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Defining Scope and Biodiversity Focal Interests in USAID Biodiversity Programming

AUGUST 2017

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ACRONYMS
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
SEA	Sustainable Ecosystems Advanced

I. INTRODUCTION

This document provides supplementary, in-depth but targeted guidance to assist United States Agency for International Development (USAID) staff and implementing partners as they complete the biodiversity program design process described in USAID's three _Biodiversity How-To Guides_.[1] These how-to guides have been developed to help design teams, program managers, and implementing partners systematically approach biodiversity conservation design, planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning within USAID's Program Cycle, and in compliance with the Agency's Biodiversity Policy.

This guide supplements _Biodiversity How-To Guide 1: Developing Situation Models in USAID Biodiversity Programming_. It provides more specific guidance about defining the scope of a biodiversity program and identifying biodiversity focal interests (see blue highlighted area in Figure 1 and Steps 1 and 2 in How-To Guide 1). USAID's Biodiversity Code requires that "site-based programs must have the intent to positively impact biodiversity in biologically significant areas." The process of defining the biodiversity program scope and identifying the biodiversity focal interests directly responds to this requirement.

Figure 1: Grand River Project Example – Situation Model with Biodiversity Program Scope and Focal Interests Highlighted[2]

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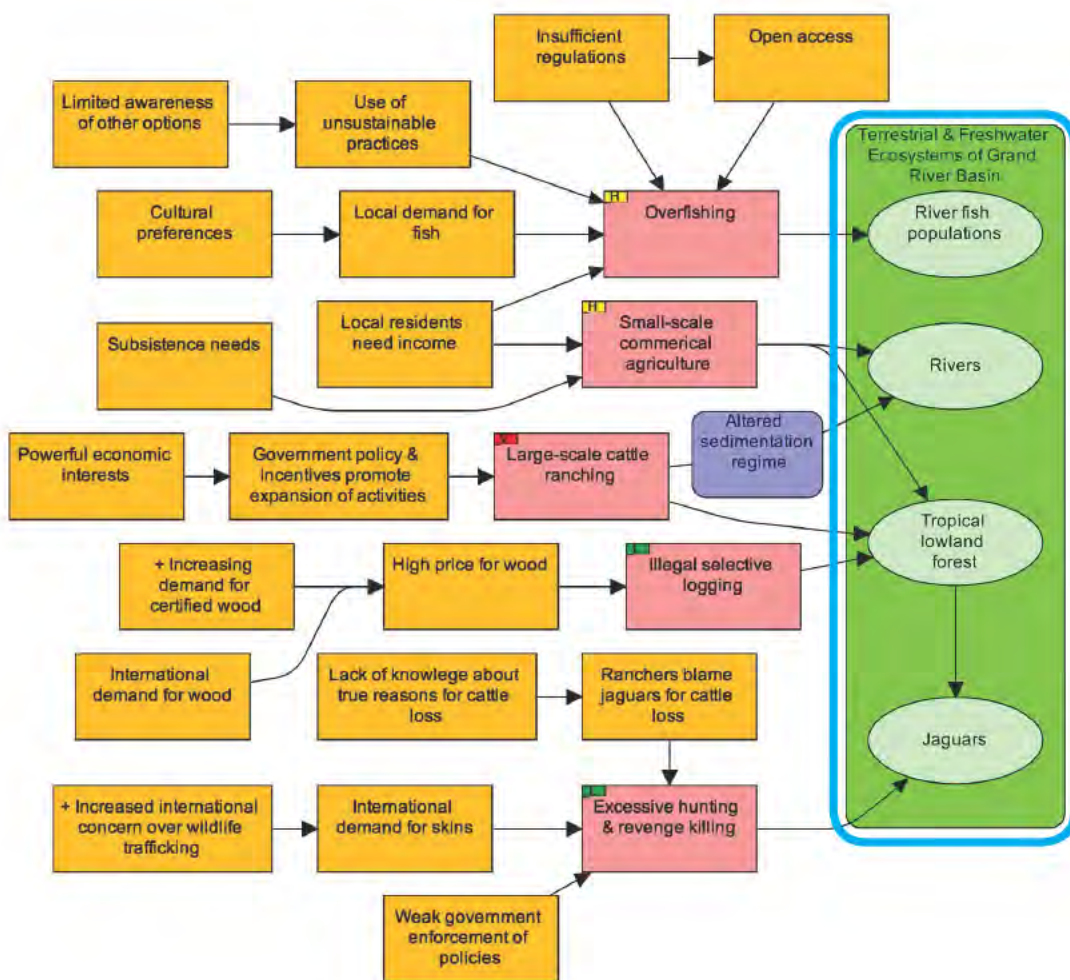
[1] USAID's Office of Forestry and Biodiversity developed three Biodiversity How-To Guides: 1) _Developing Situation Models in USAID Biodiversity Programming_; 2) _Using Results Chains to Depict Theories of Change in USAID Biodiversity Programming_; and 3) _Defining Outcomes and Indicators for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning in USAID Biodiversity Programming_. These how-to guides are based on requirements of the USAID Program Cycle and concepts from _The Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation_, a set of best practices for adaptive management developed by the Conservation Measures Partnership (of which USAID is a member) and widely used in the conservation community.

