

# **RENARM and the USAID Bilateral Missions**

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### ANNEXES

Annex A - List of Interviews

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADO	Agricultural Development Officer
APAP	Agricultural Policy Analysis Project
CCAD	Central American Commission on Environment and Development
CATIE	Tropical Agriculture Center for Regional Education
DESFIL	Development Strategies for Fragile Lands (USAID/W)
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
EPAT	Environment and Natural Resource Policy Analysis and Training Project (USAID/R&D/AG)
FSP	Forestry Support Program
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
LAC	Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (USAID)
MSI	Management Systems International
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NYZS	New York Zoological Society
PACA	Proyecto Ambiental para Centroamérica (Central America Environmental Project)
PVO	Private Voluntary Organization
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
RENARM	Regional Environmental and Natural Resources Management Project (USAID)
ROCAP	Regional Office for Central America Programs (USAID)
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
WCI	Wildlife Conservation International [Name changed to NYZS - the Wildlife Conservation Society]

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The RENARM project paper envisions a "collaborative approach to implementation" in which regionally directed activities enhance and complement projects of the bilateral USAID Missions. This report was commissioned to examine the relationship of the Missions to ROCAP and RENARM as the project completes its fourth year -- to identify what is working well or not working well and why, and to shed light on the underlying causes of any problems. The study is part of MSI's contract to provide RENARM with continuing internal evaluation, and its goal is to identify measures that would strengthen the collaborative relationship as RENARM enters its second phase.

RENARM consists largely of programs implemented at the regional level -- policy analysis, watershed management, plant protection, management of natural forests, environmental education, protected areas, buffer-zone development, and the like. The project also provides technical assistance and back-stopping to those Missions that request services. Tables 1 and 2 show that RENARM has provided these services, and carried out project activities, in every country in the region. Construction of the tables, with information supplied by RENARM and Mission staff, revealed that the Missions differ widely in their involvement with RENARM. Some rely extensively on regional services; others have little or no contact with RENARM activities. Most have strong opinions about what a regional project should be and do.

RENARM's relationship with the USAID's in Central America is in fact seven different Mission-to-Mission relationships. Beyond these are many more individual professional relationships. There is as yet no discernible sense among the personnel of ROCAP, bilateral Missions, and the various implementing organizations that they are part of a RENARM or Central America "team." Rather, they remain a diverse set of players. The majority of them are responsible to supervisors and governing bodies in Washington and New York. Each player juggles the concept of a Central America region with a different organizing principle (bilateral assistance, Latin America/Caribbean as a region) that determines individual goals and responsibilities. Even organizations based in the region (CATIE, Zamorano) essentially operate their programs as a series of bilateral relationships.

This would not be a problem -- it would still be possible, with good coordination from the regional level, to define and implement a regional program -- if the diverse players mutually understood and shared an organizing vision and purpose, and kept sufficiently up to date on activities throughout the region to recognize opportunities for collaboration and potential for conflict. Although progress has been made, neither of these conditions has been fully realized to date. Within AID, neither Central America as a region nor ENR as a regional strategy appears to carry enough weight to effect changes in management styles or priority-setting authority. The strongest recommendation resulting from this study is that AID must invest in *developing collaborative processes*, including some agreed-upon means for mediation or imposition of overriding authority, so that conflicts can be resolved instead of dragging on and on. AID needs to seriously consider how to make collaboration and cooperation rewarding for the various AID Missions in Central America, both bilateral and regional.

This study is based on interviews. Its subject matter is the opinions and perceptions of the personnel of RENARM and the bilateral Missions. Five strong themes emerged.

**1. AID's institutional structure is at odds with its official strategy of regional collaboration on ENR programs.<sup>1</sup>** If it is to orchestrate AID's Central American ENR strategy, which encompasses both ROCAP and bilateral Missions, RENARM needs an explicit plan for dealing with the communications and structural issues affecting work with bilateral Missions. The ROCAP office and project staff have no supervisory authority or history of strong leadership. Indeed, ROCAP has a three-decade history of uneasy relations with the bilateral Missions. For technological as well as agency-procedure reasons, communications between the two have been difficult.

There are special difficulties associated with attempting collaboration in an atmosphere of pervasive change. The ROCAP management structures have been in almost constant transition. AID's balance of power in Central America is in transition, and any shift toward regional authority implies winners and losers. Competition for funding is intense. Regional "economies of scale" may benefit those countries traditionally short on resources, but may actually dilute programs already strong at a bilateral level.

**2. Free technical assistance, particularly in forestry, is, to the bilateral Missions, the most positive aspect of the project to date.** Mission staff generally would like to have more services of this type, including "swat teams" of experts available at the regional level to back-stop Mission programs. The "swat team" concept includes timely response to needs and opportunities as well as high-level technical expertise.

**3. The buy-in mechanism has not been as attractive to bilateral Missions as originally foreseen.** The project paper identified buy-ins as both a major area of collaboration and source of some 18 percent of total project funding. For a variety of reasons, buy-ins to date represent a much smaller percentage of actual project funding than predicted. Procedural glitches made them difficult to do in the early years. NGO implementers are not eager to take on bilateral Mission priorities when they have their own, and are required to bring in matching funds to boot. Perhaps most relevant, there exist myriad other possible buy-in mechanisms (DESFIL, LACTECH, APAP, BSP, etc.), making it possible for Missions to "shop" for their preferred project officers and consultants, or contract them independently. Some of these other projects offer "menu items" comparable to RENARM's, including policy analysis and protected areas. RENARM has not provided demonstrably better alternatives.

This has particularly affected the RENARM component that was, perhaps, to be the most explicitly regional, imposing coherence on RENARM/Mission efforts -- monitoring and evaluation. Missions have chosen other sources for M & E assistance, in part because M & E, alone among the RENARM services to Missions, is not free, and in part because of resistance to having ROCAP involved in Mission M & E. Fortunately, many of the Missions have chosen PRISM, also contracted by MSI, which provides a certain regional coherence, albeit outside the RENARM project umbrella.

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<sup>1</sup> See AID's 1989 document, *Environmental and Natural Resource Management in Central America*.

**4. The RENARM project has tended to concentrate resources unevenly, widening rather than narrowing the gap between countries.** This applies primarily to the portions of the project implemented by PACA, CATIE, and Zamorano. In general, these institutions have used RENARM resources to invest more where they already were strongest. PACA, for example, has no programs in Nicaragua or El Salvador. The environmental education scholarship program also excluded Nicaraguans and Salvadorans who cannot meet academic requirements. In the case of CATIE and Zamorano, RENARM could perhaps exercise better supervision and guidance to help these institutions work in a more truly regional manner.<sup>2</sup>

For the NGO-implemented projects, spreading resources evenly throughout the region may not be the main objective; however, the strategic reasons for the areas and activities selected are not clear to the bilateral Missions. From a bilateral point of view, the one-to-one matching funding required of the implementers appears to be at the root of the problem. On the one hand, the NGO contributions limit RENARM's ability to direct program investments. On the other hand, several Missions that have been trying to attract these same NGO's to become involved in bilaterally funded projects find that RENARM has "eaten up all the matching money for the region." That is, NGO's are telling bilateral Mission staff that their commitments to RENARM preclude them from becoming involved elsewhere.

**5. Bilateral Missions want a stronger information-sharing function, which they rank as an extremely high priority.** The bilateral Mission staff say this is particularly crucial for the success of the policy program, which most of the Missions would like to see function as a regional forum for sharing information and discussion of common issues.

Communications in general are weak throughout the project, say the bilateral Mission staff. Some of this is to be expected in the early years, as pilot and demonstration projects move from the start-up to extension phase. But the pressures of time and polarization have resulted, in virtually every aspect of the project, in at least some of the Missions being "out of the loop." Networking remains a critical need, but many of AID's own internal processes discourage sharing and "recycling" concepts developed in one country across country borders.

Several of the Missions are designing or implementing large, multifaceted ENR projects. This will provide an even broader range of experiences and approaches worth sharing. It is an opportune time for RENARM to invest strategic thinking in its role as a network secretariat.

However, it is important to note that the RENARM staff challenge both the Missions' characterization of communications as weak, and the notion that RENARM should function as an information network. This criticism is seen as part of the natural competitiveness between regional and bilateral Missions. ("Bilateral Missions will *never* say RENARM is a worthwhile project and it is working well; it's in their interest to say that communications are weak.")

