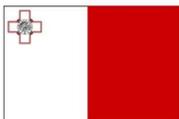




Rural Development Programme 2014-2020

Guidelines on the Submission of Payment Claims related to Investment Measures

(Version 3.0)



The Rural Development Programme for Malta 2014-2020
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Europe Investing in Rural Areas

Contents

1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	Grant Agreement	3
3.0	Bank Payment Form.....	3
4.0	Advance Payments.....	4
5.0	Interim Payments.....	4
6.0	Reimbursement Payment Claims.....	5
6.1	Payments by subrogation	6
7.0	Checks on Payment Claims	7
8.0	Procurement Procedures.....	7
9.0	Fiscality of Invoices	9
10.0	Valid Proof of Payment	10
11.0	Reimbursement of Wages.....	11
12.0	Reductions and Sanctions on Payment Claims	11
13.0	Debt Recovery.....	12
14.0	Maintenance and Replacement of Equipment.....	12
15.0	Principles to be applied by the Beneficiary.....	13
16.0	Data Protection	13
17.0	Control Requirements.....	13
18.0	Controls prior to Final Payment.....	14
19.0	Controls after termination of the Project	14
20.0	EU Publicity Obligations	14
21.0	Force Majeure.....	15
22.0	Transparency.....	15
23.0	Amendment to Guidelines	15

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide general information and assistance to Beneficiaries of rural development investment measures when submitting claims for reimbursement through the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) under the Rural Development Programme for Malta 2014-2020. These guidelines provide detailed requirements for the submission of reimbursement payment claims. It is to be noted that the eligibility requirements applicable under each sub-measure of the Rural Development Programme are set out in the specific measure guidelines as issued from time to time by the Managing Authority.

2.0 Grant Agreement

Once a Beneficiary's project proposal is selected and awarded a grant, the beneficiary will be invited to enter into a Grant Agreement with the Managing Authority (MA). Following the signature of the Grant Agreement and subject to the eligibility rules of the specific measure, a Beneficiary may start to submit payment claims to the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (the Agency) for processing, verification and ultimately payment authorisation.

3.0 Bank Payment Form

Immediately after signing the contract with the Managing Authority and prior to the submission of any claims for reimbursement, the Beneficiary is to ensure that a completed bank payment form/financial identification form is submitted to the Agency. This is required to create a Beneficiary profile in the Agency's payment system. In the absence of a completed bank payment form, no funds can be paid to the Beneficiary. The form may be downloaded from the Agency's website (www.arpa.gov.mt). Completed, original bank payment forms are to be submitted to the Front Office, Pitkali Markets, Ta' Qali, L/O Attard or at the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency Front Office, Ghammieri, Marsa or at the Office of the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency, Experimental Farm, Imgarr Street, Xewkija, Gozo.

A beneficiary may also request to be notified of payments via SMS. Should the beneficiary opt to subscribe for this service, s/he is to complete the relevant form which may be downloaded from the Agency's website (www.arpa.gov.mt). Completed forms are to be submitted at the Front Office, Pitkali Markets, Ta' Qali, L/O Attard or at the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency Front Office, Ghammieri, Marsa or at the Office of the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency, Experimental Farm, Imgarr Street, Xewkija, Gozo.

4.0 Advance Payments

If the Grant Agreement includes the provision for the issuing of an advance payment, upon signature of the Grant Agreement, the Beneficiary may present a request to the Agency for the issuing of such payment. The issuing of an advance payment is subject to the submission of a financial guarantee issued by a recognised financial institution equivalent to 100% of the amount eligible as advance payment.

Upon submission of the bank guarantee, the Agency will proceed to issue an advance payment equivalent to 50% of the eligible investment component cost approved for the project, covered by the guarantee mentioned above. The payment will be deposited in the bank account indicated by the Beneficiary in the respective bank payment form.

In order to release the financial guarantee, the Beneficiary must present sufficient invoices, accompanied by respective valid proof of payment, equivalent to the amount of the Advance Payment paid out after the completion of the project.

5.0 Interim Payments

A Beneficiary may submit requests for interim payments in accordance with the disbursement schedule included in the Grant Agreement. These payments will be paid in lots. In total, these lots cannot exceed 80% of the total eligible cost and shall be paid upon presentation of relative invoices and valid proof of payment as well as any necessary supporting documentation required for the verification of the payment claim.

