DEVELOPMENT INNOVATION VENTURES PROGRAM REVIEW
FINAL REPORT, PHASE 2

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1. DEVELOPMENT INNOVATION VENTURE CONTEXT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

USAID’s Development Innovation Ventures (DIV) program is an open innovation program that tests and scales creative solutions to development challenges.¹ According to USAID, the projects are ideally bold development ideas that are then piloted and continuously tested to gauge their effects, with an aim to ultimately scale those that show potential for the greatest impact. The grants are flexible and are designed to take a strategic risk, build evidence of what works, and promote the best solutions.² An overriding aim of the DIV has been to work with awardees to emphasize rigorous testing of evidence, cost-effective approaches in implementation, and identification of pathways towards scaling up the benefits for greater impact.

1.1.1 DIV CONTEXT

A brief literature review on development innovations reveals that there are inadequate empirical studies on their success and social return compared to other forms of development aid. One study commissioned by USAID in 2019 that sought a cost-benefit analysis of the DIV, generated interesting findings for further reflection in the broader innovation landscape.³ The study found that of the 41 innovations that were implemented globally between 2010 and 2012, ten of these reached 95 percent of all the beneficiaries in the DIV portfolio. This was attributed to several factors including the realization that different innovations require different lengths of time to scale; inadequate impact evaluation data on the benefits from the innovations, and challenges in allocating monetary value to certain innovations such as those aimed at non-monetary social benefits such as fraud reduction. In 2019, the Global Innovation Fund reported that not all innovations achieve impact at scale, with only ten percent of investments yielding any significant returns.⁴ It has been recommended that an expanded view of the paths to scaling should be adopted, which includes allowing room for strategic partnerships to leverage distribution networks including those availed by governments and large enterprises.⁵

1.1.2 DIV STRUCTURE

The scaling pathway of USAID’s DIV grants is tiered as follows:⁶

- Stage one: covers projects that are aiming for proof of concept, with a target to reach a few hundred beneficiaries. Projects in this tier will attract up to $200,000.
- Stage two: caters for projects that have advanced their innovation further and are at the level of testing and positioning scale-up reaching beneficiaries in their thousands. Projects in this tier can access up to $1,500,000.
- Stage three: is for projects that are already on a scaling-up path, with the potential to reach millions of beneficiaries. At this stage, projects will have demonstrated evidence of the innovation through scaling up. Projects in this tier can access up to $5,000,000.

² Ibid.
⁵ Kremer, M et al (2019).
1.1.3 DIV IN KENYA

In Kenya, a total of 36 DIV grants were awarded in the last ten years. Of these, 27 grants have been completed and are now closed. The Mission Support Program for the Journey to Self-Reliance Pivot (MSP) has been requested to support USAID to conduct an in-depth review of the grantees’ performance following grant closure. In Phase 1, MSP assessed 11 of the 27 completed grants since there was an ongoing collaboration with USAID. In Phase 2, MSP gathered additional data on nine of the 11 grantees included in Phase 1. Of the 11 grants assessed in Phase 1, MSP removed two7 grantees from Phase 2 as they indicated their innovations failed and were discontinued, and the implementing staff had since left.

Below is a summary description of the nine grantees that were reviewed:

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<th>#</th>
<th>GRANTEE</th>
<th>BRIEF DESCRIPTION</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Taka Taka Solution</td>
<td>From waste to increased agricultural productivity. Stage 2: $892,614 (2013-2016)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Soko Inc</td>
<td>SasaAfrica, Ecommerce. Everywhere. For Everyone. Stage 1: $100,000 (2013-2014)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Apollo Agriculture</td>
<td>Agronomic Machine Learning, Remote Sensing and Mobile Technology for Smallholder Farmers. Stage 2: $300,000 (2017-2020)</td>
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<td>Sanivation</td>
<td>Delivering Non-Sewered Sanitation Services to the Urban Poor. Stage 1: $150,000 (2017-2020)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Safe Water and AIDS Project (SWAP)</td>
<td>Improving Health through Micro-Entrepreneurship in Western Kenya. Stage 1: $100,000 (2013-2016)</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Baisikeli Ugunduzi</td>
<td>Milele Tube Final Testing and Marketing Introduction. Stage 1: $100,000 (2012-2013)</td>
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1.2 TASK OBJECTIVES

The objective of the assignment was to provide additional primary data and trend analysis, measuring the cumulative changes in cost of the innovations and understanding the drivers of these cost changes, and also outlining the relationship between the increase in sales vis-à-vis the number of beneficiaries.