This study found more complaints than compliments. Some of the problems that have affected RENARM's ability to work well in the region are not readily resolvable. Missions

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<sup>2</sup> Many of the bilateral Mission staff may be unaware of the connection between RENARM and certain NGO, CATIE, or Zamorano activities, because these organizations market the activities as their "own."

generally feel that they did not have the opportunity to influence either the strategy or the project, but in some cases this also reflects a low priority for ENR and lack of active participation in the planning processes. While history cannot be rewritten, the project can, perhaps, create more effective feedback loops and take other steps to assure that bilateral programs' objectives and needs are taken into account.

The various sections of this report explore in more detail the Missions' and RENARM staff's perceptions of what is working and what is causing frustration. The point of view that is not well represented here is that of the institutions within the region that the project seeks to strengthen. Further studies might well look at how competition, creative tension, and collaboration among the different levels of AID and its implementing organizations affect them, positively or negatively.

The strongest message from Mission and NGO staff participating in the recent RENARM Coordination Meeting seemed to be, "Take another look at what is appropriate at the regional level." It is clear that consensus on this issue will be difficult to achieve. But a healthy debate, and respect for the legitimate interests of all concerned, should serve at least to bring into the open and perhaps even resolve many of the issues that still stand in the way of solid collaboration.

**Table 1. Assistance Provided by ROCAP to Missions by Program Area**

Program area	Forestry	Policy	Environment	NGO/training	M&E
All countries	Technical assistance provided by Henry Tschinkel and Abe Guillen to all Missions -- a continuing service provided under ROCAP auspices since early 1980s. Project design, impact assessment, policy assessments. Virtually all Missions mentioned this as the most valuable service provided by RENARM and would like to have more.	<b>Green Book</b> available for policy review in all countries		Small grants for research, TNC training fellowships, contracting experts via PASA's for technical assistance.  Informal collection & sharing of data on NGO-implemented projects.	MSI team assistance w.th PPAS/ objective clarification and indicator development for Mission programs as a whole.*
Belize			5 EAs	assistance with project design	* This activity, which resulted in M & E plans for each of the Missions, is part of the PRISM project and not RENARM.
Guatemala		Policy analysis for NRM project	4 EAs		
El Salvador		Policy dialogue process, assistance with PROMESA redesign	5 EAs	Assistance with design & NGO selection for PROMESA project.	
Honduras			1 EA	Regionwide: informal collection & sharing of data on experiences of NGO-implemented PACA projects.	
Nicaragua	Technical assistance with new forestry law - drafting, seminars & workshops for officials, followup & analysis				
Costa Rica			3 EAs		consultation with FORESTA: workshops for the Fundecor NGO in objective clarification & indicator development
Panama			2 EAs		

**Table 2. Regionally Implemented Program Activities, by Country**

Program area	CATIE - IPM - watershed - multi-use trees - nat. forest	PACA	Paseo Pantera
Belize	Agreement with CATIE recently signed, work just beginning with IPM, natural forestry	Work with Belize Zoo and CES on environmental education, protection of Maya Mountains area	"Low-profile" work with various protected areas
Guatemala	Buy-ins for plant protection	Sierra de las Minas (Defensores de la Naturaleza), CECON CDC. Mission would like to improve information & communication.	
El Salvador	Rio las Cañas watershed project		
Honduras	San Marcos Ocotepeque watershed project	Parque Nacional Cusuco (Fdn. Pastor Fasquelle), Merendón watershed	Río Plátano Biosphere reserve, expansion to include corridor
Nicaragua	watershed project on south shore of L. Nicaragua		Bosawas/Plátano corridor
Costa Rica	Watershed, multi-use trees, natural forest production are "very complementary" to Mission programs (4 buy-ins); also provide research & database support	AGUADEFOR & subsidiary organizations working in Tempisque area	Ecotourism council, sea turtle reserve
Panama	IPM work, potential to do more		

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. Background, purpose and scope of work**

In 1989, AID approved the document *Environmental and Natural Resource Management in Central America: A Strategy for AID Assistance*, to guide all AID environment and natural resources (ENR) investments in Central America, by ROCAP and by the bilateral Missions. The RENARM project was designed under ROCAP's supervision in 1989. The design gives RENARM responsibility for

- Carrying out on a regional scale those activities which seem to make the most sense to carry out on a regional scale; and
- Assisting other AID Missions in carrying out ENR projects through technical support and sharing of experiences (successful and otherwise).

RENARM's design features several innovations. Among these is an extensive monitoring and evaluation program set up to provide feedback and learning. The M & E process includes among its goals to facilitate coordination between RENARM and the bilateral ENR projects, as well as to facilitate linkages among the project's several components.

This study was undertaken, as part of the M & E internal evaluation contracted to MSI, to explore the relationship between the RENARM Project and the USAID bilateral Missions in Central America. The objective is to provide RENARM and the Missions with an understanding of the degree to which their activities are complementary, replicative, or mutually supporting, and to identify avenues for improving the integration of RENARM and bilateral efforts.

### **B. Methodology**

The consultant participated in the RENARM coordinating meeting May 24-26, 1993, in San José, Costa Rica, and then traveled to Guatemala and El Salvador to interview RENARM and Mission staff, in person and by telephone. (A list of interviews, and the questionnaire used as a guide, are included as Annex A.)

Mission staff (Agricultural Development Officers, Environmental Officers, and some others) were asked to identify and comment on services provided by RENARM technical staff, and activities carried out by the project implementing agencies and consortia. They were asked about successes and failures with joint ventures and buy-ins. Several open-ended questions sought information about concurrence or disagreement with the regional mandate and strategic focus, and asked for ideas for improving RENARM's contributions to country-specific and regional natural resource management.

The original intent was to carry out all interviews in the Missions. At the coordination meeting, it became apparent that certain of the Mission staff had relatively little contact with RENARM, making it possible to review their experience in a short interview in Costa Rica. Other Missions with more experience working with the project participated in detailed case-study interviews on site. Logistical difficulties (conflict with an OAS meeting in Nicaragua, one

ADO's home leave, and the May 25 seizure of power and subsequent presidential expulsion in Guatemala) also made it necessary to conduct some of the interviews by telephone. All of the Mission staff who were requested to participate in interviews gave generous amounts of time, set up calls and meetings with other members of their staffs, and were forthcoming and constructive in their comments even when critical of the RENARM project.

Although all interviews followed roughly the same format, there were marked differences in the degree to which Mission staff were familiar with RENARM activities, had given thought to the relationship, and were willing to discuss it at length. Interviews ranged from twenty minutes to two hours, in some cases with two or three follow-up calls. In general, the quotes used in the report are not attributed. This is intentional, to draw more attention to the substance than to who is saying what about whom.

The data gathered through this process should not be seen as a precisely weighted description of the Missions' perceptions and attitudes. They do show a consistent emphasis on certain recurring themes, although strikingly little consensus on most issues. Thus any statement that begins, "Mission staff say..." should provoke caution, simply because there were almost no points of consensus. "General agreement" in this context means any more than half of the persons interviewed, but usually with one or two strong dissents.

Some of the opinions expressed to the consultant in personal interviews differed markedly from second-hand reports of what the interviewee had said to someone else. In fact, many of the opinions and viewpoints expressed here are probably subject to change within a relatively short time. When differing or contradictory interpretations were given of the same event, the report tries to note both, rather than attempting to verify which is accurate. The wide range of experiences and attitudes, and the marked differences in responses, should be a sign to use caution in generalizing from this survey.

One final caveat is in order: these are *perceptions*. Some of the generalizations were checked against country profiles and annual reports, but no other verification was attempted.

### **C. Recommendations for next steps**

The observations reported here represent one consultant's interpretation of information provided by a diverse group of USAID staff, together with a few representatives of organizations implementing various aspects of the RENARM project. The interviews were conducted over a short time span, when most of the respondents were preoccupied by other pressing concerns, not the least of which was continuing uncertainty about the future of the bilateral USAID Missions in Central America.

While there may never be an "ideal" time or objectively "correct" answers to the questions posed here, the themes developed here should provide fruitful grounds for further exploration. Because of the diversity of viewpoints and philosophies expressed during the course of two and a half weeks of research, this report should be expected to provoke a fair amount of dissent. It will serve its purpose if it stimulates continued thoughtful discussion and helps to focus discussion on issues that RENARM and the bilateral Missions can productively address.

