



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



NATURAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CLEARINGHOUSE

Final Report

FEBRUARY 2007

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Chemonics International Inc.



USAID / R. HILBRUNER

Coastal resources play a key role in USAID development assistance activities, ranging from fisheries management to sustainable tourism to aquaculture and seaweed harvesting. NRIC has provided support for reporting on these activities for the agency.

NATURAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CLEARINGHOUSE

Final Report

USAID Contract No. LAG-I-00-99-00014 Task Order # 9



U.S. FOREST SERVICE / M. HILBRUNER

Improved livelihoods and increased opportunities for education frequently accompany community-based natural resources management activities such as sustainable tourism, as described by a week-long training course in sustainable tourism developed with NRIC assistance for delivery to USAID field staff.

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FRONT COVER: Foreign and local tour operators study an interpretative panel in the Talassemtane National Park, Morocco.

CHEMONICS / J. MACGREGOR

BACK COVER: Ways of life have remained unchanged for generations, sometimes centuries, in Morocco. USAID is working to help improve incomes and livelihoods without affecting people's cultural heritage, through tourism and agricultural assistance activities documented on NRIC's interactive environmental projects database.

J. CHAVEZ



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Coastal mangrove forests have a high biodiversity index. They are critical nursery, breeding, and feeding grounds for local fish and bird populations, and provide vital shoreline stabilization for exposed coastal areas.

ACRONYMS

DEC	Development Experience Clearinghouse
EGAT	Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade
FY	fiscal year
GCP	Global Conservation Program
GIS	geographic information systems
IQC	indefinite quantity contract
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NRIC	Natural Resources Information Clearinghouse
NRM	Office of Natural Resources Management
UN	United Nations
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

THE COMMUNITY WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM / TCCC



NRIC's support to USAID has addressed a wide range of water issues, including water quality and habitat protection, water supply and sanitation, and integrated water resources management.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 2002 to 2007, the Natural Resources Information Clearinghouse (NRIC) provided support to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Natural Resources Management (NRM) in its efforts to “improve human well-being through healthy ecosystems and sustainable resource management.”¹

NRIC supported the full range of tasks outlined in its scope of work within the obligated budget. Its technical specialists worked with each of the NRM office’s four thematic teams — biodiversity, forestry, land management, and water — to meet short- and long-term project needs, despite funding cuts at the agency that affected NRIC resources. During the course of its contract, NRIC:

- Produced more than 150 communications and outreach materials, such as reports, presentations, brochures, fact sheets, and posters
- Developed and/or maintained more than 260 Internet and Intranet Web pages
- Supported numerous conferences, workshops, seminar series, and training events, addressing topics such as sustainable tourism, poverty reduction, natural resources management, indigenous peoples, and the Amazon Basin Initiative
- Supported special initiatives focused on topics of particular relevance to ongoing NRM office activities in Washington and in the field

1. Natural Resources Information Clearinghouse. 2004. EGAT Natural Resources Management Office Strategic Framework.

- Provided support to help bring NRM office programming in line with the new Foreign Assistance Framework, and to help position the office to be more responsive to emerging field demands
- Created a database that houses information on 578 projects and a library that contains 4,117 associated documents

Several factors contributed to NRIC's success, including:

- The flexibility to take on tasks outside of the defined work plan and to allocate resources to fulfill short-turnaround, ad hoc requests while continuing to support planned projects
- Its accessibility to NRM office staff via NRIC's Washington, D.C., location — NRIC specialists were available to meet with team members regularly and on short notice
- The skill set and expertise offered by NRIC's staff and short-term technical assistants, who provided comprehensive, substantive support to the NRM office and whose collaboration ensured seamless support to the office
- The depth of resources offered by the primary contractor, Chemonics International, to support NRIC as needed

Lessons learned from the NRIC experience could inform a similar contract effort in the future. Steps to take to improve service include:

- Creating a long-term, comprehensive communications strategy that aligns itself with office objectives and maximizes resource use
- Involving contractor staff throughout a project's life cycle to take full advantage of the resources it offers and to create a coherent plan for taking a project from the idea stage to implementation
- In the face of staff turnover at the NRM office, ensuring ongoing projects are effectively transitioned to a new project leader, who will see these projects through to completion
- Prioritizing needs to ensure resources are spent on projects of most use to the office
- Supporting field- and centrally-funded projects as USAID adapts to the new Foreign Assistance Framework

This report will highlight NRIC's key activities during the past five years, and discuss successes and lessons learned.



ORANGUTAN FOUNDATION INTERNATIONAL

The biodiversity earmark has directed many of **USAID's** activities and initiatives overseas toward protection of threatened habitats and species, such as this Indonesian orangutan.

Accomplishment

In addition to supporting the NRM office's core activities, NRIC played a key role in developing and implementing several special initiatives. NRIC remained flexible to meet long-term needs and fulfill short-turnaround, ad hoc requests, providing seamless service to the office while meeting budget targets.

Challenge

As originally designed, NRIC was to have a core project staff of 10. However, due to budget cuts at the agency, several positions were eliminated or merged, and additional positions were lost over time when they were not filled upon departure of a staff member.

Solution

Despite declining resources, NRIC responded with a ramped-up effort wherein some technical staff served multiple office teams, and short-term technical specialists were contracted to support discrete projects. NRIC was able to support the full range of tasks outlined in the contract, as well as additional activities not anticipated in the initial project scope.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In 2002, the Office of Natural Resources Management contracted with Chemonics International to establish the Natural Resources Information Clearinghouse as a task order under the Biodiversity Conservation and Forestry indefinite quantity contract. NRIC's primary functions were to:

- Address gaps in understanding of the agency's sustainable natural resources and agricultural activities, projects, programs, and policies
- Develop a clearer profile of agency, partner, and public sector natural resources information needs to better meet those needs
- Develop improved information technology applications — including Web sites and an interactive online project and document database — to support agency and NRM office information needs

