

Remote Management of Environmental and Social Impact Assessment: Small scale aquaculture in Myanmar¹

—David A. Burack, contracting environmental consultant, Brooklyn, New York, USA, May 2021

“Necessity is the mother of invention.” --ancient proverb

As we have learned through this year of the pandemic, when there are obstacles to something that has to be done and the ordinary means of accomplishing that thing are not available, it is necessary to improvise. Many of us found that in order to complete overseas or out-of-doors field assignments, we had to develop “workarounds” in order to keep going. This paper briefly describes the basic principles and technology used by one international environmental consultant to keep going when the need and opportunity were present. The accompanying presentation illustrates some of the methods and technologies employed.

Surprisingly, technology is not the primary factor required for success in carrying out distant and extensive assignments. Digital technology certainly is necessary to make use of the latest technical developments, but first and foremost is a capable and cooperative client or project owner. Overcoming the management and operational constraints of remote project assignments is key to solving the distance problem, as I learned when preparing the environmental management and monitoring plan (EMMP) for an extensive small-scale aquaculture programme in Myanmar in July 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic was nearing its peak in Myanmar, and just past the peak in the USA. The project included field investigations and farmer questionnaires, etc. The project was sponsored by a prominent international NGO, WorldFish-Myanmar, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Travel into Myanmar from the US was not possible due to governmental constraints imposed in both countries. COVID-19 travel restrictions were overcome utilizing an international team and telecommunications technology to prepare the required environmental documentation in limited time frame and well within budget. The IAIA21 presentation on this subject, “Remote International EIA for An Aquaculture Programme in Myanmar” - Abstract ID# 1641, is scheduled for viewing as from 20 May 2021 at 9:00 a.m. (Last minute programme changes are possible; please check the schedule.) It contains illustrative examples and further project details.

Presented below, for brevity, are the main presentation takeaways.

¹ The views and opinions in this paper are mine, and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of WorldFish, its partners, or the U.S. Agency for International Development. —David A. Burack

Remote Project Management Takeaways

- Organization and management are the key essentials; *up-to-date technology is important, but is clearly secondary to organization, management, and communications.*
- Conclusion. Remote management and conduct of EIA study provides most of the advantages of direct “boots-on-the-ground” project environmental assessment at significant cost and time savings, especially where international personnel or international and intra-country travel is required.
- What you will need:

Necessary

- A willing, able, and flexible client and client manager
- Clear understanding and excellent oral and written communications; basic telecommunications technology, Zoom, Teams, Google Earth, etc.
- In-country field and/or office technical assistance

Desirable

- Portable easy-to-use cameras, 360° camera & drone if possible
- Hand-held simple to use field monitoring meters
- Field technical, logistical support



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