## **D. Acknowledgements**

The sections on CATIE and joint ventures and buy-ins draw heavily on a case study prepared by Octavio Ramirez, director of CATIE's plant protection program. The full study is appended as Annex B.

## II. RENARM AND THE MISSIONS

### Overview

Understanding the relationship between the RENARM project and the bilateral USAID Missions in Central America requires consideration of two questions. First, is there a shared sense of purpose, a mutual understanding of the agenda? Second, how well do they actually work together? Both the philosophical and the mechanical aspects affect the interactions.

This report begins with two sections exploring regional and bilateral understandings of RENARM's regional mandate and its strategic focus. Not surprisingly, the study turned up considerably divergent, almost polarized, points of view about both. Some of the issues identified in these two sections -- especially a sense that the regional mandate is not well defined -- recur as background noise in the third section, which looks at specific experiences of collaboration, successful and otherwise.

In the third section, "Complementarity and Conflict," we examine the on-the-ground relationships of RENARM-implemented project activities with bilateral Mission projects and programs. Again, experiences vary widely, but some general observations are possible. The section concludes with a look at two "corporate climate" issues that have affected RENARM-Mission relationships throughout - a pervasive and threatening climate of change, and some special difficulties related to communications.

#### A. The regional mandate

*ROCAP's primary responsibility under the [Environmental and Natural Resource Management in Central America]*

*strategy is to support bilateral programs with a combination of regional programs and expert advisory support. Where problems do not respect international boundaries, or where pilot or generic interventions are needed, ROCAP will develop regional programs, in collaboration with country Missions. ROCAP will also work with AID/W to stimulate other donors to support programs at the regional level.*

-- Project Paper, page 6

RENARM's relationship with the bilateral Missions is complicated. Not least among the complications is the fact that regional ENR activities are defined by a strategy without having a clearly identifiable "general" in charge. The RENARM project (until a few weeks ago this would have read "ROCAP and the RENARM project staff") has assumed some of the leadership and coordinating roles, but others remain outside its authority. Implementation of the tactical activities leading to achievement of the strategy is shared by RENARM and the Missions. However, not all of the Missions see the regional strategy as a guiding or unifying force. A few have Mission environmental strategies. Some use the regional strategy regularly, but others see it as mainly a public-relations tool.

To use a different analogy, RENARM sometimes plays a supporting role in the drama of the regional strategy (technical assistance in project design, forestry, environmental assessments, etc.) and sometimes plays the lead (the regionally-financed *Green Book*, CATIE, PACA, Paseo Pantera, and other projects). But the full cast doesn't see RENARM assuming the director's chair. The project paper clearly assumes that ROCAP will play some such "secretariat" role, bringing together and making a coherent whole of the various action plans and Mission activities in

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"The Missions have caught up with ROCAP, and most of them are implementing the components of the strategy. It's important."

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"If you think the Missions are using the strategy to set their programs, you're kidding yourself. I had to go looking for a copy, dig it out and blow the dust off it."

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the region. But ROCAP and the RENARM project have not clearly developed (or been permitted to develop) that role. Different staff, at different times, are "helpers" and "cops," and this often leads to confusion.

This is true for a variety of historical and structural reasons. How the regional coordinating function will develop is a crucial question at a time when USAID is down-sizing and looking for ways to use funds, especially operating funds, more efficiently. The future of the bilateral Missions in Central America, and the level of authority that will be exercised at a regional level, are not yet clear.

As the RENARM project has evolved, project managerial and technical staff have developed a working definition of the regional mandate, giving priority to activities where economies of scale result from implementation at the regional level; opportunities to influence decision-making processes at the regional level; activities with a long investment horizon that might preclude feasibility at a bilateral level; activities requiring high levels of coordination at the regional level; and investments with a potential for high payoff but involving significant uncertainty.

At the bilateral Mission level, this vision of RENARM's regional mandate is not so clear. Debate continues over the proper activities of a regional project. At the country level, comparing bilateral versus RENARM-implemented projects, the distinguishing logic is not always evident. One of the working groups convened at the Costa Rica coordinating meeting, considering what phase II of RENARM should look like, included among its responses: "How relations [between RENARM and the Missions] can work better is to adjust the focus to what is appropriate at the regional scale."

And what is appropriate at the regional scale? There seemed to be agreement among those participating in the coordinating meeting that RENARM is better equipped than the bilateral Missions to monitor, and play a leadership role in developing strategies to address certain overriding regional trends, among them:

- Demographic trends, especially population growth, but also increasing urbanization and regional migration. Population growth alone has the potential to render moot, or at the least unsustainable, virtually all investments in ecologically appropriate development.

- A significant and perhaps growing level of investment, and a trend toward conditionality, by various bilateral and multilateral institutions. As the single largest donor in the region, USAID has an opportunity for coordination and leverage. At the very least, it should work to ensure that investments aimed at production and market forces do not work at cross purposes with the environmental strategy. Beyond the donor community, RENARM is also in a unique position to facilitate coordination with other regional entities and activities.

- The weakness of local democratic institutions, and an increase in social disorder and instability.

■ The proliferation of NGO's and PVO's, and a trend toward delegation of central government functions to local and private entities. To the extent that this trend, like the one mentioned above, can be addressed by training and technical assistance, there are potential economies of scale, as well as opportunities to share experiences across country borders. However, this may be a pendulum swing rather than a solid trend, and it would be a mistake to ignore or try to bypass the governments of the region.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that physical and political conditions also constrain AID's ability to implement a regional mandate. One of the most obvious of these is the conflict between the selection of Guatemala as the location for the regional project, and the expectation that the project would serve as a communications center and clearinghouse. Guatemala has no postal service; access to long-distance telephone lines is sporadic; and not all project personnel are authorized to use the diplomatic pouch for routine communications. There are managerial aspects to RENARM's communications problems, too, discussed below, but future decisions about siting of project offices and personnel will set some absolute limits on what can be accomplished.

## **B. The strategic focus**

The strategic goal of AID's ENR programs in Central America is *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 biodiversity, and provides the means for equitable and sustainable economic growth.*

Toward that end, the strategy identifies five program areas, each of which is addressed in some manner by the RENARM project. They are (1) sustainable agriculture, (2) production from natural forests, (3) management of wildlands and protection of biological diversity, (4) management of critical watersheds, and (5) policy formulation, institutional strengthening, and environmental education. The RENARM project groups its activities in three program components: natural resources policy initiatives, environmental awareness and biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture and forestry. A fourth component dealing with CATIE's institutional development, has not been implemented, although CATIE is a major player in the sustainable agriculture and forestry component.

It is difficult to generalize about the Missions' perception of the strategic focus, except to note that several of the respondents expressed a strong opinion that the strategic focus is far too broad, especially in a time of shrinking resources, to provide effective guidance for decision making. At the same time, staff questioned whether the five program areas, even if all were successful, would be sufficient to achieve the strategic goal.

Various opinions have been expressed about which of these program areas have seen the greatest progress, and which are most important to pursue. This is an area where ultimately it may not be possible to come to an answer by consensus. Continuing the discussion begun at the coordination meeting will be useful, but *leadership and authority* (from Washington if necessary) will need to be applied.

**Focus on Policy:** There is general agreement that the policy component must be strengthened, or abandoned if it cannot be strengthened. This is true among Missions

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"The revised strategy should take resource limitations into account and describe coherent relationships and priorities among the diverse components of the ENR portfolio. It should help to focus AID resources where they will provide the greatest returns in terms of our development objectives and help clarify the logic underlying the program (what ties it all together?) "

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who have received considerable assistance from the policy team and rate it as extremely valuable, as well as of Missions who rate current policy activities as inadequate. The *Green Book* gets mixed reviews. In at least one country it was viewed as out of date even before it was published due to sweeping legislative change. (RENARM's response: The policy inventory portion was only an annex to the body of the book, which is analytical.) Two respondents remarked that it was useful but duplicative of other policy studies carried out under APAP and EPAT. Some of the Mission staff seemed to have only superficial knowledge of it.

One of the Mission staff interviewed suggested that the policy component should focus strictly on CCAD and building it into a viable regional forum. Others questioned CCAD's credibility and staff ability to work on policy at high levels. Some Mission staff suggested that RENARM needs higher-level policy advisors with more personal and political clout; however, it was difficult to come up with names of who that would be. There seems to be a division of opinion on whether these high-level people would be North Americans ("people like Jack Vaughn or Walter Arensberg") or Central Americans.

