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THE SERVIR PROGRAM DEMAND:  
CULTIVATING USE OF BETTER INFORMATION ACTIVITY

## PARTNERSHIPS Concept Paper



**SERVIR GLOBAL**  
The Regional Visualization and Monitoring System

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## Introduction

As the SERVIR program has grown, so have expectations of what it can do and whom it can “serve.” For example, increased visibility and awareness of what SERVIR Africa can bring to RCMRD member states also means increased demand for SERVIR products and services. As current hubs grow and new ones come on line, “mature” hubs such as CATHALAC wonder what their connection is/will be to a global SERVIR network. At ICIMOD, a SERVIR Southeast Asia hub means SERVIR will have broader coverage, but also raises questions on potential areas of geographic overlap. And for USAID and NASA, how to respond to requests for bringing SERVIR to other countries and regions, how to best coordinate and collaborate with other U.S. and non-U.S. agencies and institutions, and how to ensure that SERVIR on a global level is effective and sustainable in the long run represent both challenges and opportunities.

From its beginnings, the SERVIR Program has been underpinned and strengthened by partnerships: the partnership between USAID and NASA to create SERVIR; the model of establishing regional hubs with existing institutions implementing SERVIR products and services among their partners; and the increasing linkages between SERVIR and other agencies and programs. The SERVIR stakeholder network is richly complex, and the term “space to village” can be applied not only to how geospatial information brings benefit to local communities, but also to how the chain of SERVIR relationships can be traced from space (i.e., NASA) to local organizations. As USAID and NASA look ahead to future expansion, a strategic approach to partnerships will help strengthen SERVIR and more effectively leverage the strengths and experiences that each partner brings.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: 1) to summarize previous discussions and ideas on types of partnerships and what they mean; and 2) to serve as a thought piece and “spring board” for future discussions and strategic planning for SERVIR.

## Partnership types

From discussions with SERVIR stakeholders, seven partnership types emerged. In brief, these include the following:

1. **Interagency:** specifically between U.S. government entities. (e.g., U.S. Forest Service, EPA, NOAA, Interior Department, etc.)
2. **Between donors:** for example, co-funding of projects with the World Bank.
3. **Between hubs:** creating the opportunity for concrete collaboration and knowledge sharing between SERVIR hubs.
4. **With hubs and “spokes”:** linking SERVIR hubs with other entities that are potential champions and contributors to SERVIR.

5. **Between hubs and other institutions:** advancing collaboration on joint initiatives.
6. **Between hubs and USAID regional and bilateral missions:** advancing collaboration with regional and national level projects in multiple sectors
7. **With the private sector:** advancing collaboration where appropriate with private sector entities and private sector philanthropic efforts at both the global and hub level.

Each of these models is discussed below.

### Interagency partnerships

Beyond USAID and NASA, other U.S. government agencies are already intentionally or unintentionally working with SERVIR. For example, the GHG inventory work in Africa involves the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the pre-defined role of SERVIR Africa is only one component. On the other hand, at ICIMOD, the U.S. Forest Service has an initiative where SERVIR efforts are related, and while there is mutual interest in coordination, the nature of collaboration is yet to be defined. Different USG agencies, including NOAA, EPA, Forest Service, Interior Department and others have thematic, geographic, technical, and scientific overlap or complementarity with SERVIR, and identifying and pursuing partnerships could bring financial and programmatic benefits and synergies.

### Between donors

A number of multi- and bilateral donors support the development and use of geospatial information for environmental decision-making. These include the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), in partnership with the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA); the World Bank; the Asian Development Bank; the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD); UN organizations; and others. CATHALAC, ICIMOD, and RCMRD all have initiatives supported by non-U.S. donors that overlap and “blur the lines” of what is a SERVIR-developed product or service. Collaboration with donors could potentially occur at the USAID level – both from Washington and the missions – as well as through hub institutions themselves.

### Between hubs

The idea of a global “SERVIR network” implies interconnectedness and active collaboration among network members. At present, current hubs are part of the SERVIR program “umbrella,” and bilateral MOUs exist, such as between CATHALAC and RCMRD. However, active collaboration between hubs on specific projects or initiatives is an area that could be strengthened. This could include joint development of SERVIR applications, shared problem solving, knowledge sharing, etc. The proposed SERVIR “community of practice” could be underpinned by strong connections among the hubs themselves. NASA is working to formalize this further under the banner of the hub exchange program, which was previously referred to as “south-south collaboration”. In discussions with the hubs, however, while expanding such partnership is of interest, other region-specific priorities are seen as higher priority to them.

## **SERVIR hubs and spokes**

While all hub institutions have geographically regional projections, reaching beyond the specific country location of the hub poses geographic, financial, and operational challenges. The idea of creating a network of SERVIR entities has been discussed, and several models exist. Under a hub and spoke model, SERVIR global would link to hubs, which in turn link to country level “spokes.” These spokes would be country-level partners that receive SERVIR support and resources; however, their connection to SERVIR global is through the hub institutions. Under this model, there are three levels of SERVIR.

