

Using Multi-NGO Consortia in  
Wildlands Projects:

Lessons for RENARM

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## List of Acronyms Used

ASOMA	Western Environmental Association
BEST	Belize Enterprise for Sustained Technology
CARE	Cooperative Assistance for Relief Everywhere
CATIE	Tropical Agriculture Center for Research and Education
CCAD	Central American Commission for Environment and Development
CCC	Caribbean Conservation Corporation
CI	Conservation International
DAP	design and perform
E/GCC	USAID's Environment/Global Climate Change Program
FUNDAECO	Foundation for Ecological Development and Conservation
LIO	lead implementing organization
LNGO	local non-governmental organization
MAYAREMA	Maya Region Environmental Management Project
MNI	multi-NGO intervention
MSI	Management Systems International
NGO	non-governmental organization
NRMAP	Natural Resource Management Project (USAID/Belize)
ONARM	Office of Natural Resource Management
PACA	Central American Environmental Project
RENARM	Regional Environment and Natural Resource Management Project
RFA	request for application
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
TR&D	Tropical Research & Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USNGO	United States-based non-governmental organizations
WAR	Water and Air Resources
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society

## Executive Summary

Much of RENARM's original design was consciously experimental, attempting to introduce innovative program elements, together with an active monitoring and evaluation component, to determine what works best and adapt program design and implementation accordingly. The Wildlands/NGO component is an excellent case in point: RENARM aggressively sought out USNGOs to team together in the belief that by doing so they could accelerate development of a mixed conservation/development model, achieve a greater impact, and access the wide range of technical skills necessary to have success.

That was the experiment. This report is the test, whereby RENARM is examining itself to consider ways to improve its work with more than one NGO in an integrated development effort (referred to in this report as a "multi-NGO intervention", MNI). It is hoped that the analysis will be used in considering how best to design "RENARM II" and to help programs in other parts of the world think through how to work with multiple NGOs.

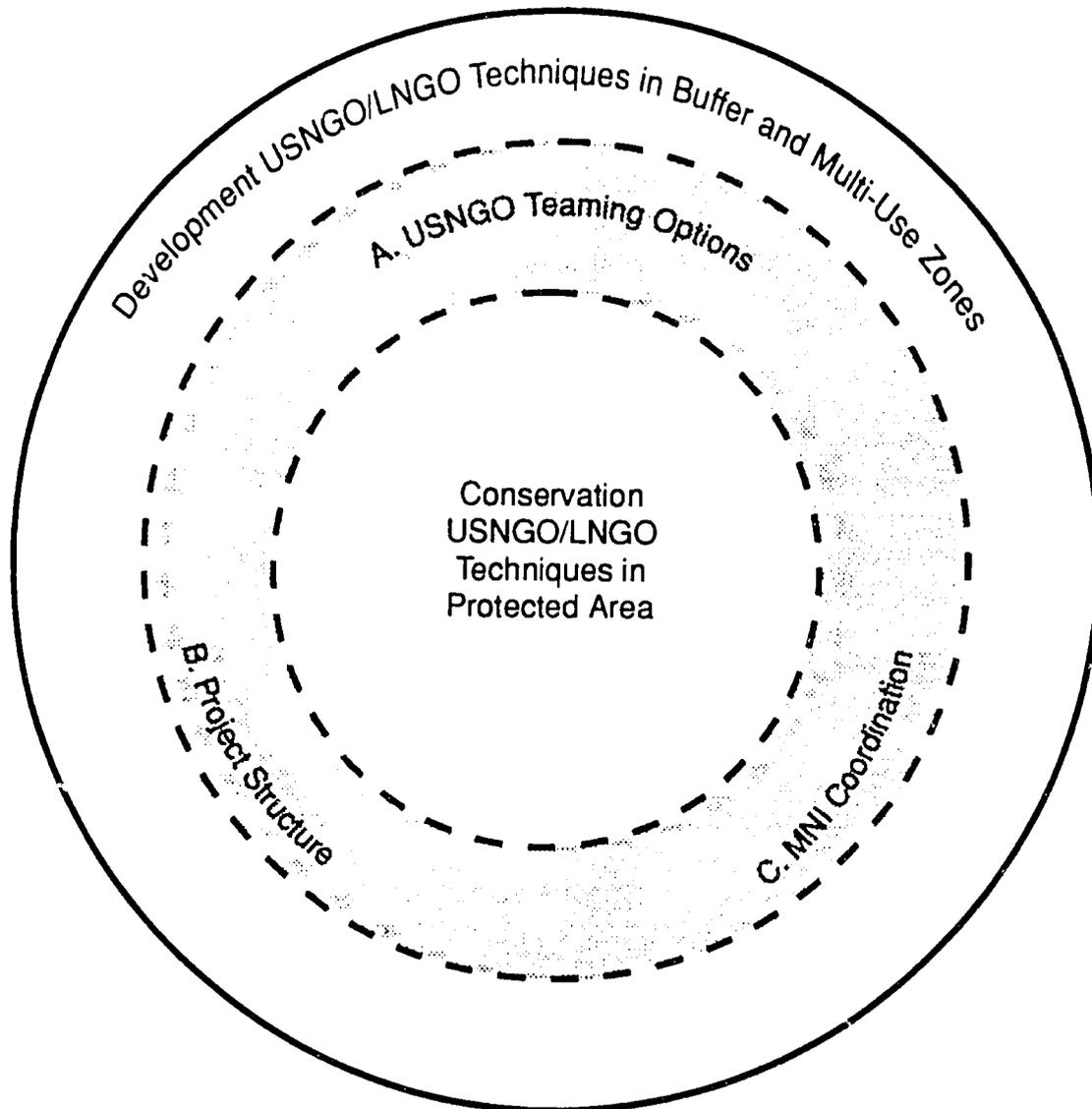
RENARM designers believed that to achieve success in a protected area, the project needed to address both conservation issues within the limits of the protected area and development issues in the buffer and multi-use zones surrounding it. Thus, it issued RFAs to USNGOs, strongly urging consortium approaches. RFA drafters felt that within protected areas conservation techniques and practices were needed, and thus conservation USNGOs would be required. In buffer and multi-use zones, however, development techniques and practices, and thus development USNGOs, would be necessary. By encouraging the teaming of development and conservation NGOs, it was hoped that common objectives and strategy could help synergize their efforts. Figure 1, presented below, sketches the focus of this study: how to structure the connections between the USNGOs to maximize the impact of MNIs.

This study made no effort to assess the impact of the MNIs used by RENARM; that analysis will be performed as part of the up-coming external evaluation of RENARM. **It is very difficult to determine the extent to which the conservation and development partners in the MNI learned to incorporate each other's strategies and techniques.** One of the MNIs, Paseo Pantera, included only conservation NGOs so no test was available. The structure of the other, PACA (including CARE and The Nature Conservancy), appears to have resulted in so little contact between its partners (except at the highest levels), that it would be difficult to associate any changes in behavior with gains from the dynamics of teaming conservation and development NGOs. CARE reported gaining experience through PACA in institutional development and improved its corporate resume in the field of conservation and environmental education -- but these developments seem to have been mostly self-

# Figure 1

## Themes in Multi-NGO Consortia in Wildlands Projects

1. To develop synergy, rather than conflict or mere co-existence among development and conservation techniques, the items in the shaded area will require special attention.



