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Bi-annual Performance Report Narrative

LASER PULSE
Year 2 Bi-Annual Report (2020)

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ACRONYMS

AOR:	Agreement Officer Representative
BP:	Boundary Partner
CRS:	Catholic Relief Services
CSFA:	Comprehensive Success Factor Analysis
DDL:	Development Data Library
DEC:	Development Experience Clearinghouse
FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
FY:	Fiscal Year
HEI:	Higher Education Institutions
iNGO:	International NGO
IU:	Indiana University
KM:	Knowledge Management
LASER PULSE:	Long-term Assistance and SErvices for Research: Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine
MEL:	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
OM:	Outcome Mapping
PM:	Progress Marker
RAN:	Resilient Africa Network
RF:	Results Framework
R4D:	Research for Development
RFA:	Request for Applications
TOC:	Theory of Change
UIC:	USAID Interest Countries
UND:	University of Notre Dame
USAID:	United States Agency for International Development

1. BACKGROUND

LASER PULSE is a five-year USAID-funded consortium, led by Purdue University and also comprising Catholic Relief Services, Indiana University, Makerere University, and the University of Notre Dame. LASER PULSE supports 'embedded research translation' through a global network of 1,800+ researchers, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private sector representatives, to support the discovery and uptake of field-sourced, evidence-based solutions to development challenges spanning all USAID technical sectors and global geographic regions.

The LASER PULSE strategy of 'embedded research' ensures that applied development research is co-designed with development practitioners, and results in solutions that are useful and usable. LASER does this by involving development practitioners to collaborate with researchers -on sector gap refinement, research question definition, carrying out and testing research, and developing translated research products for immediate use. We support this process with capacity building and technical assistance to enable the researcher/practitioner partnerships to function effectively. LASER PULSE is focused around four pillars: 1) Formation and Curation of a Technically and Geographically Diverse Network of University Researchers, Centers, and Institutions; 2) Identification of Key Research Questions; 3)Funding of Research Awards to Network Members; and 4) Translation of Research Findings into Policy Briefs and Actionable Policy or Programmatic Recommendations

2. AWARD/CONTRACT REFLECTION

What's working and what's not? How do your achievements compare to your original goals and scope?

2a. *How has your award/contract implementation differed from what you submitted in your proposal/application? Why has it differed and/or why did you change course?*

Below we summarize how two key LASER strategies have worked well, or presented challenges, to promote LASER approaches, in line with our original goals and scope.

1. As envisioned in our proposal, the **Research for Development (R4D) forums** have worked well as vehicles to promote embedded research translation and its usefulness in promoting development objectives. In this reporting period, LASER has been in the process of implementing three single-country R4D events (Colombia, Vietnam, and Ethiopia), all in various stages of completion. LASER has changed its focus from regional to single country R4D forums for strategic as well as pragmatic reasons.
    - **LASER made a strategic decision to hold a single-country focus with the Colombia R4D Workshop,** in order for us to leverage Purdue's decade-long relationships with Colombian HEIs. We expected that building on these existing relationships would help to guarantee significant participation from Colombian academics and government representatives in the R4D Workshop, and therefore offer greater opportunities for the sustainability of LASER's embedded research translation approach. This assumption proved correct, as evidenced from the active participation of Colombian researchers and practitioners at all stages of the R4D planning process, including two extensive pre-conference visits with discussion group sessions at multiple institutions (data in Table 5), and leadership during the R4D workshop sessions by Colombians. Moreover, the R4D Workshop served as a 'launchpad' for follow-on activities with USAID Colombia and with Colombian researchers, such as the Venezuelan Migrant Crisis-focused hackathon summarized further on in this document.

- **LASER had planned a SE Asia regional focus** for an R4D Conference to be held in Thailand. However, as we explored holding our conference there we encountered many obstacles, such as in our ability to provide award funding to neighboring countries. Because of these obstacles, we made a pragmatic decision to hold a single-country R4D workshop in Vietnam. The workshop will now be held after the Vietnam award round (given COVID-19 restrictions on travel and on large events).
- **The decision to hold a single-country R4D event in Ethiopia was both strategic and pragmatic**. It was pragmatic in the sense that Ethiopia's neighboring countries are not ones where LASER could easily make research awards. But it is a strategically attractive country for us because of support from the mission for the LASER approach, and because of substantial existing relationships with all LASER consortium members. LASER IU colleagues especially have strong relationships within academia and government in Ethiopia. As explained for Colombia, such existing relationships make it much easier to create interest in and support for LASER to sustain its approach with these stakeholders.

2. In the **development of regional and country-specific RFAs**, and review of concept notes and proposals, we have faced **unanticipated bottlenecks in the process**, which have resulted in delays - especially for the first (East Africa) round. The process bottlenecks centered around the following areas, for which we note the solution we have taken to mitigate them:
   - **Finalization of the sectors of interest for the EA RFA:** The refinement of the three sector focus areas within the RFA took much longer than anticipated due to the under-anticipated need to balance the interests and feedback of three USAID bureaus and others. *Solution applied to later rounds:* Previous to the RFA, we ask the missions to identify priority focus areas, based on areas about which they would like more evidence. With the missions providing the focus areas, these are aligned with USAID priorities overall and require less work on the part of USAID representatives.
   - **Prolonged processes to develop the RFA templates** Development of the first RFA template especially required significant rounds of feedback from CDR. The content section of the EA RFA, which addressed three focus areas in three country contexts, required significant rounds of comments from the respective Bureaus.
     - For the East Africa round, LASER used CSFA to determine the sector focus areas for each country, as well as to refine them. Requesting the sector focus areas from the mission for the Colombia RFA reduced the amount of time required for the CSFA process by at least 4 months.
     - Having applicants complete the gap refinement and contextualization for their proposed focus country, in collaboration with practitioners. This process is part of the revised RFA template that will be used for Vietnam and Ethiopia award rounds.
     - Having an existing RFA template for the following round one meant the time was reduced by 1 month.
     - Eliminating the concept note phase for award rounds (this is already being done, starting with the Vietnam round).

- **Prolonged approval processes** For the East Africa round, the lack of early mission feedback in determining the sector focus, appeared to impact time for concurrence, following award recommendations. The need for concurrence from three countries also increased the time prior to final approval.
    - Solution applied to later rounds: Engaging the mission at the onset, in sector focus identification and in RFA application reviews, will presumably reduce the time needed for negotiation of mission concurrence because USAID staff will have been more intimately involved in the RFA process from the beginning. This will have it's own challenges that we will have to navigate, including appropriately managing requests for USAID staff time, but we anticipate that it will still result in more and better awards being issued in less time.. We also anticipate that our shift to single-country RFA's will reduce mission concurrence time, in comparison to our multi-country RFA approach, because it avoids conflicting USAID priorities and streamlines the approval process.

At this writing, LASER is still in the process of finalizing the first round of awards, focused on the sub-sectors identified for East Africa, The Colombia award round process is just entering the request for the full application phase, so it is early to speak of the process issues and results of this activity.

2b. Thinking about your theory of change, implementation model, and your progress/achievements to date: What are the 2-3 elements that are working best? Why? What is working less well? Why?

The Theory of Change (TOC) for LASER PULSE is as follows:

Closer collaboration between academic researchers, development practitioners, policymakers, and donors results in new research that is readily translated into useful policies, products, and practices as evidence-based solutions to development challenges.

LASER tracks the extent to which our activities create the change we hope to see, as summarized in LASER's TOC and expanded in the Outcome Mapping Vision), through monitoring of our progress markers, and reporting in the Outcome Monitoring Journal.