When a Beneficiary avails of an advance payment facility, the Beneficiary may request further interim payments amounting to 30% of the eligible cost. Such payment will be issued by the Agency following the submission of a reimbursement payment claim by the Beneficiary; the claim should be accompanied by all the necessary invoices and valid proof of payment as well as any other relevant supporting documentation as required by the measure guidelines. The final amount, equivalent to 20% of the eligible cost, shall be issued by the Agency only after completion of the project. The Beneficiary must submit a request for reimbursement for the final 20% once all project components have been completed and payments settled in full. The final payment will be issued once any on-the-spot checks as necessary confirming that the project was completed according to the agreed terms and conditions of the respective Grant Agreement have been performed.

By submitting a final payment claim accompanied by the declaration found in Annex 1 (also available on the Agency's website www.arpa.gov.mt) a beneficiary would be declaring:

- that the project has been completed in line with the approved project ;
- that all relevant works have been completed;
- that any structures built as part of the project are functional i.e. in use for the use they were originally intended for in the application and grant agreement;
- that any equipment procured as part of the project is installed, commissioned, fully functional and in regular use.

A final payment claim will be rejected if this declaration is not submitted.

6.0 Reimbursement Payment Claims

As a general rule payment claims shall consist of the following:

- A payment claim form (available on the Agency's website www.arpa.gov.mt);
- Invoice/s pertinent to the service, supply or works provided and which are being claimed as part of the respective payment claim (refer to Section 9 for details which should contain an invoice/s); and
- Valid proof of payment in respect of each invoice submitted as part of the payment claim (refer to Section 10 for details related to what constitutes a valid proof of payment);
- ***Photographic evidence of any supplies or works covered by the payment claim.*** This is without prejudice to the performance of in-situ visits and/or on-the-spot checks by the Agency;
- In the case of structural works, the claim is to be supported by a bill of quantities certified by a warranted architect covering the invoiced amount/s. The bill of quantities is to be supported by ***photographic evidence of the works***, including evidence of the works at different phases to provide visibility of certain structures which may not be visible upon completion of works.

The payment claim form is to be completed by the Beneficiary and is to provide sufficient and clear information to enable the Agency to determine which items of the contractual agreement are being claimed for reimbursement, as well as the details pertaining to the invoices and proof of payment being submitted.

An original payment claim form is to be presented and signed by the Beneficiary. All original invoices and proof of payment are also to be submitted and shall be supported by documentation related to the procurement process e.g. quotations, tender submissions, quotation/tender evaluation report, contract for supply or service, etc.

The Agency may from time to time issue a list of documentation required in support of payment claims under the different Measures envisaged in RDP 2014-2020.

Payment claims are to be submitted at the Front Office, Pitkali Markets, Ta' Qali, L/O Attard or at the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency Front Office, Ghammieri, Marsa or at the

Office of the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency, Experimental Farm, Imġarr Street, Xewkija, Gozo.

The Agency shall register and acknowledge the submission of each payment claim.

6.1 Payments by subrogation

Public entities including Local Councils may benefit from a facility whereby the Agency may effect payment directly to the beneficiary's assignee i.e. payment directly to the contractor or supplier or service provider. In such cases, the beneficiary is required to:

- Inform the Agency that subrogation is to be applied in respect of payments under the respective project;
- Enter into an agreement with the supplier, contractor or service provider specifying that the Agency will only settle the expenditure eligible under the respective measure, that no delay for payments can be imposed by the assignee to the Agency and in case of financial corrections to the assignee (following controls), the latter can only claim the corresponding payment reduction to the beneficiary, and not to the Agency; and
- Submit a completed bank payment form including the details of the contractor's or supplier's bank account.

Once the Agency is satisfied that the above have been implemented, the beneficiary may proceed to submit payment claims accompanied by the respective invoice/s certified correct by the Project Leader, as well as any other documentation required for verification of the expenditure.

