



USAID
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OFFICE OF FORESTRY AND BIODIVERSITY: ASSESSMENT OF BIODIVERSITY INTEGRATION EFFORTS

Developing a Better Understanding of Efforts to Integrate
Biodiversity Conservation with Other Sectors to Enhance
Human Development

APRIL 2020



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Front Cover Photo:

Safe Motherhood Action Group community meeting at the Mundabi Rural Health Center, Mundabi, Zambia. Photo credit: USAID/Zambia.

Back Cover Photo:

A floating vegetable garden at Najirpur of Pirojpur district in Bangladesh. Photo credit: Muhammad Mostafigur Rahman.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	6
What do we mean by “integration”?.....	6
Integration priority areas of action.....	7
Context	8
Purpose.....	8
Methods.....	8
Rigor.....	9
Findings	10
The Institutional Context of Biodiversity Integration.....	10
Institutional Barriers to Integration.....	10
Overcoming Institutional Barriers.....	11
Opportunities and Incentives for Integration.....	11
Building Constituencies.....	12
Washington, DC, Constituencies.....	12
Mission Constituencies.....	13
Leveraging Entry Points.....	13
Entry Points.....	13
Tools and Guidance.....	14
Approaches to Leveraging Entry Points.....	15
Additional Integration Support.....	15
Developing the Evidence Base.....	15
Evidence Products.....	15
Findings from the Bridge Activity.....	16
Future Milestones.....	17
Recommendations	18
1: Emphasize Natural Resource Management as a Framework for Biodiversity Integration.....	18
2: Continue Building Constituencies and Champions for Biodiversity Integration.....	18
3: Continue Developing Tools and Guidance to Leverage High-Value Entry Points.....	19
4: Continue Building the Evidence Base for Biodiversity Integration.....	19
Conclusion	19
Reference	20

FIGURES

FIGURE 1: HIGH-LEVEL THEORY OF CHANGE UNDERLYING INTEGRATION ASSESSMENT.....	6
FIGURE 2: RESEARCH PROCESS.....	8

TABLES

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF BARRIERS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND INCENTIVES FOR INTEGRATION.	10
TABLE 2: FUTURE MILESTONES FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION INTEGRATION.....	17

BOXES

BOX 1: FAB'S INTEGRATION-FOCUSED ACTIVITIES	7
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ACRONYMS

BRIDGE	Biodiversity Results and Integrated Development Gains Enhanced Project
BFS	Bureau for Food Security
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research
DRG	Democracy, Rights, and Governance
ENRM	Environmental and Natural Resource Management
FAA	Foreign Assistance Act
FAB	Office of Forestry and Biodiversity
FTF	Feed the Future
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MI	Measuring Impact
MI2	Measuring Impact II
SEEK	Sharing Environment and Energy Knowledge
TDY	Temporary Duty
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

INTRODUCTION

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “INTEGRATION”?

This report presents a broad assessment of the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) efforts to implement its [Biodiversity Policy’s](#) second goal: to “integrate biodiversity as an essential component of human development.” Since the early integrated conservation and development projects in the 1980s, conservation professionals have recognized the importance of incorporating humans’ development needs and aspirations into biodiversity conservation goals. This recognition of the critical connections between environmental and development sectors—such as agriculture, governance, and health—led to further integration to enhance development outcomes. The concept of “Nature, Wealth, and Power” grew out of research into integrated rural development efforts, and USAID’s Nature, Wealth, and Power (2002) and Nature, Wealth, and Power 2.0 (2014) activities demonstrated how the integration of natural resource management, sustainable resource use, and strengthened governance could lead to improved outcomes for people and nature.

In 2014, USAID published its first Biodiversity Policy, which emphasized that managing and maintaining healthy ecosystems is a critical part of achieving long-term human well-being outcomes and enhancing resilience and self-reliance. Moreover, integrating biodiversity conservation into other sectors’ programming can expand conservation impacts. Additionally, the Policy acknowledges that biodiversity conservation efforts can be strengthened through tools and approaches from other development sectors as well as by the explicit recognition of conservation’s contributions to other outcomes. Thus, integration within USAID and the broader development context, is meant to be bi-directional. This assessment focused on how USAID promotes integration between biodiversity conservation and other sectors and is framed by the high-level theory of change illustrated in Figure 1 below.

