partnerships and collaborations to achieve FSN-IL's planned activities and outputs. The stakeholder network includes Malawi's National Planning Commission (NPC), the Mozambique Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition (SETSAN), private sector actors (SMEs and SUN Business networks), academic and research institutions, development partners, and FSN-IL sub-awardees.

Activity 2: Research for Development

In Quarter 1 (Q1) and Q2 of Year 3, FSN-IL continued to focus on developing and implementing a robust R4D program, which focused on awarding the second round of competitive grants.

Accomplishments:

Activity 2.1 Update R4D Strategy

To ensure alignment between applicants' proposed and awarded projects with the vision and goals of FSN-IL, the ME modified its competitive award approach for FY24. The application process will consist of three stages, which includes 1) submission of an Expression of Interest (EOI) that will be competitively reviewed, 2) co-creation process with the FSN-IL ME and consortium partners, and 3) submission of a full proposal that will be competitively reviewed and selected. Special attention will be given to the choice of reviewers matched to the applicant to avoid any conflict of interest. The rationale for this approach is that it will allow FSN-IL to be more targeted in answering the questions that were identified through the scoping assessments. Applicants will submit an expression of interest, and those who are competitively selected will work with the ME to jointly develop a research plan that supports both the applicant's objectives and the Lab's overarching goals.

Activity 2.2 Competitive Sub-Award Process

First Round of RFAs: Actions to Support Storage, Packaging and/or Cooling Innovations for Perishable Foods in Target Geographies.

In Q1 of Year 3, the ME received approval from USAID on the subaward packages for the [five recipients of this RFA](#) and held an introductory meeting and orientation with all the Project Investigators (PIs) and team members. In Q2, a follow up meeting was held with PIs and project members to discuss logistical and operational items, such as reporting requirements, branding and marking, financial processes, and

communications opportunities and expectations. As sub-awardees begin to receive a fully executed contract with Tufts, they are starting to submit their workplans and roll out their proposed research projects.

Second Round: Demonstrating the Cost-Effectiveness of Innovation Bundles to Support Food Systems Transformation for Nutrition, Food Safety, and Reduced Food Loss and Waste.

In Q1 and Q2 of Year 3, the ME developed and released a Call for Expressions of Interest (EOIs), titled, “*Demonstrating the Cost-Effectiveness of Innovation Bundles to Support Food Systems Transformation for Nutrition, Food Safety, and Reduced Food Loss and Waste.*” The call for EOIs was released on February 1st and will focus on applied research that demonstrates that bundles of innovations can support food systems transformation for nutrition in target geographies at scale. The bundle of innovations to be implemented and/or tested will reduce loss and waste of nutrient-dense perishable foods while ensuring food safety in Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, and/or Bangladesh. FSN-IL released the call for EOIs to its e-list on Mailchimp, consortium partners, expert advisory board, and Tufts technical specialists, and promoted the call widely on its social media accounts (X, Facebook, and LinkedIn). Additionally, this announcement was circulated with interested contacts formed during the Malawi and Mozambique consultations, faculty, and students at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy and posted on Agrilinks. The announcement was also circulated among the Ag2Nut and Agriculture, Nutrition and Health (ANH) e-lists.

Building on lessons learned from the first round of RFAs, this application process will now consist of three stages: submissions of expressions of interest, a co-creation process, and submissions of full proposals. The deadline to submit EOIs is March 5th, 2024. Selected EOIs will then undergo the co-creation process with the ME and experts from its consortium of partners in Q3, and a select few will then be invited to submit a full proposal.

III. Human and Institutional Capacity Development

Activity 3: Human and Institutional Capacity Development

In Q1 and Q2 of Year 3, FSN-IL continued to update its HICD strategy, focusing on both academic and non-academic capacity building as well as focusing its activities with US-based Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) and institutions in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Accomplishments:

Activity 3.1 Update HICD Strategy

Based upon outputs from the scoping exercise and consultations held with local stakeholders in Q2 at the country level, the ME has elected to conduct two regional workshops on circular economy—one in Asia (Bangladesh or Nepal) and one in Africa (to be held in Malawi). This strategic decision aims to foster increased collaboration and cross-pollination of ideas among regional stakeholders in the four countries. Additionally, recognizing the language constraints in Mozambique where English-based training may be a barrier to full engagement, the ME plans to conduct a third workshop later in the year in Mozambique to be held in Portuguese.

Activity 3.2 Development and Implementation of Advanced Competencies and Skills Training Development and Implementation of Travel Fellowships for MSI Institution Students and Faculty

A call for applications for the FSN-IL travel fellowships has been drafted and is pending final review before being uploaded and shared externally. Five FSN-IL travel fellowships will be awarded for a maximum amount of \$3000 USD per award. Travel fellowships will help support travel and expenses associated with

attending conferences or undertaking internships hosted by local or international institutions focused on improving food systems in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mozambique, or Nepal.

Emerging scholars working in food systems or health and nutrition in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mozambique, and Nepal, students (undergraduate, graduate, PhD, post-doc) enrolled in a food systems or health and nutrition program at an accredited university in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mozambique, and Nepal, and students enrolled in a food systems or health and nutrition program at an institution designated as Minority Serving Institution (MSI) by the United States government (list) will be eligible to apply for funding.

Travel fellowships aim to build human capacity by providing applicants with an opportunity to further develop their content knowledge or skills by attending conferences and undertaking internships on food systems and nutrition. Recipients will benefit from knowledge exchange, networking opportunities, and exposure to innovations in the field which are expected to spur future innovations and lifelong partnerships. The impact extends to local and global levels, empowering individuals to contribute meaningfully to the improvement of food systems in their respective countries.

