

ME 14-135



USAID
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REQUEST FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION (RCE)

PROGRAM/ACTIVITY DATA:

Program: Local Solutions to Address Transition and Security Challenges in the Middle East

Countries: Middle East Regional

Time Period: August 2013- March 2018

Funding begins: FY2013

Funding Ends: FY2017

LOP Amounts: \$5,000,000

IEE prepared by: April Hahn, ME/TS

 Date 4/11/2014

Date: April 1, 2014

IEE Amendment (Y/N): N

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION RECOMMENDED: (Place X where applicable)

Categorical Exclusion: X Negative Determination: _____
 Positive Determination: _____ Deferral: _____

ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS: (Place X where applicable)

CONDITIONS _____ PVO/NGO: _____

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS & RECOMMENDED THRESHOLD DECISION

Pursuant to 22 CFR 216.2(a), environmental analysis/evaluation is required for new projects, programs or activities authorized by USAID. This IEE evaluates activities planned under "Local Justice and Security Mapping and Dialogue".

A **Categorical Exclusion** pursuant to 22 CFR 216.2(c)(2), is recommended based on:

- i. The action does not have an effect on the natural or physical environment.

BACKGROUND

1. Introduction

USAID's ME Bureau is building capacities in countering conflict and violent extremism in response to the dynamic security landscape in the Middle East. To address this regional landscape and heightened US engagement – particularly with the new Interagency Sahel-Maghreb Strategy -- ME/TS/DGPS is establishing a mechanism to enhance our tools in this area.

USAID re-oriented its programming to support political reform efforts and mitigate conflicts emerging in the region following the Arab Awakening and consistent with the Middle East North Africa Presidential policy guidance in 2011. This shift was not directly targeted at countering conflict and violent extremism, as that threat was not then considered severe enough to warrant specific programming in MENA. However, USAID's reform and transition-related work does address some of the structural conditions that create an enabling environment for violent extremism and insurgency to grow. These investments indirectly address some of the root causes of extremism by improving livelihoods, providing constructive opportunities for youth, and fostering transparent and inclusive governance.

USAID in MENA has limited number of programs that specifically target countering violent extremism (CVE), funded largely through the Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP). USAID is seeking to advance our capabilities in this area and, in particular the Maghreb-Sahel strategy, by building upon the significant experience USAID has in addressing extremism in the Sahel.

Best practices in CVE programming highlight the need to invest early in analysis that identifies with more precision the essence of the perceived problem(s) and appropriate responses to address them. Guiding this process is USAID's *Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency (VE/I)* policy in September 2011. It is an integral component of the interagency response to complex national security and development challenges. This policy not only focuses on prevention, but also directs USAID to identify whether an appropriate development response exists to the VE threat or risk and, if so, to design programming to address the drivers of VE uncovered.

2. Objective and Activities

The goal of this activity is to gain a better understanding of the dynamic nature of conflict and violent extremism in the Middle East and how development can play a role in preventing or mitigating conflict and violent extremism. This task order will enhance the ability of the Technical Support (TS) Office for the ME Bureau to better assess and respond to these highly salient Democracy and Governance (DG) and Peace and Security (PS) issues. The activity will contribute to USAID and broader U.S. Government (USG) strategic thinking, planning and programming.

Activities include the following:

- Undertake analytic work. Conduct assessments, strategies, studies, mapping and analysis of the drivers of conflict and violent extremism in various countries in the Middle East, with a focus on those countries in which we have programs.
- Undertake pilot programs. Work on a bilateral and multicounty basis to engage civil society, communities, and formal and informal governing actors to better address conflict and VE issues in their communities. Activities may include cross border exchanges, networking, and capacity building among key local stakeholders. Illustrative examples include strengthening the capacity of local governments to identify and address causes of conflict and extremism; strengthening the capacity of civil society to contribute to peace-building and the reduction of extremism, and enhancing traditional mechanisms of community participation. There will be no support for construction or other activities that may impact the environment under the pilot programs.

APPROVAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION RECOMMENDED:

By signing below, you approve the Request for Categorical Exclusion for "Local Solutions to Address Transition and Security Challenges in the Middle East."

CLEARANCES:

DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF TECHNICAL SUPPORT

ME/TS Director: Kay Freeman Date: 4/11/2014
Kay Freeman, Middle East Bureau,
Director, Office of Technical Support

DECISION OF THE MIDDLE EAST BUREAU ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICER:

ME: John Wilson Date: 4/11/2014
John Wilson, ME Bureau Environment Officer

Approved:

Disapproved:

