REQUEST FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION (RCE)

Project/Activity Data:

Project/Activity Name: Investing in Media
Amendment (Yes/No): No
Geographic Location(s) (Country): Burma
Implementation Start Date: 10/1/2020
End Date: 6/30/2024

Bureau Tracking ID:
Tracking ID of Related RCE/IEE (if any):
Tracking ID of Other, Related Analyses (if any):

Organizational/Administrative Data

Implementing Operating Unit(s): USAID/Burma
Total Estimated Cost: $18,500,000
  If amended, specify previous funding amount:
  If amended, specify new funding total:

Prepared by: Linnea Beatty
Date Prepared: 3/26/2020

Environmental Compliance Review Data

Environmental Determination(s):

  Categorical Exclusion: [ X ]
  Negative Determination with Conditions: [ ]
  Positive Determination: [ ]
  Deferral: [ ]

IEE Expiration Date: 6/30/2024

Additional Analyses/Reporting Required
Climate Risk Rating(s): Low [ X ] Moderate ____ High _____
USAID APPROVAL OF INITIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EXAMINATION

PROJECT/ACTIVITY NAME: Investing in Media

Bureau Tracking ID: ______________

PROCUREMENT SENSITIVE: This document contains procurement sensitive information and should not be publicly posted to the Environmental Compliance Database before the acquisition is finalized.

Clearance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office Director, Clearance</th>
<th>ok</th>
<th>03/29/2020</th>
<th>Christopher Hobbs Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mission Environmental Officer Clearance</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td>03/30/2020</td>
<td>Travis Guymon Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mission Climate Integration Lead Clearance</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td>3/30/2020</td>
<td>Khun Thein Soe Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Development Officer Clearance</td>
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<td>3/31/2020</td>
<td>Kimberly Bostwick Date</td>
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<td>Regional Environmental Advisor Clearance</td>
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<td>4/1/2020 by email</td>
<td>Shamenna Gall Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resident Legal Officer Clearance</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td>3/30/2020 by email</td>
<td>Sergiu Troie Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Mission Director Clearance</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td>04/01/2020</td>
<td>Pamela Fessenden Date</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1.0 Purpose and Scope

1.1 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this document is to establish that all proposed projects/activities belong to classes of actions eligible for Categorical Exclusions as set out in Agency regulations (22CFR 216.2(c)) and that there are no foreseeable significant direct or indirect impacts that would preclude them from receiving a Categorical Exclusion. Upon approval of this document, the Categorical Exclusions are affirmed for the project/activity. This analysis also documents the results of the project/activity level Climate Risk Management process in accordance with USAID policy (specifically, ADS 201 mandatory reference 201mal). This RCE is a critical element of a mandatory environmental review and compliance process meant to achieve environmentally sound activity design and implementation.

The activities under review are recommended for categorical exclusion.

1.2 Background and Description of Activities

USAID’s new media program, Investing in Independent Media (IIM), aims at ensuring the viability of independent, public interest, and accountability-oriented media as a critical element of Burma’s emerging democracy. The availability of news and information is a key piece of countering disinformation and misinformation in Burma. The Activity will support public interest journalism created by local and national media houses and independent journalists. The activity recognizes that media outlets are committed to self-reliance, but in the context of an evolving and unstable business environment requires assistance to report news that holds political and economic actors accountable.

The primary objectives of the activity are to:

1. Increase the use of research and audience analysis in operational decision-making by public interest oriented independent media organizations
2. Enhance the ability of public interest and accountability-oriented media houses and journalist’s ability to respond to political and legal pressures
3. Increase the financial independence and viability of local and national media operations

The activity will span 48 months and will be carried out from October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2024. Target groups for this activity will include local and national media houses, independent journalists, civil society organizations, and relevant national and sub-national government officials.

The illustrative interventions generally include, but are not limited to, providing capacity building and technical assistance, production of research and analysis, efficient sub-grants including core supports, and in-kind assistance to include, but not limited to, provision of venue fees, travel and transportation, meeting-related hospitality, technical advisors, translation, facilitation services or expert speakers, and office equipment for office and media works. The key intended results are:

- Media Market, Print Distribution, and Media Sector Analyses developed
- Flexible Research Fund established that allows for media houses to request research that would be of benefit to their media operations.
- Consultations and Training developed and implemented.
- Strategic Review Sessions and internal assessments held to gather and analyze performance data.
• Grants Manual developed that outlines process for selecting, awarding, tracking, and evaluating sub-grants.
• Emergency support fund developed to support independent journalists and their families when under legal duress due to reporting.
• Fellowships and exchanges between Burma media houses and journalists developed and coordinated.
• Equipment, supplies and software purchased.
• Development of four printing presses as viable businesses.
• Support for media and donor conferences.