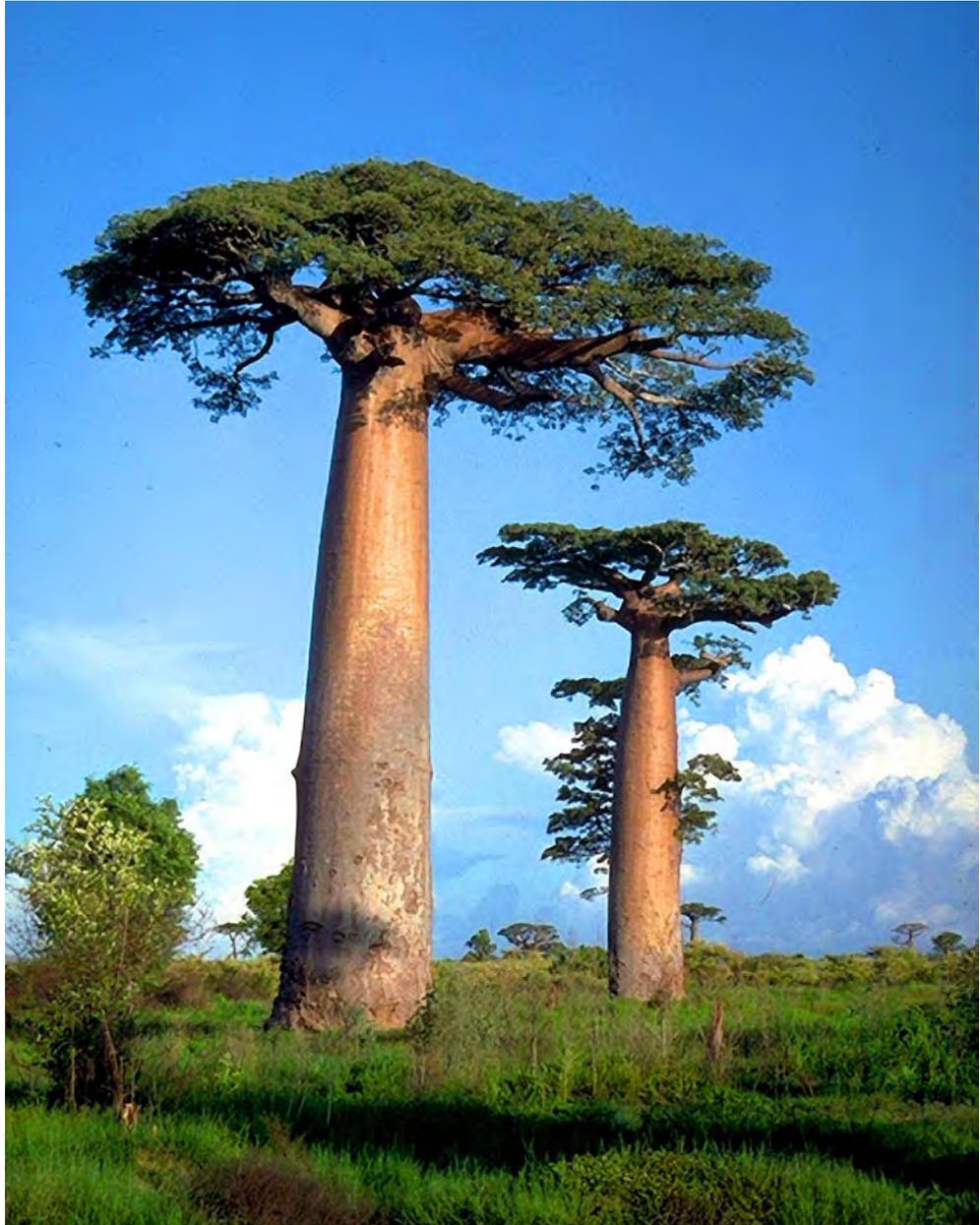
BENEFIT TO USAID: PUBLIC IMAGE

NRIC's support to the NRM office was pivotal in raising the office's profile within and outside of USAID. NRIC's contributions to top-quality communications materials and Web sites, and conferences, workshops, and training events helped these products serve as powerful marketing tools for USAID's NRM programs. These tools can continue to be used to engage partners, increase internal and external support for the office's programs, and support office funding requests.

- Facilitate improved coordination and collaboration among professional practitioners, within and outside USAID

NRIC's technical specialists supported the NRM office's four thematic teams: biodiversity, forestry, land management, and water. With additional support of a webmaster and an editor, these specialists were able to assist the teams with diverse projects, such as preparing communications materials and annual reports to Congress, developing interactive databases, maintaining a Web presence, and supporting workshops and training.

This report describes key projects that benefited USAID and outlines lessons learned that may inform a similar NRM office support project in the future.



USAID / CJ ELPION

Madagascar includes a diverse range of habitats that are endangered by deforestation and resource extraction. NRIC has reported on many global USAID initiatives to prevent illegal logging and support habitat protection and non-timber forest product development.

Accomplishment

NRIC produced more than 150 reports, presentations, newsletters, fact sheets, brochures, posters, and other outreach products for the NRM office. These products helped to communicate the global importance of natural resources management initiatives and provided support and guidance for field implementation of resources protection and development projects.

Challenge

Although communications activities and products dominated NRIC's workload, the lack of a comprehensive, long-term communications strategy meant that many products were produced without advance notice, pulling resources away from planned projects and sometimes delaying their implementation.

Solution

NRIC submitted two proposed communications strategies, and although these efforts did not result in an approved strategy that would establish project milestones and create a more predictable workflow, NRIC worked with the NRM office to adjust schedules for longer-term projects to meet immediate needs, and directed its resources as needed to fulfill ad hoc requests and planned project activities.

CHAPTER TWO

CORE ACTIVITIES

More than 80 percent of NRIC's funding supported core projects for the four NRM office teams, for which NRIC created communications and outreach materials, developed and maintained Web sites, and provided technical assistance. The balance was dedicated to development and delivery of several substantive special initiatives.

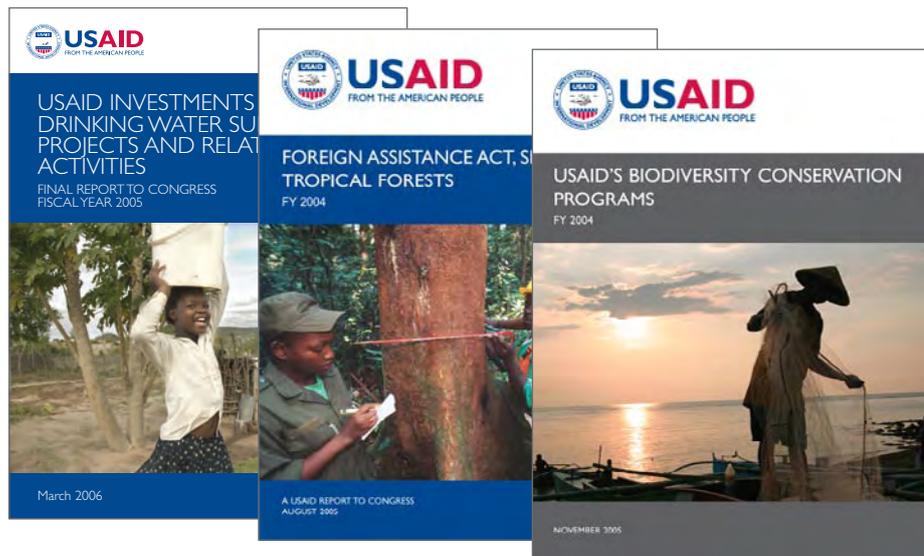
COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH

During the five-year support contract, NRIC produced a variety of communications and outreach products for internal and external audiences. These products served as marketing tools to demonstrate the depth and breadth of USAID activities in the NRM sector, and brought tools and techniques to field offices to assist with project implementation. Additionally, NRIC supported conferences, workshops, and training events that allowed practitioners to share best practices and lessons learned related to the NRM field.