If following administrative and any necessary on the spot controls a claim is found to be eligible for payment, Agency will issue payment to the supplier/contractor for the amount claimed on the invoice; if after controls are completed, it transpires that part of the claim is not eligible under the grant agreement, or that sanctions must be applied, the Agency will pay the supplier/contractor only the eligible value of the invoice. Following issuing of the payment, the Agency will provide the beneficiary with the details of the payment and will inform the beneficiary to settle any ineligible amount directly to the contractor out of its own funds. The supplier/contractor is required to submit proof of payment (fiscal receipt) for the full amount of the invoice including the net amount and the VAT element. The supplier/contractor must issue all invoices in the name of the beneficiary.

7.0 Checks on Payment Claims

The Agency will perform a number of checks on payment claims. Checks include but are not limited to verification of compliance with the public procurement regulations, verification of the correctness and completeness of the information included in the payment claim by matching the fields with the actual documentation, checks on supporting documentation, etc.

The Agency shall retain the right to reject a payment claim if this is not of sufficient quality or does not contain all the relevant details. In this regard a payment claim containing incorrect or missing information will be rejected and sent back to the beneficiary via email as well as through registered mail. In doing so the Agency will issue a rejection letter including details of the reason for the rejection of the claim.

The Agency may also request the beneficiary to submit clarifications or additional documentation; depending on the nature of the clarifications requested, the Agency shall stipulate a deadline for submission of additional information or clarifications which deadline shall not exceed 10 working days from the date of the request sent via email or through registered mail. Failure by the beneficiary to submit the requested clarifications within the stipulated timeframe shall lead to rejection of the payment claim. Rejected claims and any supporting documentation will be sent back to the beneficiary by registered mail.

8.0 Procurement Procedures

In respecting the relevant EU Regulations, the Agency must emphasise that any procurement procedures followed as part of the implementation of projects funded through Rural Development funds including procedures followed by private entities and NGOs, are to be in line with the Public Procurement Regulations.

Where quotations for works, supplies or services are sought, all quotations are to be obtained from a minimum of three different and independent suppliers. Quotations are to be comparable in model specifications, works to be performed or service to be provided.

Quotations should be dated not earlier than six (6) months from the start of works, supply or service. If a quotation was issued by a contractor, supplier or service provider more than six (6) months before the start of works, supply or service, the contractor, supplier or service provider is to issue a declaration indicating that the offer is still valid.

Only original quotations are accepted. If a supplier issues a quotation electronically and sends it to the beneficiary via e-mail, the beneficiary is to submit a copy of the accompanying e-mail from the supplier.

All suppliers are to be in possession of a valid VAT registration number with the VAT Department. If any of the three suppliers are found as not having a valid VAT registration

number, or are found to be related to each other, the Agency retains the right to apply financial corrections in line with the applicable guidelines issued by the European Commission. This approach is in conformity with the basic principles of transparency, objectivity, non-discrimination and appropriate disclosure as required by the relevant regulations governing the disbursement of Rural Development funds.

Quotations should also bear all the fiscal details necessary to be able to verify the suppliers' details, in particular the VAT number and the name of the organisation as well as the name and VAT number of the Beneficiary. Quotations shall be dated, given a reference number and a clear description of the item, service or works to be supplied, with all the necessary specifications and quantities of the items, price per item and net amount. Specifications must include the make, dimensions, power-related attributes and quality of the material.

Quotations are to include a breakdown of items being quoted, a net amount, the relevant applicable VAT rate, the VAT amount and the gross amount inclusive of VAT.. If a quotation does not specify whether the total price includes VAT or not, it is understood that the quotation is inclusive of VAT. As a result one should extract the amount excluding VAT in order to eliminate the VAT element when identifying the eligible expenditure. This is also in line with the VAT Act. Only in cases where the quotations show that the supplier is VAT exempt will the Agency not deduct the VAT component from the total amount quoted.

Moreover, computer-generated quotations with amendments in pen or in pencil will not be accepted.

Quotations should also provide a clear price breakdown of every item, which is very important especially if the item description contains cost components which may not be eligible as per guidance notes for applications.

In accordance with the Public Procurement Regulations, expenditure relating to economic operators convicted of a criminal offence are considered ineligible for funding and such expenditure will not be reimbursed by the Agency.

The Agency retains the right to apply deductions and sanctions if verifications reveal that quotations submitted are not in line with the above requirements.

9.0 Fiscality of Invoices

Invoices are to be clear and valid as per the twelfth schedule of the Value Added Tax Act (Chapter 406 of the Laws of Malta), which stipulates what a tax invoice should include.