[2] Figure 1 and other figures in this supplemental guide were generated using Miradi Adaptive Management Software, which is approved for use in USAID biodiversity programs and can be used as a tool to support program design and implementation.

Developing a well-defined scope and set of biodiversity focal interests is a critically important, but often overlooked, process within the Program Cycle. The overall direction and potential impact of conservation efforts are underpinned by how a program[3] design team defines its geographic or thematic boundaries (i.e., biodiversity program scope) and what it determines are the key ecosystems, habitats, and species (i.e., biodiversity focal interests) it needs to conserve. These early decisions will shape the design and outcome of the project or activity. Therefore, it is critical that biodiversity program managers give this process sufficient time and thought and ensure the necessary skills, expertise, knowledge, and evidence are available to make sound decisions.

This supplemental guide outlines the following steps:

Step 1: Clarify and define the biodiversity program scope
Step 2: Draft an initial list of potential biodiversity focal interests
Step 3: Review the initial list of biodiversity focal interests and group or split them (as needed)
Step 4: Narrow the list of biodiversity focal interests to a manageable number

This supplemental guide uses the same fictitious example project (the Grand River project)[4] as used in the three Biodiversity How-To Guides. The purpose of the Grand River project example links to a fictitious Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) component – an Intermediate Result on "Biodiversity conservation for improved well-being of targeted rural communities." Although fictitious, the example is based on real-life contexts where conservation is an integral part of development.

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[3] For the purposes of this document, the terms "program" and "programming" are used as general terms to encompass USAID project and activity levels.

[4] The Grand River example used in the How-To Guides and this supplemental guide is a teaching example and should not be interpreted as an endorsement of any specific thematic or technical decisions taken along the course of the example development.

II.   WHAT ARE BIODIVERSITY PROGRAM SCOPE AND FOCAL INTERESTS?

A biodiversity program scope defines the broad parameters or rough boundaries (geographic or thematic) for where or on what a program will focus. Geographic scopes can be very broad (e.g., an ecoregion crossing national boundaries) or narrow (e.g., a small priority area) or something in between. Likewise, a thematic scope can be very specific (e.g., preventing ivory poaching in Northern Kenya) or much broader (e.g., promoting sustainable forestry across all of Asia).

Efforts to conserve or effectively manage ecoregions,[5] priority areas, or protected areas typically have a geographic scope or program area. Efforts to address threats, enabling conditions, or species have a thematic scope though they also often operate under a broad geographic boundary.

A biodiversity focal interest is an element of biodiversity (species, habitat, and/or ecosystem), within the defined program scope, that a program is working to conserve. Typically, a biodiversity program scope will include several biodiversity focal interests, which collectively represent the biodiversity of concern within the program scope. In choosing biodiversity focal interests, program design teams should consider focal interests that: 1) represent the biodiversity within the program scope, 2) reflect ecoregional or landscape-level conservation priorities, and 3) are viable or feasibly restorable.

Biodiversity focal interests can be plant or animal species like jaguars (here in Panama) or habitat/ecosystem types such as forests. Photo credit: Jerry Bauer, USAID.

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[5] An ecoregion is a "large unit of land or water containing a geographically distinct assemblage of species, natural communities, and environmental conditions."

III. HOW TO IDENTIFY AND SELECT SCOPE AND BIODIVERSITY FOCAL INTERESTS

Defining a program scope and selecting biodiversity focal interests are almost always a group effort. One person is rarely knowledgeable enough to define an appropriate program scope and develop a robust list of representative focal interests alone. Using the steps below, a diverse group of people – usually a program design team – with broad ecological knowledge of the region or topics should refer to existing technical information and institutional priorities to discuss and reach agreement on the program scope and a limited combination of biodiversity focal interests. Drawing in key stakeholders and outside expertise can make the thinking and end-products more robust. It is often useful to have a facilitator for this process.

Step 1: Clarify/Define Biodiversity Program Scope

Defining a program's biodiversity scope is an early step that is critical to shaping the design of the program but one that often receives little attention. A design team, however, should take the time needed to clearly define its biodiversity program scope. Doing so requires consulting with people knowledgeable about the geography, biodiversity, and/or theme and drawing upon the best information available.

A good starting point for identifying the biodiversity program scope and focal interests is a review of existing evidence. Design teams should not start the process without consulting prior efforts to catalogue, characterize, and prioritize biodiversity within the country or region. The results of these intensive efforts typically draw on key experts' experience and advice and can guide teams to make science-based strategic choices. National-level sources to consider include a country's Biodiversity and Tropical Forestry Analyses (118/119), National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plans (required under the Convention for Biological Diversity), and local ecologists and other experts from national and regional universities and research centers. Global biodiversity priority-setting exercises are also important resources. Examples include World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) Global 200 list, which provides a comparative analysis of biodiversity covering every major habitat type across the globe, or Conservation International's Hotspots, which catalogues the most heavily threatened regions where conservation success can have a meaningful impact in securing global biodiversity.[6]

Often, program design teams will have a rough idea of their geographic scope because of commitments beyond their direct control. Where a team has the flexibility to determine where they will work, they should consult the priority-setting resources previously mentioned and may find it useful consider similar questions and criteria at a national level as those used in global priority-setting initiatives. For example, the team should consider whether they should set their program scope to include:

- Areas of high biodiversity (e.g., coral reefs)
- Areas with unique biological features (e.g., montane grasslands or dry forests)
- Highly threatened areas (e.g., fragmented forests threatened by agricultural expansion and human settlement)
- Largely intact, less-threatened areas (e.g., remote, interior forests that are difficult to access)

From a pure biodiversity perspective, consider natural and ecological boundaries when defining a program scope.