The LASER activities below are functioning well to create the change expressed in our TOC.

1. **The use of the Comprehensive Success Factor Analysis to drive RFA gap refinement**

Comprehensive Success Factor Analysis (CSFA) is a method to identify sector gaps and to refine the sector focus for LASER RFAs. CSFA has been used to identify the issues for each R4D and award round focus. CSFA was meant to identify gaps in country-level systems, where the results of embedded research translation could be used as evidence for greater investment in collaborative partnerships between researchers and practitioners. CSFA has been adapted in response to our findings for the East Africa, Colombia, Vietnam award rounds, and is currently being applied to the Ethiopia anticipated award round. CSFA is applied to identify gaps at a systems level in sector priority focus areas. Once identified, the gaps enable us to refine a focus for LASER RFAs. To date we have refined sector focus areas for: Youth engagement in agriculture, water security, and social and emotional skills for basic education (East Africa); Integrated rural development, youth, and Venezuelan migrant crisis response (Colombia); Small and medium enterprise competitiveness, water pollution, and air pollution (Vietnam); and Predictors and indicators of resilience, and youth civic engagement (Ethiopia). This focus has enabled us to develop RFAs for four award rounds in various stages of implementation. As these

RFA rounds are one of the main vehicles (as well as buy-ins and network engagement) through which we promote researcher-practitioner collaboration, it is key to the success of our vision, as represented in our TOC, to have a robust methodology to identify these gaps.

2. The Integration of embedded research translation into buy-in research projects

Buy-in activities are currently LASER's main vehicle for assessing the effectiveness of our approaches to support the change reflected in our TOC. LASER has recorded (through Progress Marker reporting) changes that validate our approaches in implementation of the Uganda Indigenous Peoples, the Tusome, and the South Sudan buy-ins. These changes include: researchers engaging other researchers in effective practices conducting research with communities; and observations about researcher-NGO collaboration in research translation. A few observations noted the desired changes in activities outside of LASER - especially with researchers who have had roles in LASER buy-ins. For example, Purdue's Shah Family Global Innovation Lab Seed Grant Round for 2020 had several entries, and at least one winning entry, that were inspired by LASER approaches and partnerships. This was the case with Dr. Jennifer Deboer, responding to a challenge from Plan USA on a girls' empowerment project, as well as with CARE USA responding with a challenge for the Seed Grant Round, after previous engagement with LASER (at the Uganda R4D conference).

With respect to the question of which elements of LASER's TOC, model, and activities aren't going as well, several external factors (gov't shutdown, CoVid-19) have cause cascading delays in the implementation of important LASER activities like R4D convenings, RFA releases, and subsequent awards to researcher/practitioner teams. Because of these delays, we don't feel like we have sufficient evidence to determine if those elements of our model are as effective as we anticipate. For example, while most indicators map well against Y2 targets, four of them (LP-7, LP-11, LP-13, LP-18) have yet to report any data because they are tied to pending LASER research awards.
Until research awards are well underway, buy-ins will continue to provide our best evidence to validate LASER approaches, but we have not yet finalized explicit guidance on integration of embedded research translation into LASER's detailed Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for buy-ins. Recently, the Research Translation Working Group (comprising all consortium members) has been developing such guidance, and will be integrating it into the SOP so that all new buy-in activities will include this focus explicitly. A link to an updated list of LASER buy-ins can be found under Section 7 below. See Section 6 below for more details on performance monitoring.

2c. Next year's work-planning is coming up, how might you adapt approaches or activities to leverage what's going well? Address elements that are not working as well?

LASER has developed a **Recalibration Plan** that will be fleshed out in Y3 planning to help us to leverage what's going well and address the elements that need improvement. First, with respect to leveraging what's going well, this recalibration plan calls for.

Extending Reach and Sustainability

The LASER Recalibration plan leverages opportunities to implement differently to expand reach, to apply existing CSFA trees for gap identification, among other strategies. For example, CSFA is undergoing adaptation from Purdue research team-applied to boundary partner-accessible, so that in Y3 LASER network members are able to access materials to apply CSFA on their own to identify gaps in sector system conditions. The CSFA team is also currently designing training materials tailored for two sets of audiences (leaders, and researchers/practitioners). Through the release of these materials in year 3, LASER hopes to 'democratize' this methodology as a systems lens to frame

and contextualize the work of individual researchers and practitioners and highlight opportunities for enhanced impact.

The Recalibration Plan also addresses the bottleneck challenges encountered in the award rounds described in 2a and 2b and responds to COVID-19 with contingencies for planned activities. **At this time LASER plans these adjustments to R4D events and award rounds:**

- R4D conferences will not be implemented in Year Two, but LASER will move forward with the award round for Vietnam. At such a time when we are able to travel to Vietnam and convene our boundary partners we will hold a post-award launch event (planned for Y3).
- The R4D conference planned for Ethiopia in Y2 is postponed until Y3. Depending on timing and opportunity, LASER will either hold an award round followed by a post-award launch event, or will hold a preaward R4D conference, followed by an award round. To date we are unable to confirm with the Ethiopia USAID Mission which is the more likely scenario for Ethiopia, given its COVID context.
- A global award round will be led by UND in Y3. It will be followed by R4D launch events in countries where awards are made. The details of this round are still being developed, and there are certain unknowns that will likely persist into the second half of Y3, such as the countries where LASER is able to make awards.
- A post-award launch event will be held in Colombia at such a time when this is possible - now planned for Y3. Post-award R4D events will use awards as examples of embedded research translation, but also for advocacy of LASER approaches (ERT and CSFA). This is part of the sustainability of LASER. This will be addressed through approaches that make sense according to LASER relationships in that country, as well as to country contexts.
- In order to disseminate LASER approaches more broadly, we will continue to present our work at conferences and prepare manuscripts for peer-reviewed journals.

3. MAJOR MILESTONES / ACHIEVEMENTS

3a. Q1 and Q2 FY 2020: Describe the top 2-3 milestones / achievements during this reporting period.

- **East Africa Award Round:** The first LASER Award round resulted in the recommendation in March of 2020 to fund 6 applications (2 in basic education, 3 in food security, and 1 in water security) for a total of $1.45 M in awards. Currently, the awards are pending concurrence from the USAID Missions in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Please see Table 1 below for details pertaining to the number of concept notes and full applications.

Table 1. East Africa RFA Concept Note Summary

Concept Note Status	Applicant Type			Development Sector			Totals
	US HEI	UIC In-Country	UIC Other	Basic Education	Food Security	Water Security	
Received	18	44	1	15	38	10	**63**
Accepted*	15	37	1	15	29	8	**52**
Selected for Full Application Request	10	2	0	4	5	3	**12**

* Concept notes that conformed to all required submission criteria

- **Colombia R4D Workshop** (please see this report for more detailed output and outcome data)

The objectives for the R4D Workshop, all of which were met through its implementation, were as follows:

1. Identify missing factors in consideration of the three priority sector areas through discussions with researchers and practitioners, and the application of modified CSFA tools.
2. Facilitate connections and opportunities for collaboration between researchers, and between researchers and practitioners.
3. Improve the understanding of LASER's concept of research translation
4. Ignite interest in sustainable development research funding among policymakers.