REPORTS

NRIC produced several technical reports and reports to Congress that were some of the NRM office's most high-profile products. A few of these reports are highlighted below.

Annual forestry and biodiversity conservation reports. Working with NRM program staff, NRIC prepared annual reports that serve as the principal outreach vehicles for the NRM office's Biodiversity and Forestry teams. NRIC collected information from across the agency and its missions and provided writing, production, and distribution support for the Foreign Assistance Act, Section 118: Tropical Forests



Report, and the Foreign Assistance Act, Section 119: Biodiversity Conservation Report, which summarize global program activities, highlight key projects, detail program expenditures, and analyze funding trends. These reports are distributed to USAID partners, missions, and key members of Congress. Both reports have grown in scope each year, and NRIC thinks the reports' style and content have improved consistently as well. In 2006, the reports were combined to capitalize on program synergies, reduce costs, and reduce the reporting burden on the field.

Water for the Poor annual report. To improve the impact of USAID's water portfolio, NRIC examined how and where the agency invests in water-related activities. At the center of this effort was a comprehensive and systematic review involving the compilation and analysis of data for estimated water-related obligations per fiscal year (FY). NRIC used this analysis to produce four annual reports to Congress that tracked agency-wide water obligations under the Water for the Poor Presidential Initiative.

Other reports. NRIC helped the NRM office meet several of its annual and biennial reporting requirements and fulfilled a number of one-time reporting requests. The wide range of reports supported include the Report of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the multi-agency Coral Reef Task Force Report, and the intra-agency Global Climate Change report and "Activities Not Managed In-Country" data sheets. NRIC also produced reports for international conferences, including the second Intergovernmental Review meeting of the Global Programme of Action. Additionally, NRIC researched and reported on ways the Water Team could promote the President's Volunteers for Prosperity Program.



Sustainable Tourism Specialist Roberta Hilbruner discusses USAID's activities in sustainable tourism with Claudia McMurray, assistant secretary of state for oceans, and international environmental and scientific affairs in front of a poster and display created by NRIC for a State Department-sponsored Earth Day Tourism event.

OTHER OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION PRODUCTS

NRIC supported the NRM office's outreach efforts by developing presentations, brochures, fliers, fact sheets, newsletters, and other communications materials that promoted specific activities and programs. Examples include:

- Brochures for the Forestry and Biodiversity teams, and a brochure for the Biodiversity Team's Global Conservation Program (GCP) partnership.
- A poster and fact sheets highlighting office and team activities for the 2003 Mission Directors' Conference, and posters highlighting agency-wide biodiversity activities for the 2003 World Parks Congress.
- Several fact sheets and updates to existing text on Water Team activities for distribution at international conferences and events.

- NewsFlash articles for the Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade's (EGAT) Intranet home page.
- Text and materials for publication in USAID's *Frontlines* newsletter.
- Several PowerPoint presentations, including briefings for the USAID administrator and EGAT assistant administrator, and a presentation by then-Assistant Administrator Emmy Simmons to the U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development in New York.
- Eleven fact sheets were produced for the World Water Forum III in Kyoto, Japan in 2004. Seven fact sheets and six banners related to the theme of "USAID Partnerships in Water" were produced for the World Water Forum IV in Mexico City in 2006.

CONFERENCE, WORKSHOP, AND TRAINING SUPPORT

NRIC supported a variety of conferences, workshops, and training events during the life of its contract, two of which are highlighted below.

Indigenous peoples and conservation workshop. In 2003, NRIC provided planning and logistical support to a one-day NRM office workshop addressing indigenous peoples, conservation, and development. Several USAID case studies were presented, and experts from international conservation and governance nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) gave presentations that addressed legal and institutional issues, capacity-building, and bio-cultural conservation.

GCP partners' meeting. In 2006, NRIC supported the Biodiversity Team's GCP Annual Partners' Meeting, designed to improve collaboration among partner organizations' learning initiatives. NRIC worked with the GCP partners before the meeting to develop and distribute proposals on the learning initiatives that the partners were most interested in funding during FY 2007, and facilitated a day-long session at the meeting to review the proposals and make initial decisions on which proposals would move forward.

WEB SUPPORT

NRIC helped the NRM office maintain a robust Web presence by developing and managing content for public (www.usaid.gov), quasi-public (www.nric.net and www.usaidwater.org), and internal (EGAT Intranet) Web sites during the course of the contract. With NRIC's support, the number of visitors to the NRM office's forestry, biodiversity, land management, and water Web pages increased substantially from the sample period of January 2005 to January 2007.

According to Web statistics obtained for these sites, visitors from many countries accessed and/or researched information on USAID's NRM portfolio. Due to the manner in which visitor data are collected, a comprehensive list of countries cannot be produced. However, at a minimum, visitors from the following countries accessed the NRIC-maintained Web sites: Australia, Canada, Germany, India, Italy, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand, and the United Kingdom.

Accomplishment

With NRIC's support, the NRM office increased the environment's presence on USAID's Web site. A sampling of visits to NRM-related Web pages on www.usaid.gov for January 2005 and January 2007 show that the number of visits increased by:

- 40% to water pages
- 10% to land management pages
- 30% to forestry pages
- 14% to biodiversity pages

Challenge

In May 2003, USAID's Bureau of Legislative and Public Affairs announced that the agency's public Web site, www.usaid.gov, would require immediate conversion to fit a new theme-based template that would replace the site's existing organization of Web pages by office and bureau.

Solution

All available NRIC staff members contributed to the effort by writing content, locating appropriate photographs, and designing natural resources-themed pages to comply with the new format. New content was ready for posting in just over a month, well within the time frame allotted by the bureau.



INTERNET DESIGN, MAINTENANCE, AND UPDATES

www.usaid.gov. With input and guidance from NRM office staff, NRIC developed new and updated content for www.usaid.gov to describe agency activities in the NRM program's four thematic areas — biodiversity, forestry, land management, and water. NRIC's support of NRM office and related natural resources management Web pages helped to significantly expand the office's presence on this site, while the number of visitors to NRM-related pages increased substantially from January 2005 to January 2007. As of February 2007, NRIC managed 127 Web pages on www.usaid.gov.

www.nric.net. NRIC developed an extensive, interactive online database that catalogues USAID natural resources projects and links to hundreds of associated agency documents. This geo-referenced database and document library is an important research and reference tool for USAID staff and the agency's partners in the natural resources management community. The site's search pages include links for users to submit project information and documents to NRIC and USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse to supplement existing content and to encourage improved contractor compliance with document-posting requirements. As of February 2007, NRIC managed 77 pages on www.nric.net.