There is even some divergence of opinion on whether policy can be addressed at a regional level: "These are strong, proud, individual countries. They're *never* going to adopt a policy here because it's working in El Salvador." Or, "Regional comparisons are perhaps not the most persuasive argument for policy change." Mission staff agree that policy constraints are the primary obstacle to making long-term change toward sustainable development in the region. Where they diverge is on the issue of what are the most effective means of achieving change. There seems to be a general desire for the RENARM evaluation to consider the potential effectiveness of other approaches than the one the project has taken.

**Focus on protection/development:** Mission staff differ on whether RENARM is sufficiently mature to determine what is working and abandon or change those programs that have failed to produce results. Buffer-zone management experience has been less than positive in the RENARM project, as it has been worldwide. This is one area that should be addressed as a critical unknown, one of the working groups at the coordination meeting recommended. Successes should be sought out for learning.

### C. Complementarity and conflict

RENARM and the Missions, working together and separately, sometimes helping each other and sometimes in spite of each other, have made some major achievements toward realizing elements of the regional strategy, and the objectives set forth in RENARM's project paper. Other portions of the internal evaluation review these accomplishments succinctly. (See *RENARM's Current Direction as Compared with Six and Ten Year EOPS.*)

RENARM is big, and diverse, and very difficult to make generalizations about.

There is considerable conflict, *which itself has been a catalyst for creativity and new approaches*, as well as a source of frustration. Some regional programs complement and support bilateral efforts by design (eg., PACA and Paseo Pantera brought a protected-areas component to AID's portfolio in Honduras; the *Green Book* informed policy analysis in several countries; models were developed for multi-agency, multi-theme collaboration developed in Tempisque, Costa Rica, including protected wildlands, ecotourism, and buffer-zone development). Others have this effect serendipitously. Examples include Cultural Survival's role in bringing about greater attention to the role of indigenous peoples, and a regional effort to incorporate their interests into natural resource management; donor collaboration in pesticide management programs and research.

RENARM has brought together a diverse group of USAID staff of various levels, NGO's, Central American educational institutions, local agencies, and others. This experience has not always been smoothly orchestrated and cordial, and meetings have often showed little evidence that anyone asked, "Who should be here and why?" Nonetheless, the project has focused a great deal of energy on sharing experience, lowering institutional barriers, and confronting the question of just how to achieve sustainable development in Central America. There is general agreement on the value of getting people together who normally don't have the opportunity to meet and talk. Several respondents suggested that RENARM might also make a valuable contribution by organizing small-group meetings on specific topics or regularly bringing together the various RENARM actors at a country level.

From a bilateral Mission point of view, the project's investments -- geographically and programmatically -- are

cause for questions ranging from economic efficiency to a sense of unevenness and even unfairness. Nicaragua, for example, suffers from not having been an established Mission when the project was initiated. Mission staff feel that this status limits funds available to them; therefore Nicaragua has to "lure" RENARM activities through buy-ins rather than having them centrally funded. Other Missions fail to get "their share" of the regionally funded PACA and Paseo Pantera projects because of the differing priorities of the implementing NGO's. Formal and informal standards for qualifying for some RENARM services (fellowships, scholarships, research grants, technical consultation with EPA) tend to "widen the gap" between more developed versus less developed countries, rather than concentrating training where it is needed most. This, by the way, was a "positive criticism -- we like RENARM and want to work more closely with it."

Much of the discussion of complementarity, collaboration, and conflict had a feel of "self-fulfilling prophecies" on both sides. At a superficial level, it's not surprising that people would work best and feel most comfortable collaborating with colleagues who want and appreciate their help, and tend to avoid those with whom relations are not so good. But this has created a number of vicious circles and communications breakdowns. Missions in general complain of not being "in the loop" and not knowing what is available from RENARM. RENARM staff accuse Mission staff of deliberately ignoring attempts to bring them into the loop. Since there was no way for the consultant to evaluate where in this polarization the true picture might lie, it is difficult to conclude much beyond that communications are at the heart of the issue in the perception of conflict.

**Complementarity:** Tables 1 and 2 show, in summary form, *some* of the ways in

which RENARM technical assistance, service functions, and regionally implemented project elements complement Mission projects and activities.

These tables are doubtless incomplete. In some cases, Missions and RENARM are not even sufficiently aware of each other's activities to know whether they are complementary. And it is important to note that the *value* accorded to the various services does not necessarily correlate directly with the number of interventions or time invested.

One program often mentioned as making a significant contribution on the regional and bilateral level is the long-term benefit of strengthening educational programs in the region. At least 100 students will receive master's degrees in watershed management and plant protection from CATIE, or bachelor's degrees from Zamorano, during the course of the project. The 3,000 or so professional years that they will collectively contribute may be one of the RENARM project's most important impacts.

The area in which the Missions give RENARM highest marks, and consistently request increased project investment, is in the provision of technical services; the example universally cited is in the forestry consultancies provided by Henry Tschinkel. The regional "economics of scale" concept *works* when the regional office is able to provide *ongoing* assistance from skilled professionals *resident in the region* -- that is, people who bring background, knowledge, and their own contacts to bear, who have a good sense of the context in which their assistance is sought, and who can be called upon for follow-up assistance. Some Missions felt that they were not getting enough assistance; others criticized the long response time to requests or said their requests for information were referred to unhelpful third parties. But these were

generally constructive criticisms from people who want more of a service they appreciate.

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"I was checking some figures for the Mission director, and it surprised me to find that we have had 180 person-days of technical assistance from the RENARM and PACA staffs. That's pretty near a person-year of time."

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Various Mission staff have suggested that similar high-level professionals or "swat" teams for technical back-stopping would be useful in additional disciplines. Among those suggested: policy advisers with the kind of clout necessary to call on and influence presidents and ministers (although some bilateral Missions clearly feel that policy dialogue is their own mandate and not RENARM's); experts in protected areas, land tenure, watershed management specialists, more foresters, and perhaps additional technical disciplines for environmental assessments. From this series of interviews, it is not clear that Missions would be able to agree on the specific persons or services to be provided; Henry Tschinkel may be unique. Other high-level advisors would likely be more useful to some Missions than to others, and this would need to be carefully balanced.

The fact that regional advisors' services are free to the Missions has a great bearing on their popularity. When asked if more technical assistance from the regional office would be similarly valuable on a pay-as-you-go basis, Mission staff gave mixed responses. The service's value in this context appears to depend on the quality of the technical assistance, tending toward a view that it would be worth while to retain *very well qualified and connected advisors*

that Missions would not be in a position to contract on their own.

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"We still need a world-class environmental education expert. The project originally promised an inventory of materials, filling the gaps, establishment of one public and one private repository in each country. The need for that has not diminished."

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Mission staff also consistently request more sharing and discussion of existing technology, and increased attention to the role of RENARM as a clearinghouse, at the expense of new-technology development if necessary.

**Conflict:** To some extent, nearly all the Missions see RENARM as a diversion of funds that otherwise would be available for their own projects. Most would prefer a greater emphasis on support of bilateral Missions.

Conflict is more apparent at the higher levels of administration (ADO's, who report directly or indirectly to Mission directors and tend to reflect the director's commitment or resistance to regionalization). Environmental officers and project managers tended to be more positive in their assessments of complementarity. *This was by no means absolute.* Some ADO's were highly supportive and appreciative of RENARM collaboration, and some environmental officers had sharp criticisms.

There may be more of a correlation between perceptions of conflict and the *resources available to the Mission to work bilaterally* -- that is, Missions with extremely limited resources look to RENARM as a source of otherwise unavailable support and technical assistance. Missions that have

historically had larger budgets, and ability to contract high-level technical advisors, seem more likely to be skeptical about regionally delivered services. This is not surprising, since there is a real possibility that support of their own programs will be weaker than they were when delivered bilaterally. It is *not* a reason to dismiss their reports of conflict as mere "turf protection." Where economies of scale at the regional level result in diminished program quality for one or more countries in particular, special care should be taken to address this problem.

RENARM's uneven provision of services adds to the perception of conflict. The project gives an impression of *preference* for certain Missions and projects (Costa Rica, Mayarema). If the geography of project activities and technical assistance is in fact determined by *strategic* considerations, these are not well articulated or understood by the Missions.

Several of the Mission staff noted problems and conflicts that have since been resolved (Costa Rica's year-long effort to do a buy-in, problems caused by NGO entry into Belize) but observed that these were problems that could have been foreseen and avoided. Instead, the solutions were applied after difficulties had occurred. Complaints about repeated layers of overhead and administration persist.

Some conflict is inevitable for structural reasons. This is a theme that recurs throughout the interviews and this report. USAID as an institution is highly organized, hierarchical, and bilaterally oriented. Its tradition in the natural resources arena is agricultural production projects. RENARM, on the other hand, is structured to work holistically and laterally, by teamwork and collaboration, without a great deal of hierarchy or formal organization. A good part of its substance -- biodiversity conservation, protected areas, buffer zones, environmental policy -- is

outside the mainstream of professional interest and experience of the more production-oriented agriculture staff.

Interestingly enough, the issue of how to manage, as an institution and as a project, so that the hierarchical and collaborative styles have synergy, was raised by representatives of both the regional staff and more than one Mission. Some even suggested that it should be possible to develop a creative tension that would spur all to greater achievements.

### **CATIE and Zamorano**

The Sustainable Agriculture and Forestry component of the RENARM project includes development and use of CATIE, the Tropical Agriculture Center for Regional Education, and the Pan-American Agricultural School at Zamorano, Honduras, as regional centers for education and outreach in such disciplines as watershed management, plant protection, tree crop dissemination, production from natural forests, integrated pest management, and wood utilization and market development. These are, for the most part, existing programs that RENARM is supporting in their application.

At a theoretical level, the Missions have a great enthusiasm for support of regional institutions like CATIE. At a practical level, there are problems. CATIE is intrinsically a research, education, and training institution, and develops its priorities along disciplinary lines. It has never been disposed to, nor particularly skilled at, responding bilaterally to priorities within a given country.

Belize and El Salvador until recently had not signed on to the agreement with CATIE that would have opened the door for work in-country; Honduras and Panama have

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"They risk getting ahead of the curve. Because [CATIE] has developed expertise in natural forest management, they're out there with the technical viewpoint, 'What's the best way to cut these trees?' There's no process at the local level to determine whether there should be any cutting in the region."

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extremely weak relationships. CATIE responds independently to requests for assistance from various groups, governmental and nongovernmental, within any given country, following its own disciplinary priorities and those of its donors, which include various European assistance agencies as well as multilaterals. Should CATIE's projects work at cross-purposes with other programs in any country (for example, tree cutting inside the Maya Biosphere Reserve) there is no set procedure for negotiations and resolutions -- in fact, no reliable mechanism to inform those affected.

In general, the Mission's perception of CATIE's efforts has little relation to RENARM per se. Those that have had good working relationships with CATIE in the past continue to do so, and those that have not, have generally not used RENARM as a mechanism to develop them. It is not always visible at the bilateral Mission level when CATIE is RENARM, and when it is CATIE, financed by the Norwegians or Swedes or other donors. A few of the AID staff interviewed for this report suggested that RENARM might provide a valuable service by working with CATIE to develop better working climates in the countries of the region. This is also discussed in the section below.

## Buy-ins and Joint Ventures

Bilateral Missions can get RENARM's services through buy-ins (transfer of bilateral funds to RENARM) or joint ventures (collaboration with RENARM, each Mission using its own resources). The project paper also suggests the possibility of buy-outs (RENARM funding provided to bilateral Missions or other projects). This has happened only with respect to centrally funded policy projects, and to a considerably lesser extent, coastal resource management.

The vast majority of funds in RENARM are not buy-ins. The project paper envisions some 10 percent of the total project, or about \$6 million, as coming from buy-ins; this was amended to \$10.9 million. In the first three and a half years of the project, the total obligation for buy-ins is \$1.5 million. Costa Rica has accomplished three buy-ins and four joint ventures. Nicaragua has used the buy-in mechanism twice for IPM programs. Guatemala has done one buy-in and one joint venture; Honduras two buy-ins with Paseo Pantera and one unsuccessful attempt with Zamorano; El Salvador bought into PACA for one project; Panama and Belize have not yet bought in.

From the ROCAP point of view, the lower-than-expected level of buy-ins has not made a serious difference in the project. In fact, the project manager goes out of his way to emphasize that he is not "pushing" buy-ins, that they should be used only if bilateral Missions find them helpful. CATIE, which had counted on resources provided by buy-ins even to be able to maintain the activities' teams of specialists fully staffed, has had to invest considerable additional effort in the search for other donors, and finds the buy-in situation discouraging.

ROCAP and Mission staff interviewed for this report identified several main causes for the low level of buy-ins:

- Mission budgets are substantially lower than envisioned at the time the project was developed.

- The time and difficulty involved in the process. Both Costa Rica and Honduras have "horror stories" of attempted buy-ins that took eight months to a year (in Costa Rica's case, coming through on the day the project expired). Although efforts have been made to work out the "glitches" in the regional contracting office, the mechanisms themselves may be intrinsically cumbersome and resistant to fixing. The sense among some Missions is still that regional staff are overloaded and can't give the full and timely attention the bilateral Missions would like. The regional staff express frustration with the restrictions imposed on them in trying to facilitate buy-ins when bilateral Missions request them.

- The availability, and preferability, of several other buy-in mechanisms to accomplish similar goals (ie., APAP, EPAT, DESFIL, BSP, FSP, LACTECH, etc.) One Mission that elected to buy in to BSP for work with local conservation NGO's gave as a reason that the BSP program officer, unlike RENARM staff, "showed an interest, she called to see how things were going, and she went out of her way to find good people for us." This theme was echoed by a number of Mission staff in different contexts -- that it is ultimately the *quality of the people they can get to work with*, rather than substance or structure of the process, that determines where they look for collaboration and how they evaluate RENARM's contributions. One Mission went through the process of a buy-in for assistance with a national environmental education strategy, expecting that the work would lead to closer involvement by the PACA team, only to be sent "an outside consultant that we could have hired ourselves, with a lot less trouble."

- The underlying animosity felt by some Missions toward the regional project.

Even where "animosity" is perhaps too strong a word, and the regional concept is more accepted, there remains some doubt (their time availability, skills, interest in the Mission priorities) about the potential contributions of implementers and regional staff. This may relate more strongly to the RENARM project than other regional efforts. Several of the Mission staff reported more satisfaction with PROEXAG, for example.

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"In hindsight, we were perhaps too optimistic. The Natural Resources Management and Protection project was planned to mesh with RENARM, but the startup time, and delays in bringing technical teams on board, made it impossible to using buy-ins to get the project up and running. We're working on two small buy-ins now."

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■ The NGO implementers have for the most part avoided becoming involved in buy-ins, or at least focused their efforts on activities already on their own program agendas, because of the requirement to produce 1:1 matching funds. It would be difficult for a Mission to convince PACA, for example, to take on a Mission priority project not already contemplated by one of the implementing organizations.

■ RENARM staff, as noted above, say they have made a point of *not* aggressively promoting or "selling" buy-ins. (Some Mission staff say this is not true, that by offering buy-ins as the only way to receive certain desired services, RENARM is de facto "pushing" buy-ins very hard.) The experience that CATIE and Zamorano have had with buy-ins seems to be directly tied to the entrepreneurial skills of the persons heading the distinct programs. Carlos Rivas,

director of the integrated resource management program, was mentioned as an example of a good promoter. The more mature programs that have moved into extension activities (and by implication, more good people with contacts to "sell" the program, or at least making a good impression on potential users) tend to be better at promotion. There is also some correlation between success at promotion and service to more traditional production aspects of AID programs, ie., the plant protection program. If RENARM desires more buy-ins, it would probably be wise to invest in working with CATIE on selection and training of staff to favor promotion skills.

#### **NGO Implementation: Paseo Pantera, PACA, Cultural Survival, etc.**

Most of the Missions have complaints about the NGO-implemented protected areas, information management, and environmental education component. In general, the Missions feel that RENARM has failed to provide leadership sufficient to assure development of an appropriate regional focus; equitable and efficient distribution of resources; or consultation with affected Mission staff and government institutions.

■ **The regional focus:** From the bilateral Mission point of view, ROCAP should exercise direction and leadership to see that the projects implemented by NGO consortia focus on areas with a regional significance. The bilateral Mission staff had expected to be consulted on their views about which areas had the greatest significance at a regional level, and what program activities were most appropriately developed and shared regionally. Although the RENARM project paper says that work plans would be developed in collaboration with bilateral Missions, the Missions say this

has never happened. RENARM staff claim that work plans are routinely shared with bilateral Missions, but their comments are never received. One senior RENARM staff member stated that in more than 12 years of forwarding work plans to Missions, he had never received a single comment.