Training Fellowships Program for MSI and Focus Country Institution Students

A call for applications for the FSN-IL training fellowships has been drafted and is pending final review before being uploaded and shared externally. Eight FSN-IL training fellowships will be awarded for a maximum amount of \$5000 USD per award. Training fellowships will support expenses associated with enrolling in an online or in-person educational program offered by local or international institutions targeting food systems in low- or middle-income countries (LMIC).

Emerging scholars working in food systems or health and nutrition in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mozambique, and Nepal, students (undergraduate, graduate, PhD, post-doc) enrolled in a food systems or health and nutrition program at an accredited university in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mozambique, and Nepal, and students enrolled in a food systems or health and nutrition program at an institution designated as Minority Serving Institution (MSI) by the United States government (list) will be eligible to apply for funding.

Training fellowships are designed to build human capacity by offering applicants the opportunity to deepen their understanding of content knowledge and skills needed to develop a career in food systems and nutrition. This is achieved through enrollment in relevant coursework which will allow fellows to acquire specialized knowledge and expertise in these areas. The training fellowships will not only enrich the professional prospects of applicants but also equip them with the tools to make meaningful contributions to addressing global challenges in food systems and nutrition.

Three Workshops on Circular Economy, Food Safety and Food Loss and Waste

An agreement with Thriving Solutions to conduct two regional workshops and one workshop in Mozambique is being processed. Discussions are underway with Thriving Solutions to arrange for translation of the presentation from English to Portuguese for the workshop to be held in Mozambique. Additionally, one or two English/Portuguese speaking participants from Mozambique will be identified to attend the workshop in Malawi and be trained as trainers to facilitate the workshop in Mozambique later in the year under the guidance of the Thriving Solutions team. The workshops are intended to raise awareness on the critical importance of shifting food systems to becoming circular and regenerative to support the Sustainable Development Goals 2030.

The impact of training individuals across the government, private sector, academia, non-profits, NGOs, and CSOs to implement circular food systems is significant. This method of structuring food systems promotes sustainability by minimizing waste and optimizing resource use, fostering an efficient and eco-friendly approach that mitigates the effects of climate change. It also champions small-scale and diverse farming

practices, reducing dependence on centralized and industrialized food production. Consequently, it positively impacts community health by facilitating access to nutritious, locally produced foods and creates financial opportunities for smallholders. The training sets the stage for a holistic and resilient approach to the long-term viability of a food system, one that aims to provide enduring benefits for current and future generations by prioritizing ecological balance and social well-being.

The ME also plans to collaborate with Food Enterprise Solutions (FES), a USAID-funded organization in Nepal, specializing in food safety training, to deliver the Food Loss and Waste capacity building workshop. Knowledge gained from the workshop can contribute to improved public health practices, reducing the risks of foodborne illnesses and opening avenues for potential exports.

Development and Implementation of AGCI Workshop on Food Loss and Waste

FSN-IL is working with the Aspen Global Change Institute (AGCI) on the Food Loss and Waste Workshop to be held in Q3. Event preparations include program agenda development and logistics planning. The Associate Director of FSN-IL represents the Lab on the planning committee and will be one of the speakers. FSN-IL is finalizing the contract with AGCI. The workshop will identify and discuss actionable global food loss and waste mitigation plans. More importantly, the results of this workshop will include policy and programming recommendations for actions that policymakers and donor organizations could consider implementing.

Activity 3.3 Assessment of Curriculum Needs

MSI Curriculum – Scoping of Content and Gaps

The MSI student working group is creating a needs assessment survey to identify gaps in areas of their schools related to food systems and, more broadly, careers in global development. Specific course needs, student training needs, course reviews, and curriculum reviews will be identified through the survey execution to help FSN-IL develop support activities for the students for the coming fiscal year that will address the gaps. The needs assessment will be online and reach all students in the 17 historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) institutions affiliated with the 1890 Universities Foundation. The questionnaire will consist of questions to gauge students' understanding and current knowledge of global food systems (GFS), students' experience in GFS education, what elements of GFS are the most interesting/important for students and should be included in education curricula, students' expectations in developing skills for careers in GFS, etc. Under the direct guidance of their faculty advisor, Dr. Judith Boateng, students will prepare the survey and solicit feedback from the team at Tufts University and the 1890 Universities Foundation before survey execution, set for late Q2 of FY24. Results will be analyzed and shared in Q3 for full dissemination.

Curriculum and Course Development Needs in Two Focus Countries

This activity will be completed in Q4 of FY24.

Activity 3.4 Development and Implementation of Technology/Innovation Challenges

This activity targets youth- and women-led SMEs/startups, business networks, and agribusinesses in focus countries. These stakeholders will act both as co-creators of new evidence and as one target audience for findings through start-ups, accelerators, mentorship and capacity development, and innovation challenges.

Food System Innovation/Technology Challenges

FSN-IL is in the process of negotiating the GAIN Bangladesh proposed budget to fund the Food Frontiers 3.0 Technology Challenge activity. The ME has reviewed a few drafts of the proposed GAIN budget and made key decisions regarding proposed activities, which have included ensuring \$100K USD is allocated in award money. Final negotiations are taking place, and next steps involve initiating a sub-award amendment

with GAIN to begin preparations for the Food Frontiers 3.0 project that will provide eight technology challenge awards and training to more than 20 young entrepreneurs.

