Responses to Questions of Clarification for
Virginia Tech SANREM RFA

Technical Approach

1)   Will the CRSP orient sub-awards by identifying core countries where most research will be undertaken and can be easily integrated? If not, how will they ensure that research undertaken at different geographical scales in different countries/eco-regions will be transformed into meaningful knowledge?

Our strategy for two-stage, competitive planning/long term grants will be the main means of integrating SANREM CRSP sub-award activities. Virginia Tech proposes to orient the related RFA processes to core *regions* identified in collaboration with USAID/EGAT/NRM/LRM. The two-stage program development process allows for the early identification of synergies within and between these core regions. The planning grant RFAs will identify *priority inquiry areas* and, in some cases, *priority systems* in which applicants will orient their proposed activities. Applicants will be encouraged to link with on-going projects and programs working at the same and other scale levels. Planning grant recipients will be guided by the ME to identify synergistic linkages with other grant recipients across countries, regions, and landscape scales during this program development phase. These linkages are essential to the SANREM III landscape approach to sustainable development and they will be an important component of the long-term core research proposals.   As a result of this process, successful core applicant teams will profit from and build on to existing country and region-level systems knowledge and contribute toward greater scale integration and the application of meaningful knowledge on the ground.

The SANREM III strategy to promote inter- and intra-regional scale research knowledge development and integration will occur on several levels. The Systems Coordinators will monitor work in their assigned systems in each region and assume responsibility for cross-site and inter-project coordination and integration. The ME will ensure that cross-system integration and complementarities in research programs are emphasized. The External Evaluation Panel will seek ways to combine planning grant proposals to create more integrated, holistic activities and will advise the ME of compatible proposal combinations.   In addition, annual meetings of PIs from SANREM III activities will be held to facilitate information and knowledge sharing and integration across scales and regions.

2)   What is the process by which more specific indicators will be developed after year one of the program?

The TOP framework presented in our proposal describes our general strategy to assess program development and performance. Initially this framework will guide the ME (with

assistance from the Systems Coordinators) to prepare a tentative list of project outcomes that reflect SANREM III objectives (social, economic, and environmental) and the LRM Intermediate Results. The final outcome indicators will be negotiated and agreed upon between the ME and project PIs in consultation with USAID.

In addition to undertaking certain high impact, follow-on activities of the previous CRSP phases, Year One will focus on building the foundation for a strong and relevant core and associate program. As the core and associate programs develop, the TOP framework will allow us to collaboratively define indicators at different levels of planning and performance and determine how to measure and report them. All participants in the competitive planning grant process and subsequent core program will couch monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of their activities within the TOP framework. Consequently, as a result of the competitive sub-award process, appropriate indicators and M&E methodologies will be identified and implemented early in Year Two in conjunction with the long-term core activities.

3)   What specific involvement/role will each of the collaborating institutions have in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the CRSP?

All collaborating institutions will provide input into the formulation of the RFAs before they are released by the ME. In addition, they may lead activities (through the LWA framework) in the areas where they have predominant capabilities. They are free to partner with whomever they choose to prepare offers in response to the RFAs. To the extent that collaborating institutions are among those chosen for sub-awards, they will be fully involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of their specific activities.

Collaborating institutions will have additional roles and responsibilities in the design and implementation and evaluation of the CRSP through their representation on the Technical Committee (TC) and the Board of Directors. Two members of the collaborating institutions will serve on the TC (one of these institutions will be an IARC) on a rotating annual basis. There will also be a rotating-membership seat on the Board of Directors for the collaborating institutions.

4)   Does VT foresee short-term training in SANREM technologies of end-users– farmers and rural communities managing natural resources?

