

Request for Concept Notes

Multi-year emergency program impact evaluation in South Sudan

This request for Concept Notes (CNs) is administered by the [LASER PULSE](#)¹ (Long-term Assistance and SErvices for Research Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine) consortium led by Purdue University and funded through USAID's Global Development Lab/Center for Development Research.

1. Background

The Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) is interested in pursuing a rigorous impact evaluation to learn from a pilot multi-year emergency (MYE) award. Emergency awards are typically short-term interventions, 12-18 months or less, designed to provide assistance to save lives, reduce suffering, and support the early recovery of populations affected by both acute and protracted emergencies. However, in the last year, the former Office of Food for Peace (now BHA) pursued a pilot multi-year emergency Annual Program Statement (APS) under the premise that longer-term emergency interventions, in certain circumstances, can help populations move beyond relief assistance to longer-term recovery. MYE activities may also mitigate the impact of shocks, prevent the erosion of household assets and livelihoods, and accelerate recovery—contributing to the future resilience of affected households and communities. These MYE activities have the potential to provide a critical link between humanitarian and development programs (aka, the Humanitarian-Development nexus), and rigorous evaluation can contribute to the evidence base for effectively designing and implementing multi-year emergency activities.

South Sudan was chosen as a pilot country for MYE food assistance activities (expected to be awarded by Sept. 2020 and to end around Sept. 2023). The MYE Food Assistance APS can be found here: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/Final_FY_20_FFP_Multi-Year_Emergency_MYE_APS_compliant.pdf

[The South Sudan Amendment to the APS](#) is here:

https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/Final_FFP_FY_20_Multi-Year_International_Emergency_APS_Amendment_2_South_Sudan_compliant.pdf

BHA expects to award up to three MYE food security activities in South Sudan. However, BHA expects to conduct an impact evaluation of only one award. The activity for evaluation will be determined by BHA once the activities are awarded and based on an assessment of the operating context. Refer to the South Sudan Amendment to the APS for additional information on the program objectives and geographic areas of focus.

The USAID Mission in South Sudan is building its strategy for future resilience programming specifically on top of the MYE food security programs. The strategy started by working in the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (PFRR) in areas of collaboration with the UN and other

¹ LASER PULSE is a five-year USAID-funded consortium that supports the research-to-translation value chain through a global network of universities, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector for research-driven, practical solutions to critical development challenges in USAID interest countries (UIC). LASER supports the discovery and uptake of research-sourced, evidence-based solutions to development challenges spanning all USAID technical sectors and global geographic regions.

donors. These areas of focus for the MYE programming were hard-hit by the floods last year and are food insecure ([IPC 3-5](#)).

From an operational perspective, infrastructure, communications, and security constraints continue to make South Sudan one of the most difficult and dangerous places in the world for humanitarian workers. BHA is looking for a partner who can operate in a highly complex and dynamic context, and ideally, has previous experience collecting data in South Sudan. BHA is looking for a partner who can provide adaptive/innovative methods given the dynamic and uncertain context in South Sudan.

BHA is pursuing an impact evaluation, using experimental or quasi-experimental methods, (comprising a baseline and an endline phase) to learn about the below topics. USAID and the research/evaluation partner will jointly develop final evaluation questions as part of the evaluation co-design process.

- Impact of the activity on household food and nutrition security
- Impact of the activity on households' ability to mitigate and recover from shocks and stresses (conflict or climate related)
- Impact of the activity on building community resilience
- The value added of a multi-year emergency activity (compared to a typical ~12 month activity)
- The added impact of layering MYE activities with other USAID emergency, non-emergency, and resilience activities
- Cost effectiveness of interventions

2. Specific Deliverables

Deliverable	Prospective Deadline (to be adjusted once research institution is identified)
<i>Project and Evaluation Planning</i>	
In-briefings with USAID and IPs (phone)	Within one week of award
Inception report, including work plan/timeline	1 month after award
<i>Phase I: Baseline Evaluation</i>	
Baseline Protocol and Research Tools	2 months prior to baseline data collection