In January 2024, FSN-IL consulted with stakeholders in Malawi and Mozambique on potential ways to engage and support innovative MSMEs and start-ups. From these conversations, the ME noted certain recurring critical challenges faced by local enterprises led by women and youth. Among these challenges include issues of accessing and managing financial resources, the complexities surrounding the ability of local enterprises to secure the necessary funds for their growth and development initiatives, and risk aversion to secure grant environment to loan-based models emerged repeatedly. In line with FSN-IL's commitment to fostering sustainable, healthy diets and developing the private sector to advance and scale-up innovations, FSN-IL, along with the local support and expertise from its consortium partners and implementing partners (IPs), is considering a stage-wise training aimed at building the capacity of local entrepreneurs and start-ups competing for grants and accelerator programs implemented by USAID-supported initiatives.

The training conducted on a rolling basis will i) equip entrepreneurs with the knowledge and skills to validate their business models, ii) promote financial resilience by strengthening financial management skills, iii) generate demand for nutrition-dense foods and contribute to the growth of a market segment aligned with health-conscious consumer preferences, and, iv) contribute to ongoing efforts of USAID-supported initiatives to establish mentorship programs and network opportunities to create a supportive ecosystem where young and women-led entrepreneurs can share experiences and learn from each other. The initiative will focus on key pillars crucial for entrepreneurial success, that include business model validation, financial management skills, and provide entrepreneurs with tools and strategies to effectively market and position their products in the market and foster collaboration between entrepreneurs and nutrition experts to ensure commodities align and support healthy, sustainable diet objectives.

Food Business/Entrepreneurship Exhibition/Marketplaces

During the reporting period, the ME continued to explore opportunities to collaborate with focus country partners. This activity will be achieved in Q4 (August) of FY24.

Activity 3.5 Develop and Conduct Two Regional Symposia

FSN-IL was a co-host for the Delivering for Nutrition in South Asia: Equity and Inclusion (D4N23) conference that took place on November 1-2 in Kathmandu, Nepal. FSN-IL also sponsored an interactive learning lab on "Field Perspectives on Semi-Qualitative Data Collection" led by the Valley Research Group on day two of the conference. A total of 27 participants attended the workshop that focused on both the theoretical and practical aspects of research design, quantitative and qualitative sampling, and how to conduct data collection in the field. Participants were given exercises and opportunities to apply the information and received feedback on individual cases and scenarios relevant to their context and experience.

Co-hosting the D4N23 conference, which covered a wide range of systems, including health systems, safety nets, and food systems, had a multifaceted impact. It provided a comprehensive platform for interdisciplinary discussions, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange among professionals and experts from various fields. This integrative approach can lead to holistic solutions, promoting a deeper understanding of interconnected challenges and innovative strategies to address them.

Furthermore, sponsoring a learning lab on semi-qualitative data collection will enhance the research capabilities of individuals, empowering them with the knowledge and skills needed to design robust studies. This, in turn, contributes to the generation of high-quality, context-specific research that can inform policies and interventions tailored to the needs of Nepal. The training also fosters a culture of evidence-based

thinking. Ultimately, this capacity-building initiative can lead to improved research outcomes, better-informed decision-making processes, and a strengthened research community in Nepal.

FSN-IL plans to co-host the 10th National Food Conference in Nepal in collaboration with NEFOSTA. Similarly, in Q4 of FY24 (August), FSN-IL will work closely with partners in Mozambique and Malawi to host a conference in Southern Africa.

Activity 4: Stakeholder Engagement

In Q1 and Q2 of Year 3, the ME continued engagement through various consultations and activities with consortium partners, regional, and national stakeholders in the focus geographies, which further informed activities and the engagement strategy.

Accomplishments:

Activity 4.1 Update Engagement Strategy

As part of the strategy, the ME made in-country visits to Malawi and Mozambique to interact with potential collaborators. The ME identified and interacted with up to 59 stakeholders, which included government and private sector actors, civil society groups, academic institutions, and development partners through one-on-one interactions and through the external consultation process. The ME plans to use feedback from the interactions to inform future engagement and in-country HICD and R4D activities.

Activity 4.2 Engagement with MSI Cross-Consortium Working Group

After a successful application and review process, six final students were chosen for the MSI Student Working Group in early October. The 1890 Universities Foundation team identified and chose a faculty advisor, Dr. Judith Boateng of Alabama A&M University, to guide the student working group in their activities. The first meeting with FSN-IL, the 1890 Universities Foundation, Dr. Boateng, and the official student working group convened on October 25th. Following the first introductory meeting, Dr. Boateng and the 1890 Universities Foundation representative have since hosted a monthly meeting with the students, during which the group goes over the plan of action for activity assignments and student progress. FSN-IL and the 1890 Universities Foundation team continue to meet following each student meeting to discuss group accomplishments, finances, and challenges.

The MSI Student Working Group curriculum was established to provide the students with a meaningful understanding of the interconnecting concepts of food systems, agriculture, and nutrition indicators. The first few months of the MSI student working group consisted of various assigned readings on global food systems' key challenges, which the students were asked to develop possible solutions for in preparation for group discussions. Once the students developed an understanding of food systems, the major assignment and focus of their working group was to prepare a needs assessment survey tool to identify the needs of students at 1890 universities related to leadership and career-building opportunities in the global food systems space. The survey results will drive the future work of the student group and set a precedent for future MSI activities. Additional student working group assignments consist of the planning and organization of webinar and workshop events, which will allow the students to collaborate with each other and external stakeholders (academia, government, and international) to engage 1890 institution members on global food systems topics.

