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Environmental & Natural Resources
Policy and Training Project (EPAT) 936-5555

EPAT Management Team Comments on August 1994 Evaluation Report

The USAID/G team (Russell Misheloff and Kenneth Baum) assigned to manage EPAT has carefully reviewed the evaluation report and finds that it contains numerous inaccuracies, poorly supported allegations, nonsequiturs and misleading statements. There are also serious problems with the evaluation team's methodology. As a result, the validity of many of the team's conclusions and recommendations is highly questionable. In our[1] judgment, the report is therefore unacceptable.

Since this represents a third draft, and since many of its deficiencies were pointed out to Checchi and to the evaluation team when USAID commented on previous versions, USAID has concluded that additional effort on Checchi's part is not warranted, and has so advised Checchi.

In the paragraphs which follow we deal in considerable detail with each of the deficiencies of the report, proceeding section by section. We do this to document the Agency's conclusion about the report's limited usefulness.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Checchi evaluation team notes that "the original purpose of this evaluation was to assess the progress of this project over its first two years of activity ...,[but that it] realized early in its work that the project is beset with fundamental problems ...[which call for] a major restructuring ..." The stated reasons for this state or affairs include (a) "performance shortcomings of the lead implementing institutions" and of the USAID team which manages EPAT, (b) and the design of the project, especially the arrangement under which 2 separate consortia were assigned responsibility for different components of the project.[2]

Rather than deal with the methodological deficiencies and major mistakes of fact and of interpretation in the context of comments on the report's "Executive Summary," we have chosen to discuss each issue raised by the evaluation team as it appears in the body of the text, cross-referencing the Executive Summary as appropriate.

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[1]As used in this document, the first person plural ("we" and "our") refers to the USAID/G EPAT project management team, Russell Misheloff and Kenneth Baum.

[2]The relative importance assigned by the evaluation team to the alleged performance shortcomings on the one hand and design/procurement arrangements on the other is unclear from the text. See paragraph 1 under the section entitled "Introduction" below.

INTRODUCTION

1. Page 1, last paragraph: The statement to the effect that "mistakes in procurement structure, and USAID procurement restrictions" while relevant, "cannot be blamed for [what the evaluation team believes to be] the project's shortcomings to date", is inconsistent with the statement in the "Executive Summary" of the report (top of page 3) that "the project will not achieve its intended objectives so long as there is more than one lead implementation agency." If the evaluation report is to be of any use to USAID, it will need to identify in clear and unambiguous terms the causes of any problems brought to the Agency's attention.

2. Page 3, bottom (continuing on page 4): The Checchi team asserts that there are several centrally-funded USAID projects to which regional bureaus and USAID missions can turn for technical assistance and training "similar" to that provided by EPAT. It then lists 12. Several of them are very different from EPAT. For example, GREENCOM focuses on the use of communications tools for environmental education and has no capacity in the areas of policy analysis, environmental economics or the strengthening of overseas institutions to which governments look for policy analysis and support. The Environmental Planning and Technology project functions only in the area served by the ENI Bureau, and, as its name implies, is strongest in the areas of technology and engineering. EP3 has a similar focus. F/FRED (which incidentally is no longer an active project), could not be accessed via buy-ins. The same is true of SANREM, which focuses on agricultural production systems and does not have a policy component.

3. Page 4, first paragraph under the heading "overall Project Philosophy": The Checchi team asserts that project designers expected that EPAT would have a special "synthesizing" function. The term is ill-defined, and the statement about the intent of the designers is incorrect.

4. Same paragraph: The evaluators indicate that one of the features of the project which was to distinguish it from others was its focus "on developing **tools** of economic analysis that could be used to assist in determining appropriate environmental policies in developing countries." (emphasis added) The <u>alleged</u> unsatisfactory performance of the core research element of the project seems to relate significantly to the failure of the project to produce new tools. The team comes back to this point over and over again. For example, on page 17 it is noted that the dearth of new tools helps explain the project's alleged failure "to market itself effectively." On page 27, the reader is told that

> A key question for the evaluation team is whether each [MUCIA] research team is developing a focus that will lead it to the generation of new types of economic analysis ...

This apparently is a "key question" because

> The logic of the state-of-the-art research component of the EPAT project was to isolate the researchers from field distractions to allow them to develop new economic analysis tools applicable to environmental policy issues. (page 32).

Or more expansively

> The purpose of the EPAT project is to develop and apply tools of economic analysis to environmental policy issues in developing countries. (page 43)

And on page 63, the Checchi team concludes that

> ...theultimate success of this project depends on it developing a reputation for the development and application of a limited number of tools of economic analysis to environmental policy issues in developing countries...[3]

The reasons for the emphasis (obsession?) which the evaluation team gives to development of analytical tools is unclear to the USAID staff assigned to manage EPAT. True, the Project Paper discusses tools prominently. But in most instances, that document gives equal attention to substantive research findings (the importance of which the evaluation team apparently weights very lightly). The relative importance of methodological and substantive research is a matter for judgment. We respect that of the evaluation team, although we are not at all sure we understand the basis for its position. There certainly has been (and continues to be) debate on the subject among the institutions charged with the management and implementation of EPAT. We would however make two points. First, we do not view the position taken in the design documents, i.e. approximately equal weight to methodological and substantive research, as the last word on the subject. Second, the evaluation team erred by giving undue prominence to development of analytical tools and reaching very unfavorable conclusions about project and institutional performance because its assessment of priorities is not universally shared.

5. Same paragraph: The evaluation team distinguishes between the functions of the prime contractor (Winrock International) and the holder of the cooperative agreement (the Mid-West Universities Consortium for International Activities, or MUCIA) by indicating that

> the forms of economic analysis ready for application in developing countries were to be included under a level of effort contract while the research needed to develop new models of economic analysis was to be carried out under a cooperative grant agreement.

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[3]Other references to tools (or methods) appear on pages 5, 8, 9, 34, 35, 37, 45, 62 (where the term is used no less than 19 times), and 63.

In fact, the distinction between the functions of Winrock and those of MUCIA has little to do with the readiness of tools for field application. As already indicated, the team has erroneously given much too much emphasis to tools development. Rather the distinction relates to the need to respond to the different agendas of USAID as an agency and its field missions. The Winrock contract is designed to respond to demands for services from missions and regional bureaus. The MUCIA cooperative agreement is designed to respond to USAID's strategic need to know more about the nexus between economic policy, environmental policy, environmental quality, natural resources use and development.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

In our view, the methodology is substantially flawed for at least two reasons. First, rather than use the project outputs listed in the logical framework section of the Project Paper as yardsticks for assessing performance, interpolating from the end of project status (EOPS) section of the Log Frame Matrix to come up with intermediate indicators, the evaluation team chose to rely much too heavily on the few intermediate indicators actually listed in that document [4] and "to develop some of its own yardsticks for acceptable project performance." The criterion it chose was "what could be reasonably expected." (page 7) This is highly subjective, especially since (a) evaluation team members have little project management experience, and therefore little basis for assessing "what ... other contractors/grantees would have been able to accomplish if they had the responsibility to implement the project", and (b) 'reasonable expectations' are extremely difficult to determine when -- as in the case of EPAT -- an activity is exploring new and complex subject matter.