In general, a tax invoice should contain the following particulars:

- The date of issue;
- A sequential number which uniquely identifies the invoice;
- The name, address and VAT number of the supplier;
- The name, address and VAT number of the customer;
- A description sufficient to identify the quantity and nature of the goods or the extent and nature of the goods or the extent and nature of the services applied;
- Breakdown of price in case of multiple items or services in a single invoice and breakdown of price with clear distinction of the amounts excluding VAT, the VAT element and the gross total of the invoice;
- The date on which the supply was made or completed or the date on which a payment on account of a supplier was made;
- The taxable value per rate or exemption, the unit price exclusive of tax and any discounts or rebates if they are not included in the unit price;
- The amount of tax chargeable, if any, at each rate so chargeable;
- The total amount of tax chargeable, if any.

Only original invoices are accepted with payment claims. If a supplier issues an invoice electronically and sends it to the beneficiary via e-mail, the beneficiary is to submit a copy of the accompanying e-mail from the supplier.

Statements cannot be considered as replacements of invoices and thus they are not considered valid. However, requests for payment are considered to be equivalent to an invoice provided that all details including date of issue, request number, name, address and VAT number of the supplier and name, address and VAT number of the customer are all present. Furthermore, in case of a request for payment, a VAT receipt should be submitted. If this is computer generated then this must bear an EXO number approving such procedure.

Invoices should always be issued in the name of the Beneficiary as the client. This is very important given that it is the beneficiary that is receiving payments from the funds under these Measures, so it must be the beneficiary that incurs the costs of completing the project.

Fiscal receipts issued through cash registers should bear the VAT number of the Beneficiary and must be accompanied by a corresponding invoice/cash sale. Hand written documents are also accepted provided that such documents are signed by the supplier.

10.0 Valid Proof of Payment

Payment claims and invoices are to be accompanied by valid proof of payment to demonstrate that the relevant payment transaction between the beneficiary and the supplier/contractor/service provider has been effected.

The following are considered as valid proof of payment:

- Fiscal VAT receipt/Cash register receipt/Cash receipt issued through a computerised system that has been authorised by the VAT Department and includes an EXO number; or
- Bank transfer/Relevant transaction in bank statement; or
- Encashed cheque image.

In the case of reimbursement of wages, bonuses, income supplements and social security contributions, the following shall be sought as proof of payment:

- Payslips containing the PE number;
- Reference of cheque/bank transfer details should be present on the pay slips;
- An encashed cheque image or transaction receipt through internet banking to demonstrate that wages have actually been paid;
- Claims for social security contributions are backed by proof of payment (encashed cheques image or bank transaction receipt) as well as a copy of the FS5 submitted to the Inland Revenue Department (IRD) and the corresponding receipt given by the IRD.

All proof of payments must be dated prior to the expiry date of the contract. Furthermore all proof of payment and invoices must be dated after the start of the eligibility period as indicated in relevant eligibility guidelines.

There should not be any form of corrections carried out in pen or by correction tape/fluid since this will render the receipt/invoice ineligible. It is advisable that fiscal receipts issued through cash registers are photocopied (upon being issued) as these will eventually fade rendering the print illegible.

In cases of payments by subrogation as outlined in section 6.1, no proof of payment is required at payment claim submission stage. However, a fiscal receipt for the full invoice amount is to be issued by the supplier/contractor within 15 working days from date of execution of the payment by the Agency. The supplier/contractor must issue the receipts in the name of the beneficiary. A copy of the fiscal receipt submitted by the supplier/contractor to the Agency will be referred to the beneficiary for record purposes.

11.0 Reimbursement of Wages

Measure 19 envisages the reimbursement of running costs for Local Action Groups (LAGs) which include wages, bonuses, income supplements and social security contributions. For the processing of such claims, the Agency requires the submission of the following documentation in order to assess the eligibility of expenses:

- A copy of the employee's employment contract with the LAG;
- ETC certificate presented confirming employment with the LAG;
- Timesheets for each employee certified correct by the Chairperson or a Board Member of the LAG in the case of a LAG Manager's wage and by the LAG Manager in the case of the LAG Secretary's wage confirming the number of hours worked.

