ASEAN-U.S. PARTNERSHIP FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE, EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY (PROGRESS)

A MID-YEAR ASSESSMENT OF THE ASEAN-U.S. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FELLOWS PILOT PROGRAM

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## ACRONYMS

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAAS</td>
<td>American Association for the Advancement of Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMS</td>
<td>ASEAN Member State(s)</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<td>ASEC</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations Secretariat</td>
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<td>COST</td>
<td>ASEAN Committee on Science and Technology</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
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<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
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<td>MoU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<td>PoA</td>
<td>Plan of Action</td>
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<td>PROGRESS</td>
<td>Partnership for Good Governance, Equitable and Sustainable Development and Security</td>
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<td>S&amp;T</td>
<td>Science and Technology</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>U.S.-ASEAN</td>
<td>United States Mission to ASEAN</td>
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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This mid-year assessment of the 2014 ASEAN-U.S. Science and Technology (S&T) Fellows Pilot Program serves to identify the challenges and successes in the first seven months of implementation and to translate the findings into useful recommendations for the program’s second year. The report was prepared considering the four program objectives:

1. Advance regional cooperation
2. Strengthen science-based policy-making
3. Build scientist capacity to influence policy
4. Enhance U.S. – ASEAN Science & Technology cooperation

After collecting and analyzing data from 18 interviewees, as well as written materials produced by Fellows and PROGRESS, the findings and recommendations are summarized below.

The main strengths of the pilot program are that:

1. Fellows had unique professional opportunities to gain exposure to new people and places. They built connections with their peer Fellows and got to interface with influential policy-makers and scientific experts.

2. Fellows have acquired new skills and knowledge, increasing their capacity for influencing policy.

3. Specifically, the mid-year Science & Technology Fellows Program’s Capacity Development Training Workshop and participation in COST Meetings were deemed very successful. Fellows unanimously rated these events highly in terms of implementation, relevance, and effectiveness.

4. Each individual Fellow has expanded his or her professional network. This, in turn, contributes to the building of a network of scientists and policymakers throughout ASEAN and beyond, hopefully translating to increased linkages between ASEAN Member States, as well as between science and technology.

Conversely, the main challenges in this pilot program are that:

1. Some Fellows felt they were not placed in the host ministry/institution best positioned to support them in terms of subject matter, level of commitment to the program, and connections to appropriate ministries or individuals to impact policy.

2. Some Fellows struggled to be recognized as colleagues in their host placements and lacked credibility when contacting other ministries. A lack of knowledge about the S&T Fellows Program—even within their work environment—prevented access to helpful resources.

3. Some interviewees requested clearer articulation of the outputs expected at the end of the program. Given the broad task of “influencing policy”, they question the feasibility of accomplishing this within one year’s time.
4. The selected group of Fellows did not reflect a balanced representation in terms of AMS, gender distribution, nor focus areas. Additionally, the pilot program participants numbered only eight, with even fewer (six) anticipated to see the program through to completion.

**Recommendations:**

1. Increase recruitment efforts and dissemination of application information.

2. In determining both the number of Fellows and the number of focus areas, consider the advantages of support, cross-border collaboration, and regional impact in having Fellows from different ASEAN Member States share subject areas.

3. Strive for representation from each of the ASEAN Member States (AMS), as well as greater balance between males and females. Inform and follow up with each country to ensure candidates from each AMS are nominated by the required deadline.

4. Place Fellows in the ministry that most closely corresponds with their thematic focus area and/or one that already has a subject-relevant initiative to which the Fellow could contribute.

5. Ensure that host institutions, mentors, and supervisors understand the commitment they are making to the Fellow and the program. Prioritize mentors or resource persons based in the same country as the Fellow.

6. Make it clear to the host institution and supervisor that the program is not intended to be a scientific research fellowship. In communicating this to prospective Fellows, make mention that while not the primary objective of the program, there may be research-related activities involved, which will vary from one fellowship to another.

7. Include capacity-building sessions on communication and writing early on in the program or during the orientation. Condense the number of panel discussions and panelists per discussion. Try to select panelists with thematic areas directly applicable to the Fellows. Consider a peer review/feedback opportunity for Fellows’ Plans of Action.

8. Consider facilitating mid-year Focus Group Discussions (FGD), bringing together the Fellows in each thematic focus area and inviting them—along with other experts—to provide comments and suggestions on each Fellow’s draft policy recommendations.

**II. INTRODUCTION**

This report is an evaluation of the ASEAN-U.S. Science and Technology Fellows Pilot Program, funded by USAID and launched by PROGRESS in April 2014. With the cooperation of the ASEAN Secretariat, the program embedded eight scientists within five host ministries in Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam to promote science-driven policy making. With the aim of informing subsequent years for the program, this report describes and analyzes the relevance, effectiveness, and intermediate
results with relation to the program goals. PROGRESS will conduct a final assessment at the completion of the pilot year to capture final results. This is anticipated to take place around April 2015.

The work was initially carried out from October 1st to October 31st and was informed by reports and other documentation made available by PROGRESS staff. Additional interviews were conducted in November and December 2014, after submission the first draft of this report. There were eight questions for this assessment outlined in the terms of reference:

Relevance
1. Are the activities and outputs consistent with the overall objectives of the pilot program?
2. Does the program meet the needs of the key stakeholders?

Effectiveness
3. How effective is the implementation of the Fellowship program?
4. How effective is the participation of the supervisors in the program?
5. How effective is the: 1) mentoring support, 2) AAAS support, and 3) the PROGRESS project support provided to the fellows?
6. How effective was the recent leadership and communication workshop in terms of serving the needs of the Fellows?

Intermediate Results
7. What are the key achievements (outputs and activities) of the current pilot program relating to policy processes and engagement? How does it support the supervisors in terms of policy making in their host ministries?
8. Are the program goals being achieved/are likely to be achieved? If so, how and to what extent? If not, why not?

