



**Request for Categorical Exclusion
Strengthening Preservation of Tibetan Culture Project**

Activity/Project Title: Strengthening Preservation of Tibetan Culture Project		Solicitation #: N.A.
Contract /Award Number (if known): N.A		
Geographic Location: India; 386		
Originating Bureau/Office: USAID/India, General Development Office (GDO)		
Supplemental IEE: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	DCN and date of Original document: N.A	
Amendment: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	DCN and ECD link (s) of Amendment (s):	
Programmatic IEE: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	Amendment No: N.A	
Funding Amount: \$2,325,200	Life of Project Amount: \$7,500,000	
Implementation Start/End: August 2023- August 2028		
Prepared By: Balaka Dey	Date Prepared: February 20, 2023	
Expiration Date (if any): August 30, 2028	Reporting due dates (if any): N.A	
Environmental Media and /or Human Health Potentially Impacted (check all that apply) None <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Air <input type="checkbox"/> Water <input type="checkbox"/> Land <input type="checkbox"/> Biodiversity <input type="checkbox"/> Human Health <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		
Recommended Threshold Determination: <input type="checkbox"/> Negative Determination <input type="checkbox"/> With Conditions <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Categorical Exclusion <input type="checkbox"/> Positive Determination	<input type="checkbox"/> Deferral <input type="checkbox"/> Exemption <input type="checkbox"/> USG Domestic NEPA action	
Climate Change <input type="checkbox"/> GCC/Adaptation <input type="checkbox"/> GCC/Mitigation <input type="checkbox"/> Climate Change Vulnerability Analysis (included) Adaptation/Mitigation Measures: Not Applicable		

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Pursuant to 22 CFR 216.2(a), an environmental analysis/evaluation is required for new projects, programs or activities authorized by USAID. This Request for Categorical Exclusion (RCE) evaluates activities being undertaken under a new Strengthening Preservation of Tibetan Culture Project over a period of three years from 2023-2026 (Phase -1) and Phase II (2026-2028) that will leverage lessons learned from program implementation and explore virtual reality options and immersive experience in replication of successful global models. The implementation of Phase II would depend on availability of funds, financial terms being met, the achievement of compliance, and successful evaluation of activities implemented during Phase I. The Project will help ensure the cultural continuity of the Tibetan community through digital preservation of ancient Tibetan manuscripts and artifacts in India and Nepal on a secure, sustainable, and accessible digital platform managed by the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA).

The Project will be implemented through two cooperative agreements awarded with an estimated life of project (LOP) funding of \$7.5 million over five years (2023-2028). One of the two awards will be implemented by a potential technical partner while the other will be implemented by the Social and Resource Development Fund (SARD), for achieving the overall goal of the Project.

- The selected technical partner will implement the activity with a total funding of \$5 million in two phases.
- SARD will partner with the technical partner to coordinate activities to achieve the overall goals with a total funding of \$2.5 million in two phases.

The above two activities are covered as a part of this RCE.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Categorical Exclusion: Pursuant to 22 CFR 216.2(c)(3), the USAID/India General Development Office (GDO), the "originator" of the subject activities, has determined that the program activities which include technical assistance, training programs, capacity building, preserving Tibetan manuscripts using digital innovations and other similar types of environmentally neutral actions, consist of types of interventions entirely within the categories listed in 216.2(c)(2) and are therefore recommended to be categorically excluded by falling under the following classes of actions:

- Technical assistance, training, development of training material, information dissemination, except to the extent such programs include activities directly affecting the environment {22 CFR 216.2(c)(2)(i)};
- Analyses, studies, academic or research workshops and meetings {22 CFR 216.2(c)(2)(iii)};
- Document and information transfer {22 CFR 216.2(c)(2)(v)};
- Studies, projects or programs intended to develop the capability of recipient organizations like the Central Tibetan Administration, monasteries and libraries to engage in development planning, except to the extent designed to result in activities directly affecting the environment {22 CFR.2(c)(2)(xiv)}.