Typically, a design team will also have to consider other conditions, such as political and/or management boundaries, since governments and ministries tend to be organized around these units. A design team may also have to consider social and political factors of the biodiversity program's context. For example there may be an area that, because of donor, local government or other key stakeholder preference, must be included in, or excluded from, the program scope area. If a team is having difficulty narrowing its program scope, commissioning an assessment may help advance their thinking. While design teams will often have to use both technical (ecological) and institutional criteria when defining biodiversity

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[6] See *Evidence in Action: How to deploy evidence for strategic approaches to biodiversity conservation* (forthcoming 2017) for additional information.

program scopes (and focal interests), it is important to understand that these are different filters to help them narrow the focus of their efforts. In determining a biodiversity program scope, these institutional (social/political) criteria can be applied before or after the technical criteria, with the assumption that after institutional criteria are applied, the result still contains areas of biological significance to select from. It is important not to mix technical and institutional criteria. Teams should document the process how these filters were used to make decisions.

A clear scope sets the initial boundaries for what the program will attempt to do. To meet the requirements of the Biodiversity Code that "site-based programs must have the intent to positively impact biodiversity in biologically significant areas," the scope should identify the biologically significant area and the evidence for its biological significance. For example, a program design team may set a geographic scope that encompasses a specific protected area (identified as a priority in the National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan) and its legally designated buffer zone. The defined program scope clarifies that the team is focusing only on that area and the biodiversity it encompasses. Wildlife or natural areas that fall outside of that protected area and buffer zone – no matter how important – would not be part of that program's scope. Likewise, a program with a thematic scope to decrease the threat of elephant poaching for ivory will focus only on elephants (not rhinos or other threatened species) and will also not focus on other threats like revenge killing for crop damage.
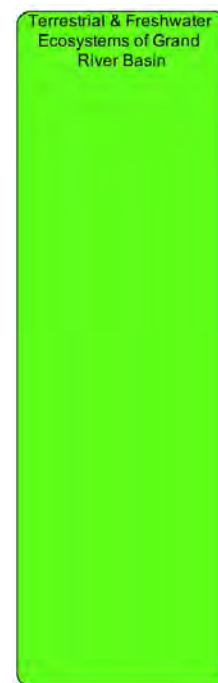
Figure 2: Grand River Project Example – Biodiversity Program Scope

In the Grand River project example, the team summarized their biodiversity program scope as "terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems of the Grand River Basin" (Figure 2), as mapped by la Universidad Autónoma (2016). The example project focuses on terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems within the Grand River Basin, though it will include close collaboration with neighboring municipalities that share these ecosystems." This additional detail clarifies where the project will focus and, importantly, where it will not focus.

In reality, there may be some indistinct boundaries, and it may not be entirely clear if a program scope is geographic, thematic, or both. Nevertheless, defining the program scope is a key step in focusing a program's efforts. Whether a biodiversity program scope is geographic or thematic is less important than being clear and specific about how the design team will define its work area. There is no "right" choice for a biodiversity program scope, but the team should clearly justify its decisions and understand that these decisions will shape the program.

Once the program design team discusses and agrees upon the biodiversity program scope, it is very useful to identify it on a map when possible – especially if the scope is geographic in nature, as it is in most cases.

The final products of this step should be a clear delimitation of the biodiversity program scope that everyone interprets equally and a description of how and why the team arrived at that decision.

Step 2: Draft an Initial List of Potential Biodiversity Focal Interests

Biodiversity focal interests are the species, habitats, and/or ecosystems on which a design team has chosen to focus its conservation efforts. Biodiversity focal interests should be clear and discrete and within USAID's manageable interest, yet also represent and encompass the full suite of biodiversity to be conserved and/or managed within the biodiversity program scope.

Developing and using biodiversity focal interests involves identifying a suite of ecosystems and/or species to represent the status of biodiversity and natural resources within the program scope. Biodiversity focal interests can be plant or animal species (e.g., elephants, jaguars, sea turtles, orchids) or habitat/ecosystem types (e.g., forests, peatlands, coral reefs).

There is no prescribed way to develop a list of biodiversity focal interests that is representative of the biodiversity or natural resources within the biodiversity program scope. A "coarse filter/fine filter approach" is a useful framework

for selecting biodiversity focal interests (The Nature Conservancy 2007). Coarse filter interests are usually ecosystems or community types that, when conserved, also conserve a larger suite of species and/or habitats. The species and natural communities conserved under a coarse filter are "nested interests" (Box 1). Fine filter interests include species and communities that are not captured well by coarse filter interests and, therefore, require individual attention. These biodiversity focal interests may be rare, face unique threats, and/or or require unique strategic approaches.

When trying to conserve the full expression of biodiversity of an ecoregion, there is a tendency to include more biodiversity focal interests than teams can track and measure with available resources. Since development programs are resource-limited, it is important to keep the overall number of biodiversity focal interests manageable. As mentioned in Box 1, a limited list of nested biodiversity focal interests can help teams manage some of the complexity.

