EXTERNAL DIALOGUES:

Summary of Climate Strategy Special Objective Focus Groups with USAID Implementing Partners

CONTENTS

BACKGROUND: MOTIVATION AND GOALS OF THE PROJECT

In October and November 2022, USAID's Bureau for Management (M Bureau), Office of Management Policy, Budget, and Performance (MPBP), conducted six focus groups that involved some of USAID's Implementing Partner (IP) organizations. USAID conducted the focus groups to learn how it could, from a customer experience perspective, best collaborate with the IP organizations to implement USAID's Climate Strategy 2022-2030. M/MPBP focused specifically on the Special Objective of that strategy: "Do Our Part: Strengthen operations and approaches to programming to address climate change and further climate justice within USAID and our partner organizations."

USAID conducted two sets of focus groups: one that focused on operational greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the other that focused on strengthening diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in the workforce that focuses on climate and the environment.

USAID's goal for the operational GHG emissions focus groups was to understand the actions the IP organizations were implementing and/or planning to implement to improve their energy efficiency, reduce their operational GHG emissions, and to work toward net-zero goals. USAID was also interested in identifying and understanding the barriers the IP organizations are facing in their efforts to reduce their operational GHG emissions.

Through the workforce DEIA focus groups, USAID sought to understand the actions IP organizations were implementing and planning to implement to improve DEIA, and how those efforts would help them achieve their climate goals. USAID was also interested in understanding the barriers the IP organizations were facing in their efforts to improve workforce DEIA.

USAID intended this effort to be an initial dialogue with its IP organizations to socialize the Special Objective; benchmark IPs' related initiatives; identify additional learning opportunities; and inform actions USAID could take to optimally engage with, incentivize, and support its IP organizations as USAID implements its Climate Strategy.

IMPLEMENTATION

USAID conducted four operational GHG emissions focus groups: two included five (5) IP organizations and two included three (3) IP organizations, for a total of 16 unique IP organizations and 20 unique individual participants. USAID invited 28 IP organizations, which means the organizational participation response rate was 57%. USAID conducted two workforce DEIA focus groups: one included five (5) IP organizations, while the other included three (3), with a total of 10 unique individual participants. One (1) IP organization emailed answers after USAID held the focus groups. Overall, nine (9) of the 20 IP organizations USAID invited ultimately participated, for an organizational participation response rate of 45%. USAID held the focus groups via Google Meet between October 31 and November 6, 2022. Each focus group lasted 90 minutes.

In the Methodology section that begins on page 18 of this report, USAID described the approach it used to identify the IP organizations it invited to participate in the focus groups. In the Appendix, USAID also included a list of the IP organizations it invited and that participated in the focus groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section includes both M/MPBP's recommendations for USAID based on M/MPBP's analysis of the focus groups participants' inputs, as well as the participants' recommendations for USAID. M/MPBP categorized the recommendations by type (i.e., "follow-up efforts" and "new USAID activities and efforts") and domain (i.e., "reducing GHG emissions" and "workforce DEIA").

> **Editorial Note:** In several cases, participants recommended that USAID take action related to engaging its IP organizations about reducing operational GHG emissions. The USG is following established USG rulemaking processes to inform and solicit feedback from the public when considering establishing USG-wide contractual requirements for reducing, measuring, and tracking GHG emissions. If necessary, USAID will act at the agency level once the USG rulemaking processes finish. USAID encourages its IPs to follow the relevant Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) cases and use the opportunity for public comments to express their suggestions and concerns. IPs may be interested in Case 2021-015, *Disclosure of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate-Related Financial Risk*, for which the public comment period closed on 13 February 2023 (see https://www.regulations.gov/document/FAR-2021-0015-0037), and Case 2021-016, *Minimizing the Risk of Climate Change in Federal Acquisitions*, for which the Federal Acquisition Regulatory Council is drafting a proposed rule and will solicit public comments.

M/MPBP'S GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP EFFORTS

1. Share this report with the focus group participants and other IP organizations via USAID's Industry Liaison and industry association groups, within USAID, and with partner U.S. Government (USG) agencies (i.e., the Department of State, the General Services Administration [GSA], and the Council on Environmental Quality [CEQ]).

2. Conduct a more complete effort to collect data to enable USAID to more robustly and quantitatively analyze IP organizations' efforts to implement initiatives that align with the Special Objective and to inform USAID's efforts to implement the Special Objective. Implementing this recommendation would require USAID to:

    a. Develop a list of all relevant IP organizations (domestic, international, and local);
    b. Develop a survey with more specific and precise questions, based on the results of the initial focus groups;
    c. Submit a Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) clearance package to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and receive OMB approval to conduct the survey; and
    d. Invite IP organizations to complete the survey.

    USAID should explore two other options for collecting this information, if the burden of exploring these options is not greater than doing the survey itself. First, explore partnering with CEQ to coordinate with other USG agencies that operate internationally (i.e., the Department of State, Peace Corps, etc.) to collect the information. Second, explore collaborating, through USAID's Industry Liaison, with industry organizations to develop and distribute the survey.

PARTICIPANTS' GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW USAID ACTIVITIES & EFFORTS

Participants in all of the focus groups mentioned that they regard and respect USAID as a leader by virtue of its activities and efforts to drive GHG emissions reduction activities in the international development and humanitarian assistance fields. Also, all participants shared that they appreciated the opportunity to participate in the focus groups and interactions; they found them to be beneficial, informational, and inspiring, and expressed their willingness to engage in similar efforts in the future.

The focus group participants recommended that USAID leverage its leadership position to help its IP organizations implement and promote activities to reduce their GHG emissions and strengthen their workforce DEIA by:

1. Organizing for its IP organizations additional information exchange opportunities, such as focus groups or webinars. These opportunities could focus on more specific and narrowly-defined issues, such as the best metrics and methodologies to use when tracking GHG emissions or diversity in organizations.

2. Organizing educational workshops for its IP organizations to share information amongst themselves. These workshops could help the smaller IP organizations develop and implement policies and procedures, which they could do with help from the larger and more advanced IP organizations.