Activity 4.3 Support USAID's Community of Practice on Food Loss and Waste

The ME continues to support USAID's Community of Practice (CoP) Food Loss and Waste (FLW) by actively engaging in the quarterly meetings. In addition, FSN-IL is working with the Aspen Global Change Institute (AGCI) on the Food Loss and Waste Workshop to be held in Q3.

Activity 4.4 Stakeholder Engagement

Quarterly Webinars

In Q1 and Q2 of Year 3, a total of two webinars were conducted by FSN-IL.

- On September 20th, 2023, FSN-IL, in collaboration with Thriving Solutions, conducted a webinar titled "[Introduction to Urban Food Systems](#)." In this webinar, expert speaker Seta Tutundjian from Thriving Solutions discussed urban food system basics while exploring the different types of food systems. She also discussed the key elements of the urban food system and how they differentiate per food system. The webinar concluded with a case study from John Triantafyllis of the World Union of Wholesale Markets. This webinar was moderated by Patrick Webb, Director of FSN-IL, and attended by 127 participants globally.
- On December 13th, 2023, in collaboration with the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition, titled "[Pursuing Food Systems Transformation Despite Financial Constraints](#)." In this webinar, distinguished panelists discussed a diverse range of actions that are relatively low-cost that were put forth by the Global Panel in their policy brief. After a summary of the brief by Patrick Webb of Tufts University, Tom Arnold of the Irish Government's Special Envoy for Food Systems, Amos Laar of the University of Ghana, and Adeyinka Onabolu of GAIN provided insights on the brief based on their expertise and unique experiences. This webinar was moderated by Shibani Ghosh, Associate Director of FSN-IL, and attended by 141 participants globally.

Continued In-Person and Virtual Engagement Across Different Stakeholder Groups (Missions, Labs, USAID Initiatives, Business Networks)

In Q2, members of the ME traveled to Malawi and Mozambique to hold one-on-one meetings with stakeholders working within the context of food systems transformation and to identify potential collaborators for upcoming in-country innovation challenges and workshops on circular economy and scaling readiness. Both country visits began with in-briefs at the respective USAID missions followed by visits with stakeholders, which included Malawi's National Planning Commission (NPC), LUANAR, Tetrattech, Heifer International, MwAPATA, Care Malawi, Alliance of Bioversity International/CIAT, aQysta, SETSAN, WFP Mozambique, iDE, and IITA, as well as USAID Feed the Future funded programs Growth Poles, PREMIER (Technoserve), RESINA (ACDI/VOCA), iDE's Resilient Coastal Communities (RCC), SPEED, and consortium partners GAIN, HKI, IFPRI, ICRISAT and NCBA/CLUSA. The meetings and discussions served as an entry-point for FSN-IL to foster an environment of collaboration, co-creation, and active engagement with stakeholders and implementing partners to maximize the effectiveness of their initiatives and contribute meaningfully to the development and implementation of scalable solutions that address key challenges in the local food systems.

The ME also used these extensive consultations to promote the recently announced expression of interest; input gained from the interactions further informed refinement of the EOI. Notice of the EOI generated much interest from stakeholders at all levels and the discussions held with them allowed the ME to communicate the intent of the next round of awards to elicit targeted, quality proposals.

During the two-week period of engagements, several avenues for collaboration were identified. Together with Malawi's NPC, the ME has begun planning for a multisectoral coordination event in March 2024 that will convene actors working in the food systems space in Malawi, a priority identified by the NPC during the consultation, which will be stewarded by the Ministry of Agriculture. This event will build on the commitments made by the government during the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit to develop actions towards Sustainable Food Systems and the National Pathways Report summarizing the key priority actions for addressing food systems challenges in the short-term (3 years) and medium-term (10 years). The gathering will foster closer coordination and engagement among diverse stakeholders to collectively address the challenges and opportunities within Malawi's food systems. An agenda is being developed and a working

group has been established with members of the NPC and local partner MwAPATA. Weekly planning meetings are underway.

The ME also met with Executive Secretary Dr. Leonor Mondlane of the Mozambique Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition, and after fruitful discussions, received an invitation to join weekly meetings coordinated by SETSAN. The ME plans to engage in-country partner NCBA CLUSA to represent FSN-IL and ensure continued engagement with SETSAN and other key stakeholders, consortium partners, and private sector actors. Having a designated point of contact for FSN-IL in Mozambique will enhance the efficiency of the Lab's in-country collaboration.

Lastly, FSN-IL Associate Director is serving as Chair of the Innovation Lab Council for FY24. Meetings are ongoing with Kansas State University (KSU) to plan the upcoming IL Council meeting to be held in Nepal in April 2024. KSU holds the Associate Award for administering the funding for the meeting and since this is the first year with this type of collaboration, frequent communication and engagement are being held between the ME and KSU to ensure successful implementation of the event. A venue has been finalized and logistical preparations are underway and being carried out by Harvestmoon, an event organizing company in Kathmandu. A registration link has been opened for the meeting and circulated among IL Council members.

A list of presentations given by the Director, Associate Director, and Research and Capacity Building Manager are presented in Appendix B.

Activity 5: Governance and Administration

In Q1 and Q2 of Year 3, FSN-IL continued to maintain its governance and oversee all proposed activities, including development of materials, review, and processing of subawards, ensuring compliance with USAID's policies, and timely reporting.

Accomplishments:

Activity 5.1 Communications

Quarterly Newsletter, E-list Updates, and Social Media

The ME continues to regularly monitor and update the FSN-IL website, with the help of the Web Developer at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy. In Q1 and Q2 of Year 3, approximately 1,800 users have interacted with the FSN-IL website. Additionally, FSN-IL continues to maintain its social media presence on X(Twitter), Facebook, and LinkedIn, to regularly inform on the Lab's activities, events, news, and calls for proposals. The Lab also posts on Agrilinks and regularly shares announcements with the Ag2Nut community, USAID Advancing Nutrition, and Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University.