III. BACKGROUND

As articulated by the PROGRESS program, “In a region that leads the world in technological innovation and advancement in a number of burgeoning fields, there are surprisingly few scientists consulted by AMS governments on policy decisions that may have long-term effects on the environment, economic growth, and ultimately, the quality of life of citizens.” PROGRESS, in collaboration with USAID and the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC), set out to implement a program that would enable ASEAN to play a role in institutionalizing a culture of science-based policymaking throughout the region. In 2014, they piloted the ASEAN-U.S. Science and Technology (S&T) Fellows Program, embedding eight early career scientists within government offices in their respective AMS home countries where they work to promote and advance data-driven policymaking.

This program aims to establish a cadre of ASEAN’s science and technology leaders with the capacity to work at the crossroads of science and policy. ASEAN-U.S. S&T Fellows, currently midway through their fellowship year, are working directly with AMS ministries to bring science to the policymaking process.

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1 PROGRESS Draft 2015 Workplan
2 Context from S&T Fellows Program Brochure_Prospective Applicants or Partners_9.19.2014
They serve as liaisons between the scientific community and government officials and engage in diverse activities within their areas of expertise to advance ASEAN priorities. Applicants receive a monthly stipend, mentoring and professional training.

PROGRESS anticipates expanding the program in 2015, embedding up to 16 Fellows within ministries across one of three ASEAN priority areas. This assessment serves to inform and influence the implementation of the second program year, building upon the strengths and addressing the challenges identified in the pilot year.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Focus

This assessment was conducted using the qualitative Rapid Assessment Procedure (RAP) approach, which aims to generate programmatically useful information. Selected in order to obtain quick feedback, this technique is particularly useful for identifying where corrections should be made mid-course in the implementation phase of projects. The assessment relied on data collection and analysis techniques whereby qualitative methods were complemented and reinforced by survey information and desk review of secondary data. The team used data triangulation—or the use of multiple data sources—to check and establish validity of information collected. Questions were analyzed from the perspectives of Fellows, supervisors, mentors, and administrators.

Data collection methods included in-depth interviews complemented by a desk review to determine intermediate results, as well as firsthand impressions of various program aspects. The overall approach encompassed:

a. Collection of primary data through 18 semi-structured interviews. The team collected primary data from seven fellows, six supervisors, three mentors (including one USAID representative), and a representative from each U.S.-ASEAN and ASEC. Data collection from Fellows and stakeholders was conducted through in-depth interviews inquiring about the Fellows’ experience, professional development, and outcomes. The interviewees were asked about the influence of the program elements on the Fellows’ progress toward achieving the program objectives. The semi-structured interview guides are included in Annexes A-D.

b. Secondary data sources for the desk review include reports written by the Fellows and analyses, quarterly reports, and communication materials produced by PROGRESS.

Data from Fellow, supervisor, and mentor interviews was collected in confidence. Names, countries, and other specific identifiers have been left out of this report in order to preserve their anonymity.

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B. Limitations

Mentioned below are limitations, shortcomings, or conditions outside of the researchers’ control that might influence the assessment results.

Given the location of most of the interviewees, the majority of the interviews were conducted verbally via telephone or Skype. Though every attempt was made to facilitate clear connections for calls to interviewees overseas, there were occasions outside of the team’s control where connectivity issues prevented the interviewers from clearly hearing an interviewee’s voice. In an attempt to work through unclear or disjointed audio, interviewers reiterated what had been heard to confirm accuracy. In the worst case scenarios, they followed up via email requesting written clarification.

With a narrow window of time, there were some interviewees who were unable to accommodate the proposed interview times before the initial deadline. After submitting the first draft of the report, PROGRESS was able to schedule additional interviews and has incorporated this data into the assessment.

PROGRESS took measures to conduct this assessment objectively and without bias. The initial recruitment process for an external, independent M&E Specialist to lead this and other assignments produced a strong candidate who was unfortunately unable to begin work by the date necessary. As a result, PROGRESS, with USAID’s concurrence, arranged to conduct the assessment in-house by Addie Ryan and Nathya Yahya. It is noted that Nathya Yahya, the PROGRESS M&E Assistant who also contributed to the assessment, had prior involvement in the Fellows program, including previous interactions with Fellows. Although no Fellows or supervisors cited shortcomings or improvement areas with regards to support received from PROGRESS staff, it should be noted that they may have been hesitant to do so, given that the interviewers were PROGRESS staff.

V. THE FINDINGS

A. Relevance

1. Consistency with Program Objectives

   a) Advance regional cooperation

The ASEAN-U.S. Science and Technology Fellows Program connects scientists with one another and with policy-makers throughout the ASEAN region. For many Fellows, the highlight of the ASEAN-U.S. S&T Fellows Orientation Program—and even of the program to date—has been the connections they have made with their peer Fellows, with experts in their fields throughout ASEAN, and with policy-influencers in their communities. One Fellow said,

“Travel and meeting with many interesting people [with] expertise in the area I’m working on. That’s the biggest opportunity and I appreciate it so much, to know more people and gain networks.”

U.S.-ASEAN PROGRESS
The orientation program and mid-year capacity building workshop brought the Fellows together and allowed them to share their experiences with one another; cultivating relationships of support and, at times, collaboration that could continue remotely. In this pilot year, there were seven (originally eight) Fellows focusing on five thematic areas. Several Fellows noted the potential for yet greater ASEAN cooperation and impact had there been a peer Fellow in another AMS with whom they could collaborate, support one another, and compare findings in a shared subject area. However, some Fellows have been cooperating despite subject area differences. One Fellow has been actively contributing submissions to the online newsletter ASEAN-NDI (Association of Southeast Asian Nations – Network for Drugs, Diagnostics, Vaccines, and Traditional Medicine Innovation) and has solicited contributions from at least one other ASEAN Fellow. The pilot program is a positive start in linking scientists throughout the ASEAN region, yet there is more potential in terms of enhancing regional cooperation on ASEAN strategic priorities. After highlighting the benefits of the network of thousands of AAAS program alumni, one mentor noted that similarly with the ASEAN-U.S. program,

“It would be nice to build a network of people who then [in the future hold] influential positions... If ASEAN could develop a similar network [to AAAS], that would be fantastic.”