In addition, USAID and NASA frequently hear of countries and institutions that want to be part of SERVIR, both in existing hub regions and regions not currently served by SERVIR. Given the continued growth of SERVIR, there is an interest in establishing a means for such countries and institutions to partner with SERVIR, either through a formal agreement with an existing hub or through an agreement with SERVIR at the global level. In particular, building such partnerships across diverse institutions could help further the availability of SERVIR products and services across the whole range of GEO societal benefit areas.

## **Between hubs and other institutions**

A number of strong research institutions and NGOs are operating in related sectors in the various regions, and these institutions may be interested in SERVIR-related projects or programs. For example, there may be collaborative opportunities with environmental, conservation, health, education, and other organizations that do not necessarily fit the profile of a SERVIR “entity” but might bring additional value to SERVIR. The difference is that these institutions remain outside of the “internal” SERVIR network (e.g., hubs).

## **Between hubs and USAID regional and bilateral missions**

As SERVIR increases its outreach to USAID regional and bilateral missions in existing hub regions, there are potential partnerships that could link these missions with hub institutions. Many of these partnerships would be directly related to SERVIR, but some have potential to extend beyond the scope and timeframe of SERVIR, which could benefit the long-term sustainability of SERVIR and the hub institutions. For example, USAID/W, NASA and RCMRD gave a presentation to USAID mission staff in Dar es Salaam about SERVIR in February 2013 and there was significant interest expressed by mission staff in data sets and services. There was limited previous interaction between this mission and RCMRD and this interaction enabled some new regional connections to be built. However, it is important in planning this outreach that there be capacity within the hub to be responsive to the potential increased demand for products and services from USAID.

## **Private Sector Partnerships**

Through much of the project's history, private sector companies in the aerospace and geospatial industries have expressed interest in partnering with SERVIR. The interest has largely been focused on the supply of products, services and software to supplement SERVIR's existing resources. While some private sector partnerships have not been deemed advantageous to SERVIR, others are being considered as potential opportunities both at the global and hub level. For example, there is ongoing dialogue with ESRI about continuing and expanding their partnership with SERVIR. In addition, the philanthropic arm of Google, Google.org, has committed to funding satellite antenna hardware at RCMRD, which will enable them to receive valuable satellite information on a more real-time basis, which will certainly benefit their SERVIR products and services. Private sector partnerships have the potential to bring new technologies into SERVIR and enhance outreach, but it is important that they be fully analyzed before pursued to ensure a partnership with one company rather than another provides a clear net benefit to SERVIR. This is an area that has mostly been focused on by NASA, though ICIMOD has become engaged in such partnership development as well.

## Partnership mechanisms

Once there is an understanding of the “with whom, what and why” to pursue a partnership, clarifying the nature of the partnership and how it will be carried out (or continue to be carried out) is the next step. Some mechanisms include MOUs and/or strategic partnership agreements; subcontracts; multi-donor initiatives; joint ventures; “pool” funding that puts money in a common pool and managed collectively; and grants. The mechanism best suited for a partnership will likely not be prescriptive, and will depend on the particular needs of partners.

## Considerations

While partnerships can be seen as the way forward for SERVIR, a number of issues need to be considered. For example:

- **Branding:** How will efforts be attributed and branded by different partners?
- **Ownership:** Who “owns” – or can claim the right to “catalyzing” – whatever product or service is developed?
- **Funding:** Is it expected that each new potential partner will come with funding streams? Or is there an expectation that existing SERVIR partners will provide funding to facilitate partnerships in key sectors and regions?
- **Rules of engagement:** What are the roles of the different partners, and who is responsible for what?
- **Risk management:** Who determines what a risk is and how it will be mitigated? How will risks for different partners be managed, especially if efforts are dependent on the efforts or resources of others?

- **Timing:** How will different funding, planning, and product cycles be managed, and by whom?
- **Knowledge management:** Who or what will ensure that knowledge and lessons learned are shared among partners?
- **Communications:** Who will decide what is communicated about SERVIR and how?
- **Administration and management:** Who oversees what?
- **Sustainability:** How will partnerships and multi-stakeholder initiatives be managed into the future?
- **Strategic vs. opportunistic growth:** How can SERVIR strike a balance between planned partnerships and opportunities that present themselves?

## Recommendations for next steps

- **Define the SERVIR global strategy.** Beyond sustainability planning, a broader SERVIR global strategy, and the process to define it, could help guide the strategic direction of SERVIR and the roles that current and potential partners could play.<sup>1</sup>
- **Explore existing and potential partnerships of each type and identify targeted partnerships to pursue.** What partnerships are currently in place and what potential opportunities exist? Which partnerships would add the most value to SERVIR and further the mission? How is the value to SERVIR estimated on a global and/or a hub scale? Which are the easiest to pursue?
- **Determine who will lead partnership development.** This does not have to reside in one person or SERVIR stakeholder (e.g., NASA, USAID or a hub), but having a clear agreement on who is responsible for a specific partnership and having a thought out approach will lead to greater success.
- **Identify short and midterm actions and wins.** While this concept paper proposes defining a long-term SERVIR strategy, quick wins – and partnerships – are important to keeping momentum going.

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<sup>1</sup> A SERVIR global strategic plan is not part of the Demand Activity SOW, although sustainability and communications plans are.