2. Important considerations to enable effective consortia formation and LNGO participation.

D. USNGO Relationships with Local Institutions

E. Procurement Strategies

\* Items A-E refer to sections of Part 4 of this report, Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations.

directed. TNC reports improved coordination between its data and implementation arms, but this does not appear to represent learning from the development model.

The MNIs do, however, appear to have effectively tapped a broad range of highly skilled and experienced conservation and development professionals. Participating USNGOs are expanding their regional capabilities in conservation and developing useful local networks.

The most striking lesson emerging from our analysis was unexpected and does not directly address the working hypotheses within the Wildlands/NGO component: **whatever gains USAID hopes to achieve through use of MNIs will only accrue if proper attention is paid to the management requirements of the MNI formed.** Many of the shortcomings the team noted in MNI effectiveness and efficiency were the result of failures of the MNIs, as organizations. For MNIs to function effectively, it is essential that USAID and the members of the MNI recognize that by forming an MNI to achieve a project purpose, they are forming a new organization with a special mission and communication, reporting, and decision-making requirements that must be tailored to the needs of the new MNI.

Planning -- and investment -- for this organization must begin at the project design stage and continue for the life of the project. **Invitations to participate in MNIs must clearly state the vision of the project** so that competing NGOs can identify areas where they have a comparative advantage and form complementary partnerships. Since MNIs will require the melding of organizations with differing missions and organizational structures, **proposers must be given more time to form the MNIs than is normally granted in USAID's bidding process.**

Prior to being awarded cooperative agreements **MNIs must be required to demonstrate how they will structure the new organization to deliver the vision USAID specifies.**

The USNGO world is a relatively new one to many at USAID, and activities to be undertaken in NRM will always have geographically specific issues (both technical and organizational) about which some USNGOs may be able to instruct USAID. Accordingly, we recommend that the **design and procurement process somehow provide for greater participation by interested USNGOs prior to bidding.**

It is the opinion of the team that if USAID seeks to continue using MNIs for natural resource projects, and this seems both likely and advisable, **USAID must recognize that management of MNIs is an intensive process and budget accordingly.** This means that USAID must be prepared to spend considerable staff time supporting, monitoring, and promoting the MNI to ensure that it stays on track. **MNIs should have a coordinating unit to promote coordination and communication, provide management economies of scale, and promote synergy among the partners.** To avoid conflict of interest and tyranny of one party in the MNI, **the unit should be directed by an independent organization, probably contracted by USAID or the MNI and it should provide a service function to the other partners.** The unit would provide strategic planning, monitoring, facilitation, and coordination services to the MNI in an impartial manner.

RENARM considers expansion and deepening of LNGO technical, organizational, and political participation in Central America an important objective. The current MNIs have helped pursue this objective. However, the team feels that **follow-on activity to this project would benefit from the addition of an LNGO umbrella project which could provide access to greater numbers of LNGOS, provide a forum for LNGO exchange, and possibly develop a nucleus and safe haven for LNGO dialogue with local governments.**

# 1. Introduction and Context

The study summarized in this report was financed under the monitoring and evaluation component of the RENARM project paper which states,

This monitoring and evaluating process should be both summative and formative, and it should be decision driven....It should sum up what has happened and draw lessons learned .... It should formulate these lessons as analytical information for future redesign and for the inclusion of new elements in the Project. (p. 110)

The report examines the experience of "multi-NGO interventions" in natural resource management projects to provide lessons learned for RENARM's continuing efforts under its NGO/Wildlands component. It is not intended as a formal evaluation, such as the mid-term RENARM evaluation, scheduled to follow this study by several months.

The NGO/Wildlands Component of RENARM is currently executed through two groupings of US-based NGOs (USNGOs), PACA and Paseo Pantera, and their local counterparts. The initial bidders' conference and RFAs issued by USAID to complete work under this component encouraged USNGOs to apply as "consortia". PACA, composed of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and CARE, and Paseo Pantera, composed of Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC), were formed in response to the incentives created through the procurement process.<sup>1</sup> That response shaped the structure and institutional capabilities of the two teams.

In preparation for the anticipated continuance of RENARM (hereafter called RENARM II), the current Wildlands Component project management (including USAID, USNGOs, and LNGOs) expressed a desire to review the experience of PACA and Paseo Pantera and other selected MNIs. The objective was to learn when such "multi-NGO interventions (MNIs) are advantageous, and how the design and procurement of RENARM II could be structured to improve future MNIs.<sup>2</sup> While readers will be able to find some specific exceptions to the generalizations found in this document, the authors hope that the reports's conclusions and recommendations will provide useful overall guidance as the follow-on activity to RENARM is designed and implemented.

The report has a broader audience as well. We hope that analysis of the experience of MNIs, and its application to RENARM's specific concerns, will help inform design and implementation decisions of other environmental activities requiring the contribution of more than

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<sup>1</sup> Originally, Conservation International (CI) was also a member of PACA. However, relatively early into the implementation of RENARM, CI left PACA, chiefly due to differences in implementation style and disagreement as to how PACA should proceed.

<sup>2</sup> Since NGOs could be associated in a wide variety of ways, we have chose to leave open the nature of the teaming by referring to them as "multi-NGO interventions" (MNIs), instead of "consortia", which appears to carry with it for some readers certain preconceptions as to the nature of the association.

one NGO.<sup>3</sup> We expect that USAID will increasingly enlist the assistance of more than one NGO to work on environmental projects for the following reasons:

- (a) NGOs have a wide range of experience and technical expertise to offer USAID in addressing natural resource management and conservation issues and broadening the perspectives included in USAID's programmatic thinking;
- (b) It is becoming increasingly apparent that successful interventions in these areas require multi-disciplinary approaches; and
- (c) Most USNGOs have reasonably focused missions and the NGO market is characterized by niche occupation.

Thus, to achieve success in environmental projects and work with NGOs, USAID will often choose to work with more than one NGO.

We hope this report will increase awareness among project designers in both USAID and the NGO community of the opportunities, pitfalls, and approaches necessary in working with MNIs.

## 2. Methodology

The analysis contained in this report is based on interviews and project documentation review. Interviews with over 60 individuals were conducted in Washington, DC., Georgia, Florida, Virginia, Belize, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala. A listing of the persons interviewed and their organizational affiliations appears in Annex 1. All US-based organizations currently participating in PACA and Paseo Pantera were included in the interview group, as well as two organizations that were originally included in either PACA or Paseo Pantera, but are no longer full members. Sub-contractors to the MNIs were also interviewed. PACA and Paseo Pantera staff were interviewed at both headquarters and field locations. A major US conservation organization which decided not to bid on RENARM was also interviewed.

Local organizations interviewed included several LNGOs that were partnered with PACA, Paseo Pantera, both PACA and Paseo Pantera. LNGOs were also interviewed that did not work with the MNIs, but worked with MNI members on other projects as well as LNGOs that had absolutely no direct connection with any of the MNI members. The interview group also included host government officials and the Central American Commission for Environment and

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<sup>3</sup> See, "The U.S. Agency for International Development and the Private Voluntary Community (A report to the Advisory Committee on Voluntary Foreign Aid from a Joint Task Force Established by the Agency for International Development and InterAction)" Draft #2 October 14, 1993. The Task Force has presented AID with several recommendations that will expand the existing range of options for creating more innovative and efficient arrangements for bringing NGOs together to deliver outputs in the service of AID's strategic objectives

Development, the CCAD.