b) **Strengthen science-based policy-making**

At seven months into its pilot year, there is insufficient evidence to evaluate whether or not science-based policy-making has clearly been strengthened as a direct result of this program. As the first program of its kind in the region aiming to link science and policy-making, it only represents a first step toward increasing the engagement of the scientific community in the policymaking process throughout ASEAN Member States. With only six Fellows anticipated to fully complete the pilot year, there is unlikely to be an overwhelming impact. However, each Fellow has already cited an expanded professional network midway through this first year. By continuing the program with increasing numbers of participants, ASEAN will be building an expanding network of ASEAN-U.S. S&T Fellows and program alumni across the ASEAN region. As the program expands, there will be greater potential for visible impact.

c) **Build scientist capacity to influence policy**

Participation in the ASEAN-U.S. Science and Technology Fellows Program has allowed scientists to expand both their technical and interpersonal skills. The Fellows—many of whom came from laboratory work environments—have discovered new methods of data collection, learned new communication techniques, and gained knowledge about the world of policymaking. Some Fellows have been engaged for the first time in qualitative research, involved in interviews, and focus groups with community members. Others have discovered the tedious task of policy desk research, immersing themselves in countless reports and regulation readings. Through practical experience and formal training, all of the Fellows have developed a better understanding of what it takes to communicate with policy-makers verbally and in writing. In some cases Fellows discovered that “persistence” and “negotiation” skills were needed to gain access to networks of policy-makers or to get a meeting within a particular ministry. For the self-proclaimed introverts, this communication, when coupled with the task of
networking, proved to be the biggest challenge and the area of greatest capacity improvement toward influencing policy. According to one Fellow,

“...the training I have received really helped my personal development. With interpersonal skills and meeting a lot of people who make change as a policy dialogue, I [now] talk to people and help them to recognize solutions...to better do their jobs.”

All Fellows said that they have improved their communication skills toward policy-makers as a result of this fellowship and further testimonies are cited in the Workshop Implementation and Overall PROGRESS Support section below. The knowledge and networks acquired through this program seem to be equipping scientists with the skills and resources to take a more prominent role in their respective country’s integration of science into policymaking.

**d) Enhance U.S. – ASEAN Science & Technology cooperation**

The AAAS S&T Policy Fellowship Program, from which the ASEAN-U.S. Science and Technology Fellows Program was inspired, has served as a model in the design and objectives of the program. AAAS alumni presented at the ASEAN-U.S. S&T Fellows Orientation Program, giving new Fellows a sense of what to expect, inspiration for activities, and a newfound network of peers and mentors in the U.S. The US-ASEAN connection between these two fellowship programs has been primarily one of mentorship. Further U.S.-ASEAN peer-to-peer cooperation on science and technology developments as a direct result of this program has yet to be realized.

**2. Fulfillment of Stakeholder Needs**

Supervisor accounts provide insight into the perception of the program from the perspective of the host ministries and institutions. Among six supervisors interviewed, four said the program was in line with their expectations and two said their Fellow was not meeting their expectations in terms of delivering outputs and impact. One of the latter interviewees explained,

“I expect that the Fellow shall be able to present a new and ‘out of box’ solution to the problem based on scientific approach rather than an ‘ordinary solution’.”

This supervisor went on to acknowledge the fact that the candidacy pool was quite small in this pilot year and the profile of the selected Fellow—though the best among the applicants—did not quite match their needs.

Not having direct involvement in the program implementation, Dr. Alexander Lim (Science and Technology Division, ASCC Department within ASEC) was unable to evaluate the program in terms of meeting ASEC’s needs, though his feedback on the program recruitment and management has been incorporated into this report.

The U.S. Mission to ASEAN is quite pleased with the program thus far and is eager to see it continue and expand. Likewise, a representative from USAID said that the program “has gone very well for a pilot year”. Stakeholders in general are yet unable to evaluate the program at its mid-year point, without
knowing what results, outputs and effects will be realized at the conclusion of the pilot year and beyond. It will be important for PROGRESS to follow up with the various stakeholders at program year’s end and afterward to best evaluate whether their needs and expectations were met.

B. Effectiveness

1. Workshop Implementation and Overall PROGRESS Support

In addition to the monthly financial provision, PROGRESS has supported the Fellows by organizing two key events to date in the pilot year. The ASEAN-U.S. S&T Fellows Orientation Program in Jakarta at the commencement of the program April 1-7, 2014, served to explain the objectives of the program and introduce the participants to USAID, ASEC, and AAAS. During this workshop, Fellows had the opportunity to meet one another, hear from AAAS alumni, and develop Plans of Action for their fellowship year. They also heard from guest panelists represented by ASEC, AAAS, and various CSOs on a variety of topics related to engagement between scientists and policy. As one Fellow attested,

“[The orientation program] absolutely was beneficial. The training explained about what we were going to do and what my responsibilities are. It was very useful. Before the training, I didn’t know what type of job I was going to do but afterward I knew very well.”

All Fellows and supervisors who attended the event said this introduction was useful, though many supervisors were unable to attend for various logistical reasons. Teresa Leonardo—USAID/RDMA’s Sr. Regional S&T Advisor and Activity Manager for the ASEAN-U.S. Science and Technology Fellows Program—noted the importance of supervisor attendance at this event in informing and cultivating overall engagement in the program, suggesting stronger encouragement of attendance in future program years.

Two Fellows mentioned that the panel discussions were not necessarily relevant to all Fellows, one citing “information overload” and another highlighting the fact that some Fellows did not share the subject area of any of the expert guest panelists. One Fellow mentioned that more time could be allocated to developing the plan of action (PoA). Teresa Leonardo stressed the importance of this step, advising that the PoAs receive more feedback and focused attention to set the appropriate expectations and direction for the fellowship year. She also suggested,

“Maybe [Fellows] could bring their PoAs to the capacity-building event at the one- or two-month mark. Then Fellows could provide input into each other’s POAs.”