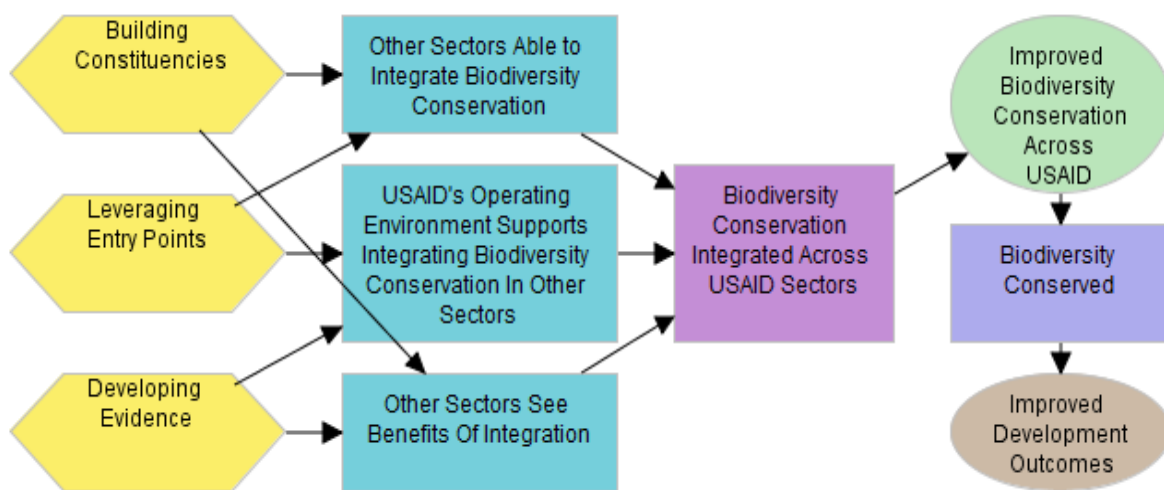


Figure 1: High-Level Theory of Change Underlying Integration Assessment

INTEGRATION PRIORITY AREAS OF ACTION

Since the Policy's release in 2014, the USAID Office of Forestry and Biodiversity (FAB) has sought, either directly or through implementing partners (Box 1 below), to implement Goal 2 of the Policy through three priority areas of action (illustrated as yellow hexagons in Figure 1 above):

1. **Building constituencies for biodiversity integration with other sectors:** efforts to foster professional relationships across the Agency to implement integration. This includes creating integration working groups that engage with integration champions in other offices and bureaus, and providing training and technical assistance to programming beyond biodiversity conservation.
2. **Leveraging entry points:** efforts to identify points within USAID policies and processes, such as the Program Cycle, where integrated approaches can be encouraged and to develop tools and guidance to support integration in key steps of the Program Cycle. These include FAB's guidance on the Foreign Assistance Act 118/119 Tropical Forest and Biodiversity Analysis and on ecosystem valuation in cost-benefit analysis and political economy analysis.
3. **Developing evidence:** efforts to understand and communicate if, how, and under what conditions biodiversity conservation efforts contribute to broader development, self-reliance, and other USAID objectives.

These three action areas are interdependent. For example, the Food Security and Biodiversity Conservation integration working group developed evidence products that demonstrate the importance of wild-caught fisheries in development (see: [The Importance of Wild Fisheries for Local Food Security and Nutrition](#), [Fishing for Food Security: The Importance of Wild Fisheries for Food Security and Nutrition](#), [The Role of Wild-Caught Fisheries in African Development](#), and [Wild-Caught Fish Are Feeding the World](#)). The creation of these evidence products also necessitated the engagement of constituents for integration in USAID's Bureau for Food Security (BFS). Additionally, USAID developed guidance for leveraging Program Cycle entry points to better integrate fisheries and food security (see [Integrating Food Security and Wild Caught Fisheries Management in USAID Programming](#), and [Looking to the Sea to Support Development Objectives: A Primer for USAID Staff and Partners](#)). Both the evidence and the entry point guidance supported integrated programming around food security and fisheries globally. For example, USAID's Mission in Ghana has used some of these products to inform a Feed the Future (FTF) activity, the Sustainable Fisheries Management Project, which applies natural resources management to advance a food security objective.

BOX 1: FAB'S INTEGRATION-FOCUSED ACTIVITIES

FAB manages two key implementation activities supporting USAID biodiversity conservation:

- Biodiversity Results and Integrated Development Gains Enhanced (2015-2020) advances Goal 2 of the Biodiversity Policy.
- Measuring Impact (2012-2018) and Measuring Impact II (2018-2023) promote and support evidence-based adaptive management of biodiversity conservation and integrated programming.

CONTEXT

PURPOSE

The assessment, implemented from April through September 2019, had three objectives:

- To document and describe USAID’s efforts to integrate biodiversity conservation across the Agency’s portfolio and achievements to date;
- To assess the different modalities used for implementing biodiversity conservation integration, including FAB’s implementing activities (see Box 1 on page 6); and
- To provide a set of practical recommendations for improving biodiversity integration for different contexts and desired outcomes.