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7 Michigan State University and Kickstart
The analysis also sought to assess the actual results realized as a direct result of DIV funding, unexpected challenges and how they were addressed, and achievements resulting from the DIV funding.

**1.2.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

During Phase 2 MSP sought to address the following information needs:

- Number of innovations that remained active or scaled substantially. In addition, to provide any trend analysis, by year or frequency of innovation units deployed.
- Changes in cost of the innovation, specifically in whether grantees had been able to decrease their costs and those whose costs rose. The drivers of both cost efficiencies (reduced costs/unit) and increased costs were also addressed, and how these changes compared to the projections.
- Review and expound on the grantee sales and beneficiary data collected in Phase 1.
- Organizational changes the grantees made as a result of or after receiving DIV funding.
- Challenges faced by grantees (expected and unexpected) and the resolution measures put in place.
- Analysis on the achievement of the overall DIV goals. Specifically, if Stage 1 awardees proved their concept without need for further proof; if Stage 2’s positioned for scale (as evidenced by their ability to scale), and if Stage 3s scaled to millions. Based on Phase 1 data collection, only one grantee was reported to have reached over one million beneficiaries with their innovation, and two reached over 100,000. MSP explored the push and pull factors the grantees experienced.

The following tasks were prioritized in Phase 2:

- Review new/revised information needs and priorities. Receive additional information from USAID and ensure expectations are clear via a kick-off meeting with the USAID DIV and USAID/KEA SPA teams.
- Prepare mini-inception report inclusive of modified data collection tools or new tools (as necessitated by information needs reviewed in Task 1).
- Conduct primary data collection with the available grantees (the nine of 11 grantees that were included in the Phase 1 data collection) on the new information needs outlined in the inception report.
- Analyze the data and share preliminary findings with USAID in a small validation meeting/workshop prior to commencing report writing. The validation meeting/workshop would also be used to co-create recommendations with USAID based on the presented findings.
- Revise Phase 1 report to incorporate new findings and share draft report.
- Disseminate the new findings to the DIV and USAID/KEA in a forum determined by USAID.
- Incorporate any feedback received during dissemination and submit the final report.
2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 DESIGN

The DIV review focused on nine grantees in Kenya. The review employed a qualitative descriptive design that involved collection of additional primary data through consultations with the grantees. Qualitative data was obtained using semi-structured interviews with selected respondents/key informants (KI). Quantitative data on sales was requested from the participating grantees during the interviews to address the new review questions.

2.2 REVIEW POPULATION

Phase 2 of the DIV review identified nine closed programs out of the 11 reviewed in Phase I. For the qualitative information, the review will involve semi-structured interviews with innovation units’ key personnel or currently available grantee senior staff. Experiences and perspectives of these staff on the innovations regarding the study questions were collected.

2.3 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Data collection was conducted using a KI interview guide, which can be found in Annex 1. The tool was finalized in collaboration with USAID staff.

2.4 DATA QUALITY CONTROLS AND ANALYSIS

During qualitative interviews, the MSP consultants took notes and ensured that notes were identified using agreed codes or grantee names and titles of the respondents. The Phase 2 identified key performance indicators were populated in line with the indicator definitions and trends over time. MSP developed a summary for each grantee and performed a thematic review of qualitative data, connecting the data to the review questions, seeking relationships, context, interpretation, and outliers to better explain what is happening and the perception of those involved. Data was captured using themes summarized in Microsoft Word.

2.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to beginning an interview, all participants were asked to give verbal informed consent for the interview and for it to be recorded for ease of transcription afterwards. They were informed that these recordings would not be submitted to USAID.