In Q1 and Q2, the fall issue of the [FSN-IL newsletter](#) was released and was opened by over 850 recipients. These newsletters serve to provide short and concise updates on recent events, upcoming webinars, publications, presentations, and other news on the Lab and its consortium partners on a quarterly basis. The winter issue of the FSN-IL newsletter is being drafted and set to be released at the end of February.

Activity 5.2 Project and Knowledge Management

In Q1 and Q2, FSN-IL continued to utilize the Piestar platform to conduct reporting sessions and store ME information in accordance with USAID reporting requirements. FSN-IL consortium partners completed their required assignments of semi-annual reporting and the RFA competitive subaward projects were onboarded to Piestar in December 2023. In addition to semi-annual and annual reporting requirements, the competitive subawards are also mandated to submit monthly updates to the ME.

FSN-IL met as needed with the technical staff at Piestar to make enhancements to the site that will assist with requirements for exporting reports, updating the dashboard, updating the FSN-IL portal with new and improved forms, and back-end creation and management of reporting sessions. In the interim, the Project Coordinator maintains regular contact with the Piestar Support Manager to resolve any technical issues that come up. The ME's Senior Program Manager is involved in Piestar's Innovation Lab working group, which meets every month to discuss and resolve technical issues. Best practices and news about upcoming events are shared with the group during these meetings.

Development and Integration of an Innovation Explorer Platform in the FSN-IL Website

The ME worked with the Tufts Purchasing Department to finalize a contract with Bajra Technologies in Nepal to begin designing the Innovation Explorer platform. In addition, the ME began creating individual profiles with supporting information for each innovation that will be uploaded to the platform and available to users when visualizing innovation bundles to address their specific problem statements and/or scaling ambitions. The first team meeting occurred and was used to discuss project management details, which are currently being outlined. Completion of the Innovation Explorer platform will foster knowledge dissemination and catalyze adoption or investment in evidence-based practices that improve agricultural outcomes.

Activity 5.3 Governance Oversight

At the beginning of FY24, the orientation for the second Project Manager was completed and was assigned to focus on the work in Nepal. Given the complete, rapid, and almost simultaneous rollout of capacity-building activities throughout the first six months of this year, the ME has permanently confirmed the addition of the Project Administrator, who had temporarily been backstopping the operations work for the last year.

The ME received a Buy-In from the Nepal Mission, which supported adding two new positions to the Tufts team. A Project Coordinator was successfully recruited to support the operations for the research and capacity-building activities related to the Buy-In. In addition, the team is currently recruiting a data analyst based in Boston to support the technical activity related to the surveys in Nepal. FSN-IL is also recruiting for the two in-country positions supporting the work in Nepal. A contract with a local vendor was fully executed to assist with recruiting and to provide logistic support in onboarding the two new staff members.

Additionally, five fully executed subawards were completed in the last six months after multiple reviews and approvals. Currently, the sub-awardees are submitting work plans for ME approval. Approximately fifteen award modifications were also executed in Q1 for each partner consortium institution. Although less partner involvement was requested at the beginning of this year (as the ME identified stakeholders in each country), the ME plan for the following six months includes increased partner participation in all activities, including in the new EOI proposal review process. Lastly, collaboration between the ME and the 1890 Universities Foundation has been going strong with the one-of-a-kind, first-ever establishment of an MSI student working group and the continued oversight team composed of the faculty advisor from Alabama University, an 1890s consultant, and members of the Tufts team.

Activity 5.4 Development of EMMP

The ME awaits for USAID's guidance and Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) determination for FSN-IL activities. Based on the IEE determination, the ME will develop and submit the EMMP for USAID's approval.

Short-Term Training

Date	Country of Training	Brief Purpose of Training	Who Was Trained?	Number Trained			
				M	F	Other	Total
9/20/2023	Virtual	FSN-IL Webinar Series with Thriving Solutions: Introduction to Urban Food Systems	Varied stakeholders from government, private, research and civil sectors	53	71	3	127
11/2/2023	Nepal	D4N2023 FSN-IL Learning Lab led by IFPRI New Delhi	Varied stakeholders from government, private, research and civil sectors	13	14	0	27
10/19/2023	Netherlands	FSN-IL Panel Session at Micronutrient Forum Conference 2023. Led by Eileen Kennedy with Isabel Madzorera, Alan de Brauw, Tom Van Mourik, Eva Monterrosa	Varied stakeholders from government, private, research and civil sectors	N/A	N/A	N/A	36
12/13/2023	Virtual	FSN-IL Webinar with Global Panel on Agriculture: Pursuing Food Systems Transformation Despite Financial Constraints	Varied stakeholders from government, private, research and civil sectors	56	78	7	141

IV. Innovation Transfer and Scaling Partnerships

The FSN-IL ME continues to facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange of over 270 ‘on-the-shelf’ food systems innovations identified through the scoping exercise in all of the in-country interactions across a diverse stakeholder network. The workshops on Scalability Assessment of Bundling Innovations will aim to bridge the gap between innovation and practical implementation by harnessing the power of an interactive, Innovation Explorer platform. The online tool will serve as a centralized hub for compiling and disseminating food systems solutions aimed at improving the productivity of nutrient-dense foods, enhancing food safety, and reducing food loss and waste. By leveraging this platform, individuals and institutions in the target countries can identify potential scalable and sustainable solutions that align with their specific needs and challenges. We anticipate this platform to be live by May of 2024 in time for the first scalability assessment workshop in Nepal.