The assessment also aimed to provide feedback on the Biodiversity Results and Integrated Development Gains Enhanced (BRIDGE) activity’s efforts to support integration, and its findings and recommendations will support USAID’s continued work in biodiversity integration by:

- Informing the design of the next generation of FAB programming and the upcoming FAB Project Appraisal Document;
- Guiding Measuring Impact II (MI2) and other partners’ integration efforts; and
- Influencing FAB’s efforts to engage constituencies from key USAID partners, including staff working in global health; democracy, human rights, and governance; climate change and resilience; economic policy; and food security.

This assessment is exploratory and descriptive (Patton 2002); the assessment team sought to understand and describe how FAB implements Goal 2 and what impact those actions have. Thus, the findings include detailed descriptions of the action areas in practice and insights from informants on the effectiveness of those actions and how they could be strengthened.

METHODS

An external consultant conducted the assessment and designed the process as a broad view of the various ways USAID has advanced Goal 2 of the Biodiversity Policy. The assessment kicked off in Washington, D.C., with a meeting at the FAB office. The research process included five steps (Figure 2).

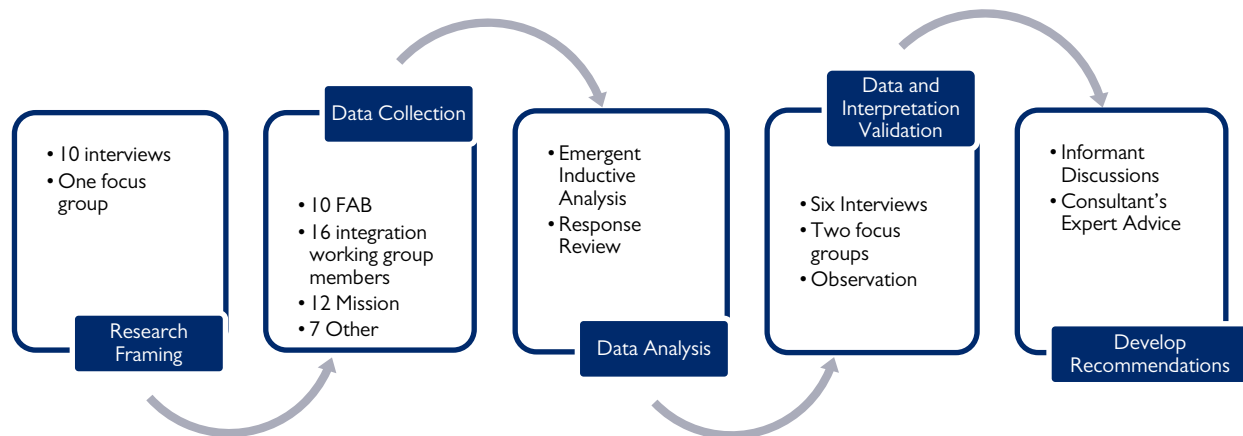


Figure 2: Research Process

1. *Research Framing:* Ten current and former FAB staff participated in preliminary open interviews. BRIDGE staff also participated in an open-format group discussion. These meetings oriented the assessment and provided background information.
2. *Data Collection:* In collaboration with USAID and BRIDGE, the consultant identified four key informant pools: FAB staff, integration working group participants, Mission staff, and other Washington, D.C.,-based staff who had interacted with FAB outside of integration working groups or Mission support. An online survey (using Google Forms) was developed for each pool. The assessment used purposeful sampling (Patton 2002) to identify key informants across USAID who engage in integration-related activities. These informants were invited to participate in qualitative surveys; in the surveys, participants described how they practiced integration and engaged with FAB's integration activities and shared their perceptions of what worked well and what could strengthen integration at USAID. By email, 163 potential informants received invitations to participate, with weekly reminders for three weeks. Over the course of one month, 45 informants completed the online surveys: 10 FAB staff, 16 integration working group members, 12 Mission staff, and seven other FAB support recipients.
3. *Data Analysis:* The consultant collected data in Excel spreadsheets and sought to discover relevant patterns across the survey responses. The consultant reviewed the responses by question and by informant pool, identifying emergent concepts, unique responses, and quotations that elucidate responses. The results of this inductive analysis (Patton 2002) were organized in the Excel spreadsheets. Questions common to all groups allowed qualitative comparison between groups.
4. *Data Interpretation and Validation:* In July, the consultant attended Integration Day at the Environment Officers Conference in Washington, D.C. He conducted six interviews and two focus groups with FAB and BRIDGE staff members and with environment officers to confirm and validate the survey findings. He also collected additional information on the BRIDGE activity. The consultant further validated his interpretations in discussions with FAB, MI2, and BRIDGE staff in interactive presentations on July 31 and August 1, 2019.
5. *Development of Recommendations:* The consultant developed a list of recommendations that were validated with the key audiences, including FAB. He organized the findings and recommendations, summarized in this assessment report, into a comprehensive presentation to inform USAID's continued work in biodiversity integration.