Second, Checchi has chosen to rely heavily on interviews, but is unwilling or unable to provide information about how it weighted the different views expressed and used them to determine the numerical ratings which appear on the first page of the Executive Summary, and on pages 27, 39, 46, 51, and 60 of the main body of the report.

The use of interviews as an evaluation technique is accepted practice. But in this particular instance it is problematic. Below (see paragraph 5 under "Project Performance") we cite an instance in which the Checchi team changed the way it summarized responses to an interview question between the first version of the evaluation report and the current one. There are several other instances. In many of these cases, the current version reflects more negatively on the project than does the earlier formulation. Thus:

First draft of evaluation report: [Appendix 2, page 52, Question 1]

Question: Are you satisfied with the process by which the overall topics of each research team were chosen?

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[4]Enumerated on page 7.

Answers: The overall topics were specified through the RFP, though team topics were chosen through a process of discussion and elimination.

Current version: [Appendix 2, page 3, Question 1]
Question: Same as above.
Answers: One respondent said they (sic) were satisfied, but the others said they were not satisfied as their proposed topics were not accepted and there was (sic) not enough conceptual efforts identified.

First draft of evaluation report: [Appendix 2, page 53, Question 2]
Question: In the interest of environmental and natural resource development, do you believe there are more important research topics than the ones currently being addressed by the research teams? If so, what are they?
Answers: Believe that the topics being currently studied are the important ones.

Current version: [Appendix 2, page 3, Question 2]
Question: Same as above.
Answers: One respondent was satisfied, one was not satisfied while the others were not responsive to the question.

First draft of evaluation report: [Appendix 2, page 53, Question 3]
Question: Do you believe that AID's involvement in defining the overall research topics and in determining particular research assignments under each topic has been: a) excessive; b) about right; or c) insufficient? Discuss.
Answers: AID's involvement has been about right and the right type. They have provided suggestions, ideas and comments, but have not pushed one way or the other.

Current version: [Appendix 2, page 4, Question 3]
Question: Same as above.
Answers: One respondent said about right, one said there was insufficient involvement, while two said there was excessive USAID involvement and wrong advice had been given.

First draft of evaluation report: [Appendix 2, page 54, Question 10]
Question: Are you satisfied with MUCIA's management of this grant? Explain.
Answers: There were no complaints about the grant, budgets or travel arrangements.

Current version: [Appendix 2, page 5, Question 10]
Question: Same as above.
Answers: One respondent said they (sic) had no complaints, one had some problems, especially with central control over travel, one was expressly not satisfied and said they (sic) had a "miserable experience," and one also said they were (sic) not satisfied

as there was too much money for logistics/overhead and too little for research, and said this was an "example of how a project should not have been designed."

In commenting on the first version of the evaluation report, the USAID EPAT management team pointed out discrepancies between the mixed responses to interview questions reported in Appendix 2 of that document, and the negative conclusions which the evaluators drew in the main body.[5] We had hoped that in later versions the evaluation team's discussion and conclusions would better reflect the interviews. We did not imagine that the problem would be resolved by recharacterizing what interviewees had said.

PROJECT PERFORMANCE

1. Page 10, first full paragraph: Checchi indicates that modifications in the research agenda were to be made inter alia on the recommendation of the WIEA[6] TAG. This is incorrect. There is no "WIEA TAG." If, as we would guess, the evaluation team is really referring to WIEA's senior technical advisors, it should be noted that this group has no responsibility for review of the research agenda. This is one of the basic facts about the project which the evaluation team should have grasped early on. The fact that it didn't probably reflects another fact - that the evaluators did not spend sufficient time with EPAT management staff.

2. Page 11, second and third paragraphs under "Performance": The Checchi team incorrectly states that "the synthesis papers have not been completed,...". And on the basis of this error, it erroneously concludes that "there is no **apparent** [emphasis added] rationale concerning how the individual activities of each research group relate to the overall group focus,..."Our comments on the evaluation team's treatment of synthesis papers is presented below.[7] Here we would note that, despite the fact that some of the synthesis papers have not been finalized as quickly as we had hoped, they are far enough along to be of use to the researchers in helping determine what research topics should be accorded priority at this stage. The team's allegation that absent completed synthesis papers, "the research program has been left disorganized and unfocused" is therefore unfounded. We made this same point in response to an earlier draft of the evaluation report.[8] We are disappointed that the

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[5]See "USAID/EPAT Management Team Comments on 2/28/94 Evaluation Report", in particular page 16, paragraph 7 and the last paragraph on page 32.

[6]The Winrock International Environmental Alliance, the consortium which holds a contract for implementation of some elements of the EPAT contract.

[7]See paragraph 4 under "Assessment of Organizational Performance and Interrelationships".

[8]See page 27 (especially footnote 17) of document entitled "USAID/EPAT Management Team Comments on 2/28/94 Evaluation Report".

team does not seem to understand it, or disposed to understand how "real world" research programs are actually implemented and managed.

3. Page 11, third paragraph: Checchi's comment that "many [of the 119 "seemingly unrelated 'deliverables'] show any evidence of what might be considered state-of-the-art research" is disingenuous. Fewer than half of these intended pieces have seen the light of day, in draft or in final. Are we to assume that the team characterized them on the basis of titles only?

4. Same paragraph: The contention that "many [of the MUCIA research papers] are secondhand research pieces that have been done under other auspices" is highly misleading. The evaluation team should have understood by now that neither the synthesis papers nor the policy briefs (which together account for over half of the EPAT/MUCIA "research" documents published so far) were ever expected to be state-of-the-art works containing material never seen elsewhere. Instead, both publications series were expected to bring together previous research for specific purposes -- agenda building in the case of the synthesis papers, and accessibility to a policy audience in the case of the policy briefs. Nor should it be surprising if those engaged in preparing the syntheses and policy briefs were to draw in part on their own prior work. They were after all selected for participation in EPAT on the basis of their professional experience and understanding of issues of interest to USAID.

Additionally, as has been pointed out to the Checchi team previously,[9] much of the work of the Forest, Water, and Watershed Management team has multiple sponsors, all of which are recognized in publications authored by team members. Far from being a problem, USAID considers this kind of leveraging a plus.

Lastly, on one occasion, EPAT/MUCIA (with USAID concurrence) purchased reprints of an important paper which both institutions agreed should be readily available to EPAT's policy audience.

5. Same paragraph: The team's contention that, "with the exception of some collaborative research efforts in Morocco and Turkey," "there has been little interaction ...with institutions or researchers in developing countries" is mistaken. Responding to an earlier draft of the evaluation report, MUCIA noted on March 28, 1994 that, "primarily through Set-Aside activities, MUCIA research teams have in the past or are currently working with researchers in ..." several developing countries in addition to Morocco and Turkey. Among those enumerated in that communication were Nepal, Brazil, Kenya, Costa Rica, and Liberia. If the evaluation team had asked, it could have found out that since that time additional collaborative field work has been developed in Egypt, Barbados, Mexico, the Philippines Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

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[9]Hans Gregersen's April 5, 1994 letter to Nick Poulton, which was transmitted to the evaluation team under cover of Nick Poulton's April 7, 1994 memorandum.

