COVID-19 PREPAREDNESS AND RISK MITIGATION PLAN

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1.0 BACKGROUND

The outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) has presented companies around the world, including ME&A, with new challenges, circumstances and uncertainties. In response to these challenges, ME&A has developed the following **Preparedness and Risk Mitigation Plan** (the Plan), which is intended to: 1) identify and mitigate the risks resulting from this unprecedented situation; 2) protect the health and well-being of our employees, the wider community, and partners; and 3) ensure that ME&A continues to provide high quality and timely services to its clients. The Plan describes the measures that our firm has taken to adapt to the new reality of doing business which, for the near future, does not allow working from office, traveling internationally and/or locally, or meeting people face-to-face. These measures will remain in place until normal operations can be re-established and will be reviewed and updated constantly in order to respond quickly to the fluid situation created by COVID-19.

2.0 PREPAREDNESS AND RISK MITIGATION MEASURES

ME&A has taken the following steps to adapt its operations and ensure uninterrupted service to its clients:

1. Continue engagement with our U.S. Government clients, USAID Missions, implementing partners, and other key partners and clients in order to collaborate and coordinate with them on broader planning efforts.
2. Incorporate updated strategies into our planning, decision making, and implementation of day-to-day activities. These include adapting various and new communication tools, adjusting the way we manage tasks, and incorporating new, innovative technology.
3. Create multiple implementation scenarios that take into account various assumptions and aim to understand the effect of change in current projects. Based on that understanding, review all aspects of the project, such as personnel, services, budgets, and other resources.
4. Develop flexible personnel and management policies and procedures in order to react nimbly to changing situations.
5. Identify project tasks which might be limited or temporarily discontinued during the time of the pandemic.
6. Update our emergency communication plan for distributing timely and accurate information to our staff at headquarters (HQ) and in the field.
7. Communicate regularly with our project teams and other key partners to share information about what ME&A is doing to continue uninterrupted implementation of contracts and projects.
8. Address concerns from staff and/or partners regarding level of operations.

To implement the above steps, ME&A has put in place the following measures:

2.1 Personnel

a. All of ME&A's field office and Washington DC area HQ employees and consultants work remotely during the COVID-19 outbreak until further notice from management.

b. Employees are responsible for completing their responsibilities and tasks and remaining in constant communication with their supervisors and work teams at HQ and in the field. Communication is maintained by using any of the virtual tools provided by ME&A such as GoToMeeting, Microsoft Teams, Skype, SMS, e-mail, and WhatsApp phone calls, among others.

c. All employees are provided with secured laptops and any additional equipment needed to successfully complete their tasks.

2.2 Communication Tools and Technologies

a. ME&A maintains constant communication with USAID Contracting Officer's Representatives (CORs), Contracting Officers (COs), and program officers in order to discuss any new possible developments, changes in activities and implementation plans, and any other issues related to the projects being implemented in the field.

b. All project-related files and correspondence are uploaded on SharePoint, thus allowing continued remote access regardless of location or time zone. All project staff are able to create, access, edit, and comment on documents simultaneously.

c. ME&A's HQ telephone system forwards all calls received at the employee's office number to a telephone number of the employee's choice home or mobile. In addition, it generates and transmits e-mail voice messages to the employee's e-mail inbox.

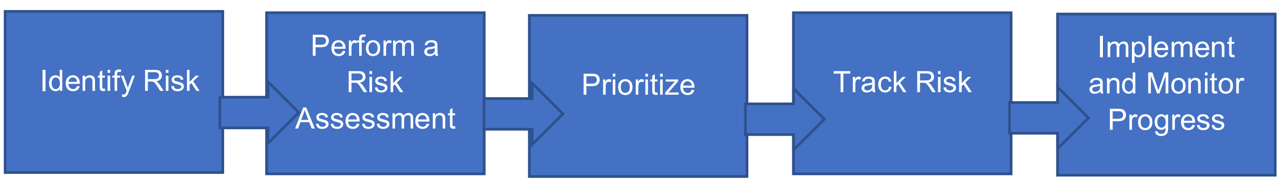
d. All employees stay logged in to Microsoft Teams during working hours to ensure connectivity flow among work teams.

e. Supervisors check in with their staff every day and organize teamwork-planning meetings via Microsoft Teams twice per week.

f. Project Managers have daily Microsoft Teams meetings with field project Chiefs of Party (COPs).

2.3 Project Implementation

For all projects, short- or long-term, the following process is adopted:



2.3.1 Long-Term/Multi-Year Projects

a. Conduct a thorough review of the project work plan then group tasks according to the following categories:

- Tasks/Activities that are close to completion
- Tasks/Activities that have started but are not scheduled for completion within the next six months
- Tasks/Activities that have not started yet

b. Identify and assess risk: For each task, *identify potential risks and assess their impact* in disrupting the operations. For example, if the tasks are likely to be delayed, determine if delay is caused by the:

- Need to demobilize COP
- Inability to mobilize international consultants or teams
- Inability to meet with field counterparts
- Inability of counterparts to take earlier planned action in a timely manner
- Inability to conduct capacity building activities and classroom training
- Inability to conduct large focus group discussions (FGDs)
- Inability to conduct in-person key informant interviews (KIIs)
- Inability to conduct performance evaluation activities
- Inability to do field data collection

c. Identify all successor or dependent tasks/activities and estimate how delays in completing predecessor tasks/activities may affect the meeting the workplan milestones or the project completion date.

d. Estimate any anticipated cost increase.

e. Prioritize Risk: Once the risk assessment is completed, rank the potential risks from most severe to least and prioritize.