RIGOR

In exploratory qualitative assessments of this type, the evaluator, or evaluation team, understands, interprets, and builds recommendations through the lens of expertise and experience—the goal is to be as “factual about observations” as possible. Often in qualitative inquiry, evaluators strive to be balanced, fair, and conscientious while taking account of multiple perspectives and realities, rather than aiming for the objectivity that experimental approaches seek. To guard against bias, the expertise and thinking processes of the evaluators are made explicit, as are the lenses through which findings are interpreted and presented. Bias can be countered in a number of ways, and this assessment used three common methods:

1. **Triangulation:** “using multiple methods of data collection and analysis” (Patton 2002, 555). In this assessment, data was collected through one-on-one interviews, a qualitative survey, and focus groups, and the evaluator compared responses across these different methods.
2. **Participant Review:** “the people described in the analysis react to what is described and concluded” (Patton 2002, 560). In this assessment, the evaluator shared the findings, conclusions, and recommendations with participants through focus groups and presentations.
3. **Transparency:** sharing the data and interpretations openly so it can be checked by others. The evaluator shared with FAB the Excel database in which both survey responses and focus group responses were cataloged and analyzed. In this way, others can view and consider the data, interpret them in light of new perspectives, and build stronger findings.

FINDINGS

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF BIODIVERSITY INTEGRATION

To set the stage for in-depth discussions of the assessment findings, the survey and focus groups included questions to illuminate the institutional context of biodiversity integration. These questions identified institutional barriers, opportunities, and incentives for integration (summarized in Table I below). The most frequently mentioned issues are shared in this section.

INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS TO INTEGRATION

Respondents identified many institutional barriers to integrating biodiversity with other sectors. The most common responses were:

- “Siloed” approaches to development in which sectors focus solely on their own mandates without regard for other Agency priorities and
- A lack of time for staff to devote to developing integrated approaches.

Table I: Summary of Barriers, Opportunities, and Incentives for Integration

BARRIERS

- Siloed approaches
- Lack of time
- Biodiversity-specific terminology and theory of change development processes

OPPORTUNITIES TO OVERCOME BARRIERS

- + Build support among leadership
- + Demonstrate biodiversity conservation contributions to self-reliance and resilience

INCENTIVES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTEGRATION

- + Renewed Agency-wide interest in natural resource management and resilience
- + Biodiversity metrics in Journey to Self-Reliance Roadmaps
- + Broader results from modest budgets
- + Promote stronger biodiversity protections through Reg. 216 processes

Another common concern was how terminology can impede integration. The term “biodiversity” is not well understood outside of the conservation community. Phrases like “threats-based approach” and “Open Standards” further complicate collaboration with those outside of USAID environment programming. Such technical terms may limit understanding of how other sectors’ approaches to programming compare to the biodiversity sector. Respondents noted that adapting biodiversity theory of change terminology to be more compatible with other sectors could facilitate more and better integrated programming.

OVERCOMING INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

Respondents provided additional insights about ways to overcome institutional barriers. They thought it was critical to begin building support among Agency and Mission leadership, which can lead to more integrated programming at the Mission level and broader support for integrated approaches at higher levels in the Agency. Respondents noted that a key opportunity for FAB and its partners is to demonstrate the importance of biodiversity conservation to resilience and to the Agency’s Journey to Self-Reliance framework.

OPPORTUNITIES AND INCENTIVES FOR INTEGRATION

Respondents identified a range of opportunities and incentives for biodiversity integration in the Agency. These include building on emerging Agency-wide interest in natural resource management, leveraging the recommendations of the 2019 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) global assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and using U.S. policy opportunities to promote biodiversity integration during Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) processes. Generally, the 2019 IPBES assessment demonstrated the urgency of biodiversity loss and its impacts on global development objectives, creating more awareness of and increased conversations about environmental degradation.

Respondents perceive USAID’s adoption of the [Environmental and Natural Resource Management \(ENRM\) Framework](#) in 2019 as an opportunity to elicit support for more integrated programming. They noted that as an explicit and inherent component of natural resource management, biodiversity conservation will likely receive more attention as the Agency’s emphasis on natural resources expands. Similarly, the Agency’s growing focus on resilience could also spur support for biodiversity conservation; to capitalize on that opportunity, FAB will need to demonstrate how biodiverse ecosystems support resilience. The Agency’s inclusion of “Biodiversity and Habitat Protections” as one of the 17 Journey to Self-Reliance metrics also presents an opportunity to promote the importance of integration across sectors. Additionally, while generally seen as a problem, some respondents recognized that funding limitations could drive interest in integrated programming to achieve broader results from modest budgets.

Respondents also identified opportunities to employ [Reg. 216](#) (the U.S. federal regulation defining USAID’s pre-implementation environmental impact assessment process) to promote better protections for biodiversity in Mission-level planning. For example, one respondent recommended that environmental compliance teams review Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) Sections 118/119 analyses and require that biodiversity concerns identified in the analyses be addressed in CDCS process. While this specific suggestion is beyond the scope of Reg. 216, the possibility of biodiversity conservation benefitting from a closer association with environmental compliance teams is viable.