Regardless of a program's size, it is almost always possible to select a focused list of eight or fewer[8] focal interests that best capture the biodiversity within the program scope. Typically,

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Box 1: Using Nested Biodiversity Focal Interests

Sometimes teams wish to highlight specific components of a broad biodiversity focal interest and will "nest" those components within the broader focal interest. These nested interests are species, ecological communities, and/or ecosystems that are also conserved if the broader biodiversity focal interest within which they are found is conserved. For example, a biodiversity focal interest of tropical mangroves might have nested interests that include fiddler crabs, roseate spoonbills, and other endemic plant and animal species.

Teams can capture their nested interests in a table to make it explicit which species, ecological communities, and/or ecosystems they assume will be conserved under the broader focal interest. If a team has very broad biodiversity focal interests, developing such a table can help the team be clearer about the biodiversity that the team intends to influence through its program. The list of nested species, ecological communities, and ecosystems typically include species that have special status ratings (e.g., IUCN RED List species), and it is important to convey how their needs will be addressed by conserving the broader biodiversity focal interest.

The nested interest, biodiversity focal interest, or biodiversity program scope will depend on the scale at which the design team is working. For example, a wide-ranging species like the Bengal tiger could be the biodiversity program scope (for a thematically oriented program), a biodiversity focal interest within a program (for a program with the Sundarbans as the biodiversity program scope), or a nested focal interest within an ecosystem (such as the mangroves of the Sundarbans). The "right" choice will depend on the scale at which the team focuses and the way they choose to define the context they are trying to influence.

Teams, however, should keep in mind that it is not practical to manage for and monitor all nested species. The most important nested interests could be captured as key ecological attributes when doing a viability analysis.[7]

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these biodiversity focal interests – whether keystone species[9] or representative ecosystem types – are vital to a team's efforts because they have an umbrella effect: conserving or restoring them will allow teams to conserve many other species or ecosystems not explicitly selected.

To select biodiversity focal interests, it is important to draw on the expertise and knowledge of those familiar with the context, as well as any available assessments, literature, project reports, and other evidence that can inform the process. A design team should start by listing ecosystems as potential biodiversity focal interests, as these focal interest types tend to include the majority of biodiversity in a given site (i.e., they serve as "coarse filters"). The team should next apply a "fine filter" approach to identify any important species or groups of species that are subject to threats that would continue even if the identified ecosystems were not conserved (e.g., unsustainable hunting, overfishing, disease).

It can be helpful to use large sticky notes or notecards to place proposals onto a wide work area (whiteboard, wall, etc.) for a whole team to discuss, if it has more than five members. Any team member should then feel free to propose modifications, clarifications, and/or additions. Using this interactive process, the team can start to group or split focal interests, as appropriate. Geospatial data can also help teams identify and refine their candidate set of biodiversity focal interests (see Box 2 on page 10).

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[7] See Step 2 in *Biodiversity How-To Guide 1: Developing Situation Models in USAID Biodiversity Programming* and Step 3 in The Nature Conservancy 2007.

[8] This best practice number of eight or fewer comes from years of experience The Nature Conservancy has had planning and designing conservation efforts over thousands of sites. Organizations using the *Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation* have been following this guideline with good results, also across hundreds of sites.

[9] Keystone species are those whose presence is crucial in maintaining the organization and diversity of the ecological communities in which they are found. The integrity and stability of the community are determined by keystone species' activities and abundances (Paine 1969; Mills et al. 1993).

Step 3: Review Initial List and Group or Split Biodiversity Focal Interests (as Needed)

Typically, design teams will identify more biodiversity focal interests than they can feasibly manage to address through their programming. Alternatively, some may try to avoid this problem by grouping many potential biodiversity focal interests under an umbrella name. This may work on occasion, but it will not work in every circumstance.

Deciding whether to group or split biodiversity focal interests can seem somewhat confusing. Indeed, the decision is not always clear-cut, and there is no right answer.

Group biodiversity focal interests if they co-occur on the landscape, share common ecological processes, share similar direct threats, and therefore require similar strategic approaches.

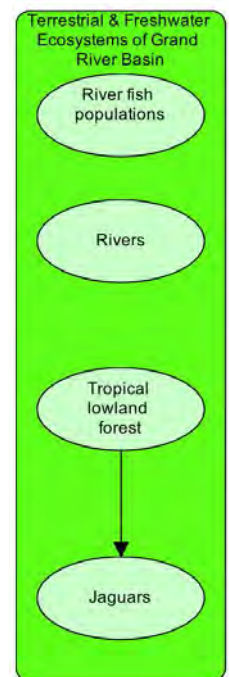Some common examples of biodiversity focal interests that could be grouped include:

- A forest block and its associated plant and animal species, if the only factors affecting the survival of the associated species are the health and area coverage of the forest. For example, a biodiversity focal interest of "Andean paramo" might incorporate all the paramo grass and rodent species because (1) the species co-occur with the Andean paramo focal interest, (2) they require the same ecological processes supported by a healthy Andean paramo system, and (3) the threats to the paramo itself (e.g., urban encroachment, agriculture) are the same as those affecting the grass and rodent species. Thus, if the Andean paramo is conserved, then the team can be fairly confident the associated grass and rodent species will also be conserved.
- Groupings of animals or plants that share a common ecological process or behavior. For example, a team could group the biodiversity focal interests of mountain lions, wolves, and bears into one focal interest called "top predators," or a team might group the ferruginous hawk, long-billed curlew, Cassin's sparrow, and other threatened migratory birds into one focal interest called "migratory prairie birds."
- Any species or ecosystem that falls under an umbrella species. For example, if a team in Central Asia chooses snow leopards as their biodiversity focal interest, they might assume that they will also ensure the survival of the blue sheep and the Asiatic ibex – two important species for snow leopard survival.