“ I just wanted to complement you on yesterday’s workshop: excellent job! I’ve been to quite a few how-to presentations on a variety of Web-related topics, but very rarely do you leave these workshops feeling empowered to actually start doing it. But you certainly provided the right amount of specific how-to information mixed with insights on how to approach a possibly overwhelming task like the one you discussed. ”

**PARTICIPANT,
508-COMPLIANCE
PRESENTATION**



www.usaidwater.org. Designed for the Water Team in March 2003, NRIC produced the NRM office’s initial non-publicized 20-page Internet Web site (www.usaidwater.org), so that it could be accessed by participants at the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto. The site expired in February 2005 as it was determined that all content on the site was repurposed for USAID’s public site and the Intranet, and subsequently archived.

BENEFIT TO USAID: 508 COMPLIANCE

NRIC has been a principal among USAID contractors in ensuring that Web content is compliant with the Section 508 regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act. When USAID’s Bureau of Legislative and Public Affairs notified Web content providers in 2003 that all posted documents needed to be 508-compliant, NRIC staff proactively researched the issues involved with making Web products accessible to the disabled, and met with a staff member at the National Federation of the Blind to better understand the process and technology involved. As a result of proficiency gained while building the agency’s external and internal Web sites, NRIC was asked, along with another contractor, to develop training in 508 compliance for USAID staff and contractors who manage Web content for the agency.

EGAT INTRANET DESIGN, MAINTENANCE, AND UPDATES

NRIC developed content for the EGAT Intranet that describes the NRM office staff’s technical expertise and contract mechanisms available to support field operations and activities, and that provides information to support delivery of services to the field. The Intranet pages provide essential information about USAID natural resources programs and policy, supported by links to other Web pages, online

documents, and the Web sites of contractors and partners working with the agency to implement global natural resources programs. NRIC's webmaster worked with NRM office and Office of Program Management staff to develop a seamless process for EGAT's review and the posting of NRIC-developed updates and new content. As of January 2007, NRIC managed 14 pages and 34 users' guide pages on EGAT's Intranet.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Database and library development and management. During the life of the contract, NRIC collected and catalogued project information and supporting materials (e.g., CD-ROMs, books, manuals, and internal agency documents) relevant to USAID's NRM portfolio. In FY 2003, NRIC prepared a strategy that focused on the acquisition of information related to these projects and selected themes of special interest to the NRM office and its teams. NRIC used these materials to create a database and library that made information resources easily accessible to NRM office and USAID field staff, as well as to outside partners, to help with project research, design, and implementation. The NRM online library includes a searchable database that generates summaries of search results listing project records containing project information, its contractors and partners, USAID strategic objectives, and associated project documents. The documents library includes reports generated by USAID, its contractors, and its partners that describe the NRM projects and other USAID natural resources activities, as well as their impact and lessons learned. As of January 2007, the database contained records on 578 projects and the library contained 4,117 documents.

NRIC also prepared an operations manual to document data acquisition, records management, and quality control methodologies. This manual will facilitate reactivation and updating of the database and library resources if the NRM office elects to do so.

Water obligations tracking. At the center of NRIC's water obligations tracking effort was a comprehensive and systematic review by the water specialist, involving the compilation and analysis of data contained in annual reports and the Congressional budget justification for estimated water-related obligations for the current fiscal year. Water obligations data were used by the USAID Water Team, regional bureaus, and the Department of State to communicate agency investments in water programming to the executive branch, Congress, and the public. For example, the results of the data analysis were used for preparing annual reports to Congress on the \$200 million annual earmark for investments in water resources globally, progress of the Water for the Poor Initiative, and for contributing to the Online Presidential Initiatives Network. The data have been kept in a series of spreadsheets covering FY 2000 to FY 2006.

Accomplishment

Due to NRIC's cyclical review of updating project and document records, NRIC was contacted a number of times by USAID's Development Clearinghouse (DEC) for copies of project reports and other technical documents it did not receive from the original authors.

Challenge

On average, DEC only receives 30 percent of all USAID-funded project documents from USAID contractors.

Solution

To aid DEC in populating its database, NRIC added links to DEC's report submission page to encourage visitors and contractors to submit their project deliverables.



BITHOLANDI

Promotion of sustainable tourism activities and projects includes local capacity building and development of handcraft enterprises that generate income to improve local livelihoods. Development of long-lasting and locally sustained tourism projects was encouraged through an in-depth training program presented to USAID field staff and in-country partners, providing them with tools and skills to design and develop sustainable programs.

Accomplishment

NRIC provided significant support to the NRM office's successful sustainable tourism initiative. NRIC provided technical expertise and planning and logistical support as this project rapidly expanded from an internal assessment to a multi-agency collaboration to promote sustainable tourism as an important global tool for economic development and environmental protection.

Challenge

Each special initiative began with a clear scope of work and defined timeline. In execution, however, the scope of these activities deviated, almost without exception, from the original intent. This occurred either because the projects expanded significantly beyond the original concept or because of a change of project "ownership" at the NRM office that led to a different vision of the desired product and its end use.

Solution

NRIC remained flexible and responsive to client needs and worked — in some cases forming new collaborations and partnerships — to meet the evolving goals of the various initiatives. With the Sustainable Tourism Initiative, for example, partnering with international tourism experts at other agencies and organizations considerably enhanced development and delivery of the USAID sustainable tourism training course. This partnering model has now been adopted for USAID activities in the tourism sector through the Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance.

CHAPTER THREE

SPECIAL INITIATIVES

Beginning in 2004, NRIC received funding to support several NRM office special initiatives that addressed timely topics in the natural resources management community. Although this funding represented less than 20 percent of NRIC's budget, the special initiatives were an important focus of the office. Among these initiatives, NRIC supported:

- A multi-office seminar series addressing the relationship between poverty reduction and natural resources management
- An analysis of biodiversity conservation activities in the Amazon Basin



Training in Sustainable Tourism

In addition to skills training and capacity building among indigenous peoples, USAID has created a seven-day course in sustainable tourism design and development for USAID field staff and their host-country partners.

The course addresses:

- basic principles of sustainable tourism and knowledge of available tools and techniques;
- capability to analyze tourism's potential effectiveness for meeting a particular strategic objective, and entry points for utilizing tourism to accomplish program goals;
- how to approach tourism project design and implementation, outlining activities that build sustainability; and
- realistic expectations about what can be accomplished in 3–5 years, with examples of indicators for measuring success.

The first training course was held in Tanzania in late February 2006.

- Facilitation of an office-wide strategic planning process to develop and formalize new goals, objectives, and indicators for the NRM office
- A major sustainable tourism portfolio evaluation and follow-on field training activity
- Agency geographic information system (GIS) and sustainable tourism portfolio analyses
- An assessment of the human rights impact of biodiversity conservation activities in protected areas



S. SWIERENGA

Colorful masks manufactured by indigenous peoples for sale to tourists are displayed in Chichicastengo, Guatemala.