Table 2. Colombia R4D Conference Participant Summary

Participant Type	Female	Male	Latin America	Africa	US / Canada	Total	Percent
Researchers	16	17	32	1	1	33	28.2%
Implementers	23	27	49	0	1	50	42.7%
Donors	6	11	16	0	1	17	14.5%
LASER Staff	6	11	2	2	13	17	14.5%
Total	**51**	**66**	**99**	**2**	**16**	**117**	100%

LASER engaged Colombian researchers and NGO representatives in advance through discussion groups to gain important insights into three sector focus areas: (a) Integrated rural development, (b) Youth and (c) Venezuelan migrant crisis. The feedback from these groups helped to shape the conference session focus, which in turn provided background and focus on the content for the RFA template. The advance work with participants enabled us to engage them to lead many of the sector-focused sessions. Table 2 above provides a breakdown of participant numbers by category, country, and sex[1]. Following this workshop, Colciencias, the ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation in Colombia, has reached out for a call to discuss some elements of LASER, specifically regarding how we evaluate development research applications. Colciencias administers a national program for applied research directed towards regional development priorities financed by its general system of regalias through the tax revenue secured from the non-renewable resource extraction sector. The linked (inserted in the title above) Colombia R4D Workshop Report provides detailed information on the event, its preparation, and how it contributed input to the Colombia RFA.

- **'Visualizing Venezuelan Migration Issues in Colombia' Hackathon**

As a year two approved activity, and a follow-on activity to the R4D Workshop, the hackathon allowed LASER to build upon collaborations with Colombian universities and the USAID Colombia mission, which we view as important social capital to promote LASER approaches for sustainability of our work in Colombia. LASER PULSE collaborated with The QED Group, Data Elevates,

Table 3. Hackathon Team and Person Count

Institutions Represented	# of Teams	# of Persons
Univ. del Norte	2	6
Notre Dame (ND)	7	21
Purdue	12	34
UNAL	6	17
ND/Purdue	2	7
Total	**29**	**85**

[1] Note that in this table 'Implementers' refers to NGO practitioners and policymakers.

Tableau, and USAID/Colombia on a data visualization hackathon around Venezuelan migration issues for Colombia. Table 3 below shows the numbers of teams/submissions, and the total number of individuals who participated. After a formal review process, 11 submissions were sent to USAID/Colombia for final selection of three winning teams.

1. The winning team was "Why Women Code" from the University of Notre Dame, with an outstanding data visualization entitled "A Staggering Exodus into Colombia."
2. In second place was "Grupo Migración y Salud de la Universidad del Norte," with a data visualization entitled "La Migración Me Quedo o Me Voy?"
3. The third place team was "Scope Consulting" from Purdue University, with a data visualization entitled "Eder and the Venezuelan Migration Crisis"

USAID's Center for Development Research tweeted the results about the three winning groups, as did both the Colombia USAID mission and LASER:

- https://twitter.com/GlobalDevLab/status/1248686874492796928
- https://twitter.com/GlobalDevLab/status/1248687255050506240
- https://twitter.com/GlobalDevLab/status/1248690118665424899

Additionally, Notre Dame produced a story on the winning teams.

3b. Cumulative: Please describe the top two achievements over the life of your award/contract.

While LASER is still early in our program implementation, we propose that our two key achievements to date are the following:

1. Operationalizing embedded research translation

LASER has successfully institutionalized our approach to embedded research translation by mainstreaming it into all of our processes, from the R4D forums through which we promote it, to our RFAs, buy-in SOP, and our MEL processes.

Table 5. Number of LASER Research Translation Approach Meetings

Entity Type	Colombia	Thailand	Vietnam	Ethiopia	Total
NGO	10	4	19	4	37
University/Center	10	2	14	10	36
Gov't. Ministry	2	0	3	3	8
Donor	4	1	3	1	9
Total	26	7	39	18	90

The LASER award rounds advance solutions to development challenges through collaborative partnerships that promote dissemination of the research translation outcomes of those partnerships. LASER as a program mainstreams research translation through all of its mechanisms and documents, including through award processes; buy-in program design; through training at R4D workshops; and online through embedded research translation certificate training. Table 4 provides numbers of LASER network members and R4D Workshop participants trained in this concept.

In addition to more formal training on embedded research translation, LASER consortium members have held discussion group meetings with LASER Boundary Partners in Colombia, Thailand, Vietnam and Ethiopia for the purpose of promoting understanding of, and gaining support for, LASER's concept of embedded research translation partnerships. These meetings vary widely in participation, so that we might meet with 2 or 3 people at an NGO discussion, but 25 at a university meeting. In Colombia, researchers made presentations on their development research and discussed challenges and opportunities to collaborate with NGOs. Donor meetings there included German and Canadian assistance, as well as the European Commission. Vietnam's very different context resulted in

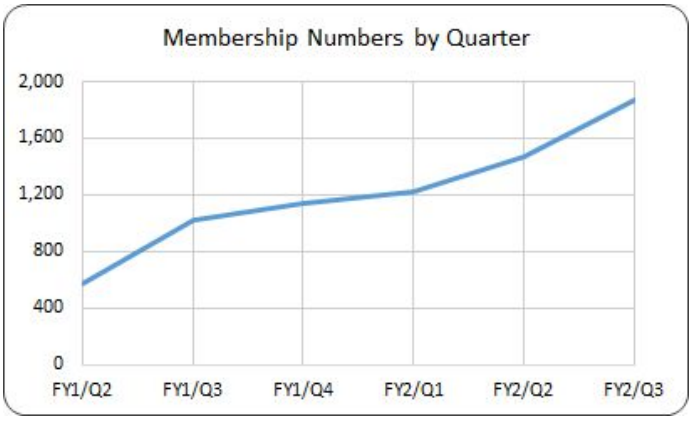
meetings with some different kinds of entities - more quasi-government research centers, and a considerable number of local NGOs. While LASER does not expect that one or two exposures to discussion groups or a training will necessarily change behavior of our stakeholders, we do expect that such exposure will influence them so that if opportunities for such partnerships arise, they will have resources to help them take advantage of those opportunities (See point 2, under section 2b).

Table 4. Aggregate Count for LASER Research Translation Training (at R4D and Online)

Type of R4D Participant or Network Member	Gender			Training Via		Totals
	Female	Male	Unknown	R4Ds	Online	
Development Professional	35	44	0	58	21	79
Researcher	113	146	6	74	191	265
Industry Collaborator	2	3	2	–	7	7
Donor	5	9	0	14	--	14
Total	**155**	**202**	**8**	**146**	**219**	**365**

The LASER concept of embedded research translation, in which research that is co-designed all along as its application framework, appears to us a significant difference from other definitions of research translation. Purdue and CRS are currently conducting research to understand whether the LASER definition is unique, and if not, what other organizations operationalize the definition LASER uses. LASER will provide results in a report '*LASER PULSE Research Translation Literature Review Report'* that will be available (and uploaded to USAID's DEC) by the next reporting period.

2. LASER Network Engagement



LASER has increased its membership of both researchers and practitioners at a steady rate, and engaged its members in funding opportunities and in training resources. The LASER network platform aims to help researchers and practitioners 'match up' in partnerships for LASER awards and other development collaborations, as well as to access training and learning opportunities around LASER approaches and methods. LASER provides online training resources for all members, including certificate training on gender integration and on research translation, both of which are required for award applicant teams. To date, 429 members have taken gender training, and 301 have taken the training on research translation. Additional training is to be finalized by the next reporting period, when data on network members' use of this training will be provided.