2.6 DISSEMINATION PLANS AND STRATEGIES

The results from the review were finalized by the team, and a final consolidated report in line with USAID policies and developed in collaboration with USAID will be submitted to USAID for dissemination to other stakeholders. Before this, a validation meeting/workshop will be held to co-create recommendations with USAID based on the presented findings. The final review report will be made available on the USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse as required by Agency policy.

2.7 LIMITATIONS

The main limitation in this study was recall bias. Most of the grants were completed more than five years ago and a majority of the staff, who implemented the projects, have left the organizations. Therefore, there are some gaps in information, specific to each grantee. Most of the quantitative data are estimates since the projects did not invest in robust data management systems and therefore, in
many instances, data was not well kept and the respondents were not able to provide comprehensive answers.
3. KEY FINDINGS

3.1 DESCRIPTION OF KEY SUMMARY FINDINGS

3.1.1 SUSTAINABILITY

The review established that most of the DIV grantees sustained their innovations beyond the USAID DIV funding period as the grantees sought additional funding from other investors and donors. For example, one grantee experienced exponential growth both during implementation of the DIV and between the end of their DIV grant and the present (2021) to expand their business components, number of staff and personnel, annual revenues, and geographic locations of operations and sales. Another grantee successfully raised over $11 million USD in equity to continue financing their operations after the DIV grant. Out of the nine grantees, seven sustained their innovations; one did not sustain their innovation, while another realized that it did not make economic sense to justify continuing.

The grantees also adapted their strategies based on the lessons they learned during implementation. For example, resilience, perseverance and thinking outside the box constantly have remained a critical success factor for one grantee. This is in light of the need to navigate political economic challenges such as self-interested parties in the industry and a ‘not so enabling’ environment. The need to constantly survey the greater environment, and technological advancements in similar contexts as well as in advanced economies in order to keep abreast, have all been an important focus area for this grantee to succeed. Another grantee indicated that constant innovation and improving of existing products enabled their organization to stay afloat by having contingency plans.

3.1.2 SCALE

Four out of the nine grantees substantially scaled up their innovations, either reaching millions of beneficiaries or generating revenues in the millions of dollars. One grantee expanded from reaching 1000 target users in 2017 to over 40,000 in 2021, while rapidly increasing their annual revenues. One grantee indicated that the DIV funding was like a ‘vote of confidence’ on their company, and it strategically enabled them to explore tech-related innovations by hiring highly acclaimed technology experts, who designed their sophisticated data management and automation system, and further facilitated their ability to scale. Another grantee has rapidly expanded their geographic scope and reach of millions of people in East Africa and other regions. Specifically in Kenya, where the DIV funding supported them, they are reaching 2.1 million people in the nine counties with about 18,000 units as of 2021.

Three grantees seemed to have proven their concepts and were ready to scale up but did not receive additional funding to upscale. One grantee made good progress, but the innovation did not gain traction while one grantee’s innovation failed.

3.1.3 COSTS

Grantees had to change their unit prices to make the products attractive to the target beneficiaries. Three grantees reduced the unit costs of the innovation products/units. There was only one grantee that increased the unit cost due to change in the product quality. And the rest of the six grantees either did not change, or the changes were inconsistent and fluctuated over time.
3.1.4 IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Grantees faced a lot of challenges during implementation as they rolled out their innovations. These include:

Marketing of products was a big challenge: A number of grantees had a challenge of identifying the right customer while some lacked funding to invest in sales and marketing of their products. For example, one grantee found that marketing organic fertilizers was initially a serious challenge. The company then approached smallholder farmers directly who had issues of cash/capital for investment and also did not have the requisite knowledge. Data from farmers was also of poor quality as it was believed agents may have falsified some data entries in order to post better sales outcomes than the reality really was. Currently, about 70 percent of the product is now selling after shifting to work with smallholder farmers rather than larger farms and middlemen. The grantee has now invested more in marketing their organic fertilizer in order to increase public knowledge and interest. This has led to greater awareness among farmers and increased the sales.

