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## **U.S. Government Convenes Innovators in Northern Thailand to Tackle Air Pollution Challenges**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Chiang Mai, Thailand, February 10, 2020 – A team of six youth innovators called “No Grant SMOG” won the first prize at Smogathon Thailand 2020 for inventing active-learning tools to educate elementary school children about smog.** To help address air pollution challenges, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), in collaboration with the U.S. Department of State’s Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) and the Royal Thai Government’s Pollution Control Department, hosted “Smogathon Thailand 2020” in Chiang Mai from February 8 to 10.

This “hackathon” brought together young professionals, students, and technical experts from various fields and challenged them to use a satellite-based air quality monitoring and forecasting tool, created by USAID’s SERVIR-Mekong project and co-developed with NASA, the Royal Thai Government’s Geo-Informatics and Space Technology Development Agency (GISTDA), and Pollution Control Department to help identify solutions for regional, national, and local air pollution challenges. Over three days, participants competed as teams to develop solutions and turn them into prototypes for a judging panel.

“The U.S. Government is pleased to host this event in partnership with the Royal Thai Government,” says Sean O’Neill, Consul General at the U.S. Consulate in Chiang Mai. “This event challenged participants to use new technologies, including the use of geospatial data, to improve the accuracy of air quality monitoring. I would especially like to congratulate all the young innovators who took part in this challenge to find a solution for their communities.”

Six students from different universities formed a team called No Grant SMOG during this hackathon and were awarded the first prize for creating learning tools such as board games to educate elementary school children about smog. The board game is designed to walk the children through the game with knowledge about smog, its root causes, and preventive measures. Because children can play an active role in disseminating information to their peers and families, the team hoped the tools will help raise awareness about the issue among the public.

The winning team will continue to work with technical advisors from USAID’s SERVIR-Mekong project at the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) and NASA to apply satellite-informed air-quality to improve their learning tools.

In addition to the first prize, special prizes were awarded to the other five teams, including Dust Barrier for Environment and Sustainability, Smogless for Civic Engagement, Air4All for Most Innovative Idea, Potter Innovation for Geospatial Application, and Boxcorn for True Digital Spotlight Award.

Private corporations such as True Digital Park and the Digital Economy Promotion Agency (DEPA) also generously supported the event with additional prizes.

“Addressing air pollution challenges requires participation from all sectors,” said Juniper Neill, Deputy Mission Director of USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia. “We hope this event will be a model that leads to future innovative collaborations among governments, the private sector, and young people in Thailand and across the region.”

The event builds upon the success of the first Smogathon organized by the U.S. Consulate and YSEALI in May 2019. Last year's Smogathon resulted in innovative ideas such as smokeless furnaces and a website for farmers to inform the public when open burning will happen.

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## **NOTE TO EDITORS**

- Download photos from <http://tiny.cc/gvssjz>

### **About SERVIR-Mekong**

SERVIR-Mekong is a joint initiative of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), implemented by the Geospatial Information Department of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC). SERVIR-Mekong makes use of publicly available satellite imagery and technologies to address challenges related to water resources, disasters, climate resilience, agriculture and ecosystems in the Lower Mekong.

### **About USAID**

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is the principal U.S. Government agency extending assistance to countries worldwide recovering from disaster, trying to escape poverty and engaging in democratic reforms. USAID's Regional Development Mission for Asia, based in Bangkok, oversees a broad portfolio of regional and transnational programs, and provides support to several USAID bilateral missions in Asia as well as manages programs in countries in which it does not have a permanent presence. Its regional approach addresses transnational problems such as human and wildlife trafficking, emerging infectious diseases, malaria, and HIV/AIDS. Please visit [www.usaid.gov/asia-regional](http://www.usaid.gov/asia-regional) or @USAIDAsia on Facebook and Twitter for more information.

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