M/MPBP's GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW AND ONGOING USAID ACTIVITIES & EFFORTS

Participants from the smaller IP organizations indicated consistently that their organizations rely on external consultants to address technical topics for which they lack in-house expertise. In addition, almost all participants expressed concerns that they lack funding for some of the specialized activities that are necessary to (a) modify the organizations' operations to reduce GHG emissions and (b) optimize implementation and tracking of DEIA goals. With these issues in mind, M/MPBP recommends that USAID:

1. As stated in the "Editorial Note" on page 2, encourage its IPs to follow the relevant FAR cases and use the opportunity for public comments to express their suggestions and concerns. In addition, to ensure its IPs are aware of public comment opportunities, USAID should continue to inform its IPs whenever the Federal Acquisition Regulatory Council holds public comment periods for pertinent cases.

2. Continue to monitor and engage in the ongoing USG rulemaking processes to account for USAID's goals and concerns unique to the Agency's awards that are implemented overseas, including related to on-site activities like transportation, accommodations, purchasing and using clean and/or renewable energy, and data tracking and reporting. To inform USAID's position and better understand how it relates to others' positions, the Agency may have an opportunity to engage with other overseas-presence USG agencies, CEQ, and industry organizations.

3. Continue leveraging opportunities to thoughtfully integrate USAID's Climate Strategy into its program award solicitations, deliverables, and evaluation criteria.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REDUCING GHG EMISSIONS

The participants stated clearly that they expect USAID will provide specific guidance for IP organizations for reducing, measuring, and tracking GHG emissions and related activities.

M/MPBP's Recommendation:

1. Monitor and engage in the ongoing USG rulemaking processes to account for USAID's goals and concerns unique to the Agency's awards that are implemented overseas, including related to on-site activities like transportation, accommodations, purchasing and using clean and/or renewable energy, and data tracking and reporting. To inform USAID's position and better understand how it relates to others' positions, the Agency may have an opportunity to engage with other overseas-presence USG agencies, CEQ, and industry organizations.

Participants' Recommendations:

1. USAID's guidance should reflect the activities and priorities USAID implements internally (e.g., for vehicles, business travel, etc.). USAID should frame the guidance for its IP organizations as a "follow the leader" message.

2. USAID should align and make its priorities, policies, and guidance consistent with other USG agencies' priorities, policies, and guidance to reduce burden on IP organizations.

3. USAID should develop and share with its IPs a long-term plan to reduce GHG emissions through which USAID:
   a. States its priorities clearly.
   b. Provides clear timetables for IP organizations to voluntarily implement activities that align with USAID's Climate Strategy priorities.
   c. Offers precise definitions, measures, metrics, and methodologies.
   d. Recognizes and allows for differences between large and small IP organizations, large and small projects, and geographical locations.

4. USAID should coordinate with other donor organizations to discuss and explore coalescing around standards globally to reduce burden on IP organizations and standardize tracking and reporting.

   USAID Editorial Note: Implementing some of these participants' recommendations would require USG rulemaking. As a USG agency, USAID must, at minimum, align with USG-wide rules and guidance. Through open FAR cases and a notice-and-comment rulemaking process, the USG is considering establishing requirements for partners to track, report, and reduce their GHG emissions. While USAID always considers global applicability and burden on IPs, USAID encourages IPs to use the notice-and-comment opportunities in the USG rulemaking process to articulate their concerns and suggestions.

PARTICIPANTS' POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORKFORCE DEIA

There was a clear difference between the participants' responses in the operational GHG emissions and workforce DEIA focus groups. Whereas in the operational GHG emissions focus groups participants highlighted significant differences between the various IP organizations, including related to their size, operational priorities, and organizational structure, the most salient feature of the workforce DEIA focus groups was that most of the participants noted that their organizations have similar DEIA goals and

motivations, and are implementing similar initiatives and actions. This, most likely, reflects the impact of existing regulations and public and industry norms, trends, and expectations related to workforce DEIA. For example, in its [Benchmarking Race, Inclusion, and Diversity in Global Engagement (BRIDGE) survey](#), a coalition of industry leaders developed the first sector-wide "diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) baseline at the organizational level across US-based organizations in the international development and humanitarian sector."

Importantly, participants noted that sometimes USAID's solicitation specifications and qualifications are rigid, stringent, and do not necessarily align with USAID's workforce DEIA goals. For example, sometimes USAID's "work experience" requirements for Chiefs of Party and other leadership roles disqualify some candidates who are from traditionally underrepresented communities, which creates even greater barriers to entry for otherwise qualified candidates. In line with this feedback, participants recommended that:

1. USAID should review how to optimally incorporate its workforce DEIA and Localization goals into its award process to avoid key personnel requirements that are unnecessarily rigid and stringent, and to open opportunities for candidates from underrepresented communities.

    USAID Editorial Note: USAID is currently implementing several actions to reduce barriers for USAID awards. For instance, USAID is implementing Recommendation 3 of its [Equity Action Plan](#), "Reduce internal and external barriers for USAID awards, including by reducing acquisition and assistance administrative burdens that negatively affect partner capacity." Implementing Recommendation 3 is also part of USAID's ["DEIA in USAID Programs" Agency Priority Goal (APG)](#). By implementing the APG, USAID is streamlining its proposal and application processes to make partnering with USAID more accessible by reducing the high costs of preparing competitive applications and proposals. Additionally, in March 2023, USAID achieved an APG implementation milestone by publicly launching [USAID's Acquisition and Assistance Strategy](#). USAID is seeking feedback on its A&A Strategy Implementation Plan on an ongoing basis. M/MPBP submitted the focus group participants' recommendation to USAID's Industry Liaison to consider as part of USAID's A&A Strategy Implementation Plan.

DETAILED BREAKDOWN OF THE RESULTS

In this section, USAID breaks out by operational GHG emissions and workforce DEIA focus groups the structure of the conversations in the respective sessions. USAID presents in **bold font** each question it asked, followed by a summary of the participants' responses in *italics*. In some cases, USAID supplemented the summaries with some general observations.

This effort was an exploratory study USAID conducted with a group of its IP organizations. Most of the questions USAID asked participants were open ended and offered participants the opportunity to provide any information they choose at their preferred level of detail. Because this was the approach used, USAID believes that, to be as transparent and clear as possible, it is valuable to list—in all their diversity—the points, activities, hurdles, and concerns the participants raised.