The FSN-IL ME has been exploring potential partnerships with Sun Business Networks in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Mozambique, ICRISAT, NCBA CLUSA, GAIN, and Harvestmoon International to implement scalability assessment workshops. These workshops will be held in Q3 and Q4 later this year.

V. Consortium Partner Updates

In Q1 and Q2 of FY24, FSN-IL consortium partners participated in a number of conference-hosted presentations on behalf of the Lab. Tom van Mourik represented Helen Keller International (HKI) as a panelist at the Micronutrient Forum Session, “Exploring Metrics for Measuring Progress Towards Nutrition-Sensitive Food Systems,” on October 19, 2023. In addition, HKI representatives conducted other presentations in Q1 that were partially supported by FSN-IL at various conferences and consultations. Presentation titles include, "Subnational analysis and systems approach to design climate resilient food systems for nutrition in Cambodia," "Integrated Nutrition and Agriculture Programming: Pathways for

Diversified Healthy Diets & Nutrition,” and “Making Food Systems Work for Complementary Feeding in Low- and Middle-Income Countries.” HKI also facilitated the delivery of FSN-IL’s objectives during the January 2024 visit to Mozambique when representatives met with Helen Keller’s country director and partners.

ICRISAT continues to represent FSN-IL through presentations at international conferences and consultations. The major focus of ICRISAT’s work that aligns with the objectives of the Lab includes strengthening post-harvest segments of the value chains of nutrient-dense and climate resilient food commodities, promoting holistic approaches and suitable business models for promoting regenerative and nutrition sensitive food systems, and supporting monetization of ecosystems services and carbon/nature credits for sustainable practices.

VI. Competitive Subaward Updates

In Q1 and Q2 of FY24, the sub awards were being prepared and reviewed by all five academic institutions in multiple departments and dates of activity launch were being discussed. Once fully executed, the sub-awardees began working on their workplans. All sub-awardees received their executed contracts with Tufts, and based on the date the agreements were finalized, began to submit their workplans and roll out their research projects. Subawards reported that their project teams have been assembled and sub-contracts with in-country partners are being finalized.

The Purdue University team under the leadership of Dr. Julia Bello-Bravo began research activities quickly and have thus far trained a ginger farmer cooperative in Nepal on how to manage ginger storage inventories and monitor environmental conditions. The training also included criteria for determining ginger quality. A market survey was completed, and data results are in process for an analysis. The project will plan for an inception workshop to be held at the end of February in Tansen, Nepal. Prior to the workshop, communication with Nepali governmental partners at the national, district, and municipal levels, international and local NGO partners, universities, women ginger producers, and private sector actors took place to solicit ideas for the workshop.

At Texas State University, the team led by Dr. Madan Dey initiated a process to recruit graduate students for the project. These students will enroll in various graduate programs at the Bangladesh Agricultural University. Key stakeholders in Bangladesh are being consulted and a project website was developed. Over the next month, FSN-IL will review partner workplans and begin regular collaborative meetings as all the research will be rolling out.

VII. Issues or Concerns Encountered During the Reporting Period

Management Entity

Five new institutions were awarded funding support in April FY23 based on their competitive proposals for the RFA, “Action to Support Storage, Packaging, and/or Cooling Innovations for Perishable Foods in Target Geographies.” However, obtaining fully executed awards for this group was accomplished in February FY24. Initial packet approvals were delayed, as sub-awardees had challenges reflecting indirect rates, travel supporting documentation, and in-country partner budgets. Once these issues were corrected, Tufts had to review all packets again and prepare documentation to be sent to USAID. The turnaround time for USAID approval was longer than usual, and two more rounds of questions sent to the sub-awardees each time and re-reviewed by the Tufts team were completed. Tufts also incurred a delay in submitting the awards to the partner institutions, given the workload in the pre-award department at that time.

Consortium Partners

FSN-IL received helpful feedback from its consortium partners on issues that have come up thus far in Year 3. A common issue reported by FSN-IL partners was a lack of engagement opportunities provided by the Lab to report on. Arizona State University and GAIN both shared a desire to have more communication with FSN-IL to discuss opportunities that leverage project metrics. GAIN is interested in pursuing the opportunity to engage in the current project exploring the value of bundling of innovations, either in Mozambique or Bangladesh. Johns Hopkins and the University of Colorado shared similar concerns about the need to expand on opportunities for consortium partners to collaborate as a group in between reviews.

The FSN-IL consortium partner group consists of a robust network of organizations and research centers that are integral to this activity. The ME realizes that partner involvement is dependent upon the Lab engaging its partners in thought leadership and collaboration. As FSN-IL continues to plan activities for the remainder of the year (for example, the EOI reviews and in-country stakeholder engagements), opportunities for further engagement will be shared.

VIII. Future Work

Management Entity

In the second half of Year 3, FSN-IL will continue its activities for consultations on innovation bundling, research for development, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement. In Q3 and Q4, FSN-IL will conduct four scaling readiness of innovations workshops to develop capacity of local government and nongovernment stakeholders (including the private sector) in developing their understanding of innovation bundling. Following the convening of these workshops, FSN-IL will hold in-person consultations in Malawi and Mozambique to reflect on the outputs of this workshop.

Additionally, the ME will move forward in the EOI process in Q3 by inviting a selected number of applicants to undergo the co-creation process, and then a subset to be invited to submit a full proposal. Winners for this call are expected to be announced in early Q4. The RFA winners selected in 2023 will also be rolling out their proposed research in Q3.