In other cases, most of the grantee’s funding went into product development and little into marketing and sales. This led to business model failure for some grantees. For example, one grantee spent most of their resources in developing the products and had insufficient funds remaining to promote their product and sales, and thus it was difficult for this grantee to sustain their innovation. In addition, they experienced a very slow uptake of the product as most people could not afford it.

COVID-19 disruption/lockdowns: Due to COVID-19, significant revenue was lost by commercial models due to lock downs, which led to loss of business. For example, one grantee lost significant revenue due to COVID-19 from its commercial customers, e.g., shopping malls, hotels. However, this period did not fundamentally disrupt the business, as no staff members were let go during this period despite the revenue losses. Another grantee’s innovation, which was capital intensive, required equipment that is expensive and was bought at the end of 2019 from China. This means that it came into Kenya at the beginning of 2020, just when COVID-19 had struck. The material comes from Italy, which was hardest hit by the pandemic. Therefore, the grantee found themselves stuck with expensive equipment and could not access raw materials to continue operating the equipment, which was a significant setback for the company. With time and the gradual easing of COVID-19 restrictions, the gold-plating business improved by approximately 50 percent.

Financing: Access to additional funding as either running capital or for scale up was a big challenge for several grantees. This led to changes in the innovation to remain relevant or align to the new funding requirements. For example, one grantee sought additional financing to scale from public sector partners but getting financing to scale up the innovation was difficult as government institutions are often risk averse and require showcasing of the scalability. This spurred the grantee to strengthen their documentation and to use catalytic capital to showcase their plant upscale, which is challenging as project financing is not viable in the renewable sector where margins are high, and loans are used to cover the project and be paid from revenue. To address the financing challenge, the grantee is looking into government and financing institutions and other foreign sources of capital to build a portfolio of successful options to rapidly replicate their model elsewhere through sustainable sources of financing such as tenders.

Lessons Learned: Due to agile leadership, most of the grantees were able to turn these challenges into opportunities and succeeded while some could not gain traction in order for their innovations to be sustained and scaled. For example, in response to challenges spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, one grantee’s leadership learned that the ability to pivot was crucial to business innovation. With the
COVID-19 lockdowns in the USA and Europe, the grantee’s merchants, who purchase on wholesale to sell in their stores, closed. This implied that 70 percent of potential sales would have been locked out of this market. To avoid this loss, the grantee shifted to the digital market platforms, targeting retail business and began online business. They connected with Amazon and other digital platforms, to sell their products online. Given COVID-19, the grantee made a conscious effort to keep the artisans working and hence bought stock that did not have an immediate market. Strategically, this meant that the grantee shifted from customer-based orders to bulking the stocks and then waiting for the customer. As such, they secured a physical distribution center to house the stock in the USA. Positively, while the grantee previously struggled to meet customers’ demand for supplies, by the time COVID-19 restrictions began to ease later in 2020, they could now release the stock to the market between November and December 2020 and fulfill customer demands.

Another grantee reported key lessons learned that continuous development and provision of skills through training of the staff contributes to the successful implementation of an innovation, and adequate funding is important as it enhances the organization’s monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes as well as improves human resource and operations processes. Additionally, another grantee indicated that they learned during their DIV grant period that it is important to invest in staff to improve production as they have more than tripled their production compared to when they relied on a robot.

3.2 RELATIONSHIP WITH USAID

There was mixed feedback from grantees regarding their relationship with USAID. Most of the awardees had a very good working relationship with USAID DIV while some did not. Some of the complaints included the hands-off nature of the USAID DIV unit, lack of communication, guidance and support regarding the grants, reporting, and future opportunities. Grantees made attempts to reach out to DIV, but DIV was not responsive to requests for support/guidance.

Below are some of the feedback received, starting with those who felt their relationship with USAID was strained. One grantee appreciated that USAID came in early, with the first grant. But felt that there was no adequate continuity, as their AOR changed, which was a bit frustrating for the grantee. At some point, it was hard to access follow-on DIV grants, with the awardee having tried unsuccessfully. There has not been any continuity thereafter in the relationship between USAID and the grantee after the first DIV grant. One of the grantees also struggled with the fact that the executive management spent time to report on the spending and reconciliation, which they felt was extremely time-consuming.