Figure 3: Grand River Project Example – Biodiversity Focal Interests

Split biodiversity focal interests if they are subject to threats not addressed through ecosystem conservation, are subject to threats that fall outside program scope, and/or are politically important species or ecosystems.

Some common examples of biodiversity focal interests that could be split include:

- Animal or plant species that are directly threatened by hunting, fishing, or any other type of harvesting. In these cases, conserving their habitat will likely not be sufficient to guarantee their survival. For example, the hunting of bushmeat may not significantly alter a forest's condition, but the primates within that forest could be decimated.

- Plant or animal species that are threatened by disease or competition from non-native invasive species. In this case, even if the surrounding habitat or ecosystem remains mostly intact, the affected native plant or animal species are likely to die out through competition or disease. For example, the spread of infectious salmon anemia from farmed salmon to wild species may severely threaten wild species without having any significant impact on their ocean habitat.
- Specific wide-ranging or migratory species that might be subject to threats that fall outside of the biodiversity program scope. For example, a wide-ranging species like African elephants may need both savannah and forest ecosystems to meet food and habitat needs. A team working in forests and mountains may wish to identify elephants as a biodiversity focal interest since ensuring the health of forest ecosystems does not guarantee the health of elephant populations.
- Politically important species or ecosystems that a team could use to generate public support for its project. For example, it might make sense to identify specific biodiversity focal interests, such as a charismatic animal (panda bear) or a historically important or symbolic species (redwood trees), even if these species could be conserved by conserving the broader ecosystem within which they occur.

In the Grand River project example, the team chose four biodiversity focal interests (Figure 3 on page 10). They split river fish populations from their rivers (ecosystem) biodiversity focal interest because they knew that the fish populations were highly threatened by overfishing and are of importance to USAID as a food source for vulnerable populations. Conserving the rivers would not guarantee the survival of key fish populations. Likewise, the team split jaguars out from the tropical lowland forest in part because of hunting pressures, but also because jaguars are an important and charismatic cultural icon in the area. To ensure buy-in from local stakeholders and donors, the design team knew it should specifically identify jaguars as a focus of their project.

Step 4: Narrow the List of Biodiversity Focal Interests to a Manageable Number

Once a program design team has identified potential biodiversity focal interests and made decisions about grouping and splitting them, team members will need to narrow their list to eight or fewer interests. For a smaller, focused program, this may be a fairly easy task. A larger program, however, may struggle with this. Despite the challenges, it is important to keep this list manageable, as a team commits itself and program resources to the focal interests it chooses.

The team should select a limited number of the biodiversity focal interested identified that have the following characteristics:

- *Represent* the biodiversity at the site. The biodiversity focal interests should collectively represent or capture the array of ecological systems, communities, and species at the project area, and the multiple spatial scales at which they occur.
- *Reflect* ecoregional and landscape-level conservation aims. Teams should ground their focal interest selection in priorities expressed in higher-level priority-setting documents, such as the National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan and/or ecoregional and landscape-level priorities identified in key assessments or by the host country government and partners.
- *Are viable or at least feasibly restorable*. Viability (or integrity) indicates the ability of a biodiversity focal interest to persist for many generations. If a biodiversity focal interest is on the threshold of collapse, or conserving a

Rows of beehive ovens used for a charcoal operation in Pará state, Brazil. Photo credit: Eric Stoner.

proposed focal interest requires extraordinary human intervention, it may not represent the best use of limited resources.

- *Are threatened or likely to be threatened.* A team should consider how threatened potential focal interests are and make intentional decisions about why they prioritize those focal interests. For instance, it may make sense to identify highly threatened focal interests to ensure that programmatic interventions work to decrease the level of threat. However, it may be wise to identify less-threatened biodiversity focal interests to keep them from becoming threatened in the future. Doing so might require fewer resources and avoid potential costly action in the future.

In addition to these technical criteria, institutional and political considerations may play a role in identifying biodiversity focal interests. Some common considerations include:

- *CDCS priorities.* Teams should refer to priorities and conditions addressed in the CDCS and ensure their biodiversity focal interests are consistent (or at least compatible) with CDCS priorities.
- *Strategic value.* If work to positively impact a particular biodiversity focal interest could leverage other development actions, generate synergies among partner organizations, and/or lead to public support, then the selection of that biodiversity focal interest may be favored.
- *Provision of key ecosystem services.* When finalizing a list of biodiversity focal interests, design teams could consider a focal interest's ability to provide important ecosystem services, its likelihood of doing so, and the number of people who would benefit in a meaningful way from that ecosystem service. For example, a design team may decide to include fish populations as a biodiversity focal interest because they provide food and support fisheries livelihoods for an entire region. They may decide not to include jaguars, however, because they provide fewer or less-obvious ecosystem services and only a small number of people (i.e., those in tourism) benefit from those ecosystem services.