On the capacity building front, a call for training and travel fellowships will be announced in Q3 for emerging scholars and students in MSI's and in FSN-IL's focus countries. Additionally, following the success of the introduction to the circular economy workshop in Cairo in FY23, three circular economy workshops will be conducted by Thriving Solutions (one in Asia and two in Africa). FSN-IL will also convene the Food Frontiers 3.0 in Bangladesh with GAIN Bangladesh to provide eight technology challenge awards and training to more than 20 young entrepreneurs. Additionally, FSN-IL will co-host the 10th National Food Conference in Nepal in collaboration with NEFOSTA and other organizations and will work closely with partners in Mozambique and Malawi to host a conference in Southern Asia.

Lastly, FSN-IL will continue its engagement activities by rolling out the final two webinars for the year. The next webinar is expected to be in early Q3. Additionally, FSN-IL will continue its regular engagement with the 1890s Foundation and faculty advisor to monitor the progress made by the MSI Student Working Group, including the rollout of the needs assessment to scope the content and gaps in the MSI institutions. With FSN-IL being the chair of the Innovation Lab council in FY24, the Lab will continue its preparations for the Regional Partners Meeting in Q3 to be held in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Consortium Partners

FSN-IL received positive feedback from its consortium partners on the continuation of work that has been completed thus far in Years 1-3. From the semi-annual reporting session that was conducted in February, the partners shared their plans and ideas for future collaboration. There is a general interest in the partners' eagerness to review upcoming applications, participate in FSN-IL hosted webinars and workshops, provide thought leadership, and represent the Lab at an identified international event/conference/meeting of interest in Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

GAIN is exploring possibilities to exploit synergies with programs for mutual leverage. Such programs include the Bangladesh Innovation Challenge as part of the FSN-IL Food Frontier Challenge 3.0, and solar drying of fish in Mozambique through a larger Dutch funded program. ICRISAT plans to support FSN-IL in the development and implementation of specific capacity-building activities as requested by the ME. These may include organizing a training course, preparing materials for a workshop, or providing short training sessions (e.g., learning labs at annual symposia and/or conferences such as the Agriculture, Nutrition and Health Academy). Johns Hopkins and the University of Colorado are working on papers that are in the pipeline to be published in FY24. In addition, the University of Colorado will be conducting presentations to various international and national stakeholders on food safety challenges and innovations identified by FSN-IL. Johns Hopkins is also organizing a meeting on 'wonder crops' in Washington that is expected to have overlap with FSN-IL. Further details will be shared with the Lab soon. Lastly, NCBA/CLUSA looks forward to potential partnership with FSN-IL work in Mozambique.

IX. Nepal Buy-In

On September 25, 2023, FSN-IL secured a buy-in from USAID to advance the assessment of nutrition governance at the national and provincial level alongside an assessment of provincial-level food systems in Nepal. As part of the buy-in, FSN-IL will evaluate challenges and opportunities for sustainable food systems transformation in Nepal. In addition to the research activities, FSN-IL will undertake capacity-building workshops for national and provincial-level policy stakeholders in Nepal.

Accomplishments:

During the reporting period, the FSN-IL ME finalized and received approval from USAID on the annual workplan, the DMP, and the MEL plan for the Nepal buy-in activities. In collaboration with the USAID mission, the ME drafted an implementation letter required by the Government of Nepal (GoN) prior to the commencement of buy-in activities. Preparations are in place for the ME to meet key government stakeholders in Nepal to present and obtain approval for the buy-in research and capacity-building activities.

On the research front, the ME successfully revised the Nutrition Governance Index (NGI) tool and tailored the Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI) tool to fit Nepal's context. Consent forms and the study protocol were finalized and submitted to the Tufts Social and Behavioral Educational Research (SBER) and Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) for the ethical review and approval processes. The FSN-IL ME received approval from Tufts SBER and is anticipating final approval from NHRC by the end of February. Preparations for training the data collection team at VaRG on NGI and Food-EPI surveys are ongoing. FSN-IL's Research and Capacity Building Manager, Dr. Robin Shrestha, traveled to Nepal to oversee the training and survey roll-out.

The ME successfully secured a sub-award with Valley Research Group (VaRG) in Nepal. VaRG will play a critical role in data collection for nutrition governance and food systems transformation monitoring assessments. Additionally, a professional service agreement was finalized between FSN-IL and Harvestmoon International, a local firm based in Kathmandu. The firm will be responsible for planning and organizing the

logistics for the four provincial and one national-level capacity-building workshops scheduled in Q3 and Q4 of FY24.

To ensure the successful execution of the research and capacity-building initiatives, FSN-IL recruited and onboarded a Project Coordinator who will oversee the technical and administrative aspects of the buy-in. Additionally, the recruitment process for a designated Data Analyst for the buy-in is ongoing. The FSN-IL ME is also currently in the process of recruiting an in-country coordinator who will oversee the logistical planning and execution of the capacity-building workshops in Nepal.

Annex A: Success Story

Success Story: Participants Gaining New Perspectives from the FSN-IL and 1890 Universities First MSI Student Working Group



Yazmine Thomas is presently conducting research in the field of Food Science at UMES, where she is pursuing her doctoral degree.

As a participant of the first FSN-IL and 1890 Universities Foundation MSI Student Working Group, Yazmine Thomas, a PhD student at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES), had the privilege of witnessing firsthand how the program has broadened her perspective on food systems. “My narrow view of food systems, limited to the plough and plate, was shattered by the program’s comprehensive approach. FSN-IL has taught me that food systems are not just about planting seeds and stocking shelves; they are about the intricate dance of supply chains, nutrition labels, and the struggles of small farmers. The program has highlighted the importance of exploring the menu beyond ‘farm-to-fork,’” says Yazmine.