USAID encouraged a free exchange of ideas in every focus group. Every participant did not respond or contribute to every question. In addition, occasionally, participants' responses diverted the conversation in directions that did not directly relate to the question USAID asked. The participants devoted some time to these tangential conversations; as a result, participants did not address in all focus groups all of the questions USAID planned to ask. The USAID facilitator balanced letting the participants drive the conversation and intervening to advance the dialogue and manage the focus groups effectively.

Therefore, instead of reporting quantitative summaries, such as "X% of the participants reported …", The USAID project team chose to present lists of participants' responses. The team asserts this is the best way to convey the breadth and diversity of participants' responses. The USAID project team also noted instances when the participants largely agreed with one another, and those instances when the participants disagreed.

USAID edited the participants' responses for clarity, brevity, and plain language, while preserving the substance of the responses. In some cases, USAID moved the responses participants provided for one question to the section for a different question when the responses aligned more closely with the latter question.

SUMMARY OF THE FOUR OPERATIONAL GHG EMISSIONS FOCUS GROUPS

USAID's goal for the operational GHG emissions focus groups was to understand the actions the IP organizations were implementing, and/or planning to implement, to improve their energy efficiency, reduce their operational GHG emissions, and to work toward net-zero goals. USAID was also interested in identifying and understanding the barriers the IP organizations are facing in their efforts to reduce their operational GHG emissions.

Does your organization have:
- **A sustainability plan or strategy?**
- **Plans to work toward net-zero emissions from its operations?**
- **Plans to work towards GHG emissions reductions?**

All focus group participants reported that their organizations are working to reduce their GHG emissions and carbon footprint, but that they are at different stages in the process.

- *Participants from 10 of the 16 organizations indicated their organizations have plans and have set at least some targets. Some participants mentioned that their organizations' targets align to 2030 for scope 1 and 2 and 2050 for scope 3 GHG emissions.[1] Participants from four organizations indicated that their organizations have committed to achieving net-zero GHG emissions on various timelines.*
- *Participants from two organizations indicated that their organizations have clear frameworks and/or plans, but have not set or committed to specific targets for reducing their GHG emissions.*
- *Participants from the other organizations shared that their organizations are in various stages of the planning and benchmarking phases.*

USAID noted that across all of the focus groups, an organization's level of planning and commitment correlated with the size of the organization, with larger IP organizations being ahead of the smaller organizations in their journeys to reduce their operational GHG emissions.

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[1] **Scope 1** emissions are direct GHG emissions that occur from sources that an organization controls or owns. **Scope 2** emissions are indirect GHG emissions associated with an organization purchasing electricity, steam, heat, and cooling; they physically occur at the facility where they are generated but are the result of the organization's energy use. **Scope 3** emissions result from activities from assets an organization does not own or control, but that the organization indirectly affects in its value chain; includes all emissions sources that are not within an organization's scope 1 and 2 boundary. For more information, see www.epa.gov/climateleadership/scope-1-and-scope-2-inventory-guidance and www.epa.gov/climateleadership/scope-3-inventory-guidance.

Can you describe your goals and approach?

Most participants referred to a similar process through which their organizations use pre-COVID-19 pandemic years (typically 2019) to establish baselines to guide and help track their long-term efforts to reduce their GHG emissions. Participants noted that their organizations are targeting and benchmarking GHG emissions, procurement, supply chains, and waste.

Participants mentioned that their organizations are implementing the following activities to reduce their operational GHG emissions:

- *Switching to electric vehicles (EVs).*
- *Purchasing offsets and Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs).*
- *Encouraging and embracing remote work and virtual training.*
- *Reducing staff business travel and commuting.*
- *Relocating close to public transportation options.*
- *Prioritizing local and in-country procurement.*
- *Right-sizing office footprints based on their approach to telework and remote work in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and based on where they operate globally.*
- *Reducing energy consumption.*
- *Switching to clean energy sources (e.g., solar) and energy-efficient appliances (e.g., ENERGY STAR-certified appliances).*
- *Switching to cloud computing.*

USAID noted that across all of the focus groups, the activities participants reported that their organizations are implementing vary, sometimes widely, across their global operating locations, based on the nature of their on-site activities and the local context.

USAID also noted that many participants, especially those who were representing smaller organizations, mentioned that their organizations rely on hiring external consultants to implement many of these activities.

We'd like to hear about your organization's efforts to reduce its operational GHG emissions and your organization's motivations. What drives your organization's climate and GHG activities and motivations?

There was a clear consensus among participants about their organizations' key motivations for striving to reduce their operational GHG emissions. Almost all of the participants highlighted several themes, which USAID organized into two main clusters: "Internal" and "External" motives.

Internal motives: These activities

- *Align with the organizations' missions.*
- *Reflect the organizations' values.*
- *Are perceived by the organizations as moral and just.*
- *Reflect the personal values of the people working in the organizations—and they expect and push their organizations "to do the right thing".*
- *Help compete for and retain skilled workers. Job candidates often ask the organizations what they are doing to reduce their operational GHG emissions and carbon footprints.*

External motives: These actions are expected or dictated by:

- *Market forces, as reflected by peer organizations' actions and clients' expectations. This applies mostly to commercial organizations.*
- *The USG and other governments with which the organizations work and interact.*
- *Donor organizations and individual donors.*

Participants mentioned additional motives, which are <u>*combinations of internal and external motives:*</u>

- *Lend credibility to the IP organizations in the context of the work they are doing. The organizations must "walk the talk". For example, if they implement projects to reduce GHG emissions in developing countries, they risk appearing hypocritical if they do not reduce their own GHG emissions.*
- *Drive innovation within the IP organizations.*
- *Benefit and/or minimize GHG emissions-related externalities for the vulnerable countries in which many of the IPs organizations operate.*

How has your organization integrated efforts to reduce GHG emissions into its operations?

The participants shared a variety of actions their organizations have taken and that continue to guide their operations:

- *Centralizing certain operations across locations when feasible (e.g., via [power purchasing agreements](#)).*
- *Developing centralized guidance and expectations across office and project locations.*
- *Identifying collaborating partners (e.g., airlines, hotels, etc.) that share similar goals and help reach their goals and targets.*
- *Revising their work policies to offer more telework and remote work flexibilities.*
- *Integrating climate change and sustainability considerations into their leasing decision processes.*
- *Reducing their office footprints.*
- *Revising organizational policies (e.g., travel, training, etc.) and implementing the changes across locations, such as by intentionally deciding when to use virtual meetings vs. in-person meetings (balancing relationships, impact, GHG emissions considerations, etc.).*
- *Emphasizing and strengthening localization efforts.*
- *Transitioning to solar energy in certain locations.*
- *Raising local suppliers' awareness of sustainability and climate mitigation opportunities.*
- *Creating internal task forces to measure, track, and optimize the impact of policies.*
- *Involving staff to contribute actively to developing and implementing climate-related policies and guidance.*
- *Tracking various daily activities that affect and identifying opportunities to reduce the organization's operational GHG emissions. Some IP organizations use global standards like those from the [Greenhouse Gas Protocol](#) and [CDP](#) (Carbon Disclosure Project) to inventory and report their GHG emissions.*
- *Empowering staff to make decisions that help reduce GHG emissions.*

USAID noted that the IP organizations that participated in the focus groups are at different stages in their journeys to reduce their operational GHG emissions. Participants from some of the organizations, primarily the smaller ones, explicitly stated that their organizations are just beginning their journeys and

are still figuring out some of the policies they want and need to develop and implement (e.g., for air travel, training, etc.).

USAID also noted that participants cited a diversity of experiences, opportunities, and constraints across geographic locations. Some participants mentioned how their organizations learned from the experience of organizational units that are located in other parts of the world that are more advanced in mitigating operational GHG emissions. The organizations were able to transfer the lessons learned to organizational units in other locations. In other cases, local constraints prevent uniformly implementing the same policy in all of the organization's operating units and locations.

Importantly, the participants also shared that their organizations have made a point of communicating to USAID and other donor organizations that they want to reduce their operational GHG emissions, but that there are additional expenses involved in doing so—and that additional donor funding would help.

What are some of the successes your organization has already had in reducing its operational GHG emissions? What internal operations-focused sustainability and climate change initiatives is your organization working on that you would like to share? What actions did your organization take, and what have the impacts been?

- *Forging partnerships, such as by participating in the Sustainability Managers Roundtable (SMRT, see https://www.wri.org/sustainability-wri) the World Resources Institute (WRI, see https://www.wri.org/sustainability-wri) and Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC, see http://nrdc.org), and InterAction's working groups (i.e., the Environmental Sustainability working group), and by joining global initiatives, like [RE100](#), that are working towards common definitions, metrics, etc.*
- *Partnering with research institutes and universities to improve ways to reduce operational GHG emissions.*
- *Changing norms, such as no longer purchasing diesel-powered generators for every operating location.*
- *Recognizing that a large number of employees are concerned about their personal carbon footprints and supporting their reliance on public transportation, walking, biking, or other sustainable forms of transportation.*
- *Encouraging offices in different countries to initiate activities to reduce GHG emissions.*

USAID noted that participants recurrently cited that the COVID-19 pandemic has made it hard for their organizations to assess the net impact of various policies and initiatives they have implemented to reduce their GHG emissions.

Several participants emphasized that their organizations are not purchasing carbon offsets because: a) the organizations are prioritizing minimizing the operational GHG emissions they can manageably control, and b) it is difficult or impossible to verify the quality of many of the offsets.

What lessons learned or promising practices have emerged thus far?

Lessons Learned:

- *It is important for IP organizations to report their activities to reduce their GHG emissions because it helps recruit new, young, and talented employees.*

- *It is difficult to collect and aggregate data (e.g., GHG emissions, electricity consumption, etc.) across multiple locations due to differences in how the data are collected and stored (various breakdowns, aggregation levels, etc.), and variance in data quality and reliability.*
- *It is difficult to collect data because data is difficult and costly to access.*
- *It is often still complex to inventory operational GHG emissions even if an organization has previously been through the inventorying process.*
- *Organizations need to be flexible and open minded when it comes to on-site activities to reduce GHG emissions and respect local needs and priorities.*
- *It is important to consider and weigh optimizing short- and long-term goals (e.g., should one switch to natural gas or bypass this intermediate step and transition directly to renewable energy sources?).*
- *Interest in and appetite to engage in activities to reduce GHG emissions varies considerably across country and local contexts.*

Promising Practices:

- *In large organizations, expertise and knowledge about climate issues is often spread out and "isolated". IP recommended developing tools and opportunities—such as workshops, periodical meetings and chats—to empower staff to share their knowledge, information, and ideas, and to encourage innovation.*
- *Introduce incentives to promote low-emission travel options.*
- *Plan to reduce office space and related costs.*
- *Guide and mentor overseas partners to redesign activities to reduce operational GHG emissions.*

What challenges or barriers have your organizations experienced with addressing climate change and reducing GHG emissions? What barriers do your organizations face to reaching a target, such as net-zero emissions?

- *Securing buy-in from leaders in the organization. More precisely, convincing leaders to prioritize activities that relate to climate change and reducing operational GHG emissions in the context of the IP organizations' primary missions.*
  - *Developing strategies to convince leadership to do this.*
  - *Funding these activities, given the fixed and prescribed nature of the IP organizations' budgets.*
- *Funding for large, expensive items that go beyond the lifetime of a project, such as EVs.*
- *Funding for offsets.*
- *Funding for activities to track operational GHG emissions. These are often outsourced, because of lack of in-house expertise, and are costly.*
- *There is a mismatch between how visible and effective activities are, which can make it challenging for organizations to target funds to the highest-impact activities. For example, some activities, like windmills, are photogenic and great for public relations materials, but those activities may be more expensive and less effective per dollar than mundane activities like improving building insulation.*
- *Inducing behavior changes and developing appropriate approaches and strategies to encourage such changes is as important as upgrading or replacing existing hardware.*
- *Poor understanding of public-private cooperation models, especially in the energy domain.*
- *Dealing with scope 3 GHG emissions sources, which represent a significant portion of the operational GHG emissions of service IP organizations and are an inherent part of the business model, but are hard to estimate, measure, and control.*

- *Difficulty estimating, measuring, and controlling GHG emissions related to purchased goods and services.*
- *Having limited operational control in rented spaces.*
- *Tracking:*
  - *Difficult to obtain data from various sources, especially when organizations do not directly control some of them.*
  - *GHG emissions related to staff working from home.*
- *Developing new travel policies that address when and how to travel, which accommodations to use, etc.*
- *Budgeting and accounting for vehicles and renewable energy sources for various offices.*
- *Donor and project rules may discourage long-term and expensive investments (e.g., EVs, solar).*
- *Prioritizing efforts: recognizing through which activities organizations can achieve the greatest results in various locations and projects.*
- *The political landscape in the United States and its implications for climate policy into the future.*
- *Managing the tradeoff between growing the organization and reducing its operational GHG emissions.*
- *Small organizations can't afford to have a full-time sustainability person/team/office and also lack the local expertise to address all sustainability-related issues.*
- *Uncertainty about the "future of work" after the COVID-19 pandemic makes planning difficult.*

What (if any) interventions or actions might help address these barriers?

USAID:

- *Clarifying how much of a priority it is for IP organizations to reduce their operational GHG emissions associated with implementing USAID awards.*
- *Stressing and highlighting the importance of measuring and tracking all relevant metrics.*
- *Clarifying and being very explicit about award requirements, criteria, and expectations, and being flexible by allowing IPs organizations to optimize designs accordingly. The more specific USAID's criteria are, the easier it will be for IP organizations to identify opportunities.*
- *USAID being flexible allows IP organizations to innovate and leverage opportunities.*
- *Recognizing that it is much easier to implement changes in developing countries that have fewer regulatory restrictions and less political resistance, and using this as a tool to promote innovative approaches in these locations.*
- *Developing clear and standard ways to track GHG emissions to avoid double counting and omitting emissions.*
- *Aligning with the broader donor and USG community to define emissions boundaries, determine the appropriate level of tracking and reporting (project, organization, etc.), and so on.*
- *Providing better and more consistent guidance for IP organizations making long-term and more expensive investments as part of implementing USAID awards, such as EVs.*

IP Organizations:

- *Providing access to high-quality guidance and resources for existing and new country offices as early as possible.*

If USAID were to consider implementing a GHG reduction guidance, what steps would your organization need to take to scale this policy?

- *The most important part would be to provide consistent "rules of the road" and definitions, and to ensure that people are not using methodologies that are flawed or have been discredited.*
- *It is going to be easier to apply and implement for scope 1 and 2 GHG emissions.*
- *Use goals and targets consistent with other USG agencies, such as the [GSA Federal Contractor Climate Action Scorecard](#), and not create a new set of rules.*
- *There are some existing guidelines, such as from EPA Center for Corporate Climate Leadership (https://www.epa.gov/climateleadership), that some IP organizations follow. USAID would have to refine them and define the boundaries of scopes 1, 2, and 3 emissions and provide guidance specific to USAID's mission, not use different guidance from other USG agencies.*
- *Any USAID guidance should be sensitive to the diversity of USAID's IPs organizations, their size, resources, and missions, and should preserve a "level playing field" and not penalize smaller IP organizations.*
- *The process should seek to help all IP organizations along their sustainability journeys, regardless of where they are now. USAID could help by facilitating communities of learning and practice.*
- *USAID should consider a tiered approach with different rules for large and small IP organizations.*
- *USAID should develop guidelines at the country/Mission level.*
- *USAID should consider that a new set of guidelines induces a new set of compliance requirements that can be very costly, especially for small organizations.*

What would be a realistic timeframe for implementing them?

- *The timetable would depend, naturally, on the nature of the guidance. Among the tentative and contingent responses:*
    - *If it is something that IP organizations currently do, it will be easy. New requirements may take longer due to the internal vetting and approval process.*
    - *One year or longer.*
    - *A phased approach would be necessary and USAID could learn from those IP organizations that are already doing a lot of tracking.*
    - *Start with scope 1 and 2 GHG emissions.*
    - *It would be good to have a 10-year plan to work toward net zero, but a plan that is sensitive to the diversity of the IPs, their size and resources, and the nature of their missions.*

Does your organization have an estimate of the volume of GHG emissions it generates? If "Yes", how does your organization measure/estimate its GHG emissions? (E.g., what methodologies, tools, frameworks, etc., does your *organization use to track GHG emission data?)*

- *Participants from nine IP organizations responded that their organizations have an estimate, one participant responded that their organization is in the process of developing an estimate, and two participants responded that their organizations don't have an estimate yet.*
- *Among the participants who reported that their organizations have estimates, there were some variations and qualifications. Some reported that their organizations:*
    - *Track scope 1 and 2 emissions, and only some scope 3 emissions;*
    - *Have estimates only for some locations, such as corporate headquarters and/or locations in the United States, but not all locations globally where they operate;*
    - *Have operating units overseas that are separate entities and that have different policies.*

○ *Use different protocols. Some use guidance from the [Greenhouse Gas Protocol](#), while others use guidance from [CDP](#) (Carbon Disclosure Project). Some develop in-house approaches, often with the assistance of consultants. Others reported hybrid approaches, such as using the Greenhouse Gas Protocol for scope 1 and 2 emissions and an in-house methodology for some scope 3 emissions.*

If not, what are barriers to tracking how much your organization is emitting?

- *Small organizations lack the time and resources to track their operational GHG emissions.*
- *Uncertainty about the best methodology to use and ways to implement that methodology across multiple locations and projects.*

How could USAID help IP organizations further adopt and implement operational GHG reduction objectives?

Participants in all focus groups cited a need for USAID to provide strong and clear guidance to its IP organizations. Some participants suggested USAID should impose strict reporting requirements, but others worried such requirements may be too hard to implement, would impose barriers for smaller organizations, and would, inevitably, lead to challenges and litigation that would adversely affect USAID's and IP organizations' ability to complete important development projects. Participants also suggested that USAID should:

- *Make reducing operational GHG emissions a performance metric in evaluation criteria for awards.*
- *Clarify criteria and how USAID would measure, validate, and evaluate performance in awards.*
- *Clarify rules about costs and offsets.*
- *Clarify rules for purchasing generators, solar panels, and renewable energy.*
- *Identify and prioritize the things USAID expects its IP organizations to do to reduce their operational GHG emissions (subject to funding/budget).*
- *Provide guidance, expertise, tools and models, and training to help IPs organizations.*
- *Convene stakeholders on the topic of reducing operational GHG emissions.*

Participants also frequently cited a need for flexibility with respect to other rules and suggested some changes. Participants shared that:

- *The [Fly America Act](#) sometimes leads organizations to book longer flights with more stopovers, which results in more GHG emissions than shorter, more direct flights.*
- *USAID should review the accounting depreciation rules for investments in solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and related devices to ensure USAID is not inadvertently discouraging its IP organizations to make these types of investments when implementing USAID awards.*
- *USAID should review and reconsider award terms that require IP organizations to have personnel be in-country for a certain amount of time. USAID could provide IP organizations more flexibility to work virtually and be more intentional about when to travel, which would reduce travel-related GHG emissions.*

How could USAID and IP organizations best communicate achievements toward operational GHG reductions? What concerns about communicating your organization's GHG emissions reduction efforts do you have?