At the end of this reporting period, the LASER Network comprised a total of 1,863 members (43.5% Female; 51% Male; 5.5% not reporting a gender) with 647 new members added in Y2 Q1/Q2. As shown in the chart, growth of the Network slowed during the last half of Fiscal Year (FY) 1, but has resumed a steadily increasing pace to date in Y2. We have found that while the geographic focus for each award round has somewhat limited our opportunities to engage network members outside of the countries of that focus, we expect that our global award round, planned for Y3, will

expand our reach. Additionally, LASER cross-posts many non-LASER funding, training, and conference opportunities. By Y3 we will expand LASER outreach and value through an optimized internet platform[2] that provides increased visibility and facilitates searches and other interactions for members.

4. SUMMARY OF KEY ACTIVITIES FY 2020

Provide a description of the key activities undertaken in the reporting period (e.g. organized by the RF).

IR1: Increased HEI delivery of collaborative and effective development-focused research

Sub-IR 1.1: Increased capacity of LMIC HEIs to obtain, administer, and conduct effective applied research programs

1.1.2 Conduct focused research gathering activities among Asian researchers to provide information on institutional barriers in SE Asia for embedded translation

Between December 6-12, 2019, Makerere University's Resilient Africa Network (RAN) joined Purdue, IU and CRS on a field visit to Vietnam. RAN gathered data to conduct an analysis at eight Universities in two of the main cities, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Through qualitative research methods (focus group discussions and in-depth interviews), the team engaged researchers and administrators to explore the existing systems and infrastructure that support research translation capacity to address development challenges related to business competitiveness, with a focus on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), and air and water pollution. The research questions for the pilot visit were framed around the following dimensions/research focus areas: 1) Understanding the set up/university system in Vietnam, 2) Research infrastructure, 3) Linkages, partnerships, and collaboration, 4) Continuity and sustainability, 5) Research applicability, 6) Dissemination and knowledge translation, and 7) Research management and support systems. Preliminary findings are presented below and a detailed report for this activity will be submitted for the 2020 Final Performance Report.

- *Research:* There are strong research centers and research consultancy firms particularly in Hanoi that focus on applied research including air pollution and climate change, green innovation and water resources conservation. There was a reported need to further strengthen the quality of research done by HEIs. The communist system encourages female participation in public/technical service. There is a high-level participation of female faculty in research and female academic staffing level range between 40% and 70%.
- *Research translation:* Both central and local governments are in research question identification, dissemination of research findings, and the uptake of the findings.
- *Collaborations between practitioners and academics:* No clear guidelines exist on collaborations between practitioners and HEIs. However, some practitioner organizations regularly collaborate with Vietnamese researchers. Practitioner organizations tend to directly contract individual academics instead of an HEI due to the many bureaucracies and government control of public HEIs.

Sub IR 1.3 Increased inclusion of private sector, government, NGOs, and others in research for development

[2] LASER has received bids for this work and we are in the process of selecting a vendor.

1.3.6 Hold pre-R4D conference engagement meetings with researchers and practitioners to identify barriers and opportunities to partner with researchers

In planning for the Vietnam conference, LASER consortium members made two visits: One was a scoping visit in October, in which Purdue and IU LASER staff visited 19 universities, government think-tanks, and NGOs. During the second visit, from December 6-12, to Hanoi and HCM City, CRS led 13 practitioner focus group discussions (FGDs) in Hanoi and HCMC. The accompanying team (from IU, Purdue, and RAN) had further discussion groups in Hanoi and HCMC, with 21 universities, government centers, iNGOs, and local organizations.

For Ethiopia, a LASER scoping visit was carried out February 29 - March 7th. The team met twice with USAID representatives, and also with Ministers from Agriculture and from Science and Higher Education; with the highest-level representatives from 8 of the most important universities from around the country; and representatives of four international NGOs. Another visit was planned for April 6-10, led by CRS for practitioners and RAN for researchers but due to COVID-19, CRS made plans to carry out virtual key informant interviews (KIIs) with practitioners in mid-April. As of April 10th, the virtual Ethiopia workshop has also been postponed, necessitating a push back of the Ethiopia KIIs until later in the summer.

1.3.11 Revise, apply and document Comprehensive Success Factors methodology as it evolves and is applied adaptively in different country and regional contexts

CSFA's evolution from its first application in Uganda to an adaptive approach applied to Colombia, is summarized in the Colombia Report. In a move to 'democratize' CSFA, the team has created a draft guidance manual to train LASER staff, as well as a generic issue tree template to be contextualized for each sector and country. The team is creating a video training that will be linked to the LASER website, along with the finalized guidance manual, and workbook with templates for issue trees (generic, and examples). The democratization is meant to put this methodology in the hands of researchers and other BPs who would like to use this to identify gaps in sector focus areas from systems perspective.

IR2: Increased HEI synthesis, exchange, and translation of research results into useable development products and practices

Sub IR 2.1 Increased collaboration of development actors with HEI researchers throughout the research-to-translation value chain

2.1.1 Make awards for standard R4D grant round for East Africa

This activity was carried over from Year One, owing to a prolonged process of finalizing the first LASER RFA document, including both the basic document around LASER's processes and requirements, as well as the sector-specific content. This delayed process reflected the usual challenges of the 'first' round, one of which was related to USAID approvals for the sector focus areas proposed, given that these first round focus areas were not sourced from the East Africa missions, but were identified using an extended CSFA process. During this reporting period, LASER requested full proposals from 12 of the applicants from the table above, of which 6 were finally sent to the AOR for approval: 2 in education, 3 in food security, and 1 in water) as of March of 2020 for a total of $1.45 M in awards. A sidebar chart of data on the East Africa concept notes and full applications received is under point 3a above.

2.1.1 Make awards for standard R4D grant round for Colombia

The Colombia RFA was released, and a webinar was held for potential applications to pose questions. Additional webinars were held to provide guidance for Concept Note reviewers. The review of concept notes began March 27th, and was not completed until April 17th. By March 13th LASER had received 49 Concept notes, of which 6 were not reviewed because of incompleteness of applications. The breakdown for those advanced to the full proposal stage is shown in the table below. We expect to make awards in early August, and so will be able to report on awardees by the Final Year Two Report.

Table 6. Colombia RFA Concept Note Summary

Concept Note Status	Applicant Type			Development Sector			Totals
	US HEI	UIC In-Country	UIC Other	Youth	Venez. Migration	Int. Rural Develop.	
Received	6	43	0	14	15	20	49
Accepted*	4	39	0	13	13	17	43
Selected for Full Application Request	4	10	0	5	3	6	14

* Concept notes that conformed to all required submission criteria

2.1.6 Develop RFAs based on USAID sector priorities

An RFA was developed for Colombia, and sent out to R4D conference attendees, and their respective institutional leadership. USAID priorities were identified for Vietnam and for Ethiopia, and a CSFA survey has been carried out and analyzed for the Vietnam award round, which LASER expects to announce in mid-May, after having the green light to advance with this from the Vietnam USAID mission. This CSFA process is currently being undertaken for Ethiopia as well, so that LASER will be ready to hold a grant round when the Ethiopia mission allows this.

An updated RFA template (for use with Vietnam and beyond) is undergoing revision for future award rounds, based on updated guidelines that make the LASER focus on translation and gender criteria more transparent for applicants. Processes for reviewers have also been updated, to change from a numeric scale to an adjectival scale, and to use a consensus panel for discussion and final selection of applications. This template will be further updated to include guidance on refining, in partnership with practitioners, CSFA-identified gaps. This was not been finalized during the reporting period.

Sub IR 2.3 Enhanced capacity of HEI researchers to translate research results into usable products and practices.