Fellows also benefited from the ASEAN-U.S Science & Technology Fellows Program’s Capacity Development Training Workshop and COST Meetings, held August 19th-24th, 2014 in Jakarta and Bogor, respectively. Seven fellows attended these events, since one Fellow had withdrawn from the program for personal/medical reasons. Seventy-one percent of attendees evaluated the leadership and communication training overall to be “excellent” and found that it “fully” met their expectations. Eighty-six percent of the fellows who attended conveyed that the facilitators’ style and methodology were excellent. Not only did Fellows unanimously say they benefited from this leadership and communication
workshop, but some even cited specific examples of application and knowledge sharing in their workplaces. As one Fellow recounted,

“...during the workshop it was funny, we were asked to write a persuasive memo and all of us wrote [as] we were used to doing in research proposals—long background, objective, method—but a persuasive memo is actually quite different... This had to be revised from two pages to a half page.”

In further evidence of the impact of this workshop, the Fellow continued,

“My supervisor asked me to write a briefer for the president of [my country] and I used my knowledge from this [event] to prepare our agency activities in a briefer.”

All of the participants said that this content was helpful and wished the communication and writing sessions were given earlier on in the pilot year or as a part of the orientation program.

The supervisors have worked relatively independently from PROGRESS, with the exception of communication about their Fellows’ quarterly updates. Not being direct recipients of PROGRESS support, they were largely unable to speak to the level of support PROGRESS has provided to the program and the Fellows. A few interviewees expressed that it would be nice if PROGRESS would provide financial support “to enable the supervisor accompanying the Fellow attending a national or international seminar or workshop on their topic.” Though the offer was made to all supervisors to travel to Jakarta for the program orientation, none were able to make arrangements to do so due to scheduling conflicts. Dr. Lim similarly postulated that the program would see “more aggressive” supervisor and mentor participation if there were remuneration for what are currently volunteer roles.

One mentor said he did not expect or need much support from PROGRESS, though suggested that a quarterly check-in would be helpful in order to have a little more understanding or ability to contribute to the objectives of the program. Natalia Kessler of the U.S. Mission to ASEAN noted that PROGRESS Program Manager Zullia Saida had been “very helpful and always very professional”.

2. Supervisor Participation

Within their host ministry, each Fellow was assigned a supervisor, typically someone relatively senior who is familiar with the policy-making process and could help guide and connect the scientists in their new domain. The nature of the relationship between supervisor and Fellow is varied. Fellows and supervisors based in the same department and general workspace might have daily interaction, whereas others might only meet face-to-face once per month, depending on travel schedules and the level of collaboration or support needed for the Fellows’ tasks. Though quite busy in their permanent roles, Fellows said their supervisors were willing to make time to meet with them. One supervisor stressed,

“Being a supervisor, you really need to set aside some time to work with the Fellows and to discuss with them more often constructively so you can make sure the Fellows can learn and improve their communication skills [for use with] the policy makers.”
More than one Fellow expressed that it has at times been disadvantageous that their supervisor does not share their specific academic background. As one Fellow said,

“I hoped my supervisor would have my same focus so we could collaborate. He can’t give me specific advice on [my focus area] content.”

To the contrary, another Fellow described particularly strong supervisor support,

“He is VERY supportive. Whenever I need something he gives me the appropriate resources to prepare. He is really great. He encouraged me to go to workshops to meet with a lot of people. At meetings he would introduce me to people who work in other organizations and ministries and... he introduced me to local policy makers.”

Despite some challenges, the Fellows notably appreciated their supervisors’ guidance on the topic of networking, particularly in understanding who to talk to and getting initial introductions.

3. Mentoring

In addition to a supervisor, each Fellow was to be assigned a mentor outside of his or her host institution. The mentors in this pilot year were AAAS alumni, American PhD Scientists in their Fellows’ general area of expertise who had transitioned from science to government.

One of the challenges identified throughout this assessment was the identification of mentors. Dr. Montira Pongsiri, Champion for the ASEAN-U.S. Science & Technology Fellows Program and AAAS alumna, left her position as Science Advisor to U.S.-ASEAN before program implementation began. In her absence, PROGRESS, along with USAID and U.S.-ASEAN struggled to find available AAAS mentors for each of the Fellows. As a result, Teresa Leonardo served as a mentor for two Fellows. The program was unable to identify a mentor who shared the area of expertise for one Fellow or to identify a replacement mentor for a second whose mentor could no longer participate in the program. PROGRESS has a need — along with USAID and U.S.-ASEAN —to think through how to better identify and establish a strong mentor aspect to the program, whether with the help of AAAS or U.S. Missions and Embassies within participating AMS.

As observed with the supervisors, mentors have demonstrated varied levels of engagement with their Fellows during the pilot year. Many of the mentors are based or traveling in a different country than their mentee, lending most communication to be via email. Each of the mentor interviewees identified the physical remoteness and communication between themselves and their Fellows as significant limitations to their role as a mentor. They all recommended finding a way to get the mentors and mentees to meet, one suggesting a gathering of all mentors and Fellows “for a lessons learned or a sharing event”. One interviewee who was able to meet his mentee in person described the change he experienced after having this opportunity,

“For the first few months it was really difficult for me to get an idea what [the Fellow’s] experience was and her plan for the fellowship. In my experience that is really very normal... It
really changed when I met [the Fellow] in Jakarta. [It helped me] understand her experience, what she is capable of, and her plan for the fellowship.”

PROGRESS and USAID acknowledged this would be beneficial, but that PROGRESS would likely be unable to provide funding support for mentor travel. Teresa Leonardo suggested that a priority for the mentoring component in future program years should be identifying mentors or resource persons based in the same country as their mentees. In spite of the challenges posed by the geographic separation, Fellows expressed sincere appreciation for the advice and networks the mentors shared with them.