Procurements as currently planned will not have an adverse effect on the environment; however, the Implementing Partner and cognizant technical office will review equipment purchases prior to procurement to ensure they are in compliance.

It is anticipated that the following Equipment will be acquired by purchase: printing presses, and a long-term vehicle lease for the Myanmar office. It is anticipated that the following supplies will be acquired by lease or purchase: Office equipment including computers and servers, translation headset devices, portable solar power systems, furniture, phones, printers, etc.

If equipment purchased through the project is determined to cause adverse effects resulting in mitigations, then this RCE will have to be amended and the mitigations documented prior to the purchase. No new construction will be included in this RCE. In the unlikely event that the Activity proposes construction, this must be reviewed separately and must be approved under an amendment.

2.0 Environmental Determinations

2.1 Recommended Threshold Decisions

- Justification for Categorical Exclusion Request

The activities described justify Categorical Exclusions, pursuant to 22CFR216.2(c)(1) and (2), for which an Initial Environmental Examination, or an Environmental Assessment are not required because the actions do not have an effect on the natural or physical environment.

Specifically, as currently planned, these activities fall into the following classes of action:
1. Education, technical assistance, or training programs except to the extent such programs include activities directly affecting the environment (such as construction of facilities, etc.)
2. Analyses, studies, academic or research workshops and meetings
3. Document and information transfers

3.0 Climate Risk Management

Pursuant to the ADS 201mal, USAID must factor climate resilience into international development programs to the extent allowable by law, assessing and addressing climate risk, as appropriate.
Consistent with ADS 201.3.4.5, if climate risk has not been adequately assessed at the strategy or project level, or if the risk rating was not exclusively determined to be “Low,” climate risk must be assessed, with plans specifying mitigation actions at the activity level.

The below Climate Risk Screening table summarizes activity-level climate risk management, including programmatic components, identified risk and associated mitigation measures. The implementing partner will implement identified actions during the life-of-project and report back regularly to the activity manager on the status of their implementation, to enable smooth oversight and ensure sustainability of developmental objectives.

**Table 1: Climate Risk Screening**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks / Defined or Illustrative Interventions</th>
<th>Climate Risks</th>
<th>Risk Rating</th>
<th>How Risks are Addressed</th>
<th>Opportunities to Strengthen Climate Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective 1: Increase the use of research and audience analysis in operational decision-making by targeted public interest oriented independent media operations</td>
<td>Changes in temperature, precipitation rates including variability of monsoon rains, and reduced predictability of natural disasters could have an adverse effect on programming implementation in certain areas of the country. Including storms and floods could damage infrastructure; road, house, water, health, communications, and other services. Heat waves, droughts and floods could injure communities and individuals.</td>
<td>&quot;Low&quot;</td>
<td>The activity will address any adverse effects on program implementation through proactive climate mitigation planning.</td>
<td>Support Journalist Training to Ensure Accurate and Conflict-Sensitive Reporting on Climate Issues.</td>
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<td>Support participants including Media and Media Houses to make informed Mitigation-Related Decisions when feasible.</td>
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<td>Build the capacity of journalists and media to advocate for, participate and monitor mitigation planning and resources.</td>
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</table>

**4.0 Limitations**

The determinations recommended in this document apply only to projects/activities and sub-activities described herein. Other projects/activities that may arise must be documented in either a separate Initial Environmental Examination (IEE)/RCE, an IEE/RCE amendment if the activities are within the same project/activity, or other type of environmental compliance document and shall be subject to an environmental analysis within the appropriate documents listed above prior to commencement of implementation.
5.0 Revisions

Per 22 CFR 216.3(a)(9), when ongoing programs are revised to incorporate a change in scope or nature, a determination will be made as to whether such change may have an environmental impact not previously assessed. If so, this IEE/RCE will be amended to cover the changes. Per ADS 204, it is the responsibility of the USAID Assistance / Contracting Officer Representative to keep the Mission Environmental Officer, Regional Environmental Advisor and Bureau Environmental Officer informed of any new information or changes in the activity that might require revision of this environmental analysis and environmental determination.