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"I appreciate being invited to their [PACA] meetings, but our interaction is superficial. What they're doing is good -- it's one more protected area that somebody is taking care of. But they've never sat down and asked us what we would see as important."

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The PACA projects particularly raise questions about what is appropriate at a regional versus bilateral level: "Sierra de las Minas [PACA's project in Guatemala] gets about the same funding as MAYAREMA, for a park one-sixth the size, and because of the regional structure, less funding gets to the field."

This problem will be difficult to resolve. Because NGO's bring their own resources to the program on a 1:1 matching basis, RENARM is not in a position to direct their activities at Missions' request. Several of the Mission staff have suggested adjusting the matching grant requirement to give AID more clout in general, or to encourage the flow of funds and effort toward AID's higher priority areas.

■ **Equity:** The matching requirement also gets the blame for concentration of resources in areas where the NGO's already had projects and people, instead of extending them to areas with less coverage. El Salvador particularly suffered from a lack of NGO interest -- it was still at war when the project funds were first allocated, and there

is a tendency to see the country as environmentally a lost cause. Even if a Mission was willing to put up its own funds to buy into RENARM to get protected-areas and information-management activities going in its country, it sometimes would find the NGO reluctant to commit to activities, for programmatic or matching-fund reasons.

■ **Efficiency:** In general, those Mission staff who are directly familiar with PACA projects feel that the Mission could have accomplished significantly more in the same area, or in an area of higher priority, if the funds had simply been made available as a buy-out to support bilateral programs.

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"Communication is a key element. We don't have enough information on what's going on, and this is risky. Rumors travel fast, and a project can be destroyed if people turn against it based on rumors about what AID is doing."

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■ **Lack of Consultation:** Some Missions have wound up in the middle when NGOs have initiated programs without consulting Missions or government agencies, and conflict has resulted. In Belize, for example, where PACA has a relatively high profile, the project got off to a rocky start. Neither the Mission nor the government was informed initially of who would be doing what. The Mission intervened: "It's a very small country, and it was relatively easy to work out. We did have to take some hard action to bring the problem to their attention."

RENARM has not provided guidance or protocols for its implementing agencies and consortia, in part because protocols might vary from country to country, but this is an area where some work could, perhaps, be done. Likewise, the Missions could take

a stronger leadership role in organizing country-wide forums for information sharing. For example, small meetings on specific topics involving bilateral, regional, NGO and other personnel could be organized by RENARM, the Missions, or the two together, and might be just as or more useful than the annual coordinating meeting.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

RENARM's continuous M & E component is intended to serve the ENR strategy for Central America as well as the project itself. MSI's Scope of Work directs the firm to work on internal evaluation of RENARM proper; facilitate coordination between RENARM and the bilateral ENR projects; and provide periodic technical assistance upon request to support USAIDs with monitoring and evaluation of parallel bilateral projects and the help their M & E systems mesh with the RENARM project systems.

Few of the Missions and implementing institutions have yet used the M & E component. Also lacking is the unifying theme -- compatible M & E to track progress on components of the Central American strategy throughout the region.

According to the MSI Chief of Party (COP), this is due primarily to an under-estimation in the Scope of Work and in the project paper of the staff time and budget commitment necessary just for RENARM proper. At RENARM management's direction, virtually no effort has been made to promote buy-ins by the Missions for M & E technical assistance, although information on the procedure for buy-ins has been provided. It is, of course, inappropriate in any case for MSI to promote buy-ins to its RENARM-funded contract.

This study has increased MSI's contact with Missions and understanding of their priorities and needs. Some modest

funding may remain under the current contract to provide MSI personnel other than the COP for special studies and evaluation. At least one Mission is looking at a buy-in (although this is a difficult sell, because M & E, unlike other technical assistance provided by RENARM, has to be paid for, and Missions have access to evaluation consultants through a variety of other contracting mechanisms). MSI's special advantage in the region may come from the teams of advisors the firm has contracted for each of the Missions for development of Program Performance Assessment Systems, clarification of strategic objectives, and indicator development. (This work was carried out under the PRISM project.)

Tables 3 and 4 present an overview of the variety of objectives and indicators worked out by ROCAP and the seven Missions, with TA from MSI teams, to monitor their progress. Six of the seven Missions have policy-reform objectives roughly analogous to ROCAP/RENARM's policy objective; five of the six selected *passage or implementation of specified policies* as an indicator. Four of the seven Missions have committed to protected-area conservation program outputs, but their plans for monitoring vary from counting the number of units established or plans approved to counting hectares in protected-area status.

Five of the seven Missions are monitoring deforestation, either nationwide or in targeted areas, but again, the methodology varies from counting hectares of forest cover lost, to tracking percent of loss, to percent remaining. Five Missions are monitoring adoption of sound practices promoted by project extension (analogous to ROCAP's "Improved knowledge, attitudes, and skills regarding environmental problems and practices" objective). Again, the data will focus on different units -- number of persons or families, percentage of target

groups, hectares affected, number of plans approved. Two Missions propose attitude surveys, and three will count hectares under improved management of various types. Four of the seven are tracking biodiversity conservation by monitoring protected-area status, and three are monitoring NGO activity, either by number of projects or dollars of support.

RENARM's ongoing M & E is charting the progress of project objectives, and not surprisingly, much progress has shown up at the lower levels of the objective "tree," while there is less at higher levels. The coordination meeting, and interviews with Mission staff, revealed a lack of consensus about monitoring and evaluation of the project, with strong voices arguing (a) that the end-of-project status (EOPS) indicators chosen at the time the project paper was written are inadequate and should be changed; and (b) that at this point, although perhaps not what they could be, they should not be abandoned.

In-depth consideration of this issue is outside the scope of this study, except to note that it would seem advisable, in the course of the external evaluation and project redesign, to involve the Missions in discussion of the M & E structure for the project's next phase.

Creation of compatible monitoring that would serve to track bilateral Mission and RENARM progress toward the Central America strategy seems ultimately to be desirable. However, given the current climate of change, such an effort is possibly not feasible at this time. Still, dialogue with the Missions and with project implementers about M & E in the project's second phase could serve to identify one or a few new, innovative approaches to monitoring that might be used in an experimental way, with the objective of identifying methods to [elegantly] serve project, Mission, and regional needs.

One shared data need, for which consistent and standardized or compatible approaches might be developed, is "To what degree are people changing knowledge, attitudes, and behavior with respect to natural resources?" Another might be an effort to define management standards and adequate protection practices for parks in the region, with an attempt to establish absolute or relative criteria for when an area can be considered "protected."

### Communications

The RENARM project itself, the bilateral Missions, and the implementers of the component activities, have not done a good job of communicating with each other. The bilateral Missions feel they lack information regarding availability of services and opportunities for collaboration, and they would like to receive more "active listening" to problems that could be dealt with at a managerial level. Where relations are strained, they have often become polarized. When some bilateral Mission staff say they have not been informed, regional staff attribute this to the Missions' desire that the regional project not be seen as useful. As a result, no real communication takes place; it is merely a re-stating of positions.

This is a truism, of course. Communication is a two-way street. Those bilateral Missions that have actively sought collaboration in general express more satisfaction with the level of communication and cooperation. But no one is very satisfied, and each side typically blames the other.

From RENARM: Missions design their bilateral projects without seeking feedback from RENARM. Missions often have not provided comments, or have made superficial comments, when feedback has been sought on regional projects. From Missions: RENARM is irrelevant or useless

to the bilateral projects. By the time feedback is sought, there is little room to accommodate it because projects are already designed. RENARM staff are frustrated by Missions' assertions that they do not have enough information about what technical services are available, insisting that they *have* made the information available.

The fact that these are *common* complaints in any complex organization does not mean they are *trivial*. Improving communication is just about the lowest-input, highest-return investment a manager can make. (Business research has shown, for example, that employee job satisfaction correlates as closely with "Communication is good" as it does with "I like what I do.")

The broad range of activities and small staff associated with each programmatic area mean that RENARM staff operate under intense pressure. Mission staff are similarly overloaded. Under these conditions, the press of business makes it difficult to invest time in understanding and improving information flow. Information may in fact be flowing without being received, and this makes it even more important to find the most effective means for making sure people are "in the loop."

The readings and interviews conducted for this report identified some specific problems and suggestions for improvement.