Baseline Survey Report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First draft • Final 	2 months after completion of baseline data collection
Brief or infographic highlighting key findings from the baseline	2 weeks after submission of final baseline report
Baseline Findings Presentation/webinar	Within in 1 month after submission of final baseline report
Baseline Dataset	1 month after submission of final baseline report
<i>Phase II: Endline Evaluation</i>	
Endline Protocol and Research Tools	3 months prior to endline data collection
Final Impact Evaluation Report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First draft • Final 	3 months after completion of endline data collection
Brief/infographic highlighting key findings from the final impact evaluation	1 month after publishing of endline report
Final Impact Evaluation Report Presentation/webinar	Within 1 month after completion of endline report
Endline dataset	1 month after submission of final impact evaluation report

Timing of data collection:

The quantitative baseline and endline surveys should collect data at the same season/time of year to ensure comparability of data. Accessibility in South Sudan due to the rainy/flood season is typically limited to around 5-6 months of the year, depending on geography and seasonal variability. (See FEWSNET seasonal calendar <https://fews.net/east-africa/south-sudan>.)

Ideally, baseline data collection should take place before activity implementation has begun in order to get an accurate measure of participants’ baseline status. The timing of the baseline data collection will need to take into account a balance of seasonal accessibility as well as activity implementation. If implementation begins before the baseline data is collected, this should be discussed in the “limitations” section of the baseline study report.

3. Request for Concept Notes (CNs) from Research Teams

USAID and LASER invite CNs from multidisciplinary research teams consisting of one team leader with up to five supporting researchers. BHA is prioritizing researchers, and their affiliated institutions, that have experience conducting impact evaluations, especially in humanitarian contexts or

protracted, complex crises. The successful team is expected to be able to operate independently in South Sudan and navigate the country specific approvals and logistical requirements with little to no support from USAID. Team leader applicants should hold a PhD, demonstrate a relevant track record in research and publications on humanitarian response, food security, and related focus areas (see list below), and have experience in managing and coordinating research projects. Supporting researchers should have complementary proven expertise in the Key Areas of Focus mentioned in the South Sudan APS Amendment (rural livelihoods and productivity; community cohesion; disaster risk management) - see the link to the APS on page one.

Please note

1. Prospective implementers of the **MYE funding opportunities in South Sudan (Opportunity Number 72DFFP20APS00001)** are not eligible to participate in carrying out this evaluation, and so may not submit concept notes.
2. The evaluation comprises two distinct phases: Phase One: Baseline (planning for the entire evaluation is part of this phase) which begins at program start-up, and Phase Two: Endline. Phase Two will take place toward the end of program implementation. The team must be able to work at these times, and then pause during the implementation phase of the MYE projects.

Research teams interested in submitting CNs are required to:

1. Have their full team register on LASER PULSE Network https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8AhZcWIGps5kyjP.
2. Take LASER's online gender certification before submitting a CN. Once having registered as a researcher on the LASER website, they will have access to this training. The training can be accessed at [this link](#) (or go to <https://stemedhub.org/groups/laserpulse/courses>)

Required materials to be submitted:

1. **Concept Note:** Must be no more than four (4) typed pages long, using Arial font size 11 and must include the following sections:
 - a. **Team details:** Full name, position, affiliation, and contact information of Team Leader and all individuals on the research team. Provide a description of the role for each proposed team member, and note whether that team member will participate in all the evaluation phases.
 - b. **Capacity statement:** A brief description of the team's related prior research (cite prior published work) and expertise in areas of relevance to this project scope. Subject matter expertise (SME) should include:
 - i. baseline and impact evaluations
 - ii. humanitarian response
 - iii. disaster risk management
 - iv. food security
 - v. rural livelihoods and productivity;
 - vi. community cohesion

Successful applicant teams should also indicate any familiarity with:

- vii. Do No Harm approaches
- viii. Coordination with the [UN Cluster approach](#) through the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC)
- ix. [Sphere standards](#)

- x. Gender considerations, and integration of these considerations in the evaluation (see below), and especially with the [IASC Gender with Age Marker Tool](#).
 - c. **Illustrative Baseline and Endline Evaluation Plan**, in Gantt Chart format and accompanying descriptive narrative. Though these evaluations will be co-designed with USAID and the implementing partner (IP), LASER expects the applicant to have sufficient experience to propose an illustrative workplan, with timeline and methods, and a cost for each phase of the work. This plan should be broken down by phase: planning phase, and the two evaluation phases (see Section 2. Specific Deliverables).
2. Detailed budget for a maximum of \$850,000 for all phases of the evaluation, planning, Phase I (Baseline) and Phase II (Endline), including direct + indirect costs and broken down by institution in case of teams from multiple institutions using the provided template. The final budget will be decided after the teams are selected and the project plan is finalized. Budget pages do not count towards the 4-page CN limit.
 3. Full CV's (limited to 5 pages, including academic record and most recent list of publications-2000 and later) of the team members (do not count towards 4-page CN limit).
 4. A sample of a recent piece of research work on a topic related to this research project (does not count towards the 4-page CN limit).

Items 1, 2, 3, and 4 should be combined into one (1) PDF and emailed to Pamela McClure at pmcclure@purdue.edu by **5pm EDT, Tuesday August 25th, 2020**.

Prospective applicants will have one week to submit any questions concerning the statement of work. Questions should be sent to Betty Bugusu at bbugusu@purdue.edu. Questions should be received no later than **Friday August 7th, 2020 at 5:00 pm EDT**.

Please read carefully and note the following:

- *Given the nature of the work, comprising a baseline and endline evaluation in **two phases** to be co-designed with the project implementing partner, the information requested for the concept notes is deemed sufficient to assess the capacity of proposed teams to deliver the work described in this Request. Thus, there will be no full proposal stage.*

4. Concept Note Review

The submitted Concept Notes will be evaluated by a committee jointly selected by USAID and LASER based on the following criteria:

- (a) **Clarity and quality of the Illustrative Evaluation Plan**, based on how well this corresponds to the requested information and in response to the background information and specific deliverables.
- (b) **Team capacity**: i.e. capacity to co-design and implement the proposed baseline and endline evaluation phases. Experience, skills, cost, and availability will all be considered.

LASER Rating Definition for Application Evaluation Criteria.

Adjectival Rating	Descriptive Statement
Excellent (5)	Outstanding Application in all aspects. Applicant fully meets all capacities and requirements, and convincingly demonstrates that it will address all aspects of the CN criteria. Weaknesses, if any, can be easily addressed.
Very Good (4)	Applicant fully meets all capacities and requirements, and demonstrates that it will likely address all aspects of the CN criteria. Weaknesses, if any, can be easily addressed.
Good (3)	Applicant meets all capacities and requirements and demonstrates that it will meet the CN criteria, but shows some weaknesses, yet the positives of the Application outweigh the negatives
Fair (2)	Applicant does not meet all aspects of the CN capacities and requirements nor is evidence presented indicating the likelihood of successfully meeting the CN criteria. Significant weaknesses are demonstrated and clearly outweigh any strengths presented.
Poor (1)	Applicant does not meet the CN capacities and requirements, and indicates a strong likelihood of failure to address all aspects of the criteria and the information presented.

The evaluation committee will decide, based on the above criteria, which team(s) will be invited to prepare an initial research plan for co-creation. **The finalist team(s) will be notified on or around September 14, 2020** and invited to a virtual briefing session **September 21st, 2020**, hosted by LASER and BHA . Co-creation occurs as the evaluation team prepares a more in-depth research plan in consultation with the program implementing partner and USAID BHA, in coordination with LASER and USAID GDL/CDR.

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