

## REVIEW PROCEDURES

NOTE: This document has been prepared by the Secretariat in response to the wish of the Consultative Group to have a paper discussing and making recommendations concerning the process of reviewing the programs and budgets of the international agricultural research centers.

Each agricultural research program endorsed by the Consultative Group is subject to several kinds of review. From the standpoint of the Group, the purpose of review procedures is to assure that the program warrants support and to indicate the appropriate amount of such support.

The review procedures of the international agricultural research centers and of the Consultative Group are still in the process of evolving and being strengthened. The informal meeting of the Group during International Centers Week earlier this year clearly indicated the desire of members that this evolution continue, especially for the purpose of increasing the flow of information to donors and reinforcing the confidence with which they can make judgments about support.

### General Considerations

The members of the Group and the centers together recognize a number of desiderata to be met in the review process. A leading objective is not merely to keep donors fully informed, but to do so in a way that will inculcate in the donors a sense of participation in the progress of the centers. It also is agreed that the review process, however conducted, must not detract from the authority of trustees and directors to formulate and execute the programs of research institutions, within the constraints of the availability of finance. It is further agreed that the process should not unduly encumber the time of directors and staffs of the centers; indeed, it is hoped that one by-product of an effective procedure will be to protect the centers from a large number of uncoordinated visits from donor representatives. Finally, it is evident that no single procedure can equally well serve all the programs being supported by the Consultative Group; there must be flexibility to suit each case.

### Types of Review

Among the types of review which are now observed at some or all of the international centers are the following:

In-house. The annual examination, by the center's own director and staff, of the center's program and administration, is a first step toward the formulation of the next year's program and budget recommendations to the

trustees. It is clearly recognized that this internal examination is a domestic affair within each center. It is, nevertheless, important to other reviews: the documentation that it produces may provide a starting point of these other reviews, and its timing will influence their place on the calendar.

Consultative Group reports. In the Consultative Group meeting of December 1971, it was agreed that staff members of FAO and the Bank would prepare annually brief reports on the progress and effectiveness of the centers, as a means of helping TAC to appraise their work. Such reports were prepared in 1972 on CIMMYT, CIAT and IITA, and were distributed to the Consultative Group as well as to TAC.

Commodity reviews. In a commodity review, a center examines in depth its program of research on a single commodity or group of commodities. The review is carried out by, or with the help of, an outside expert or experts; it may or may not be combined with a symposium of leading scientists on the state of knowledge concerning the commodities in question. In-depth commodity reviews have not been tied to a regular annual or multi-annual cycle.

Over-all reviews. Panels of outside experts have been organized, at times, to help a center evaluate all its programs in a single review. The objective has been to appraise the center's whole activity, to see where growth points should be encouraged or priorities adjusted, to decide whether consequential changes of objectives and methods should be recommended. Such a review also enables donors to get a feel of how far forward they should be prepared to project their commitment to a particular center. Reviews of somewhat this kind recently have been carried out at CIMMYT and IITA.

#### Timing

Except for in-depth reviews with a multi-year perspective, it is logical that, in any given year, each review, of whatever kind, be considered as one event in a sequence, beginning with the in-house review and culminating with that meeting of the board of trustees which approves the program and budget which are to be considered by the Consultative Group for the next year. The review process normally should not begin before the usual cycle of the Center's own preparatory work for its trustees; if it is to contain a large evaluation element, as in the recent case of CIMMYT, it should be concluded in time to be considered by the trustees.

Centers are still adjusting their calendars, to the extent possible, to harmonize them with the cycle of meetings of the Consultative Group and TAC. The implication of this process is that, in order to provide plenty of time to prepare presentations for Centers Week, the final budget meeting of trustees will in some cases occur earlier than before, and probably not later than the first week of June. This implies, in turn, that trustee reviews of the scientific aspects of a center program will probably take place not later than February or March, and that executive committee meetings, tying together program and budget, will probably be scheduled for April or early May.

External reviews concerned primarily with the scientific aspects of a center's work therefore are likely to occur in the first quarter of the year. The annual progress report, with its accent on budget, can most advantageously fall in the second quarter, perhaps as early as the time of the Executive Committee meeting on budget or as late as the final budget meeting of trustees.

Up to now, apart from the extensive preparations that may be involved, it appears that the longest time that a center has devoted to the conduct of a symposium or to the visitation of an external review panel is five working days. Given that every day of review implies at least two days of preparatory time, it seems desirable that the five-day limit should continue to be observed.

### Proposals

The following proposals, some of which appear to represent a consensus that already exists in the Consultative Group or the centers, are made with respect to review procedures:

Consultative Group staff reports. It is proposed to strengthen the procedures for preparing the annual progress reports, and also to amplify somewhat the objectives of that exercise. The purpose of each report is to present, by way of background, the main features and objectives of a center's program, then to indicate the achievements and state of progress reached during the year, to describe significant changes of program and staffing that have occurred since the last review or are planned for the coming year, to analyze the budget for the coming year in terms that relate expenditures to the substantive program of research and training, and to examine the implication of current budget trends for future years.

The annual progress report is not a substitute for nor a rival to a center's own presentation. It is an independent view of a center's annual program and budget, prepared with particular attention to the cost-effectiveness of the center's activities. In the nature of things, research progress is gradual, so that the progress report, particularly in the case of well established centers, is likely to be incremental, without dramatic developments from one year to the next.

On the subject of the center's program, the progress report would be expository and analytical in describing developments; it would not seek to evaluate the suitability of the program or to recommend changes. On budgetary matters, the report could be expected to present comments on the budget proposals as related to the approved program and, if considered necessary, to make recommendations on the amount of support required. Beyond that, the report might also flag issues of program or budget which, while lying outside the scope of the report, seemed to the Consultative Group staff to be worth the further attention of the center director, TAC or the Consultative Group.

Reports of this kind can considerably advance the common interests of the centers and the Consultative Group. Evidently it will considerably facilitate the consideration of financial requirements by members of the Group. It will help give effect to Group concerns about cost effectiveness, and should considerably enhance the value of budgeting as an instrument of medium-term as well as annual planning for both Group and centers.

The report should help provide the foundation for two other pieces of work desired by members of the Group: the establishment of a notional ceiling of financial support for each center over a period of years, subject to adjustments for rising prices and for the cost of additional activities undertaken with the endorsement of the Consultative Group; and the presentation to the Consultative Group, each year, of an over-all analysis of combined center budgets, together with an analysis of financial implications for future years.

The first year's experience with annual progress reports has indicated directions in which improvements can be made. The use of existing FAO and Bank staff, who have other duties to perform, has caused difficulties of scheduling, and also has somewhat limited the range of professional qualifications that could be brought to bear on the preparation of progress reports.

It is therefore proposed, as members of the Consultative Group have suggested, to strengthen staff support. Henceforth, it will be the aim to provide, for the purpose of preparing each annual progress report, at least two professionals: at a minimum, each report will be the responsibility of a senior agricultural expert and a specialist in budgeting and in accounting procedures.

It may be remarked in passing that the centers themselves might well profit from the distribution of a compact annual report additional to and different from the annual reports they now prepare. Such a report might briefly review the center program, describe the center's activities and achievements during the year, comment on plans for the coming year, and provide basic budget information. It would be different from the annual reports now prepared by some centers, which are research reports written for specialists. It would be written in lay language; it could usefully be distributed to donor agencies and publics, and to interested persons in the developing areas which the center is intended to serve. The subject matter obviously has a close affinity to the annual program and budget presentation approved by center trustees; and the report might advantageously be prepared in conjunction with, or derived from, this presentation.

Scientific reviews. The Consultative Group staff review would be closely tied to the rhythm and content of annual program and budget presentations to Boards of Trustees and, thereafter, to TAC and the Consultative Group. In the case of more penetrating reviews of the content of scientific programs, it is less possible and less desirable to be categorical either about timing or format. The missions of the centers themselves are too variegated to permit close uniformity, and so long as the initiative in planning and designing such reviews lies, as it should, with the centers, differences of style are to be expected.

It is clear, nevertheless, that donors are looking to the centers to conduct two different types of scientific appraisal. One is a long-range review, designed to be the basis for a center's scientific program over a period, say, of five to seven years. At some such interval as this, a center would be expected to arrange for an in-depth examination by or with the participation of outside experts, of the suitability and effectiveness of its program, designed to evaluate the prospects of further progress, and to test whether major changes in the center's objectives and structure would be desirable.