Within A.I.D. we interviewed individuals responsible for the original design and procurement of RENARM as well as those responsible for implementation and oversight of the Wildlands/NGO component.

In order to gain comparative perspective the team attempted, in a less comprehensive manner, to integrate lessons from other MNI initiatives, including USAID/Guatemala's MAYAREMA project and the LAC Bureau's Environment/Global Climate Change project in Brazil. MAYAREMA is of interest because it contains many of the members of PACA and Paseo Pantera in a parallel, rather than an integrated, MNI structure and it is being implemented in Central America. Interviews with participants at, and attendance at, the twice-yearly planning/coordination meeting were used to learn about MAYAREMA. E/GCC was only brought generally into the analysis, based on the experience of one of the team members with that project.

The team consisted of two full-time RENARM staff intimately familiar with the project, Leslie Lannon, NGO Coordinator, and Hillary Lorraine, Research Advisor, as well as a consultant, Mark Renzi, from Management Systems International, the monitoring and evaluation contractor to RENARM.

After the interview data was compiled, the team met in Guatemala to write the final report. A draft report was submitted to ROCAP, and comments were incorporated into the final version.

### 3. History

RENARM implements USAID's Central American Strategy. The Strategy established the boundaries and rationale for USAID's Central American efforts and provided the framework for project design, justification, and implementation of USAID NRM projects.

The Strategy established USAID's goal as "to produce, with the citizens of Central American countries, the conditions for sustained exploitation of natural resources in a manner that minimizes the damage to the environment, protects bio-diversity, and provides the means for equitable and sustainable economic growth." It identified the constraints to remedial action as policy failures, institutional limitations, cultural and social forces, and technology.

This strategy, and the RENARM project design, represent an emerging theory of sustainable development -- that decentralization and broad-based participation are essential conditions for creating and maintaining decision-making processes and institutions that can formulate and implement policies that will lead to equitable and sustainable economic growth.

RENARM's Wildlands/NGO Component pursues this decentralization by incorporating

recent U.S. experience with NGOs as motivators of a more participatory and transparent environmental policy environment. It was designed to utilize the inherent strengths of NGOs and to promote their growth and development in Central America as a vehicle for driving democratic systems, increasing pluralism, and promoting broadly based participation.

At the time RENARM was being designed, economic development and conservation of natural resources were generally treated separately by USAID and by separate NGO providers. NGOs had developed institutional capabilities and technical expertise in their chosen area. RENARM's support for consortium building reflected the designers' concern for creating an institutional capability to address conservation and development as interdependent activities. Their belief was that NGOs would be able to transfer to one another their expertise through cooperation within a consortium of conservation and development NGOs. This mutual learning process would give rise to an integrated conservation and development model along with the tools and institutional capabilities to deliver sustainable NRM services in a new world characterized by downsizing of governments and emerging local NGO communities.

The central design theme was to create a project structure that supported innovation and risk taking, was flexible, self-evaluating, capable of learning, and would generate economies of scale at a regional level gained through: a) coordination and sharing lessons learned; b) a buy-in capability with Missions to reduce overhead costs associated with program design and administration; and c) provision of activities that span political borders.

Currently there are two MNIs in RENARM. PACA is composed of CARE (LIO) and TNC, and Paseo Pantera is composed of WCS (LIO) and CCC with sub contracts to Water and Air Resources (WAR), University of Florida, and Tropical Research & Development (TR&D). PACA implements Buffer Zone Management, Environmental Education, Environmental Policy and Strategic Planning, Environmental Monitoring and Conservation Information, and Wildlands Management. Paseo Pantera implements a similar scope of activities designed to develop and support the Central American biotic corridor. Both consortia have access to technical assistance provided by CATIE, Zamorano and the RENARM staff. The field headquarters of both MNIs are located in San Jose, Costa Rica, and the RENARM project office is located in Guatemala City.

## 4. Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

The following sections summarize the study team's analysis. They are divided into **Findings** (data emerging directly from interviews or document review)<sup>4</sup>, **Conclusions** (derived directly by the study team from analysis of the Findings), and **Recommendations** (actions suggested by the team, based directly on the Findings and Conclusions -- these were sometimes

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<sup>4</sup> Findings were only included if they were verified by multiple informants or were contained in prior analysis or project documentation.

discussed with interviewees as working hypotheses). The structure allows the reader test the validity of the logic employed and explore alternate interpretation of the interview findings.

The sections are presented thematically according to areas that would be of most use to those considering designing RENARM II. These thematic areas are as follows:

- A. USNGO Teaming Options;
- B. Project Structure;
- C. MNI Coordination Unit;
- D. USNGO Relationships with Local Institutions; and
- E. Procurement Strategy.

Figure 1, below, presents a graphic depiction of the how the five themes are related. If the objective of forming MNI in wildlands projects is to achieve synergy between development and conservation practitioners, then special attention must be paid to the items included in the shaded ring of Figure 1 (Items A-C above). They constitute the glue, communication, and stimulus among the NGOs. Item D is essential if the project is to be able to work effectively and efficiently with LNGOs. Item E must be considered to ensure that potential partners in MNIs have appropriate opportunity and incentives to form an effective and efficient MNI.

## A. USNGO Teaming Options

This analysis explores three ways to structure the newly-formed MNI organization within which more than one USNGO can work together. For a summary of design options, see Table 1, below. Programmatically, the first approach, "parallel MNI", offers a vehicle for contracting with several NGOs, with little intent to fashion an integrated team or approach. The latter two would be appropriate where USAID wishes to develop an MNI with greater integration among its partners. The second entry describes what was employed with PACA and Paseo Pantera and the third entry, "hybrid collaborative MNI", describes the mode recommended by this study. As indicated in Figure 1, presented in the Executive Summary of this report, the teaming structure is crucial in developing appropriate connections between the NGOs.

**Table 1: MNI Design Options**

<b><i>MNI Structure</i></b>	<b><i>Organizational Structure</i></b>
Parallel MNI	Each USNGO has its own contract, cooperative agreement, or grant with USAID and is individually responsible/accountable to USAID.
Lead Implementing Organization (LIO) MNI	A lead organization has the only direct contract, cooperative agreement, or grant with USAID. It is responsible to USAID for the project. It, in turn, has hierarchical, accountability, and programmatic relationships to the other USNGOs through sub-contracts.
Hybrid Collaborative MNI	Legally, this is structured like a parallel MNI. However, USNGOs develop a structure to coordinate, plan, and report, collectively.

**Findings**

1. Unlike consulting firms frequently used by A.I.D., USNGOs interviewed do not have a long history of working collaboratively in consortia.
2. Many of the LNGOs and USNGOs are in direct competition for recognition, donor resources and individual contributions. This is particularly true among environmental USNGOs and among development USNGOs.
3. In establishing themselves in the NGO marketplace, the USNGOs have established focused niches and particular approaches to solving environmental and development problems. Internal consistency is created through tradition, staff self-selection, and mission-reinforcing marketing strategies. This is true within each of the environmental USNGOs communities and the development USNGOs communities.
4. USNGOs report that conflicting philosophies and approaches are potentially most disruptive to consortia where the potential partners' niches overlap and where they would be expected to work in the same geographic area at the same time.
5. A range of administrative structures, lines of reporting, information exchange, and decision-making patterns exists among the USNGOs.
6. Significant USNGO costs (in labor, hiring of staff, and acquiring office space and equipment) were associated with forming MNIs among the integrated MNIs reviewed (PACA, Paseo Pantera), with some being more costly than others. In contrast, in cases where an integrated consortium was not sought (MAYAREMA, E/GCC) USNGO integration costs were

far less.<sup>5</sup>

7. Costs in USAID project officer, administrative, and contracting staff time are reported to be less when dealing with one lead implementing organization (LIO) -- such as with CARE in PACA and WCS in Paseo Pantera -- than with multiple parallel USAID/USNGO cooperative agreements with each partner (such as with MAYAREMA or E/GCC)

8. USNGOs report that having one LIO within an integrated MNI could limit synergy and stifle creativity among participants as the LIO's approach and philosophy can dominate the group. This was less true where disharmonies described in Finding 4 did not exist or where interventions were separated geographically.

9. In some cases LIO MNIs appeared extremely capable of developing shared strategic (and regional) focus and in others it appears to have been more difficult.

10. Among parallel MNIs, achieving shared strategic focus appears to require some highly energetic extra-USNGO entity such as AID, a government body, or a private consulting organization (MAYAREMA, E/GCC). No example was studied where such resources had been comprehensively, or fully successfully applied.

11. USNGOs stated that if they are forced to jointly market MNI activities, it can impede their ability to raise funds. It appears however, that looser arrangements that permit partner USNGOs to identify individual accomplishments within a MNI, provide them with the best of both worlds: ability to sell themselves on individual accomplishments and as part of a bigger scheme.

## Conclusions

1. Developing integrated MNIs among partners with significantly different organizational structures requires special attention to develop shared operating procedures that reflect the conceptual, technical, and programmatic intents of the program. (Findings 1, 3, 4, 5).

2. A costly and lengthy learning period is often required for USNGOs to be able to work effectively together in integrated MNIs. (Finding 6; Conclusion 1).

3. Even when integrated MNIs are successfully developed, competition among partners in the marketplace may impede communication, coordination, and mutual learning (Finding 2).

4. Where integrated consortia are formed, the least-costly method would be to team organizations with similar structures, common philosophies, and different market niches. Gains

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<sup>5</sup> Designers of MAYAREMA who were also involved in the design of RENARM report that MAYAREMA intentionally decided to avoid encouraging integrated consortia to avoid duplicating the experience of RENARM.

from the effort to integrate USNGOs into consortia must be significant to out-weigh the costs described above. (Conclusions 1, 2, 3)

5. Using a LIO for MNIs basically shifts a portion of the implementation costs from USAID to the USNGOs -- at the possible programmatic cost of reducing the richness of USNGO creative interaction. (Findings 6, 7)

6. The LIO MNI mechanism does not guarantee shared strategic focus within the MNI. Potential appears to exist to foster strategic focus in a parallel format, but it would require greater investment than had been made among our sample. (Findings 9, 10)

7. MNI designs must take into account the need for its members to market their accomplishments, both as individual organizations, and, perhaps, as members of the MNI as well. (Findings 1, 11)

### Recommendations

1. USAID should not actively promote integrated consortia unless it is clear that such an implementation structure would result in considerable gains in efficiency or impact. In most cases, donors should facilitate self-selection among NGOs based on technical and organizational capabilities in response to needs identified in the project. (Conclusions 1, 2, 3, 6)

2. Where MNIs are advantageous, the MNIs should strive to include partners with similar structures, common philosophies, and different market niches. (Conclusion 4)

3. Where a perfect match is not possible, as described immediately above, responsibilities could be divided along geographic, temporal, or thematic lines. (Recommendation 2)

4. Where possible, avoid encouraging one of the USNGOs to serve as an LIO. If necessary, establish a separate unit to handle the administrative burden (see also section 4C). The unit could be an A.I.D. contractor or a contractor selected by the MNI. (Conclusions 5, 6) This approach is described as the "hybrid collaborative MNI" in the table at the beginning of this section.

5. USAID should consult with USNGOs to ensure that whatever structure is design will not hinder USNGO marketing activity. (Conclusion 7)

## B. Project Structure

The RENARM project paper and RFAs treated the logistics of implementing project components as a purely technical endeavor. They said little about the implementor's responsibility for designing a project management structure capable of driving the ambitious type of "consortia"

they encouraged. Further, the characteristics of a "regional" approach were not clearly specified in the project paper, and in fact, have evolved as a result of the cooperative efforts of the RENARM staff and the consortia.

Implementation was treated as a technical NRM matter, rather than the consequence of individuals linked together across organizations that played interactive provider and consumer roles. To fully implement the intent of the project, the number of potential coordination and communication linkages implied by the project design would form a matrix with the following central players arrayed along the two axes: USAID-ROCAP, the USAID missions, National Governments, MNI Executive Committee, MNI national coordinating mechanism, LNGOs, CATIE, and Zamorano. The connections would be more or less important depending on activities and opportunities to achieve a value added capability through creating a synergistic interaction.

The reader may want to refer to the organizational charts for Paseo Pantera and PACA, located in Annex 2, as reference while reading this section. As indicated in Figure 1, presented in the Executive Summary of this report, the structure of the MNI is crucial to achieving synergy among the partners.

### Findings

1. The RFA required a management plan but in the case of PACA, the proposed plan was not evaluated in terms its ability to: identify important feedback about performance at various levels of the project, communicate information vertically and horizontally within and between technically interdependent program elements, calibrate decision-making authority across implementing organizations, and delegate it effectively.
2. Other USAID programs that involved similar USNGOs working in parallel contractual arrangements also appeared to suffer from incomplete coordination. Both non-integrated MNIs included in this study (MAYAREMA and E/GCC-Brazil) have contracted for external monitoring and evaluation services after the projects began in order to improve coordination. In one case, close physical proximity of the USNGOs may have contributed to informal coordination.
3. Within the MNIs, communication and coordination problems arose where there were differences in institutional vision, philosophy about service delivery, reporting, hierarchical distribution of responsibility and authority.
4. The lack of fit described above created high coordination and communication costs in the case of PACA.
5. The PACA LIO functions through a bilateral structure with country missions each having different policies and programmatic focus. The bilateral structure and decentralized centers of programmatic discretion were translated to the PACA structure, helping to impede coordination between the NGO members of PACA, PACA and Paseo Pantera, and among LNGOs in PACA.