- *It can be hard for organizations that are small and early in their journeys to reduce their operational GHG emissions to communicate their efforts and achievements. These organizations have an opportunity to learn from the experiences of peer organizations that are larger and more advanced in their journeys to reduce their operational GHG emissions.*

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the operational sustainability of your organization and helped you reduce your carbon footprint? (E.g., has your organization considered how full-time telework, reduced employee travel, etc.? Has it affected its GHG emissions?)

- *Participants across all focus groups almost unanimously agreed that their organization's carbon footprint decreased considerably during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and that they are currently finding out by how much their carbon footprints are rebounding and have rebounded. The rebounding carbon footprints are largely due to increases in business travel.*
- *Many participants also shared that their organizations are currently analyzing their performance during the COVID-19 pandemic and determining which pandemic-related operational changes to preserve as standard operating procedures and which to reverse, or adjust, to meet organizational needs and staff preferences. For example, some participants noted that early career employees in their organizations often want to work in the office to build relationships and their networks, while other employees may prefer the additional telework and remote work flexibilities their organizations adopted during the pandemic.*

- *Participants also shared that:*
  - *Their organizations will probably maintain the more flexible telework and remote work postures they adopted during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.*
  - *Their organizations have reduced business travel by reducing the number of trips and combining trips.*
  - *USAID Missions adapted to using communications technology more during the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual meetings, and virtual technical assistance to missions as part of implementing USAID awards.*

Other Points Participants Raised

- *Connections to their organizations' DEIA efforts—specifically, that reducing operational GHG emissions is an opportunity to change the makeup of their workforces and its perception (change the "mental image" many have of the typical worker in sustainability-oriented careers),*

USAID should:

- *Consider how it may track and count its IP organizations' GHG emissions that result from implementing USAID awards as part of its scope 3 emissions.*
- *Lead the way and continue to invest in and increase investments in environmental and conservation projects, as these projects are a major way USAID can use its competitive advantage to combat the climate crisis.*
- *Help fund IP organizations' actions to reduce their operational GHG emissions.*

- *Continue to use requirements and incentives ("sticks and carrots") to find ways to acknowledge and recognize IP organizations that are leading the way on minimizing their operational GHG emissions.*
- *Continue engaging with IP organizations about reducing operational GHG emissions, including by continuing to ask these types of questions.*
- *Communicate its plans to work with its IPs organizations to help them develop realistic expectations and plans to operationalize any new GHG emissions tracking and reporting requirements USAID may institute.*

SUMMARY OF THE TWO WORKFORCE DEIA FOCUS GROUPS

USAID's goal for the workforce DEIA focus groups was to understand the actions IP organizations are implementing and/or planning to implement to improve DEIA, and how those efforts would help them achieve their climate goals. USAID also wanted to understand the barriers its IP organizations face in their efforts to improve DEIA in their workforces.

What is your organization *doing well* in terms of ensuring diversity of identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, and beliefs through your recruitment, hiring, and promotion practices? Can you please share any best practices and/or lessons learned?

- *Developed a special diversity-focused internship program that primarily targets people who identify as members of minority groups.*
- *Created DEIA advisory groups and opportunities for employees to provide anonymous feedback to executives.*
- *Signed the [Coalition for Racial & Ethnic Equity in Development (CREED) pledge](#) and are working to implement its principles.*
- *Added "floating holidays" to enable staff to select some of their own holidays off and added Juneteenth to the organization's official holiday list.*
- *Performed a DEIA audit to develop a framework for DEI statements and a benchmark for future audits.*
- *Introduced all staff to DEIA tenets and ensure they consider the tenets in all aspects of their work.*
- *Stress flexibility in hiring practices: focus on the necessary skills for the position and not necessarily educational level and professional experience, as these can be barriers.*
- *Advertise positions widely using platforms and posts that can reach the largest and most diverse pool of candidates possible.*
- *Ensure job postings use bias-free language, and focus the screening and interviewing process on qualifications to recruit the best and most diverse candidates.*
- *Recruit diverse candidates for senior positions.*
- *Build relationships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and other minority serving institutions (e.g., Gallaudet University and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf [NTID]).*

What efforts or lessons learned does your organization employ to train its workforce to recognize and minimize unconscious bias in hiring?

Most participants shared that their organizations are implementing similar efforts:

- *Investing significantly in training, such as workshops, courses, training videos on unconscious bias and microaggressions, etc., to help their personnel recognize their biases and learn ways to address them.*
    - *Most but not all IP organizations require their personnel to complete unconscious bias training.*
    - *Some of IPs organizations' efforts started by training senior leaders.*
- *Rethinking business, operations, recruitment, and retention practices. For example, organizations are creating diverse teams to engage with clients and implement projects.*
- *Created Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) for employees who have disabilities and who need specific workplace accommodations.*

What policies or procedures are working well within your organization to ensure that your workforce is offered equitable pay and benefits regardless of identifier—e.g., age, race, gender, ability, or category of staff (permanent, not permanent), etc.?

Most participants shared that their organizations:

- *Periodically perform statistical studies of employee pay as a function of demographics and functional roles to ensure equity. Some organizations hire outside consultants to perform these studies.*
- *Review pay equity periodically using industry-wide benchmarks to ensure that long-time employees do not fall behind.*
- *Strive to ensure equity throughout the employee lifecycle in the organization.*
- *New laws in New York and California that require organizations to specify the salary range in job announcements which will speed and strengthen efforts to ensure equitable pay and benefits.*
- *Train staff about the need to be transparent about pay equity.*
- *Use ERGs and Communities of Learning and Engagement (COLEs) to communicate with staff about compensation.*

What policies or procedures are in place to increase accessibility in your organization's workplace?