It is disturbing that between the first and the most recent version of the evaluation report, the Checchi team changed the way it characterized MUCIA research team leaders' responses to its inquiry about collaboration with developing country researchers/institutions as follows:

> First draft of evaluation report: [Appendix 2, page 53, Question 5]
> Question: ... to what extent have you involved developing country researchers/institutions in your research activities? ...
> Answers: Developing country researchers are now involved. Their participation is important for the success of the project, both in terms of providing a reality check, and in developing materials that will be relevant and understandable to them.
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> Current version: [Appendix 2, page 4, Question 5]
> Question: Same as above.
> Answers: Two respondents said they had involved developing country researchers/institutions, one proposed to do so and one respondent was non-responsive.

6. Next paragraph: Here the team attempts to take its mistaken conclusion that the research program is unfocused one step further and to insinuate that changes which have been made in the research teams are somehow related to this alleged lack of focus. Suffice it to say that the allegation of lack of focus -- building as it does on the team's mistaken conclusion that the synthesis papers have not been prepared -- is inaccurate, and that changes which have been made in the composition of the research program and the involvement of particular individuals were made for totally different reasons having to do with personnel, management and the relative importance of particular topical issues to USAID.[10]

7. Page 12, first full paragraph: The evaluators note that in March 1993 MUCIA assumed certain project functions previously carried out by the University of Wisconsin on its behalf. Unfortunately, the context suggests that this is illustrative of the "disarray" of MUCIA staffing. In fact, what it illustrates is MUCIA's willingness and capacity to take strong measures to correct management difficulties which were jeopardizing the project.[11]

8. Page 12, "Design Expectations": The evaluation report notwithstanding, it is not "quite clear" that in-country research is only "to be done at the request and with funding from

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[10]For good measure, the evaluation team also introduces allegations of "USAID micro-management", and alludes to "significant dissatisfaction" and "frustration" on the research teams, although the connection to the presumed lack of focus of the research program is difficult to discern.

[11]See also page 24.

individual missions or regional bureaus ..." In some instances, core funded, in-country research has been carried out to shed light on priority issues identified by MUCIA and the USAID EPAT management team. The Checchi team acknowledges this in the next paragraph when it indicates that "the expectation was that the research team members would only carry out applied in-country research where such research was closely related to the core research program ..."

9. Page 13, top: The statement that the USAID EPAT management team viewed buy-ins as "an opportunity to field-test and apply analytical methods developed by the core research program" is only partly true. As already noted, the evaluation team has given much too much emphasis to development of tools. USAID signed a requirements contract with MUCIA primarily to enable missions to access the expertise developed by the researchers by virtue of their involvement in the core research program.

10. Page 13, second paragraph under "Performance": Checchi implies that, because there have been only a few buy-ins to date, "it's difficult to argue that there has been any significant or sustained collaboration among MUCIA universities and host country institutions." This is a nonsequitur. As already indicated, the core research component of EPAT was expressly designed so that research in developing countries would not depend on buy-ins.[12]

11. Next paragraph: The evaluators indicate that there were "serious delays in mobilizing teams for the Madagascar studies." Only one Madagascar effort was delayed.[13]

12. Next paragraph: The team seems to be suggesting that there is something wrong because EPAT's involvement in the NIS area focussed on "analyses of critical environmental issues and further steps for U.S. assistance." Checchi should have known that EPAT's "clients" include USAID's overseas missions and regional bureaus.

13. Page 14, third paragraph under "Performance": The statement that "there has been a total of only nine publications through the end of FY93" is wrong. The correct number is 18. By August 1994 28 documents had been published. The implication in the evaluation report that a cumbersome approval process and "a number of presentation and layout problems have led to publication delays with the result that ..." research output has been meager cannot be substantiated, and is a distortion of the facts.

14. Page 16, second and subsequent paragraphs under "Performance": The dollar figures for buy-ins to EPAT/WIEA for the first 2 years of the project are substantially correct. It

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[12]The same poor reasoning appears in the first paragraph of page 58.

[13]The evaluation team makes the same, erroneous point in the first full paragraph on page 41.

should be noted that the sharp upward trajectory in buy-ins continued in the third year, i.e. the fiscal year ending September 30, 1994. Actual and projected buy-ins to WIEA during that year total $3.6 million. This is important to note since in these paragraphs the evaluators present a gloomy picture of the prospects for developing future work, citing all kinds of reasons for WIEA's alleged inability "to create market demand for its services." The point is that there is demand, and it is not diminishing. We disagree that future buy-ins from USAID missions in Madagascar, Jamaica and the former Soviet Union are likely to be small or non-existent; active dialogues looking toward further productive collaboration are underway with the Madagascar and Jamaica missions. The ENI Bureau anticipates significant buy-ins to EPAT for activities in Russia, Ukraine and the Eastern Europe region in both FY 1995 and 1996. Despite the fact that many African missions "already have environmental projects in place" (page 17, first paragraph), EPAT has received buy-ins from REDSO, Madagascar, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Lastly, notwithstanding the Asia Bureau's cooperative agreement with the Harvard International Institute of Development (HIID), which parenthetically was signed after EPAT was approved and underway, EPAT/WIEA has done buy-in funded work in Indonesia, and is actively discussing collaboration with mission personnel in the Philippines and Sri Lanka, as well as with the U.S.-Asia Environmental Partnership (US-AEP).

15. Page 16, first paragraph: The Checchi team notes that "all the regional bureaus have at least one broad-based regional environmental project to support their technical assistance needs, and there is an equally strong preference to work with that contractor." We would first reiterate that this has not shut EPAT out of the market. The bureaus recognize that they cannot rely on "their own" contractors for the full range of services they need. Secondly, the discussion in this paragraph suggests that the evaluation team is not fully aware that the logic of the reorganization currently underway in USAID is that increasingly field missions and regional bureaus will look to the newly created Global Bureau to provide technical services.

16. Page 17, third paragraph: The evaluation team's contention that "until recently, WIEA's core staff did not include a trained economist" is incorrect. Mike Rock, an eminently qualified economist, was assigned to the project on a one-quarter time basis from the very beginning. We are surprised that Checchi appears not to have known that. If, however, the team is contending that, given the nature of EPAT, WIEA needed more economic talent on its core staff, we would agree (as would WIEA). To help rectify the problem, in April 1993, WIEA hired Katherine Jewsbury on a full time basis. And with Ms. Jewsbury's departure, WIEA recruited and recently brought on board a very good replacement, and is revitalizing and reactivating its senior technical advisory group in order to further strengthen its capacity in the areas of environmental and natural resources economics.

17. Page 18, second paragraph under "Performance": It is accurate that WIEA's institutional strengthening work has focused on environmental, not economic, institutions. EPAT was designed to work with both. But at least equally important, EPAT/WIEA

contract was designed to provide field support. To date, there has been little field demand for working with host country institutions responsible for economic policy.[14]

18. Page 20, first three paragraphs under "Performance": Both the grammar and the logic of these paragraphs is very confusing, bordering on incoherence. The evaluators begin their second paragraph by advising that the availability of subsidized training under other projects is a problem. But there are others. The first one enumerated is the availability of "other heavily subsidized training programs." The report then goes on to pose, but not to answer, "a real question" -- "whether U.S.-based training for three to six weeks for host country participants at mission expense is a cost effective way of promoting environmental training." The reader is entitled to ask why this is a real question. Is the "problem" the fact that training is U.S.-based? or is it the length of the training program? or the audience for the training? The evaluators don't say. They merely imply vaguely that "it" -- whatever "it" refers to -- "may represent a misguided view about where such training should occur and who should be the target audience of training assistance." (emphasis added) They then go on to provide an "example" (of what it isn't clear). In fact the "example" turns out to be a statement of another need, i.e. for strategic planning assistance in the area of environmental training, which in the Checchi team's "view" represents "a more cost-effective approach" (to what?). The reasoning by which the team came to its "view" are left to the reader's imagination.[15] On the basis of these ramblings, the team concludes that performance under the training element of the project has been "less than acceptable."