[See Annex 2, PACA Structure, and note that only one LNGO was shared by CARE and TNC]

6. The PACA structure [See Annex 2] imposed an indirect communication and decision-making structure on all decisions that were non-routine in nature. Decisions made at the national CARE-PACA level had to travel through the Regional CARE LAC office in New York (now Atlanta) to the Regional Technical Assistance office in Atlanta back to the PACA Central Office.
7. At program outset, clear communication channels and decision-making protocols were not established within the MNIs and between MNIs and ROCAP. Neglecting to establish clear legitimate communication channels has persisted between the MNIs and the national governments, AID missions, CARE missions, and LNGOs. In some cases this resulted in costs associated with suboptimal site and NGO selection and restructuring of the consortium.
8. The RENARM Project Paper did not sufficiently specify the MNI's relationship to the USAID Missions. In several cases, site selection and LNGO selection became fraught with organizational considerations that took precedence over technical and participatory criteria. This served to: a) impede project progress, b) undermine local participatory process, c) fail to gain important institutional support from government, and d) fail to accrue the anticipated efficiency gains from buy-ins with AID missions.
9. Several sources noted that a contact person familiar with all MNI activities was needed to coordinate and facilitate information flow at the regional and national levels.
10. Informants indicated that the country teams, as structured in PACA, did not play their intended coordination role effectively. They also reported a strong coordination capability at the national level was required to facilitate communication among the MNI actors, promote consensus on work plans, communicate with the national and regional environmental community, coordinate with governmental agencies, and act as a focal point for coordinating with bilateral and donor organizations.
11. MNI partners located in close proximity to one another reported that communication and coordination were fostered by the arrangement. Conversely, where partners were not located together, coordination seems to have been impeded. The location of ROCAP and the MNI headquarters in separate countries also contributed to increasing communication and coordination costs.
12. Informants in CARE and TNC reported that some of the inter-institutional learning project designers anticipated from the MNI structure did occur. Exploring the nature and extent of inter-institutional learning was beyond the scope of this study and the team was unable to determine whether or not the changes discussed would have occurred in the absence of the TNC/CARE teaming.

## Conclusions

1. The RENARM project required creating institutional relationships and delivering tasks that were new and untried by USAID and many of the cooperators, however, they continued to apply existing standard routine approaches to the new conditions. (Findings 1,3,4)
2. USAID and the MNIs paid insufficient attention to organizational design during the planning process. A standard management structure was put in place before analyzing the nature of the proposed tasks and activities and the coordination, control and communication capabilities that would be required to implement them. (Findings 1,3,4)
3. In cases where program designers intend there to be value added capabilities derived from either parallel or integrated MNI activities, explicit attention to communication and coordination mechanisms will improve project output, including provisions for locating MNI headquarters in the same place. (Findings 2,3,4; Conclusions 1, 2)
4. Over time the management structure of PACA evolved in response to internal and external pressures and conflicts giving rise to new structurally related problems that in some cases hindered ability to deliver project outputs in line with the spirit of the project design. Project designers need to anticipate these sources of implementation failure and allocate USAID and MNI resources to their solution when soliciting the participation of MNI. (Findings 3-10; Conclusion 3)
5. The delegation of authority and decision-making responsibility in many cases did not support bottom-up participatory involvement of the major participants especially the national governments and USAID missions,. Neither did it facilitate sequencing activities provided by different members of the MNI applied at the site level. (Findings 5-7, 10, 11)
6. Coordination mechanisms at country and regional levels, in some cases does not appear to have been sufficient to create the "greater than the sum of the parts" synergistic character envisioned in the project paper and expected in integrated MNIs. (Findings 9, 10)
7. Physical proximity of the MNI members facilitates communication and adaptive respond to implementation challenges as they arise. (2, 11)
8. While inter-institutional learning was reported to have occurred at upper levels it probably did not occur at the LNGO level as a result of the MNI structure. (Findings 6, 12)

## Recommendations

1. RFAs should place as much attention on the organizational delivery mechanism as they do on specifying the technical components and intended outputs. Organizational structure [decision-making, coordination, communication and control] is an essential intermediate output

because it controls the project's capacity to deliver its intended output. Special attention should be placed on new and/or experimental activities. (Conclusions 1-6)

2. Monitoring and evaluation indicators should be identified and employed that assess the health and utility of the MNI management structure put in place to implement outputs. The management structure should be interpreted to include all the key participants required to implement the spirit and intent of the project. (Conclusions 1-6)
3. Allocate funds for addressing the organization design issues identified above and for monitoring the relationship and process capabilities required to implement the spirit and intent of the technical components of the project. (Conclusions 1-6)
4. The conceptual and technical content of the project should drive coordination, communication, locus of discretion and responsibility. For example if conservation data provides a basis for a program designed in response to Rapid Rural Appraisal, then the activities must be tied together structurally. (Conclusion 5)
5. To minimize conflicts, divide responsibilities in ways that are understood by all. That division can occur along thematic, geographic and temporal lines. (Conclusion 2)
6. Formal coordination mechanisms should be developed at the country and regional levels. (Finding 10; Conclusions 5, 6)
7. Strong country working groups composed of all implementing USNGOs and LNGOs that are members of the MNI should be created and incentives established to encourage them to function as a coordination body linking major participants to MNI activities and to each other. (Finding 10; Conclusion 6)
8. A country coordinator is essential to provide a central point of contact for the country working group and act as liaison between the working group and the array of potential cooperators. The country coordinator and working groups create a mechanism to keep government informed and build linkages with related projects and other donors. (Findings 9, 10; Conclusion 6)
9. In general, the MNIs (and donor project manager) should share close physical proximity to facilitate daily on-going coordination and communication and to develop a shared "project mentality" to balance a natural propensity to view activities only from the point of view of the home organization. (Conclusions 6, 7)
10. Inter-institutional learning within the large NGOs was an intended benefit of the MNI structure. The team assigned to perform RENARM's mid-term evaluation should explore the extent to which it occurred and whether or not teaming is a cost-effective vehicle for strengthening USNGOs to deliver NRM activities in the service of achieving USAID strategic objectives. (Finding 12)

## C. MNI Coordination Unit

This section explores how the MNI coordination unit might be structured to provide facilitation and communication support at the various levels of MNI activity. Whatever teaming structure is ultimately adopted for MNIs (see section 4A) to obtain a synergy among the partners, the RFA for RENARM II must require MNIs to ensure that the flow of information among partners, adequate coordination, strategic planning, monitoring, and reporting is engineered into the MNI design. At the same time, the cost of establishing and maintaining these mechanism management layers or bureaucracy. As indicated in Figure 1, presented in the Executive Summary of this report, a coordination unit may well prove to be crucial to achieving synergy among the partners.

### Findings

1. Analysis from this study indicates a need for structured and planned mechanisms to facilitate planning, coordination, monitoring, evaluation, and program adaptation. (See section 4B)
2. To be effective, the MNI must have the capacity to both reach down to the project site level and to retain credibility with top management of the USNGOs, A.I.D., and government representatives. (See Section 4B)
3. To be credible with its constituents, the MNI coordination unit must possess technical capacity in the areas in which it will serve: strategic planning, facilitation, monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and other management functions.
4. It appears possible to have one of the partners serve this role (as in the case of Paseo Pantera) when the MNI is composed of a relatively small number of partners sharing relatively harmonious philosophies, structures, and approaches,
5. As the number of partners increases, or as disharmony in philosophy, structures, and approaches increases, the central function can lose credibility among the partners within the MNI if it becomes perceived as promoting the interests of one partner over the others.
6. If staff of the coordination unit are employees of one of the partners, it is likely that their loyalties will be with their employer -- at the very least, this perception will exist among the partners.
7. Consensus exists among RENARM NGO partners that the coordinating unit could play a very important coordination role and that it should be service-oriented in its relationship with partners and the MNI's various projects.

8. Consensus also exists that the coordination unit could usefully serve as a center for providing various forms of technical assistance to the partners -- possibly achieving economies of scale.
9. Consensus exists that the unit should not have any decision-making authority; that such authority would add an unnecessary layer of management to the MNI.