2.3.1 Engage with buy-in and grant teams to guide translated products, communication, and applicable audiences and actors for dissemination; support content tailoring and timely dissemination of translation products

IU developed policy brief, project summary, communications, and implementation planning templates, which are currently under final review. Four tools have been completed and are available here, with guidance on their use. IU is currently developing guidance on the utilization of policy briefs and on using accessible language, as well as a poster template, targeted for completion by the end of Year Two.

IR3: Increased dissemination of translated research results for evidence-based solutions

Sub IR 3.1 Increased access among development actors and information brokers to good practices and systems for delivery of translated research

3.1.5 Deliver a Quarterly newsletter to network members

As planned, two quarterly newsletters have been produced in blog form (in November 2019 and in March 2020) to keep our members abreast of LASER PULSE activities and opportunities, and a notification with links to these were sent to network members. Additional newsletters will be produced and sent in June and in September.

Sub IR 4 Enhanced systems and structures for gender and minority considerations in the HEI network that enable women and minorities to conduct research

4.2 Review LASER RFA proposals to ensure adequate consideration and strategy to address gender issues

Gender mainstreaming has been built into the RFA template, in the form of guidance for applicants and an Annex with metrics. This is in addition to the LASER online gender training (and certificate) that is required for all applicant PIs team members. Additionally, training for reviewers contains guidance on how to review applications with a gender lens. And finally, the Grant Management document contains gender review guidance for grants managers. This document has not yet been finalized.

5. ENGAGEMENT WITH PARTNERS FY 2020

Provide a brief overview of how you've engaged with the partners that make up your HESN 2.0 Award, both internal and external. Be sure to include the addition of any new partnerships.

5.a List of partnerships (subawards/subcontracts, formal, or informal) with institutions of higher education

5.a - Please list partnerships (subawards/subcontracts, formal, or informal) with institutions of higher education, provide a brief (1 sentence overview), and estimate the amount of financial support with each institute of higher education (can be provided in an appendix if easier).

- Link to list of LASER PULSE Researchers and NGO implementers (84 institutions, with more than 1,800 researchers from 52 countries). LASER engages with its network members through quarterly newsletter/blogs, through announcements of training and funding (including LASER RFAs) opportunities, as well as through targeted requests for information and feedback.
- LASER PULSE's first award round (East Africa) resulted in anticipated awards to six teams, comprising many new partners. Because these awards are not yet finalized (some lack information to complete, and others lack mission concurrence, environmental or gender compliance documents, etc.), we are not yet at liberty to list the new partners.
- LASER's most recent buy-in activity, *The Nature and Scope of Trafficking in Persons* (TIP) in South Africa, is not yet finalized but comprises a partnership with a policymaker boundary partner:
    - **The Government of South Africa's Department of Science and Innovation** has been a partner in designing the program description for this buy-in, as well as the terms for a competitive call for proposals. Two teams, comprising three partner organizations, are currently in the final award/contracting stages, but because they are not yet finalized, LASER is not at liberty to list these expected partners.

5.b - New and ongoing partnerships for human and institutional capacity building between higher education institutions in the United States and developing countries are of particular interest.

1. **Dohuk University** is the partner for the Support to Traditional Cultural Practices for Northern Iraq buy-in, the Program Description for which was signed in September 2019. The buy-in team works closely with Dohuk to design the anthropological assessment tools, and to train U Dohuk researchers to undertake research to inform the design of the agricultural extension support needed for farmers to re-establish their cultural practices.
2. **Vietnamese universities and implementers** in planning for the Vietnam Workshop. Representatives from 40 NGO, government agencies, and HEIs engaged in pre conference meetings, as well as in feedback for the CSFA survey. More precise and focused engagement will come with the release of the Vietnam RFA planned for mid-May.
3. **Ethiopian universities and implementers** in planning for the Ethiopia Workshop: Pre-conference visits were made with 8 universities, 3 government ministries, and 4 international NGOs, to promote the LASER concept of embedded research translation, and the planned R4D conference and grant round.
4. **Colombian universities (Hackathon):** Universidad del Norte contributed data visualization submissions from 2 teams (6 people); and Universidad Nacional contributed data visualization submissions from 6 teams (17 people) to the LASER hackathon. These endeavors raised the awareness of the institutions, as well as of Colombia USAID Mission, of the importance of data visualization in understanding complex challenges, and it underscored the capacity of student teams to present quality data visualization products.

6. MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING (MEL)

Provide us with the most up-to-date progress against indicators, using the Indicator table below.

Table 7. Bi-annual Performance Indicator Table for LASER PULSE (Fiscal Year 2).

Key result Area (Intermediate Result)	Indicator # & Code	Indicator Name	Life of Project Target	Year 2*		Data Collection Method	Comments
				Target	Q1/Q2 Achieved		
Objective: Enhanced discovery and application in policy and practice of university-sourced, evidence-based solutions to development challenges	(1) L3.S.2_in1	# of program or policy changes made by public sector, private sector, or other dev. actors influenced by Lab-funded research results or related scientific activities	20	3	0	n/a	No results to report (please see the "Issues" sub-section below this table)
IR1: Increased HEI delivery of collaborative and effective development-focused research	(2) L3.S.1_in2	# of research products produced with LASER-supported funding	92	15	7	BIDRF**; Deliverables Tracker	2 LMIC, 5 Other; Tusome buy-in (1); PSE-1 (1); LASER Core (5) ^

Sub-IR 1.1: Increased capacity of LMIC HEIs to obtain, administer, and conduct effective applied research programs	(3) Custom LP.1	# of tertiary-level educators & faculty who complete pro. develop. activities w/ USG assist. [gender d/a]	560	160	262	R4D-RTL^^	118 F, 144 M; Colombia R4D conference & Online training
Sub-IR 1.2: Adoption by HEI networks of best practices for conducting and translating research	(4) Custom LP.2	Percentage-point improvement on research readiness assessment score [gender d/a]	--	40	0	Online register	Data not conducive to scoring; ind. to be redeveloped (see "Issues" section)
	(5) Custom LP.3	% of research proposals with adequate gender & translation components	--	70%	44%	RFA concept note scores	East Africa (36%); Colombia (53%)
Sub-IR 1.3: Increased inclusion of private sector, government, NGOs, and others in research for development	(6) Custom LP.4	# of development actors (d/a by institution) engaged in research for develop. [gender d/a]	500	128	77	BIDRF; R4D-RTL	38 F, 39 M; data from 10 Buy-Ins & 1 R4D conference
	(7) L3.S.2.2_in1-num	# of collaborative research initiatives resulting from engagement btw. researchers develop./ policy actors	28	10	0	n/a	No results yet; LASER research grants to be awarded in next reporting period
Sub-IR 1.4: Increased partnership opportunities for US and LMIC HEIs within the research to translation value chain	(8) L3.S.1.2_in3	# of institutions or affl. individuals associated w/ CDR research networks	4,050	2,220	1,863	Network registration data	Count is cumulative. 647 new in Y2 Q1/Q2 (562 UIC, 87%; 77 US, 13% US; 235 F, 411 M)
	(9) L3.S.1.1_in3	% of research projects led by UIC or MSI HEIs / research institutions (includes LASER buy-ins)	--	33%	0%	BIDRF; Program records	1 project, but led by a US HEI (see Issues section below).
IR2: Increased HEI synthesis, exchange, and translation of research results into useable development products and practices	(10) Custom LP-10	# of research products translated for use	80	9	7	BIDRF; Deliverables Tracker	Tusome buy-in (2); South Sudan (1); PSE (1); LASER Core (3) ^
Sub-IR 2.1: Increased HEI collaboration with field-level development actors throughout the research to translation value chain	(11) Custom LP.5	Partnership scorecard to measure deep collaboration (co-creation) btw researchers and develop. practitioners [gender d/a]	--	0	0	Online register	The metric is being developed; research grants yet to be awarded