Climate Risk Screening: Pursuant to ADS Chapter 201 and Executive Order 13677, Missions must assess climate-related risks and vulnerabilities in all its projects and address them as appropriate. A climate risk assessment was conducted at the CDCS level for the Tibetan Communities Special Objective, within which this Project is included. The climate risk for the CDCS rated activities was determined as “low” in India and potentially “medium” in Nepal. GDO has ascertained climate risk for all planned interventions with the Project as low.

The summary table (attached as Annexure 1) includes the potential risks to the Project due to climate change.

3. BACKGROUND AND ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this Project is to establish the digital platform to ensure the cultural continuity of the Tibetan community through digital preservation of ancient Tibetan manuscripts and artifacts in India and Nepal on a secure, sustainable, and accessible digital platform managed by the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA). The Project will be implemented by two partners in two phases over a period of five years.

The Project requires a collaborative approach for achieving the overall goal of the project. The two partners through two (2) Cooperative Agreements will need to engage closely to deliver the results. This Project has a combined estimated life of project (LOP) funding of USD \$7.5 million over five years (2023-2028) broken out as follows:

- 1) A competitive award (Digital Activity) with a total estimated funding of \$5 million. The award is proposed to be obligated with \$3 million in Phase 1 and \$2 million in Phase 2 (Technical Prime – TBD); The technical prime will be required to work with CTA to ensure close engagement in implementing all activities; and
- 2) An award directly to the Social and Resource Development Fund (SARD) of the CTA with a total estimated funding of \$2.5 million (SARD Activity). SARD will partner closely with the technical partner to coordinate and convene with the various stakeholders in the Tibetan community and ensure governance structures for use and maintenance of the digital platform. SARD is proposed to be obligated with \$1.5 million in Phase 1 and \$1million in Phase 2.

3.1 Purpose and Scope of the IEE

The purpose of this RCE is to duly reflect on potential environmental impacts under the Project.

3.2 Background

Since the beginning of the cultural revolution in Tibet during the 1960s, the protection, preservation and sustainability of Tibetan culture and identity has remained under massive threat. A direct consequence of the popular Tibetan movement led to the destruction of rare Tibetan cultural resources including the ancient and rare manuscripts, art and artifacts which were passed on across several generations. The vision of HH Dalai Lama to keep the Tibetan culture and traditions alive is driving the Tibetan community to consider different strategies to preserve the unique identity of their community. Protection and restoration of these valuable cultural artifacts is a key priority of the Tibetan community. Presently several localized efforts to preserve ancient and rare manuscripts in libraries and archives are underway in different geographic locations but coordination and centralization remain a critical challenge. Limited resources not only limit such efforts from considering long term sustainable models, but also impacts the quality of technical tools being used for this purpose.

The Tibetan community is scattered globally, so there is a strong need to have unified access to the cultural resources based on the foundation of adequate research, use of assistive technology and sustainable governance approach. The stakeholders are currently engaged in preservation of the rare Tibetan scripts. It is therefore important that they are all connected to create a more enabling environment based on leveraging synergies from one another.

Given the complex geopolitical dynamics and sensitivities attached with the Tibetan context, there is significant lack of data and research on the Tibetan digital landscape. This particularly applies to the exact availability of Tibetan manuscripts in India and Nepal and the specific approaches used for consolidation and preservation of the resources, which make evidence-based planning and design of the proposed activity more challenging. In addition to this, most of the existing digitization activities lack ownership of the Tibetan Government in exile which is a concern considering that CTA's primary mandate is culture preservation and protection of unique Tibetan identity in exile.

The proposed activity seeks to contribute to the overarching objective of ensuring cultural continuity of the Tibetan community through protection, digital preservation based on frontier technological innovations, and promotion of the centuries old Tibetan manuscripts and cultural artifacts in an online digital platform. The activity will use a cooperative agreement through full and open competition involving a co-creation process. This activity will be managed by GDO with an initial obligation of \$3 million using funds from Fiscal Year (FY) 2022. The remainder of the funds will be provided incrementally, subject to the availability of funds for Phase II.