Sustainable tourism. The NRM office's sustainable tourism initiative began as an internal assessment of USAID's portfolio in the tourism sector, but quickly expanded in scope, given widespread interest within USAID and demand from field offices for more information and guidance on developing sustainable tourism activities. NRIC supported this successful project by:

- Developing a searchable database on sustainable tourism activities, a report describing USAID's portfolio of tourism programs and activities, and a suite of related Web pages.
- Preparing talking points for then-USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios, who presented highlights of USAID's tourism

sector portfolio to the global tourism community in a keynote address to the U.N. World Tourism Organization's 2004 Policy Forum. NRIC also created PowerPoint presentations for field representatives describing four exemplary tourism projects funded by the agency.

- Helping design, develop, and deliver a seven-day training course on sustainable tourism, which took place in Tanzania in February 2006.
- Supporting a speaker series and an online discussion forum hosted by USAID, the World Bank, and the United Nations-World Tourism Organization that addressed the role of development communications in sustainable tourism. NRIC prepared a summary document merging input from the live and virtual events for distribution at the 2006 World Congress on Communication for Development in Rome.

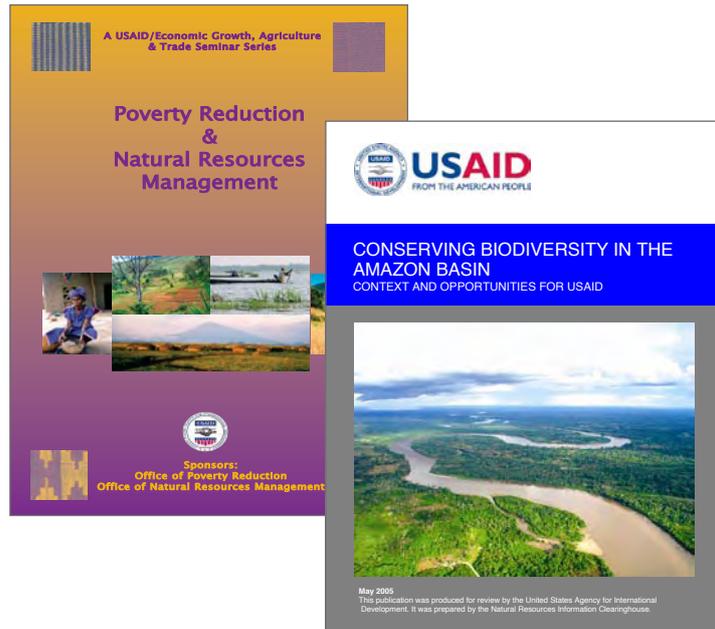
“ Thank you so much again for the opportunity of participating in such a rich training! It was the best one I attended during my 12 years with USAID. ”

**PARTICIPANT,
USAID/BRAZIL MISSION**

BENEFIT TO USAID: SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The NRM office's seven-day sustainable tourism training event in Tanzania capitalized on successful partnership-building activities by NRIC's and USAID's tourism coordinators, who were able to access the services of tourism experts from the private sector to assist with the design, content development, and delivery of portions of the training at minimal cost. This effective partnering and collaboration led to creation of the Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance (one of USAID's Global Development Alliance activities), which merges the financial and other resources of multiple partners to effectively promote sustainable tourism activities that range from research, training, and education to project design and implementation.

Poverty reduction and NRM. In 2004, NRIC coordinated the design and implementation of a seminar series, co-hosted by EGAT's NRM office and the Office of Poverty Reduction, which explored the links between natural resource management and poverty reduction in developing and transitional countries. Experts from within and outside USAID shared knowledge and tools for understanding the complex role that careful natural resources management plays in reducing poverty. Seminars explored the conflicts and barriers to improving livelihoods of the poor and ways of assisting them with improving their immediate standard of living and ensuring a sustainable future. Presentations, a case study to apply lessons learned in the seminars, and readings from the eight-part seminar series were posted to a suite of Web pages on www.nric.net. NRIC also prepared a report, "Issues in Poverty Reduction and Natural Resource Management," based on material presented at the seminars.



Amazon Basin. The Opportunities Assessment for Biodiversity Conservation in the Amazon Basin was primarily funded by the Latin America and Caribbean Bureau, not by the NRM office. The assessment performed by NRIC was comprised of a series of stakeholder meetings in Washington, D.C. and within the region and focused on issues related to protected areas management, indigenous peoples, sustainable agriculture, forestry, and fisheries. In addition to extensive preparatory work, the NRIC team spent three weeks traveling throughout the region, gathering input from stakeholders. The team sought the participation of key members of USAID staff, international development organizations, NGOs, governmental organizations in each of the countries visited, and civil society organizations. The opportunities assessment culminated in the preparation of a 94-page report, “Conserving Biodiversity in the Amazon Basin: Context and Opportunities for USAID,” which was circulated to and vetted by a wide range of involved parties. The document provided a prioritization of opportunities that were used to form the basis for USAID’s Amazon Basin Conservation Initiative.

At the conclusion of the project, NRIC updated and developed new content for the Amazon Basin Conservation Initiative’s pages on USAID’s Web site.

GIS portfolio analysis. USAID has invested heavily in GIS and related technologies, particularly in the area of natural resources management. To better understand the agency’s use of GIS, the NRM office tasked NRIC with conducting an evaluation to identify how USAID uses geospatial data and information for natural resources management, summarize challenges encountered in applying or

sharing GIS tools and analyses, and suggest opportunities for improving the use of GIS throughout the agency. NRIC produced a report, “Geographic Information Systems: Applications and Practices for USAID Natural Resources Management Programs,” based on this evaluation.

Conservation and governance. This special initiative was planned as a project to develop and field-test tools for effective governance that addressed natural resources management and biodiversity conservation issues. However, NRM office staff directed a shift in focus toward development of a detailed assessment of the impact of protected area creation on the human rights of local and indigenous populations. An initial report discussing the role that effective governance plays in establishing and managing protected areas that affect local populations was drafted and submitted. With the departure of the original NRM office champion for this activity, the focus shifted, and a substantially revised report was developed. The new report focused more on the need to protect human rights when creating and maintaining protected areas, and how this could be accomplished while meeting biodiversity conservation goals. As of February 2007, the NRM office was evaluating next steps for this initiative, including how to finalize the report, what audiences it should reach, and what tools could be created — based on the report’s recommendations — to benefit USAID headquarters and field staff and the wider conservation community.



USAID / J. BRENNAN

Globally, forests are being destroyed at unprecedented rates by unsustainable and illegal logging, agricultural expansion, large-scale industrial and infrastructure projects, and national policies that subsidize forest conversion to other uses. NRIC has helped USAID document USAID's on-the-ground efforts to reduce illegal logging, improve the management of protected forest areas, promote agroforestry, empower communities to responsibly manage local forest areas, and promote adoption of reduced impact logging techniques.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROGRAM EVALUATION

During its five-year contract, NRIC provided a range of services to support the NRM office's activities. Many of its projects were successful, while there are lessons learned that could inform the design of a future clearinghouse.