- *Offer reasonable accommodations and have plans to offer training.*
- *Empowered ERGs to educate personnel about how to speak up about accessibility issues and develop accommodations for people with diverse abilities.*
- *Using COVID-19 pandemic-related learning from transitioning to virtual and hybrid work to plan the future of the hybrid workplace.*
- *A large and highly international organization has adopted tools and resources like closed captioning and translators to enable effective communication across sites and countries.*

Does your organization have any *novel* practices—practices that are yielding equitable and transparent results—for employees to disclose and resolve issues related to experiencing discrimination or harassment in the workplace?

- *Developed a Code of Conduct and employee handbooks that describe the process of handling discrimination or harassment.*
- *Provided multiple channels, including an anonymous 24-hour hotline, for employees to report retaliation and other concerns.*
- *Leveraged employee networks and groups to facilitate reporting outside of the chain of command.*
- *Annual training on harassment.*
- *Implemented efforts and apply good practices at headquarters and abroad.*

Are there other internal initiatives that your organization is planning or implementing to strengthen DEIA within its workforce? (E.g., employee affinity groups focused on DEIA and making recommendations to leadership?) If so, can you share how these initiatives especially relate to climate- and environment-focused positions?

- *Establishing a new ERG that focuses on environmental justice. Groups that focus on both demographics and professional interests can advance multiple goals and be more impactful within the organization.*
- *Establishing advocacy groups that have members from various units and backgrounds.*
- *Making equity one of the organization's core values.*
- *Implementing periodical "DEI Passport" programs to learn about other cultures, such as by empowering employees to present about their cultures, attend cultural events, screen films that feature different cultures, etc.*
- *Launching IDEA (inclusion, diversity, equity, and accountability) programs.*
- *Developed a gender course for Latin America and planning to develop similar courses for other locations (e.g., Africa).*
- *Proposing a DEI course for the Board of Directors.*

Please raise your hand if your organization currently assesses, tracks, or measures DEIA within its climate- and environment-focused workforce?

Most participants raised their hands.

If yes, how does it go about doing that? What is working well for your organization?

- *Tracks gender, ethnicity, and race related to employee promotions and attrition.*
- *Set clear goals and targets (e.g., 30% people of color) in hiring and promotion pathways.*
- *Periodically report DEIA data internally.*
- *Publish dashboards internally that enable tracking in real time.*
- *Consider reporting DEIA data externally.*
- *Track training on unconscious bias and related activities.*
- *Track how well ERGs and COLEs achieve their goals.*
- *Track more difficult to track items via periodical employee surveys and periodical meetings between staff, ERGs, and senior leaders.*
- *Use an inclusion app to send employees tips, surveys, challenges, etc.*
- *Rely on hiring external consultants to implement DEI programs.*

- *Performed a DEI audit in 2021 and will perform another audit in 2023. Developed and refined the Key Performance indicators (KPIs) for this process.*

How might your organization better assess or measure DEIA within its climate and environment-focused workforce? How might better measuring and reporting on the DEIA of your organization's climate- and environment-focused workforce improve equity in the Climate Strategy implementation process?

- *Following trends over time enables organizations to determine which of their efforts are and were more and less successful in achieving their goals, then adapt and adjust their efforts accordingly.*
- *Hire a consulting firm to develop DEIA plans.*
- *Strengthen collaboration between human resources (HR) and advocacy groups.*
- *Use exit interviews as a tool to probe for and identify DEIA issues.*

The participants did not respond directly to the second question, but they all indicated their organizations' DEIA policies and efforts apply to all staff members and do not focus exclusively on a specific subset of the workforce.

What challenges does your organization face in improving DEIA in its climate- and environment-focused workforce at all levels, including at the leadership level? What might be holding your organization back?

Participants shared that their organizations:

- *Develop and launch systems with good intentions, but do not always roll them out and maintain them in a way that ensures the systems serve their goals. Sometimes staff think these efforts go too far (e.g., by being too intrusive) or do not serve their needs.*
- *Recognize that many DEIA-related measures rely on self reports, which are often biased (e.g., personnel often underreport disability and veteran status).*
- *Struggle to find the time for the appropriate DEIA training for everyone in the organization.*
- *Have many actions that are driven by "here and now" considerations, such as requirements and terms of current projects, grants, and proposals. The emphasis on short-term considerations gets in the way of thinking and planning creatively about the composition and nature of the future workforce.*
- *Find it hard to diversify their climate or environment-related workforce because there is a very limited pool of applicants available today. Historically, various careers have attracted people from certain groups. One implication is that there are not many minority role models in top leadership positions.*
- *Find there are more women in entry level positions but fewer in senior level positions, so it will take time to achieve change.*
- *Do not have funding sources for programs—like internships, fellowships, and other support mechanisms—that would help advance long-term efforts.*

Is there anything USAID asks of your organizations that might inadvertently be contradictory to our goal to strengthen DEIA, specifically within your organization's climate- and environment-focused workforce?

USAID should:

- *Continue to facilitate meetings like these focus groups and help create a community of practice.*
- *Reconsider the structure of the allowances that might inadvertently favor men over women with family.*
- *Include DEIA explicitly in the qualifications and descriptions of USAID-funded and -sponsored opportunities.*
- *Revisit and possibly revise the qualifications it requires for various (mostly senior) positions for projects that, currently, favor a small group of people and prevent many otherwise qualified candidates from being considered and hired.*
- *Educate USAID managers to embrace the Agency's official DEIA priorities and policies.*

METHODOLOGY

USAID used data from its WorkwithUSAID.org Partner Directory to identify IP organizations that work with USAID in the "climate change and environment" sector. Based on the range of time zones in which the IP organizations are based, the size and footprints of the organizations, and the USAID team's limited resources, USAID decided, as a starting point, to scope its focus groups effort on IP organizations that implement large USAID contracts and awards, including in USAID's programs and operations.