3.3 Description of the Activities

To address these challenges, USAID is designing a Project aimed at ensuring the cultural continuity of the Tibetan community through digital preservation of ancient Tibetan manuscripts and artifacts in India and Nepal on a secure, sustainable, and accessible digital platform managed by the CTA. The Digital Library is proposed in two phases, with the first phase primarily focused on the **expected outcomes and the illustrative results** outlined below, while a second phase will leverage lessons learned and explore virtual reality solutions based on immersive experiences. Sustainability of outcomes through both the phases and activities will be a key factor driving the successful implementation of the Digital Library.

Key Components to be implemented under technical assistance award:

- Improved preservation of Tibetan manuscripts and cultural resources leveraging innovative digital technology.
- Increased accessibility of cultural resources for the Tibetan community; and
- Strengthened capacity of the CTA to govern and manage the digital platform in a sustainable way.

Key Components to be implemented under SARD award:

- Strengthened technical expertise and capacity building of Tibetan libraries for long term sustainability of the digital platform.
- Enhanced visibility and promotion of Tibetan culture through the digital platform

This online platform is intended to make the digitized resources accessible to the Tibetan diaspora and the international community across the globe in a simple and secured environment. The initiative proposes capacity building of the CTA to govern and manage the digital platform in a sustainable manner based on the creation of standard operating practices, policies and governance processes. In addition to digital preservation of culture, the activity would explore income generation opportunities for the community based on dissemination of vocational training.

(a) KEY COMPONENTS OF THE DIGITAL LIBRARY TO BE IMPLEMENTED BY THE TECHNICAL PARTNER UNDER DIGITAL ACTIVITY (UNDER PHASE 1):

The proposed initiative envisages to address the following three main outcomes:

Component 1: Improved preservation of Tibetan manuscripts and cultural resources leveraging innovative and latest digital technology

This component seeks to address the urgent need to protect, preserve and promote the Tibetan cultural artifacts and manuscripts at a time when the cultural continuity of the community is potentially threatened. Strengthening the preservation of the centuries old Tibetan manuscripts through latest technology and techniques will contribute towards the continuity of the rich cultural heritage in the long run.

The proposed results of this activity include-

- landscape assessment conducted in collaboration with CTA to understand the extent of digitization of Tibetan manuscripts, the stakeholders involved and strategic analysis of existing opportunities and challenges.
- a strategic implementation plan developed to address gaps for ensuring quality digitization of all resources based on the outcomes of the assessment.
- physical conservation of Tibetan manuscripts and texts facilitated in collaboration with the CTA.
- modern technological innovations adopted to preserve Tibetan culture in a sustainable fashion.
- Design and implement digitization training in collaboration with CTA for young Tibetan youth to ensure current work and future sustainability.
- Avenues for livelihood opportunities explored in collaboration with CTA based on the dissemination of skills for preservation and digitization of Tibetan manuscripts

Component 2: Increased accessibility of cultural resources for the Tibetan community

This component aims to ensure that the gamut of digitized manuscripts and texts are accessible to the Tibetan diaspora and international community in a simpler, secured, sustainable and user-friendly manner. This platform is intended to be effectively used to transmit the resources to the future generation thus acting as a digital resource portal on Tibetan Buddhism and cultural resources. It is intended to specifically attract Tibetan and international scholars for accessing the repository of digitized resources and support a congenial learning environment for monastic education and academic pursuits. Under this component, both the applicant and the CTA will closely engage to design a robust marketing and outreach strategy for ensuring optimum visibility of the digital platform.

Proposed results of this component includes-

- increased awareness and dissemination of the knowledge of classical Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan cultural heritage worldwide based on a robust outreach strategy
- improved accessibility to rare Tibetan manuscripts and cultural resources supports monastic education and scholarly/research pursuits of the Tibetan community and international scholars
- developed a digital platform that serves as a resource center on the unique Tibetan culture and heritage

Component 3: Strengthened capacity of the CTA to govern and manage the digital platform in a sustainable manner

This component seeks to address the vital need for sustainability of the Tibetan digital platform in the long term beyond the life of the Project. Sustainable management approaches such as capacity building of the CTA officials to govern the digital platform, formation of a governing body, training on IT skills for increased employability of Tibetan youth, and development of policies and protocols is proposed to be explored for long term continuity of the platform. Further, the component would consider creation of effective linkages with the development partners to learn about successful governance mechanisms aimed at building sustainability of the digital platform. The activity would also help CTA identify and establish credible financial models of sustainability of the digital platform through replication of best practices in the similar spectrum.