Some Fellows appeared to either not need or not take advantage of the benefits of the mentor relationship, whereas others seemed to seek an unanticipated level of technical direction from the role of the mentor. In committing to this role, the mentors were asked to check in monthly and share their own experience transitioning from the world of science to policy, to serve as a sounding board for ideas and problem-solving, and to help Fellows think through the career impacts and trajectory this Fellowship could influence. One of the mentors whose Fellow was not requesting support commented on the challenge of determining the appropriate balance between being proactive in the mentor role versus “on standby” and suggested that “some additional clarity on that would help”.

For many, it seems, the frequency of communication with mentors has decreased since the first several months of the program. As one Fellow explained,

“[My mentor] is very supportive... really helped me to connect to other people. I just feel like [my supervisor] and I work well and my job is OK so I didn’t reach out to [my mentor] that much. I should work on that.”

Though the majority of Fellows admitted to not having reached out to their mentor for support in recent weeks, most said they received prompt and helpful responses when they had last done so.

4. AAAS role and support

The assessment team was asked to assess the effectiveness of support provided by AAAS. In asking Fellows, supervisors, and mentors about the level of support they received from AAAS, most interviewees were unclear on what type of role or support AAAS should have been providing throughout the program. In speaking with program managers, it became evident that AAAS was neither asked nor expected to play a continuous support role in ASEAN-U.S. Science & Technology Fellows Program. As such, this assessment question was not entirely appropriate. In this pilot year, the main interactions between AAAS and program participants took place during the orientation program and throughout the year between Fellows and their AAAS alumni mentors. Supervisors and Fellows alike expressed the usefulness of hearing from AAAS about their experiences at the orientation. In fact, one Fellow said that hearing from AAAS was “the most useful part” of the orientation program. A few of the Fellows have maintained email contact with AAAS members they met at orientation and one Fellow even took inspiration from an AAAS initiative presented at the orientation and implemented it within her fellowship.
VI. INTERMEDIATE RESULTS AND LESSONS

A. Strengths and Achievements

1. Program Strengths

The strengths of this program are most clearly showcased among the opportunities that have been made available to the Fellows. With the opportunity to travel to new places for their work, Fellows have met local and international government representatives, spoke with experts in their fields, and engaged in cultural exchange with their peer scientists. These exchanges are the first steps in building a sustainable cross-border ASEAN network among Fellows, and among scientists in general.

Via PROGRESS-facilitated events and of their own initiative, Fellows have gained new knowledge and skills, further equipping them to influence policy and work toward achieving the program goals. As highlighted previously, the mid-year communications and writing workshop was very successful in building Fellows’ capacity. Both this event and the subsequent COST meeting in Bogor were highly regarded by Fellows, USAID, and U.S.-ASEAN. PROGRESS will want to consider repeating these activities and building upon these program strengths in subsequent years.

Additionally, Fellows gained access to new networks of scientists and policy-makers. With assistance from supervisors and mentors, Fellows gained access to established networks of policy makers. One Fellow praised the program,

“Overall you have such powerful and supportive people that are willing to connect our fellows to their network. I really, really appreciated that.”

Some Fellows found additional, less formal mentors throughout their fellowship. Two interviewees specifically expressed gratitude for the guidance and networking connections provided by Dan Rathburn of DAI-Bethesda. With each Fellow networking in his or her field as well as with their peer Fellows, the fellows program lends itself to increased linkages between ASEAN Member States, as well as between science and technology.

As one Fellow attested, the program objective in itself embodies the opportunity potential for the ASEAN region:

“To use my science background and do something good for my country, that's the biggest opportunity I think. I have seen a lot of policy going on in [my country] and other countries that cannot be implemented because they don’t know what is going on [in terms of relevant scientific background].”

Fellows understand that policy is best applied when using science as a basis. While acknowledging it is a long-term process, they expressed a desire to contribute to positive policy change in their countries and the ASEAN region.
2. Key Achievements

Listed below are examples of activities and outputs accomplished relating to policy processes and management. In the program’s first seven months, one or more of the Fellows:

- Prepared policy briefs on the role of science and technology in policymaking
- Attended meetings, workshops, seminars and international conferences to present on and learn about policy within their research focus area. These events were hosted by INGOs, the UN, and host institutions.
- Held discussions with the policy-makers in their host ministry, the national planning and development agency, and other stakeholder institutions such as the national water operations agency.
- Prepared a report for host ministry submission to be used for study, data modeling, and development of data tools.
- Developed educational materials on how to lead an evidence-based policy dialogue.
- Participated in the development of university-level policy course curriculum.
- Submitted publications to an online publication and recruited other potential contributors to do so (both writers and stakeholders.)
- Engaged in dialogue with local government leaders (village, city), advised on community-specific issues, and finalized a draft policy recommendation.
- Presented on the ASEAN-U.S. Science and Technology Fellows Program at local universities.
- Contributed writing to the InnovASEAN blog for a non-scientific audience

B. Challenges and Limitations

1. Challenges for Fellows

Fellows have encountered many challenges throughout their participation in the fellowship program. The two most notable challenges were the lack of information—or in some cases lack of information trickling-down—about the program provided to relevant ministries, and secondly, the suitability of the host ministry and Fellow pairings to meeting both parties’ objectives.

Several fellows who were placed in the S&T Ministry noted a disconnect between their host and their subject area. In more than one case, the current supervisor does not have the same academic background as their Fellow to best support and connect them to relevant experts or policymakers in the Fellow’s field. In other cases, the host ministry may not have relevant on-going initiatives the Fellow can leverage or the selected Fellow may not be the ideal fit to best meet their host ministry’s priority needs.

Because of the bureaucratic nature of ASEAN governments, breaking into the appropriate ministry network on one’s own is challenging. One Fellow suggested,

“Maybe the Ministry of Science & Technology can make contact with other ministries in my country so they can send the fellows to the ministry that is most suitable.”
Whereas the S&T Ministry is a helpful resource and gateway connection, it does not necessarily fit as the environment for Fellows’ work immersion. In other cases this year, a ministry might be ill-fitting in terms of ability to fully engage in the program.