USAID performed desk research based on publicly available information to benchmark this set of organizations to try to ascertain the current status of their efforts to improve their operational sustainability and reduce their carbon footprints, and to advance DEIA within their workforces. USAID relied primarily on the following indicators to narrow down the list of IP organizations: whether the organization

- Included information on its website about: sustainability, GHG emissions reporting, a sustainability plan, a net-zero or other commitment to reduce emissions, a Chief Sustainability Officer or similar senior executive-level position, etc.; DEIA, DEIA reporting, a Chief Diversity or DEIA Officer, or similar senior executive-level position, etc.

- Published any press releases, blog posts, and similar public communications that featured sustainability, climate change, and DEIA, and/or were featured in news articles and other public communications about these topics originating from other organizations.

- Was a member of, had committed to, aligned with, or been certified by initiatives like the Science-Based Targets Initiative (SBTI), Gold Standard, Carbon Disclosure Project, Greenhouse Gas Protocol, Carbon Trust, etc.

Using the narrowed down list, USAID categorized the IP organizations based on IP type (e.g., large, small, Woman-Owned Small Business [WOSB], institutional support contractor [ISC], "new and underutilized" partner, "traditional partner", etc.) and the benchmarking data USAID collected.

For the operational GHG emissions focus groups, USAID categorized IPs based on the availability and (if relevant) the nature and details of their public-facing net-zero targets and/or goals and commitments to track operational GHG emissions and/or data on GHG reductions.

For the workforce DEIA focus groups, USAID categorized IP organizations according to whether the organizations were new or underutilized partners, traditional partners, or ISCs.

Based on USAID's analysis and classification of the IP organization, the USAID team divided the IP organizations into groups such that: 1) there would be no more than seven organizations in a focus group (to control the number of participants in case some IPs decided to have more than one representative participate); 2) each group included a diverse set of organizations to ensure that the focus groups also provided the IP organizations opportunities to learn from each other based on their different places in their sustainability and workforce DEIA journeys. Based on its desk research, USAID selected a representative group of IPs to invite to participate in the GHG and workforce DEIA focus groups.

USAID used the IPs groupings when scheduling the focus groups. However, if a particular date and time did not work for a particular IP organization's representative(s), USAID was flexible and offered the representative(s) the opportunity to join an alternative focus group on the same topic.

APPENDIX: LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS USAID INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FOCUS GROUPS

OPERATIONAL GHG EMISSIONS FOCUS GROUPS

Organization Name	Website URL	Name of Person	Comments
Participants			
Bixal	www.bixal.com	Mark Bardini	
Cadmus Group	cadmusgroup.com	Christina Becker-Birck	
Catholic Relief Services (CRS)	www.crs.org	Caroline Millet	
Catholic Relief Services (CRS)	www.crs.org	Patience Komboni	
Chemonics International, Inc.	chemonics.com	Kathleen Klaniecki	
Deloitte Consulting LLP	www.deloitte.com/global/en	Richard Longstaff	
Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI)	www.dai.com	Donald Lunan	
EnCompass LLC	encompassworld.com	Alaine Kennedy	
Environmental Incentives (SEEK)	enviroincentives.com	Steph Wilson	
ICF International	www.icf.com	John Venezia	
ICF International	www.icf.com	Leslie Chinery	
iDE Global	www.ideglobal.org	John Choptiany	
Jefferson Consulting Group	www.jeffersonconsulting.com	Jeremy Arensdorf	
Mercy Corps	www.mercycorps.org	David Nicholson	
Mercy Corps	www.mercycorps.org	Francis Xavier Tuokuu	
RTI International	www.rti.org	Janelle Griffin	
RTI International	www.rti.org	Robyn Camp	
Save the Children	www.savethechildren.org	Dean Chan	
Social Solutions International	www.socialsolutions.biz	Tiffany Ditzel	
Tetra Tech, Inc.[2]	www.tetratech.com	Daphne Hewitt	
Tetra Tech, Inc.	www.tetratech.com	Leslie Shoemaker	
Invited; Did Not Participate			
ABT Associates	www.abtassociates.com	N/A	

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[2] MSI is now a part of Tetra Tech.

Organization Name	Website URL	Name of Person	Comments
Action for Enterprise	www.actionforenterprise.org	N/A	
Agora Partnership	agora2030.org	N/A	
Association of Public & Land Grant Universities (APLU)	www.aplu.org	N/A	
CARE USA	www.care.org	N/A	
CDM Smith	www.cdmsmith.com/en	N/A	
Chenega	www.chenega.com	N/A	
Dexis Consulting Group	dexisonline.com	N/A	
FHI 360	www.fhi360.org	N/A	
International Medical Corps	internationalmedicalcorps.org	N/A	
ZemiTek	www.zemitek.com	N/A	

WORKFORCE DEIA FOCUS GROUPS

Organization Name	Website URL	Name of Person	Comments
Participants			
ACDI/VOCA	www.acdivoca.org	Mike Thayer	
Cadmus Group	cadmusgroup.com	Dawn-Marie Gray	
Dexis Consulting Group	dexisonline.com	Laura Dabkowski	
Dexis Consulting Group	dexisonline.com	Letitia Little	
EnCompass LLC	encompassworld.com	Beeta Tahmassebi	
ICF International	www.icf.com	Demola Sholagbade	
ICF International	www.icf.com	Kary James	
Institute for Sustainable Communities	sustain.org	Shawn Essien	
Jefferson Consulting Group	www.jeffersonconsulting.com	Carrie VanDenbergh	
World Wildlife Fund	www.worldwildlife.org	Jessica Leung	
Rainforest Alliance	www.rainforest-alliance.org	Ana Hernandez Azmitia	Emailed responses; did not participate in a focus group.
Invited; Did Not Participate			
Conservation International	www.conservation.org	N/A	

Organization Name	Website URL	Name of Person	Comments
Bixal	www.bixal.com	N/A	
Environmental Incentives (SEEK)	enviroincentives.com	N/A	
International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)	www.iucn.org	N/A	
Nature Conservancy	www.nature.org/en-us	N/A	
Rainforest Foundation International	rainforestfoundation.org	N/A	
Social Solutions International	www.socialsolutions.biz	N/A	
Wildlife Conservation Society	www.wcs.org	N/A	
Winrock International	winrock.org	N/A	
World Resources Institute	www.wri.org	N/A	
ZemiTek	www.zemitek.com	N/A	