12.0 Reductions and Sanctions on Payment Claims

Where a payment claim contains ineligible expenditure which was clearly included by the Beneficiary with the aim of obtaining payments in an irregular manner, reductions and sanctions are to be applied in accordance with Article 63 of Regulation (EU) No 809/2014, unless the beneficiary can provide a justification for the ineligible expenditure claimed.

The reduction to be applied is calculated in this manner:

If the value of the ineligible expenditure amounts to more than 10% of the total value of the payment claim, then a sanction equivalent to the value of the discrepancy is further reduced from the eligible amount determined from the payment claim before the payment is processed for authorisation.

The Agency may also apply deductions in situations which give rise to conflict of interest such as in the case of related suppliers, suppliers who hold a direct relationship with the beneficiary, companies in which the Beneficiary or a representative of the beneficiary have direct control or shareholding, etc. lack of observance of procurement regulations, etc. In this regard the Agency will make the necessary deductions in line with the European Commission's *Guidelines for determining financial corrections to be made to expenditure financed by the Union under shared management, for non-compliance with the rules on public procurement*. A copy of these guidelines is available on the Agency's website www.arpa.gov.mt.

13.0 Debt Recovery

Should the Agency identify any undue payments issued to a Beneficiary or note that irregularities have been made by a beneficiary, the Agency will initiate debt recovery procedures. A Beneficiary will be notified of a debt through a notification sent to the same beneficiary via email and subsequently through registered mail. Such a letter will include the amount to be recovered and the reason for recovering these amounts. On receiving a debt notification, the Beneficiary is required to either accept the debt or object to it.

If the Beneficiary accepts the debt, s/he is to complete a Debt Acceptance form which would mean that the beneficiary would like to have the said amount deducted from any upcoming payments. If the Beneficiary does not have any upcoming payments, the debt is to be settled within 30 calendar days from the date of the notification.

If on the other hand the Beneficiary does not agree with the debt, an Objection form is to be completed and submitted to the Agency with 15 working days from the date of the debt notification. Objections submitted to the Agency will be reviewed by the Agency's Objection Board. The Beneficiary will be notified in writing of the Board's decision to accept or refuse such an Objection.

These two forms may be downloaded from the Agency's website www.arpa.gov.mt and may be submitted at the Front Office, Pitkali Markets, Ta' Qali, L/O Attard or at the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency Front Office, Ghammieri, Marsa or at the Office of the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency, Experimental Farm, Imġarr Street, Xewkija, Gozo.

If the beneficiary has any pending debts after the elapse of 60 calendar days from the date of debt notification and has neither submitted a debt acceptance form nor an objection, interest at a rate of 8% will be applied as per EC Regulation No 1122/2009, EU Directive 2011/7 and Article 1852 of Chapter 16 of the Law of Malta.

14.0 Maintenance and Replacement of Equipment

It is important to note that costs incurred for maintenance of equipment are not eligible and cannot be paid out of EAFRD, not even in the case of equipment procured or infrastructural works co-financed through EAFRD. Therefore, any maintenance costs to be incurred for the sustainability of the investment once the EAFRD grant is exhausted, must be borne by the Beneficiary.

Furthermore, replacement of existing equipment cannot be financed through any other EU Funds. Such costs must be borne by the applicant and thus are ineligible.

When purchasing equipment through EAFRD, it is important that the equipment is used for the specific reasons for which it was bought and in accordance with the conditions stipulated in the contract. All documentation in relation to purchase and use of the equipment has to

be filed and an inventory of all equipment has to be prepared and maintained by the said Beneficiary.

The Beneficiary must ensure that:

- The equipment comes with the appropriate guarantees;
- If any fault results in the equipment, all documentation in relation to the repair must be kept;
- If the equipment purchased needs to be replaced, both the old and new serial numbers must be retained. The new equipment must also carry out the same functions of the equipment being replaced and must be of the same or higher specifications of the equipment being replaced. The beneficiary must inform the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency that the equipment has been replaced and provide the necessary documentation;
- The relevant EU publicity requirements needs to be apparent on the equipment purchased as per section 20.0 EU Publicity Obligations.

15.0 Principles to be applied by the Beneficiary

If a proposal is selected for funding, the Beneficiary will be bound by the principles of good governance, sound financial management and any relevant EU or national legislation.