The second area warranting improvement is information dissemination about the program to, and throughout, the relevant institutions and ministries. In trying to integrate into their host ministries, certain interviewees expressed a sense of isolation and a quest for connection. Fellows struggled to explain their purpose and establish credibility, not only when attempting to connect with those ministries more closely linked to their thematic area, but even within their host ministry. One Fellow remarked that she was not recognized as a co-employee by the others in her work environment and that even the Human Resources Department didn’t understand her position. Another voiced unease in the workplace due to co-workers’ knowledge that the Fellows Program was funded by the U.S. Government. This associated suspicion and distrust served as a barricade against information and prevented inclusion in meetings where proprietary information may have been revealed. Even representatives at the COST meeting in Bogor were in some cases uninformed. One interviewee recalled that the COST representative did not even know that their S&T Ministry was hosting a Fellow until that meeting, six-months into the program. Other COST representatives thought the Fellows worked for USAID directly and did not realize they were actually, in a sense, working for ASEAN Member States and/or ASEAN as a regional organization.

Given the broad objectives of the program, Fellows have struggled to understand clearly the expectations for outputs and impacts. Gaining access to government resources and information takes time and the process varies from one country to another. On average, Fellows seemed to need about six months to become comfortable in their roles, understand the context in which they are working, and establish credibility within their new network. Yet others at seven months still struggle to understand how to influence policy in their country. One Fellow advised,

“Issues must be very concrete and specific in order for the Fellow to not only understand the context of the method, but also the cultivating process. I think this pilot program is very good and the goal is very beautiful. But maybe the duration must be a little bit longer for the second. Please [have a] very, very specific focus for the fellow.”

Other challenges mentioned by interviewees include the need to adapt from a science laboratory environment to a social-science research environment, learning how to meet and communicate with high level policy makers, and navigating the bureaucracy necessary to achieve their goal. These challenges are inherent in the nature of the fellowship and can be addressed, to a certain extent, by capacity-building initiatives, and otherwise with the Fellows’ efforts and initiative to learn and adapt. Specific feedback and recommendations on capacity-building efforts and needs are discussed elsewhere throughout this report.

2. General Program Limitations

One limitation the program inherently faces is the fact that the regional nature makes it hard to evaluate how the program is progressing for individual Fellows. For example, no one from the program’s
management (neither PROGRESS nor USAID) has been able to check in with the Fellows and supervisors in person in Burma. The goal moving forward will be to determine how to engage more with these supervisors in a way that is both productive and logistically feasible.

An unforeseen limitation for the program has been the unexpected resignation of two Fellows prior to program completion. One Fellow left in June 2014 and a second at the end of October 2014, both for personal reasons. With only 75% percent of the participants seeing the program to completion, this will skew the overall outputs and impacts.

Dr. Alexander Lim presented some areas for program improvement, stating that the “glaring observation” of the pilot year is the fact that seven out of eight selected Fellows were female and that certain countries (i.e. Malaysia) did not make the deadline for putting forth candidates and so did not participate in the pilot year program. Whereas one female Fellow recommended increasing the number of male participants to minimize family-related resignation, the assessment team does not promote this as a basis for candidate selection. The program could, however, benefit from a more diverse pool of applicants—and thus Fellows—in terms of male-to-female ratio and AMS country representation. USAID and PROGRESS did not have a role in the program promotion and application process during the pilot year, which was the responsibility of the COST representatives. In the pilot year, the applicant pool was quite limited and PROGRESS did not have control or influence over the diversity of the Fellows. In future program years, there are already plans and steps in place for greater promotion of the program, which is expected to increase the diversity of the applicant pool and overall competitiveness of the selection process.

From ASEC’s perspective, the departure of Dr. Montira Pongsiri was a huge loss and program implementation suffered as a result. Dr. Lim stressed that in addition to Zullia Saida’s management and administrative support, the program “absolutely” needs a dynamic and dedicated technical program leader who understands all of the technical focus areas and can assist PROGRESS.

3. Likelihood and Extent of Program Goal Achievement

If program goal achievement is defined as each Fellow having directly influenced a newly approved science-based policy, then expecting such results by the pilot year’s end is ambitious, to say the least. At the seven month mark, it does not appear likely that many new policies influenced by the Fellows will be in place after 12 months. Depending on the scale of the policy change—ministerial, national, or ASEAN-wide—influencing policy and seeing it through to implementation could take several years. As stated by one Fellow and echoed by others,

“One year is not enough to finish the objectives of the program. We have to understand the problem, collect the data, [do the] analysis, then the next year make the recommendation and justify to other experts. So I think two years is better.”

In considering the broader objectives of the program, the most visible impact is likely to be the participating scientist Fellows’ improved capacity to influence policy.
VII. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In considering the feedback from the interviewees, listed below are eight recommendations put forth for program recruitment, preparation, and implementation in the coming program year(s).

A. Recruitment of Fellows and Host Institutions

1. Increase recruitment efforts and dissemination of application information. As one Fellow said,

   “make sure people can apply. All my friends are very excited about the fellowship but they didn't know about it [last year].”

   This could be done via promotional visits to AMS and comprise visits to schools and institutions, including those recommended by this year’s Fellows. Plans for a promotional “Road Show” are already underway by PROGRESS.

2. In determining both the number of Fellows and the number of focus areas, consider the advantages of support, cross-border collaboration, and regional impact in having Fellows in different ASEAN Member States share subject areas. As one supervisor suggested,

   “The program is good but it is going to be better if you have a session that develops projects with multiple countries together. Like an ASEAN challenge, not for each country but ASEAN as a whole… If the Fellow can do the same topic as other fellows and look at the question as the ASEAN region, it would be better.”

3. When selecting Fellows, strive for representation from each of the eight eligible AMS, as well as greater balance between males and females. Inform and follow up with each country to ensure candidates from each AMS are nominated by the required deadline.

4. Place Fellows with the ministry, supervisor, and mentor that most closely correspond with their thematic focus area or that already has a subject-relevant initiative to which the Fellow can contribute. As one supervisor advised,

   “From my experience, those host ministries should have some sort of program activity in which the Fellow can be involved. Otherwise it is very risky that they don’t receive specific tasks; no opportunity for learning by doing.”