BUILDING CONSTITUENCIES

This section describes how FAB has built constituencies and integration champions with key sectors across USAID. Then it presents informants' views of the accomplishments of these efforts as well as how they might be improved.

Early interviews revealed that FAB's efforts to build constituencies have included creating integration working groups engaging with integration champions in other offices and bureaus, and providing training and technical assistance to Missions. These efforts to build constituencies and integration champions created and nurtured personal relationships at different levels. As a result of their efforts, FAB and its integration implementing partners have successfully built constituencies and champions in Washington, D.C., and global Missions.

WASHINGTON, D.C., CONSTITUENCIES

The most visible and most discussed effort to build constituencies in Washington, D.C., is the integration working groups. FAB has teamed with other USAID bureaus and offices to create and facilitate integration working groups that focus on global health; food security; climate change; and democracy, human rights, and governance. An integration working group for economic growth evolved into a small team working on ecosystem valuation and cost-benefit analysis recommendations. The integration working groups comprise staff from FAB, other technical bureaus or offices, and regional bureaus. Working together, group members seek opportunities and entry points for integration with biodiversity conservation and serve as a channel for two-way learning between staff working in different sectors.

While FAB has engaged with additional Agency champions, the assessment team was not able to learn enough about other Washington, D.C., efforts to include them in the assessment.

Integration Working Group Accomplishments

Integration working groups have built awareness of the development benefits from multi-sectoral approaches, such as how improved fisheries management may include economic diversification, reducing pressure on fisheries and also fostering economic growth in communities. Integration working group participants reported increased knowledge of how better to support integration and that the integration working groups have led to new integrated activities; however, respondents did not cite specific integrated activities.

Respondents noted that the integration working groups have successfully created horizontal (e.g., among cross-office colleagues near the same hierarchical level in the Agency) constituencies and champions for integration in Washington, D.C.. Essential working group actions for increasing integration include participants creating new relationships, improving communication across sectors, and collaborating on specific tasks.

Overall, respondents thought the key to building effective constituencies and champions through integration working groups is working on shared goals and results, ensuring collaboration co-benefits that align with each sector's desired outcomes.

Integration Working Group Improvements

Respondents were also asked how to improve the integration working groups. Respondents noted that integration is much more likely to happen at the Mission level, so supporting Mission staff in advancing integration could be a future function of the groups. Some respondents recommended involving Mission personnel in some integration working group meetings. Respondents also repeatedly called for building stronger evidence for conservation's contributions to economic development and the economic value of biodiversity and for finding ways to enhance USAID leadership support.

MISSION CONSTITUENCIES

In addition to the Washington, D.C., integration working groups, FAB and its implementing partners have successfully built constituencies and champions in Missions by providing direct technical assistance and training. Respondents recognized that FAB successfully built constituencies and champions for integration at Missions by:

- Focusing efforts on program office staff and Mission leadership who are empowered to integrate programs;
- Providing in-person technical assistance and process facilitation, such as developing integrated theories of change;
- Ensuring frequent, individualized interactions between a FAB or implementing partner contact and a Mission counterpart; and
- Delivering biodiversity conservation training.

LEVERAGING ENTRY POINTS

This section describes the findings related to the development of tools and guidance to integrate biodiversity conservation into the USAID Program Cycle at appropriate phases. Entry points are steps within the Program Cycle where integrated approaches can be encouraged. Leveraging these includes the strategic development, use, and distribution of tools and guidance to support, improve, or advance integration at the identified entry points.

ENTRY POINTS

The assessment investigated several potential entry points for integration within the Program Cycle, including:

- Deciding to integrate biodiversity conservation efforts with other sector actions;
- Incorporating biodiversity conservation into Mission strategic planning processes;
- Designing integrated projects or activities;
- Implementing integrated projects or activities; or
- Monitoring, evaluating, learning from and adaptively managing integrated projects or activities.

Mission-based respondents nearly unanimously reported that FAB has no influence over a Mission's decision to integrate biodiversity programming with other programs. However, the same respondents nearly unanimously reported that working with FAB greatly contributed to a Mission's ability to implement integration. Since Mission staff have the most in-depth understanding of the situation and

context in their countries, they are best able to make initial decisions about integrated programming. Once that decision is made, Missions recognize the importance of receiving support for their integration efforts.

For the remaining entry points, the assessment first catalogued the tools and guidance available and then examined the efficacy of FAB and partners' approaches to leverage entry points. The assessment also incorporates additional suggestions from informants of how FAB and its partners could support improved integration.