CREATING SUCCESS: WHAT WORKED

The NRIC project successfully supported the NRM office, primarily due to the attributes highlighted below.

Flexibility. The flexibility of NRIC staff and the overall contract mechanism to take on tasks outside of the defined work plan was an important strength. NRIC estimates that 30 percent of its tasks were not anticipated in a given year's work plan, and its ability to respond to short-turnaround and ad hoc requests, while undertaking planned activities, ensured the NRM office's short- and long-term needs were met. Working with NRM office staff to prioritize projects and requests was key to this success.

Accessibility. Because NRIC was based in Washington, D.C., NRM office staff had regular and immediate access to NRIC's technical specialists and support personnel. NRIC staff were able to support office meetings and meet face-to-face with team members, even on short notice. Through this regular contact, NRIC staff were able to work with team members to better understand and meet their support needs.

Large resource base. The depth of resources provided by the primary contractor, Chemonics International, was often key in accomplishing tasks (especially those related to publications layout and production), and in quickly identifying short-term technical assistance resources for discrete projects. Extensive financial and administrative support was also provided by the Chemonics home-office team at no additional cost to the NRIC contract. Chemonics tracked budgets and expenditures and was responsive in providing regular updates to the cognizant technical officer.

Technical expertise. NRIC's technical, Web, and editorial specialists, along with short-term technical assistants and Chemonics' graphics team, collaborated to provide seamless support to the NRM office, whether creating communications materials, maintaining a Web presence, supporting internal and external meetings and training events, or providing technical assistance. Each staff member brought specialized skills and knowledge to the project, and by working together they enabled NRIC to create high-quality products and consistently support the full range of tasks in the contract's scope of work.

BENEFIT TO USAID: STRATEGIC PLANNING

NRIC assisted the NRM office with several strategic planning efforts intended to help the office meet its goals and maximize the efficient use of resources across projects. NRIC

- Helped the office define its vision and objectives by facilitating the process that led to development of *The Proposed EGAT/NRMO Strategic Framework*, which in turn helped articulate the office's role within EGAT
- Facilitated NRM office and team retreats designed to increase cross-team communication and collaboration on office projects
- Participated in strategic planning for larger-scale assignments, such as special initiatives, which paralleled USAID's new focus on providing development assistance with more collaboration among offices and with multiple outside partners

LESSONS LEARNED: WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Not all of NRIC's activities were completely successful, and, as with any project, there remains room for improvement. Some lessons learned are highlighted below.

Lack of a coherent communications strategy. Developing a coherent and coordinated communications strategy for the NRM office proved a significant challenge. Although last-minute requests cannot be avoided, a long-term communications strategy would help teams plan



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East Africa's vast wildebeest herds migrate more than 1,800 miles each year in search of water and forage.

projects that support office objectives, maintain a focus on the “big picture,” and ensure resources are used efficiently. NRIC developed several detailed proposals for an office-wide strategy, and in some cases, parallel proposals for individual teams, but these initiatives were never implemented, due in part to a lack of NRM office staff time to give the strategies detailed consideration, and still less time to act on them.

Delayed inclusion of NRIC staff. In order to produce the most useful and accurate reporting and outreach products, project communications strategies should be considered at the earliest stages of a project cycle. However, it was often not possible for USAID to include NRIC staff in initial project planning, particularly during the procurement process, due to NRIC's contractor status. This situation, combined with NRIC's necessary exclusion from many of the NRM office's internal communications channels and processes, often led to NRIC staff being “out of the loop” on programmatic evolutions. If NRIC technical specialists and the webmaster were included at the initial stages of project conception, full outreach possibilities and comprehensive plans for ushering a product from design through implementation could be developed and successfully executed.

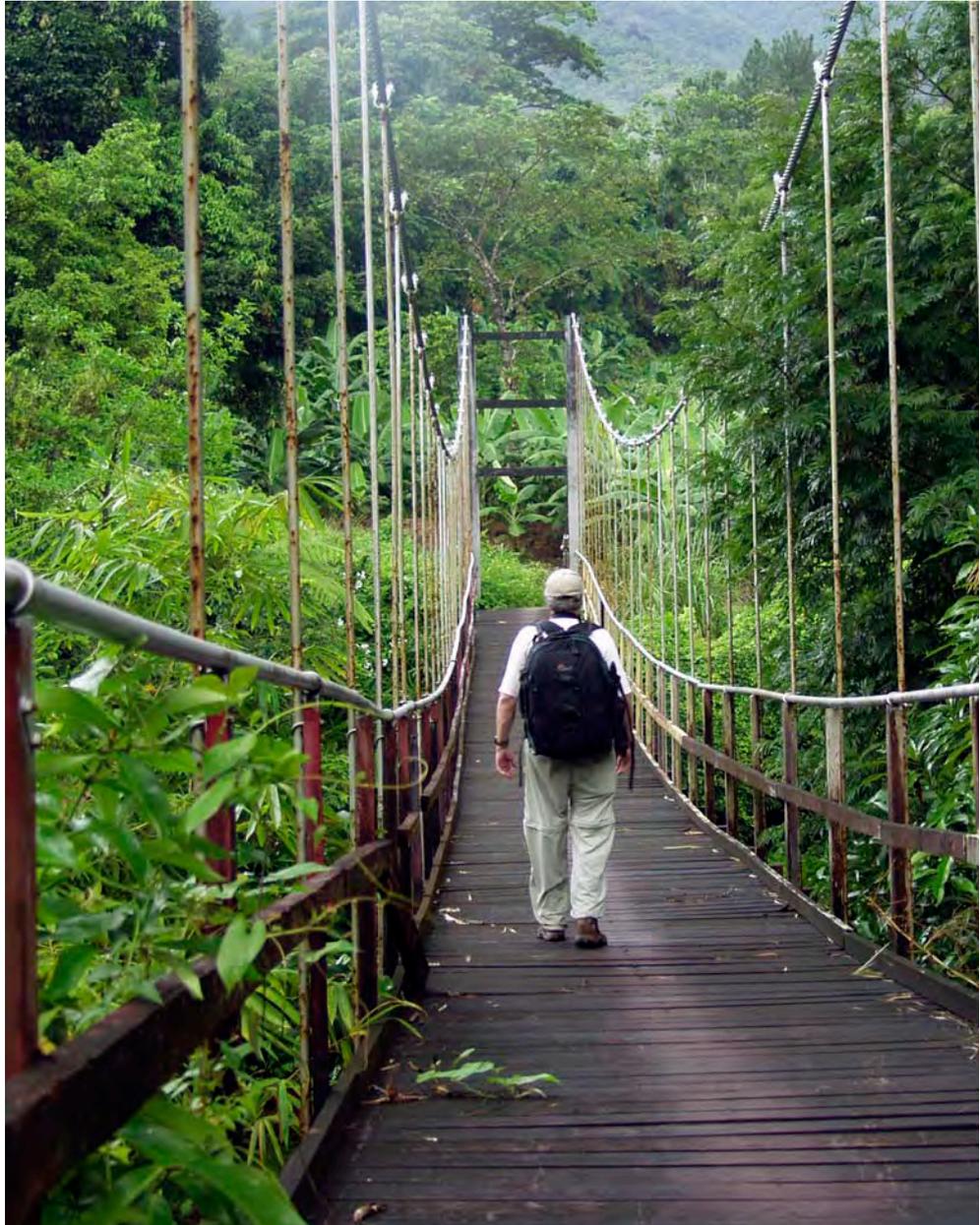
Underutilizing NRIC staff skills. NRM office staff did not always know how to make the best use of NRIC's services and skills, or how to