On one of several possible models, the long-range review would be started on the basis of a symposium in which both outside and center scientists were participants. On the basis of research gaps and approaches suggested by the symposium, the center staff would subsequently draw up a general plan of operation for the following five to seven years. That plan might represent radical shifts of emphasis and objective from what had gone before, with significant implications for the structure, staffing and budgets of the center. In any case, the plan, as approved or modified by the trustees, would be reviewed by TAC and the Consultative Group and, once accepted, would be the background against which all other reviews would take place. It would presumably also be the basis on which donors would determine their attitudes toward continuing long-range support of the center.

Donors and centers also see a place for interim scientific reviews, often strongly relying, in current practice, on the evaluation of an outside panel of experts. Such reviews would assess progress, would help centers keep up to date in a scientific sense, and might help to prepare the way for long-range shifts of emphasis and objectives. On one possible format, such a review might take place every three years or so; on another, a center might conduct a review of part of its program each year in such a way that the whole program would be covered during a cycle of about three years.

Panel selection. The selection of the members of external review panels, in the case of scientific reviews, is of considerable interest to members of the Consultative Group. A range of suggestions has been made by members of the Group, nearly all reflecting a desire for some form of participation by the Group in the selection process.

To be fully effective, the experts of the review panel should be personae gratae both to the centers and to the members of the Consultative Group. It therefore seems desirable for both the centers and the Group to participate in the selection process.

The centers themselves should have the best knowledge of the kind of expertise needed, and also the widest knowledge of where such expertise is to be found. It seems logical that they should, in the first instance, nominate the panel of experts who are to conduct the review. At their own discretion, they obviously may choose to consult particular donors in preparing these nominations.

On the other hand, since the experts conducting the review must have credibility with the donors, it is recommended that the Group confirm the nomination of experts. To take care of difficult cases, the Group should also have the option to supplement the center's nominations. Experts nominated by the centers, if past practice is a guide, will likely number only three or four; it would not be a burden, if it appeared desirable, for the Consultative Group to add one or two.

Since it would be cumbersome to the point of impracticability for the Consultative Group to act as a body on the confirmation and supplementation of panel nominations, it is recommended that the Group entrust these functions to the Chairman of TAC acting in consultation with the Chairman of the Group. It is further recommended that members of TAC be eligible to serve on panels, either as original or supplemental nominees.

The role of TAC. Annual progress reports, as originally proposed, were meant simply to assist TAC in its annual evaluation of centers. It is clear that they are of wider interest, and now as a matter of routine should be distributed to members of the Consultative Group as well. It also seems desirable to establish the practice that reports of scientific review panels, although prepared primarily for center trustees, directors and staffs, are made available directly to members of the Group and of TAC.

It is apparent that the strengthening and evaluation of review procedures will permit some evolution in the role of TAC. No suggestion is made that the Consultative Group will diminish its reliance on TAC in so far as supporting ongoing centers is concerned; but the flow to TAC of information about and appraisals of the work of those centers will be very much increased, and TAC itself will have correspondingly less need for any original investigation of the work of those centers. It will be able to give more time to other matters: in particular, the consideration of what gaps in agricultural research it is most crucial to fill, and how they might best be filled; and the weighing of new initiatives and proposals.

A review schedule for each center. If the measures recommended in this paper seem generally to meet the interests of the Consultative Group in the review process, it is recommended that the next step be for the Group to request each center to prepare a tentative schedule of in-house reviews, external reviews, seminars and executive committee and trustees' meetings through 1977, indicating which reviews would be closed and in which they would welcome participation by representatives of members of the Consultative Group. Some centers, indeed, already have such a schedule running through 1974.

The Secretariat would circulate the resulting calendar among the members of the Consultative Group and among the centers themselves. It would thereby expect to set in motion correspondence and consultations which would (1) enable the Consultative Group to indicate whether or not the schedule for each center meets the Group's requirements and, if not, in what respects the Group would wish it modified; (2) enable Consultative Group members to arrange with the centers for attendance or other forms of participation in

those reviews, seminars and other meetings which are open to them; (3) enable the centers, with the help of the Consultative Group secretariat, to iron out avoidable conflicts of scheduling; and (4) enable donors to arrange visits to the centers on a schedule and on a scale that should effectively reduce the burden on center directors and staff.

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