- Both Missions and RENARM should make an effort to take the other's needs seriously and to try to address them.

- RENARM's descriptions of each of the technical assistance capabilities and how to access them should be available in various and redundant media -- E-mail, personal mail, inclusion with regular reports and communications. Regional technical advisors should track person-days of assistance by country, and make an effort to initiate contacts when countries are not being served.

- To the extent that it can do so within Agency reporting requirements, RENARM should make an effort to cut down on the paper avalanche and make its reports more readable and accessible. It should experiment with topical meetings and other alternatives to the report for information flow. The information clearinghouse function should be further studied and better implemented.

## Change

RENARM could be described as an project designed to provide leadership in accomplishing a regional strategy by teamwork. In the recently fashionable business discipline of team building, it is a fundamental principle that *when the composition of the team changes, team building regresses a few phases and has to start again from a lower level*. The forces of change affecting USAID in Central America have made regional collaboration -- difficult in a structural context, to start with -- even less likely.

ROCAP has had three different management structures and six different teams in three years. RENARM project staff are about to make their third office move. At the Mission level, roughly half of the Mission directors, ADO's, and environmental officers have changed jobs since the RENARM project began, or will change within the next few months. Two of the Missions (Nicaragua and Panama) were not operating when the project paper was approved. Two more (Costa Rica and Belize) are phasing out. At the 3 1/2 year mark, the ROCAP office was merged into the Guatemala Mission. The future of Missions throughout the region continues to be the subject of considerable fear and rumor.

These are not the conditions under which teamwork and collaboration can be nurtured in any organization. Newcomers

need time to develop working relationships. If those in leadership position are "lame ducks," their ability to lead is limited. A commitment to making a regional program work in the future should imply a commitment to agree, soon, on a regional management structure that can be stable, and to find ways to reward excellent performance and keep those performers in the region.

### III. R E N A R M I I : RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This section is not a comprehensive review of what bilateral Missions want in RENARM's second phase. Indeed, there is not general agreement that RENARM should have a second phase. Most of the bilateral Mission staff interviewed felt that the evaluation team should look at each of the program areas as potentially expendable or replaceable by "buy-out" funds that would directly support Mission activities if they fit the regional strategy.

The conclusions listed here, tentative though they may be, are drawn from two sources. On Day Two of the coordination meeting, small-group discussion focused on "What should phase II of RENARM look like?" In individual interviews, RENARM and Mission staff were asked, "In an ideal scenario, what would the project have been/be like?"

Their responses:

- RENARM should focus applying the components of the strategy in multi-country ecological and social units (eg., the Gulf of Fonseca, the Maya forest, indigenous peoples).

- There is an urgent need for better communication and networking among professionals in the region. RENARM

should become more effective as a clearinghouse for technology, information, policy, and education. The project should develop mechanisms to improve real-time sharing of existing technology and place a lesser priority on developing new technologies. RENARM should use its convening power to bring people together for this purpose more regularly. With specific regard to CCAD, assistance should be extended to convening managerial and technical staff from the seven countries, not just Presidents and Ministers.

- RENARM is well placed to collect information on the "total picture" that affects AID programs in each country, including programs in other areas of USAID, including those dealing with population and other external forces with potentially profound effects on bilateral efforts. RENARM can help the Missions adapt their ENR strategies to economic forces that will affect the region. The bilateral Missions want RENARM to work at the regional level to increase leverage and provide information about other donor priorities and programs (World Bank, IDB, Europeans, Japanese, etc.) -- as it has done in the pesticide management program. To enhance multi-country donor coordination, RENARM might be uniquely qualified to initiate a donor forum.

- The Missions need regional "swat teams" of highly qualified experts, available on reasonably short notice, to provide technical assistance.

- The project should focus on "people" issues (education and training), public/private relationships; facilitation of policy harmonization; and its role as coordinator, integrator, facilitator. The project's role in institutional strengthening is particularly important to the sustainability of activities initiated by both regional and bilateral projects. RENARM might very usefully address the increasing need for

training in environmental assessment techniques. RENARM could provide funds and trainers for direct training of government and private firms and individuals who will be responsible for EA's, and to train trainers who can develop capacity in each country.

■ RENARM should continue its efforts to focus on what is working, and most cost effective. Although there is not yet consensus on this, and the evaluation should provide more guidance, the leading candidates for more intense effort appear at this point to be sustainable agriculture, rehabilitation of degraded lands, protected areas and biodiversity conservation.

■ Improve communications. For those programs intended to be demand-driven, work at making Missions more aware of what is available (and giving them a voice in what will be available). Make the design of phase II more bottom-up: encourage the Missions to work among themselves to identify regional needs and priorities, and use that input in the project redesign.

**Table 3. Comparison of Regional and Mission ENR Objectives and Program Outputs**

<b>ROCAP</b> Strategic Objective: Environmentally sound and efficient practices in natural resource management	<b>Costa Rica</b> Strategic Objective: Improved long-term management of the natural resource base	<b>Panama</b> Strategic Objective: Preservation of natural resources	<b>El Salvador</b> Strategic Objective: Improved environmental and natural resource management
2.1 Improved protection of selected endangered and valuable biodiversity zones	Maintenance of integrity of national parks	Improved management of national parks & preserves	
2.2 New/improved NR management techniques, goods, & services developed	Increased, sustainable management of private forests (2.2, 2.4)		
2.3 Improved environment-related policy formulation and implementation			NR use policy/legal framework created & implemented
2.4 Improved knowledge, attitudes & skills regarding environmental problems & practices among NR managers, extensionists, & the general public	Strengthened local knowledge and implementation of natural resource management	Sustainable management of privately forested lands  Improved canal watershed management systems (2.2, 2.4, 2.6)	Increased public awareness of environmental problems in target areas and nationwide  Improved productive activities which are consistent with better management
2.5 Effective, sustainable NR & environmental organizations	Institutionalized base for regional conservation areas	Strengthened institutional capacity of INRENARE  Long-term environmental funding operational	
2.6 Development of a professional cadre of agriculture and NR management professionals			

<b>Nicaragua</b> Strategic Objective: Environmentally sound production and extractive practices	<b>Honduras</b> Strategic Objective: Improved management toward long-term sustainability of selected natural resources	<b>Belize</b> Strategic Objective: Improved use of terrestrial natural resources	<b>Guatemala</b> Strategic Objectives: Improved NR management in the highlands & Peten, increased production by disadvantaged groups
Improved sustainable economic practices related to protected areas (2.1, 2.4)			Preventive & restorative measures expanded (also 2.4)
Improved environment & NR technology transfer	Increased environmental awareness & technology transfer		
Improved resource use policies & regulation implemented & enforced	Improved policy framework	Increased capacity of BTIA to influence NR/tourism policy	Policy reform
		Increased capacity of LNGO's to influence env. & NR policy	
		Alternative cropping systems adopted to targeted areas	Sustainable agricultural practices promoted
		Increased community commitment to env. & NR management	
Strengthened environmental & NR conservation advocacy groups (NGO's & PVO's)	Increased private sector activity in improving NR management		
Strengthened institutional capacity (IRENA) for resource use & env. protection			

**Table 4. ENR Strategic Objectives and Indicators for Central America**  
(From Bilateral Mission Action Plans, 1993 and 1994)