best access NRIC's resources, in part because the availability of those resources was not clearly communicated, and because there was a lack of consistency regarding how the different teams engaged NRIC. NRIC could have created a better understanding of what its staff had to offer through more communication about specialists' skill sets and NRIC's contract mechanism. A comprehensive marketing effort could have allowed the NRM office to fully realize opportunities to use NRIC's resources and NRIC's specialists to more substantively contribute to office projects.

Lack of project ownership. A number of projects fell through the cracks on departure of various NRM staff, as the original motivation and champion were no longer present to shepherd them through to completion. In retrospect, some of these projects (GIS activity, as an example) should have been revisited and reevaluated in the new team context to affirm that they still met NRM office or team needs, or could be modified to do so, and that sufficient funding remained available to achieve any changed objectives.

Underutilizing products. Although tasked by the NRM office, some products created by NRIC went largely unused. Examples of this are the project and documents database and library. These resources were intended to make project information easily accessible to NRM office and USAID field staff, as well as to outside partners, to help with project research, design, and implementation activities. Although the concept was enthusiastically received in the few instances where it was actively marketed to USAID field staff, and the database and library were accessed extensively in certain topical areas (e.g., sustainable tourism), by and large the NRM office did not make significant use of this resource. Expanded marketing to the NRM office and directly to field staff might have changed this, or perhaps the lack of use was because staff did not have sufficient time to investigate and use the resources, which remain a robust source of information still available online at the time of publication of this report.

Funding issues. As the mechanism existed under NRIC, the four teams were "taxed" to provide funds to support NRIC activities, but there was no mechanism to provide core funding from the NRM office as a whole, with the exception of the special initiatives. This led to expectations that the team monies would be directed to supporting the appropriate technical specialists, and did not make allowances for the need to fund the NRIC support system — editor, database manager, webmaster, and chief of party — that was necessary to support the fulfillment of tasks and activities undertaken by the technical specialists. An alternate financing structure should be evaluated in the future.



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NRIC has supported NRM Office biodiversity and forest conservation initiatives. This canopy walkway allows tourists to experience the vast diversity of the indigenous flora and fauna in a Latin American rainforest.

CHAPTER FIVE

LOOKING FORWARD

Should the NRM office decide to create an NRIC-style service mechanism in the future, the office should consider creating a comprehensive, long-range plan clearly outlining its objectives and expectations for the new mechanism, and designing projects to meet those objectives to enable the most efficient use of contractor resources. A consensus among the teams and the NRM office as a whole on exactly what kind of support they need individually and collectively is essential to the success of any future clearinghouse mechanism. Communicating the availability of contractor resources and promoting collaboration among the teams is also key.

That said, the contractor must be able to quickly adapt to changing needs and be flexible to fulfill ad hoc requests, while maintaining a focus on the office's long-term strategy. The contractor should work with NRM office staff to prioritize projects, and shift resources as needed to meet short- and long-term needs. Finally, the contractor should have the depth and breadth to comprehensively support the full range of office activities, and ensure its specialists work together to provide seamless service to the NRM office, as they did under this contract.

A significant component of future assistance activities under a new mechanism should be directed toward helping the NRM office maintain its relevance under the new Foreign Assistance Framework by responding to the challenges set by the framework and seizing opportunities to support other USAID objectives, such as peace and security, governing justly and democratically, and investing in people.

The NRIC team will disband after March 7, 2007. Although all discrete tasks have been completed, there are many ongoing activities that will be passed on either to other contract vehicles or back to the NRM office staff. A rundown of these outstanding items is presented below.

Technical assistance. After NRIC closeout, the NRM office's now merged Biodiversity and Forestry Team will continue to be served by NRIC's current biodiversity and forestry technical specialist. The technical specialist will be based within the offices of the USDA Forest Service, International Programs, and will continue to fulfill many current obligations for the Biodiversity and Forestry Team, such as report writing, development of outreach publications, and Web site maintenance.

The NRM Office's Water Team will also continue to receive support from NRIC's current water technical specialist after project closeout. This specialist will work for a new contractor through a task order issued under the Water indefinite quantity contract (IQC) II through December 31, 2007. The water technical specialist will continue to provide support to the Water Team through the following activities: collecting, managing, and analyzing agency water obligations data; writing reports; developing outreach materials; generating Web site content; and responding to research requests by team members.

The Land Team has been historically well-supported by multiple mechanisms in addition to NRIC (e.g., AgCOM; GreenCOM; Coffee Corps; a Land Tenure IQC; FRAME; and the Soils, Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resources Management and Integrated Pest Management Collaborative Research Support Programs). In the future, the newly established Prosperity, Livelihoods, and Conserving Ecosystems IQC and the Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance will provide Land Team members with additional support and opportunities for collaboration.

Web support. After NRIC closeout, the majority of Web content will be appropriated and maintained by various contractors.

The transfer of ownership of www.nric.net will be made to Indepth Learning, of Rio Rancho, New Mexico. This bodes well for continuity of the site, as well as ongoing maintenance of NRIC's database that includes information on USAID's NRM portfolio, as this site and related holdings will remain intact. However, there are concerns that there may not be enough funding to continue populating the database to add additional projects and related documents for the public to access. A strategy for dealing with information requests to borrow hard-copy library holdings in Washington, D.C. still needs to be developed with the New Mexico contractor.

Ownership and maintenance of Web content for the NRM office on USAID's public site (www.USAID.gov) and its Intranet will be distributed among various contractors, with the exception of one sector. Water Web page content will be managed by a contractor under the Water IQC II contract mechanism. Biodiversity and forestry content ownership and maintenance will be appropriated by NRIC's current biodiversity/forestry specialist, who will move to the USDA Forest Service post-NRIC. However, as of February 2007, it is not yet known if another Web content provider will appropriate ownership and maintenance of Web pages for the Land Team.