f. Track Risks and Mitigation: Track risks and take measures to mitigate them. Examples include:

- Develop/adjust project management structures for telework or remote work.
- Increase the recruitment of qualified local consultants or teams (when possible).
- Hold virtual meetings (phone conferences, GoToMeeting, Microsoft Teams, Skype, *etc*.).
- Work with the client/USAID to modify workplan to include realistic approval or action time.
- Conduct webinars or online training and learning sessions.

g. Present the proposed mitigation measures modification to the workplan to USAID COR/CO for discussion and approval.

h. Realign budget line items to respond to the new tasks and challenges and discuss with USAID.

i. Discuss with USAID CO the financial implications if any of applying these mitigation measures and submit a Request for Equitable Adjustment (REA) if needed.

j. Use Table 1 below to track tasks and the actions taken.

Table 1: Program Progress Planned Actions

Task	Status	Deliverable	Originally Due	Anticipated Delivery	Planned Actions

2.3.2 Short-Term Evaluations

For ongoing short-term evaluations, the process listed in 2.3.1 above will be followed to identify and assess risks, prioritize activities, track risk, and implement and monitor progress. In addition, we will:

a. Work closely with USAID to design a methodology which, when possible, will allow conducting evaluations without fielding teams.

b. Design an evaluation plan which will be a living document and will be updated frequently based on the developments in the field.

c. Work closely with the IPs to receive a complete and accurate list with contact information for all stakeholders and beneficiaries (as many as possible).

d. Revise sampling sizes based on the above (b).

e. Determine which project stakeholders will be targeted using revised strategy and methods and who will be responsible for interviewing them and how.

f. Conduct interviews using Skype, GoToMeeting, or WhatsApp.

g. Conduct surveys using state-of-the-art online survey tools (see Technology section).

h. Use SMS (text) to send short surveys or ask few questions.

i. Use as many sources as possible, including secondary sources, information collected by government departments and other donors, and organizational records, as well as data that have been collected for other research purposes, to complement data collection.

j. For people that cannot be reached by phone, ask local team members to contact them personally, if possible.

k. Conduct virtual FGDs, KIIs, and surveys using innovative/state-of-the-art technology (see Technology section).

l. Prepare local team members to work independently and conduct interviews.

m. Ensure that the local consultants are trained and prepared to undertake independent data collection and devise oversight procedures to monitor and ensure their performance.

n. Organize regular calls with the evaluation team (every three days) to understand progress made and challenges faced.

o. Request daily notes (if possible) from the team leader and the team members.

p. Keep USAID informed regularly by providing weekly written progress reports.

q. Discuss with USAID any challenges faced by the use of the new methodology and what is to be expected.

r. Provide solutions on how to address these challenges.

2.4 Technology

2.4.1 Communication Tools

Microsoft Teams

a. Each ME&A employee is provided with a Microsoft Teams account that they should use throughout the day.

b. Guest users can be invited, as appropriate.

c. Meetings can be recorded and transcribed afterwards, as needed.

d. Participants can collaborate simultaneously on documents.

e. Application is compatible with all devices and operative systems.

GoToMeeting (GTM)

a. ME&A holds two GTM accounts.

b. Each account allows up to 26 participants to video call and more to participate by calling the phone number provided with the account.

c. GTM offers the option to dial in to the meeting (computer not required).

d. GTM provides an unlimited number of meetings with no time limit.

e. One call is permitted at a time per the GTM account, so it requires a meeting time slot to be available.

Others

ME&A also uses other communication methods, including Skype, WhatsApp, FaceTime, Viber, *etc*.

2.4.2 Data Collection and Analysis of Digital Technology, Platforms and Tools

Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)

a. Interviewer uses telephone to call individuals to conduct surveys, following script provided by software application.

b. Customizes data flow of survey questionnaires based on answers provided and information known about participant.

c. Typically elicits significantly higher response rates than web-based surveys.

d. ME&A partners with several local firms that use CATI to conduct data collection.

Surveys

ME&A has already worked with GeoPoll, a leading provider of mobile-based remote data, with a robust platform that can: conduct surveys with text, video, and picture questions; quickly disseminate information; and gather pictures and other location-based data from individuals on-the-ground in specific areas.

Data Collection Tool

ME&A is developing a data collection database tool the Missions can use to collect data across three platforms depending on need: ArcGIS, Microsoft Excel, and Google Forms. The tool:

a. Collects graphics, tables, and maps.
b. Allows data enumerators to gather and submit data for processing in real time.
c. Allows USAID staff in the field to pull up relevant data when they are in that location.

Remote Communication Tools

ME&A frequently uses communication tools such as Skype and WhatsApp to conduct KIIs when it is impossible to conduct the interviews in person because of inaccessibility.

Other platforms

ME&A is also in discussions with different companies that conduct sophisticated web-based surveys and FGDa. These include Qualtrix, ESRI, and Remesh Research Platform.

These platforms:

a. Allow for survey uploading and include pre-built surveys with embedded survey methodologies.
b. Using artificial intelligence, read and understand open-text comments from participant responses, automatically coding the data.
c. Allow real-time interaction with discussion participants, using uploaded discussion guides, through text, open-ended question, polling, photo, and video modalities.
d. Organize participant qualitative and quantitative responses while data streams in from discussion in real-time, allowing moderators to analyze data as it comes in.
e. Export data into CSV files and PowerPoint.
f. Support multiple languages, including English, Spanish, French, and Arabic.
g. Allow for data analysis and creation of visuals including maps, dashboards, graphs, *etc*.