Country, strategic objective, projects, budgets	Indicators selected
<p><b>Nicaragua</b> Strategic Objective: Environmentally sound production and extractive practices</p> <p>Projects: Natural Resource Management, Miskito Keys Protected Area, Economic Recovery &amp; Development, PVO co-financing</p> <p>\$7,750,000 FY 93 \$7,600,000 FY 94 \$1,000,000 FY 95</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rate of deforestation (ha. deforested/year)</li> <li>- Reduced pesticide use on major crops (No. of applications per crop per cycle)</li> <li>- Laws and regulations passed and implemented</li> <li>- Protected areas under effective management (No. of has.)</li> <li>- Employment and family income in buffer areas</li> <li>- No. of farmers reached by environmentally focused extension programs</li> </ul>
<p><b>Honduras</b> Strategic Objective: Improved management toward long-term sustainability of selected natural resources</p> <p>Projects: Forestry Development, Policy Analysis &amp; Implementation, LUPE, RENARM, National Environmental Protection Fund, Biomass Energy Systems &amp; Technology</p> <p>\$7,837,000 FY 93 \$7,250,000 FY 94 \$6,538,000 FY 95</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Forest reserves/protected areas under long-term management plans (number of parks/reserves)</li> <li>- Increased area of pine forest harvested in accordance with acceptable forest management practices (hectares)</li> <li>- No. of households practicing one or more environmentally sound cultivation practices</li> <li>- Improved environmental legislation passed and regulations issued (no. of laws/regs published)</li> <li>- AFE replaces COHDEFOR</li> <li>- Increased percentage of total lumber processed by band saws</li> <li>- Person/months of training in effective forest management</li> <li>- Change in scores on environmental attitude interviews (increased positive attitudes toward environmentally sound forest practices)</li> <li>- Increased area of forest managed for sustainability in model management units (has.)</li> <li>- Increased effective environmental activities (No. of NGO projects)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Belize</b> Strategic Objective: Improved use of terrestrial natural resources</p> <p>Projects: NARMAP, TMP, RENARM, Parks in Peril, Ethnobotany, University Linkages, Env/Global Climate Change</p> <p>\$3,170,000 FY93 \$2,450,000 FY94 \$1,619,000 FY95</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Resolved threats in 35 critical habitats (index of security weighted average)</li> <li>- Deforestation (percent loss)</li> <li>- Income from sedentary agriculture in targeted areas</li> <li>- Value per tourist at selected sites</li> <li>- Farmers with secure land tenure in targeted areas</li> <li>- No. of farms in target areas using project-disseminated practices</li> <li>- Applications to Conservation Development Fund from local communities</li> <li>- No. of special development/community protected areas established</li> <li>- National, transparent land-use system established &amp; in use</li> <li>- Comprehensive system of protected areas established</li> <li>- MNR &amp; MTE staffing plans implemented</li> <li>- Tourism growth management system established &amp; operating</li> <li>- Local financial support for NGO's, for BTIA</li> <li>- No. of members of NGO's, of BTIA</li> </ul>

Country, strategic objective, projects, budgets	Indicators selected
<p><b>Guatemala</b>  Strategic Objectives:  Improved NR management in the highlands &amp; Peten, increased production by disadvantaged groups</p> <p>Projects: Highland ag development, Community NRM, RENARM, Parks in Peril, Environmental Support, Biodiversity Support</p> <p>\$2,400,000 FY93  \$3,740,000 FY94  \$5,550,000 FY95</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Declining rate of deforestation in Maya Biosphere (% of remaining forested land)</li> <li>- Land under improved natural resource management practices in highland areas (has.)</li> <li>- Targeted user groups applying improved NRM practices (percentage)</li> <li>- Percent of CONAP budget from GOG sources</li> <li>- Effective NRM policy environment (indicator to be determined)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Costa Rica</b>  Strategic Objective: Improved long-term management of the natural resource base</p> <p>Projects: FORESTA, Tortuguero (Mission and LAC), Biodiversity Protection and Management Training, Public Demand for Environmental Services, Conservation of Biological Diversity, Forestry Regulation for Sustainable Management, BOSCOA, PATS, Native Trees (OTS), Regional Agricultural Higher Education</p> <p>\$1,349,000 FY1993  \$1,395,000 FY1994  \$1,575,000 FY1995</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loss of area under natural forest lying outside the national park system (hectares lost)</li> <li>- Area remaining under productive natural forest (hectares remaining)</li> <li>- Revenues generated by national parks as a percentage of the system's operating costs</li> <li>- Conservation law infractions in the national parks effectively adjudicated by the courts</li> <li>- Increased stumpage value of standing timber</li> <li>- Adoption of sustainable forest management practices (No. of sustainable forest management plans submitted for DGF approval)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Panama</b>  Strategic Objective: Preservation of natural resources</p> <p>Projects: Natural Resources Management, RENARM, Parks in Peril</p> <p>\$2,500,000 FY 93  \$1,500,000 FY 94  \$1,800,000 FY 95</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Net no. of hectares country-wide deforested</li> <li>- No. of hectares country-wide of natural vegetation lost annually</li> <li>- INRENARE improvement under GOP performance classification</li> <li>- Private land reforested in Canal watershed (has.)</li> <li>- NGO endowment established &amp; capitalized</li> <li>- NGO funding of private and public env. organizations (\$\$)</li> <li>- Park plans approved (#)</li> <li>- Implementation of plan elements</li> <li>- No. of parks implementing measures to control illegal incursions</li> <li>- Has. declared protected in Canal watershed</li> </ul>

Country, strategic objective, projects, budgets	Indicators selected
<p><b>El Salvador</b>  Strategic Objective:  Improved environmental and natural resource management</p> <p>Projects: Env/Nat Resources, Agr Sec Modern, PADF/SENS, SABE, CLASP, RTAC II, Small Farmer, Agribus. Dev., Technoserve, Coffee Tech, NRECA</p> <p>\$8,025,000 FY 93  \$8,204,000 FY 94  \$7,955,000 FY 95</p> <p>Projects:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No. of has. of non-forested land under improved natural resource management, including buffer zones</li> <li>- Water quality (turbidity/PPM suspended solids) and seasonal flow (M3/sec) in PROMESA demonstration areas</li> <li>- Has. of forest cover</li> <li>- Establish environment and NRM strategy</li> <li>- National environmental education policy decreed (yes/no)</li> <li>- Consolidation/refinement of existing laws/regulations (forestry, environment, irrigation/drainage)</li> <li>- GOES expenditures/investment in natural resources (national - % of national budget)</li> <li>- % of survey respondents indicating understanding &amp; awareness of environmental issues (nationwide; also target areas &amp; Ahuachapan)</li> <li>- # and % of target beneficiaries under ANR's portfolio</li> </ul>

## ANNEXES

## Annex A

### List of Interviews

1. Costa Rica, 24-27 May  
  
Anne Lewandowski, Natural Resources Advisor, USAID/Costa Rica  
David Heeson, Rural Development Officer, USAID/Costa Rica  
Kermit Moh, Private Sector Officer, USAID/Panama  
Hillary Lorraine, Policy Research Advisor, RENARM  
Joseph MacGann, Natural Resources Project Officer, USAID/Belize  
Wayne Williams, Regional Environmental Officer, ROCAP  
Claudio Saito, NGO Advisor, ROCAP
  
2. Guatemala, 28 May-6 June  
  
Henry Tschinkel, Forestry Advisor, ROCAP  
Leslie Lannon, NGO Coordinator, ROCAP  
John Acree, Regional Pest Manager, ROCAP  
Keith Kline, Natural Resources Advisor, USAID/Guatemala  
Edgar Piñera, Environmental Officer, USAID/Guatemala  
William Sugrue, RENARM project manager  
  
(by telephone)  
  
George Like, ADO, USAID/Belize  
Margaret Harritt, Environmental Officer, USAID/Honduras  
Brian Rudert, ADO, Nicaragua  
John Warren, USAID/Honduras
  
3. El Salvador, 7-9 June  
  
Gordon Straub, Agricultural Development Officer  
Peter Gore, Environmental Officer  
Ross Wherry, PRJ, PROMESA project  
Miguel Araujo P. and Carla de Alfaro, Secretaria Ejecutiva de Medio Ambiente  
(PROMESA counterpart agency)  
Don Harrington, ANR
  
4. Washington, 10-15 June  
  
Phone/FAX communication  
  
Dwight Steen, ADO Honduras

## Annex B

### Interview Format

#### Bilateral Cooperation

*The purpose of this portion of the RENARM internal evaluation is to explore the nature of the relationships between RENARM and the bilateral Missions, and to make recommendations for improving integration of RENARM and bilateral efforts. This is not a "questionnaire" - to be filled out and handed in - but rather, a guide for discussion in interviews that I would like to arrange with you. You are welcome to add topics more relevant to you than those listed here. You may also, if you choose, write an assessment for inclusion in the evaluation report.*

-- Ruth Norris, Management Systems International

#### 1. What services have been provided to the Mission by RENARM advisors?

Program area	Activities	How did the Mission benefit, either from direct technical assistance or from sharing experiences/ideas from other countries?
Policy		
Forestry		
Environment		
NGO/training		
Monitoring/ evaluation		



**4. Your comments about RENARM's regional mandate: In an "ideal" scenario, what regional natural resources issues should be addressed and how? What support would you have wanted? How does this compare with RENARM's progress to date?**

**5. Your comments about RENARM's strategic focus:**

**6. How can RENARM's contributions to Central American, and your country's, natural resource management be improved?**