

The Ridge to Reef Watershed Project (R2RW) is a five year (with an optional sixth year) activity contributing to the achievement of USAID/Jamaica's SO2 – "improved quality of key natural resources in areas that are both environmentally and economically significant". R2RW comprises three Components contributing to the achievement of the results under SO2. Component 1 assists targeted organizations identify and promote sustainable environmental management practices by resource users. Component 2 focuses on identifying and supporting solutions to improve the enforcement of targeted existing environmental regulations, primarily in the Great River and Rio Grande watersheds. Component 3 provides assistance to key organizations to support, coordinate, and expand watershed management efforts in Jamaica. For more information about R2RW, please contact one of the following organizations:



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# Rimona and the River Babies



Rimona sat on the river bank, watching the river babies. They were small and brown with short, curly hair. They wore tunics made from leaves carefully stitched together. They played and laughed in the sunshine. They screamed with delight as they jumped into the water, making big splashes. When they caught sight of Rimona, they suddenly vanished from sight. Rimona sighed. She wished she could swim and play in the river like the river babies.



The next day she returned, hoping to see them again, but there was no sign of them. She heard thunder rolling in the distant hills, then felt the rain. Then she heard the sound of rushing water and saw brown muddy water was gushing down the river. To her horror, she saw the river babies being swept along by the current. Worse was to come. One of them, caught in a mass of branches, was drifting towards the bank where Rimona was standing. She took a long stick to separate the branches.

"Hold on to the stick and I'll pull you to safety," said Rimona to the river baby.

"Don't be afraid of me. I'm not going to hurt you. You might die if you get swept away by the river. " When the terrified river baby grasped onto the stick, Rimona gently pulled her out of the river and picked her up.

"We have to find your family," said Rimona. She ran down the road to the bridge, where she saw the other river babies on the bamboo rafts tied to their moorings near the bridge. She put down the river baby, who ran crying towards her family. Rimona, splashed with mud and soaked to the skin, then headed for home.

"Where have you been, girl?" screamed her mother from the verandah. "Get out of those wet clothes at once or you'll catch your death of cold."

"I had to rescue a river baby," said Rimona.  
"What nonsense you talk," replied her mother.

"Do they have the fare?" he asked.

Millie giggled as Rimona called to the river babies to come.

Millie's brother looked, but saw no one.

"Rimona is as mad as Millie," he thought.

Rimona, opened the door for them to get in.

"Do you know the place where the river springs out of the rock and makes a waterfall? That's where your passengers want to go," Rimona asked Millie's brother.

"That's not a safe place and taxi can't go there. It's a good distance from the road."

The river babies listened intently as Millie's brother described how to get from the road to the waterfall.

When they reached the stop, Millie's brother saw the back door open and close by itself. He felt a shudder run down his spine.

"Good bye, and take care," said Rimona, as the river babies slipped out of the car and ran off down the narrow path.

"Don't tell anyone about this," Millie warned her brother.

"I sure won't," he replied. "You little girls can get away with make believe. I can't," he said.

"Then it's our secret," said Millie.

"But there's one thing I have learnt," said Rimona. "We have to look after the river. The river belongs to everyone. We must all keep it clean and healthy, for all of us to enjoy."



"What are you talking about?" asked Millie.

"Remember those little people you once saw at Belvedere? They're going to be poisoned. My daddy washed his spray can in the river and that stuff is so poisonous it will kill everything."

"We're going to Belvedere. You can come with us," said Millie. "How are you going to tell them? They will hide as soon as they see you."

Then Rimona whispered to Millie how she had rescued the river baby.

"I hope they will recognise me," she said.

When they arrived at Belvedere, Millie begged her brother to leave her and Rimona by the river, while he went to buy some ortaniques.

Rimona and Millie sat on the river bank. To their surprise, the river babies swam towards them.

"Hello," said the biggest one. "We've come to thank you for rescuing our little sister,"

"Thank you, but you're in great danger," sobbed Rimona, almost choking on her words.

"There's poison in the river. You have to escape from here." The river babies were horrified.