19. Page 21, second paragraph under "Performance": The evaluators justify their judgment that EPAT's "cost effectiveness performance" is "unacceptable" by citing several real or alleged problems which exist "despite a four person USAID EPAT management team." Assuming, for sake of argument, that the problems enumerated are real, the causal relationship between their alleged existence (and persistence) and the size of the management staff is not apparent. Would, for instance, WIEA have involved more (or fewer) economists in its work if the USAID EPAT management staff had numbered say six (or one)? Would MUCIA have produced synthesis papers faster or better?

20. Same paragraph: The assertion that the USAID management staff numbered four is true but misleading. Prior to the recent departures of Ms. van Blarcom and Ms. Tighe -- neither of whom will be replaced because of budgetary constraints -- there were 4 individuals who spent some, but certainly not all, of their time on EPAT management

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[14]See also the section on "Institutional Strengthening" on page 42.

[15]The evaluators come back to this point again on page 56. But the discussion there does not clarify the basis for their conclusion that strategic planning assistance to developing countries is an appropriate strategy for EPAT.

matters. Ms. Tighe had several other responsibilities, as did/does Mr. Baum.[16] There are now 2 individuals whose responsibilities include, but are not limited to, management of EPAT on behalf of USAID/G.

21. Page 22, second paragraph under "Performance": It is true as stated that the "WIEA TAG has [not] met on a formal basis." What isn't said is that it was never anticipated that it would. Members were to be available to the WIEA core staff to provide advisory services as needed. The group was constituted in recognition of the fact that a small core staff, howsoever competent, could never be expected to embody the full range of expertise needed to provide high quality services to USAID missions in a wide variety of topical areas. It was expected that the Senior Technical Advisors would be called upon individually.

22. Same paragraph: To the Checchi team it seems "apparent" that "the TAG [not the "WIEA TAG", which is a different body] is not playing the advisory role it was intended to play." The reasons for this conclusion are not apparent. The team acknowledges that only one TAG member was interviewed (who was unable to attend the second TAG meeting). We wonder why the other TAG members were not contacted, and how the evaluators were able to reach conclusions without interviewing them.

23. Next paragraph: The team indicates skepticism about the results of the December 1993 project retreat because "job descriptions and titles have not changed significantly from what was called for in the RFP and RFA." We don't understand why the team attaches major importance to such changes.

24. Page 23, first full paragraph: In this paragraph, the evaluation team comments incorrectly that, by awarding the field support and research "contracts" to different bidding groups, the USAID management team assumed the added responsibility of ensuring "...that the collaboration and coordination needed for this project to succeed took place." The team returns to this theme in several other sections of its report.[17] On page 48, it explains its reasoning by indicating that

> When the major contract and cooperative agreement were not awarded to the same partnership, the plans that had been worked out within each partnership for cooperation and collaboration were lost, making it incumbent upon the USAID EPAT management team to insure the needed cooperation and collaboration was forthcoming.

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[16]The evaluation team makes the same, misleading point in the first paragraph under "Staffing" on page 48.

[17]See pages 25, 48, 53, 57, 60-61, and page 2 of the Executive Summary.

In effect, "USAID effectively discarded the management plans set forth by each bidding group on how they would coordinate contract and grant activities." (page 53).

As an aside, we are quite surprised that the evaluation team purports to have considerable knowledge about the management plans of each bidding group. More seriously, we need to observe that USAID made it crystal clear that the contract and the cooperative agreement were to be awarded under two separate and independent competitive procurement actions. Bidders were told that coordination and cooperation between the contractor and the institutions to be awarded the cooperative agreement were important, and were asked to propose "mechanisms and procedures ...to assure effective coordination and collaboration among all eventual implementing institutions for the project and A.I.D."[18] The selection criteria in both the RFA and RFP indicated clearly that the technical evaluation of proposals would take into account how bidders proposed to assure needed collaboration and coordination of efforts.

If any confusion as to USAID's intent remained, it should have been dispelled at the EPAT pre-proposal conference held on May 29, 1991, soon after release of the RFP and RFA. The following quotation from the verbatim transcript of that conference -- which was made available to all bidders -- is as clear as it can be:

> **Written question:**[19] [RFP] evaluation criteria seems (sic) to attribute greater points to consortia whose members bid both on the TA requirements contract and on the cooperative agreement with its associated requirements RFP, thus effectively reducing the value of a group of bidders interested in only the TA contract. Alternatively, this evaluation criterion could be understood to mean that a consortium bidding only on the TA contract must propose innovative coordination mechanisms which will induce collaboration between the consortium and eventual winning cooperative agreement institution(s). Please clarify.
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> **Mr. Misheloff:** The answer is the second alternative. Effectively, that means that whether or not an institution, or grouping of institutions bids on one side, i.e., the technical assistance contract, or on both sides, it needs to demonstrate mechanisms, innovative mechanisms for coordination and collaboration between all of the implement institutions which will eventually comprise EPAT.[20]

25. Page 23, "Design Expectations" section: The statement that "a fourth senior project economist position was provided as an option that could [be] exercised at some future date" is inaccurate. The RFP indicated that USAID would have the option of increasing level of

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[18]Page 166 of the RFP; similar language appears on page 21 of the RFA.

[19]Received in advance of the conference and read out to all present

[20]This is from the second page of the transcript, the pages of which are unnumbered.

effort under the contract. However, it did not specify that the increase must be used to hire an (or another) economist.

26. Page 24, "Implementation" section: The use of the term "license" to describe MUCIA personnel actions is totally unwarranted. All changes were agreed to between USAID and MUCIA.

27. Page 24, third complete paragraph: Ms. Jewsbury's position is not currently vacant. It was recently filled by a highly qualified economist.

28. Page 25, first paragraph under "Design Expectations": It is true that "all parties fully expected the EPAT project would be difficult to manage," but not, as the evaluation team incorrectly contends, "because it involved a cooperative agreement for core research and related activities and a separate requirements contract for technical assistance." Rather, the management challenge was the result of the newness and complexity of the subject matter.

29. Page 26, first full paragraph: The Checchi evaluators wonder aloud how the USAID team is able to carry out its oversight responsibilities "without sufficient written information from their contractors." The answer, which we would have given to the Checchi team if we had been asked, is that we have almost daily contact with both project implementing organizations. We generally have little difficulty in obtaining all required information in a timely fashion. Checchi has not demonstrated that the USAID management team lacked access to any useful information.

30. Page 26, second paragraph under "Performance": The Checchi evaluators' reference to "several incidents" of inappropriate behavior on the part of the "USAID EPAT management team in developing countries..." is unsubstantiated. Given the small number of trips abroad which members of the USAID management team have taken, we question whether there really were "several incidents."

ASSESSMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE
AND INTERRELATIONSHIPS

1. Page 27, second paragraph under "Introduction": The rationale for work plan approvals and disapprovals have always been made available to research team leaders and members. Disapprovals have sometimes been accompanied by suggestions/requests for modifications for improving methodology and/or for focussing on subjects which are topically important to USAID as well as development practitioners, policy makers and analysts in USAID-assisted countries.