Proposed results of this component include-

- enhanced technical capacity of CTA officials and other stakeholders to operate an innovative model of digital platform
- Tibetan community including youth trained, in collaboration with the CTA, on IT skills and international standards for enhancing their employability in the technical field and roles associated with the proposed Tibetan digital platform.
- improved instructional materials, policies, strategies and standard operating processes adopted and practiced for establishing and smooth functioning of digital platform
- identified self-sustaining models to ensure continuity of the digital platform.

(b) KEY COMPONENTS OF THE PROJECT TO BE IMPLEMENTED BY SARD THROUGH THE SARD ACTIVITY (UNDER PHASE 1)

Component 1: Strengthened technical expertise and capacity building of Tibetan libraries for long term sustainability of the digital platform.

This component will address the most crucial element of SARD's engagement in the initiative, which is to ensure the sustainability of the digital platform through creation of governance structures and effective transfer of the skills and capacities. As mentioned earlier, SARD will closely collaborate with the Technical Partner of the Digital Project during the creation of the centralized and integrated digital platform. SARD's engagement will help to identify the technical processes and systems desired by CTA for sustainable management of the platform.

To achieve this, the initiative will begin by focusing on the creation of a governance initiative likely drawing from a consortium of Tibetan libraries and stakeholders that would help to assess the precise needs for preservation and consolidation of these Tibetan cultural resources held in various repositories across India and Nepal. The understanding of the current state of digitization will help to draw a strategic plan for addressing the possible gaps and challenges in this field. In coordination with the prospective technical partner of the Digital Activity, the preservation needs will be identified, and the best digitization methods will be determined to ensure the transmission of these

resources to the future generation. The consortium will facilitate centralized coordination of the digitization of Tibetan manuscripts and other resources helping the stakeholders leverage synergies and replicate best practices from successful digitization models.

Moreover, SARD will establish robust technical systems and processes that will facilitate sustainable and cost-effective management of the platform beyond the life of the program. To ensure strong management approaches, SARD will closely engage with the prospective technical partner of the Digital Activity to devise standard operating procedures, technical guidelines and policies. The SARD Activity will explore effective linkages with development partners to learn about successful governance mechanisms aimed at building sustainability of the digital platform. In addition to this, collaboration with the Tibetan community, especially the youth, will be explored to provide them with training on IT skills and international standards, which will enhance their employability in the technical field and associated roles related to the Tibetan digital platform.

Expected results of this component include:

- Increased technical capacity of Tibetan libraries and other stakeholders in managing an innovative model of the digital platform, through training and capacity building initiatives.
- Digitization training program designed and implemented in collaboration with the technical prime for young Tibetan youth to ensure current and future work sustainability.
- Livelihood opportunities explored in collaboration with the technical prime based on the dissemination of skills for preservation and digitization of Tibetan manuscripts.
- Standard policies, protocols and guidelines developed in collaboration with the technical prime for smooth operation of the digital platform.
- Sustainable governance models jointly developed with the technical prime for ensuring long term continuity of the Tibetan digital platform.

Component 2: Enhanced visibility and promotion of Tibetan culture through the digital platform

This component is intended to raise cultural awareness and impart Tibetan cultural values to the Tibetan diaspora and the international community. Engagement of the CTA from the very start will ensure that the digital library is institutionalized, and all operations sustained beyond the life of the Project SARD in collaboration with the technical prime will closely engage to design a robust marketing and outreach strategy for ensuring maximum visibility of the digital platform. The digital platform is intended to be used in a manner that provides a gateway to Tibetan culture, artifacts and rich repositories of other resources. The platform will act as a vital resource for the Tibetan diaspora and the international community, ensuring that the rich cultural heritage of Tibet is accessible to all, while also providing a secure and sustainable way to preserve and promote the resources for future generations.