After going through the four steps, the design team should have a manageable list of biodiversity focal interests (eight or fewer) that collectively represent the biodiversity within their program scope. Each biodiversity focal interest should include a clear description of the focal interest, a justification for why the design team chose that focal interest, any references to important technical information about the focal interest, and any remaining questions or comments the team has regarding the focal interest. This documentation is important for the team's own record-keeping and later review, as well as for discussions with those not directly involved in the planning process.

See Box 3 for a reminder about setting (sub) purpose statements for biodiversity focal interests – an important step covered in more detail in *Biodiversity How-To Guide 2: Using Results Chains to Depict Theories of Change in USAID Programming*.

> *Box 3: Refresher – Setting (Sub) Purpose Statements for Biodiversity Focal Interests*
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> *Defining the biodiversity program scope and biodiversity focal interests is an important step in developing the purpose and/or sub-purpose of a project or activity (something a design team will do at a later point in the methodology laid out in the Biodiversity How-To Guides). Developing the purpose and/or sub-purpose involves defining in a statement the desired future state of the biodiversity program scope and each biodiversity focal interest. To define the (sub) purpose[10] for biodiversity focal interests, it is important to consider key ecological attributes the focal interest needs in order to ensure its viability. These include a certain size, condition, and landscape context. For more information and detailed guidance, see Step 1 in* Biodiversity How-To Guide 2: Using Results Chains to Depict Theories of Change in USAID Biodiversity Programming*.*

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[10] For clarity, the term "(sub) purpose" refers to a purpose or sub-purpose, depending on the level of planning within a mission's results framework.

IV. EXAMPLES OF PROCESSES TO DEFINE THE DISTRIBUTION OF BIODIVERSITY FOCAL INTERESTS

EXAMPLE 1: NIASSA NATIONAL RESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN (MOZAMBIQUE)

Team members brainstorm, discuss, group, and split ecosystems and species. Photo credit: Kathleen Flower/WCS.

In June 2016, the Wildlife Conservation Society and the National Administration for Conservation Areas brought together local stakeholders to develop a management plan for the Niassa Reserve – Mozambique's largest protected area (42,000 km^2) and part of the Niassa-Selous Transfrontier Conservation Area, linking to the Tanzanian Lukwika-Lumesule Game Reserve.

The biodiversity program scope was already legally defined as the Niassa Reserve protected area boundaries. Working within this program scope, the team identified the following biodiversity focal interests: inselbergs, mountain forest, miombo woodlands, rivers and tributaries, dambos/wetland systems, elephants, and big carnivores. The team grouped several potential focal interests by naming common broader ecosystems (e.g., rivers and tributaries, dambos/wetland systems) that were important from a biodiversity perspective, while they split out focal interests that might not be addressed through the conservation of broader ecosystems. More specifically, they chose elephants because there has been intense poaching pressure due to the ivory market, and they chose big carnivores because these carnivores are also subject to poaching for trophy purposes, traditional medicine markets, and retaliatory killings for livestock losses.

They then mapped the location of these biodiversity focal interests by hand on a paper map to be digitized at a later point. Even this simple map is sufficient to help teams visualize their biodiversity focal interests and understand how they fit into the broader landscape that made up the biodiversity program scope, as well as how they experience threats within that landscape.

Presenting mapped biodiversity focal interests. Photo credit: Kathleen Flower/WCS.

EXAMPLE 2: MESOAMERICAN CARIBBEAN REEF (MEXICO, BELIZE, GUATEMALA, AND HONDURAS)[11]

The Mesoamerican Caribbean Reef ranges from the Bay Islands of Honduras north through Guatemala and Belize to the tip of Mexico's Yucatán peninsula. The reef, part of an interconnected system of coastal habitats and currents, is one of WWF's Global 200 priority ecoregions – areas of exceptional biodiversity whose protection are vital for the conservation of the world's biodiversity.

Starting in 1999, a group of experts from across the region worked with WWF staff to identify significant features that best represent the reef's biodiversity. This led to an initial biodiversity program scope with eight subregions (Figure 4).

The following year, the group refined the ecoregional and subregional boundaries that defined their biodiversity program scope based on a biophysical analysis of available evidence (Figure 5). This refinement recognized the influence of the major terrestrial watersheds on the health of the reef. This "reef to ridge" project area had broad implications for conservation efforts, as it identified the need to look beyond traditional reef boundaries to work on direct threats and drivers associated with terrestrial watersheds. While this process happened some time ago, the lessons about revisiting and updating a program scope still hold today for teams around the world.