2. Same paragraph: The "economic jargon" quote is a true classic. In response, we can do no more than to repeat our comment on an earlier draft:[21]

> The evaluation team needs to explain the point it is trying to make by quoting "another researcher" ... who "was instructed to 'remove economic jargon from a paper' and when he had done so ...was told 'that it did not have enough economic analysis.'" We presume that the team understands that jargon is no substitute for analytical thinking. Removing the former sometimes makes deficiencies in the latter more obvious.

3. Page 27, last paragraph: The team attempts to buttress its claim that MUCIA lacks "a comprehensive vision" by quoting Ken Baum out of context to the effect that the research program is "scattered" and "a mixed bag," but that it could be expected to "take shape" over the next year, and that one more turnover of staff and researchers was needed. In fact, when repeatedly pressed, Ken's reply, closely paraphrased, was that 'the publications are scattered throughout the research program, and may look like a mixed bag until the full scope of the research program and activities are realized over the full 5 years of the cooperative agreement. The holes in the publication program probably will take a couple of years to fill in the most important areas.' Ken observed that more change could be expected in year 3 (beginning April 1994) owing inter alia to severe budgetary constraints and the formation of the new institutions team. The staff turnover remark was made in the context of a conversation in which it was noted that the chief-of-party position would need to be filled in year 3, as would those of several research team members -- funding permitting.

4. Page 28, section on "Synthesis Papers": The Checchi team acknowledges the logic of the sequence of events for the research program as set out in the Project Paper and cooperative agreement. Those documents indicate that at the outset priority would be given to the preparation of synthesis papers for research agenda building and other purposes. The team then mistakenly asserts that, contrary to what it was told by MUCIA, no such papers have been prepared, and on that basis erroneously concludes[22] that the research program lacks focus. The assertion is based on a definition of synthesis papers of the evaluation team's own creation -- a definition restrictive enough to disqualify each of the papers which MUCIA and USAID classify as synthesis papers; a definition far more restrictive that contained in the Project Paper. Thus, papers are disqualified by the evaluators because (a)

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[21]"USAID/EPAT Management Team Comments on 2/28/94 Evaluation Report" transmitted to the evaluation team under cover of a memorandum from Russell Misheloff to Elliott R. Morss dated March 29, 1994.

[22]Top of page 28.

they are not "group" products of one of the MUCIA research teams[23], (b) they are efforts produced by research teams, or members of research teams, which no longer exist, and/or (c) their preparation is cosponsored by USAID/EPAT and other institutions. At most, the team has established that the process of preparing the synthesis papers has not proceeded as rapidly as we had hoped it would. USAID acknowledged this in commenting on previous drafts of the evaluation.

5. Page 29, paragraph beginning "The evaluation team reviewed ...": In summarizing Appendix 5, the Checchi team here notes inter alia that neither Dan Clay nor Gayl Ness are members of any research team. Dan was a member of the Population and Environment Team until that team was disbanded for programmatic and budgetary reasons. It is unclear why his work should be denigrated on that account. The evaluators indicate they had "no information on Ness' affiliation with the project." He was in fact also a member of the Population and Environment Team until he accepted a position with UNDP/Geneva and left the University of Michigan. We have no idea why the Checchi team did not know that. Certainly, the information was readily available.

6. Page 31, last paragraph: The report indicates that rather than attempt to disseminate policy relevant information in a user friendly format -- what the policy briefs are designed to do -- a more appropriate course "would have been for the research teams to have entered into arrangements with the consulting firms associated with MUCIA and with WIEA to promote this information into buy-ins for the respective groups." We disagree completely. The purpose of the policy briefs is to inform the policy development process in USAID-assisted countries, not to generate buy-ins, either for the "for profit" consulting firms associated with the MUCIA/EPAT bidding group, or for WIEA.

7. Page 32, first paragraph under "The Set-Aside Program": The statement that "40 percent of the set-aside activities funded to date is not reported as being affiliated with any of the research teams" is not quite correct. The actual number is either 31 percent or 37 percent depending on whether the calculation is based on the total number of set-asides or their dollar value. More importantly, the use of the 40 percent figure to characterize the program as "ad hoc" is disingenuous. As the evaluation team should have known by now, upport for the research teams is only one of the functions which the set-aside program was designed to serve. It should, therefore, not be surprising that some 30 to 40 percent of the program involves activities not directly supportive of the research teams.

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[23]And, by the Checchi team's lights, membership on a research team is to be very narrowly construed. Thus, papers authored by research assistants of team members do not qualify as group synthesis papers. Nor do efforts of researchers engaged under set-aside arrangements. This, despite the fact that elsewhere in the report the Checchi team criticizes alleged "ad hoc" use of the set-aside arrangement for activities which are not closely related to the efforts of research teams (see page 32).

8. Same paragraph: Checchi's contention that a disproportionate percentage of set-aside funding has been used to support the forestry team is incorrect. The figure cited in the report (40 percent) is inaccurate. The correct figure is 24 percent. Set-aside funding used to support other research teams amount to 46 percent of the program by value, not 20 percent as reported in the evaluation report. It is clear that set-aside utilization is much more balanced than indicated in the evaluation report.

9. Next paragraph: The evaluation team erroneously indicates that Jane Hall is to receive over $82,000 through the set-aside program, an amount which it considers excessive. Dr. Hall, although not associated with a MUCIA institution, was a full member of the Energy, Industry and Urban Environment (EIU) Team for a year and a half. Set-aside funding supported her work with that team, including part-time graduate student support, travel, supplies and communications and overhead at California State University -Fullerton. This arrangement was canceled when the MUCIA budget was cut and the EIU team was reduced in size. The effect was to reduce the amount of set-aside funding used for Dr. Hall's work to approximately $49,000. It should also be noted that, contrary to the last sentence of the paragraph, no funding was provided to Dr. Hall after she ceased to be a member of a research team.

10. Page 33, first paragraph under "Uncertainty Over What Research the MUCIA Grant is Supporting": The evaluation team's contention that it cannot adequately assess the research component "because it is not clear what research products have been and are being financed by the project" is lame.[24] While the "deliverables" list is evolving as the research program adapts to changing USAID priorities and growing understanding of research needs on the part of the MUCIA researchers and the USAID management team, the list provided by MUCIA was accurate at the time it was provided. The fact that some research work is cosponsored by other institutions as well as USAID is irrelevant to the question of what EPAT is sponsoring. So too is the fact that some of the work has intellectual antecedents (either produced by the author or by others). After all, neither the synthesis papers nor the policy briefs were ever designed to be original works.

11. Same and subsequent paragraph (continuing on page 34): The evaluation team's treatment of the paper authored by Thomas White makes a mountain out of a mole hill. We simply cannot imagine how the team interpreted the statement on the cover page quoted in this section to mean that the document is a reprint. The fact that MUCIA was not able to give Checchi a precise dollar figure representing its financial support for the preparation of the document does not change this conclusion, nor does it lend credence to

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[24]The evaluation team returns to this matter on page 38 (first paragraph under "Research and Training", on page 53 (first paragraph under "Cooperative Agreements as USAID Procurement Vehicles", on page 61 (second full paragraph), and on page 2 of the Executive Summary.

an assertion that the document was prepared earlier, or with primary support from other funding sources.