Expected results of this component includes:

- Tibetan diaspora and international community have improved accessibility to Tibetan digitized resources through the digital platform
- Improved dissemination of Tibetan culture and representation across borders leads to strengthening of cultural ties in the diaspora community scattered across the world.
- Digital platform portrayed as a unique interactive forum for Tibetan youth facilitating regular exchange of cultural know-how.

4. Geography and Beneficiaries:

The Strengthening Preservation of Tibetan Culture activity will work with the monasteries and libraries located in the Tibetan settlements across India and Nepal.

5. RECOMMENDED THRESHOLD DECISIONS AND MITIGATION ACTIONS

Recommended Action: Categorical Exclusion (Please refer to Summary section)

The justification for recommending a determination of Categorical Exclusion for all the activities under the Project is because of their nature, which consists of technical assistance, training, monitoring and evaluation. The table below lists all the activities according to Reg. 216 requirements and recommends Threshold Decisions and environmental compliance actions.

Sl. No.	Activities	Effect on Natural/Physical Environment	Threshold Decisions and Reg. 216 Actions Required
1.	Phase 1: Improved preservation of Tibetan manuscripts and cultural resources leveraging innovative and latest digital technology	No effect	Categorical Exclusion: No action required
2.	Increased accessibility of cultural resources for the Tibetan community	No effect	Categorical Exclusion: No action required (no net increase in materials that will beget waste is expected)
3.	Strengthened capacity of the CTA to govern and manage the digital platform in a sustainable manner	No effect	Categorical Exclusion: No action required

4.	SARD Component 1 - Strengthened technical expertise and capacity building of Tibetan libraries for long term sustainability of the digital platform	No Effect	Categorical Exclusion: No action required
5.	SARD Component 2 - Enhanced visibility and promotion of Tibetan culture through the digital platform	No Effect	Categorical Exclusion: No action required
6	Phase II: Developing virtual reality options and immersive cultural experiences	No Effect	Categorical Exclusion: No action required

Recommended Environmental Actions

- The implementing partner shall implement all activities in accordance with the Government of India's protocols and requirements for COVID 19. The partners will also refer and follow WHO's best practices on the COVID 19 requirements.

7. REVISIONS:

Pursuant to 22 CFR 216.3(a)(9), if new information becomes available which indicates that a proposed action under 'Strengthening Preservation of Tibetan Culture' in India and Nepal might be "major" and its effects "significant", this determination will be reviewed and revised by USAID/India and submitted to the Bureau Environmental Officer (BEO) for approval, and if appropriate, an environmental assessment will be prepared in accordance with the procedures stipulated in 22 CFR 216. It is the responsibility of A/COR to timely inform the Mission Environmental Officer and BEO of any changes in the scope and nature of the approved activities, which may require the revision of the approved Threshold Decision.

Annexure 1

Climate Risk Management Summary Table

Tasks / Defined or Illustrative Interventions	Climate Risks List key risks related to the defined / illustrative interventions identified in the screening and additional assessment.	Risk Rating Low / Moderate / High	How Risks are Addressed Describe how risks have been addressed in activity design and/or additional steps that will be taken in implementation. If	Opportunities to Strengthen Climate Resilience Describe any opportunities to achieve multiple development objectives by integrating climate

			you choose to accept the risk, briefly explain why.	resilience or mitigation measures.
<p>Phase 1:</p> <p>Component 1: Improved preservation of Tibetan manuscripts and cultural resources leveraging innovative and latest digital technology</p>	<p>Extreme climate events and increasing temperatures may disrupt the planned implementation of the surveys, data collection, training, events and workshops. This in turn will impact the delay in implementation of the planned activities and achievement of the outcomes.</p>	Low	<p>USAID/India will review the timing of the planned events and the location so that adequate arrangements are made in planning the surveys, timings, and in extreme cases, shifting participants in case of flood, water- logging etc. USAID will advise the implementing partner to factor in the issues related to extreme weather for each of its components. The implementing partner will be encouraged to raise awareness of its staff and all involved during the implementation of the project on the need for climate risk analysis and its impact.</p>	<p>The recipient of the activity will create greater awareness and learning and enhance the capacity of the CTA staff and other implementing partners to address climate risk. This in turn will improve the capacity of these stakeholders to address climate risk, most of whom otherwise would not have taken climate risks into consideration.</p>
<p>Component 2: Increased accessibility of cultural resources for the Tibetan community</p>	<p>Increasing temperatures will disrupt the planned implementation of the workshops, consultations with stakeholders, events</p>	Low	<p>USAID/India will review the timing of the planned workshops and events so that adequate</p>	<p>The recipient of the activity will be cognizant of the potential climate risks and will be</p>