One grantee felt that it was not beneficial for USAID to push for higher targets as they were still learning. They reported that they felt under pressure during reporting required at the end of each milestone.

The following grantees felt that they had good working relationship with USAID. One grantee felt that their relationship with USAID was good and that they received a lot of benefits post-DIV, including venture support, which they felt has been very helpful. They also received technical assistance, which led to one of their biggest partnerships. They felt that during the grant implementation, communication with USAID was good and that they were introduced to other networks.

Another grantee felt that the relationship with USAID was largely positive. This was as a result of having had a little bit more of a background on how it would be like to work with USAID from their advisors. The grantee was well aware of USAID terms. They also felt it was really helpful having a fixed obligation grant from USAID, which enabled them to get going with the work. They applauded this
method as it was beneficial particularly at the early stages of implementation even for the second grant as they had to scale back being a young company that was less familiar with the development sector.

Lastly, one other grantee reported having an excellent relationship with USAID with a good understanding and appreciation of the programs. Payments were made and the grantee also met all reporting timelines. USAID accommodated an adjustment in the original proposal that allowed for investment in a tracking software to curtail losses in the third year of implementation.
4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 LESSONS LEARNED

Grantees learnt a number of lessons during implementation. The following were some of the crosscutting lessons learnt, and point to areas of improvement for grantees in future:

- Regular collection of different business data while monitoring key indicators helps to track progress towards commercial viability.
- For sustainability to be actualized, there is a need to ensure operational costs are covered through the sale of products.
- Creating the right products for a specific market ensures margins are reached and the cost of sales becomes low and affordable.
- In order to scale up an innovation, meaningful partnerships with stakeholders, local utilities and local governments are important.
- Continuous development and provision of skills through training of the staff contributes to the successful implementation of an innovation.
- Adequate funding enhances an organization’s M&E processes as well as improves the human resource and operations processes.
- Conducting research and having a little background on a potential grant funder is key in tailoring proposals and expectations for a project depending on outside funding to implement.
- Setting realistic organizational goals helps organizations deliver as planned and even improve on their initial innovations.

4.2 CONCLUSION

Most of the DIV grantees sustained their innovations beyond the USAID DIV funding period. This was achieved through seeking additional funding from other investors and donors. Grantees also pivoted their strategies based on the lessons they learnt during implementation. Out of the nine grantees, seven sustained their innovations. One grantee could not sustain their innovation despite being a purely commercial model. They showed proof of concept but required additional external investments (grants or equity) for growth through marketing and sales of their products. Another grantee’s innovation was a purely public model but despite additional funding from other sources, they could not sustain the business as they realized that the innovation did not make economic sense to justify continuation.

Four out of the nine grantees substantially scaled up their innovations either reaching millions of beneficiaries or generating revenues in millions of dollars. Three of these were purely commercial models and received substantial additional investments that allowed them to expand and reach millions of beneficiaries. One grantee was purely public but since they received stage 3 funding ($7.5 million), they were able to reach millions. However, they over-relied on donor funding for scale up. One grantee was a hybrid model, but largely public, seemed to have proved their concepts and were ready to scale up but did not receive additional funding. Another grantee received stage 2 funding, was a purely commercial model and were very successful. However, the reported sales were very low despite the additional external investments from other sources (more than $15 million). Most likely these sales and reach were understated. One grantee has made decent progress, but the innovation did not gain traction while another grantee’s innovation failed. Purely commercial models that received additional investments beyond the grant tended to be more successful and significantly contributed to the goal of
DIV of reaching millions of beneficiaries with the innovation. This is because they made more sales and reinvested and reproduced the units to reach more beneficiaries.

Grantees had to change their unit prices to make their products attractive to the target beneficiaries. Three grantees reduced the unit costs of their innovation products/units. There was only one grantee that increased their unit cost due to change in the product quality. The rest of the five grantees either did not change, or the changes were inconsistent and fluctuated with the season.