Sub-IR 2.2: Increased capacity of field-level development actors to participate in the research to translation value chain	(12) Custom LP.6	# of development actors trained on translation (@ R4D conf. and on-line modules) [gender d/a]	270	80	66	R4D-RTL; Online register	28 F, 38 M; Colombia R4D conference & Online training
	(4b) Custom LP.2	Percentage-point improvement on research readiness assessment score [gender d/a]	--	40	0	Online register	Data not conducive to scoring; ind. to be redeveloped
Sub IR 2.3: Enhanced capacity of HEI researchers to translate research results into useable products and practices	(13) Custom LP.7	# of LASER-produced research translation materials (e.g. toolkit) utilized by researchers [gender d/a]	70	10	0	n/a	Materials have been developed, but research grants yet to be awarded
IR3: Increased dissemination of translated research solutions and policy	(14) L3.S.2.2_in2	# of convenings with decision-makers to disseminate research for use and/or develop policy recommend.	142	8	4	BIDRF	Tusome buy-in (3); South Sudan buy-in (1)
	(15) L3.S.2.2_in3	# of participants in convenings with decision-makers to disseminate research for use and/or develop policy recommend. [gender d/a]	4,375	125	81	BIDRF; In-person reporting	36 F, 45 M; Tusome & South Sudan buy-ins
	(16) L3.S.2_in2	# of instances of USAID OUs using CDR-supported research tools, approaches or mechanisms	34	8	12	BIDRF; Program records	2 bureaus, 6 missions, and 4 LAB-sponsored projects
Sub-IR 3.1: Increased access among develop. actors and information brokers to good practices and systems for delivery of translated research	(17) Custom LP.8	# of translated research products shared with networks, policy-makers, private sector, and/or donors	78	7	7	BIDRF; Program records	Tusome buy-in (2); South Sudan (1); PSE (1); LASER Core (3)
Crosscutting Sub-IR 4: Enhanced systems and structures for gender and minority considerations in the HEI network that enable women and minorities to conduct research	(18) Custom LP.9	# of female researchers, and/or US minority researchers, conducting LASER-funded research	28	10	0	n/a	No results yet; LASER research grants to be awarded in next reporting period

* This mid-year report covers program performance only for Q1 and Q2 of Fiscal Year 2.

** BIDRF = Buy-In Data Reporting Form

^ See list in Section 13 for details

^^ R4D-RTL = R4D Conference Registration and Training Logs

Summary of progress toward life of project targets (cumulative)

Reporting data is derived from the 10 buy-ins managed by LASER in Y2 Q1/Q2, the Colombia R4D conference held in October 2019, and from program administrative records relating to core LASER activities. Table 1 above consists of the 19 official LASER PULSE indicators ("official" signifying that there are targets associated with them); they are listed in red text from 1-18, with Indicator 4 being repeated (as 4b) under a different Sub-IR.

It cannot be overstated how much the delays in programming caused by external events (2019 government shutdown, 2020 virus pandemic) have impacted many of the performance indicators. Most of the progress reported displays a one-year lag due to the delayed implementation of their associated activities. Similarly, 4 indicators (LP-7, LP-11, LP-13, LP-18) have no data to report due to the fact that research awards have not yet been made. Nevertheless, Table 1 clearly shows that 9 of the LASER indicators are on an excellent trajectory with respect to Y2 targets: 3 indicators are already at or above their Y2 targets, while 6 indicators are greater than or equal to 50% of their Y2 targets – with the expectation that they will achieve or exceed them by the end of FY2. This includes some key indicators (e.g. research outputs, translation, capacity building), which implies that the core mission of LASER is on track due largely to a dedicated staff and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

Several other performance indicators, that appear to lag in relation to Y2 targets, are expected to catch up in Q3/Q4 due to: (1) the East Africa R4D research grants being officially awarded and work initiated, (2) Vietnam RFA and associated virtual activities conducted by LASER, and (3) the Colombia R4D research grants being officially awarded. Perhaps some activities of the Ethiopia RFD will take place by the end of the fiscal year to contribute to these, and other, performance indicators. It is also anticipated that several new buy-ins will be contracted in the next reporting period, as well.

While it is difficult to be definitive about program performance after only 3 of 10 reporting periods completed to date, LASER is confident that key indicators are signaling that great progress is being made despite some of the implementation challenges mentioned above. With the research awards phase about to gain its full momentum, those indicators yet to show data will begin reporting, while most of the others will be boosted towards their targets (especially from Y3 onwards). As such, the majority of the LASER indicators should be on a good trajectory towards the life of project targets – at least 8 of them already appear to be solid in this regard. A clearer picture regarding the Program's trajectory should emerge by the end of the Y2 Q3/Q4 reporting period, however, and will be addressed in the Y2 Annual Report.

Issues with Specific Indicators / M&E Updates

Of the 19 indicators: 7 show no data, while one (LP-3) massively exceeds its Y2 target. The following points explain these issues in some detail:

- **LP-1 L3.S.2_in1 # of program or policy changes made by the public sector, private sector, or other dev. actors influenced by Lab-funded research results or related activities**

  No data to report. Perhaps the South Sudan, Tusome, PSE-1, and/or SRLA buy-insis indicator will have data to report in Q3/Q4 for this indicator; several outputs have been produced from all but the latter, and it is with the fully expected completion of several buy-ins that at least one (if not all) of these buy-ins should generate the type of impact that this indicator is geared

towards. LASER has consulted with some PIs or Co-PIs to determine which of these buy-ins are likely to report a positive number for this indicator. LASER will also query appropriate personnel from the respective M/B/IOs, as well as the NGO and/or LMIC government entities that are relevant, to determine if any of their programs or policies have changed due to these LASER-managed projects.

- **LP-3 Custom LP.1 # of tertiary-level educators and faculty who complete professional development activities with USG assistance**

  The data for this indicator is from the Colombia R4D conference and LASER's online training courses on research translation and gender considerations in research. This is the first reporting period in which the online training participants have been counted and added to this indicator; LASER had no idea that such a robust participation rate would be observed for a given reporting period, and clearly the targets must be revised upwards to reflect this surprise. Note that LP-12, the sister indicator to LP-3 that tracks translation training for development practitioners, does not have the same "problem" since the participation rate for development practitioners is very much less; in addition, LP-12 does not include the gender training as part of its purview.

- **LP-4 Custom LP.2 Percentage-point improvement on research readiness assessment score**

  The intent behind this indicator was to measure the average improvement in online training participant scores over time by calculating differences in respondent scores based on a before and after quiz. However, the way the testing is set up precludes this structure, and LASER was then only able to look at differences if an individual took the training and quiz more than once. As a result, with a few exceptions almost every participant scored 100% on the first attempt. Therefore, the existing data cannot provide meaningful scores and so this indicator, and/or the way the quiz is presented, must be rethought and redeveloped. This also applies to LP-4b, which is just the same indicator applied to scoring development practitioners (under Sub-IR 2.2) that take the same online training modules.