Through this student working group, participants such as Yazmine have gained a new perspective on the role of nutrition in food systems. The program’s outlook on hunger, micronutrients, and food justice has revolutionized understanding of the impact of food on individuals and

communities. “I have come to realize that food systems are not just about providing sustenance; they are about nourishing minds and bodies,” says Yazmine. FSN-IL has also emphasized the importance of placing people at the center of food systems. For Yazmine, the program has widened her lens to include the faces behind the food industry, from the hands that sow seeds to the women who balance baskets on their heads. Food systems are not just about crops but about dignity, equality, and community.

Yazmine concluded, that armed with FSN-IL’s gifts of newfound wisdom and a kaleidoscope of perspectives, she will now step into the world with a deep appreciation for the complexity of food systems. The program has provided her with a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies at play in the food industry, and she will carry that knowledge with her as she navigates her professional and personal life. Her journey continues, one forkful at a time, as she strives to apply the program’s lessons to make a positive impact in the world of food science.

Appendix B: FSN-IL and Consortium Partner Presentations in Q1 and Q2 of Year 3

Presenter	Event	Location	Topic	Date	Audience
Seta Tutundijan, John Triantafyllis	FSN-IL Webinar	Virtual	Introduction to Urban Food Systems	9/20/2023	127
Shibani Ghosh	Friedman School Speaker Series	Boston, MA	Panel Discussion - The Great Debate: Meat Consumption	9/20/2023	90
Shalander Kumar	XVI Agricultural Science Congress	Kochi, India	Transforming Food Systems in Marginal Environments: Strategies and Implications	10/12/2023	100
Eileen Kennedy, Isabel Madzorera, Alan de Brauw, Tom Van Mourik, Eva Monterrosa	FSN-IL Panel Session: Micronutrient Forum Conference 2023	The Hague, Netherlands	Exploring Metrics for Measuring Progress Towards Nutrition-Sensitive Food Systems	10/19/2023	36
Patrick Webb	China Good Food Summit	Virtual	Transforming food systems for human and planetary health	10/24/2023	Est.450,000
Shibani Ghosh	MSI Student Working Group Introductory Meeting	Virtual	Actions to Reduce Food Loss and Waste, Enhance Food Safety, and Promote Access to Nutrient-Dense Foods	10/25/2023	13
Patrick Webb, Shibani Ghosh, Elizabeth Marino-Costello, Robin Shrestha, Jennifer Stickland	Subaward Orientation	Virtual	Introductory Orientation Food Systems for Nutrition Innovation Lab RFA Awardees	10/27/2023	18
Bhim Raj Suwal, Shailes Neupane	D4N2023 Conference	Kathmandu, Nepal	FSN-IL and VaRG Learning Lab: Field Perspective on Semi-Quantitative Data Collection	11/2/2023	27
Shalander Kumar, Abhishek Kumar, Padmaja Ravula	D4N2023 Conference	Kathmandu, Nepal	Methodological Insights: Evaluating the Rural Food Environment to Promote Sustainable and Nutritious Diets in India	11/2/2023	100

Tom Arnold, Adeyinka Onabolu, Amos Laar, Patrick Webb, Shibani Ghosh	FSN-IL Webinar	Virtual	Pursuing Food Systems Transformation Despite Financial Constraints	12/13/2023	141
Shalander Kumar	83 rd Annual Conference of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics	Bhubaneswar, India	Systems approach to transform farm and food systems for improved resilience and livelihoods: Evidence and way forward	12/20/2023	250
Patrick Webb, Shibani Ghosh, Robin Shrestha, Jennifer Stickland	Consultation stakeholder meetings with USAID Mission, National Planning Commission, LUANAR, ICRISAT, Tetrattech, IFPRI, CARE, Heifer Intl, MwAPATA, Growth Poles, aQysta, WFP and Alliance of Bioversity Intl/CIAT	Lilongwe, Malawi	FSN-IL Intro & Activities in Malawi	1/15/2024- 1/20/2024	26
Shibani Ghosh, Robin Shrestha, Jennifer Stickland	Consultation stakeholder meetings with USAID Mission, SETSAN, GAIN, NCBA CLUSA, USAID SPEED, Technoserve (PREMIER), ACDI/VOCA (RESINA), HKI, WFP, IITA, iDE	Maputo and Nampula, Mozambique	FSN-IL Intro & Activities in Mozambique	1/21/2024- 1/27/2024	33
Kavitha Kasala, Padmaja Ravula	International Conference on Food & Nutrition Security through Agriculture Ecosystems	Hyderabad, India	Enhancing Maternal and Child Nutrition: A Holistic Approach through Nutrition Education in Tribal Communities	2/2/2024	50
Patrick Webb	MSI Student Working Group Meeting	Virtual	Scaling Food System Innovations to Promote Healthy Diets	2/9/2024	8

Appendix C: FSN-IL and Consortium Partner Publications in Q1 and Q2 of Year 3

Organization	Type	Title	Author	Status
FSN-IL	Journal Article	The state of food systems worldwide in the countdown to 2030	Kate R. Schneider; Patrick Webb; Others	Published
FSN-IL	Journal Article	Evaluating preschool linear growth velocities: an interim reference illustrated in Nepal	Swetha Manohar; Andrew Thorne-Lyman; Others	Published