Figure 4: Initial Biodiversity Program Scope and Subregions for Mesoamerican Caribbean Reef
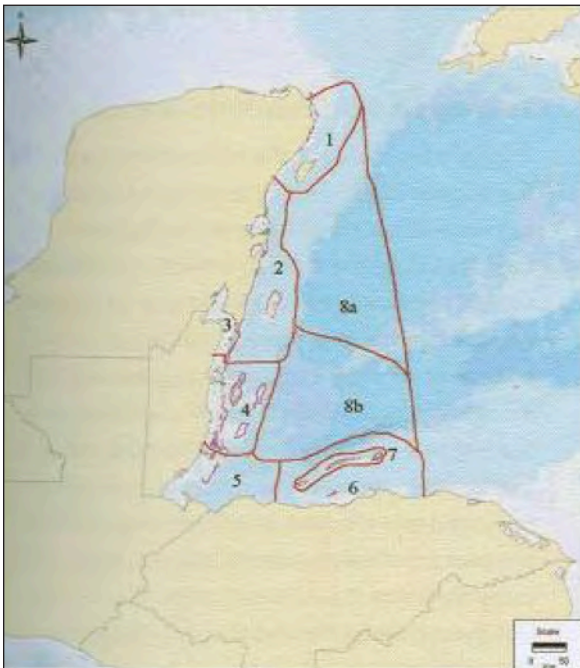

Figure 5: Refined Biodiversity Program Scope and Subregions for Mesoamerican Caribbean Reef

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[11] Information for this example comes from Kramer, Philip A. and Kramer, Patricia R. (2002) *Ecoregional Conservation Planning for the Mesoamerican Caribbean Reef*.

EXAMPLE 3: USAID SUSTAINABLE ECOSYSTEMS ADVANCED (SEA) PROJECT (INDONESIA)[12]

The biodiversity program scope for USAID SEA encompasses several levels of governance: national level, Fisheries Management Area 715, and 13 districts within three adjacent provinces (West Papua, North Maluku, and Maluku) in eastern Indonesia (Figure 6). The design team defined the scope based on the area's high marine biodiversity, status as a national priority area for fisheries, presence of small island provinces/districts, high rates of extreme poverty, and high vulnerability to climate change.

Figure 6: USAID/Indonesia SEA Biodiversity Program Scope
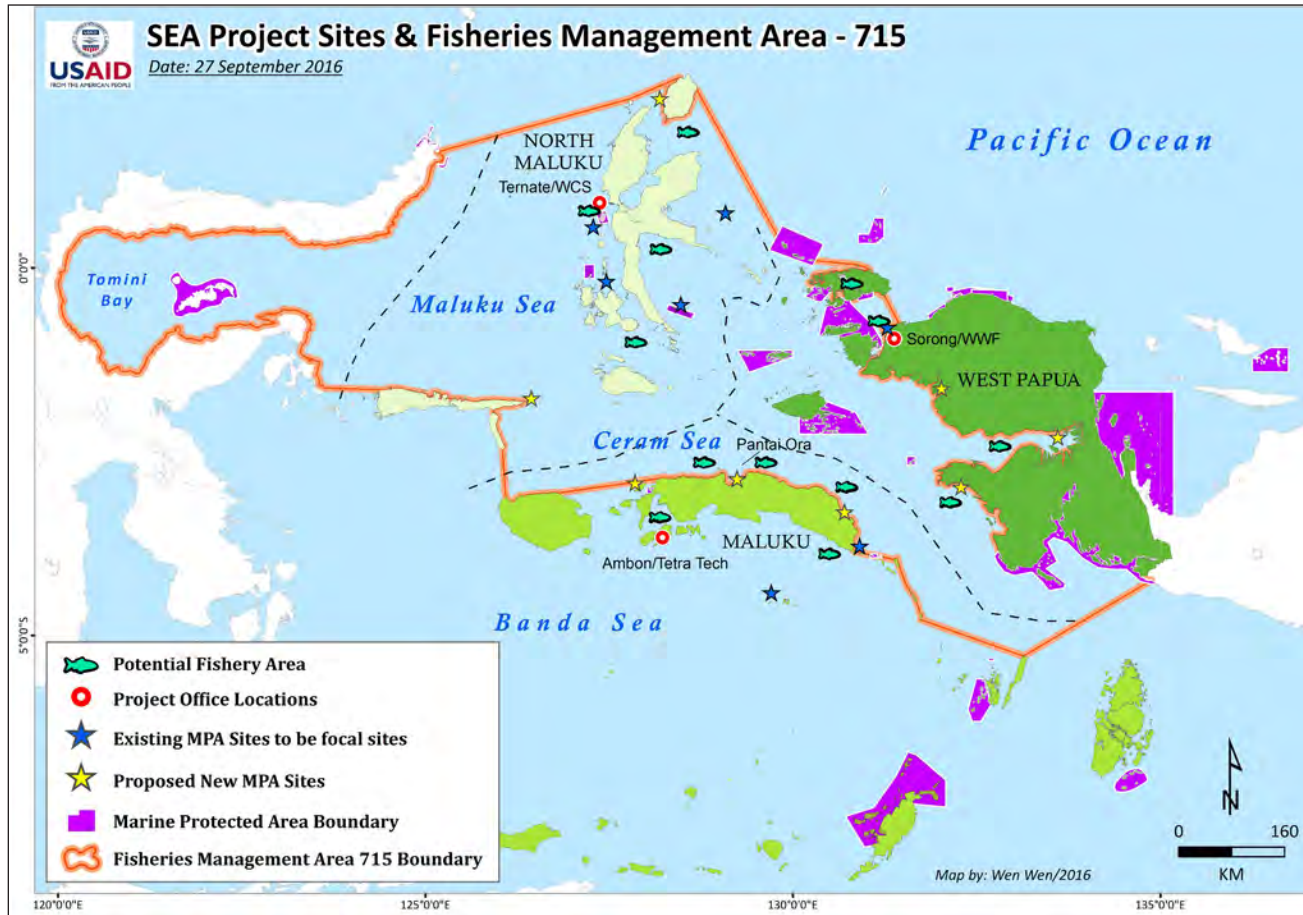
This scope was the result of many discussions and key decisions involving ecological, political, social, and institutional considerations. Some of the main factors the USAID SEA design team considered included:

Technical Criteria:

- *Biodiversity priorities:* USAID/Indonesia drew upon a USAID-funded assessment that determined the Geographic Priorities for Marine Conservation in Indonesia. This consultative assessment involved more than 40 scientists, researchers, and managers and identified priority areas to inform government planning for a national network of marine protected areas. The assessment identified northeast Indonesia as one of the priority conservation areas.
- *Emphasizing an ecosystem approach to fisheries management:* Some design team members felt it was important to demonstrate an approach that recognizes the importance of an ecosystem-based, multi-species approach to fisheries management, while also including appropriate management levels across the ecological area (e.g., nested levels of governance, ensuring neighboring districts and provinces coordinate with each other and the

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[12] Information for this example comes from USAID/Indonesia Sustainable Ecosystems Advanced (SEA) Project First Annual Work Plan, March 2016 to September 2017.

national government). The design team decided to focus its site-based work on the three provinces that border the Halmahera Sea, which could serve as a demonstration of an ecosystem approach to fisheries management in Indonesia that involves districts, provinces, and the national government.

- *Refining the geographic scope after the award:* One of the biggest challenges for the activity was defining where specifically to target work on fisheries management. Although the activity is focused on sustainable management of fisheries within a single fisheries management, in some cases the administrative units of government that are responsible for fisheries management area at the district and provincial level are not confined to this single area. For example, one major fish landing site is located outside the fisheries management area but services fishing boats that were harvesting fish from multiple fisheries management areas, some outside of USAID SEA's geographic scope. Thus, actions to address fisheries management in this province could not be limited to resources harvested from a single fisheries management area. In other words, the USAID SEA actions would need to expand slightly beyond its initial program scope, as determined after the award had been made.

Institutional Criteria:

- *Support to host country government:* USAID/Indonesia wanted to support the national government efforts to improve fisheries management. By explicitly including part of the 11 large fisheries management areas in its biodiversity program scope, the mission could effectively demonstrate its support.
- *USAID/Indonesia mission priorities:* The mission decided to try to co-locate most of its work in eastern Indonesia, as this region had a great need for development and was home to highly vulnerable human populations with unmet health needs. USAID's Biodiversity Policy and Biodiversity Code require that biodiversity funds be used in priority areas for biodiversity – a potential challenge for missions that want to co-locate their work. In the case of Indonesia, however, the marine biodiversity assessment independently identified the northeast corner of Indonesia as a priority biodiversity area.
- *Whether to build upon past work or enter into new geographic areas:* The USAID SEA design team had to determine whether to locate it in areas with previous USAID/Indonesia support and build upon that momentum or to shift to new ones. Recognizing the benefits and drawbacks of each option, the design team decided to expand its support to new areas in order to build on the successful ongoing work in Raja Ampat, a protected area within Fisheries Management Area 715. Many NGOs were working in the area with substantial support from foundations. USAID/Indonesia saw an opportunity to both safeguard marine protected area investments by ensuring sustainable fishing in the area and foster partnerships with others working in Raja Ampat.

Biodiversity Focal Interests

During the design phase, the USAID SEA team discussed how to identify its biodiversity focal interests. Indonesia is located within the Coral Triangle – a global center of marine biodiversity with rich and productive coral reef and mangrove ecosystems. Coral reef fisheries and small pelagic fisheries are some of the most biodiverse in the world and are critical for local food security, nutrition, livelihoods, and national revenues. USAID SEA is predicated on an ecosystem approach to fisheries management and marine biodiversity conservation, including the goods and services derived from management and conservation. This approach requires a focus on protecting and managing both critical habitats and species. Given this context and after many conversations, the USAID SEA design team identified several biodiversity focal interests, including coral reef ecosystems and fish (such as grouper and snapper), mangrove forests, seagrass meadows, endangered coastal and marine species, small pelagics (fish), and highly migratory species (such as tuna).

The design team also discussed the scale of the focal interests. Considering the characteristic in Indonesia's fisheries, especially in Fisheries Management Area 715, the team decided to emphasize small-scale fisheries over large-scale fisheries. The rationale was that these fisheries are very dominant (with a fishing capacity nearly equal to medium- and large-scale fisheries) and are in need of better management to ensure sustainable fish stocks. Additionally, small-scale fisheries contribute more fish to domestic markets in Indonesia and employ more people than larger-scale fisheries.

While USAID SEA invested a lot of time and discussion up front, the end result was a clear and well-justified scope and biodiversity focal interests.

V.   RESOURCES

BIODIVERSITY PROGRAM SCOPE

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SELECTING BIODIVERSITY FOCAL INTERESTS WITH MANY STAKEHOLDERS

For a description of a process for selecting biodiversity focal interests across a large region and in conjunction with a wide group of stakeholders, see pages 8-9 in particular in:

The Nature Conservancy and Foundations of Success. 2007. Conservation of Biodiversity in the Hudson River Estuary – The Process. A Report on a Multi-Stakeholder Workshop Series Using a Modified Version of TNC's CAP Process. Available from: http://www.fosonline.org/resources.