TOOLS AND GUIDANCE

FAB has produced or influenced a variety of tools and guidance documents that support integration throughout the Program Cycle. Some are closely related to or derived from evidence products, which are described in the following section. Some were repeatedly mentioned by respondents as useful, while other tools appear to be less well known or used. All the tools and guidance mentioned by the informants are discussed here, with the exception of the *Biodiversity and Development Handbook*, which is presented but was not mentioned by informants.

The [Foreign Assistance Act Sections 118/119 Tropical Forest and Biodiversity Analysis: Best Practices Guide](#), developed through BRIDGE, was repeatedly identified by respondents as the most effective tool for incorporating biodiversity conservation into Mission strategic planning processes. The guide details the steps necessary to prepare, conduct, and use the FAA 118/119 analysis. If carried out early enough in the Program Cycle, and with support from a Mission's program office, the guidance document can provide opportunities for integration in the CDCS process.

Activity design provides another key entry point for integration. MI and MI2 have supported activity design using the [Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation](#). Although many supported activities were not specifically developed for integration, MI and MI2's critical support to USAID's biodiversity activity design could similarly be used to design integrated activities. MI also published [Integrating Food Security and Wild Caught Fisheries Management in USAID Programming](#), which details how situation models and results chains can be used for integrated design.

FAB, BRIDGE, and USAID's Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) have worked together to apply the DRG approaches of political economy analysis and thinking and working politically to the biodiversity sector. In 2019, they produced the [Discussion Note: Thinking and Working Politically and Strengthening Political Economy Analysis in USAID Biodiversity Programming](#). Thinking and working politically can be used at multiple entry points to help define blockages to conservation action and provides pathways to governance-related actions. Mission staff cited this guidance as useful in program and activity design.

BRIDGE also worked with other sectors to develop a set of [integration reference sheets](#) for health; democracy, human rights, and governance; food security; water and sanitation; and biodiversity more generally. Mission staff reported that the reference sheets help environment and non-environment staff at USAID collaborate on and implement biodiversity conservation integration.

While not specifically identified by respondents, FAB's [Biodiversity and Development Handbook](#) includes a section about integration with other sectors, laying the foundation for how and why biodiversity

conservation contributes to broader development goals. Broader dissemination of the handbook’s messages to Agency leadership could further encourage integrated efforts.

APPROACHES TO LEVERAGING ENTRY POINTS

The assessment survey asked FAB team members, Mission-based staff, and other USAID staff to identify the most effective ways FAB has supported USAID’s integration work, providing these examples:

- Developing and distributing targeted evidence products that support integration;
- Relationship-building;
- Convening integration working groups;
- Developing evaluation scopes of work;
- Building constituencies; and
- Providing direct facilitation and face-to-face support to Missions.

Of these, survey respondents considered building constituencies and providing direct facilitation and face-to-face support to be the most effective approaches. One respondent explained: “We created long-standing engagement relationships with members of FAB and integrated working groups with FTF and GCC [Global Climate Change] and FAB to implement interesting evaluations and do work together—we had regular calls and emails.... The same 1–3 people [participated in TDYs and field support] so that they became knowledgeable about country specific context and could be more useful--relationships and strong communication was built over time.” Informants also mentioned BRIDGE’s FAA 118/119 guidance, MI and MI2’s design and monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) support, and FAB’s biodiversity training as examples of the direct approaches that help them integrate programs.

ADDITIONAL INTEGRATION SUPPORT

Respondents shared additional types of support from FAB that would be helpful in facilitating integration at the Mission level. They noted an ongoing need to market biodiversity conservation in a way that could attract funding from other sectors, and respondents cited the importance of engaging Mission directors and Mission program officers. Mission staff also need additional support on how to *initiate* an integrated approach in the planning process and how to *measure* the impact of integrated activities. One Mission staff member noted that a single, consistent FAB point of contact who supports the design team could be very impactful.

DEVELOPING THE EVIDENCE BASE

During the research framing, key informants and the consultant identified several evidence products that FAB and partners have produced to support integration. During data collection, the assessment team attempted to examine the efficacy of the evidence products but found that most respondents were not yet familiar with most of them. Therefore, the Evidence Products section below describes the products that were mentioned during data collection and how informants discussed them.

EVIDENCE PRODUCTS

Although FAB and partners are continuing to effectively develop and utilize the evidence base for integration, most informants were not familiar with many existing evidence products. Respondents

primarily identified products that synthesize research demonstrating how biodiversity conservation contributes to other development outcomes. FAB staff reported that such evidence is expected to build support for integrated programming both in Washington, D.C., and in Missions.

The assessment distinguishes between tools and guidance that explain how to integrate (described above) and products primarily focused on promoting integration and its benefits (described here). FAB and BRIDGE have made significant advances to develop new evidence products to promote integration with multiple sectors.