- **LP-5 Custom LP.3 % of research proposals with adequate gender and translation components**

  Estimating targets for this indicator was very difficult because there was no basis from which to provide initial estimates, and so it was understood that the initial RFA(s) would be informative. Despite not meeting the target, the key result here is a clear improvement (increase) in the percentage from 36% for the East Africa RFA concept notes to 53% for the Colombia RFA concept notes. This likely reflects the greater pre-conference engagement that LASER had in Colombia with women researchers during in-country visits, as well as an emphasis in all HEI meetings to ensure that women researchers were at the table when LASER opportunities were discussed. Moreover, LASER held a webinar to discuss the RFA with potential applicants prior to the deadline for concept notes; both gender and embedded translation were emphasized since their inclusion into proposed research is key for LASER awards. Note that concept notes were used to measure this indicator (contrary to the indicator title) because explicit scores for the gender and translation components in the full proposals were not provided; in addition, the much greater number of concept notes allowed for more meaningful evaluation. The determination of "adequate" was made by counting the number of Colombia RFA concept notes that had average scores of 5 or greater (scale = 1-9) simultaneously for both gender and translation (i.e. each focal area had to be greater than or equal to 5 to be tallied). For East

Africa RFA concept notes, both gender and translation required average scores of 2 or greater (scale = 0-5) to be considered adequate in these judging sub-categories.

- **LP-7 L3.S.2.2_in1-num # of collaborative research initiatives resulting from engagement between researchers and development/policy actors**

  No data to report due to delay in awarding of LASER research awards. This indicator will have data to report for Q3/Q4 with the certain awarding of the East Africa grants and, most likely, the Colombia grants.

- **LP-9 L3.S.1.1_in3 % of research projects led by UIC or MSI HEIs / research institutions (includes LASER buy-ins)**

  No new buy-ins were contracted during the reporting period; the only project was the LASER-QED Hackathon, which was led by a US HEI. As, such, the data reported for this period is 0%. However, LASER anticipates meeting or exceeding the FY2 target upon the issuance of research awards beginning in the next reporting period (two new buy-ins are expected to be finalized, as well).

- **LP-11 Custom LP.5 Partnership scorecard to measure deep collaboration between researchers and development practitioners**

  No data to report. This was always intended to measure teams formed as part of the LASER research grants awards, although it could be applied to certain buy-in teams. A draft partnership scorecard has been developed and needs to be tested before deploying. This indicator will certainly be online for Y3.

- **LP-13 Custom LP.7 # of LASER-produced research translation materials (e.g. toolkit) utilized by researchers**

  No data to report. Several research translation tools were developed in March 2020, and LASER will begin tracking their use by researchers in the LP Network (and beyond to the extent possible). Thus it is anticipated that this indicator will begin generating data to report on in Q3/Q4 of FY2.

- **LP-18 Custom LP.9 # of female researchers, and US minority researchers, conducting LASER-funded research**

  No data to report. This was always intended to measure teams formed as part of the LASER research grants awards and, as such, it is anticipated that this indicator will begin generating data to report on in Q3/Q4 of FY2 when the East Africa research awards are underway, and especially in the 1st reporting period of Y3 when the Colombia research work begins.

7. USAID ENGAGEMENT FY 2020

Please provide a summary of progress for each active buy-in you during this reporting period.

Brief Summary of Current/Active USAID Buy-ins

A link to the Buy-In Update sheet is included here.

Potential USAID buy-ins to program (if applicable) FY 2020

The USAID South Africa mission, together with the Government of South Africa's Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) have worked with LASER to develop a draft PD, and to hold a

competitive process to award two teams (the teams are currently finalizing the PD) for a Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Buy-In.

Other engagements with USAID FY 2020

Describe engagements with USAID operating units other than the Center for Development Research.

- **USAID Center for Evaluation and Impact Assessment (EIA)** - Is the USAID partner for the Self-Reliance Learning Agenda (SRLA) Buy-In.
- **USAID Colombia Mission** 1) Participated in the Colombia R4D workshop; and 2) provided information to help LASER focus the Hackathon's call for data visualizations, and the mission also selected the three winning teams.
- **USAID Ethiopia Mission** - 1) Participated in several phone conversations to provide the sector focus areas for the CSFA, and also met with the LASER Team during our scoping visit (Feb 28 - March 6, 2020) to guide us in planning for the planned R4D conference.
- **USAID Laos Mission** - Is the USAID partner for the Applied Nutrition Research Capacity Building Laos (LANI) buy-in.
- **USAID Malawi Mission, USAID Nepal Mission, USAID Cambodia Mission, the Bureau for Africa, the Bureau for Asia, and the Office of Education/Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment** - Are the USAID partners for the Multi-Country Study on Inclusive Education buy-in.
- **USAID Global Development Lab Office of Program and Strategic Planning** - is the unit within the Lab that has been working with LASER and the Iraqi HEI partner to design the Northern Iraq Cultural Restoration Project buy-in.
- **USAID Somalia Mission** - Is the USAID partner for the Evaluation of Somalia's Accelerated Quality Learning buy-in.
- **USAID South Sudan Mission** - Is the USAID partner for the Impact Evaluation of Psychosocial Support on Children's Well-being Literacy, and Math Outcome in the Integrated Essential Emergency Education Program buy-in.
- **USAID Uganda Mission** - has been working extensively with the RAN team on the Uganda Indigenous Peoples buy-in implementation, but also in general connected with the USAID regional development initiative, that this buy-in feeds into.
- **USAID Vietnam Mission** - Has provided extensive guidance for LASER's sector focus area and planning for R4D conference.

Detail for the buy-ins referenced above can be found in a link at the beginning of this section.

8. LESSONS LEARNED / BEST PRACTICES FY 2020

Reflect on the past reporting period and describe "Lessons Learned" or "Best Practices" that emerged.

- Clarified definition of embedded research translation

LASER's definition differs from concepts of research translation that we have found to date. CRS is undertaking research of the grey literature on various definitions of research translation, so that a report on this investigation will be forthcoming by the end of the year. LASER's modified definition of research translation is as follows: *an iterative co-design process among academics, practitioners,*

and other stakeholders in which research is intentionally applied to a development challenge. Core to this approach are four translation pillars- partnership, process, product, and dissemination.

- Clarified definition of 'research' with LASER

Related to point one, we have found that there is confusion over LASER's definition of research. Participants commonly understand research, as an academic study, with a hypothesis, that leads to results in the form of publications in peer-reviewed journals. By 'research' LASER means to promote and operationalize '*the expertise of a researcher applied, in collaboration with a practitioner, to a development challenge toward a solution.*' This definition helps both researchers and practitioners see much greater opportunity for collaboration. It is challenging only when researchers would like to promote the research they have focused on, and are not open to adjusting their approaches. This is perhaps a challenge inherent in the culture and the system of academic research.

- Understanding the challenges and opportunities for engagement with USAID missions

LASER's experiences engaging USAID missions has shown some very clear advantages to promote collaboration on embedded research translation. Missions undertake extensive consultative processes every five years, with government leaders and other stakeholders, to develop the next Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). Thus, when missions propose focus areas for LASER RFAs, we know we are getting the results of that process. And LASER is able to position itself as a resource to advance the priorities of the CDCS, through promoting collaboration with academia (not traditionally a development partner for any donor) toward the country's development objectives. In this way LASER also advances self-reliance in the country, by strengthening the role of local institutions in development. All of these considerations are win-wins for LASER and the mission, and in working with the mission we gain credibility with international NGOs, other donors, and national government leaders. On the other hand, missions have many political considerations and obligations that can take the attention of diplomats and local staff at a moment's notice, and reduce their ability to focus on opportunities with LASER. Moreover, working with the mission entails mission concurrence formalities, which can create bottlenecks in LASER timelines for advancing award rounds prior to releasing an RFA.

