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The Bureau of Reclamation in the International Arena

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ABSTRACT

Since the earliest days of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), there has been an international component to what essentially has been a domestic program. The development and management of the water resources in the 17 Western States have been the primary mission of Reclamation since 1902, although we have routinely ventured outside our borders to learn from and assist other countries.

Just as the map of the world has changed dramatically over the course of Reclamation's lifetime, so has the nature of Reclamation's international involvement. Reclamation employees have worked in more than 80 countries, either on short-term temporary assignments or as part of longer-term resident teams. Most of Reclamation's international activity has been in the semi-arid or arid regions of the world, primarily in developing countries. Reclamation's overseas presence has also mirrored America's international experience, with the bulk of the activities occurring since World War II (War). Following the War, many large-scale foreign assistance programs emerged for both post-War reconstruction and Cold War efforts to combat the spread of communism.

Like the domestic program, Reclamation's international activities have evolved to meet changing economic, environmental and political realities. Sometimes dramatic or day-to-day changes have occurred in the International Program due to sudden shifts in U.S. foreign policy, the vagaries of funding, and rapidly changed political conditions in host countries. While we refer to an "International Program," the Program comprises an ever-changing array of unrelated international activities and projects that are quite diverse in their nature and objectives. Although Reclamation has been involved in many hundreds of international activities, a list of some of the larger ones is available at <http://www.usbr.gov/international/projects>. Reclamation's activities related to the international rivers shared with Canada and Mexico are largely components of the domestic program and will not be discussed here.

This paper is not intended to be a comprehensive list of Reclamation's international activities; rather, its focus is to highlight some of the important trends, key initiatives or projects, and a few of the noteworthy people who have been involved with the Program. The Program consists of three main parts: technical assistance, technical cooperation and exchange, and training and visitor programs.