Yes, end-user short-term training will be an extremely important component of the SANREM CRSP. RFAs for core and associate awards will require an integrated training component to address how grassroots end-users will learn about SANREM technologies and approaches. We expect much of this component to involve a Training-of-Trainers methodology in which project partners and their clientele learn about these new technologies and skills, and in turn transmit them to their own constituent end-users. Targeted partners will include local and international NGOs and their staffs, government extension agents and/or other relevant bodies who work directly with farmers and rural communities. All training programs will be expected to include documentation on how they will carry out such dissemination, within and outside of the scope of the SANREM

project itself, and will also include a monitoring system documenting training output and achievement.

Management Approach

1)   Is there research that VATECH will commence immediately with the signing of the agreement? If so, what is this research?

Yes. Each of the five institutional partners with landscape systems coordination responsibilities will immediately institute a core research program using systems coordination start-up funding. This will include initiating research to begin construction of the SANREM III knowledge base for their landscape system. For example, Virginia Tech, which is responsible for the watershed-based systems coordination, will conduct a comprehensive assessment of past watershed management and restoration projects to identify projects and characteristics of projects world-wide that produce or fail to produce positive outcomes. The results of this literature and project synthesis will be published and serve as an invaluable baseline to inform future project activities. In addition, the information will be made available via the project's website as a keyword searchable database.

Our rapid start-up strategy also calls for issuing, virtually immediately, invitations to previous SANREM PIs and related institutions to propose high-impact, follow-on activities that may be supported for up to 18 months. For example, former Virginia Tech SANREM PIs will propose follow-on support for our NASA "Carbon from Communities" (carbon sequestration) project in Mali that partnered with the SANREM CRSP during the last phase. This project proposal will be considered for funding by the TC along with all other former SANREM-related bridging requests.

2)   In addition to web-based approaches, how does VT plan to optimize dissemination of SANREM Research findings?

Each long-term RFA applicant team will include a plan for disseminating research results in their proposal. In-country dissemination will be stressed through publications (hard-copy, local language), conferences, workshops, seminars and training of trainers, as appropriate. Each RFA applicant team will provide a strategy to include research results in new or modified training or education curricula. In addition, the ME will promote dissemination via journal articles, reports, books, book chapters, articles in trade journals and the popular press, fact sheets, research briefs, and presentations at appropriate conferences and workshops.

3)   What will be the extent and content of instruction in gender issues in the CRSP training programs?

Relevant gender-training guidelines and content will be developed by the ME gender specialist for all activities. Gender training will occur at all levels of program

implementation. The content will vary depending on the type of trainees and the level of training. There are three main target audiences, each of whom will require adapted topics. These are NGOs/policy makers/administrators, scientists, and local communities. Issues to be addressed include:

- Providing analytical tools to assess the mutual impact of NRM and the differing socio-cultural context in which women and men are embedded
- Addressing socio-cultural issues, particularly issues of masculinity and femininity and the implications these have for HIV/AIDS infected populations
- The differential access of grass-roots level men and women to training programs and other resources and its impact on NRM and agriculture
- Studing gender differences in approaches to the biological and agricultural sciences.

Management/Organizational Structure

1)   Please provide resumes of core management staff (Director, Deputy Director, Program P.I. Gender Equity Coordinator, Policy and Economic Impact Assessment Coordinator.

Please see the annex.

2)   What emphasis is VT placing on natural resource management in the CRSP? Why are the NRM disciplines not better represented in the proposed CRSP Staff? What options are open for NRM staff to be included?

Virginia Tech places extremely high emphasis on NRM in this project. We believe that all approaches under this CRSP must ultimately link sustainable environmental management to the economic concerns of the local population under good governance. Therefore, we define NRM broadly to include not only the provision of ecological services (e.g., biodiversity, fertile soil, clean water and air, etc.) that is the technical focus of NRM, but also community capacity building that enables local consensus building, planning, and management.