12. Page 35, second paragraph under "Information and Dissemination": The text implies that the Project Paper attempted to "compensate" for an alleged shortcoming in project performance. This is curious. The Project Paper was prepared prior to project authorization and implementation. At the time, there were no shortcomings (real or imagined) which needed compensation.

13. Page 35, second paragraph under "Human Resource Development" (including footnote 8) : The team "heard" (presumably from us) and agrees that there is no market for the (MUCIA) core course. It goes on to reprimand the USAID EPAT management team and MUCIA for having "...allowed the work on the course to proceed ..." This assessment is unfair to both institutions.[25] USAID came to realize that there is a limited market for a course such as the one MUCIA was developing when WIEA presented its core course for the first time in February - March 1993, and did not attract a sizable audience. At about the same time, we learned that HIID (with USAID sponsorship) would offer a course similar in some respects to the one MUCIA was planning. Further work on the MUCIA course was suspended <u>at that time.</u> The fact that there were other "heavily subsidized courses offered by other donors and US government agencies that predated USAID's decision to suspend course development" does not suggest that there was a sound basis for suspending MUCIA course development earlier. If anything, the existence of other course offerings suggested that the market was not saturated. This was the assumption we made. We changed our minds when WIEA's inability to attract a larger audience demonstrated that market demand was, in fact, limited.

14. Page 36-37, "Model Budget to Complete a Group Synthesis Paper": Two things can be said. First, no one has contended that delays in the completion of the synthesis papers was the result of inadequate funding for the research teams. We therefore don't understand why Checchi felt it necessary to emphasize that budgets were adequate for that purpose. Second, and more seriously, the Checchi team's conception of what is involved in producing a "group" synthesis paper is overly simplistic. As gleaned from the "model budget" on page 36, the evaluators appear to believe that the process could/should proceed as follows:

- a one day meeting of team members,
- approximately 20 days of effort per person for 5 persons to prepare individual synthesis papers,

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[25]As are the closely related criticisms of MUCIA in the first paragraph under "Coordination and Collaboration" on page 37 and of the USAID project management team on pages 47 and 50.

- external review of the individual papers[26] by 5 people, each spending 2 days on the effort,
- a second one day meeting, presumably to review the individual papers, reach consensus on approach, style, organization and assignments for preparation of a "group" synthesis paper, as well as on research priorities implied,
- a second round of external review, and
- approximately 10 day of effort per person for 4 persons to draft, review, edit and complete the "group" paper.

If the process of synthesis preparation merely involved "experts" organizing their thoughts and transferring what is in their heads to paper, this scenario might be realistic, although even in this case, there is little room for unanticipated contingencies. But that isn't the case. We are asking people to review what is known, what is not known and what needs to be known for intelligent policy formulation in areas about which few have systematically thought and written. They will need to review literature from other disciplines in addition to their own, to consult with, decipher and attempt to evaluate diverse, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives, and to consider the research implications of their findings. The "group" will then need to digest the work of its members, to reconcile conflicts, to decide how to proceed as a "group" and to -- as the kids say -- "get it done." The process, like the making of sausage and legislation, may not be a pretty one. It is certainly likely to take more time and effort than the Checchi "model budget" allots.

15. Page 37, first paragraph under "Staffing": As evidenced by the alleged failure of MUCIA to produce synthesis papers, the lack of focus of the research program, the "ill-conceived" policy briefs, and the lack of "evidence of progress in the development of policy tools," the evaluation team asserts that MUCIA's former chief-of-party was "...incapable of managing a research program." We have dealt with each of these matters in previous paragraphs. None of them is accurate. The team's conclusion is therefore baseless.

16. Same paragraph: In support of its erroneous conclusion that "MUCIA has been derelict in its staffing responsibilities ...," Checchi notes that in its original proposal, MUCIA had proposed to post an operations coordinator and the project's dissemination director in Washington. Since, in the course of negotiations, USAID agreed to alternative arrangements, we fail to comprehend the charge of dereliction of duty.

17. Page 38, last paragraph: If the evaluation team has reason to believe that there may have been improprieties, these should be brought to the attention of the Inspector General. In the context of an evaluation, we do not believe it appropriate for the team to raise questions which it is unable to answer, thereby insinuating, but not firmly establishing, that there was any wrongdoing. While we have no reason to suspect wrongdoing, we are perfectly prepared to have the charges investigated by the proper authorities.

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[26]We presume this is what the fees are for.

18. Page 40, first four paragraphs: Whether the WIEA contract is "attractive ... in comparison to an Indefinite Quantity Contract (IQC)..." is irrelevant. The WIEA contract is not an IQC. IQCs are designed to provide short term (maximum of 120 days) services on demand for discreet activities. While the WIEA contract can provide such services, it also provides longer-term services for much more complex undertakings. It is this substantial difference in the complexity of authorized activities which justifies the larger core staff which WIEA has assembled.

19. Page 40, fourth paragraph: The evaluators note that "an economic focus has only been predominant in five of WIEA's twenty buy-in activities to date". A "focus" on such analysis is, in their view, "the key indicator" of success. And, of course, the project therefore is found wanting. We would note that the terms "focus" and "predominant" are vague and subjective. In this regard, when WIEA and the USAID EPAT management staff independently attempted to reproduce the evaluation team's results, they came up with different lists of delivery orders which would qualify. In both instances, the total number exceeded the 5 which the evaluators take to be the correct number. And both USAID and WIEA felt that there were additional delivery orders which involved economic analysis, even if it was not "predominant." Perhaps more importantly, we are surprised to see that the evaluation team is narrowly construing its view of EPAT by suggesting that what "was sufficiently important to justify" the project was a focus on "economic analysis applied to environmental policy issues". While this is indeed a focus, so too is analysis of the environmental implications (primarily from an economic perspective) of economic policy. Indeed, presumably recognizing this, the team elsewhere erroneously faults EPAT for not addressing the organizational development needs of economic, as opposed to environmental, institutions in its buy-in work.[27]

20. Page 42, 3rd paragraph: The evaluators report that WIEA contends that "the USAID EPAT management team has not been supportive of WIEA's efforts to market to the field, either by not allowing them to go on marketing trips or by interfering in the direct communication between WIEA staff and USAID clients". The allegation, which the evaluation team repeats on page 48, is untrue. WIEA staff have been on several marketing trips and have had considerable contact with various USAID clients. Of course, in a few instances, USAID management has felt that it was better positioned to approach particular potential clients by virtue of personal and professional associations, or because mission and/or regional bureau program managers told USAID/G staff that they did not wish to be marketed by contractors. The former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe are cases in point. This role for USAID management appears to accord nicely with the evaluation team's restrictive perspective of what that role should be (see page 63).

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[27]See page 18, second paragraph under "Performance". See also our comments on that paragraph in this document (paragraph 17 under "Project Performance").

21. Page 43, second paragraph under "Cost Effectiveness" and Page 45, second paragraph under "Management": Elsewhere,[28] and with particular reference to MUCIA, we have commented on the evaluation team's overemphasis on "tools of economic analysis." Here, the team indicates that for WIEA also the development of tools is critical. It is incorrect to say, as the team does, that "the justification for providing core monies to WIEA is the belief that it will take further work to develop these tools and convince USAID missions that they are needed." Whatever one thinks about the priority that should be accorded to development of tools, it is not, and never was, a prominent function for WIEA. The evaluation team's assertion to the contrary cannot be substantiated in <u>any</u> project documents.