BRIDGE's work on ecosystem-based adaptation presents a broad range of integration opportunities. Originally a means to integrate climate change adaptation with natural systems, ecosystem-based adaptation is also a practical approach to enhance human and environmental resilience through improved natural resource management. The [USAID Ecosystem-based Adaptation Synthesis](#) provides a comprehensive summary of the co-benefits ecosystem-based adaptation can provide to food security, water security, coastal populations' resilience, and the mitigation of and recovery from extreme events. This synthesis summarizes a series of [ten supporting ecosystem-based adaptation evidence summaries and case studies](#) that BRIDGE also developed.

The [Biodiversity Conservation Advances Global Health Priorities](#) summary demonstrates the value of integration between global health and biodiversity conservation. USAID's collaboration with the Gund Institute for Environment at the University of Vermont further advanced the evidence base for global health integration through forests and human well-being research. The collaborative paper [Impacts of Forests on Children's Diet in Rural Areas Across 27 Developing Countries](#) demonstrates the critical role intact forests and wild areas play in rural children's diets.

FINDINGS FROM THE BRIDGE ACTIVITY

In addition to assessing BRIDGE's evidence products and research, the evaluator looked at the activity's larger impacts on implementing Goal 2 of the Biodiversity Policy. Overall, the assessment found that after a slow start-up, BRIDGE has been highly successful in developing tools, guidance, and evidence to improve integrated biodiversity conservation programming while possibly being more limited in providing direct support to Missions and activity teams. Respondents most frequently discussed BRIDGE's successful tools and guidance, specifically the FAA 118/119 best practices guide, the thinking and working politically discussion note, and integration case studies.

Assessment participants consistently highlighted the 118/119 guide as an example of excellent guidance materials. BRIDGE staff has also provided direct support in a few countries for 118/119 analysis. However, the assessment was not able to clarify whether the direct assistance or the guidance itself was most effective in improving the analysis process. One Mission staff member noted that BRIDGE expertise allowed them to complete a 118/119 analysis in time to inform their CDCS, despite significant budget cuts and unexpected staffing shortages.

Respondents also noted that BRIDGE successfully demonstrated the benefits of thinking and working politically to biodiversity outcomes by integrating key DRG interests and expertise in the discussion note product. Mission staff members mentioned that the [Discussion Note](#) and BRIDGE's expertise have been central to their programming.

BRIDGE has also developed valuable [integration case studies](#) that demonstrate how Missions have successfully integrated biodiversity conservation and other programs. The ability of case studies to illustrate the viability of integrated programming and its implementation make them particularly useful to USAID.

The only reported limitation to BRIDGE’s impact has been its inability to engage with and support Missions during design stages. To avoid conflicts of interest in future procurements for the implementing partner, BRIDGE primarily relies on FAB staff or other implementing partners to apply guidance directly through technical support (with the exception of the noted I18/I19 analysis support). Respondents suggested that the guidance, and the resulting work, would have been strengthened if BRIDGE directly supported the design and implementation of integration programming.

FUTURE MILESTONES

In final data collection activities, respondents identified milestones as part of a vision for integrated programming in the next five years. As this was an open-ended question, few milestones were mentioned by more than one person. The assessment consolidated responses and summarized them in Table 2.

Table 2: Future Milestones for Biodiversity Conservation Integration

RESPONDENTS		
... EXPECT TO SEE	... WOULD LIKE TO SEE	... WOULD LOVE TO SEE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More CDCSs that include integration • Reduced “siloing” • Implementation of new integrated procurements • MEL plans that capture “integrated indicators” • More rigorous evidence of biodiversity impacts on human development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More flexible funding options (within the Biodiversity Code) to advance integration • Investment of funds from other sectors into biodiversity conservation programming • Missions assigning integration to leaders in the program office or technical offices • FAB promoting co-design with other offices and longer-term MEL efforts • USAID embracing and funding ENRM as a foundation of development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More host countries recognizing the value of integration and funding it • More agriculture and nutrition-related programs embracing biodiversity conservation and other ecosystem goods and services • A wild-caught fisheries office established by BFS • All economic planning tools at USAID taking into account ecosystem valuation • Office of Acquisition and Assistance recommending integration in solicitations, when relevant • Staff incentives in place to develop integrated programs

RECOMMENDATIONS

The guiding logic of the Biodiversity Policy’s integration goal still holds true: Biodiversity is an important component of human well-being, and encouraging integration and learning across sectors can expand conservation and development impacts. Given the institutional barriers that exist, USAID has been able to successfully promote biodiversity conservation integration, but there remain many opportunities to further expand integration efforts. ***The overall recommendation of this assessment is to continue to work to integrate biodiversity conservation across the Agency.***

To better achieve this vision for the future of integrated programming, the assessment produced a range of specific, actionable recommendations for FAB. The assessment team also worked with FAB to draft an after-evaluation action plan to implement key recommendations. These recommendations are summarized in four overarching themes.