Grantees faced a lot of challenges during implementation as they rolled out the innovations. Some of the challenges related to the product acceptance, roll-out of their strategy and/or implementation context. Due to agile leadership, most of the grantees were able to turn these challenges into opportunities and succeeded while some could not gain traction in order to survive.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The review recommends the need to strengthen networking and collaboration between DIV grantees to increase opportunities for cross learning as well as strengthen communication with grantees who receive these grants for the first time, to provide guidance, respond to their questions and any clarifications they may have, especially immediately post award. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of DIV:

- DIV needs to strengthen networking and collaboration between DIV grantees working within a country for purposes of sharing lessons. For example, more established grantees could mentor or provide support to smaller or less experienced grantees. This would ensure that the funded grantees sustain the innovations beyond the funding period.
- DIV should develop a clear roadmap and criteria that defines the path from stage one to stage three to ensure that great innovations are supported to substantially scale up to reach millions. This will not only support grantees to grow, but also ensure that innovations identified and funded at stage 1 or 2, are supported to reach maturity.
- DIV should develop and share guidelines for the funding of grantees, clearly defining the process, expectations, and timelines. Some grantees could have benefited from a closer, more supportive working relationship with USAID. However, it is noted that DIV uses fixed amount award type grants that allow grantees a large degree of flexibility in how they achieve the agreed upon milestones. These grant types also greatly limit the reporting, meeting and coordination typically seen in traditional grant structures. DIV now has a new technical assistance window that provides targeted support. This is a timely initiative that if used proactively will help address many challenges for grantees who receive USAID funding for the first time.
ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW TOOL

This tool will be administered through telephone or video conferencing by one of the consultants. The tool targets only one grantee key personnel. However, in case there are questions that require another staff to respond, this will also be allowed.

Grantee: ___________________________________ Date: ____________________

Award Number: ______________________________________________________

Award Name: _______________________________________________________

Name of Respondent: _________________________ Title: _______________________

Is the respondent still working for the grantee/organization? Yes/No __________

1. Could you please share with us the important data that you collect, analyse and use for key decisions on the innovation(s). How regularly is it collected? How is it used for decision making?

2. I would like to establish the number of innovation units you delivered during the implementation of this award. Innovation units – refer to a measure of outreach (i.e. # of units sold/delivered).

   1a. How many are they currently? Please describe the innovation. How did you define and report innovation units?

   1b. **For Stage 1 grants, Ask:** Share with us how the innovations changed over time and what necessitated these changes if any? What changes did you make within the organization, and on the strategy to effectively implement the award?

   1c. **For Stage 2 and 3, Ask:** Looking at the first year of implementation (meaning prior to receiving DIV funding), could you kindly share with us the numbers you started with and how these have increased annually to reach the current numbers?

3. Were there any agreed innovation units targets with USAID? What were these initial targets?

   3a. If there are any variations, ASK, what caused these variations (push and pull factors)

4. For the innovation units in Q1 above, what was the unit cost of the innovations? Did the costs increase or decrease over time?

   4a. If the costs have reduced, ASK, what were the drivers of these cost reductions?

   4b. If the costs increased, ASK, what were the drivers of these increased costs?

5. What adjustments did you make to mitigate against the cost fluctuations?

6. Please reconfirm the sales and beneficiaries data provided in phase 1. *Probe: explore/detail explanations provided for any sale or beneficiary fluctuations/significant changes from period to period or when compared with initial and final data. Also confirm why some figures appear to be exceptionally small or large per beneficiary.*

7. What changes did your organization make as a result of DIV’s funding? *Probe for Human Resource changes, organization development changes, strategy changes, or growth or focus.*
8. What were the challenges faced (expected and unexpected) during implementation? How did you address them? Any changes you had to make to address these challenges? Were any challenges not addressed and why?

9. The ultimate goal of DIV was to reach over one million beneficiaries with the funded innovations. What were the push and pull factors you experienced? (what made it possible to reach the target or what made it difficult to reach the target)

10. How would you describe the relationship you had with USAID? What areas of improvement did you note and would like to share with us?