   The placement committee should also consider institutions, ongoing initiatives, and points of contact that the applicants have already identified. Utilizing established connections could expedite the orientation process and increase impact and outputs.
Create a place for this in the application and state that such information will be considered, but not guaranteed.

To ensure greater success in the program, facilitation of appropriate mentors and matching subject matter supervisors are critical. Mentors will provide the Fellows with backgrounds, scientific value added, and experience in how to push through scientifically-based policy recommendations in a bureaucracy. To the extent possible, facilitate opportunities for mentors and Fellows to meet and/or identify mentors based in the same country as their mentees.

Having the right supervisor that is responsible for the subject matter will be a guarantee for greater success as the Supervisor understands the challenges as well as possibilities on whether the proposed policy recommendation will have the chance to be adopted and implemented.

5. Ensure that host institutions, supervisors, and mentors understand the commitment they are making. If funding allows, this would ideally be done with a visit or tour that serves as an orientation for the hosts. Before the program begins, clear communication should be disseminated throughout the host institution – not only to the department head – about the program objective, the role of the fellow, and the expectations of the host ministry. This would increase Fellows’ ability to advance their tasks without the roadblocks experienced this year as a result of unfamiliarity with the program. Supervisor attendance at the orientation program should be strongly encouraged.

B. Prior to Program Commencement

6. Make it clear to the host institution and supervisor that the program is not intended to be a scientific research fellowship. In communicating this to prospective Fellows, mention that while not the primary objective of the program, there may be research-related activities involved, which will vary from one fellowship to another. Mid-year questionnaires and interviews demonstrated that this was an area of inaccurate expectations. For example, one fellow was expecting the fellowship to be focused on policy-making and was surprised to be spending 50% of the fellowship time still doing research. Other Fellows were expecting to have a research component to the fellowship and were surprised to not have any at all. One interviewee recommended, in reflecting on the orientation program,

“Maybe they should explain more specifics on our duties and what [outcomes] they expect from us at the end.”

C. Program Implementation

7. Include capacity-building sessions on communication and writing in the orientation program. Condense the number of panel discussions and panelists per discussion. Try
to select panelists with thematic areas directly applicable to the Fellows. If the next year will have three thematic areas, structure breakout session so Fellows are divided by thematic area and not overwhelmed by or dispassionate toward presentations unrelated to their field. Give more attention to and feedback on the Fellows’ Plans of Action.

8. Consider facilitating Focus Group Discussions (FGD) by inviting other experts to provide comments or suggestions on the draft policy recommendations being prepared by the Fellow. This might be most effective if there is one FGD per thematic area and not only experts, but the other Fellows in that thematic area, can provide feedback. If the capacity-building activity is moved to the beginning of the program year, as recommended above, the FGD could serve as a mid-year event.

D. Conclusion

A frequent concern expressed by Fellow and supervisor interviewees alike, is that of measurable outputs toward the program objectives upon completion. There were several recommendations by interviewees to extend the duration to 18 months or two years. One mentor also suggested providing the opportunity for Fellows to apply for an extension or second year of fellowship, which is offered in the AAAS Program. The assessment team isn’t prepared to make this an official recommendation, but more of a consideration in terms of setting objectives and expectations. One interviewee aptly articulated that it would be better,

“If the actual role of the Fellows [is] specifically stated as well as the expectations, because connecting science with policy is quite a broad objective. It’s better if is something specific, measurable, attainable, and realistic given the one-year time.”

The current program objectives are certainly worthy, so translating them into attainable and measurable expected outputs will be the challenge moving forward. The program should absolutely continue for a second year and with the recommendations presented here regarding recruitment, planning, and implementation the program should see increased engagement, capacity, and collaboration for what hopes to be a sustainable network of ASEAN science-based policy champions.

“I think if this kind of program is [continuing] longer, we can see a lot of people doing [similar initiatives]. We can see more impact, have a bigger network and have bigger influence. I strongly recommend other people to do it.”