	<p>and other policy level consultations. This in turn will impact the schedule of the events and achievement of the outcomes. While production of large scale materials the IP will be advised to follow the best practices to reduce any environmental impacts.</p>		<p>arrangements are made.</p>	<p>committed to the best practices that reduce environmental impacts. The proposed digital platform could be used as an opportunity to make resources on environmental resilience accessible to the diaspora community and create sensitization on the need to follow protocols on climate change and sustainability.</p>
<p>Component 3: Strengthened capacity of the CTA to govern and manage the digital platform in a sustainable manner</p>	<p>Extreme climate events, weather events, and climate induced disasters may reduce the ability of the CTA to participate in activity interventions, capacity development trainings. These extreme climatic events and disasters may also divert government resources (human and xtreme climate events, weather events, and climate induced disasters may reduce the ability of the CTA</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>USAID will advise the implementing partner to factor in the issues related to extreme weather for each of its components.</p>	<p>The recipient of this award will factor in the climate variability issues affecting the particular geography into consideration while planning for the capacity building of the CTA officials. To minimize the effects, training and capacity building of the CTA and others on conducting climate vulnerability assessments and</p>

	to participate in activity interventions, capacity development training. These extreme climatic events and disasters may also divert government resources (human and monetary) from the activity.monetary) from the activity.			adaptation planning can be used to build technical skills in providing effective services.
SARD Component 1: Strengthened technical expertise and capacity building of Tibetan libraries for long term sustainability of the digital platform.	Extreme climate events, weather events, and climate induced disasters may reduce the ability of the CTA to participate in activity interventions, capacity development trainings. These extreme climatic events and disasters may also divert government resources (human and xtreme climate events, weather events, and climate induced disasters may reduce the ability of the CTA to participate in activity interventions, capacity development training. These extreme climatic events and disasters may also divert government resources	Low	USAID/India will review the timing of the planned workshops and events so that adequate arrangements are made.	The recipient of this award will factor in the climate variability issues affecting the particular geography into consideration while planning for the capacity building of the Tibetan libraries. To minimize the effects, training and capacity building of the Tibetan libraries and other stakeholders on conducting climate vulnerability assessments and adaptation planning can be used to build technical skills in providing effective services.

	(human and monetary) from the activity.monetary) from the activity			
SARD Component 2: Enhanced visibility and promotion of Tibetan culture through the digital platform	Increasing temperatures will disrupt the planned implementation of the workshops, consultations with stakeholders, events and other policy level consultations. This in turn will impact the schedule of the events and achievement of the outcomes. While production of large scale materials the IP will be advised to follow the best practices to reduce any environmental impacts.	Low	USAID/India will review the timing of the planned workshops and events so that adequate arrangements are made.	The recipient of the activity will be cognizant of the potential climate risks and will be committed to the best practices that reduce environmental impacts. The proposed digital platform could be used as an opportunity to make resources on environmental resilience accessible to the diaspora community and create sensitization on the need to follow protocols on climate change and sustainability.

<p>Phase 2: Developing virtual reality options and cultural immersive experiences</p>	<p>Extreme climate events and increasing temperatures may disrupt the planned implementation of innovative options and approaches impacting the achievement of the outcomes</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>USAID will advise the implementing partner to factor in the issues related to extreme weather for each of its components.</p>	<p>The recipient of the activity will leverage opportunities to help the Tibetan community plan and prepare for adverse climate change impacts and build capacities to adapt their interventions to curb the negative impact of the changing environment. This in turn will improve the capacity of the Tibetan stakeholders address climate risk, most of whom otherwise would not have taken climate risks into consideration.</p>
---	---	------------	--	--