22. Page 44, first paragraph under "Staffing": It is not correct to indicate that only 2 WIEA staff members "are expected to be staying with the project." Actually, so far as we are aware, none of the WIEA staff -- including the newly hired economist -- has any plans to leave in the foreseeable future.

23. Page 45, last paragraph: We do not understand the evaluation team's reference to "the partnership group." Moreover, the criticism leveled against WIEA for inadequate economic expertise on the core staff has been substantially mitigated by the recent hiring of a highly qualified economist to replace Katherine Jewsbury.[29] Lastly, it is a little misleading to indicate, as the team does, that "the two economists previously working on the project have just left." One of them -- Mike Rock -- has not really "left". He remains available to the core team (although not full time) as one of WIEA's Senior Technical Advisors. The other has, as indicated, been replaced.

24. Page 46, first paragraph under "Introduction" and page 47, first paragraph under "Implementation": The responsibilities of USAID, as enumerated in the first of these paragraphs, do not suggest that the Agency planned an unusually intrusive involvement in managing EPAT. These are the responsibilities of managers of <u>most</u> Agency projects. Similarly, we know of no G/ENR "decision to involve itself in the implementation of EPAT to a greater extent than is normally the case for USAID projects." The specific examples of USAID EPAT management team involvement in project implementation decisions presented on page 47 fall well within the prerogative of Agency project managers and are accepted practice.

25. Page 48, first paragraph under "Staffing": The team faults the size of the USAID EPAT management staff on the grounds of cost and the difficulties which a "large" staff has in maintaining clarity about "who is responsible for what." With respect to cost, as noted

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[28]See paragraph 4 under INTRODUCTION.

[29]This comment also applies to subparagraph 1 of the fourth paragraph on page 2 of the Executive Summary in which the identical charge is made.

above, and as the evaluation team should have known (since it was told), while until recently there were four members of the staff, two of them were far from full time. The clarity issue is a bit of a straw man. As the USAID management team pointed out in response to an earlier draft of the evaluation report:[30]

> While, all other things equal, clarity is certainly better than ambiguity, and is easier to achieve when all management decisions are made by a single individual, the correct criterion for staff size is workload. If the latter requires more than one person, means need to be found to avoid confusion, but not at the expense of unduly restricting staff size. Somehow, this seems obvious.

26. Page 48 - 49, second paragraph under "Staffing": What members of the USAID EPAT management staff want to do is irrelevant. They have not taken it upon themselves to do the work of EPAT's implementing units. It is true, as indicated, that USAID staff had a major role in the proposal which the evaluators allude to. However, the proposal was not for an EPAT activity, but rather was a component of a proposed World Bank loan. USAID management staff viewed both their own involvement in developing the proposal, as well as that of MUCIA, as an unusual opportunity to become better acquainted with the pressing environmental policy issues in an important part of the world. Lastly, we take strong exception to use of the word "example" in this paragraph, which implies that there are many analogous instances. In fact, we doubt that the evaluation team could come up with even one.

27. Page 49, first paragraph under "Chemistry": The quotation, which is designed to set the tone for the section (and in that respect succeeds admirably), is damning IF, as indicated, it "provides a representative picture of what the evaluation team heard ...". However, if it only represents the views of a small number of disgruntled staff, or persons who left the project involuntarily, or institutions whose (arguably inflated) expectations of the role they would play in EPAT were not fully realized, then the use of the quotation paints a highly distorted picture.[31] The team needs to show that its use of the quote is appropriate in the context of an objective evaluation. A suitable demonstration that the quote is appropriate for this report would require solid evidence that "it represents the views of nearly all MUCIA and WIEA EPAT staffs as well as the views of senior managers in both MUCIA and Winrock International ..." as claimed. We would note that earlier on USAID asked

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[30]See "USAID/EPAT Management Team Comments on 2/28/94 Evaluation Report," page 26.

[31] The allegation in the quotation that the USAID management staff overused project funds for travel needs substantiation and clarification. Travel by the USAID direct hire project officer, the RSSA staff assigned management responsibilities for EPAT, and the AAAS fellow working with the USAID management staff was always in accordance with USAID regulations, and, where appropriate, the regulations of their home agencies. The USAID direct hire project officer traveled very little during the period covered by this evaluation, never with project funding.

Checchi to provide such a demonstration. The latter refused, citing only "the solid evidence ...in the interviews ...[it] conducted,..."[32] However, Appendix 2 of the evaluation report, which purports to summarize responses inter alia of "WIEA partners/Associates and Senior Technical Advisors", suggests that respondents to a question designed to elicit views about satisfaction/dissatisfaction with EPAT management expressed differing views.[33] We don't know how the evaluation team was able to conclude from those interviews that the quotation in this paragraph is representative. And, if it is not, its inclusion represents a grave, and, at this point, a deliberate injustice to the USAID EPAT management staff.

28. Page 49, third full paragraph: USAID responded to the same text in an earlier version of the evaluation report, noting that it was "not quite accurate."[34] USAID indicated that the concerns which the contracts office raised were "about the level of training that USAID will commit to RSSA personnel [personnel assigned to USAID from other U.S. Government agencies]," and observed that "this is a very pervasive problem", i.e. one that affects all RSSA personnel with project management responsibilities, not just to those involved with EPAT. Checchi did not change the text in the current version, explaining that while it had "promised not to reveal what persons ...interviewed said ..." it felt that its "statement is a better reflection of what was said than what the USAID memo[orandum of meeting] asserts." This is curious since the USAID response summarized above was prepared by the contracts office which, we can confidently assert, is better able to speak for itself than is the Checchi evaluation team.

29. Page 50, second paragraph under "Providing Clear Direction": We would not be surprised to learn that from time to time actions have "fallen between the cracks" in USAID/G. We doubt that this has happened "numerous" times, and would need creditable evidence before accepting the statement as fact.

30. Page 50-51, first paragraph under "Conclusions": The Checchi team's so-called "tenets" which, in its eyes, 'appear' to have governed "management decisions within the [USAID EPAT management] unit" are a caricature. It would appear that Checchi is implying that

1) USAID should not have attempted to deal with deficiencies in the performance of project implementing institutions by exerting strong management [35], but instead should have

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[32]See Appendix 6, item 21, page 4.

[33]See page 1, question 2 of the appendix.

[34]See Appendix 6, USAID's "Memorandum of Meeting," paragraph 30 (page 5) under "Factual Errors".

[35]Micro-management in the eyes of some beholders.

2) threatened project cancellation.

There are instances in which cancellation is the appropriate course. The evaluators may feel that this is such a case. We respectfully, but strongly, disagree.

OTHER FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO "POOR" PROJECT PERFORMANCE [36]

1. Page 54, second paragraph under "Research Location and Dynamics": We agree that by virtue of its field activities, WIEA has some familiarity "with the research needs as seen from the standpoint of USAID missions and the governments of developing countries." This has influenced the MUCIA-sponsored research program. For example, the increased priority which MUCIA is giving to institutions and policy implementation reflects the prominence of those subjects in the demands being placed on WIEA by USAID's overseas missions and their host country counterparts.