"My friend's brother has a taxi and can take you high up in the hills to where the river starts. You should be safe there. Wait here, then when he comes, I will call you."

Millie's brother was waiting for them.

"Can we go to the place where you buy pineapples?" asked Millie. "Some passengers want to go there."

"Sounds as though she needs to have some sense beaten into her," said her father, Farmer Fred Farrow, who appeared at the doorway waving his tamarind switch. At that, Rimona ran out into the rain again and up the hill to her grandmother's house.

"Granny, Granny! It's me – Rimona! Let me in!" shouted Rimona, as she hammered on the door.

"I'm coming, I'm coming. What are you doing out in weather like this? You could be struck by lightning."

"I had to rescue a river baby. They all got carried away by the current, then one of them got trapped in some tree branches. She would have died. They would have broken her neck, if I hadn't helped her. Mummy says I am talking nonsense and Daddy says he will beat some sense into me," sobbed Rimona. "Never mind, my little Rimi, you can stay with me tonight. Tomorrow your father will not remember about it, but don't ever mention river babies to him again."

"Granny, what made the river so angry? I never saw the river flowing so fast with all that mud and leaves and stuff."

"You can blame the farmers," said Granny. "Like your father – he cut down too many trees on the steep slopes and ploughed up & down the hillside. That slope is too steep to plant anything except trees. God made the trees to protect the soil and keep the river water clean and pure."

The next day, she ran home when her daddy had left for the fields. She slipped into the kitchen where she held on to her mummy's hand. Her mummy hugged her and said

"What are we going to do with you, girl?"

"I'm going to be good, Mummy," replied Rimona. "I won't give you any more trouble."

Rimona kept her word. Every morning,



she tethered the goats and fed the chickens. In the evenings she brought in the goats and helped her mummy in the kitchen. She worked hard at her lessons too, but she couldn't forget the river babies.

When planting time came, she went with her daddy to the ground he was preparing for yams. It hadn't rained for months and the earth was dry and parched. Rimona turned to look at the river, hoping to catch a glimpse of the river babies. She had never seen the river so low, with large boulders sticking out of the green and slimy water. "They can't possibly live in this," she thought.



Then she saw her granny climbing up the steep slope, stopping at intervals to catch her breath.

"Hello, Mum," said Farmer Farrow. "Coming to help plant the yams?" he asked.

"I'm coming to see what you're up to," she replied. "You need to terrace the slope or you'll lose all your soil when the rainy season starts, and all that fertilizer you're using will wash down into the river. That's why the river's so green. It never used to be like this."

"Mother, this is modern farming. You can't get a good crop if you don't use fertilizer."

"And make the yam turn black when you cut it. Old time ways were better – trees on these steep slopes protect the soil and keep the river clean. They hold the water too, so the river doesn't run so low in the dry season. Every one who lives by the river is suffering because of these things."

"I have a family to feed and children to send to school," her son replied angrily. "You want us all to starve?"

"The least you could do is plant some Annatto and Khus Khus grass along the river bank to hold the soil."



As the days passed, the rains came again.

"Time to kill the weeds," said Farmer Fred to his daughter. "You coming with me? You can carry the spray can. We have to do this early in the morning before the wind gets up."

When they had finished Fred walked towards the river with his spray can.

"What are you doing?" asked Rimona.

"Just going to wash out this spray can in the river."

"No! Daddy, no!" cried Rimona. "You'll kill the....fish"

She nearly said river babies, but managed to stop herself. Then, who should appear but the District Constable Jerry.

"Howdy Farmer Fred. Your daughter is right," he said. "You'll kill more than fish. People give their animals water from this river and it's this same river water that is treated for people to drink. That's why it's illegal to do what you are doing. I could arrest you, but I'll let you off this time. If I catch you again you'll have to pay a large fine or even be locked up in prison."

Rimona did not wait to hear her father's reply. She had to warn the river babies before they drank the poisonous water. As she ran down the road, she remembered that her friend Millie's brother had a taxi. She reached Millie's house in time to see Millie getting into the car with her brother.



"Stop! Wait for me!" she shouted. "We have to rescue the river babies."