REQUEST FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

PROGRAM/ACTIVITY DATA:

Program/Activity Title: Nepal Reading Skills Development Program
Under Operational Plan: Country Development Strategic Plan FY 13-17
Program Area: 3.2 Education
Program Element: 3.2.1 Basic Education
Program Sub-Element: 3.2.1.2 Primary Education
Country/Region: Nepal
Funding Begins: FY 12
Funding Ends: FY 17
LOP amount: US $25,000,000 estimated
Estimated activity start date: October 1, 2013
Estimated activity end date: September 30, 2018
Prepared by: Jayanti Subba
Date: March 5, 2013
IER: Original

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION RECOMMENDED: (Place X where applicable)
Categorical Exclusion: X Negative Determination (with conditions): ___
Positive Determination: ___ Deferral: ___
Exemption: ___

A. BACKGROUND

USAID/Nepal is working with the Government of Nepal's Ministry of Education (MOE) and development partners in the School Sector Reform Program pooled fund to develop and implement an Early Grade Reading Program with USAID funding of approximately $25,000,000 over the next five years.

The MOE's focus on reading outcomes is clear recognition that for Nepali children to be successful in school and in adulthood, they must acquire strong reading skills in the early grades. The proposed Nepal Reading Skills Development Program will support children, teachers, and parents to ensure that all children learn to read with fluency and comprehension in the first two grades so that they can "read to learn" by grade three. The program will accomplish its objective through three intermediate results: (1) improving early-grade reading instruction, (2) improving national and district early grade-reading service delivery, and (3) increasing family and community support to early-grade readers.

B. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

Following paragraphs describe the activities proposed for this activity:
1. Improving Early-grade Reading Instruction

The proposed program will help children learn to read in a language they speak and understand. The program will help teachers support evidence-based reading practices in their classrooms through the use of a core scope and sequence for each language being taught, linked to scripted lessons that support changes in instruction, and decodable and leveled reading materials for practice. The proposed program will help schools work within the current curriculum to ensure that all children have sufficient instructional and reading time, which should be at least 60 minutes per day, with additional after-school practice. To accomplish this result, the proposed program will undertake the following activities:

- Create, print, distribute and ensure the use of sets of leveled and decodable readers for grades 1-3 in each language being taught.
- Develop and implement evidence-based professional development and classroom coaching that helps teachers use improved instructional approaches to teaching reading, as well as classroom-level assessment to track student practice and adjust instruction accordingly.
- Increase time on task by helping schools analyze the way in which instructional time is used and ensure that sufficient focused reading instruction takes place, time is allocated for focused reading practice, reading practice reinforces content acquisition, and instruction in other subjects supports reading and writing improvement.
- Increase student reading time overall by assigning reading at home and encouraging students to use school libraries and other resources.
- Ensure that instruction and student learning outcomes improve by providing sufficient support to and supervision of teachers, incentivizing the use of effective teaching practices, rewarding creative approaches to mutual accountability at the school and district level in order to increase the use of new materials, focus instructional time, and increase opportunities for students to practice reading skills.

2. Improved National and District Early-grade Reading Service Delivery

The program will provide technical assistance to the critical government agencies providing support services to early grade reading activities. To accomplish this result, the program will undertake the following activities:

- Build the capacity of GON materials production and distribution systems so that each teacher and student has the materials they need to teach and learn.
- Introduce evidence-based approaches into the teacher preparation curriculum or as a separate teacher preparation module and will provide technical assistance to design and roll out more effective training and teacher support services.
- Support the development or adaptation of assessment tools that will begin to provide data that reliably describes the reading skills of students as well as technical assistance to the government at the national, district, and school levels on ways to use this data to improve
reading achievement. The project will also support the development and dissemination of data to parents and communities in appropriate formats.

- Provide technical assistance to ensure that a comprehensive professional development and coaching system focused on student reading outcomes is put in place. Where training is required, the technical assistance will help with the design of that training as well.
- Promote collaboration of all stakeholders through a national policy dialogue on early grade reading.
- Examine MOE's capacity needs around financial management, procurement, and related areas.

3. Increased Parent or Caregiver and Community Support for Early-grade Reading

The program will undertake the following activities:

- Support the development and implementation of a social marketing effort to increase awareness of parent and caregivers and social marketing for behavior change around simple, evidence-based activities to develop children's oral language skills and support early reading acquisition. It will also support training, probably in the form of parenting classes, to teach parents how to carry out these activities.
- Develop ways in which parents or caregivers and communities can learn how well young children can read when they are provided with effective instruction and sufficient time for learning and practicing reading, thereby changing social norms to ones of expecting success and taking action at the family, community, or school level.

4. Analytical Requirements

The project design team will support technical studies that will be used to inform the technical design of reading partnership activities. They are as follows:

- A national early grade reading assessment (EGRA)
- An assessment of Ministry of Education institutional capacity needs
- An assessment of existing early grade reading teaching and learning materials in Nepali and other mother tongue languages
- A study of classroom instructional practices:

C. JUSTIFICATION FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REQUEST

The activities outlined above in section B involve exclusively technical assistance, training, education, analyses, studies, workshops, meetings, and document and information transfers. These actions do not have an effect on the natural or physical environment. These activities fall under the classes of actions identified for categorical exclusions by 22 CFR 216 under 216.2(c)(2)(i), (ii), (iii), and (v). Hence, a Categorical Exclusion is recommended for all activities identified.
Clearances for Request for Categorical Exclusion for Nepal Reading Skills Development Program in Nepal:

John Stamm  
Director, SEED  
Cleared by e-mail  Date: 3/8/2013

Shanker Khagi  
MEO  

Andrei Barannik  
REA/Asia, Middle East & OAPA  
Cleared by e-mail  Date: 3/9/2013

Paul Kim  
Regional Legal Advisor  
Cleared by e-mail  Date: 3/11/2013

Shelia Lutjens  
Deputy Mission Director:  