16.0 Data Protection

Any information will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act, Cap 440 of the Laws of Malta. By submitting payment claims, the Beneficiary is giving his/her consent to have details of the Beneficiary and the project published in line with the obligations in the relevant Council and Commission Regulations. Moreover, this information will also be used for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

17.0 Control Requirements

Controls can be carried out by the following competent authorities:

- The Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA);
- The Managing Authority (MA) as the authority responsible for the implementation of the Rural Development Programme;
- The Internal Audit and Investigations Directorate (IAID) as the Certifying Body (CB);

- The National Audit Office (NAO) in view of the fact that public funds are being utilised for the implementation of the investment;
- The audit services of the European Commission (EC) and the European Court of Auditors (ECA) in view of the fact that the investment is benefitting from EU funds;
- The State Aid Monitoring Board (SAMB) to ensure that the project is/has been implemented in accordance with state aid regulations;
- The VAT Department to ensure that VAT regulations have been respected.

The Beneficiary must note that by signing the contract for the grant, s/he is also undertaking an obligation for the above mentioned checks to be undertaken.

18.0 Controls prior to Final Payment

In-situ visits will be performed on all projects to verify the realisation of the investment.

The applications for payment may also be verified through an on-the-spot check prior to the issue of the final payment. The control verifies the respect of the engagements by the Beneficiary.

19.0 Controls after termination of the Project

The applications granted payment may be verified through ex-post checks after the project is completed for a period of up to 5 years following the date of the final payment. Such a control verifies and confirms that the Beneficiary has abided by the conditions of stipulated by the aid which are namely :

- Not changing the use of the investment for five (5) years following the issue of the final payment;
- Remaining in farming activities for five (5) years following the issue of the final payment.

20.0 EU Publicity Obligations

Publicity is an integral part of the project. The Beneficiary must be aware of the source of funding through which he/she is given the grant. In addition, upon completion of the project, the Beneficiary must ensure that the necessary EU publicity requirements are adhered to (e.g. stickers indicating the source of co-financing are attached to all equipment procured through the EU grant and a plaque is placed in a prominent place for visitors to be aware that the investment has been co-financed through EU funding).

21.0 Force Majeure

Force majeure is generally considered to imply an abnormal or unforeseeable circumstance beyond the Beneficiary's control, the consequences of which could not be avoided by reasonable action. In cases of *force majeure* or exceptional circumstances a beneficiary is to notify the Agency in writing including any relevant supporting documentation within fifteen working days from the date on which the beneficiary or the person entitled through him/her is in a position to do so. Such requests will be reviewed by the Agency's *Force Majeure* Board and the beneficiary will be notified in writing of the Board's decision whether his/her request has been accepted or refused.

The relevant form may be downloaded from the Agency's website www.arpa.gov.mt and may be submitted at the Front Office, Pitkali Markets, Ta' Qali, L/O Attard or at the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency Front Office, Ghammieri, Marsa or at the Office of the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency, Experimental Farm, Imgarr Street, Xewkija, Gozo.

22.0 Transparency

In line with European Union Regulations the Agency must publish beneficiary payment data on its website on a regular basis. This is done to ensure that European Union Financing under the Common Agricultural Policy is carried out with transparency. Hence, all relevant payment data is published on the Agency's website and remains on line for a period of two years. The Beneficiary's name will appear together with other information (locality, postcode, payment details – measure, amount, financial year, etc.). Only Beneficiaries who receive payments that in total do not exceed €1,250 during a financial year will have their name replaced by a code.

23.0 Amendment to Guidelines

These guidelines may be amended as necessary by the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency in order to harmonise these guidelines in line with EU and national legislation as well as to ensure the effective implementation of Malta's Rural Development Programme.

Annex 1 – Declaration to Accompany Final Payment Claim

<BENEFICIARY LETTERHEAD>

Measure:

Contract Number:

Name of Beneficiary:

I, the undersigned, declare that the project governed by Grant Agreement <insert contract number> and any respective addenda has been completed. I also declare that all the relevant works have been completed and all structures built are fully functional in line with the scope of the approved project. I also declare that all the equipment procured as part of the project has been installed, commissioned, is fully functional and in regular use.

<Name in Block Letters>

<Signature>

<Date>