I: EMPHASIZE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AS A FRAMEWORK FOR BIODIVERSITY INTEGRATION

The new [ENRM Framework](#) represents a significant opportunity to advocate for biodiversity conservation contributions to development outcomes and self-reliance, particularly with sectors like economic growth and food security. FAB’s future efforts should highlight biodiversity conservation’s critical role in the ENRM Framework by emphasizing the need for strong and sustainable natural resource management to support human development. Revitalizing the [nature, wealth, and power](#) concept—which the Agency used to develop the ENRM Framework—could be an excellent approach to attract other sectors to integrated programming.

The ecosystem-based adaptation evidence summaries and case studies also provide a valuable example of how to efficiently communicate a broad range of integration ideas, approaches, and justifications. Similar case studies of and guidance for integration efforts with specific sectors would both contribute to the evidence base and broaden the audience for biodiversity conservation integration. Additionally, the lessons learned from such evidence products could be consolidated into general guidance for integrated natural resource management across the Agency.

2: CONTINUE BUILDING CONSTITUENCIES AND CHAMPIONS FOR BIODIVERSITY INTEGRATION

In Washington, D.C., FAB should continue to support the integration working groups as joint ventures with other sectors that can lead to increased integration opportunities. FAB should additionally convene integration working groups with new partners to capitalize on emergent opportunities to advocate for, build evidence for, and implement integration. Such groups do not need to be long-lived to be effective, and long-term support of existing integration working groups should be weighed against other priorities and opportunities. Finally, FAB can increase outreach to Agency leadership to champion integration; clear messages and an outreach strategy will help to recruit higher-level support.

With more opportunities for integrated strategies, projects, and activities in Missions, building constituents and champions in the field could have more direct integration outcomes. FAB should build support for integration among Mission leaders, who influence Mission programs and who can make independent decisions about integrated programming. Biodiversity training should remain a tool for

fostering champions at the Mission level, and direct support to Missions should prioritize building field staff's capacity to implement integrated programs and activities.

3: CONTINUE DEVELOPING TOOLS AND GUIDANCE TO LEVERAGE HIGH-VALUE ENTRY POINTS

Existing tools and guidance can be better leveraged to support integration. For example, the FAA I18/I19 analysis is a tool to integrate biodiversity and tropical forest conservation into Mission strategic planning, but Missions do not always integrate the findings into strategies and programs. Successful approaches, such as direct support, should be expanded and scaled. As FAB's primary technical assistance partner, MI2 is already advancing integrated programs through design and MEL support. Since MI2 can provide direct pre-design and design support, FAB should expand MI2's remit and seek additional opportunities for the mechanism to pilot and refine integration.

In addition, the Open Standards theory of change tools should be adapted to better align with governance, food security, health, climate change, and economic growth concepts, priorities, processes, and vocabulary—an objective that FAB can spearhead through MI2. There may also be opportunities to leverage environmental compliance regulations to better incorporate biodiversity considerations into Agency planning. Efforts in this area should also ensure that Mission staff possess skills to effectively assess how the Mission's proposed activities may potentially affect biodiversity.

4: CONTINUE BUILDING THE EVIDENCE BASE FOR BIODIVERSITY INTEGRATION

Strong evidence products provide the knowledge base on which integrated activities and projects will be prioritized and designed. As FAB advances its integration efforts, appropriate and relevant evidence products will be essential to advocate for, adapt, and implement integrated programming. Other development sectors are also seeking more economic and causal evidence for the benefits of biodiversity integration. To generate this evidence, FAB should work with its coalitions and champions to begin designing and establishing 10- to 15-year MEL systems and longitudinal studies to build the case for integration and to reinforce best practices.

CONCLUSION

Overall, USAID has built a solid foundation for achieving Goal 2 of the Biodiversity Policy. The cohort of horizontal constituencies and champions in other sectors is growing, while FAB staff have become critical proponents for integrating cross-sector learning and practices into biodiversity programming. USAID efforts to leverage entry points have also progressed, particularly through BRIDGE's FAA I18/I19 guidance and MI2's support of integrated activity design. FAB and partners have begun to assemble an impressive collection of evidence products relevant to a range of sectors across USAID.

Missions are also eager to integrate biodiversity conservation into projects and activities. This assessment has shared examples of integration efforts at the Mission level, as well as Mission requests for additional support. In particular, Mission staff have requested:

- Consistent, long-term, and in-person support for the design of integrated projects and activities;
- Practical guidance for how to integrate activities and improved integration MEL support; and

- Adapted tools and processes for developing theories of change that incorporate the concepts, priorities, and practices of other sectors.

With the Agency's evident interest in and support of integration, FAB is well-placed to advance implementation of Goal 2 of the Biodiversity Policy over the next five years.

REFERENCE

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