### Conclusions

1. Any MNI groupings in RENARM II should contain a capacity to facilitate communication and management decision-making at all levels of the MNI. (Findings 1, 2)
2. The MNI coordination unit must possess a high degree of skills in strategic planning, program management, monitoring, evaluation, facilitation, and fostering communication. (Finding 3)
3. In general, to serve the important facilitative role, the MNI coordination unit should not be identified too closely with any one organization. Therefore, the unit should not contain employees of the partner organizations, and ideally should be organizationally independent of the partners. (Findings 4, 6)
4. The coordination unit should not have any decision-making authority over MNI partners' activities. Its role is to be the "honest broker" among MNI partners. (Findings 6, 7, 9)
5. The coordination unit should perceive the MNI partners as its clients. (Findings 6, 7, 8, 9)

### Recommendations

1. Prior to being awarded cooperative agreements, all MNIs (as organizations apart from each USNGO) should be required to demonstrate that systems will be in place to foster communication at the country level among participating USNGOs and local institutions; at the regional level; and among the top management of the USNGOs, USAID and the governments. (Conclusion 1)
2. All MNIs (as organizations apart from each USNGO) must be able to demonstrate that they possess, or will contract for, -- in addition to the technical skills in their areas of substantive expertise -- skills in strategic planning, program management, monitoring, evaluation, and communication facilitation. These should probably be embodied in an identifiable MNI coordination unit. (Conclusion 2)

3. The coordination unit should be independent of any one of the members. It could be funded collectively by participating members. It could also be funded by USAID directly, but might then be perceived as beholden to USAID. (Conclusion 3)

4. The coordination unit should be structured to have the following characteristics:

- (a) be an "honest broker" among partners (with little vested interest in the outcomes);
- (b) be service-oriented towards the various partners;
- (c) it should not possess any authority over the partners, nor any MNI decision-making authority; and
- (d) it may usefully serve as a centralized mechanism for providing technical assistance.

(Conclusions 4, 5)

## D. USNGO Relationships with Local Institutions

A central emphasis in RENARM has been focusing on working with NGOs, both US and local. This section will examine how MNIs can be structured to most effectively interact with local institutions. The reader may also wish to refer to another RENARM self-analysis study, "RENARM, USAID and Central American NGOs: Voices from the Field", which describes LNGO attitudes toward RENARM and USAID and which was heavily consulted in drafting this section. As indicated in Figure 1, presented in the Executive Summary of this report, proper attention to LNGO/USNGO relationships is essential to obtaining full LNGO participation.

### Findings

1. RENARM's MNIs have used USNGOs to directly implement activities, partner with LNGOs in a mentoring relationship, and use LNGOs as implementation mechanisms.
2. RENARM's MNIs have not worked directly with LNGOs without a USNGO intermediary.
3. The nature of the USNGO/LNGO relationship has generally been exclusive, where each LNGO is teamed with only one USNGO.
4. The parallel nature of the USNGO/LNGO relationships has led to very little cross-fertilization of LNGOs that partner with different USNGOs.
5. In addition, the partnering pattern requires that funds pass through the USNGO to the LNGO which limits the percentage of project funds that reach the field and reduces the total number of LNGOs that can be reached.

6. A risk exists that LNGOs that are with USNGOs may end up being "cloned" to a certain extent from the mold of the US organization, partly at the expense of allowing the local organization to develop in a way most appropriate to local circumstances.

7. The economies of scale achieved through regional mechanisms established through RENARM (such as technical assistance, coordination, regional and cross-border activities) could efficiently be applied to a larger number of LNGOs than would be partnered only through current arrangements.

8. The NGO component of RENARM has placed far less emphasis on using USNGOs to work with government institutions.

9. Where MNIs have not actively included government representatives in their site selection and project planning process, NGO/Government conflict seems to have been frequent and enduring.

### Conclusions

1. Current RENARM MNI structures, and the scale of LNGO involvement in it, are not conducive to broad regional LNGO/LNGO interaction and learning. (Findings 1, 2, 3, 4)

2. RENARM is capable of efficiently reaching a greater number of LNGOs than under current MNI structures. (Findings 5, 7)

3. RENARM II would benefit from utilizing more direct mechanisms to reach LNGOs that do not require the intermediary role of USNGOs, provide development assistance more directly targeted to the LNGO's needs, and which permit it to reach more LNGOs. (Findings 4, 5, 6)

4. An opportunity may exist in RENARM II to foster coordination among LNGOs to encourage learning, international cooperation, and LNGO/government dialogue. (Conclusions 1, 2, 3)

5. In general, MNI interventions should be encouraged to include government input, at least in an advisory role. (Findings 8, 9)

### Recommendations

1. MNIs should provide mechanisms for coordination and sharing among LNGOs paired with different USNGOs in the MNI. (Conclusion 1)

2. RENARM II should include a regional LNGO umbrella project with experts in

institutional, political, and management development. (Findings 2, 3)

3. RENARM II should develop mechanisms to use the combined influence of its country teams, MNI partnerships, and LNGO umbrella project to improve LNGO coordination and develop a voice for NGO concerns with the governments. (Conclusions 2, 4, 5)

4. Representatives from national, local and regional governmental bodies should have some type of participatory role in MNI planning processes. (Conclusion 5)

## E. Procurement Strategy

The RFAs and bidders' conference that constituted the original invitation to participate in RENARM greatly influenced the participants teaming patterns, and structure of NGO interventions in RENARM in the form of PACA and Paseo Pantera. The study team examined the incentives implicit in the original RENARM RFAs, the resultant MNIs, and interviewed key players to determine how the procurement process could be improved for this component of RENARM II. The comments below refer only to the procurement processes for RENARM, not the other MNIs visited as part of this study. As indicated in Figure 1, presented in the Executive Summary of this report, the way in which the procurement is handled can affect the ability of consortia form optimally.

### Findings

1. The RFAs and bidders' conference strongly encouraged proposers to form integrated MNIs in responding to RENARM's RFAs.

2. All proposers were required to match USAID funds on a 1:1 ratio (compared to the typical 1:4 ratio), and that match was required to be at least \$1 million. This was included to : (a) increase the amount of funds invested in the project; (b) give the USNGOs a role equal to USAID in project implementation decisions; and (c) increase the commitment of USNGOs to the activities.

3. Decisions to form MNIs were based on (a) being responsive to USAID encouragement to form MNIs; (b) the need to have more than one organization in order to raise the minimum \$1 million match; (c) a desire to find complementary skills/capacities in a partner; and (d) expand service delivery niches.

4. Some potentially very qualified proposers were unable to participate because of (a) disinclination to enter a "forced marriage"; (b) disinclination to meet such a large match; and (c) institutional incapacity to meet match (ie, among profit-seeking firms).