9. PIVOT POINTS / CHALLENGES FY 2020

Discuss possible pivot points and/or challenges that your HESN 2.0 Award/Contract has identified during the reporting period. This should include new opportunities for collaboration and impact as well.

LASER's key pivot points have been summarized in 2c above, summarizing anticipated changes from this reporting period. USAID has already helped LASER to identify bottlenecks in our processes, and has supported us to think through opportunities to expand the scope of our reach with respect to our boundary partners. The outcome of this collaborative planning is a *Recalibration Plan*. We expect to reduce bottlenecks experienced in the previous award rounds by three months (instead of six) through:

- Using already identified gaps in sector focus areas from previous award rounds (youth engagement in agriculture, social and emotional skills in basic education, water resources, rural development, migration response challenges, youth in post-conflict contexts, predictors and measure of resilience, youth civic engagement and peacebuilding, SME competitiveness, water pollution, and air pollution);

- Having applicants complete the gap refinement and contextualization for their proposed focus country, in collaboration with practitioners;
- Eliminating the concept note phase for award rounds (this is already being done, starting with the Vietnam round).

With respect to *expanding LASER's scope*, during the course of the remaining six months for Year Two, the CSFA team will finalize materials for the 'Democratization of CSFA.' A summary of this undertaking, and a link to more detail, is providing under point 3b above.

Also linked to expansion of scope, LASER will undertake a Global Awards Round in Year Three. This round will target researcher-practitioner teams in all countries where we are able to make awards (non- congressional notification or funding cap countries) where we had not previously held rounds. This expansion of scope will enable us to expand the network, or to serve members in countries where we have not yet provided opportunities. There is a potential loss of opportunity for impact that will need to be addressed through strategies to capture such impact potential once mission concurrence is provided for awardees. The country focus enabled us to build on existing relationships to promote LASER widely across HEIs and other institutions, and to engage more deeply with missions. We will need to plan to do this post-award with the global round. The recalibration document has several ideas on how we might do this, and we shall expand on those and detail them for the Year Three Plan.

10. KEY ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT REPORTING PERIOD

Summarize the activities that are planned for the next reporting period (not including buy-ins). List steps that your HESN 2.0 Award intends to take to ensure the award's continued success.

- East African round awarded: These research grants are currently in the awarding phase, with Purdue's business and contracts offices requesting documents from proposed sub-awardees.
- Colombian round awarded: The current timeline has LASER making these awards between mid-July and August.
- Awards for Vietnam recommended to USAID: The timeline for this planned round is aggressive, with the target month being September to at least complete the review process and recommend awardees to USAID. Given this timeline, we propose a process that eliminates the concept note phase (requires a Letter of Interest so that LASER knows how many reviewers to plan for each sector).
- New online trainings (at least five): New online training modules for LASER PULSE Network members is now being prepared. Among those being developed: Common mistakes in LASER proposal submission; Best practices and considerations for researcher-practitioner partnerships; Outcome mapping for program design; How to promote your research in accessible language; and Bridging gaps between researchers and local communities.
- CSFA video, manual, and workbook completed: These activities will be undertaken as described in the summary provided in point 3 of this document.

As addressed in Point 2, and especially 2b, above, LASER has managed adaptively to build upon what has worked, and to recalibrate in response to bottlenecks in awardmaking, and need for greater reach with respect to program approaches.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

LASER's FY 2020 work plan was reviewed by the U.S. Global Development Lab's Bureau Environmental Officer (BEO) for potential environmental impacts and received a categorical exclusion for each included activity pursuant to 22 CFR 216.2(c)(2).

12. GENDER/SOCIAL INCLUSIONS CONSIDERATIONS FY 2020

Please summarize any efforts made/activities performed that support gender equality and social inclusion during this reporting period.

The LASER Program Director works collaboratively with the Gender Specialist from Makerere University to provide recommendations and input into 1) LASER gender requirements and metrics for LASER research award RFAs, as well as WebEx guidance for award applicants on gender mainstreaming, and award reviewers on how to assess gender considerations by applicants; 2) LASER Buy-Ins; and 3) LASER gender mainstreaming consideration trainings for Network Members. At least one additional USAID-funded program being implemented through Purdue (the Food Safety Innovation Lab) requires its subaward applicants to take the LASER gender training.

13. DELIVERABLES COMPLETED FY 2020

Provide a list of deliverables submitted during this reporting period, especially DEC and DDL uploads.

Translated Research Products

- **A Journey to Self-Reliance: Successfully Scaling and Transitioning Kenya's Tusome Early-Grade Reading Program** Completed by the Tusome Buy-In (Lead Author: A. Jalloh, CRS), with the final version approved by USAID in November 2019; uploaded to the DEC on January 16, 2020.
- **Tusome Early Grade Reading Case Study (Webinar PowerPoint Presentation)** Completed by the Tusome Buy-In (Lead Author: H. Inyega, University of Nairobi), with final version approved by USAID in November 2019; pending upload to the DEC.
- **Private Sector Engagement Evidence Gap Map (EGM) Platform** Completed by the PSE-1 Buy-In (Lead Author: P. Perrin, University of Notre Dame), with review by USAID in March 2020. Link to the platform is via GitHub; upload to the DEC is not possible.
- **Impact Evaluation of Psychosocial Support on Children's Well-being, Literacy, and Math Outcomes in the Integrated Essential Emergency Education Services (IEEES) Activity** Completed by the South Sudan Psychosocial Evaluation Buy-In (Lead Author: A. Benitez, Indiana University), with final version approved by USAID in March 2020; pending upload to the DEC.
- ***LASER-CGDV Hackathon Data Visualizations:***
  - **"A Staggering Exodus into Colombia"** created by a team from the University of Notre Dame (1st place).
  - **"La Migración Me Quedo o Me Voy?"** created by a team from Universidad del Norte in Colombia (2nd place).
  - **"Eder and the Venezuelan Migration Crisis"** created by a team from Purdue University (3rd place).

Research Products

- **Tusome Case Study: Final Report** Completed by the Tusome Buy-In (Lead Author: W. Bazeyo, Makerere University), with the final version approved by USAID in December 2019; uploaded to the DEC on January 16, 2020.
- **Application of Comprehensive Success Factors (CSF) Systems Analysis to Inform Development Research in Colombia, Part 1: Venezuelan Migration Response (VMR), Youth in Development** Created by Purdue University (Lead Author: J. Sinfield); approved by USAID on May 5, 2020 and uploaded to the DEC on the same day.
- **Application of Comprehensive Success Factors (CSF) Systems Analysis to Inform Development Research in Colombia, Part 2: Integrated Rural Development (IRD)** Created by Purdue University (Lead Author: J. Sinfield); approved by USAID on May 5, 2020 and uploaded to the DEC (with a display embargo) on the same day.
- **LASER PULSE Research for Development Conference Report: Uganda 2019** Created by Purdue University (Lead Author: A. Burniske); uploaded to the DEC on December 19, 2019 following USAID approval.
- **LASER PULSE Research for Development (R4D) Workshop Report: Bogota, Colombia** Created by Purdue University (Lead Author: A. Burniske); uploaded to the DEC on February 19, 2020 following USAID approval. .
- **Private Sector Engagement Evidence Repository** Created by the PSE-1 Buy-In (Lead Author: P. Perrin, University of Notre Dame) to house all of the catalogued PSE literature, thus it serves as an integral component of the EGM platform. Link to the platform is via GitHub; upload to the DEC is not possible.
- **African HEI Research Capacity Assessment Dataset** Created by Makerere University (Lead Author: R. Mayega); pending upload to the DDL.