-2014 ASEAN-U.S. S&T Fellow
VIII. Annexes

A. Semi-Structured Interview Guide - Fellow

1. How is your Fellowship going so far?
2. Describe how you envisioned the Fellowship when you applied for it and any ways in which reality has differed from your expectations.
3. Describe the activities you have already undertaken and the outputs you expect to achieve by the end of your fellowship.
4. How would you characterize your relationship with your supervisor?
5. How often do you meet with your supervisor and do you benefit from this interaction? If yes, what was most valuable? If no, what might have helped improve the situation?
6. How often have you engaged with your mentor and did you benefit from this interaction? If yes, what was most valuable? If no, what might have helped improve the situation?
7. What type(s) of additional supervision and/or advice would have been helpful?
8. Did you take part in the orientation training conducted by PROGRESS? Did the training prepare you for carrying out your task as a Fellow? Please explain.
9. What else, if anything, should have been part of the orientation to prepare you for the Fellowship?
10. How helpful was the August leadership and communication workshop in serving your needs?
11. How receptive do you feel that your host ministry is to the information and issues that you present? In what other ministries might Fellows in your thematic area have [more] impact?
12. What have been your biggest challenges during your Fellowship so far? How did you handle them?
13. What have been your biggest opportunities during your Fellowship?
14. What are the strengths of the Fellowship program and how would you build on them to improve the Fellowship in future years?
15. What are the weaknesses of the Fellowship program and how would you correct them to improve the Fellowship in future years?
16. Would you recommend participating in the Fellowship to others?
17. What are your recommendations for recruitment of Fellows for next year? Are there universities or other institutions we should contact?
18. Are you available to visit these institutions and make a presentation on the Fellowship and encourage others to apply?
19. Have you developed any science based analysis papers related to policy on the national level? (For ASEAN? If yes, how many analysis papers did you write? Have you presented your papers? If yes, where?)
B. Semi-Structured Interview Guide - Supervisor
1. How has the Fellows Program implementation differed from your expectations for it?
2. How did you find the action plan development process and how useful has this tool been in defining the fellow’s work?
3. How have you identified work tasks for the fellow? Has the fellow effectively understood and completed these tasks?
4. How often do you meet with your fellow?
5. Did you find your interactions with your fellow constructive? If so, please give examples.
6. What means do you use to communicate with your fellow?
7. Are you able to provide enough resources and guidance to your fellow? Is your fellow able to fully understand your guidance? (If not, what might help them understand or if so, what contributes to your success in this regard?)
8. Describe the level of support you and your fellow have gotten from AAAS.
9. Describe the level of support you and your fellow have gotten from the PROGRESS project.
10. Did you take part in the orientation training conducted by PROGRESS? How useful was this orientation for you and your fellow? Please explain.
11. What, if any, impact did you observe from your fellow following the August leadership and communication workshop?
12. What are the key outputs and activities that your fellow has achieved relating to policy processes and engagement? How does this support you in terms of policy making in the host ministry?
13. What are the strengths of the Fellowship program and how would you build on them to improve the Fellowship in future years?
14. What are the limitations of the program? Do you have any constructive feedback on how ASEAN can further improve the program?
15. What do you think you are gaining from the supervising process?
16. Given the opportunity, would you be involved in the program again? Please give reasons for your answer.
17. Do you have any recommendations for future supervisors for the Fellowship Program for another four years?
18. Are there other ministries in your government that could benefit from hosting fellows in the future?
19. Do you think it would be helpful to have fellows chosen by theme (environment, health, resource management, agriculture, etc.) and then matched to an appropriate host ministry?
20. What are some lessons learned that you think need to be incorporated into the fellowship program to make it more effective in the future?
C. Semi-Structured Interview Guide - Mentor
1. Describe how you came to be a mentor for the S&T Fellows Program.
2. Describe your experience so far as a mentor and how your current role compares to your expectations for it.
3. How would you describe the mentor role within the S&T Fellows program? ... (i.e. Teacher, Guide, Counselor, Motivator, Advisor, Role Model, Liaison/networker)
4. How often do you meet or talk with your mentee?
5. When was the last time you communicated with your mentee?
6. If not recently, why? Do you expect to be able to increase the frequency of contact in the remaining program months?
7. By what means do you communicate with your mentee? ... (i.e. Face to face, Email, Video conference, Telephone, Skype, Other)
8. Do you think your mentee benefits from your interactions with him/her? If able, please give examples.
9. Do you feel your professional and academic background was appropriate in enabling you to effectively mentor your Fellow?
10. What, if anything, have you gained from the mentoring role?
11. What support, if any, have you received from PROGRESS throughout this program?
12. What support, if any, have you received from ASEC throughout this program?
13. Given the opportunity, would you be a mentor again?
14. What are the limitations of the mentor role?
15. What do you think it takes to be an effective mentor? What advice do you have for future mentors?
16. Do you have any recommendations for how PROGRESS can further improve the mentor experience in future program years? Any additional feedback?
D. Semi-Structured Interview Guide – Administrator/Manager

1. How was the idea for the S&T Fellows Program developed and realized?
2. Describe your role within the S&T Fellows Program.
3. Describe the role of the USASEAN Mission within the S&T Fellows Program.
4. In its first 7 months, how effective has the implementation of the S&T Fellowship Program been?
5. How relevant have the Fellows’ activities been to the overall program objectives?
6. Throughout this program year, how much direct communication have you (and the USASEAN Mission) had with the fellows, supervisors, and mentors?
7. Do you think the Fellows are getting adequate support from their supervisors, mentors and PROGRESS?
8. What kind of coordination exists between the USASEAN mission, ASEC, and PROGRESS?
9. What kind of reporting does ASEC and PROGRESS provide to the USASEAN Mission?
10. To date, how has the implementation of this program differed from your expectations for it?
11. What improvements would you like to see to the S&T Fellowship program in a second year of implementation?
12. Any additional feedback
### E. Interviewee List

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Dr. Alex Lim</td>
<td>Science and Technology Division Division Head; ASEAN Secretariat</td>
<td>Division Head; ASEAN Secretariat Counterpart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Natalia Kessler</td>
<td>United State Mission to ASEAN</td>
<td>ASEAN Secretariat Liaison; U.S.-ASEAN Program Manager/Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Teresa Leonardo, Ph.D.</td>
<td>U.S. Agency for International Development Regional Development Mission for Asia</td>
<td>Senior Regional Science &amp; Technology Advisor; Program Activity Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Dyah Marganingrum</td>
<td>Indonesian Institute of Science</td>
<td>Fellow</td>
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<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Mie Mie Kyaw</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>Win Maw Hlaing Oo</td>
<td>Ministry of Transport</td>
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<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Maria Ruth Pineda</td>
<td>University of Santo Tomas</td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Honglada Thoektiattikul</td>
<td>National Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology</td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Anh Tung Pham</td>
<td>National Institute for Science and Technology Policy and Strategy Studies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pham Thi Thanh Nga</td>
<td>National Institute for Science and Technology Policy and Strategy Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Dr. Agus R. Hoetman</td>
<td>Director for International S&amp;T Network Supervisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Dr. Nyein Nyein Aye</td>
<td>Assistant Lecturer, Engineering Chemistry Department, Myanmar Maritime University Ministry of Transport</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. Hrin Nei Thiam</td>
<td>Director General, Department of Meteorology &amp; Hydrology Ministry of Transport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Dr. Nataporn Chanvarasuth</td>
<td>Senior Researcher, Policy Study and Biosafety Division, BIOTEC The National Science and Technology Agency Development Agency (NSTDA)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Bach Tan Sinh Ph.D.</td>
<td>Deputy-Director, Research Centre of S&amp;T Policy Ministry of Science and Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. Ta Doan Trinh</td>
<td>President of National Institute for Science and Technology Policy and Strategic Studies Ministry of Science and Technology</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Craig J. Starger, Ph.D.</td>
<td>U.S. Agency for International Development Regional Development Mission for Asia</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
</tr>
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<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Geoffrey Blake, Ph.D.</td>
<td>USDA Forest Service - International Programs</td>
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