5. The RENARM RFAs were not precise in communicating a concrete vision of the objectives of the project (this was especially true for defining regionalism, indicating the proper mix between institutional development and impact, and thinking through how USAID Mission buy-ins would work).
6. While Paseo Pantera has been able to maintain a focused strategy acceptable to USAID throughout the project, PACA appears to have had much more difficulty developing and maintaining a strategy acceptable to USAID.
7. Little emphasis was placed in the RFA on requesting respondents to define clearly how the MNI organization would function (see also section 4B).
8. Establishing an efficient organizational structure for PACA has proceeded slowly. Establishment of Paseo Pantera was quicker, but it represented a less complex undertaking.
9. Proposers were permitted approximately two months to respond to the RFA.
10. For the reasons noted in Sections 4A and 4B, forming consortia takes much longer than two months.
11. Very little give-and-take was permitted in the post RFA issuance period (in keeping with standard competitive bidding processes at the time).
12. USNGO informants repeatedly emphasized that USAID should avoid pushing integrated MNI approaches. Rather, they feel strongly that ultimate results would be better if USNGOs were left to establish alliances where they feel most appropriate.
13. USNGO informants report a desire to be more involved in the early design and conceptualization phases of the effort in order to incorporate their special field-based knowledge to more effectively link design to implementation.
14. Many recognized the importance of competitive processes, but expressed an interest in utilizing Design and Perform (DAP) for RENARM II, in a form appropriate for cooperative agreements.
15. Despite the 1:1 match, USNGOs did not report having any greater influence over implementation issues than under similar cooperative agreements with USAID with lower match ratios.

## Conclusions

1. Overt and active encouragement to respondents to form MNIs may result in sub-optimal

teaming arrangements. (Findings 1, 2, 3, 12)

2. Requiring such a large match reduced the potential field of respondents, created alliances for reasons other than complementarity, and does not seem to have improved the USNGO's bargaining position vis a vis USAID (Findings 2, 4, 15)
3. Failure to clearly articulate a program vision to respondents seems to have made it difficult for some MNIs to define a course acceptable to USAID (Findings 5, 6)
4. If respondents had been required to demonstrate that they had reached agreement among themselves at the proposal stage on how they would structure the MNI, and it had been carefully scrutinized for organizational soundness, it might have saved the project considerable start-up delay. (Findings 7, 8)
5. Inadequate time was provided in the RENARM solicitation to develop the kind of relationships and understandings required to forge MNIs and to address the complex organizational issues required to implement MNIs -- especially in light of the requirements to develop innovative conservation/development consortia. (Findings 9, 10)
6. MNI efforts require greater opportunity for exchange and cooperative design among interested NGOs and than was available during the RENARM procurement since so many implementation issues are directly related to the peculiarities of individual NGOs. (Findings 11, 13)
7. A modified DAP approach may be appropriate (Finding 14; Conclusion 6).

### Recommendations

1. USAID should not dictate the kinds of MNI partnering that should be entered. Rather, it should facilitate self-selection of partners among NGOs based on technical and organizational capabilities in response to needs identified in the project. (Conclusion 1; Finding 12)
2. Reduce the required match to no more than the standard 1:4 match. (Conclusion 2)
3. Use the RFA to clearly state the vision of RENARM II. The solicitation document (if an RFA) or final design (if a DAP) must be extremely detailed geographically, conceptually, thematically, and strategically if MNIs are to be used. (Conclusion 3)
4. Require that any organization (whether it be of one or more than one NGO) demonstrate how its organizational structure is capable of responding to programmatic needs detailed as indicated in Recommendation 3. (Conclusion 4)

5. Provide at least six months in total for USNGOs to participate in the design process (to the extent USAID decides to permit it) form alliances, plan the organization, and produce a proposal to USAID. (Conclusions 4, 5, 6)
6. Enlist the participation of likely NGO respondents in designing RENARM II, and consider the usefulness of applying DAP procedures to the procurement. (Conclusions 3, 4, 6, 7).

## Annex 1: List of Persons Contacted

## List of Persons Contacted

### **ASOMA**

Fidelina Zuniga, Secretaria General

### **ABT Associates**

George Johnston, Senior Economist

### **Belize Audubon Society**

Virginia Vasquez, Executive Director

Osmani Salas, Protected Areas Manager

### **Belize Center for Environmental Studies**

Lou Nicolait, Managing Director

Evan Cayetano, EIA Program

### **BEST**

Bridget Cullerton, Managing Director

### **Belize Zoo**

Susan Fuller

Elvina Culkin, Environmental Education Coordinator

### **CARE/Atlanta**

Marshall Burke, Technical Advisor

Jeanne Zelinski, Assistant L.A. Region

Curt Schaefer, Former Director Latin American Programs

Mark Lindenberg, Vice President

### **CARE/Costa Rica**

Juan Carlos Romero, National Coordinator

Milos Stanojevich, Director

Tamara Tiffany, Director Sustainable Economic Programming Initiative

### **CARE/Guatemala**

Ron Savage, Coordinator, A/NR

### **CARE/Honduras**

Manuel Hernandez, LUPE/CARE

Edas Munoz, Gerente Proyecto PACA

### **CCAD**

Jorge Cabrera, Executive Director

**CCC/Costa Rica**

Thomas K. Divney, National Director

**Conservation International**

Jim Nations, Director, L.A. programs

**Defensores de la Naturaleza**

Andreas Lenhoff, Executive Director

**FUNDAECO (Guatemala)**

Marco Vinicio Cerezo, President

**Management Systems International**

Roger Popper, RENARM M&E

Joan Goodin, Senior Associate

Ruth Norris, Senior Associate

**Ministry of Natural Resources, Belize**

Richard Belisle, Administrator of Conservation Division

**NRMAP**

Mark Nolan, Project Director

**The Nature Conservancy**

Brian Houseal, Regional Director Central America & Mexico

Bruce Stein, Director Latin American Science Program

Gina Green, Country Director, Jamaica and Belize

Kathy Moser, Director Country Programs, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua

Renan Chavez, Regional Technical Advisor

Scott Wilbur, MAYAREMA In-country Technical Advisor

**PACA Central**

Davia Kauck, Regional Coordinator

Sylvia Marin, Coordinator, Strategic Planning

Joe Stuckey, Coordinator, Institutional Strengthening

**PASEO PANTERA**

Archie Carr, Director, Mesoamerican Programs/WCS

David Carr, Director, Caribbean Conservation Corporation

Kathleen Williams, Coordinator, Paseo Pantera

Janet Gibson, Research Fellow, Belize

Bruce and Carolyn Miller, Research Fellows, Belize

Jim Barborak, Technical Advisor, PP Regional Office, Costa Rica

Peggy Carr, University of Florida

**Peace Corps**

Steven White, Former Belize Country Coordinator, PACA

**Program for Belize**

Joy Grant, Managing Director

**TR&D**

Alberto Veg., Project Manger

Joshua Dickinson, Executive Vice President

**USAID/Belize**

George Like, Agricultural Development Officer

**USAID/Costa Rica**

Ann Lewandowski, Natural Resources Advisor

Enrique Bareau

**USAID/ONARM**

Raymond Waldron, Manager, Guatemala Programs, ONARM

William Sugrue, Head of Programs, ONARM; RENARM Project Manager

Keith Kline, Project Manager, MAYAREMA

Claudio Saito, NGO Advisor

Jack Vaughn, Former Natural Resources Advisor

**World Wildlife Fund**

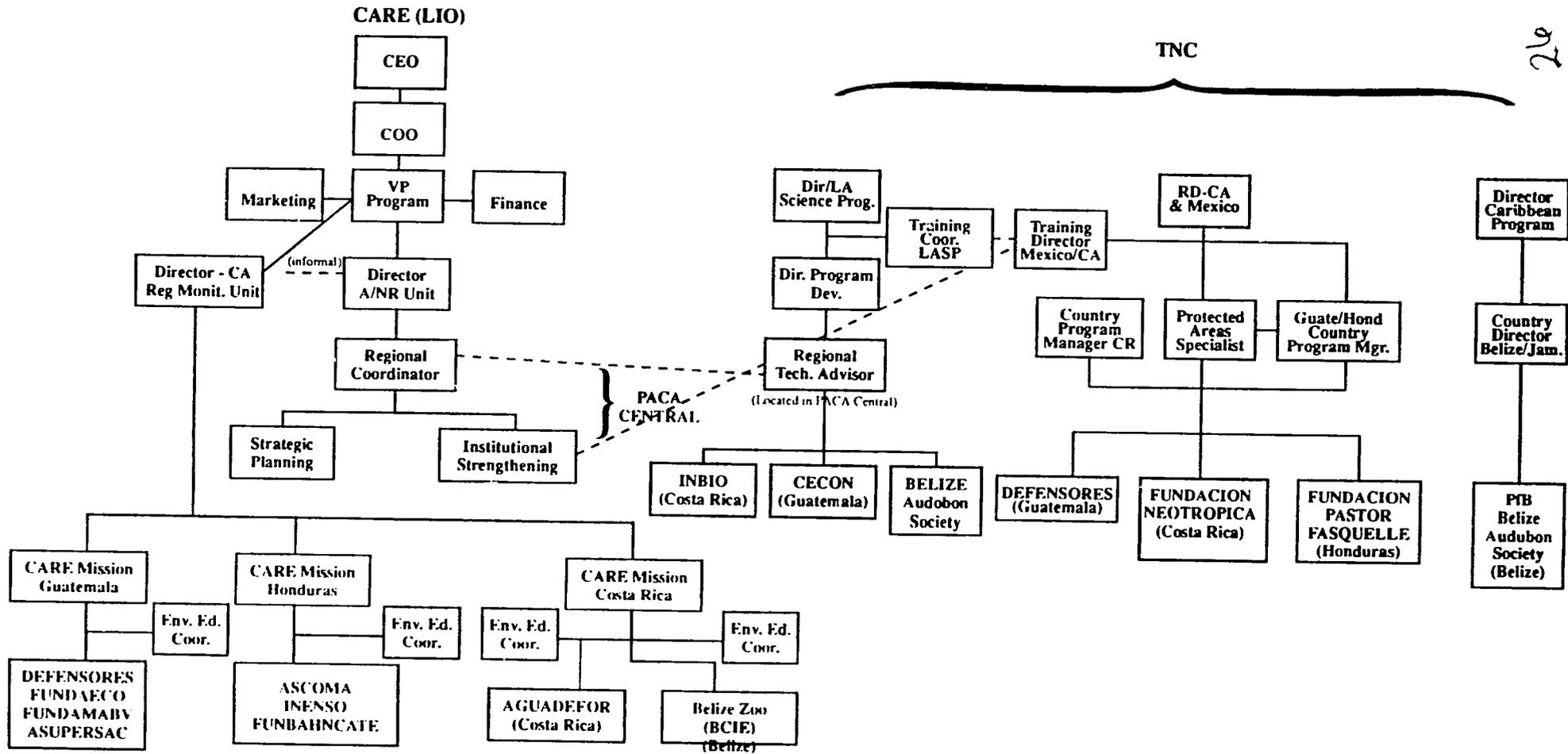
Steve Cornelius, Head of CA Programs

Diane Wood, Head of Latin American Programs

Lee Zhanow

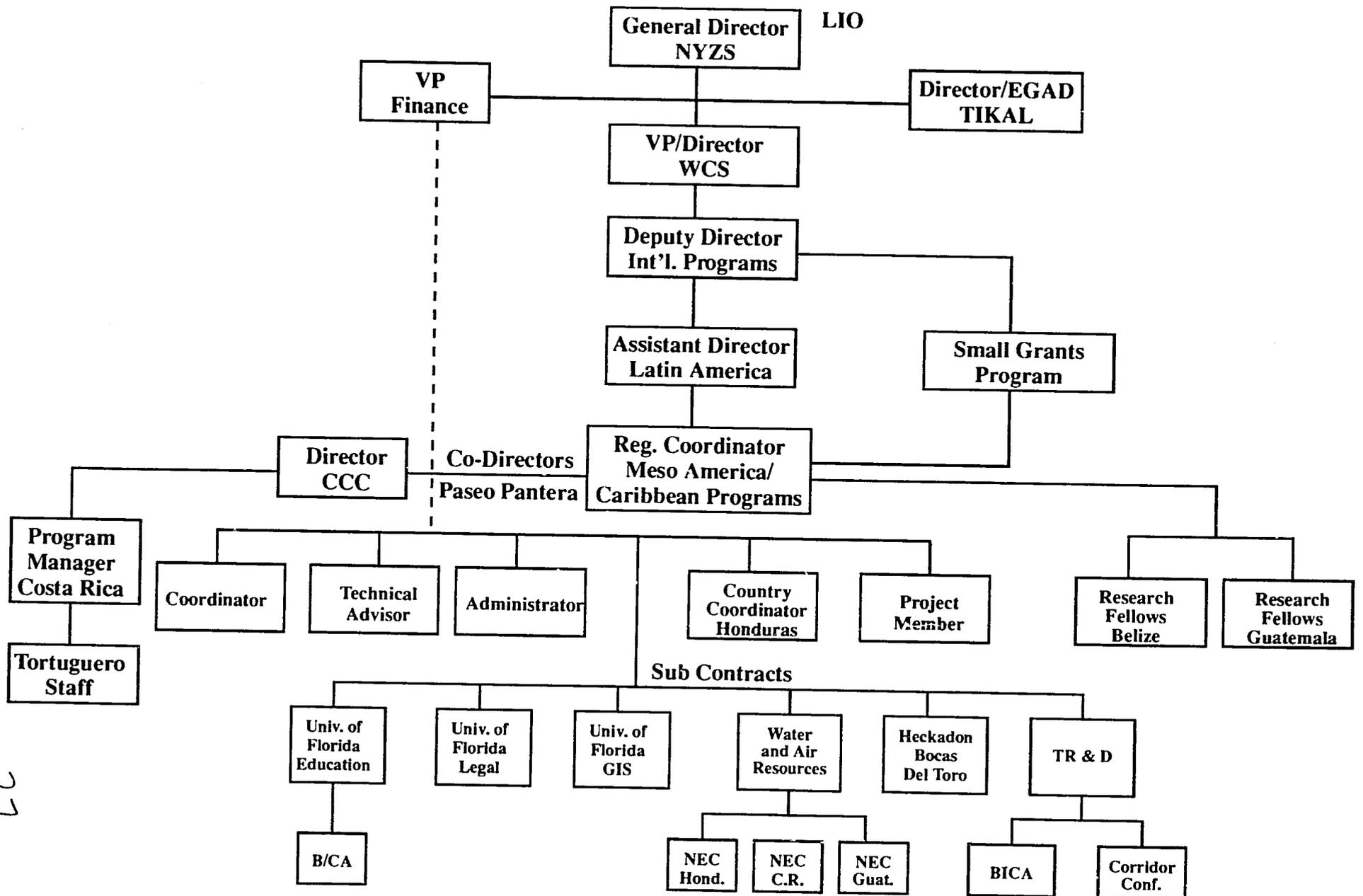
## Annex 2: Organizational Charts

# PACA



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# Paseo Pantera



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