The disaggregation of Web content ownership from one sole contractor to many contractors will provide unique challenges to the NRM office. To clarify, under the NRIC contract, all Web content for USAID's public site and Intranet were designed to conform to a unified look, in accordance to USAID technical regulations, to reflect the structure of all teams housed under the NRM office. The fact that many contractors will be providing Web services for their respective teams will require them to either collaborate in maintaining a unified format or recognize that the NRM office teams' content will be presented differently from this point forward.

Overall, many of NRIC's ongoing support activities have been absorbed through other contract mechanisms. However, these activities will not be as closely coordinated as in the past and technical information-sharing that took place during NRIC's operation will be compromised now that the specialists have been reassigned or have departed with project closeout. The NRM office may also observe that the surge capacity that was consistently offered by the NRIC team has been greatly reduced after the closeout of NRIC.



GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK AUTHORITY

Reefs around the world are threatened by coral bleaching and unsustainable fishing practices such as dynamiting. NRIC has helped USAID document coral reef protection initiatives through reports to the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force and others.

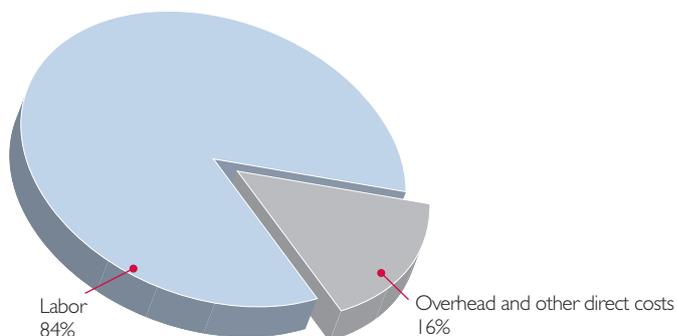
APPENDIX A

FUNDING

The NRIC task order was signed in September 2002. The original obligation for beginning work under NRIC was for \$400,000, with a ceiling of \$2.2 million. Since 2002, a series of contract modifications have been issued to raise the obligation and the ceiling to just over \$4.9 million.

The majority of funds on this project has been expended on short- and long-term technical assistance and not on other types of direct costs, such as travel, equipment, or procurement (see Exhibit A representing expenditures through December 2006). A core team of five or more staff members have continually supported the NRIC project, and various specialists have provided assistance to core tasks and special initiatives.

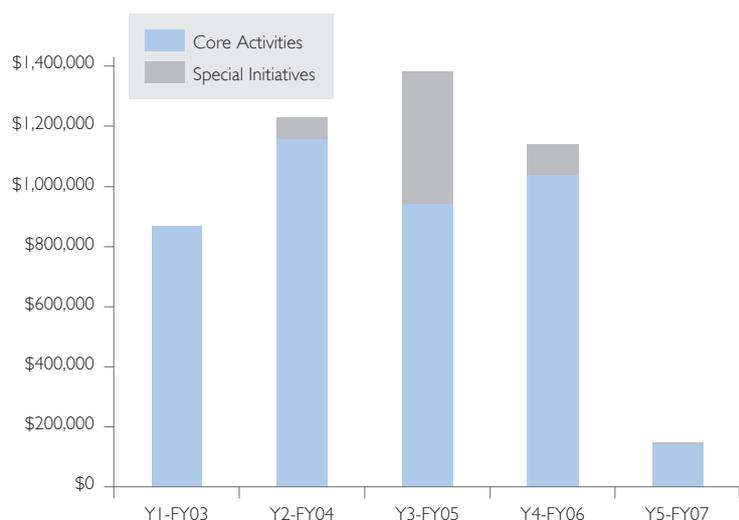
EXHIBIT A. NRIC EXPENDITURES BY LABOR, OVERHEAD, AND OTHER DIRECT COSTS



Total Expenditures: \$4,717,091

Annual spending under NRIC fluctuated between \$800,000 and \$1.4 million per fiscal year (October 1-September 30). Data for FY 2007 were not available at the time of publication; thus, numbers in this section are current as of December 31, 2006 (first quarter of Year 5). Exhibit B shows annual spending for Years 1-5 of this contract, as well as the relative amount of funds spent on special initiatives. Special initiatives were not introduced until Year 2. Overall, about \$600,000 was spent on the special initiatives described earlier. It must be noted, however, that due to the contract mechanism, separate codes for tracking special initiative funds did not exist and so all costs associated with each special initiative may not be fully accounted for in the NRIC budget. For example, several special initiatives involved significant time from the chief of party and other NRIC staff, whose level of effort was recorded as part of the core activities. In the future, if USAID wishes to more accurately track the origin and expenditure of tagged funds, the contractor should establish separate billing codes.

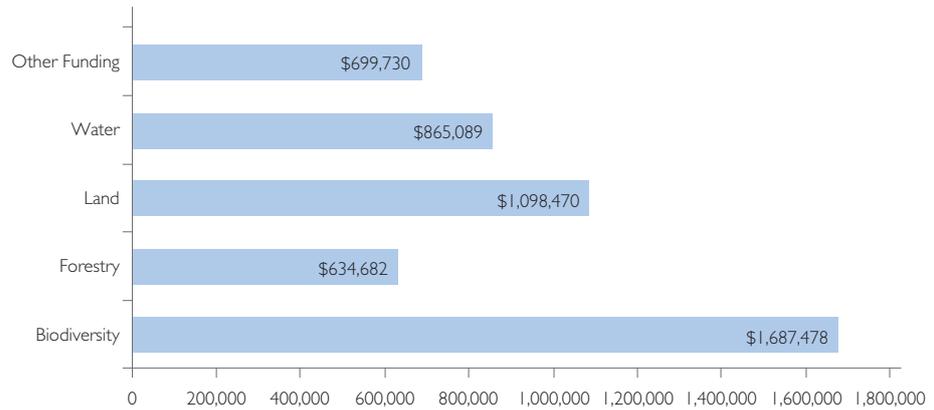
EXHIBIT B. ANNUAL SPENDING BY CORE AND SPECIAL INITIATIVE ACTIVITIES



Although the majority of funds for NRIC were allocated from one of the office’s four primary teams, other funding sources also contributed to the NRIC budget. USAID’s Latin American and the Caribbean Bureau contributed more than \$250,000 to support the Amazon Basin Initiative, and the Poverty Reduction office contributed \$30,000 to co-sponsor the poverty reduction seminar series. Overall, the Biodiversity Team contributed the most funding to NRIC (see Exhibit C). The amount contributed to NRIC from the four teams was generally proportionate to their available funds at the time of each contract modification. Because this project was funded as a joint effort of the NRM office teams, the teams’ funds were not tracked

separately under NRIC, but were combined to support the office's core activities and special initiatives. Again, if USAID wishes to better track incoming and outgoing funds for a programmatic Washington, D.C.-based project in the future, separate billing codes should be discussed at the contract execution stage.

EXHIBIT C. TOTAL FUNDING BY TEAM



APPENDIX B

MATERIALS ON CD-ROM

PDF of the NRIC Final Report

Annotated Bibliography



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