2. Page 54, last paragraph and page 55, top: The evaluation team incorrectly alleges that project USAID/G managers were biased "against consulting firms doing research" (page 55). This is nonsense. And the evaluation team knows it. It was perfectly clear from the RFP and RFA that any and all institutions were invited to bid both on the contract (mainly for field support) and the cooperative agreement (mainly for core research). Moreover, the issue came up when the USAID/G project management team commented on the evaluation team's first draft. In our comments we noted that

> while project designers hypothesized that, generally, field support activities would be best carried out by contracted consultants affiliated with for- profit firms, whereas core research was a natural for research and academic institutions, the bid documents -- both for the contract and the cooperative agreement -- did not limit the kinds of institutions which could respond.[37]

3. Page 55, third paragraph: The evaluation team implies that EPAT has designed a research program which can be carried out "..in isolation from the economic, political, and social contexts of particular developing countries." This is incorrect. The interdisciplinary composition of the MUCIA research teams and the substantial involvement of the teams in field work reflects our view that if research is to play a constructive role in informing policy, it must be grounded in real world problem solving. If the Checchi team is (in a very roundabout way) suggesting that different research issues need to be addressed by MUCIA, it should say so explicitly, and indicate what those issues are and why they are more important than those which the MUCIA program is fact addressing.

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[36]Quotation marks added.

[37]USAID/EPAT Management Comments on 2/28/94 Evaluation Report, page 2.

4. Page 55, first paragraph under "Model of Social Change": Our reading of the project paper is totally different. The discussion in that document about the need for interdisciplinary perspectives suggests that the projects' designers did not have the kind of simple, mechanistic view of the world attributed to them by the Checchi team. Certainly, "economic analysis on environmental policy issues" provides useful "inputs for a policy dialogue", but not the only ones.

5. Next paragraph (continuing on page 56): We agree that there are sometimes "tradeoffs between economic growth and environmental preservation", and that, where that is the case, values play an important role in determining what choices will be made. However, the evaluation team appears to be overlooking the fact that there are also cases in which growth and environmental quality are entirely compatible. Whether or not that occurs, different groups within a society will be differentially affected by growth and/or measures undertaken to preserve or enhance the environment. We agree entirely "that a necessary component of an effective policy dialogue model is citizen education and involvement." Our work on policy implementations and institutions, and on conflict resolution reflect this view. We don't know why the evaluation team seems to be trying to portray our perspective differently. We know the "recently-departed chief-of-party of MUCIA" well enough to know that he does not subscribe to an overly simplistic "change model".

6. Page 56, third paragraph under "Training Activities": We assume the evaluation team meant to say "subsequently" not "consequently".

7. Page 56, footnote 9: This is incorrect. Core project funding can be used for the development, presentation and evaluation of courses. Only the expenses of students are not covered from EPAT funds. Of course, given core funding limitations, we are hopeful that fees paid by course enrollees will recoup some or all of the costs of development and presentation.

UNIQUE PROJECT FEATURES

1. Page 57, second paragraph under "A Separate Contract and Cooperative Agreement" and first paragraph under "A Requirements Contract Awarded to MUCIA" (continuing on page 58): We agree that organizations commissioned to do the same work are likely to view each other as competitors. But this is not the case in EPAT. WIEA and MUCIA play quite distinct roles. Of course, had the consulting firms associated with MUCIA been given free rein to market buy-ins, as the evaluation team thinks should have happened, they would have been in direct competition with WIEA. This situation has been thoroughly discussed with the evaluation team.

2. Page 58, Section captioned "The 'Option' Provision in the WIEA Contract Permitting Increases in Level of Effort": USAID agreed that exercise of the first option to increase level of effort under the WIEA core contract was appropriate for two reasons: First, it became evident that with three core professional staff, WIEA was having great difficulty in

simultaneously maintaining close contacts with USAID missions while also providing essential headquarters type functions such as recruiting, backstopping, quality assurance and reporting. In short, essential travel came at the expense of quality performance of headquarters type functions and vice versa. Second, as indicated by the evaluation team, USAID/G and WIEA agreed there was a need to add an economist to the core team.

3. Same paragraph: The evaluation team indicates that, as an "alternative" to exercise of the WIEA contract option to increase core staff, WIEA could have "activated[d] its TAG (sic)". This suggestion lacks creditability. The discussion erroneously makes it appear that the two "alternatives" are mutually exclusive. They are not. In fact, WIEA has recently hired a senior level economist to replace the one originally recruited when the contract option was exercised and is making better use of its senior technical advisors.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS APPEARING IN SCOPE OF WORK

1. Page 59, first paragraph under "Effectiveness of Research Teams & Relationships Among Teams": In response to Checchi's May 1994 draft evaluation report, USAID asked that the statement that "certain researchers are not allowed to communicate directly with research decision makers ..."be documented. Checchi did not do so, but repeats the allegation in the current version. It is inaccurate.

2. Page 60, section captioned "Oversight Mechanisms to Insure Quality Research Products": The statement about lack of an effective quality assurance mechanism for research is inaccurate. Quality assurance has been a matter of concern from the very start of the project. All research reports have been thoroughly reviewed. In the early days, policies, procedures and systems for review were informal. As the volume of draft publications increased, that had to change, and did. Quality assurance is critical to the success of any research program. We therefore find it amazing that an allegation that EPAT has been deficient in this area is first made on page 60 of the evaluation report. A single sentence is devoted to the subject.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Page 61, third full paragraph: In commenting on the section of the Checchi report on "Evaluation Methodology", we noted our difficulties with the "what could be reasonably expected" criterion for evaluating performance (see page 4 above). On the basis of that flawed criterion, WIEA performance is here assessed "...to be less than what would be expected of a contractor, but still acceptable provided that certain actions ...are taken."

2. Page 61, fifth full paragraph: After reciting a list of real or imagined shortcomings on the part of the project's implementing organizations, i.e. failure of WIEA to staff the project adequately, deficiencies in financial management on the part of MUCIA, and MUCIA's inability to fill the vacant chief-of-party position, the Checchi evaluation team observes that "rather than working to resolve these problems, the USAID EPAT management team has

contributed to them." (emphasis added)[38] We are at a loss to determine how the USAID staff contributed to these problems (assuming only for sake of argument that they are in fact problems). USAID made the same point in commenting on the previous version of this evaluation report. In response,[39] Checchi indicated that, in the current version of the report, the text is changed to indicate that "it is the judgment of the Evaluation Team that" the USAID/G team has contributed to the problems cited.[40] Checchi then goes on to indicate that this paragraph is a "summary statement", and "documentation is presented" in an earlier section of the report. We cannot find such documentation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Page 62-63, sections A and B: We appreciate the evaluation team's effort to go beyond its terms of reference to present "its vision of how this project should work". At the same time, we would note that its vision and ours are quite different. In particular, as previously indicated (see page 2, paragraph 4 of these comments), we are rather confused by the team's seeming obsession with "tools"[41]. It appears that the team is offering a "vision" of a project designed to achieve different purposes from those we had (and still have) in mind.

Russell Misheloff

Kenneth Baum

September 30, 1994

[38]The evaluation team makes the same charge on page 2 of the Executive Summary.

[39]See Appendix 6, paragraph 26.

[40]In fact the text has not been changed at all. But even if it had been changed as indicated in Appendix 6, it would not have corrected the deficiency.

[41]The term is used no less than 24 times in these 2 sections.