All proposed CRSP staff members have worked extensively in BOTH NRM and sustainable agriculture, and we believe it is this unique ability to work at the nexus of the two that will strengthen the SANREM program. The detailed resumes of ME personnel (provided with this submission) will show that all have worked on major international NRM and sustainable agricultural issues. These include soil/water/plant interactions, forestry and agro-forestry, non-timber forest products, community-based natural resource management, natural resource and environmental policy, biodiversity protection, water resources management, and carbon sequestration. Our ME staffing plan combines key social and applied biophysical scientists with strong disciplinary expertise and long-term experience working through and managing interdisciplinary SA/NRM research and development teams. Our Program Director candidate is a highly experienced water resources engineer and watershed management expert while our Associate Director candidate is a rural sociologist and recognized M&E expert who has worked in

community-based NRM for many years. Also included on the ME team are a soil/plant scientist, a gender issues expert, and an agricultural/NRM economist. Together, we believe this unique team has the broad-based NRM expertise to effectively manage the comprehensive SANREM program while bringing in required complementary expertise in related disciplines (e.g., biodiversity, plant ecology, wildlife, etc.) as required.

The opportunities for adding to this expertise are considerable. Virginia Tech's College of Natural Resources (CNR) is a nationally recognized leader in the areas of forestry, forest products, fisheries and wildlife sciences, and geography. One unit of the CNR, the Conservation Management Institute, focuses on providing training and expertise particularly in the areas of fisheries development, non-timber forest products, natural resource information management, ecological monitoring and evaluation, and NRM planning. Beyond Virginia Tech, our partner institutions add enormous potential to respond effectively to any NRM specialist or management need. Our Systems Coordinators are recognized experts in their various systems areas and we can also draw on the expertise of their outstanding faculties in all SA/NRM fields as required.

In addition to these resources, the ME may expand in the future to include different NRM specialties in response to new directions or to service the requirements of a rapidly expanding and changing Associate Award program.

3)   *How will RFAs be broadcast to ensure maximum distribution (mass media, Fed Grant, List Serves, NASALGUC?*

RFAs will be advertised through a variety of methods to maximize exposure. Prior to distributing RFAs we will develop a database/listserv of potential applicants and interested parties. This database listserv will include potential applicants, agencies, NGOs and other organizations with an interest in SA and NRM. We will post solicitations to the SANREM III website and listserv. Solicitations will also be sent to all USAID CRSPs for distribution via their listservs. Solicitation notices will also be distributed through NASULGC, professional associations and at national meetings. Announcements will also be distributed to our partners for dissemination through their web-sites and listservs and to other SA/NRM information and knowledge providers such as FRAME.

4)   *How will the ME ensure that the SANREM III research agenda is driven by local development needs rather than the interest of US and host country researchers?*

In order to ensure that the SANREM III research agenda is driven by local development needs our RFA criteria will require that planning grant and long-term research proposals adopt participatory approaches as described by our TOP program and performance methodology. In addition, applicants will be required to take into account relevant USAID Mission goals and strategies (this will include seeking appropriate mission involvement in their proposals) and substantive input from their local, community-based partners.

5) *Will accounting software be used to facilitate reporting from the field to the home office?*

Yes. As a premier IT university, we have a number of technical options to streamline field financial and technical reporting. Many, but not all of these options involve some form of integrated, interactive reporting over the Internet. However, it is likely that a mixture of high and low tech reporting strategies will be needed initially. This will depend on the technological sophistication of the regional/country sites and the specific partners chosen through our competitive partnering process. Irrespective of initial site and partner capabilities, there will be a steady progression over time to standardized software and internet-based technical reporting procedures. To facilitate this transformation, the ME will conduct training to ensure that sub-awardees are well-versed in the application of the software and reporting system. To facilitate access and use, we will adapt standard, off-the-shelf software that is available in all major language versions (e.g. Excel) to meet our needs. Our experience has taught us that thorough software training and the availability of software in local languages are fundamental to successful financial and technical reporting. The selected software will be fully compatible with our university accounting software (Banner) and consequently will also facilitate summary analyses and reporting.