

**Theme 3 – Networking Among Regional Data Users for Capacity Building
My Community My Earth (MYCOE)
Final and Quarterly Report (Second Quarter 2008)
July - September 2008**

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Center for Earth Resources Observation
And Science (EROS)

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Description of Program:

This is a continuing activity for the Agreement and has received \$150k from LRM. Overall objective is to support the My Community, Our Earth (MyCOE) program, which was originally launched in 2001 in support of the goals of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). Under this Agreement, the objective centers on provision of GIS capacity building and related support to students in Latin American & Caribbean countries for addressing environmental, natural resource management, and sustainable development issues that are locally defined.

This activity contributes to three important regional initiatives:

1. SERVIR, the Meso-American Monitoring and Visualization System,
2. MACGA, the Meso-American and Caribbean Geospatial Alliance, and
3. GCR-Gulf States Initiative, a public/private partnership working in the disaster-prone US Gulf of Mexico States and Greater Caribbean Region (GCR), supported by USDA, USGS, USAID, universities, the Association of American Geographers (AAG), and ESRI (GIS company).

The Greater Caribbean Region is rich in biodiversity and natural resources, but many biologically diverse areas are under threat. To improve management of natural resources and biodiversity, for both environmental and economic reasons, decision-makers need better information. Geospatial information technologies such as remote sensing, GIS, and GPS can help managers of these areas make better informed decisions. However, policy makers and their institutions often lack expertise in and access to geospatial data analysis. This activity will build long-term local capacity to use geospatial technologies for monitoring and managing biodiversity in the GCR. MyCOE (My Community, Our Earth) will form a biodiversity program to link university students with in-country organizations that need geospatial data. Students will be competitively selected, will use geospatial applications to address biodiversity issues, and will learn to use the SERVIR system at the training facility based in Panama. Candidate projects have been selected from among ten target GCR countries: Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama.

All selected projects address local areas with biological significance, respond to threats to local biodiversity, use geospatial technologies, include a committed local

POC to participate in capacity building activities, and obtain USAID input and approval to ensure alignment with USAID-support biodiversity conservation activities in the region.

The entire activity proceeded over 18 months in the following three phases:

Phase I: Recruitment

1. announcement of opportunity within the 10 GCR countries to university students and local community biodiversity organizations,
2. issue invitation to existing MyCOE contacts in the 10 GCR countries and collaborators identified by USAID, and
3. conduct competitive selection of students to participate, including match-making with local or regional biodiversity initiatives.

Phase II: Capacity Building

1. plan, design, and conduct a workshop with appropriate level instruction in use of GIS for biodiversity conservation as well as training in biodiversity monitoring indicators
2. event to be held in Panama leveraging MyCOE Secretariat regional presence there as well as to potentially build collaboration with IABIN – Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network and the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI)
3. participants will include selected students and at least one other person from their matched biodiversity initiative (e.g. local NGO, government representative, faculty mentor, etc.)

Phase III: Biodiversity Project Work

1. students will conduct projects, receiving modest stipend support, My COE mentoring, MyCOE partner data, and other MyCOE resources.
2. local POC will oversee work plan, integration with ongoing biodiversity monitoring/other initiatives.

All Phases: Community of Practice Networking and Dissemination

1. students will participate in e-community of practice and web forum for peer-to-peer information sharing among the project areas (provided, facilitated, and managed by MyCOE) with the aim of fostering long-term networking relationships,
2. MyCOE will oversee opportunities for integrating local project activities with appropriate USAID projects and regional or global level efforts such as those of IABIN, STRI, SI activities, UNEP World Conservation Monitoring center, etc,
3. MyCOE will collect and disseminate individual and collective project results within international venues, including SERVIR website, conferences, and other opportunities.

Outcomes achieved from this activity included building long-term capacity in the GCR countries to use geospatial technologies for biodiversity goals, a community of practice with future leaders in biodiversity issues and practitioners that use GIS, communication between students in different countries around geographic learning for sustainable development, incorporation of local biodiversity data into broader regional efforts, and contributions to USAID biodiversity programs in the region.

Tangible deliverables include capacity building materials, a training workshop, a set of student projects, a functioning e-community, and dissemination materials.

Accomplishments and Major Highlights this quarter:

All Phases have been completed and deliverables have been produced. All of this activity is documented on the project website, with materials available for free download, including individual project results:

http://www.aag.org/sustainable/programs/biodiversity_central_america.cfm

Phase III Biodiversity Project Work Update. Students and their mentors have all finalized their individual projects and all reports received have been posted to this website. Final payment on stipends for those meeting all requisites have been issued after verification of completion of all participation elements.

Program Evaluation

A final formal program evaluation has been completed, the results of which are available in raw form (in Spanish) upon request. Summary of details are reported here (Response rate of 100% (n=23) of all student fellows and mentors):

In general terms, how has your MyCOE program experience been?

Excellent 73.9% Very good 21.7% Good 4.3% Regular 0% Poor 0%

Rate the MyCOE workshop/instruction:

Excellent 82.6% Very good 17.4% Good 0% Regular 0% Poor 0%

Rating of MyCOE program logistics:

Excellent 78.3% Very good 17.4% Good 4.3% Regular 0% Poor 0%

Much of the evaluation was conducted in an open-ended response format. In addition, comments from the listserv (which remains active) included a broad spectrum of positive feedback, including the following excerpts which are typical of the kind of reflection of participants on their overall experience:

This program has given me new horizons as far as the reach of the technology in biodiversity studies. It facilitated an interchange of experiences with other organizations. It created a good relation between fellow and

mentor. The training was of utmost importance, since we have reinforced our knowledge through these projects.

Very enriching . . . throughout each phase of the program.

The training was excellent, from the logistics of the event during our stay in Panama to the subject-matter qualifications of the professor and the whole MyCOE team . . .my expectations were fulfilled and it substantially nurtured the process that [my organization] is developing in search of GIS. . . .

There was so much coordination and thought put in to the program . . nothing “improvised”

Especially the project director demonstrated capacity to handle international groups, besides amicability and interest in knowing the activities that each student advances

To have access to this kind of information and technology has made us feel recognized and gives us new strength to keep advancing along our path toward seeking knowledge, in a way that we will be able to make important contributions to the development of our countries and the formation of capable human resources. In this particular case, without the support of you all through MyCOE, this would not have been possible.

My [fellowship] experience advanced now to such a degree that I am currently working with the national commission of natural protected areas, in charge of everything that has to do with research, analysis and the use of GIS. . . MyCOE changed this part of my life, and it gave me the strength and interest to do a thousand things – made it possible to travel, to know, to learn, and to live . . .

Further comments and results available upon request.

Problems and Concerns:

No problems or concerns

Future Plans:

This quarter (July - September) ends the project work per the end of the agreement.

The MyCOE Biodiversity Initiative has thus proven to be a successful program model that the MyCOE program hopes may be replicated in the region, throughout the Americas, and adapted to other regions of the world. We look forward to continue to work with partners toward such ends in future programs.